



Child Human Rights Defenders Investigate



Vaping



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Image courtesy Sally Jubb

Artworks courtesy created by
Members of Children's Parliament



Introduction

Children's Parliament supports a team of [Child Human Rights Defenders](#), who are experienced Members of Children's Parliament, to participate in democratic processes at local, national and international levels. Using a child human rights approach, the programme empowers children to become human rights defenders, influencing national legislation, policy and practice on key issues important to children across Scotland.

As part of this programme, the children are involved in a two-year cycle of meeting and working with decision-makers in the [Scottish Cabinet](#), Scottish Government Executive Team, Scottish Government policy teams and other decision-makers to help make positive changes on issues that affect children in Scotland. At the start of 2024, the Child Human Rights Defenders decided on three key issues (supported by evidence from children across Scotland) to explore, influence

and drive change on. The three issues identified were climate crisis education, mental health and bullying in schools and vaping.

Alongside the work with Scottish Government, the Child Human Rights Defenders use the two-year cycle to participate in additional consultations linked to their key issues, using child-led activism to promote change locally, nationally and internationally.

This report explores the issue of vaping. It aims to encourage Scottish Government, other duty-bearers¹, our allies and our partners to help drive change on the issue of vaping. This report will examine the issue selection process, the evidence found and highlight wider engagement as we work towards the implementation of the UNCRC, and ensuring children are listened to, taken seriously and that they all grow up healthy, happy and safe in Scotland.

¹ Children in Scotland are rights holders. Duty bearers are adults who have a legal duty to respect, protect and fulfil children's rights as enshrined in the UNCRC. The State is the main duty bearer.

The issue of vaping

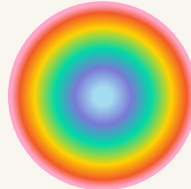
The process started with desk research (of reports, surveys and films) that focussed on rights breaches for children under 14 years old in Scotland. From this, a long list of issues was gathered into themes and shared in a survey. Over 175 Members of Children's Parliament, age 9-14, from across Scotland voted in the survey, ranking what they felt was most important to address and act on now.

Health as a headline issue scored highly within the survey. Vaping and alcohol use was identified in this survey as a specific concern of children.

The Child Human Rights Defenders team worked together to review the results of the desk research and survey, considering the issues in relation to its impact on children, their rights and how urgent this felt. They also considered the issues in relation to what was already happening in Scottish Government policymaking. From this review, children prioritised Vaping as one of their key issues to explore over the next two years.

“ If vapes were harder to see and access, it would make it harder for children to start vaping in the first place. ”

Member of
Children's Parliament



To further explore the issue of vaping, the children:

- Undertook evidence gathering from peers, in the form of 'class missions' with approx. 100 children in Dundee, Clackmannanshire and Fife
- Revisited Children's Parliament's [Consultation on Smoking and Tobacco](#)
- Contributed to Public Health Scotland's consultation on substance harm reduction, sharing their findings on vaping
- Worked with the Talbot Rice Gallery, alongside artist Bob and Roberta Smith, to create and exhibit artwork to represent their calls to action and spread awareness of their work among members of the public in the exhibition 'The Children Are Now.'

Over the past two years, the Child Human Rights Defenders have shared this evidence and discussed the issue at two Cabinet meetings and two Scottish Government Executive Team Meetings, as well as meeting Scottish Government policy leads and influencing the progress made on the UK Tobacco and Vapes Bill.



Children's views on vaping

The Child Human Rights Defenders worked with their peers to investigate vaping through a number of class 'missions'. Children in Dundee, Clackmannanshire and Fife, age 9-12 years old, were asked about their knowledge and understanding of vaping.



Why do children vape?

Children reflected on why their peers might be vaping. A popular answer was how the vapes were advertised and promoted, through display, packaging and flavours.

Children considered how vapes are designed, and felt they are more likely to be enticed to try them because of the bright and colourful packaging.

Children felt that this problem was amplified by the lack of knowledge and understanding on the dangers of vaping.

“They advertise it as different flavours, like cotton candy.”

“The packaging is colourful, and kids want to buy it.”

“On cigarettes it shows you what smoking does to you, but on vapes it doesn't.”

“Kids don't know what it is, they just know that it lets you blow smoke out like a train.”

Children shared that if they continue to lack understanding of the impact of vaping, they are more likely to continue doing it.

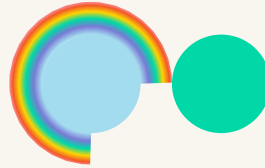
Children commented on the easy access of vapes, sharing that because of this they are more likely to try them, and in turn become addicted.

Finally, children considered the peer pressures around them and how that may influence them vaping. They reflected on older siblings or cousins vaping, or even friends who then encourage younger children to participate.

“Kids get vapes off the ground or from their older friends.”

“Vapes are easy to buy, shops sell to kids without any ID.”

“To show off and impress their friends.”



“ Kids want to vape because older kids influence them. ”

What needs to change?

Children reflected on what would need to change to reduce children vaping. They talked about how vapes are designed, thinking specifically about the packaging and flavour.



Children felt that by changing the way vapes look and taste, they will be less likely to want to try them. They also reflected on where vapes are sold, and how this could impact on children vaping.



“

“Make them look ugly so it isn’t seen as cool to do, and people won’t want to buy them.”

“Make them plain tasting, because the biggest reason people buy them is the flavour.”

“Only sell vapes and cigarettes in certain places, not shops near where children play, live, go to school, go to get a sweet.”

”

Children told us that if vapes are not sold in areas where children are, they will have much less access to them and in turn it would hopefully reduce children vaping.

Finally, children have asked for better education on vaping and the dangers of vaping – ensuring this started at a young age so children are put off early.

“Show us what can happen when you vape, like when we learn about cigarettes.”

“Tell stories to younger children and teenagers about the consequences of vaping.”





What children already know, and how they want to learn about **vaping**

Children consistently explained that to reduce children vaping, adults needed to improve children's knowledge and understanding on vapes and the dangers they bring.

A common issue that often came up when talking to children about vaping was that children thought vaping was healthy; due to the fruity flavours, or the fact that it was a 'better choice' than smoking.

“
**People
make vapes
sound good
for you.**”



Children acknowledged the difficulties around vaping and the reasons why they might be tempted to try it out. They felt that through the right kind of education, this could be reduced. Some ideas they had included:



“I think they should be taught about vaping in a fun way whilst learning about the dangers.”

“They should learn about why it’s bad and why they shouldn’t do it.”

“An ex-vaper who got sick should come in and talk about their experiences.”

“In school they should learn about peer pressure.”



The children believe that through relevant and engaging education, and an increase in knowledge and understanding, children were less likely to engage in a dangerous activity

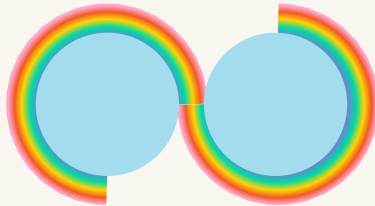
like vaping. The children believed that this, combined with a change in marketing and accessibility of vapes, would reduce the number of children vaping in Scotland.



Image courtesy Sally Jubb

The change children want to see

“ It’s up to John Swinney – the government can ban vapes and they have the responsibility to tell kids they are bad. They can change things.”



The Child Human Rights Defenders created their key call to action:

Vaping is often seen as a ‘healthy’, ‘cool’ alternative to smoking. Scottish Government need to reduce children’s access to vaping and increase their understanding of its impact.

The children’s key areas for change are:

Design of vapes: vapes are very attractive to children, as they are flavoured like sweets, brightly coloured and on display in local shops.

Access to vapes: vapes are being sold to children. They are too easy for children to buy, have them bought for, or steal.

Knowledge and understanding of vaping: children need to know about the dangers of vaping, and why they shouldn’t do it. Children want to learn about the risks of vaping in a relatable way.

The children presented these Calls to Action on vaping at important meetings with the Scottish Government Cabinet including the First Minister and Cabinet Secretaries, and Executive Team with the Permanent Secretary and senior civil servants across 2024-25.

Working to drive change

The Child Human Rights Defenders had online calls with the Vaping Policy Team from Scottish Government. As part of the new two-year approach to these issues, this was an opportunity in which the children could continue to drive change directly with policy teams inbetween key meetings.

The children and the policy team discussed the new UK Tobacco and Vapes Bill. The children were asked to share their ideas on what they hoped was included in the Bill. Some of their suggestions included:

“You shouldn’t be allowed to sell vapes unless you have a permit. Vapes should be expensive.”

“Shops that sell vapes should be away from parks and schools. In shops that do sell vapes, there should be posters [about the harm they cause].”

“Keep vapes hidden in shops like cigarettes.”

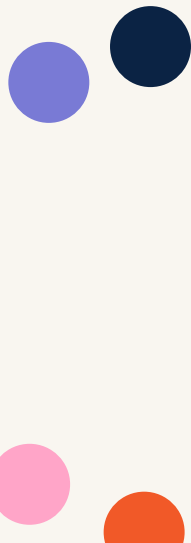
“People who have a rough time smoking and vaping should come and talk to children about it in school... it’s easier to quit if you hear from those who have.”



The Child Human Rights Defenders then worked to refine these ideas into actionable calls to align with the work they had already been doing, ensuring that children's voices are included in the shaping of the UK Tobacco and Vapes Bill when it comes to pass. They called for:

- 1. Smoke free zones:** Under the new UK Bill, new powers are being given to Scotland for smoke free zones. They should be extended to areas where children are, e.g., school grounds, parks, bus stops and community centres.
- 2. Changing vape flavours / packaging / displays:** Under the new UK Bill, new powers are being given to Scotland for the flavours, packaging and display of vapes. Vape flavours need to stop being targeted at children. The packaging should be like cigarettes, monochrome with pictures of its impact. Vapes should be hidden in shops in the same way cigarettes are.
- 3. Education:** In the new UK Bill, there is a gap relating to children's education about vapes. Children need to know about the dangers of vaping and why they shouldn't do it. Children like to learn in different ways, so it needs to be in a way that will work for them e.g., hearing from people with lived experience.

The Child Human Rights Defenders felt that these actions will further drive change to ensure that Scottish Government reduces children's access to vaping and increases their understanding of its impact.



Progress and collaboration

Across the last two years, Members of Children's Parliament have made progress towards raising awareness and influencing change on their key calls to action. At the most recent Cabinet meeting, in November 2025, the Child Human Rights Defenders highlighted two key areas of progress and collaboration with Scottish Government to demonstrate steps towards positive action:

The Members of Children's Parliament have been considering Scottish Government's new powers granted to them in the UK Tobacco and Vapes Bill. Regarding the flavours, packaging and display of vapes, and smoke and vape free zones, the children feel encouraged by these new powers and are hopeful they are used to follow through on their calls to action.

Members of Children's Parliament have also met with the Learning Directorate to talk about the importance of vaping education for children in Scotland. Whilst not immediately evidenced in the UK Bill, the children remain hopeful that this issue will be taken seriously, and Scottish Government will ensure the effective education on children and young people on the dangers of vaping.



Conclusion

The Child Human Rights Defenders have been exploring the key issue of vaping since the beginning of 2024 – working to gather evidence from other children and share that evidence to drive change in Scottish Government.

They have highlighted that children see vaping as healthy and cool and have pushed for change to reduce children’s access to vaping and increase children’s knowledge and understanding of its impact.

As this cycle of work ends, the Child Human Rights Defenders are hoping that Scottish Government, other duty bearers and allies continue to drive change on the following areas:

- Using Scottish Government’s new powers, change the flavours, packaging and display of vapes. Make them less colourful, hide them in shops and make them less appealing to children.
- Using Scottish Government’s new powers, extend smoke and vape free zones to areas where children are e.g., schools, parks etc.
- Involving children in the development of Scottish Government’s new powers, keeping them up to date on progress made.
- Further development of education on the dangers of vaping with children, ensuring children learn about it from a young age and in ways they take seriously e.g., getting ex-vapers in schools to talk to children, putting anti-vape posters in public spaces that children will engage with.

These steps are vital to ensure that children’s access to vaping is reduced, and their knowledge of its dangers is increased.

Thank you to our amazing Child Human Rights Defenders, who have worked so brilliantly with the team, and with other children, to research and evidence this issue. Thank you, Amber, Cara, Ella, Eva, Evie, Fallon, Flynn, Hamza, Kati, Michael, Rida and Tate. You are all amazing!

Thank you also to the children at Dens Road Primary School, Lornshill Academy and Rimbleton Primary School for their invaluable views, ideas and opinions to help the Child Human Rights Defenders further explore this issue.



About Children's Parliament

Established in 1996, Children's Parliament is dedicated to the realisation of children's human rights in Scotland. 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).

Through our rights-based practice, we provide children up to 14 years of age with opportunities to share their views, experiences, and ideas so that they can influence positive change in their lives at home, in school and in the community.

Our talented team use creative, participatory and play-based methods to support children to meaningfully engage in decisions that affect them.

