

### Plymouth Youth Parliament Young People's Views on Smoking and Vaping

UK youth parliament, Plymouth (ukyp) aims to give the voice of young people the chance to be heard by local and national government. It has been running since 1999 and has built a good reputation within Plymouth as a vehicle to allow young people's voices to be heard. In Plymouth we aim to give young people an opportunity to have ownership and responsibility for the campaigns they run, as well as providing chances to gain skills and experience and to ensure they have their voices heard. Young people put themselves forward for election on issues that they feel strongly on, and they are supported to run campaigns. Approximately 9000 young people in Plymouth voted in March 2024 choosing cost of living crisis, reducing cost of public transport for young people, mental health and wellbeing for young men and violence against women and girls for this year's campaigns.

UKYP provide opportunities for decision makers to meet with and listen to the views of young people in a group setting but also in smaller focus meetings. It provides an opportunity for councillors to interact with young people that use local services to enable a focus on young people and their needs within the city they represent. By supporting the participation and empowerment of young people, we are creating a better balance of power between young people and professionals.

One of the issues debated by youth parliament over the past year has been in the increase in young people vaping.

At Plymouth UKYP we worked to design a questionnaire for young people that we could send out through our school network and links to gather information from young people, our questionnaire received 524 responses over the past three weeks.

The key outcomes from the survey are set out here focussing on possible solutions, areas of good practice and joined up approaches.

### What possible solutions do you think would help with the vaping epidemic in schools?

- Harm reduction
- Teaching lessons in schools, but how effective are they?
- Raising awareness around things like spiking
- Confiscating vapes
- Not a problem because people can easily get more
- Like fast food shops, make sure vape shops can't open within a certain distance of a school
- Make vapes look less appealing to children/young people
- Same with vape shops, bright lights, décor, and music needs changing
- Reduce flavours
- Tax vapes and vaping products
- Advertise how bad vaping is – like with smoking.

Identify any areas of good practice and areas for further development

- Vaping workshops are starting to be offered in secondary schools from public health
- Police are now looking at issue in regarding to young people buying vapes, mystery shopping checks
- Need better education in lessons on the dangers of vaping, what's in the vape, risks of spiking
- Basic sign posting to help and support/ posters
- Better signposting and advertising of support sites
- Assemblies/workshops in schools to raise awareness of the concerns amongst young people
- Better harm reduction training for young people – raise awareness of spiking
- Currently vapes are Unregulated – change that and then see reduction in usage

Identify how we can ensure a joined-up approach

- Police ensuring shops don't sell to minors
- Government needs to ban disposable vapes and limit restrictions on flavours
- Advertising standards need to stop adverts being aimed at young people – including signs on buses
- Like fast food shops, make sure vape shops can't open within a certain distance of a school
- More research into dangers of vapes and impact on young people's health and wellbeing

**Conclusion**

We know that when vaping first came in, people thought or had the impression it was a good alternative from smoking but there has been a change in attitude due to the unknown health risks and side effects, the fact young people are now able to add other substances to their vapes and is placing them at risk. We also have the fact that young people who have never even smoked are now vaping because they think it's cool amongst their peers and disposable vapes are so cheap and easy to access. Vaping is not risk free, particularly for those who have never smoked and with a worrying trend in uptake amongst young people more needs to be done to raise awareness and tackle the issue.

Obviously, the House of Commons were attempting to introduce the Smoke Free Generation Campaign, which included the restrictions on vape flavours and packaging regulations and controlling how they can be stored and displayed in shops and supermarkets, at the moment they are not restricted and can be located anywhere in the shops.

Young people stated that they generally get their vapes from friends, but who know' s to check the packet to ensure it meets the safety standards to even be sold in the UK, who knew they even needed to do this, at least on cigarette packets you get very clear warnings on packets, clearly we

need to do more to ensure young people are fully aware of the risks and can make a more informed choice.

We were also informed some schools have vaping smoke alarms in the toilets now but that there is a 10-minute delay which then means by the time they go off the students have disappeared, and teachers cannot follow up on the issue, surely this defeats the object in having them in the first place. It would be good to find out which schools have them and if it has deterred young people or not?