

Children's Parliament Consultation on Tobacco and Smoking



About the Project

The Scottish Government asked Children's Parliament to find out children's views, opinions and ideas on tobacco use to feed into the Tobacco Action Plan, which aims for Scotland to be Tobacco Free by 2034.

Using a children's human rights-based approach, Children's Parliament investigated:

- 1. Children's general perception and understanding of tobacco use.**
- 2. Children's views in relation to age and tobacco use.**
- 3. Children's views on the availability of tobacco products.**
- 4. Children's views on how to reduce the impact of smoking.**

What we did

Throughout May 2023, Children's Parliament engaged with primary-aged children from four schools across Dundee and Clackmannanshire. By participating in creative, rights-based workshops, over 100 Members of Children's Parliament (MCPs) shared their views on tobacco and smoking, creating key messages for the Scottish Government.



Participating Schools

A huge thank you to our participating schools. All the included quotes and artwork in this report express the MCP's ideas, views and opinions. The participating schools were;

St Serf's Primary School, Clackmannanshire, P4
Sunnyside Primary School, Clackmannanshire, P4/5
Den's Road Primary School, Dundee, P7
Rosebank Primary School, Dundee, P6

We are so proud of the fantastic work you have contributed!



Key Messages

“If change happened, it would affect our life and make it better.”

The key themes to emerge from the consultation with children on a Tobacco-Free Scotland were:

- **Vaping vs. smoking** Both were regularly discussed, with clear distinctions being made. Vaping was seen as the ‘healthy’, ‘cool’ option, preferred by younger people, vs. unhealthy cigarettes, generally used by older generations.
- **Cost** The children held mixed views on the cost, some acknowledged that tobacco products were expensive but felt that regardless of price, people would continue to smoke. Other children wanted to ban smoking completely.
- **Tobacco sales** The children reflected on where you can access tobacco products. While many discussed how easy products were to find and buy, criminality was also a major theme, with many children linking the sale of tobacco products with serious crime and drug use.
- **Mental health/Health** Children described an extensive list of impacts on the body and mind. Children commented that often people who choose to smoke might have mental ill health or other issues.
- **Spaces** Regardless of location, the same exterior spaces were regularly mentioned as spaces in which smoking is most common, these included; outside pubs, near shops, centres of towns or cities, and alleyways.
- **Choice** Children debated passionately about choice. Some children felt that adults should be allowed to make their own decisions, while others felt that change would only come with changes to the law.
- **Hope for a positive future** Children spoke about how a Tobacco-Free Scotland might improve people’s mood, spaces would be more positive for everyone, and the benefit on health would also be visible.
- **Change to legislation** Children had loads of ideas for how to achieve a Tobacco-Free Scotland, specifically legislative changes; many of them did still feel that personal choice should be considered as harsher laws might not change the underlying issues.

The children involved in this process were passionate and open about the opportunity for change. They were excited to hear more from the Scottish Government on the potential changes that could happen for a tobacco-free Scotland for children.



Image on page 5: As part of our initial scoping, each class completed a ‘graffiti wall’ where they independently answered a series of questions. These are their answers from Den’s Road Primary.

What do you already know about Tobacco use in Scotland?

It is very bad for people.

Most of my family smoke like num, dad, gran.

You can buy tobacco at shops, pubs and super markets

It can be very addictive

It's very addictive and it can cause lung cancer. I think.
Alyssa

Tobacco is very, very bad.

It's really easy to buy alot to you 21

You need to be over 18 to smoke

You can buy cigarettes at the shops.

Why do people smoke?

Bad for you

People believe it can take most of their problems away.
-Kaci

To make themselves feel better.

People smoke because they like the taste of it.

People smoke because it has nicotine which is addictive

To release stress.

They get addicted

To relive themselves?

They got forced

To release stress

Where do you see people smoking in Scotland?

People smoke everywhere.

outside Pubs and on street

I see people smoke in their cars, in public, town, outside pubs, their house, in alleyways, and when they are walking.



our street THE Pubs

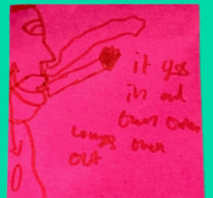
in cars.

I see people smoke in Pubs

See people smoking in the street

Outside Pubs, bars, alleyways, Dark Places

They put it in paper and burn it



People use tobacco in pipes and cigarettes or you can use non tobacco pipes

first the person light the tobacco and bread it in and take the tobacco out and blow it out the smok!!!

Eat it then spit it out

Smoke it.

Vapes ciggarets

What do children know about Tobacco use in Scotland?

Children shared with us what they already know about tobacco use in Scotland. Children had a wide range of experience and knowledge regarding tobacco use. They shared a lot of empathy and understanding around people's addiction and their right to choose. They discussed the importance of choice and the challenges of quitting due to addiction.

Common Vocabulary:

Throughout the consultation, we noticed a range of specific vocabulary that the children linked to tobacco and smoking including an awareness of differing types of vapes (Elf Bar, Lost Mary, Crystal) and demonstrations of smoking with mimicking hand movements.

Vaping vs. Smoking:

There was a clear differentiation between vaping and smoking, where vaping was seen as the 'healthy', 'cool' option, preferred by younger people, vs. unhealthy cigarettes, generally used by older generations.

“Smoking is basically bad air and is bad for your lungs and your heart.”

“My mum’s got a vape and smokes, it’s better than smoking though.”

“There are bad vapes and good vapes – some are addictive and some not. Good vapes don’t have tobacco.”

“They’ll still buy it whether the price goes up or not.”

Cost

Children acknowledged that tobacco products were expensive, many felt that regardless of price people would continue to smoke. Other children considered the potential of a gradual price increase to reduce use.

“Loads of people like it, if it was more money less people would buy it.”



“People smoke because they are depressed.”

Health - Mental & Physical:

Children were well versed on the physical and mental impacts of smoking and vaping. Often describing the decision to smoke as a response to stress, anger, or depression.

“Smoking is like suffocating your body.”

“Tobacco can cause lung cancer and infections. I wouldn’t recommend it.”

Where do children think Tobacco products are available?

We asked the children about the availability of tobacco products. Children were very knowledgeable about the different locations tobacco products could be bought. They also spoke about the cost-of-living crisis, choice, and the type of businesses selling products. Children knew where and how to buy tobacco products, and talked about how common it was to see adults and children smoking in their daily lives. Alongside this they described a strong link between criminality and linking tobacco sales to other drug use.

“You need ID to buy vapes but they sell it to anyone and hide it.”



“You can get them anywhere.”

- Public spaces x9
- Outside the pub x18
- At the shops x10
- Alleyways x7
- In my house x12



Cost of Living:

Children talked about the cost of living crisis a lot throughout the consultation. They had many thoughts about the pricing of tobacco products as a result. They described concerns about cost of everyday items.

“People steal to smoke it.”

“How do they afford it, it’s so expensive, it’s the worst.”

“Daily items are way too expensive - I don’t mind for the tobacco, but it shouldn’t be for everyday items. That’s what you need and want.”

Tobacco Sales:

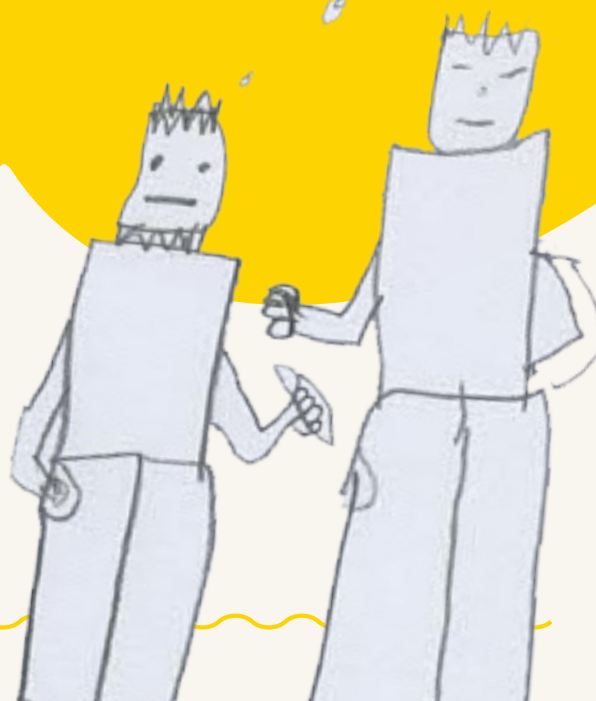
The children reflected on what type of businesses sell tobacco products. While many discussed how easy products were to find and buy, criminality was also a major theme, with many children linking the sale of tobacco products with serious crime and drug use. They also considered the impact of product placing, “you can buy them like sweets”.

“Some shopkeepers sell to young people to get money.”

“They get them from junkies who make money selling them.”

“Big industries take advantage of people buying it.”

take it



What are children's views in relation to age and tobacco use?

We asked the children about who smokes and what products they use. Children spoke about how smoking could be considered trendy, and how peer pressure could affect tobacco use. They also showed an understanding of addiction and mental health pressures and understood that tobacco use could be a complex issue. Children were brimming with ideas for what a Tobacco-Free Scotland might look and feel like. Their thoughts went beyond the physical changes to the environment, considering people's mental and emotional state there.

Age and Trends:

The age of those who smoke seems to correlate with what products they choose and what is considered trendy.

“Cigarettes and pipes are for old people.”

“Vapes smell nicer, they are new, like a trend so people try them.”



Peer Pressure:

Children told us about how peer pressure and pressure at home can play a part in tobacco use.

“People smoke because they think it is cool, but it is not.”

“I am more likely to copy my siblings than my parents when it comes to vaping.”

“I know people at school who vape more because of an older sister or brother. They do it to fit in or to look cool.”

Mental Health and Addiction:

The children commented that often people who choose to smoke might have poor mental health or other issues. They described reasons for smoking, including the impact of stress, the addictive properties of nicotine in the cigarettes, and the fake sense of happiness that smoking can offer.

“People smoke to cope when they are depressed.”

“It helps people be calm.”

Tobacco-Free Scotland: What does it look like?

The Members of Children's Parliament explored what a Tobacco-free Scotland for children might look like, developing a vision for the future.

Positive People

Children spoke about how a Tobacco-Free Scotland might improve people's mood and encourage people to be more active.

"Everyone would be happier about no smoking."

"More active people - [less]coughing when smoking, [more] running about and active."

Positive Place

Children believed that their physical environment would improve in a Tobacco-Free Scotland and Scotland would be cleaner as a result. They also referred to air quality and the impacts of cigarette litter.

"Scotland will be more colourful, smoking is kinda dark."

"Happier as the trees will be green and healthy and they will smell fresh air."

Better Health

Children felt that people's health would improve in a Tobacco-Free Scotland. Children showed concern for doctors who have to worry about their patients due to the impact of smoking, and thereafter the impact more widely on the general health of the population.

“Way greener. More horses playing and no lung cancer, animals and people die of lung cancer.”

“More likely to have a bigger life span.”

You Better Stop Smoking. ♡



Tobacco-Free Scotland: How do we get there?

After considering what a Tobacco-Free Scotland might look like for children, we asked them to consider what changes were needed to make that a reality. Children had loads of practical ideas for how to achieve a Tobacco-Free Scotland from legislative changes to medical support. However, many of them did still feel that personal choice should be considered and acknowledged that harsher laws might not change the underlying issues.

Choice

Children debated passionately about choice. Some felt that adults should be allowed to make their own choices, while others felt that change would only come with changes to the law.

“Smoking would be banned completely, all across the world.”

“It’s people’s choice if they want to smoke.”

“It’s not up to us, it’s up to the people, they should be able to buy tobacco and smoke it if they want.”

“Why do they keep making them? Why don’t they ban them?”

Legislation

Children offered suggestions for legislation that could be brought in to move towards a Tobacco-free Scotland.

Sales/Prices

The children confidently described the importance of cost, considering the connection to the cost and potential increase in pricing to make them less enticing for people to buy. The children felt that where they were sold was important, and potential adult-only cigarette shops were discussed.

“Lower price for everyday items, raise the prices for tobacco.”

“It should be worth more because of the risks it causes.”

Age

Age was discussed throughout, with a consensus that age limits were a positive step.

“I think you should be 30 before you can smoke, at 18 your body is not ready.”

“Keep raising the smoking age little by little.”

Spaces

Throughout the consultation, children mentioned adults smoking near children and the negative impact this has. The option of smoking zones was a theme across the schools, and considered a good solution.

“This should be a new rule – adults shouldn’t smoke near children.”

“No smoking in pubs, so more families in the pub.”

“Remove the addicting elements of cigarettes (...) remove the nicotine.”

Design

The children also considered potential changes to the design of tobacco products to reduce the impact, while also considering the challenge of addiction.

“Cigarettes would have flower seeds in them, or fruit seeds, they would smell nice.”

“Vapes would remove the addictive nicotine, fags would have fruit in them, they would be healthy.”

A number of children wanted to see the designs of vapes changed, as they were concerned that they were specifically marketed for children, which they felt was wrong.

“They make the design of vapes to get children – the colours and flavours make children like it.”

Medical Intervention

Alongside suggestions for changes to the law, children also showed compassion for adults being asked to quit and recommended that medical support should be available.

“The doctors should help adults to stop smoking.”

“To help adults give up there should be cigarettes with no unhealthy stuff.”

More about Children's Parliament

Our dream is that children grow up in a world of love, happiness and understanding. Our mission is to inspire greater awareness and understanding of the power of children's human rights and to support implementation of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) across Scotland.

For more about our story and the work we do:
www.childrensparliament.org.uk

