



Tobacco and Vapes Bill

Youth Assembly Members' views

20 November 2024

Background

The Youth Assembly was established in June 2021. The current 90 Youth Assembly Members took their seats in October 2023. At the time of recruitment, they were in school years 9-12 which is approximately age 12-16. They are a diverse group. Membership includes young people from every constituency and recruitment was designed to ensure proportionate representation of Section 75 categories such as gender, religious background, race, care experience, sexuality, disability, and young people with caring responsibilities.

The Youth Assembly was established to perform three functions:

- To engage with the work of the Northern Ireland Assembly, specifically with Assembly Committees on legislation and inquiries relevant to young people;
- To undertake project work generated by the three Youth Assembly committees; and
- To enable consultation with government Departments and to participate in youth voice projects.

Tobacco and Vapes Bill

Youth Assembly Members received a briefing from the Clerk to the Health Committee on 20 November 2024 in order to explain the clauses in the Tobacco and Vapes Bill. They had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss the key points.

Youth Assembly Members gave their views via a Mentimeter survey. The survey results are collated in Appendix A (pages 7-10).

The views and lived experience of Members, in their own words where possible, are summarised on pages 4 to 6.

The Youth Assembly wish to record their gratitude to Keith McBride, Clerk to the Committee for Health, for his time, patience and knowledge which has been invaluable to them in understanding and forming views on the Bill.

Executive Summary

- Members of the Youth Assembly broadly welcome the Bill and support its intention to create a smoke-free generation. It is interesting to note however, that they feel that the effects of this Bill will not be felt by them and their peers but rather by the next generation.
- Members are pleased that there is greater emphasis on vapes in this Bill than in the previous Bill. They report that more of their peers use vapes than cigarettes.
- Members feel strongly that vapes should be banned for those under 18 and they welcome the increased fines and prison sentences suggested in the Bill.
- Members feel that harsher penalties should be considered for those who supply, buy or use vapes which have been filled with class A or B drugs such as Spice.
- Members support the banning of tobacco products for those born after 1 January 2009.
- The overwhelming majority agree that the manufacture and sale of snus should be illegal. Many of them had not heard of snus before and they feel awareness needs to be raised about the dangers.
- Members support the introduction of retailer registration and licensing.
- They welcome proposals to ban smoking and vaping in public spaces and to extend the current legislation to include banning vapes and heated tobacco in vehicles when children are present although they have concerns about how this will be enforced.
- Members have concerns about the availability of additional resource both to advertise the changes to the general public and for Councils to enforce the Bill.
- Members worry that young people already addicted to vapes will not be supported to stop.
- They welcome the ban on online advertising but fear that this will be impossible to enforce on social media.
- Finally, Youth Assembly are keen to know how the success of this Bill will be measured and how the Department will decide if further measures or regulations will be necessary.

Youth Assembly Views

Age of sale

Members are worried that young people their age (13-17) who use vapes will not stop if this Bill becomes law. They say that it won't be until the generation *after* them where the benefits will be felt.

"They are addicted. The damage is done. The smoke-free generation is the next generation. It's too late for us." - M (age 14)

"The damage has already been done to my generation" – F (age 14)

Access to vapes

Members are concerned that the Bill will not stop young people accessing vapes. They report that young people tend not to buy in shops unless they look old enough and that lots of young people share vapes.

"They go out at lunch and buy it then sell it on the school toilets at lunch. They have pencil cases full of vapes!" - S (age 16)

"A few of my mates have dealers in Antrim, Belfast and Lisburn" - C (age 14)

Members also reported that some parents buy vapes for their children and even sell to other children. Members asked, "How would the Bill stop this practice?"

Members are concerned that there is no provision in the Bill to impose restrictions on the locations of vape shops. They report that there are many vape shops close to schools.

Vaping cessation

Members are concerned that young people addicted to vapes will not get the support they need to stop. There are smoking cessation initiatives which are well established. Members asked, "Has the Department considered how young people who vape will be supported to stop?"

Jurisdictions

Youth Assembly Members are concerned about enforcement of this Bill in border areas given that ROI legislation will vary from NI in relation to the age of sale

Enforcement

Members are concerned that Councils may not have the capacity to carry out enforcement actions. They asked if Councils will be given extra resource or staffing to be able to carry out this function. Members suggested that in the interests of consistency, all Councils could work together on this issue and meet more often than once a year to discuss a programme of enforcement.

Members asked if consideration has been given to increase fines or sentences for those who supply, buy or use vapes which have been filled with class A or B drugs such as spice or heroin which they feel should carry a much harsher penalty.

Members are worried that there will still be a black market created by this Bill particularly in border areas.

Advertising

Youth Assembly Members are glad to see that a ban on online advertising has been included in the Bill. However, they point out that much of the advertising which young people see is via social media which is harder to regulate.

Snus

In general, Members feel there needs to be more information on snus and the dangers associated with it. Many of the Youth Assembly Members had not heard of snus at all before the meeting. Others were aware of its use among sports players and older teenagers. They feel that awareness must be raised within schools.

“People think snus is harmless” – J (age 15)

“I’d never heard of it before this Bill” – E (age 15)

“Only since end of last year I have noticed it being a big thing in sixth form. I think snus is meant to be in for either 30 mins or an hour and I know friends which won’t go to sleep without it in!” - S (age 16)

Smoke and vape free places

Members welcome the proposed introduction of smoke-free places. They are concerned, however, that the wording of this clause is too vague, and that workplaces and public areas need to be further defined. Although there are signs at hospitals and schools already, they are not currently enforced. How will this change with this Bill?

They recognise the advantages for the environment and mentioned that this it will help “prevent addiction and influence” among young people.

Smoke free vehicles

Members felt that it was a good idea to extend the current legislation on tobacco products to include banning vapes and heated tobacco in vehicles when children are present.

One Member said that school buses must be smoke/ vape free.

“I hate going on the bus either in the morning or afternoons and it would just have that vape stench. The bus I take in the morning is a primary school bus.” - S (age 16)

Members wondered how this would be enforced as vaping can be harder to spot than smoking.

Education

Members asked how the changes brought about by this Bill will be communicated to the general public, especially to young people? Is there budget for a communications strategy? Can the relevant parts of the curriculum be updated to ensure teachers and young people know the changes?

Energy drinks

One Member asked if the Labour government or the Executive will introduce a ban on energy drinks for young people as this is another product which is damaging to the health of young people. They made the point that more young people consume energy drinks than vape, smoke, or use snus and therefore this should be a priority for government.

Measuring the success of this Bill

Finally, Youth Assembly would be keen to hear how the success of the Bill will be measured and how the Department will decide if further measures or regulations will be necessary and in what timeframe this would happen.

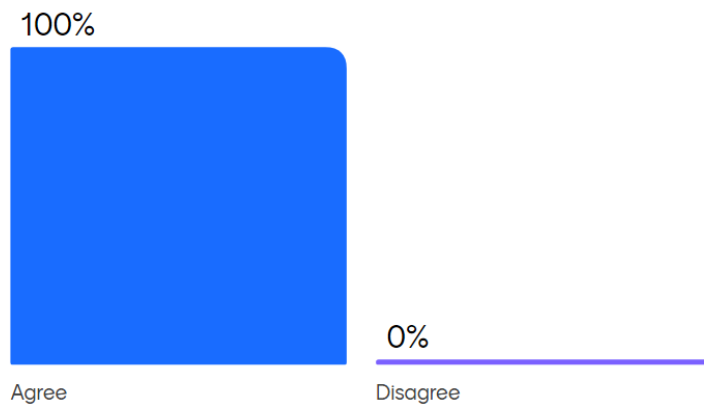
Appendix A

Mentimeter survey results

During the online meeting on 20 November, Youth Assembly Members were asked for their views on the following statements taken from the Bill.

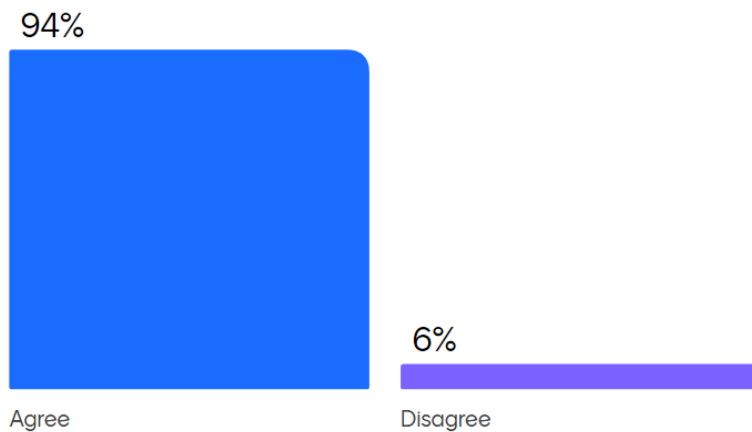
1. “Tobacco products should be banned for people born after 1 January 2009.”

Youth Assembly Members were 100% in agreement.



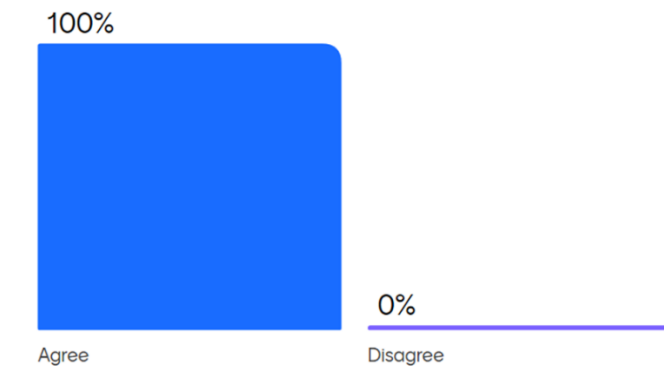
2. “It should be an offence for somebody to buy tobacco products for people born after 1 January 2009.”

The overwhelming majority of Youth Assembly Members were in agreement.



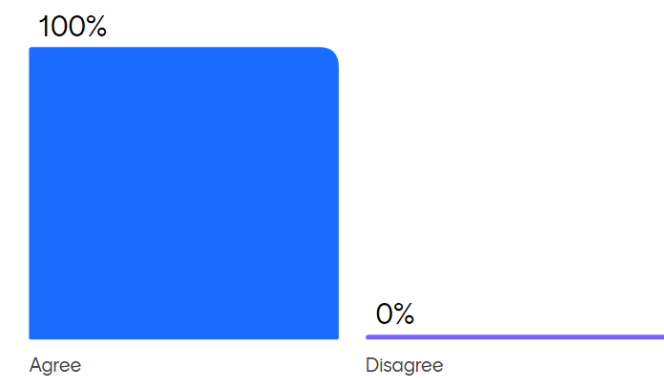
3. "Tobacco vending machines should made illegal."

Youth Assembly Members were 100% in agreement.



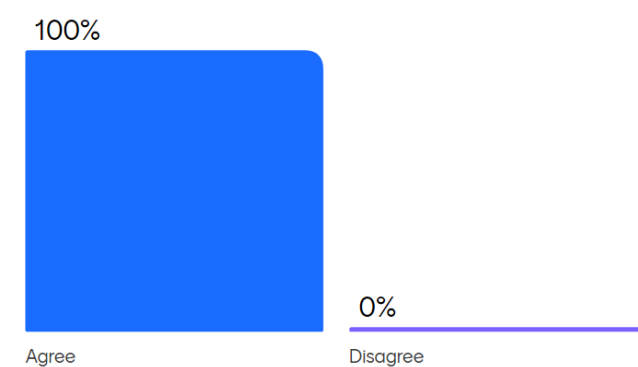
4. "Retailers should not be allowed to sell cigarettes that are not in original packaging."

Youth Assembly Members were 100% in agreement.



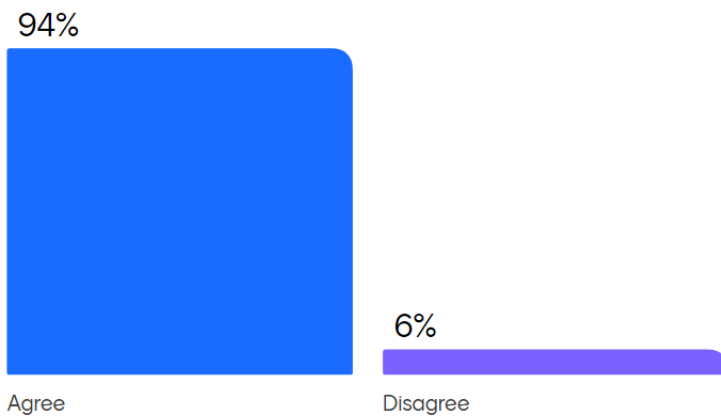
5. "Retailers must display 'age of sale notices.'"

Youth Assembly Members were 100% in agreement.



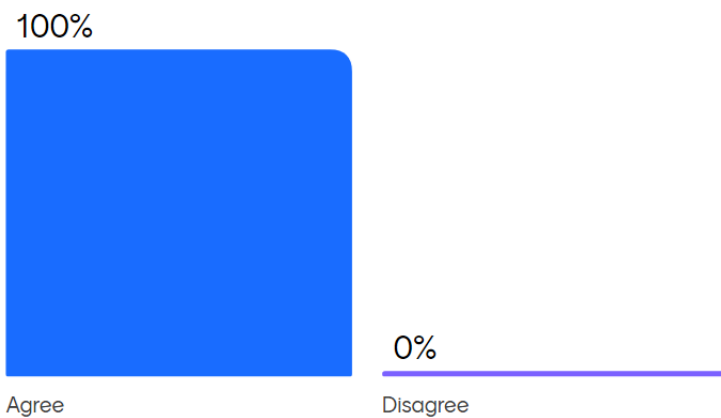
6. “Manufacture and sale of snus should be illegal.”

The overwhelming majority of Youth Assembly Members were in agreement.



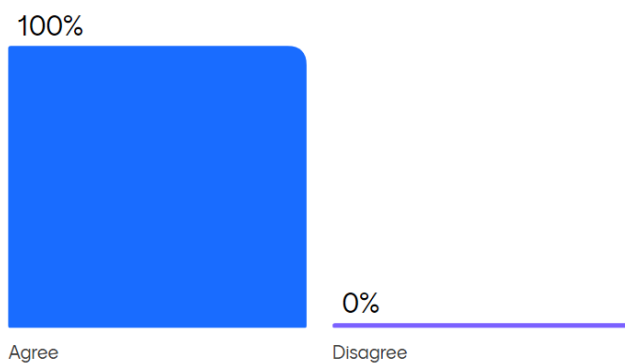
7. “It should be illegal to sell vaping or nicotine products to a person under 18 years old.”

Youth Assembly Members were 100% in agreement.



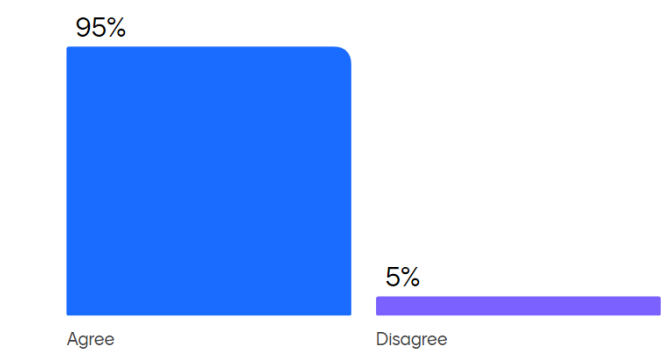
8. “It should be illegal for a person over 18 to buy a vaping or nicotine product for someone who is under 18.”

Youth Assembly Members were 100% in agreement.



9. “Vending machines selling vaping and nicotine products should be illegal.”

The overwhelming majority of Youth Assembly Members were in agreement.



10. “Retailers must have a licence to sell vaping and nicotine products.”

Youth Assembly Members were 100% in agreement.

