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“All lights on green” - Vaping and a lost generation?

A qualitative study exploring children and young people’s experiences of vaping in Wakefield District.

wakefieldcouncil

Introduction

As parents, grandparents, and Public Health professionals, we want the best lives possible for our children and all young people. In Wakefield our vision centres around doing all we can so future generations can grow up as healthy and happy as possible, whoever they are and wherever they live in Wakefield.

Many young people told us they were worried about the rising levels of vaping in their peers. Parents, colleagues and those working with young people told us they were also concerned about vaping and the impact it was having on young people's lives.

We needed to understand why young people vaped, their attitudes, beliefs and what might encourage or discourage young people to vape. We looked at the current evidence base and found some gaps in the knowledge we needed to support young people in Wakefield. So, in 2023 we began a programme of qualitative research with young people across our district and adults working with young people.

This report details our research, the review of current evidence, our research approach and importantly, what we found. The findings add new knowledge to the evidence base around vaping in young people. Several academic papers will be published detailing the research findings and the gaps in knowledge this research filled, but also learnings from doing research in a local authority setting and our approach to knowledge transfer and mobilisation. The report below is intended to provide a useful overview of the research and to present the findings in a practical and applicable manner.

Young people have been involved right from the start and will continue to be involved as we apply this research to Wakefield and share our findings as widely as possible.

Steve Turnbull,
Director of Public Health

Cllr Maureen Cummings,
Councillor for Crofton, Ryhill, and Walton

Cllr Margaret Isherwood,
Portfolio Holder for Children and Young People

Cllr Michelle Collins,
Portfolio Holder for Adults and Health

Executive Summary

Young people in Wakefield told us they were worried about the rise in vaping in their peers. Parents, Public Health colleagues and Elected Members also raised concerns about vaping and the impact on young people's health.

The evidence base at the time left a lot of questions in Wakefield and to fill the gaps in our knowledge and understanding, we began a large qualitative piece of research with young people aged 11 to 17 years old, and those working with young people.

This study added to the evidence by revealing some of the psychological drivers and structural enablers for young people to vape. Whilst vaping was regarded as normal and appealing to young people, many were vaping to deal with social anxiety or stress. The impact on their lives went beyond physical health and was impacting their behaviour, mental health, learning environment and ability to learn.

The findings have been developed with, and peer reviewed by, young people. Young people are also leading the next steps as the findings are used to inform policy, national and local campaign work and interventions.

The findings cover 3 main thematic areas and are summarised below:

THEME 1:

Why Young People Might Vape

1. **Social Norms:**
   Vaping is seen as a normal activity, often influenced by family and friends. Young people are exposed to vaping at a young age, making it feel socially acceptable.
2. **Emotional Vaping:**
   Vaping is associated with being "cool" and is often seen as a way to fit in with peers. It is also used as a coping mechanism by some young people to cope with stress, anxiety, and social awkwardness.
3. **Physical Product:**
   The convenience, flavours, and ease of use make vaping attractive. The bright colours and appealing flavours are particularly enticing to young people.
4. **Fashion and Identity:**
   Vaping is seen as fashionable and is often integrated into young people's identities.

THEME 2:

The Vaping Journey -"All Lights on Green"

1. **Access to Vapes:**
   Vapes are easily accessible through shops, online, and even local dealers. Some shops do not enforce age restrictions, making it easy for young people to purchase vapes.
2. **Normal Grocery Item:**
   Vapes are sold alongside regular grocery items, normalising their use and sending out a subliminal message that vapes are safe to purchase and use like other everyday grocery items.
3. **Digital Environment:**
   Vapes are prominently featured in social media and online content, further normalising their use among young people.
4. **Prevalence and Demographics:**
   Vaping is perceived to be widespread among young people, with many believing that a significant portion of their peers vape; creating further social norming and perceptions of vaping's acceptability.
5. **Attitudes and Beliefs:**
   Vaping is seen as a modern, socially acceptable activity for young people, unlike smoking, which is viewed negatively and for 'old people'.
6. **Parental Attitudes:**
   Some parents are aware of their children's vaping and may even purchase vapes for them, believing it to be safer than smoking. Vaping was regarded as a shared family activity for some.

THEME 3:

The Impact on Young People's Lives

1. **Addiction:**
   Many young people from this study and others' research are addicted to nicotine through vaping. The ease of use and constant availability contribute to this addiction. This addiction to nicotine is negatively impacting on their lives in many ways.
2. **Disruption to Learning:**
   Vaping causes disruptions in the learning environment, with young people showing signs of nicotine addiction, becoming distracted or disruptive and leaving class to vape.
3. **Health:**
   While young people acknowledge that vaping might be harmful, many believe the risks are low. There is confusion about the long-term health effects of vaping and current health messaging isn't landing well with young people.

The **Research Team**

The research was carried out between May 2024 and November 2024 by:

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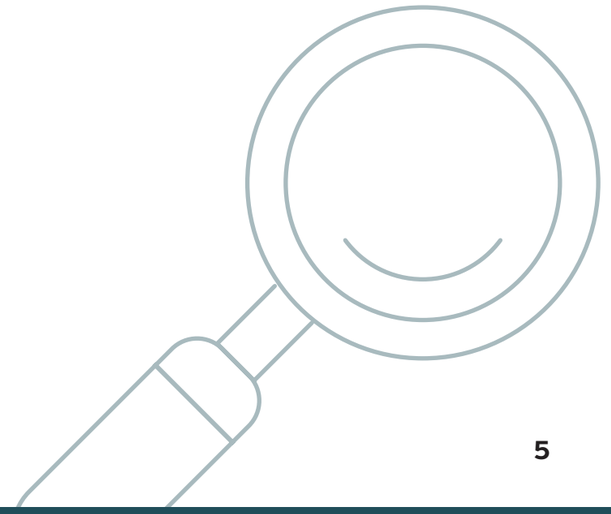
Councillor Maureen Cummings, Councillor for Crofton, Ryhill and Walton

The research was carried out using existing Council resources and no additional grant funding was used.



Acknowledgements and grateful thanks

For reasons of anonymity, we cannot list the young people and adults who took part in this study. However, we wish to acknowledge our gratitude and thanks for their contribution, for their time, guidance, ideas, support and honest discussion. Also, for the fun we had!

We would also like to thank **Gareth Hamlet**, Children and Young People Health Improvement Specialist, Wakefield Council, who was vital in helping us recruit to the study and teaching us how best to engage with children and young people. His relationships, experience and wisdom were invaluable.

Thank you also to **Professor James Woodall**, Head of Subject (Social and Community Studies), School of Health, for providing academic and ethics guidance and to **Leeds Beckett University** for providing the NVivo 12 (Lumivero 2017) software needed for Thematic Analysis.

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Why we did the research

Concerns about rising youth vaping in Wakefield emerged during community engagement activities, particularly “The Big Conversation” in 2022. Children, young people, parents, teachers, and public health officials expressed growing alarm over increased vaping and its potential health impacts.

While national data from the 2024 ASH survey indicated steady youth vaping rates in England (18%), local evidence and anecdotal reports in Wakefield suggested rising use, especially among young people who had never smoked before. Teachers also noted that managing vaping in schools was becoming burdensome.

Vaping presents a public health dilemma: it is an effective tool to help adults quit smoking (a major cause of preventable death and health costs), but it is increasingly being used by young people. The appeal of modern disposable vapes (with flavours, colours, and stronger nicotine delivery) and aggressive marketing, especially on social media contributed to their popularity.

Public Health Wakefield became concerned about vaping leading to nicotine addiction, smoking, or other health issues among children and young people. Misunderstandings among young people about the risks of vaping were noted, with some believing it is risk-free or more harmful than cigarettes.

Due to limited data on youth vaping behaviours and motivations, Wakefield’s Public Health team conducted a qualitative study involving young people, teachers, and youth workers. The aim was to better understand vaping perceptions, behaviours, social influences, and marketing impacts in the local area.

The report continues with a detailed review of current evidence, research methodology, the findings, conclusions and policy recommendations.

What the current evidence was telling us

The evidence base around vaping in young people is an emerging area. Below is a summary of the findings from a comprehensive state of the art review of the most recent research published on the perceptions, behaviours, and trends related to vaping among young people under 18 in the UK. The review was conducted in June 2024 and refreshed in February 2025.

A further literature review will be published separately from this report.

Our literature review aims

The aim of the review was to provide an update on previous reviews based on recent publications about vaping and young people vaping in the UK, identify key themes and gaps in the existing research and provide a basis from which we would establish our research needs in Wakefield.

Following analysis of our vaping research in Wakefield, the findings were compared with those of the literature review to gain further understanding of the meaning of our findings and establish where new knowledge had been found.

The literature review question

The literature review question was developed using the format recommended by the Joanna Briggs Institute (2024),

The literature review question was:

> **What is the current landscape for published youth (under 18yrs) vaping literature in the UK?**

Table 1: Key elements of our literature review question

Population	Children and young people (up to and including the age of 17 years)
Concept	Vaping or e-cigarette use or initiation of use
Context	United Kingdom

Search methodology, search strategy and study selection

Both quantitative and qualitative data were reviewed and key themes were synthesised. For full details of the search strategy and study identification, including PRISMA (2020) table, please see Appendix (1)

The studies included in the review

20 studies were included in the final review. 14 were quantitative studies, five were qualitative studies and one was mixed methods. Three of the studies were based solely in Scotland, two in Wales one in England and one in both England and the US but with the data for both presented separately. The rest were based in a combination of UK nations.

A table of the studies included, and a summary of their key characteristics can be found in Appendix (2)

What the review found

Several key themes suggested from the studies are described briefly below.

Language

Two studies identified the use of language by youth around e-cigarette use and the specific meanings (Brown et al 2020, Smith & Milton 2022). The term vapes and e-cigarettes were seen as distinctly separate things. The young people in both studies identified the terms vape or vaping to mean the use of disposable e-cigarettes which was the most common form of e-cigarette used in that age group. The term e-cigarette referred to the reusable more bulky forms of e-cigarettes that were seen by the young people as smoking quit aids for adults or older people. This was in stark contrast to the small, and perceived to be more attractive look of disposable vapes.

Prevalence of vaping

Several studies looked at the prevalence of vaping within their study (Staff et al 2022, Emerson 2023, Reyes et al 2021, Hallingberg et al 2021, Parnham et al 2024, Green et al 2020, Purba et al 2022, Moore et al 2020). These cannot be directly compared, or summarised, as the data examines different age ranges under 18 years and include different years. Additionally, the latest data on the prevalence used within these studies was from 2019, making the data somewhat out of date. What could be seen were potential inequalities in vaping prevalence by risk factor, including sex (Green 2020, Moore 2020), age, economic disadvantage (Green 2020), amount of social media use (Purba et al. 2022), and intellectual disability (but only when split by sex) (Emerson, 2023)

In one study looking at 10 to 11-year-olds it was unclear whether e-cigarette experimentation had changed over time (2014 - 2019) in this group whereas another study looking at youth who were secondary school age, suggested an increase in e-cigarette use both objectively and subjectively across 2014 - 2017 (Moore et al., 2020). Youth in the study by Brown et al. (Brown et al., 2020) also reported a subjective increase in the prevalence of vaping amongst their peers.

To note, all the data was self-reported for e-cigarette use.

Reasons to vape and marketing

There were several common reasons reported, by the study participants of the studies, about why young people vaped. Social benefit and social capital were common themes and associated with socialising with peers (Brown et al. 2020, Moore et al. 2020). This included having new flavours (Brown et al. 2020, Taylor et al. 2023, Smith et al. 2023), colours (Brown et al. 2020, Taylor et al. 2023, Porcellato et al. 2020, Smith et al., 2023), sleek design (Smith and Hilton, 2023) trading vapes and the ability to do tricks with the vape smoke (Brown et al. 2020, Moore et al. 2020). This was linked to perceptions of being "fashionable" and "cool" with vapes now seen as an accessory (Brown et al. 2020, Smith and Hilton, 2022).

Flavours of vapes were also cited as a reason to vape within some studies. The sweet flavours and recognisable flavours named after popular confectionary or confectionary brands, were regarded as enticing to young people (Brown et al. 2020, Dyer et al. 2024, Porcellato et al. 2020, Smith and Hilton, 2023). Several papers also suggested that young people recognised that the sweet flavours, along with the colours and design, are marketed towards young people (Smith and Hilton, 2022, Smith and Hilton, 2023, Smith et al. 2023).

Young people across three studies reported that marketing on social media platforms contributed to their perception of vapes being cool and fashionable with social-media influencers or adverts glamorising e-cigarette use (Brown et al. 2020, Smith et al. 2023, Smith et al. 2022).

Views on use of vapes and social norms

Two qualitative studies (Brown et al. 2020, Moore et al. 2020) offer similar findings that young people felt the occasional use of disposable e-cigarettes was common and socially acceptable with peers however, the regular use of e-cigarettes was viewed more negatively unless it was to stop smoking. In the study by Porcellato et al (2020), primary school aged children had negative perceptions of both vaping and smoking, but just under half viewed their use by adults as acceptable.

In a study by Hallingberg et al (2021) that looked at primary school aged children, there was an increase in exposure to e-cigarette use between 2014 and 2019 from a parent figure, use in cars and in public places the children visited. The study by Parnham et al (2024) also showed that for the participants in the study, the likelihood of seeing or noticing e-cigarettes on display for sale in supermarkets and small shops rose between 2018 and 2022.

Accessibility

Four studies reported the widespread view by youth that e-cigarettes are easily accessible for young people to buy through different methods such as small shops, online via social media, or obtaining them through informal networks such as friends and family (Smith & Hilton 2023, Moore et al. 2020, Parnham et al. 2024). Gaining vapes through informal networks and through social situations may mean that not all young people using vapes may have seen the packaging which could indicate the nicotine content of the vape (Moore et al. 2020, Brown et al. 2020).

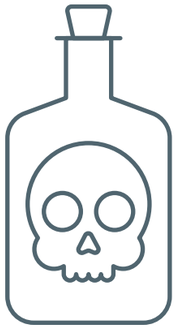
Association of vaping with smoking

There were several quantitative studies looking at association between e-cigarette use and future cigarette use (Staff et al. 2022, Conner et al. 2021, Kelly et al. 2023, Hallingberg et al. 2020, Parnham et al. 2024). These studies reported there was a significant increase in odds of future cigarette use in young people who vape compared to their peers who do not. However, two studies were using the same primary data set. One study did not find evidence of increasing smoking prevalence during a period of e-cigarette use proliferation between 1998 and 2015 (Hallingberg et al., 2020)

Qualitative insight from the study by Brown et al (Brown et al., 2020) suggested that e-cigarette use or vaping is viewed very differently by the youth compared to smoking, with smoking being perceived very negatively whereas social or experimental use of e-cigarettes being seen as socially acceptable. Even with increasing prevalence of e-cigarette use and awareness, the negative view of smoking persisted.

Perceived harms from vaping

The perceived risk of vapes within young people was variable (Brown et al. 2020) compared to the clear view of the health risks of cigarette use. However, there was no consensus that vaping was less harmful than smoking cigarettes (Brown et al. 2020, Smith and Hilton, 2022, Porcellato et al. 2020). One study highlighted the fact that the cigarette harms has been a consistent public health message being delivered from primary school age but the harms of vaping are still relatively unknown (Brown et al. 2020).



How we designed and conducted the research

Overview

In Wakefield we know that to achieve the best outcomes for all our residents, people should be involved in decisions about their lives right from the start. This is reflected in how we work with our communities and in how we conduct research and use research evidence.

Vaping was prioritised by our young people, and young people have been involved throughout the study. We wanted to work in a participative manner and be guided by children and young people throughout the whole process. This included developing the aims of the research, how we would work together to gather and analyse the data and importantly, next steps. We will work together to develop policies and interventions to help young people make informed choices about vaping based on the findings.

We also want to leave a legacy in both building research capacity and experience, but also in giving young people the opportunity to learn and have fun. Being involved in a council project, taking part in activities outside the school environment, and gaining recognition for this, could be something that they could use in the future.

Many members of the research team had not been involved in research before. This has provided learning and built capacity for future research in the local authority and understanding of the use of evidence in decision making.

Study design

The research aim was to understand the experiences of young people, their thoughts, perceptions and beliefs about vaping, as well as the drivers that might motivate them to vape or not vape. Given the nature of the data required, a qualitative approach was chosen. Qualitative in-depth interviews and focus groups were conducted using open format, predesigned semi-structured topic guides. However, to provide young people with different opportunities to be involved in collecting and providing data, workshops were also held where young people could provide data by telling their stories, through artwork or video if they chose and young people were given the opportunity to become researchers and collect data from their peers. Additionally, arrangements were made to accommodate any requirements for young people with physical disabilities or neurodiversity to be involved.

Importantly, we wanted the young people to feel able to be involved in places they felt comfortable and familiar with. We did not expect the young people to come to us and we held most interviews, focus groups and workshops in schools, colleges, youth clubs and holiday clubs.

Ethics

Ethical guidance and approval were provided by Leeds Beckett University. Matters relating to information governance, data protection and privacy were overseen by both Leeds Beckett University and Wakefield Council.

Topic guide development

The topic guides were developed with children and young people, teachers and youth workers as part of public involvement activities prior to study delivery. Questions and prompts were used to guide conversations and to keep the interviews and focus groups on track with the same content but allowing for further probing where data of interest arose.

Sampling approach and recruitment

Within qualitative research, the aim is not to create a statistically representative sample of the population but create a sample of participants in which we can be confident they provide a varied and representative set of experiences, thoughts, attitudes and beliefs about a specific topic.

As such we created a simple sample frame (Appendix 3) that we populated as young people were recruited into the study. This ensured we had a mix of vapers and non -vapers (important as to why young people did or didn't vape), ages, genders, ethnicities and geographical spread across the district (both more deprived and more affluent areas). A screening questionnaire was used to identify those who have ever vaped and those who have never vaped, however focus groups were mixed and young people were not asked to reveal their vaping status in front of others.

Adults were sampled in a similar manner to ensure a mix of experiences and perceptions from both educational settings and informal youth settings.

A multi strand recruitment approach was used including approaching head teachers, youth organisations and third sector colleagues across the district, to gain initial interest in the work. Once interest in taking part in the study was established, the team worked with the organisations to recruit young people and adults into the study through a variety of mechanisms including several pre-research visits to build relationships and trust with young people, providing written (see appendix 4 for example) and verbal information and assurance where needed.

The study planned to recruit up to 36 young people and 36 adults. As young people and adults asked to be part of the study, the sample frame was populated until the target sample was achieved. However, the response from schools and youth groups was far greater than expected, and we talked to 135 people as part of this study because there was great enthusiasm to take part. This included nine focus groups with young people ranging from 11 to 18 years old and five focus groups with adults including teachers and youth workers. Additionally, there were 3 interviews with young people. The sample frame was used to ensure the desired mix of ages, sex, ethnicity, and geographic locations across the district despite the greater participant numbers.

Participant information, consent and confidentiality

On recruitment to the study all participants received detailed information about the study with parents, and or young people, teachers and youth workers proving informed consent to take part. Please see Appendix 5 for full details.

Data collection and analysis

The focus groups and interviews were digitally audio-recorded with permission sought as part of consent. The audio recordings were stored in a password-protected file on a secure computer server via MS Teams. The audio recordings were transcribed verbatim by a professional service. Data was analysed using a thematic analysis; a qualitative research method used to identify, analyse, and interpret patterns of shared meaning (themes) within a given data set (Clarke and Braun, 2017, Hoffe and Yardley 2004) and processed using NVivo 12 software (Lumivero 2017)

What we found

The findings resulting from the thematic analysis of the data, are presented under 3 themes, and sub-themes. These are:

THEME 1:

Why young people might vape.

What things influence young people's choice to vape.

THEME 2:

The vaping journey – "all lights on green".

How many things in the lives of young people made it feel OK vape, easy to vape or encourage young people to vape.

THEME 3:

The impact on young people's lives.

How vaping was causing problems for young people.

THEME 1: Why young people might vape?

The young people, and adults, in the study reported a range of factors that motivated, or acted as enablers, for young people to take up vaping. These fell into 3 subthemes:

- It's a normal thing to do
- Emotional vaping – aspirations and making connections
- The physical product

It's a normal thing to do

For the young people in the study, vaping was a social norm, it was not considered at all unusual, and it was felt to be something many people did.

> **"I think vaping is considered just a normality nowadays, and it's just every other person that you see is doing it..."** *(Young person – FE College).*

Many young people told us they had first become exposed to vaping through friends and family. The younger, young people (11 to 14 years) had grown up seeing people vape and vaping felt normal to them.

> **"My sister does it [vapes], my older sister, and my dad does it."** *(YP- Youth Club)*

The older young people (15 to 17 years) had increasingly become aware of vaping in their early teens. Most spoke about how initial exposure to vaping in older family members was associated with quitting smoking or as a 'healthier' alternative to smoking.

> **"I think probably the older generation have gone from cigarettes to e-cigs to try and stop smoking"**
> *(YP – FE College)*

> **"I just knew adults that were trying to quit smoking, and that's how I found out."**
> *(YP – FE College)*

> **"My mum and dad smoked cigarettes, and then they stopped, started vaping and my sister was vaping."**
> *(Young person – Youth club)*

Vaping to quit smoking was associated with bigger, clunkier and re-fillable vapes, as were e-cigarettes.

Respondents described many influences that had also contributed to normalising vaping in the psyche of the young people. Some of these were subliminal in nature, for example the messages sent to young people that vaping, and buying vapes, was normal as they were sold alongside other regular purchased grocery items.

These enablers and influencers appear to combine and normalise vaping in the minds of young people and are described further in Theme 2.

> **"Vapes are very new age...vaping is more of a young person thing, whereas smoking seems like the older generation. I would say that's, yes, the difference."**
> *(Young person – FE College)*

Emotional vaping – aspirations and making connections

The young people, and adults, described several psychological drivers to vaping behaviour. These fell into drivers of behaviour which were 'enticing' or 'aspirational', those which were used to make 'connections', and those which were regarded as 'coping' mechanisms to deal with stress and anxiety.

Because it's cool and the cool kids vape

When describing how vaping is perceived by many young people, and why some young people may vape, positive associations were often used. This contrasted with those perceptions of smoking detailed in the Attitudes and Beliefs section below. **The young people described how vaping was "associated with like being cool"** *(Young person – School)*, **"a trendy habit"** *(Young person – FE College)*, and being **"more solid" [a person who you look up to and trust or admire]** *(Young person – School)*.

Young people perceived that it was the 'cool' kids who tended to vape; the most 'popular' young people. These young people were seen as the ones who did more risky things, acted cool and were more 'edgy'. Because of this, some young people tried to emulate the cool kids by also vaping to be perceived as being part of the popular group of young people.

"...you've started vaping because you want to prove you're rock solid." *(Young person – School)*

It was noted that this role modelling effect led to vaping spreading quickly, within friendship groups and schools, creating a snowball effect.

"People around the high schools were doing it, giving all that cool look and stuff like that. Then I think it quickly spread to people in high school..." *(Young person – FE College)*

Role modelling was also described as a motivator to vape in respect to older siblings, respected family members and wider role models such as sports people.

"...where you've got older people in a friend group doing it, and then the younger people feel influenced by them because older people, you tend to look up to more and think these are the people that I need to be like." *(Young person – FE College)*

"They [young people] see people who they would consider their role models doing it...They think it's acceptable because others are doing it." *(Young person – FE College)*

Some adults in the study noted that 'coolness' was not only viewed in terms of the vaping behaviour, but also about owning vapes in the way that young people want the latest toy, gadget or new trainers. This materialist ownership granting them a perceived alignment or membership of the popular young people's group.

"...it's like a new toy..." *(Tutor – School)*

There was also some limited evidence of vaping being used to impress others by doing tricks with the vapes.

Videos of such are readily available on the internet and were watched by some of the young people.

> **[videos] "...showing you what sort of cool tricks you could do with them [vapes]. I think there was like an event where people did stuff like that."**
> *(Young person – FE College)*

> **"They [people on videos] all talk about vaping they'll inhale it and do those flows waterfalls, and they'll try and make it look cool. I think our kids watch that and then they think, oh, I can do that."**
> *(Tutor – FE College)*

Some young people stated that they had started to vape to be like others in their friendship groups and this was also observed by adults in the study.

To fit in or the fear of not fitting in

"Because everybody's doing it, they save their pocket money to buy one to be the same as everybody else"
(Teacher – School).

"...they [young people] want to fit in with their mates if all their mates start doing it [vaping] someone's going to start doing it just to fit in and not feel left out."
(Young person FE College)

Young people told us that peer pressure was internalised and not exerted by others upon them; that it was driven by their own need to fit, to be like their peers and not stand out or be the odd one out.

"....because it [vaping] seems cool, wanting to seem cool, or the opposite of not wanting the stigma of not doing that thing." *(Young person – FE College)*

The fear of missing out was also stated as some young people described how they vaped to avoid being left out of a group, or the group socialising, if they didn't behave like the others.

"They [young people] don't want to miss out on that social bit. If everyone's going out to vape and they're left alone, they don't want to be left out."
(Young person – FE College)

One young person believed they had been shunned by a group of friends because they didn't vape.

"...wanting to not stand out in a group because, I mean, frankly, nowadays, if you're not doing something that your friends are doing and they're making it out as like, 'Oh, come on, do it.' It's like, well, it's the thing right now. You start to feel left out, and some people actually ditch you if you don't do it."
(Young person – FE College)

Others told us that they had used vaping to gain access to groups they wanted to be part of. The vaping gave them an excuse, or permission, to stand with and engage with a friendship group they wanted to join, or as above, hang out with the cool kids. Also create a network, discussing where to access vapes, bond over their behaviours of sourcing vapes, using and enjoying the vapes and creating a culture and a language for young people to connect over.

Whilst some young people admitted they felt vaping might be bad for them, the fear of being the odd one out, or not fitting in appeared to be a more powerful motivator than any health concerns.

"Say you're going out with your friends and they're all vaping, and you're the only one not vaping, you're going to vape, aren't you?"
(Young person – FE College)

Young people talked extensively about how vaping was used to cope with social anxiety or social awkwardness. Young people described how they used it to approach or stand with a group as they could stand with other vapers and not feel they had to join conversations as they could simply vape.

In one example, a young person carried a 'fake' vape which they used to stand with friends, so they didn't feel awkward about not vaping or having to make conversation.

Making connections - Coping with social anxiety and social awkwardness

"I had a student... I said, 'Oh. What you doing with that?' [a vape] She was waiting for her friends, and she said, 'Well, it's actually empty, they just don't know that. It just means I get to stand with them.' She'll hold it in her hand, and join in with the conversations, and stand with her friends, but then she doesn't feel totally outside of what's going on if she's got one..." *(Tutor – FE College)*

Several adults commented on how some young people use the vape like a 'safety blanket' so they can join a group without having to speak, they just pop the vape in their mouths to avoid conversation. Or alternatively they us it as an 'icebreaker' to join a group or chat with someone.

"Because people our age don't really know how to socialise, so I think it's just their way of being able to be like, 'Do you want a puff on my vape or my cig?' Or something like that. Just because they can't actually go to each other and have conversations about anything else."
(Young person – FE College)

"...sometimes if they're in a group... it's easier for them to keep getting it [a vape] out and doing it, vaping, and not trying to get into the conversation because they might not be able to communicate as good as the others, so instead of just being stood there like a lemon [someone not fitting in]. They get it out and just puff, puff, puff...Because they don't have to talk or answer questions, and they leave the others to speak... to just be seen doing something, but still count as a group."
(Tutor – FE College)

Many young people within the study spoke about how vaping was a way to cope with stress and anxiety, a kind of self-medication.

Coping with stress and anxiety

"I've heard a lot of people say it helps a lot with anxiety."
(Young person – FE College)

Vaping was used to 'calm people down', akin to mindfulness or the use of breathing techniques to combat stress and anxiety.

"I know some of them [vapers], they do it [vape] to calm down. They say it helps them calm down."
(Young person – FE College)

"...it's the inhalation. They [vapers] do it in sequences, which calms their nerves down because they're doing it in that way. It's like when you use an inhaler, I guess... When you're inhaling that in, you've got to take a deep breath and calm yourself down in order to use that. So I feel like people are using vapes in the same way."
(Young person – FE College)

The vaping often meant physically moving into another space, away from a classroom for example, and was described as 'to take some time out', 'to get your head clear' *(Young person – School).*

"...if it [vaping] gives you that slight nicotine buzz, the slight high from it, clears your head a bit..."
(Young person FE College)

Some young people also described using vapes in the same way as stimming [repetitive behaviours or motions that you may use to help cope with emotions].

"...for people who have a lot of energy, I think it's just something, their way of stimming themselves a lot of the time."
(Young person – FE College)

Some adults in the study expressed a recognition that young people may be using vaping as a coping mechanism for stress.

"...they'll [young people] get a bit mad and they'll want to go out for things [vaping], so you can see that it does release something" *(Adult – Youth club)*

"When they [young people] get fully addicted to them [vapes], they need it to calm them back down, don't they?"
(Adult – Youth club)

Other adults held more cynical and negative views about this.

"Anxiety is just a cool word to use now. It's cool if you've got mental health problems now because they can be different. So, if they're using it as an - saying it's for anxiety, it's probably because they know they get a bit more special treatment because they say they're anxious."
(Tutor – FE College)

"The kids think it's fashionable to be anxious. Like I said, that's them justifying why they use it because there are lots of other things you can do to reduce anxiety. In a school there is so much support and stuff that they can access to - rather than putting a vape in your mouth."
(Tutor FE College)

To feel grown up

Some young people believed that their peers vaped to look older or to appear more grown up.

Some young people talked about how they felt that making the choice to vape felt like a grown-up choice, something they had decided to do without adult intervention.

Making choices about what to do, or what not to do, was seen as a gateway to becoming an adult and growing up by the young people. The choice to vape was described in this way also as young people reflected on why young people vape. There is also an aspect of rebellion described; being told not to do something and trying it out to make your mind up.

This was reflected in the data from adults who also described young people speaking about vaping in this way and observed their motivation to feel more mature and in control of their own choices. The older young people felt that younger young people didn't understand or think about the risks at all. That they simply didn't know and did it to feel or look older.

Most of the young people felt it was wrong for people younger than themselves to vape; that it was a decision better made by older children even though some saying this were as young as 12 years old themselves.

Several young people reported seeing very young children vaping (circa age 7) but the majority felt vapers were 12 years and above.

> **"...think you're mature... about wanting to seem mature"** *(Tutor – FE College)*

> **"Yes, finding their feet, aren't they, a little bit?"** *(Tutor – FE College)*

> **"So that desire to be more mature, to look more older. So they think it's okay to do it [vape]."** *(Young person – FE College)*

> **"... it's [vaping] another thing that they can just feel like they can get away with and have power over..."** *(Young person – FE College)*

> **I've been told all my life I shouldn't do this, I'm getting older, I can make my own choices, so I'm going to try it. I think it's the same with vaping."** *(Young person – FE College)*

> **they [some young people] think we'll do that and we'll seem cool, which is I think why it's got slowly younger and younger because people do it to make themselves seem older..."** *(Young person – FE College)*

As an appetite suppressant

Vaping to supress appetite, or instead of eating when hungry, was only mentioned on two occasions but could be worthy of note for some young people who may be vulnerable to body image issues.

> **"I have known some people try and use it [vaping] as an eating depressant...instead of eating something to try and lose weight."**
> *(Young person – FE College)*

Vaping and drug use

Only one young person mentioned knowledge of young people using cannabis oil in vapes and it was raised by one tutor who described an incident where a young person was suspected of using cannabis in a vape.

The young people in the study were not specifically questioned about drug use through vaping, however, there were some concerns raised around illicit vapes and what they may contain, including illegal drugs.

Most young people accepted there were risks associated with legal vapes. However, of more concern was a rise in "vape dealers" who can be contacted by phone and drop vapes at your door. Questions were raised about the legitimacy of these devices and issues with other drugs being included.

One older young person believed that they had enough knowledge to vape relatively safely by purchasing legitimate vaping products.

One older young person raised their concerns that vaping may facilitate cannabis as a gateway to other drug use.

> **"I've seen one person (at current College). They were a big thing in my high school for a little bit. It was a trend going around, putting a little bit (cannabis oil) into vapes and things, but I've not seen it as much nowadays. I think it was a little instance."**
> *(Young person – FE College)*

> **"There's dealers around. You can text someone on Snapchat or Instagram, they'll just ask like I was saying, a random person's just go and give you them at you. You've got to be careful because people can spike them and everything."**
> *(Young person – FE College)*

> **"I've seen ten-year-olds vaping and smoking, and smoking weed and drinking alcohol. I think it's most likely all linked ...I think vaping might be the new gateway drug because it's so easily accessible."** *(Young person – Youth Club)*

> **"You see a lot in the news about people who've ended up in hospital because they've bought a THC (Tetrahydrocannabinol - the principal psychoactive constituent of cannabis) vape and it's been spice."**
> *(Young person – Youth Club)*

> **"I think I know enough on how to vape in a safe way, in a way to minimise the damage anyway. I don't go out and buy dodgy ones. I don't go out and buy those spice pods and everything."**
> *(Young person – Youth Club)*

The physical product

Several physical aspects of vaping and the vapes themselves made it attractive to young people whilst other reduced potential barriers for using vapes.

Convenience and ease of use was seen as a big factor by the young people and adults, in the take up and use of vapes.

Unlike cigarettes, which require a flame to light, were described as smelling bad and are heavily restricted, vapes are easy to carry, can be instantly used and have fewer physical and social restrictions.

Whilst this data cannot make any claims, or comparisons, around comparative addiction to nicotine through the use vapes or cigarettes, the ease of use of vapes may possibly contribute to addiction to nicotine through very regular exposure. As a vape carried in a pocket for example, it can be puffed upon when the user feels the need, unlike smoking where the user would likely need to leave a building or social space.

It was felt that all young people used disposables as they were smaller, easier to carry and conceal and looked more appealing.

In line with the current evidence base, the bright colours, logos and confectionary and fruit flavours were seen as attractive and enticing to young people. This made the experience of vaping an enjoyable one.

The fact they taste nice and don't smell bad like cigarettes was also cited. Whilst some young people felt removing colours and flavours may reduce uptake, some felt that some, particularly those seeking nicotine, would vape regardless.

Both adults and young people believed that the flavours and colours were very important, and some felt that if vapes tasted like cigarettes or didn't have attractive flavours, young people wouldn't vape as much. Additionally, young people talked about enjoying 'the rush'. They talked about how they felt when the nicotine hit their system and how they liked how it felt.

> **"...the convenience of a vape. It can fit in your pocket...You can just get it out of your pocket and use it."** *(Young person - FE College)*

> **"...they're [vapes] very easy for people to just use and get out and just use whenever rather than cigarettes, which is a bit more of an effort, and it's a lot worse in people's minds, I think."** *(Young person- FE College)*

> **"I think they vape more because it's easier to do [than smoking]. It's just so easy."** *(Tutor – FE College)*

> **"I definitely agree with the convenience of it. It's a lot easier to just pick up a vape as opposed to a cigarette, which is probably why younger people do it as well. It's much easier to hide if they need to hide it."** *(Young person – FE College)*

> **"Flavours and colours. If you get a nice colour,...A kid would be like, 'Oh, that's a nice colour. I want that one.'..."** *(Young person – School)*

> **"Like gummy bear and stuff...If they stopped doing those flavours...then other people wouldn't do it [vape] as much."** *(Young person – School)*

> **"Since it's [vapes] so easy to grab ... you're always on it. You don't have to roll it, light it, smoke it."** *(Young person – FE College)*

> **It's fun, enjoyable, tastes nice and there's the 'rush'.** *(Young person – FE College)*

> **"...all these flashy colours and different flavours, and you can get stuff like strawberry kiwi, banana ice, and it's like, ooh, I want to try that, but if you try it, if you have a couple, you just want more and more and more, and then you'll end up buying your own."** *(Young person – Youth Club)*

It's fashionable and part of their identity

Vaping was regarded a 'new age' and 'something young people did'.

It was described by both adults and young people as a trend. Some young people felt it was part of their 'look' and matched vape colours to outfits and for special occasions such as attending music festivals.

Several adults in the study observed the link with vaping and identity for young people and suggested that the flavours also played a part in this as young people associated themselves with certain flavours: for example, being a watermelon or a raspberry flavour vaper.

> **"Vapes are very new age...vaping is more of a young person thing, whereas smoking seems like the older generation. I would say that's, yes, the difference."**
> *(Young person – FE College)*

> **"... [the young person being discussed] was going to Glasto [the Glastonbury Music Festival] this weekend, and she was like, her vapes, and she was lining her vapes up with her outfits, so they coordinated, and she had, it was a coral one and this was the one with the coral..."**
> *(Adult – FE College)*

> **"It is [vaping] almost quite glamorised in a way...it's like, oh, look, it matches my phone case, and it's all pretty and aesthetic with all of their stuff."** *(Adult – FE College)*

> **"I wonder how much the younger people identify with their flavours as well. It's just reminding me of when I was a young smoker, you know, you were a Silk Cut smoker, or you were a Marlboro smoker..."**
> *(Tutor – FE College)*

THEME 2: The vaping journey – all lights on green.

This theme is about the world in which young people in the study lived, and how many influences have combined as an enabler to vaping and provide few control factors around vaping.

Young people within the study perceived a series of 'green lights' around vaping and very few 'red lights' to encourage them to not do it

These driving factors are seen at wider societal level, within their immediate sphere of influence, and at individual or internal level. This makes vaping seem acceptable and normal to young people, giving them a perceived 'permission' to vape if they chose to do so.

The sub-themes are:

- Access to vapes
- A normal grocery item
- The digital environment
- Prevalence and demographics
- Attitudes and beliefs

Access to vapes

All respondents spoke about how easy it was to buy vapes, how there were so many shops selling vapes and how there seemed to be new vape shops opening up everywhere.

Some felt that the shops were tapping into the potentially profitable market of young vapers.

Many examples were given about shops who didn't ask for proof of age.

Young people spoke about how quickly word spread about shops that sold to underage young people, even those wearing school uniforms.

Whilst some felt this was wrong, many had an ambivalent attitude to vapes being sold to young people, and two young people felt sympathies for the shop keepers who they saw as simply trying to make a living.

Respondents spoke about how easy it was to buy vapes online and how delivery services were available.

> **"There's three different vape shops in [town name] within a five-minute walk of each other."** *(Young person – FE College).*

> **"You see all the vape shops popping up now though. They're flying up... they all look appealing to go into. The way they're all marketed on the outside... If you're a young person walking past it and you like vaping, that's like a gold mine, isn't it?"** *(Tutor – FE College)*

The young people described how vapes could be ordered from local vape dealers who would sell to young people.

Local sellers are also using social media to sell vapes, and they deliver these to young children at any location including on a school boundary or to the youth club car park

Several young people spoke about how older siblings would buy vapes for them.

Young people being supplied vapes by parents was also reported by young people, and adults, and is reported further below in the Attitudes and Beliefs section.

> **"Some of them [shop staff] ask for ID, some of them just be like, 'Oh well, just put it [the vape] in your pocket.'..."** *(Young person -School)*

> **"...if one shop is willing to sell them to young people, then it will definitely get spread around and it'd get much more business."**
> *(Young person – FE College)*

> **"I think some are just genuinely trying to make a living and they only see that as, 'Well, I can't really turn away a customer because I've got to feed my kids and I've got to keep the business running.' ...I think it's, well, they're a paying customer. There's no malice in it, but it's just, it is what it is."** *(Young person – FE College)*

> **Amazon, you can get them off Amazon and places online and stuff as well."**
> *(Young person – School)*

> **"...with my mate's little sister, she were like, 'Oh, this man drops them off for me,' and I were like, 'You're 14."**
> *(Young person – Youth Club)*

> **"They [young people] could buy it off somebody in the village. A bloke was selling them. I don't know who it was, and they just used to go to him. Any age can buy one off him."**
> *(Adult – Youth Club)*

> **"You can text someone on Snapchat or Instagram, they'll just ask you where to and what flavour you want...So you text him or she, ...and then they'll tell you how much it and they'll ask you where to..."**
> *(Young person – Youth Club)*

> **"...from siblings. That's where I get mine from."**
> *(Young person – Youth Club)*

A normal grocery item in shops

The young people and adults in the study noted that vapes were sold as a normal good in shops and this sent a message that vapes were a normal thing and safe item to buy.

It was noted that vapes are sold alongside 'grab and go' items such as cans of pop, sweets and crisps.

This was compared to tobacco, or certain medicines, by the young people, which are hidden from general view, not freely available on the shop shelves, and highly regulated; again sending a message that vapes are safe to use.

> **"...any corner shop and they'll have an array of just different flavours... whereas cigarettes, you've got to go to specific places and you've got to go up to a counter and stuff like that, whereas vapes are on the end of shop shelves ..."**
> *(Young person – FE College).*

> **"...they're [vapes] at the tills, like they used to put all the sweets..."**
> *(Tutor – FE College)*

The digital environment

As above, the physical environment mirrored the digital environment where vapes had become a normal thing to see in the digital world.

The visibility of vapes online, particularly 'cool kids' vaping, was believed to have incentivised it to young people.

The vapes are prominent in the social media young people consume, for example: in 'product placement' style marketing, vapes are in the hand of young people in TikTok's videos, but the video is not about vaping

Young people spoke about seeing videos of people at concerts, doing fun activities and vaping being 'in the background' or people holding vapes or using them whilst doing other things.

This creates a subtle social norming affect; that they become part of everyday life, a normal activity. Additionally, this may be adding to perceptions around the prevalence of vaping and possibly building a belief that more young people vape than actually do. This can have an impact on behaviour and is detailed in Theme 3.

Whilst young people felt that adverts were tapping into a trend, rather than creating it, adults felt that young people were being directly targeted in a more aggressive manner by vaping companies and that this had been their target market and intention from the start.

Young people also felt that advertising was on the increase now and some uncomfortable that children are clearly being targeted by vape companies. Some also felt that companies were tapping into new markets to cover financial losses caused by smoking decline.

> **"As it [vaping] got more popular, it's become more like, people have been doing it on social media, but I didn't first hear about it on social media, no.**
> *(Young person – FE College)*

> **"People posting it on TikTok, vaping, or people posting profile pictures with a vape in their hand or something like that."**
> *(Young person - FE College)*

> **YP1: "[vaping]...just in photos or even if it's just in the back of a video or something."**
>
> **YP2: "I'd say the same as well, there's not really like adverts. It's more just like happens to be there, or it's like a group photo and people have just got them in their hands sort of thing."** *(discussion between two Young people – FE College)*

> **"Especially when they're [vapes] like sweet flavours, like there's some flavoured gummy bear...how is that not being targeted towards kids?**
> *(Adult – FE College)*

Prevalence and demographics

The study did not take quantitative measures on prevalence however, we asked all participants their thoughts on this. Perceptions of prevalence are important as a behavioural influence is created by perceptions of others behaviour; that vaping is more common than it is, 'everyone does it' and this provides personal permission to vape. Tied in with young people's need to 'fit in' this could be a powerful enabler and motivator.

Young peoples' perception of vaping varied depending on their social position and age. Most of the older young people 15-18 years said that 50-80% of young people had experimented with vaping. The prevalence of those that vape on a regular basis was lower at around 30% and closer to the national figures.

Staff and youth workers felt vaping had increased significantly over the previous 2 years and that prevalence was circa 20 - 30%. One group of adults felt whilst 30% of kids may have smoked in the past, 50% now vape. Some adults also reflected on the demographics of vapers. They felt that whilst smoking had been easier to predict in some socio-economic groups, vaping transcended all socio-economic groupings.

> **"It's like you can't walk down the street now without seeing a kid with a vape in their hand. "** *(Young person - School)*

> **"...you can tell the type of person that's going to smoke. You can usually see what path they're going to take, and we've got young people that you would never have thought would smoke that are vaping, because it's fashionable, and younger than they would generally smoke."**
> *(Adult – Youth Club)*

Attitudes and beliefs

The attitudes and beliefs held by the young people and adults in the study are linked to social norms, and social acceptance of vaping, and add to other factors creating the opportunity and capability to vape.

Smoking Vs vaping

All young people knew smoking was bad for your health and knew about the risks to health that smoking brings.

Smoking was regarded as a bad habit and the bad smell of cigarettes was mentioned many times.

The young people in this study regarded smoking in a very negative way, that it's 'old school' and 'what old people do' and 'a poor lifestyle choice'.

Whereas vaping was seen as new, modern, a 'social activity' and 'for young people'.

They recognised that vaping is used to quit or be healthier by smokers; but vaping in this regard was considered to be a different thing to their view of vaping as a social activity. Smokers still needing the nicotine was seen as a driver to why those trying to quit took up vaping as well as the health benefits of quitting.

Vaping to quit was associated with e-cigarettes and re-fillable vapes. These were seen as quitting aids and not something young people would use as they are clunky, unattractive and too much bother to re-fill and use.

Smoking was regarded as offensive, particularly around others, whereas vaping was not seen in this way. Vaping around others was not seen to cause offence as it smells nice and was thought not to cause harm to others. Vaping was regarded as socially acceptable whereas smoking was not.

> **"...when I was younger, I used to say smoking was slow suicide, but obviously then I started vaping."** *(Young person – Youth Club)*

Many young people felt that there were people who vaped that would never dream of smoking, and this was reflected in vaping behaviou. The young people noted how people vaping behave differently to smokers. People will walk down the street vaping, vape in company, indoors or in pubs and restaurants – things they wouldn't dream of doing if they smoked. This was felt to be partly due to restrictions, but also around the different attitudes and beliefs around smoking vs vaping. This was also reflected in adult responses.

The study found only one example of a vaper becoming a smoker. This young person believed they may have started smoking regardless of vaping as most of her family smoked despite a family member dying of smoking related lung cancer.

Most young people felt it was usually the other way around – that people might vape to stop smoking.

> **"The smell of cigs is disgusting."** *(Young person – School)*

> **"I feel like smoking is considered old school now."** *(Young person – FE College)*

> **"...vaping is a more positive... like you would rather than smoking because I mean it smells nice does vaping, whereas smoking doesn't really appeal to most people."** *(Young person – FE College)*

> **"We've had an incident of somebody vaping in a lesson. We would never have somebody smoking in a lesson."** *(Tutor – FE College)*

> **[Smoking] "It's not really seen nowadays in younger people, so they'd look a little bit odd in comparison to everyone else. Yes. It would just be a bit abnormal. Bit out of place."** *(Young person – FE College)*

> **"I'd say it's usually the other way around especially in the older generation. People would use vapes as a way to stop themselves from smoking."** *(Young person – FE College)*

> **"I think probably the older generation have gone from cigarettes to e-cigs to try and stop smoking"** *(Young Person - FE College)*

> **Vapes are very new age..."** *(Young person – FE College)*

> **"Because they're used to that little bit of nicotine so they'd probably, without it, they'd have to smoke wouldn't they?"** *(Adult – Youth Club)*

> **"...my daughter vapes in the bedroom watching TV. If she smoked a cigarette, she would never do that."** *(Tutor – FE College).*

Parental attitudes

The study found that parental attitudes, as reported by both young people and adults, often acted as an enabler for vaping. In some cases, parents were aware that their children vaped, accepted it, and even purchased vapes for them. Adults also confirmed instances of parents buying vapes for their children, contributing to the many signals normalizing vaping.

Some parents felt that if they were going to do it, they would rather they used legitimate products rather than buying cheap or illicit ones with unknown chemical content. Others believed that vaping was better than their child taking up smoking or drugs.

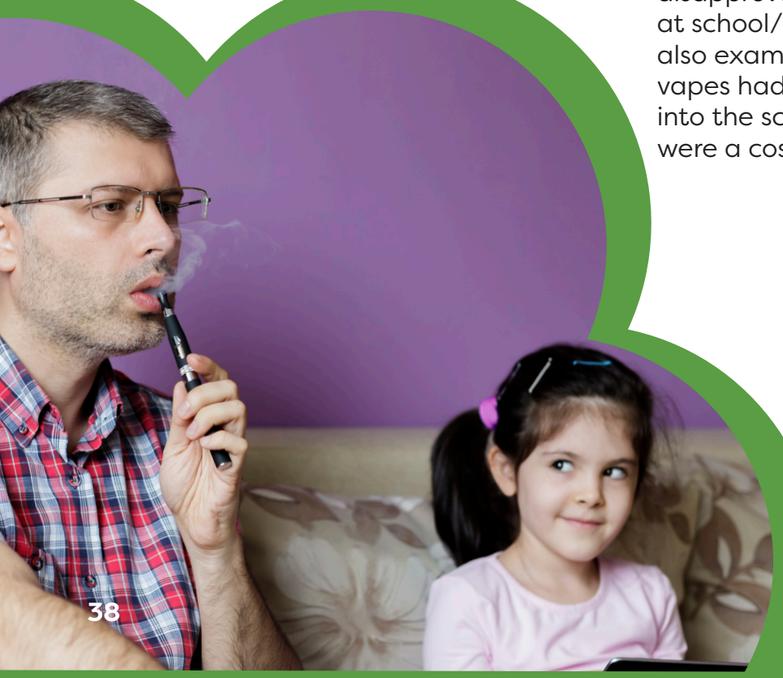
Some parents felt vaping was normal and not an issue.

In some examples young people talked about the way that some young people were parented. They described how some parents felt it was 'cool' to be more like a friend to their child than a parent. In some cases, both parent and child vaped and this bonded them and became a shared activity; something they had in common and could do together as a family.

In one example, a young person described how some parents were worried that their child was not fitting in, or was not part of a friendship group, and allow their child to vape so they would fit in.

Some young people raised concerns that parents would allow young people to vape to 'keep them quiet or 'keep them off their backs'. Knowingly allowing younger young people to vape was regarded as bad parenting by some young people.

Adults in the study felt that parental attitude was sometimes unhelpful, particularly in the learning environment. Some due to their lack of concern about vaping and belief it was OK for young people to vape, and others who disapproved of their child being disciplined at school/College for vaping. There were also examples of parents being angry that vapes had been confiscated and would go into the school to collect them citing they were a costly and valuable item.



> **"Parents are aware that they [their child] vape. Some parents buy the vapes for them."** *(Tutor – School)*

> **"I've heard of people who get them from parents... they don't see it as much of an issue or they don't know about it. Maybe say if they've had experiences with them [vapes], then that normalised it."** *(Young person – FE College)*

> **"...the people that have younger parents, they treat their kid who's a teenager as their friend more than their kid to be able to have someone to socialise with..."** *(Young person – FE College)*

> **"A lot of the time they feel like if their children aren't fitting in and the child asks for that, it's [vaping] the way to give them something to be in common with other people."** *(Young person – FE College)*

> **"You'll get parents saying, 'I paid £10 for that... 'I'm coming to collect it.'..."** *(Tutor – School)*

> **Parents are aware that they [their child] vape. Some parents buy the vapes for them."** *(Tutor – School)*

> **"...as a parent, I prefer him to be vaping than doing anything else."** *(Adult – FE College)*

> **"...maybe they don't want their child smoking, so they think, I'll just let them vape it, it's fine."** *(Young person – FE College)*

> **"... we've had siblings, that their younger siblings are - oh yes - just stood outside vaping. You know families that they'll all do it."** *(Tutor – School)*

> **"....we've gone through a stage where we confiscate and destroy them, and we've had parents ringing in and saying, 'That's my property. That's a £60 vape,' and what have you...parents will be like, 'That's my money, that's my property,' rather than they're [their child] vaping in school."** *(Tutor – School)*

> **"Everyone just thinks it's not that bad, it's only got these few things in..."**
> *(Young person – FE College)*

Vaping and health

Most young people in the study believed that breathing in chemicals through vaping was probably bad for their health in some way. However, many thought the risk of harm was low.

Some young people weren't sure if vaping was better or worse than smoking, and two young people thought vaping was worse for your health than smoking.

All young people felt that the long-term effects of vaping are unknown and believe that the research evidence is very limited at present.

Young people reported that their peers don't really talk about the potential harmful effects of vaping, that it isn't something anyone mentions. When describing examples of peers who appeared to have some limited side effects from vaping, they described how those young people often blamed something else, like a cold or asthma.

> **"I think most people know that it's obviously not good for you, but whether there's that level of what it actually does, and people know it's bad for you but not actually how bad it is, and what the effects are."** *(Young person – FE College)*

> **I think it's not been around long enough... for long enough that scientists are able to make proper discoveries of how bad it actually is."**
> *(Young person – FE College)*

Impact of health warnings and messaging

Confusion around health messaging was mentioned by some young people. They felt that vaping had been positioned as safe and OK to do as opposed to smoking. Whilst they may not have considered smoking themselves, this had created a perception that there was little or no harm in vaping in the mind of some respondents. This was felt by participants to contribute to the likelihood that current vaping and health risk messages appeared to be not landing well with young people.

Some young people also talked about how they had seen items in the media about the impact of vaping, but these were generally ignored.

"...I've seen on the news and stuff like that what happens to young people, getting put in hospital...Like your lungs are collapsing, and stuff like that.

[...they [other young people/friends] see it [health warnings], but none of us take interest to it...When you've done it that much, you don't really care..."
(Young person – Youth Club).

"Most people already know [about vaping]. They know everything they've been told in the assembly [about harms], and they just don't care."
(Young person – School)

Older young people felt that if new messaging or communications were developed, it would have a greater impact on younger young people.

"I think especially with the really younger people that are starting, like 11 and 12 ... I think just education around the subject. It might make them less inclined to start if they understand what they're getting themselves into.
Young person – FE College)

Many stated that by the time young people get to later teens the messaging is too late and will likely be ignored given the behavioural drivers leading to vaping and the subsequent addiction to nicotine.

"...people need to know the effects, short-term and long-term and start telling them that really young, even if that seems like you're going to scare them, that's probably a good thing. By the time you get to 16, 17, they've already started kind of thing and they're probably not going to listen..."
(Young person FE College)

"...if you're starting to talk to people who are already 15, they've already made an idea of it and I don't think it's [vaping behaviour] really going to change".
(Young person – FE College)

It was felt by young people that any messaging or information giving (lessons or assemblies for example) should not be 'judgy' and should be presented by people they see as like themselves (not 'old people') or by role models and people they look up to or aspire to be like.

THEME 3: The impact of vaping on young people's lives

This theme is about the impact vaping has had on young people's lives. The reported level of vaping was having a detrimental impact on behaviour, how young people felt, their ability to learn and their life outside school

The sub-themes are:

- Addiction
- Disruption to the learning environment
- Impact on health

Addiction

All respondents knew that vapes usually contained nicotine and many said they felt it was challenging to find nicotine free vapes. Whilst it was acknowledged that addiction to nicotine is more likely in people who smoke cigarettes, there was a perception that dependency to vaping products does appear to be changing.

Addiction is mentioned many times within the data and whilst there were many reasons young people might start to vape. Some were now addicted. This was akin to an 'accidental addiction' and was seen through the lens of the culture of consumerism in which all the young people live.

> **"Just might have done it [vaping] for like a laugh and that and then they've got addicted."** *(Young person - School)*
>
> **"So the cool part of it [vaping] might go, but if everybody's getting hooked on the nicotine part of it, then they can't just stop because it's not cool anymore."** *(Tutor – FE College)*
>
> Some young people reported that their friends appeared to be strongly addicted to vaping and couldn't go long without a vape.
>
> **"...they [vapers] can't last an hour without it and they have to constantly be vaping"** *(Young person – FE College)*

Others talked about their own addiction to vaping.

Some young people felt they had high levels of addiction which they illustrated by how they felt when they weren't vaping.

Habit was mentioned by some young people when prompted. They acknowledged a physical habit in terms of a hand to mouth connection at specific times of the day. This is similar to the way smokers reach for a cigarette after a meal or at a break time.

Many felt that this addiction was increased through the ease and convenience of vaping in that it was easy to vape all the time and in lots of places (unlike smoking) and as such increase the intake of nicotine. As vapes can be concealed in pockets, some young people reported being able to have a regular quick vape throughout the day.

Several young people felt they were addicted, and some had tried to quit but found it too difficult, so had given up trying and continued to vape. Quitting vaping was regarded as difficult by many, even those who didn't vape.

> **When one [a vape] dies, you'll get another, and then you'll get another, and get another, and get another, and get another. Because of the nicotine."** *(Young person – School)*

> **I just feel a bit weird [when not vaping]. It can feel a bit like - I don't know how to explain it. I don't feel right.** *(Young person – Youth Club)*

> **"...it [vaping] gets more addictive because people can do it all the time, and they can have it sat in their hand.... and you don't have to really have anything to light it or stuff like that."** *(Young person – FE College)*

> **"People are so used to it [vaping] that it's a reaction, just... like a habit"** *(Young person – FE College)*

> **"...you're dependent on it [nicotine], aren't you? So I think that's where a lot of students go. They're not even thinking about the nicotine, but then they're addicted to something without meaning to, accidentally, and then they can't give it up because addiction is incredibly hard to overcome."** *(Staff member – FE College)*

One young person spoke at great length about their vaping. They recognised that that they were strongly addicted to nicotine as they needed to vape a lot. They described how they craved the vape and didn't like how they felt when they couldn't vape. They estimated that they were likely vaping every 10 minutes every day. This aligned with their reported spend on vapes and the puff count each of these vapes provided. They reflected upon how this had affected their daily life including the time and money required to service the addiction and also impact on health seen as they could no longer keep up in football practice.

Additionally, the enjoyment and participation in sport had been affected as they needed to leave the pitch for a vape.

Adults also reported behaviours which could indicate addiction such as young vapers not being able to sit still, asking to go to the toilet a lot (so they could vape), lack of concentration, shaking and seemingly desperate for the class to end. This is discussed further below.

Several young people also noted the impact that addiction had on their finances. Some young people were spending the majority of their disposable income on vaping and felt this aspect of impact upon young people's lives wasn't considered.

Whilst this study cannot determine levels of addiction, the findings suggest addiction in many of the young vapers. Additionally, a distinction in addiction between casual/social vapers and those who vaped a lot was raised by some young people however, any links cannot be drawn from this data.

> **"They've [young people] gone through that stage where they're in the first few year of school and everybody's doing it and they want one. They've got a bit older...and they have tried to stop, and they can't."**
> *(Adult – Youth Club)*

> **"Since I played football, I can't run as long as I used to be able to. Yes, and stuff like that, so I think that's what it [vaping] does to you, like not make you breathe properly sometimes. It feels a bit weird, because when I'm playing it's very intense, and then if I can't keep playing, I just come off the pitch for a bit."**
> *(Young person – Youth Club)*

> **"...they'll [young people] sit in my classroom and be shaking, waiting to be able to go and vape again. They're waiting for break to go vape."**
> *(Tutor FE college)*

> **"I feel like if people know how much of a dent it did in your bank account, I feel like people wouldn't start."** *(Young person – Youth Club)*

Disruption to the learning environment

Both adults and young people reported that vaping was increasingly causing disruption to the learning environment in several ways.

Young people who vaped reported symptoms of nicotine addiction that affected their ability to concentrate and participate in classes. This included inability to sit still, being distracted, eager for the lesson to finish or finding excuses to leave class.

"Then they do get addicted to it [vaping] then, because even if there's only a small amount of nicotine, they can't go a full lesson without sneaking out to the toilet to go on their e-cig"
(Adult – School)

This meant a lack of engagement from these young people but also some disruption to other classmates also.

"...because sometimes I don't focus because I'll think about it sometimes, and it just causes me to be disruptive sometimes, or be like not listening, and getting told off for not doing my work, because it just feels like I need that pull."
(Young person – Youth Club)

Pupils missing classes or being absent is an issue for many schools, and whilst many activities may cause a young person to wish to miss classes, there was some suggestion that vaping may be adding to this.

"Desperate to get to the toilet, desperate to get out of a lesson. Obviously, I'm just thinking about a couple of young people; you can see that they're really struggling [with nicotine addiction]."
(Teacher – School)

Vaping is increasingly disrupting schools, taking up staff time and resources as they enforced bans, confiscated vapes, and installed measures like cameras and vape alarms. Despite these efforts, both adults and young people admitted vaping was widespread and difficult to control. School messaging focused on not vaping rather than information about vaping risks. Some exclusions from school for repeated vaping in school were reported by adults in the study who noted that excluding repeat offenders didn't help their education and that they were likely to vape more when out of school.

Impact on health

Most young people believed that inhaling chemicals must have negative effects, but many were unsure due to mixed messages and a perceived lack of clear research. While some acknowledged the risks, many adopted a “live for now” mindset, assuming serious health impacts wouldn’t affect them. This attitude was reinforced by messaging that vaping is a safer alternative to smoking. Although they didn’t generally associate vaping with smoking, the idea that vaping was relatively safe had taken hold.

Some young people gave examples of how they felt vaping had negatively impacted on their ability to exercise, run up stairs or play sports like football.

However, where health had been affected mildly, such as a cough, other issues were blamed such as a cold. Again, displaying a kind of dissonance in respect to the possible harm caused by vaping.

> **“I know that one of my friends used to go to the gym all the time, and they stopped because they wouldn’t be able to keep up with it anymore because they vape too much.”**
> *(Young person – FE College)*

> **“It’s [effect of vaping] like shortness of breath a bit… They [young people] think it’s something else.”**
> *(Young person – Youth Club)*

> **“Since I played football, I can’t run as long as I used to be able to… Yes, and stuff like that, so I think that’s what it does to you, like not make you breathe properly sometimes.”**
> *(Young person – Youth Club)*

DISCUSSION

What do the findings mean?

Introduction and summary of findings

This study adds new evidence and insight into the emotional and behavioural drivers of vaping in young people. Driven by evidence gaps and young peoples’ concerns, this topic was prioritised.

The research exposed the depth of emotional vaping; and its use as a coping mechanism for anxiety and stress and an enabler to make social connections. Additionally, within the lives and psyche of young people, there are many ‘green lights’, or enablers to vaping and very few ‘red lights’, or barriers to prevent trying and/or continuing to vape.

Behavioural choices were shaped by structural factors enabling easy access in shops or via fast delivery mechanisms. Adult use emphasised a message of acceptability. This led to a growing social norm and peer to peer spread of vaping activity. The impact on schools and colleges added another layer of policing and safety checks to their busy days.

Whilst health is often the focus of concern regarding the rising levels of vaping amongst young people, this research exposed how vaping was impacting on the wider determinants of health of young people, including their mental health, their learning environment and ability to learn.

The findings from this research are discussed in greater depth below under the three overarching themes:

1. Why young people might vape

2. All lights on green

3. The impact on young people’s lives

Why young people might vape

The increasing trend of vaping among young people is a public health concern, yet the psychological and contextual motivations behind this behaviour remain under-researched. While studies frequently cite appealing flavours, influencer marketing, and social media advertising as key motivators (Brown et al., 2020; Smith & Hilton, 2020; Moore et al., 2020), this study revealed deeper psychological drivers. These are particularly relevant post COVID-19.

Young people described how they started to vape to appear fashionable or cool (Brown et al., 2020; Smith & Hilton, 2020; Moore et al., 2020). Whilst the evidence was limited in this study, some materialism was found with young people wanting to be like the cool kids who may have the latest gadgets, reflecting a consumer driven and materialistic society. This also relates to flavours and whilst they are in themselves an enticing enabler, being attractive and marketed to young people's confectionary tastes, having the latest new flavour would also offer kudos amongst peers.

However, more significant are the findings that **vaping was used as a tool for emotional regulation and social integration**. It helped young people deal with stress, anxiety, and social awkwardness, acting as a coping mechanism and icebreaker.

The desire to fit in, or avoid exclusion from friendship groups, was a powerful motivator with many young people saving money to participate in this social trend.

Vaping provides a mechanism or access to connections and bonds, being used as a safety blanket through which to socialise with others.

This totally overrode any concerns about the safety of vaping and given the current confusion and lack of evidence around their safety, meant that the messages were mostly ignored with the need to make connections being much more powerful.

Surprisingly, many young people within this study reported using v**apes as a self-soothing strategy to manage anxiety or low mood**. While limited research exists on the direct impact of vaping on youth mental health, studies such as Smith et al. (2023) and Reyes et al. (2021) have highlighted the influence of social media and early life experiences on vaping behaviours. The act of vaping itself resembling mindfulness techniques, may offer temporary relief but long-term addiction.

This led young people to describe unintended nicotine addiction as "accidental addiction."

The long-term impact on respiratory health created by inhalation of chemicals through vaping is still relatively unknown (BMJ 2022) and whilst nicotine use alone may hold no health concerns, the impact on the young people's lives as discussed below was significant in some cases. Given the genuine despair shown by some young people at their addiction to nicotine and their failed quit attempts, this raises issues around the lack of support services currently available for those wishing to quit.

Additionally, the impact on their mental health in recognition of this addiction is of concern.

Caution needs to be exercised in current messaging, which focuses on vaping being for over 18s as this could become a perverse incentive to young people by suggesting that if they vape, they will look like, or be associated with, older people. It also suggests adult choices, something which adolescents strive to feel they are making, which is the natural rebellion of youth and becoming an autonomous person.

Given the unknown long-term health consequences (BMJ, 2022) and the emotional dependency some users experience, addiction may serve as a more impactful deterrent than traditional health warnings.

All lights on green

This study found that the social and psychological environments of young people are filled with enablers (green lights) to vape. The physical availability, social norms, marketing strategies, and minimal regulation, collectively signalled that vaping was acceptable and safe.

Young people reported that vaping was normalised via exposure in families, peer groups, and society at large. The positioning of vapes in shops alongside day-to-day groceries, their colourful packaging, and branding like collectible toys, reinforced **perception that vaping is safe and mainstream** aligning with findings from Brown et al. (2020), who noted similar cues influencing consumer behaviour and adding to the social norming effect.

Ease of access to vapes through shops, online platforms, and delivery services, further contributed to widespread use. The rise of illegal vapes (National Trading Standards, 2024) and doorstep delivery normalises this convenience. Social media platforms, especially TikTok, played a significant role in subtly embedding vape use through unregulated content and product placement.

Young people cited the ease and discretion of vaping compared to smoking as a major advantage. Vapes were viewed as more socially acceptable, lacked the stigma of smoking, and were easier to hide and use frequently. Although heated tobacco products are effective nicotine delivery systems (Cochrane, 2019), vaping may lead to frequent nicotine intake due to constant use and led to reports of addiction from some. Further research on usage patterns and addiction levels is required.

Perceptions of vaping prevalence were high. While national data from ASH (2025) reported lower rates, participants in Wakefield estimated that between 50 and 80% of young people had tried vaping, and 20 to 30% vaped regularly. **This perception of "everyone vaping" acted as a behavioural enabler by creating peer to peer permission and another green light to start vaping**.

Importantly, teachers and youth workers reported that vaping appeared to cross all socio-economic groups. Unlike smoking, which historically has greater prevalence within some demographic groups, this study found that vaping was common across all youth groups, however, detailed socio-economic data was not captured. Further work is needed to confirm this.

Attitudes strongly influenced vaping behaviours. Consistent with Brown et al. (2020), participants viewed smoking and vaping as fundamentally different. **Smoking was described in highly negative terms as "disgusting," "a poor life choice," and "for old people" whereas vaping was seen as "modern, for young people", a sociable, and largely harmless activity.** National campaigns presenting vaping as a smoking cessation tool (Gov.UK, 2022) may have inadvertently contributed to this positive view.

Young people did acknowledge some of the health risks but often downplayed them, likening vaping to other socially accepted harmful behaviours like eating processed foods or drinking alcohol. They were aware that scientific evidence about the health harms of vaping were inconclusive. **Young people believed warnings of harm were exaggerated or irrelevant to them, particularly due to a "live for now" mindset.**

Current messaging about the harms of vaping especially long-term health effects did not resonate. While some participants acknowledged decreased performance in sports, most rejected health messaging due to a lack of "concrete evidence". Campaigns must therefore shift from long-term health warnings to more immediate and relatable concerns, such as addiction or loss of control. Furthermore, i**nterventions that begin at secondary school were seen as too late**. By that age, social pressures and behavioural patterns may already be entrenched. Earlier engagement and targeted messaging are needed but much earlier and delivered by their peers or other respected influencers.

Concerns were raised about how addicted users might respond to increased regulation. **Some feared that bans on disposables could lead to stockpiling, illicit use, or even switching to cigarettes**, however, these are still unknows. The adaptability of vape companies was noted, with smaller, more appealing refillable vapes already emerging in response to upcoming restrictions.

Parental attitudes shaped young people's perceptions and behaviours. Some parents disapproved of vaping, while others took a pragmatic or permissive stance, viewing vaping as safer than other risky behaviours. A minority of families used vaping as a shared activity, suggesting a potential bonding mechanism. Although the study does not establish causal links, **the data suggested that parental behaviours contributed to the growing social norm around vaping**.

Overall, this research highlighted that vaping is widely accepted, normalised, and easily accessed by young people across different social contexts. Current health campaigns and regulations may be insufficient or misaligned with youth perceptions, and a more nuanced, age-appropriate, and psychologically informed approach is needed.

The impact on young people's lives

This study uncovered previously unexplored impacts of vaping on young people's lives, beyond what has been reported in existing literature. The literature revealed no prior research on the broader social and developmental impacts of vaping, particularly regarding its effects on education and future employment, mental health, and young peoples' finances, or other social determinants of health.

Key findings:

Daily Life Disruptions:

Vaping affected how young people spend money, behave in school, and manage stress. Some reported failed quit attempts and experienced subsequent negative mental health effects.

Nicotine Addiction:

While vapes deliver less nicotine than cigarettes, their ease of use and concealability may contribute to high-frequency use and potential addiction. Young people's self-reported behaviours aligned with signs of dependence, though the study could not quantify the extent of addiction. More research is needed in this area.

Educational Environment:

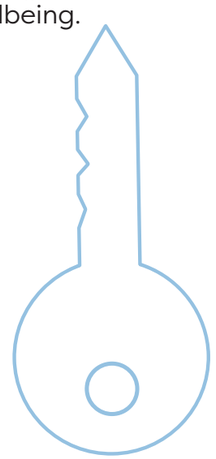
Vaping significantly disrupted learning environments. Schools reported challenges in managing vaping, with staff time diverted to enforcement. Students also described poor concentration, fidgeting, and disruptions due to nicotine cravings and potentially affecting academic performance over time.

Financial Impact:

Some young people spent a significant portion of their money on vapes, which may reduce their ability to participate in social or other recreational activities.

Mental Health and Failed Quit Attempts:

Many young people tried to quit vaping but failed, which may negatively affect mental health. These issues intersect with broader challenges faced by this generation, including social isolation from the COVID-19 pandemic, digital dependency, and changes in social connection, all of which may affect long-term brain development and wellbeing.



Conclusions and recommendations

This study highlighted complex behavioural and social drivers enabling youth vaping. Many young people felt they were part of a "a lost generation", and there is a need to focus on younger people to de-normalise vaping and prevent more young people becoming addicted to vaping.

Based on this study the recommendations are:

1. Legislative and regulatory measures

- **Support proposed legislation (Gov.UK, 2023):** New laws should restrict flavours, packaging, and marketing aimed at young people and improve regulation of vape sales to reduce access and use.
- **Legislation alone is not enough:** Wider behavioural factors such as stress, coping with anxiety, social norms, and parental influence also need to be addressed alongside regulation.

2. Early intervention and prevention

- **Start conversations earlier:** Prevention efforts must begin before in primary school, as many young people are already vaping by the time they reach secondary school.
- **De-normalise Vaping** Work with adults to make vaping less visible and socially acceptable to children, reducing its perceived normality.

3. Develop targeted messaging and campaigns

- **Move beyond health warnings:** Traditional harm-based messages are ineffective. Campaigns should focus on **loss of control, addiction, and personal freedom** e.g., "don't let vaping control you."
- **Reframe vaping as medical support to quit, not cool**: Emphasise that vaping is a quit-smoking aid for adults, not a trend or social activity for young people. Avoid glamorising it through "18+" messaging which may increase its appeal.

4. Research and evidence gaps

- **Nicotine Addiction:** Investigate levels of addiction, patterns of use, and which young people are most at risk.
- **Quitting Support:** Develop and fund support services specifically for young people who want to quit vaping.
- **Educational Disruption:** Examine the impact of vaping on classroom behaviour, concentration, and academic attainment.
- **Mental Health Impact:** Further research is needed to understand how vaping and addiction affect young people's mental wellbeing.
- **Parental Influence:** Study parents' attitudes and knowledge about vaping to inform interventions that target both young people and their families.

5. Develop a multi-faceted behaviour and structural change strategy

- Combine psychological and contextual interventions:
- A blend of legal, social, educational, and behavioural strategies is needed to reduce vaping enablers and create effective barriers.

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Appendices

Appendix 1: Literature review methodology, search strategy, study identification and PRISMA table

Methodology and search strategy

State of the Art Literature Reviews are referenced

The study design chosen was a state-of-the-art literature review Grant MJ, Booth A, 2009). This was done systematically by searching two databases, Medline and Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection. The search combined the search terms in table 2 using Boolean logic searching techniques (Dundee University 2025) and the search was limited to articles published from 2020 onwards and including at least one of the countries in the UK.

Table 2: Key search terms:

Children and young people	child* OR adolescent* OR young people OR young person* OR young adult OR youth OR teenager
Vaping	vaping OR vap* OR electronic cigarette* OR e cig* OR e-cig* OR personal vaporiser OR liquid nicotine OR nicotine vapour

*limited by United Kingdom or England or Scotland or Wales and from 2020

Article sifting and Study selection

- The studies were screened in three stages by title, abstract and then full study against the inclusion and exclusion criteria below. This screening was done by one reviewer due to the nature of the time and capacity constraints.

Inclusion Criteria:

- Published Studies: Only studies published in peer-reviewed journals were included.
- Language: Studies written in English were considered.
- Population: Studies focusing on participants under the age of 18.
- Focus: Studies that specifically addressed vaping or e-cigarette use or initiation among youth.

Exclusion Criteria:

- Non-Peer-Reviewed Articles: Review articles, editorials, case reports, and grey literature were excluded.
- Language: Studies not written in English were excluded.
- Population: Studies focusing on participants aged 18 and above.
- Focus: Studies that did not specifically address vaping or e-cigarette use or initiation among youth.
- Data Availability: Studies that did not provide sufficient data for analysis or were not available in full text.

Data extraction

Data extraction was done by a one reviewer using a Microsoft excel form created by the reviewer.

Analysis and synthesis

A descriptive narrative review was performed to provide an overview and help understand the current knowledge and developments in the field of youth vaping literature including new developments and gaps in the research.

Studies found by the search

The systematic database search yielded 194 studies, 136 from meddling and 58 from Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection. After duplicates were removed this was a total of 182 studies. After title and abstract screening using the inclusion and exclusion criteria 56 full studies were assessed. A total of 20 studies met the inclusion criteria and none of the exclusion criteria. The reasons for studies not excluded at full study assessment included not being youth specific, not being vaping or e-cigarette specific, inability to access the study, not having UK specific data, being a commentary not a study and being of too poor quality to include.

Identification of studies to be included

IDENTIFICATION

Studies identified from:
Databases total (n=194)
MEDLINE (n=136)
Psychology and Behavioural Sciences Collection (n=58)

Records removed before screening:
Duplicated records removed (n=12)

SCREENING

Studies screened by title (n=182)

Studies excluded at title screening (n=83)

Studies screened by abstract (n=99)

Studies excluded at abstract screening (n=43)
Not youth specific (n=33)
Not UK based (n=4)
Not vaping focussed (n=2)

Full studies assessed (n=56)

Studies excluded at full screening (n=36)
Not youth specific (n=33)
Not specific to vaping (n=19)
Not able to access study (n-4)
Not UK based (n=4)
Commentary/discussion (n=2)
Poor quality study (n=1)

INCLUDED

Studies included in review (n=20)

Appendix 2: Studies included in final literature review and study key characteristics

Author	Title	Year	Study type	Focus of study
Brown et al.	A qualitative study of e-cigarette emergence and the potential for renormalisation of smoking in UK youth	2020	Qualitative	Perceptions of youth around e-cigarettes and tobacco as part of an evaluation of the impact of the EU tobacco products directive
Staff et al	Adolescent electronic cigarette use and tobacco smoking in the Millennium Cohort Study	2022	Quantitative	Potential associations between e-cigarette use and regular cigarette smoking.
Smith et al	Adolescents' views on user-generated content and influencer marketing of e-cigarettes on social media: a focus group study	2022	Qualitative	Adolescents' views and engagement with e-cigarettes and the e-cigarette marketing environment
Conner et al	Association between age at first reported e-cigarette use and subsequent regular e-cigarette, ever cigarette and regular cigarette use	2021	Quantitative	Potential associations with early e-cigarette use and regular use as well as any association between e-cigarette use and subsequent smoking
Taylor et al	Association of Fully Branded and Standardized E-Cigarette Packaging With Interest in Trying Products Among Youths and Adults in Great Britain	2023	Quantitative	Potential associations of standardised packaging on e-cigarette appeal
Hallingberg et al	Changes in childhood experimentation with, and exposure to, tobacco and e-cigarettes and perceived smoking norms: a repeated cross-sectional study of 10–11year olds' in Wales	2021	Quantitative	Trend of e-cigarette perceptions and smoking norms
Parnham et al	Changing awareness and sources of tobacco and e-cigarettes among children and adolescents in Great Britain	2023	Quantitative	Trends in exposure of youth to the display of e-cigarettes
Dyer et al	Do Flavor Descriptions Influence Subjective Ratings of Flavored and Unflavored E-liquids Among Nonsmoking and Non-vaping UK Adolescents?	2024	Quantitative	Comparing perceptions of packaging and flavour descriptions of plain vs branded/flavoured e-cigarettes.
Kelly et al	E-cigarette use among early adolescent tobacco cigarette smokers: testing the disruption and entrenchment hypotheses in two longitudinal cohorts	2024	Quantitative	Potential associations between e-cigarette use and regular cigarette smoking.
Reyes et al	Early-life maternal attachment and risky health behaviours in adolescence: findings from the United Kingdom Millennium Cohort Study	2021	Quantitative	Maternal attachment and subsequent risk behaviours during adolescence including e-cigarettes use
Mark et al	Evidence that an intervention weakens the relationship between adolescent electronic cigarette use and tobacco smoking: a 24-month prospective study	2020	Quantitative	Potential associations between e-cigarette use and regular cigarette smoking.
Hallingburg et al	Have e-cigarettes renormalised or displaced youth smoking? Results of a segmented regression analysis of repeated cross sectional survey data in England, Scotland and Wales	2020	Quantitative	Potential associations between e-cigarette use and regular cigarette smoking.

Author	Title	Year	Study type	Focus of study
Moore et al	Young people's use of e-cigarettes in Wales, England and Scotland before and after introduction of EU Tobacco Products Directive regulations: a mixed-method natural experimental evaluation	2020	Mixed Methods	Changes to Prevalence and perception of e-cigarette use relating to the EU TPD regulations
Smith et al	Youth's engagement and perceptions of disposable e-cigarettes: a UK focus group study	2020	Qualitative	Perceptions of youth around vapes and vaping
Smith et al	Youth's exposure to and engagement with e-cigarette marketing on social media: a UK focus group study	2023	Qualitative	Exposure and perceptions of e-cigarette marketing on social media

Appendix 3: Simple sample frame used for study recruitment

Area	11-13	14-17	Male	Female	Other	Asian/Asian British	Black, Black British Carib/ African	Mixed and multiple	White/White British/other	Other ethnic group	Never vaped	Vaped once or twice	Used to vape but stopped	Vape every week	Vape every day
North Wakefield															
South Wakefield															
East Wakefield															
West Wakefield															

Appendix 4: Examples of written information for prospective participants

Information for VCSE Groups in Wakefield

New Research Study in Wakefield

Exploring Vaping Behaviours in Young People in Wakefield

We'd like to tell you about a study that the Public Health Research and Behaviour Change team are doing in Wakefield exploring the vaping behaviours of young people in Wakefield.

Why we are doing this research.

Many groups, including young people themselves, have told us that they are concerned about the increasing numbers of young people who vape. Although there has been some national research carried out into vaping, there are still many gaps and much we don't know – especially around children and young people. This includes,

- what young people think about the harms and risks of vaping,
- why young people might or might not take up vaping and
- what could be done to discourage children from taking up vaping or help them to stop vaping.

Vaping is a key part of supporting adults to stop smoking however, we know there are different messages about the benefits and risks of vaping which may be confusing. We also know that advertising is targeting young people, through social media for example, and this may be influencing their attitude and take up of vaping. We want to use the results from this to help us reduce the uptake of vaping in children and young people based on local insight as well as national evidence and policy.

Who we want to talk to.

We want to speak to children and young people, both vapers and non-vapers, between the age of 11-17 years who live or attend school in Wakefield District. Additionally, we also want to involve teachers, and people who work with young people, in the research to learn from their observations and lived experiences around vaping behaviour in young people.

Involving young people and leaving a legacy.

Most importantly, it is important that the research is with young people and about them – not just done to them. So, we want to involve children and young people right from the start; not just taking part in the research but also shaping the research, being researchers themselves or being on an advisory group.

We will be doing focus groups and interviews, but we hope to provide opportunities and support for young people to collect data themselves in lots of creative ways. This could be video clips, podcast discussions, photos, artwork, vision boards or any other ways they choose.

Besides collecting valuable insight, we hope to leave a legacy of some skills they can cite as an out of school achievement and we will provide references, letters, or certificates of achievement.

Once the data is collected and analysed, we hope to continue involvement through children and young people making recommendations and designing any interventions alongside our team.

Can you help?

We would be grateful if VCSE partners could helping us to identify children and young people and staff who might want to take part. This could be through existing contacts or through groups and services within the district. We have leaflets with information, and we can visit any groups to explain a bit more about the research. Including making sure children and young people know that what they say will be treated in strict confidence and all participants will be anonymous.

We may also need your help to arrange rooms or safe places to carry out interviews or focus groups and any costs will be covered.

People who are interested will be given further information and if they wish to help us with the research, they will need to sign a consent form (and gain parental consent for those under 14) to take part. Children and young people taking part will get a £10 voucher as a thank you for their help.

Governance

Yes, this research proposal has been approved in principle by Leeds Beckett Ethics Committee (LBEC), whose task is to ensure that research participants are protected from harm and research is conducted to the highest standards.

If you have more questions or think you can help us.

Please contact

Appendix 5: Participant information and consent forms

Consent form for young people aged 11 to 14 years old.

1. What is the research for?

We are doing a research study to find out what you know about vaping. A research study is a way to learn more about a topic such as vaping from a range of people. We will use the results to help young people make choices about whether to vape or not vape in the future.

2. Why have you invited me to take part in the research?

We want to talk to people aged between 11 and17 years old who vape and don't vape. This is because the number of young people vaping seems to be going up and some young people have told us they are concerned about this.

We don't know about the long-term effects of vaping or what that might lead to. We want to know what young people think and to use this information to help us support young people make a choice that is right for them.

3. Do I have to take part?

It's your choice if you want to take part in the study. You do not have to be in this study if you do not want to be. If you decide to stop after we begin, that's okay too. Your parents will know about the study too, as they must give their permission for you to take part, but they will not know what you tell us.

4. What will happen in the study?

If you decide to be part of this research, you can either talk to the interviewer on your own, if you prefer, or in a small group called a focus group. The people in the focus groups will be about your age and it will be a friendly discussion using a short list of questions. The researchers will guide the discussion, and it will take about an hour of your time.

5. What do I need to know?

There are some things about this research you should know. During the discussion you may share personal information or feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics, but don't worry, you don't have to answer any questions you don't want to.

We will set some ground rules to not share information outside of the group. The researchers will make sure all views are heard. If you don't want to be part of a group, you could choose to have an interview on your own.

6. How is the information from the group or interview used?

We look for common issues that people talk about and group those together in a written report. We will then work with young people to look at what we found out and use this to help young people make choices about vaping. We will never share your name, personal details or what you said with anyone else, and the report will not include your name or that you were in the research.

However, we need to make sure everyone is safe and well. So, if what you said shows you or someone else might be at risk of harm or injury, we must tell someone in authority who can help.

7. Are there any benefits or disadvantages of taking part?

It might not be of benefit to you but could be to others in future. A benefit means that something good happens to you. We think these benefits might help other children and young children in our area to receive the right information about vaping and to help them decide to choose whether to vape or not in future. It will also help us to think about when people might need help.

A disadvantage is when something bad happens. There should be no disadvantages to taking part other than sharing your views with other people. The researchers will stop the research if there are any problems. The safety of people always comes first.

We may not be able to include everyone who volunteers if too many people want to help the research. We must select participants of different ages and who live in different parts of Wakefield District to make sure we try and get the best information possible.

8. Is there an incentive to take part?

To thank you for taking part in the research, you will receive a £10 gift voucher.

If you want to be in this study, please write and sign your name.

Name: _____

I, _____ , want to be in this research study.

(Sign your name here) (Date) _____

Information and consent form for young people aged 15-17 years

Project Title: **Exploration of adolescents (aged 11-17 years) vaping in Wakefield District.**

Part 1: Information for young people

1.0: Why am I getting this?

This form is for young people who have said they want to help with research about vaping in our district. The research includes people who do not vape as well as people who do. We are hoping to speak with young people aged between 11-17, and teachers, to learn from their thoughts and experiences. Before any young people can take part in research, we need you to understand why we are doing the research and confirm you agree to take part and give your permission.

This form explains why we are doing this research, what will happen and who you can talk to if you want to know more or ask questions.

Once you have read this information, this form will ask your permission for you to take part in the research.

2.0: Why is this research happening?

Up to now, vaping has mainly been used by people to help them quit smoking. However, we are now seeing children and young people, who have never smoked, taking up vaping. We still do not know the short or long-term effects of vaping on young people or if vaping can lead to smoking.

We know that there are different messages about the benefits and risks of vaping which can be confusing. We also know that advertising is targeting young people, through social media for example, and this might influence attitudes to vaping. Although some research has already been done, there are still many gaps and much we don't know – especially around children and young people and vaping. The Public Health Team at Wakefield Council want to know more about vaping in our district, especially what young people think about the harms and risks of vaping and why young people might or might not take up vaping.

We will also be talking to teachers, parents and people working in public health in Wakefield District to find out what they know about vaping and their thoughts and experiences.

We will use what we find to inform our work, understand how we can support schools and help young people make informed choices about vaping.

3.0: Who has approved this research?

This research proposal has been approved by Leeds Beckett Ethics Committee (LBEC), who make sure that people who take part in research are protected from harm and the research is conducted to the highest standards.

If you wish to find out more about the ethics committee, please, contact Dr [name], Local Research Ethics Co-ordinator, Leeds Beckett University [email address]

4.0: Why have I been asked to take part?

We want to speak to as many children and young people as possible, both vapers and non-vapers, between the age of 11-17 who live or attend school in Wakefield District.

5.0: What will happen if I part?

If you take part in the research, you will be asked to take part in a focus group. This is a small group where the researchers can ask questions about vaping, and everyone has the chance to talk about their own thoughts and experiences. What you think, what you've seen and what you know about it.

If anyone doesn't want to take part in a focus group, we will offer individual interviews. Before the focus groups or interviews, we will ask you to fill in a questionnaire also so we can gather more information for our research. This will only take about 5 minutes to answer.

The focus groups or interviews will last about 45 to 60 minutes.

The research will happen at the school or community club, you normally attend. The teacher or community coordinator will help organise the young people but will not be in the discussion room to make sure the young people feel they can talk freely.

Two experienced researchers, Dr Amanda Stocks, the Insight-led Behaviour Change Specialist at Wakefield Council, or Dr Janine Bestall, Embedded Researcher with Leeds Beckett University, will guide these discussions and talk with the young people. Project coordinators Erin Langdon and Sharon Gilliver may also be present to take notes and observe the group.

We will make sure that everyone is comfortable and can ask any questions they like before the discussion starts. If anyone decides they don't want to take part at any time, they can leave the group or interview.

6.0: What questions will I be asked?

We will ask what you know about vaping and your experiences of vaping or other young people vaping. We will also ask why you feel young people might or might not vape, where young people buy vapes, what you think the health risks of vaping are and any other concerns you have about vaping.

No one will ever be asked to share anything they are uncomfortable sharing. No one will be asked to talk about anything they do not want to talk about, and the researchers will manage the groups and interviews carefully to make sure that everyone is safe, comfortable, and only talks about what they are happy to share.

7.0: How will the researchers capture the information?

It is impossible to write and really listen to what people are saying. Because of this, the focus groups and interviews will be recorded. The information recorded is confidential, and no one else except the research team will be allowed to listen to the recordings. The recordings will be kept in a password protected file on a secure computer server in the council. Any notes made by the researchers will be kept in a locked drawer. The researchers will use the recordings to write up the findings into a report. Once the report is written, the recordings will be destroyed.

8.0: Will other people know what I said?

Only others in the focus group will hear what others taking part have said. We will ask each person taking part to keep what was said in the groups confidential. However, we cannot enforce this.

When the report is written – no one will be named. We will use words like 'Young person 1 age 10' for example to identify the young people and only the researcher will know who this is. We will also be very careful that any other information that would make it easy to identify individuals will be taken out of the report. For example, names of friends, teachers, or places.

10.0: What are the benefits of taking part?

There is no immediate or direct benefit to you. However, research like this means we can use the findings to help make safer and healthier environments for the benefit of all young people in our district. By involving young people in the research, we can make sure support, and guidelines are informed by them and work the best way possible for them.

We may not be able to include everyone who volunteers if too many people want to help the research. We have to select participants of different ages and who live in different parts of Wakefield District.

11.0: Will expenses be covered?

Yes. We will reimburse any travel expenses or out of pocket expenses. To thank the young people for taking part in the research, they will receive a £10 gift voucher.

12.0: What if I don't want to take part?

You can say no now or at any point during then research. This is your choice, and whilst we hope you can help, we understand that any decision can be difficult. It can be especially hard when it involves sensitive subjects like vaping.

13.0: What if I say yes then change my mind?

You can change their mind about taking part at any time without losing your rights to ask any questions or seek more information about the research.

14.0: How will the findings from the research be shared?

As well as a report, we may write an article for a professional journal and talk about what we have found at a conference for example. it is important that if we can, we use what we find to help young people in other areas too. However, as described above, no names of who took part will ever be shared.

15.0: Who can I ask more questions or raise any concerns to?

You can contact any of the people below who will be happy to answer your questions or talk to you about any concerns.

[names, role and contact details]

Study title: Exploration of adolescent vaping in Wakefield District

Information and consent form for parents or guardians

Part 1: Information for parents and guardians

1.0: Why am I getting this?

This form is for parents or guardians of young people who have said they want to help with research about vaping in our district. The research includes people who do not vape as well as people who do.

We are hoping to speak with young people aged between 11-17 years, and adults who work with young people, to learn from their thoughts and experiences. Before a young person can take part in research, we need to have the parent or guardian's permission. This form explains why we are doing this research, what will happen and who you can talk to if you want to know more or ask questions.

Once you have read this information, this form will ask your permission for your child to take part in the research. If you agree to go ahead, both you and your child must give their permission.

2.0: Why is this research happening?

Up to now, vaping has mainly been used by people to help them quit smoking. However, we are now seeing children and young people, who have never smoked, taking up vaping and this is becoming a public health concern. We still do not know the short or long-term effects of vaping on young people or if vaping can lead to smoking.

We know that there are different messages about the benefits and risks of vaping, which may be confusing. We also know that advertising is targeting young people, through social media for example, and this may be influencing their attitude to vaping. Although there has been some research, there are still many gaps and much that we don't know – especially around children and young people and vaping. The Public Health Team at Wakefield Council want to know more about vaping in our district, especially what young people think about the harms and risks of vaping and why young people might or might not take up vaping.

We will use what we find to inform our public health policies, understand how we can support schools and encourage our young people not to vape.

3.0: Who has approved this research?

This research proposal has been approved by Leeds Beckett University Ethics Committee (LBEC), whose task is to ensure that research participants are protected from harm and research is conducted to the highest standards.

If you wish to find out more about the LBEC, please, contact [name, role and email]

4.0: Why has my child been asked to take part?

We want to speak to as many children and young people as possible, both vapers and non-vapers, between the age of 11-17 who live or attend school in the Wakefield District.

5.0: What will happen if my child takes part?

If your child takes part in the research, they will be asked to take part in a focus group. This is a small group where the researchers can ask questions about vaping, and everyone has the chance to talk about their thoughts and experiences. What they think, what they have seen and what they know about it. If anyone doesn't want to take part in a focus group, we will offer individual interviews. Before the focus groups or interviews, we may also ask young people to fill in a questionnaire so we can gather more information for our research. This will only take about 5 minutes to answer. The focus groups or interviews themselves will last about 45 to 60 minutes.

The research will happen at the school, or in the community club, your child normally attends and during the time they normally attend. The teachers or community coordinator will help to organise the young people, but will not be in the discussion room, to make sure the young people feel they can talk freely.

Two experienced researchers, [names and roles], will guide these discussions and talk with the young people.

We will make sure that everyone is comfortable and can ask any questions they like before the discussion starts. If anyone decides they don't want to take part at any time, they can leave.

6.0: What questions will my child be asked?

We will ask what they know about vaping and their experiences of vaping or other young people vaping. We will also ask why they feel young people might or might not vape, where young people buy vapes, what they think the health risks of vaping are and any other concerns they have – for example about the impact of disposable vaping on the environment.

No one will ever be asked to share anything they are uncomfortable sharing. No one will be asked to talk about anything they do not want to talk about, and the researchers will manage the groups and interviews carefully to make sure that everyone is safe, comfortable, and only talks about what they are happy to share.

7.0: Will I see the questions my child is asked?

No, we will not share the questions. We do this so those taking part feel free to talk openly. Your child may choose to tell you about the questions, but they do not have to do this.

8.0: How will the researchers capture the information?

It is impossible to write and really listen to what people are saying. Because of this, the focus groups and interviews will be recorded. The information recorded is confidential, and no one else, except the research team, will be allowed to listen to the recordings. The recordings will be kept in a password protected file on a secure computer server at Wakefield Council. Any notes made by the researchers will be kept in a locked drawer. The researchers will use the recordings to write up the findings into a report. Once the report is written, the recordings will be destroyed.

9.0: Will I or other people know what my child said?

Only others in the focus group will hear what others taking part have said. We will ask each person taking part to keep what was said in the groups confidential. However, we cannot enforce this.

When the report is written – no one will be named. We will use words like 'child 1 age 10' for example to identify the young people and only the researcher will know who this is. We will also be very careful that any other information that would make it easy to identify individuals will be taken out of the report. For example, names of friends, teachers, or places. You will not know what your child said unless they choose to tell you.

10.0: What are the benefits of taking part?

There is no immediate or direct benefit to your child. However, research like this means we can use the findings to help make safer and healthier environments for the benefit of all young people in our district. By involving young people in the research, we can make sure support, and guidelines are informed by them and work the best way possible for them.

11.0: Will expenses be covered?

Yes. We will reimburse any travel expenses or out of pocket expenses. To thank the young people for taking part in the research, they will receive a £10 gift voucher.

12.0: What if I don't want my child to take part?

You can say no now or at any point during then research. This is your choice, and whilst we hope you can help, we understand that any decision involving your child can be difficult. It can be especially hard when it involves sensitive subjects like vaping.

13.0: What if I say yes then change my mind?

You or your child can change their mind about taking part at any time without losing yours or their rights to ask any questions, seek more information or exit the research study.

14.0: How will the findings from the research be shared?

As well as a report, we may write an article for a professional journal and talk about what we have found at a conference for example. It is important that if we can, we use what we find to help young people in other areas too. However, as described above, no names of who took part will ever be shared.

15.0: Who can I ask more questions or raise any concerns to?

You can contact any of the people below who will be happy to answer your questions or talk to you about any concerns.

[names, role and contact details]

Study title: Exploration of adolescent vaping in Wakefield District

Information and consent forms for schoolteachers, school staff and others working with young people.

This form is for professionals working with young people who have agreed to participate in this research. The structure is in two parts. Part 1 provides background and information about the study, and Part 2 is a certificate of consent.

1. What is the purpose of this study?

Vaping in children and young people is rising each year. We want to talk to children, young people, teachers and youth workers about this to find out why. This study will explore the perceptions of risk, harm, social norms and marketing of vaping products for children and young people between 11-17 years. We will also talk to schoolteachers, and youth workers about what they know or have observed in schools and youth groups regarding the culture of vaping.

We will use the results to co-design key prevention messages and resources, working with children, young people, teachers, and youth workers to help them make informed decisions about vaping so they gain a better understanding of the impact of vaping on their health and wellbeing.

2. Why have I been invited?

You are invited as you work with young people in Wakefield District (see 2)

1. Young people – aged 11 to 17 years who live or attend school (or other educational facilities) within the Wakefield District
2. Schoolteachers and youth workers who work with young people aged 11 to 17 within the Wakefield District.

3. Do I have to take part?

No, you do not have to take part. Participation is voluntary and you are free to withdraw consent before, during and after the research session without giving any reason and without your legal rights being affected.

4. What will happen if I take part the study?

We will invite you take part in an interview or focus group depending on what suits you. You will receive an invite letter, participant information sheet and consent form. You will have a chance to ask questions and, if you are happy to proceed, will sign a consent form. We will schedule the interview or group a minimum of 2 days after you complete the consent form in case you wish to change your decision to participate.

The interview or focus group will be conversational and we will explore your experiences and perspectives of young people vaping. The interview or group will last about one hour and be recorded, and one person will take notes. The reason for that is we listen to the recording and identify common and unusual themes from the discussion. We will work with the research team to develop a report based on the results. We will extract comments from recordings but give these a code so no one can recognise who has taken part. We will let you know when the results are available so you can see how the information has been used.

5. What should I consider?

Are you happy to discuss young people's vaping in a group or one to one interview?

Do you agree/consent to be recorded?

Do you know how we will use your data, confidentiality and how we process data?

Do you know why we are doing this study and had a chance to ask questions?

6. Are there any disadvantages of taking part?

There should be no disadvantages for you when taking part, but you do have to take part at a scheduled time. We are aiming to do this where possible within your working hours.

We do not anticipate any risk for those taking part in this research. However, it is possible that in responding to a question, someone can reveal personal information by chance or feel uncomfortable talking about some of the topics. However, we do not wish for this to happen. It will be made clear that you do not have to answer any questions or participate in the discussion if you feel the question(s) are too personal, or if talking about them makes you uncomfortable. We will not be sharing the responses given to us by the young people with schoolteachers and others working with young people, or visa-versa.

7. Are there any benefits to taking part?

There are no direct benefits to you. Your feedback will be used with that of others to shape a report and action plan to develop and design communications and resources about risks, harms, social norms and marketing of e-cigarettes or vapes. We hope this will help young people to make informed choices about whether or not to vape.

8. Will my taking part be kept confidential?

If you are in a group, then the other participants will be aware that you have taken part in the discussion. Clear ground rules will be set about sharing information outside of the group, listening and respecting others points of views, but this cannot be enforced. We will also take time to answer questions or address any issues raised after the interview or focus group.

9. How will the data be used?

The interviews will be audio-recorded on an encrypted recorder and transcribed verbatim by a preferred provider. The recordings will be kept in a password-protected file on a secure computer server within the Council. Any notes made by the researchers will be kept in a locked drawer. Data will be analysed using University Software called NVivo. This analysis will be done on a university or Council encrypted system or laptop. Once the information is transcribed the recordings will be permanently deleted. The transcriptions are kept for 5 years and after that will be permanently deleted.

10. How will results be reported?

As well as a report, we may write an article for a professional journal and talk about what we have found at a conference, for example. It is crucial that, if we can, we use what we found to help young people in other areas too. However, as described above, no names of those who took part will ever be shared.

11. Who has provided ethics approval for this research?

This research proposal has been approved by Leeds Beckett Ethics Committee (LBEC), whose task is to ensure that research participants are protected from harm and research is conducted to the highest standards.

12. Who can I ask more questions or raise any concerns to?

You can contact any of the people below, who will be happy to answer your questions or discuss any concerns.

[names, role and contact details]