Additional information submitted by the UKVIA

Tobacco and vapes: packaging, appearance and display

Flavour descriptors and concepts

UKVIA supports the Government's objective of reducing the appeal of vaping and nicotine products to children and young people. However, we do not support the proposed blanket restrictions as drafted. The categories combine descriptors that are plainly youth-oriented with terms that provide factual information to adult consumers, and the evidence cited by Government does not establish that every descriptor within these categories has the same effect on youth appeal.

The consultation itself recognises both that vaping can help adults stop smoking and that flavours can play a role in quitting. It also relies on Taylor et al. (2025) to support limiting flavour descriptors. Importantly, that research tested simplified, factual descriptors, for example, 'blueberry and raspberry' in place of more stylised names, and found reduced youth appeal without evidence that adult smokers were deterred. This supports proportionate simplification; it does not demonstrate a need to prohibit all sensory terms, all confectionery or dessert descriptors, or all drink-related descriptors.

UKVIA therefore supports restricting clearly youth-directed concept names and presentation. Names such as 'Unicorn Dream' or 'fairy floss', references youth culture, video games, imitation of well-known confectionery brands, and wording deliberately designed to evoke children's products should not be permitted. This is consistent with UKVIA's longstanding Packaging, Labelling and Flavour Name Guidance, which already prohibits descriptors particularly appealing to under-18s or associated with youth culture.

UKVIA also opposes any restrictions on sensory descriptors, as this risks removing factual information that helps consumers to distinguish between products. Terms such as "cooling", "fresh", or "ice" are important factual descriptors, as they advise consumers on the flavour profile of the product, like whether it has a cooling sensation or tobacco profile, which is important when a lead flavour does not adequately describe the product. Signposting these flavour characteristics is also important for consumers who know they are sensitive or intolerant to mint, menthol or other flavour ingredients, as it allows them to avoid products marketed with sensory descriptors such as "ice".

More broadly, flavour descriptors provide meaningful product information. Terms such as "blueberry raspberry", "mint chocolate", "vanilla custard" and "coffee caramel" describe materially different flavour profiles. Requiring manufacturers to reduce these descriptions to a single generic word such as "fruit", "mint" or "berry" would make it harder for adult consumers to distinguish between fundamentally different products. It may also create confusion where a single lead flavour does not accurately represent the overall flavour profile.

This is particularly important because adult consumers do not necessarily choose products by broad flavour category alone. Research involving 20,836 adult frequent e-cigarette users in the United States found substantial variation in the specific flavours used by consumers and in patterns of flavour use over time.[1] This supports the view that consumers value specific flavour combinations, rather than simply choosing between high-level categories such as "fruit" or "mint".

The same proportionality should apply to food and drink descriptors. Terms such as "chocolate", "coffee", "cola", "brownie" and "cheesecake" are widely used, mainstream flavour descriptions across adult consumer categories and should not be prohibited simply because they fall within a broad food or drink category. The regulatory test should be whether the particular name, presentation or brand

[1] [2] Russell C, McKeganey N, Dickson T, et al. Changing patterns of first e-cigarette flavor used and current flavors used by 20,836 adult frequent e-cigarette users in the USA. *Harm Reduction Journal*. 2018;15:33.

association is disproportionately likely to appeal to children, rather than whether it relates to a flavour that children may recognise or access. A clear distinction should be drawn between factual descriptions of taste and presentation deliberately designed to evoke children's products, brands or culture.

A comparable distinction is already familiar in other age-restricted product categories. Alcohol products commonly use sensory and flavour terms such as honey, chocolate, vanilla, caramel and passionfruit to communicate taste characteristics. The use of such descriptors is not treated as inherently inappropriate merely because the underlying flavours may also be familiar to younger people; the regulatory focus is instead on preventing sales to children and restricting marketing that is specifically directed towards them. UKVIA considers that the same principle should apply to nicotine products: adult consumers should be entitled to accurate and meaningful information about the products they are purchasing.

The principles should be consistent across vaping and other nicotine products, but the evidence base should be assessed separately. Evidence and patterns of use differ between vaping products and products such as nicotine pouches; findings for one category should not automatically justify identical restrictions for another.

Finally, the UKVIA disagrees with proposals to restrict vaping and nicotine product flavour descriptors to a single lead flavour and to prohibit broad categories of flavour descriptions, as they are a key factor in helping adult smokers switch away from smoking. Changing guidelines to limit the number of words allowed on packing in this regard would risk disinformation or confusion for consumers, who in the moment may turn back to smoking.

A one-word or single-descriptor limit could also have the practical effect of restricting flavours indirectly. Where a complex flavour cannot be described accurately on the packaging, manufacturers may be discouraged from offering it and consumers may be less willing to purchase it because they cannot identify what the product actually tastes like. The result could therefore operate as a de facto flavour restriction without the flavour itself having been expressly prohibited.

For example, a product accurately described as "blueberry raspberry" conveys a more specific flavour profile than a single broad descriptor such as "berry". Likewise, "coffee caramel" and "vanilla custard" communicate different flavour profiles from "coffee" or "vanilla" alone. While the consultation proposes restricting descriptors to a single recognised flavour name, including by limiting hyphenated or combined flavour names, regulation should still allow manufacturers to communicate factual and proportionate distinctions where the terminology is not designed to appeal disproportionately to children.

In 2024, the UKVIA published research which found that 100% of stop smoking services providing vaping products offered flavoured options, including fruit, mint/menthol and dessert variants. Out of these options, fruit flavours were among the most popular choices for smokers attempting to quit[2].

Evidence consistently shows that non-tobacco flavours play an important role in smoking cessation and relapse prevention among adults. Removing these descriptors could make vaping products less effective as an alternative to smoking without addressing the root causes of youth uptake. The Royal College of Physicians has previously stated that flavours are an "integral part of the effectiveness of vaping as a quit aid".

For these reasons, UKVIA supports restrictions on non-descriptive concept branding but disagrees with proposals to limit products to a single flavour descriptor or ban broad categories of flavour names

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[2] **Fearon IM, Millar J, Dunne J, Murphy M.** An assessment of the provision of vaping products by UK Stop Smoking Services using data from Freedom of Information requests. *Cureus*. 2026;18(6):e110160. doi:10.7759/cureus.110160.

across vaping and nicotine products. Such measures risk undermining tobacco harm reduction and discouraging adult smokers from switching to less harmful alternatives.

Digital screens on vapes

The UKVIA accepts that digital screens should not be used for animations, games, youth-orientated graphics or other features clearly designed to increase appeal to children. However, a broad restriction to greyscale safety and status information is unnecessary.

Screens serve legitimate adult consumer and product safety functions, including displaying battery level, e-liquid level, wattage or power settings, puff count, lock status, charging status and fault warnings. These features can help adult users operate refillable and reusable products safely and correctly. Restricting screens too tightly would reduce usability and product understanding, particularly as the market moves away from single-use products. A colour system of red-amber-green would preserve the safety functions of the device, giving the user the information they need in a format that does not appeal to children.

There is also an important distinction between promotional screen content and information that allows an adult consumer to understand and manage how they are using a product. Evidence shows that adult vapers use a range of device types and nicotine concentrations, including refillable tank and mod devices that can offer greater user control.[3] Separate experimental evidence demonstrates that vaping behaviour can change in response to product characteristics. Cox et al. (2021), for example, found compensatory changes in puffing behaviour when users vaped liquids of different nicotine concentrations under fixed and adjustable power settings.[4] This indicates that users actively respond to factors such as nicotine strength and device settings, rather than using every product in an identical way.

Digital screens can assist this process by making relevant information visible to the consumer. Information such as wattage, puff count and other usage data can allow an adult user to understand their settings and monitor how they are using the device over time. This may be particularly useful for consumers seeking to moderate their use or progressively reduce their nicotine intake. The argument is not that a digital screen itself has been proven to cause nicotine reduction, but that removing information and feedback from the user could remove tools capable of supporting informed self-management.

This distinction is also consistent with the wider behavioural science literature. Michie et al.'s Behaviour Change Technique Taxonomy identifies “self-monitoring of behaviour”, “feedback on behaviour” and related monitoring techniques as established components used within behaviour-change interventions.[3] A device that records and displays puff count or other usage information can perform a comparable informational function by allowing the consumer to observe their own behaviour and make adjustments where desired. Such functionality is fundamentally different from an animation, game or decorative graphic intended to increase the attractiveness of the product.

Accordingly, screens should be assessed according to the information or content they display, rather than treating the existence of a digital display as inherently promotional. A numerical puff counter,

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[3] Cox S, Goniewicz ML, Kosmider L, McRobbie H, Kimber C, Dawkins L. The time course of compensatory puffing with an electronic cigarette: secondary analysis of real-world puffing data with high and low nicotine concentration under fixed and adjustable power settings. *Nicotine & Tobacco Research*. 2021;23(7):1153–1159. doi:10.1093/ntr/ntab013.

[4] Michie S, Richardson M, Johnston M, Abraham C, Francis J, Hardeman W, et al. The Behavior Change Technique Taxonomy (v1) of 93 hierarchically clustered techniques: building an international consensus for the reporting of behavior change interventions. *Annals of Behavioral Medicine*. 2013;46(1):81–95. doi:10.1007/s12160-013-9486-6.

battery indicator or power setting is functional information. It does not become youth-orientated simply because it is displayed digitally rather than through a mechanical indicator or printed instruction.

The Tobacco and vapes packaging, appearance and display consultation recognises that vaping is less harmful than smoking and can be an effective way for adult smokers to quit, while making clear that children and adult non-smokers should never vape. Regulation should maintain that distinction and avoid making lawful products less functional or less attractive to adult smokers, particularly when illegal single-use products that have no need for such screens exist.

Restricting screens to only the most basic status information removes potentially useful self-management and feedback functions without clear evidence that removing those functions would deliver a corresponding public health benefit. The appropriate regulatory distinction should be between functional information and promotional or child-orientated content.

A more proportionate approach would prohibit screen content that is clearly decorative or child-orientated, including games, animations, characters or other visual material whose purpose is principally entertainment or product promotion, while allowing screens to continue to display functional information needed for safe and effective adult use. Permitted information should include, for example, battery and charging status, e-liquid level, wattage or power settings, puff count, lock status, device warnings and other information concerning the operation or consumption of the product.

This is particularly important given the environmental and regulatory push towards reusable products. Reusable and refillable products can require more interaction and understanding from the user than a simple single-use device. Regulation should not inadvertently make those products harder to operate by removing functionality that assists consumers in understanding the state, settings and use of their device.

Functional lights and indicators should also be expressly permitted. Where colour is used for a genuinely functional purpose, such as a red-amber-green system indicating battery level, e-liquid level, charging status or a warning condition, there is no clear justification for requiring that information to be presented solely in greyscale. Colour can communicate status quickly and intuitively without introducing the games, animations or youth-orientated imagery that the Government is seeking to address.

For these reasons, UKVIA supports proportionate restrictions on decorative, entertainment-based and youth-orientated screen content, but does not support limiting screens to greyscale basic status information. The regulatory objective can be achieved more precisely by permitting functional information, monitoring and safety features while expressly prohibiting screen content intended to entertain users or increase the appeal of products to children. This would protect against youth appeal without unnecessarily removing functionality that can help adult consumers understand, monitor and safely operate reusable vaping products.