

Big Tobacco criticised for 'coronavirus publicity stunt' after donating ventilators

 thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2020-03-30/pmi-criticised-for-coronavirus-pr-stunt-ventilator-donation



Philip Morris International, the world's largest multinational tobacco company, has been accused of a "shameful publicity stunt" by a leading campaigner after it donated ventilators to the Greek government as coronavirus infections mount in the country.

Evidence suggests that smokers are more likely to suffer a severe form of the disease than non-smokers.

A PMI executive said that the company's Greek affiliate Papastratos had sourced and paid for the ventilators in order to help "flatten the curve". Stavros Drakoularakos, PMI's director of communications for Greece, tweeted the news and said he was "sky-high proud" of the move and described it as "proof of what sheer will and collaboration between all can achieve".

Papastratos donated 50 ventilators for use in Greek hospitals, including 19 to intensive care units at the Sotiria General Hospital of Thoracic Diseases in Athens. There are 1,156 confirmed cases of Covid-19, the disease caused by coronavirus, in Greece as of Wednesday afternoon. Thirty-eight people have died.

Vasilis Kikilias, the health minister, thanked the cigarette company for its donation.

Deborah Arnott, chief executive of Action on Smoking and Health, criticised PMI's motives. "This is a shameful publicity stunt by Philip Morris International, which owns Papastratos and has a 40% share of the Greek tobacco market," she said.

"Smoking makes people more vulnerable to coronavirus, and if they get it makes the symptoms worse, meaning they're more likely to need ventilators. Papastratos makes €1.3bn a year ... In comparison, the donation of 50 ventilators is a drop in the ocean."

A recent study published by Chinese researchers in the *New England Journal of Medicine* reported that smokers were much more likely to progress to the severe stage of Covid-19 than non-smokers.

Constantine Vardavas, a research associate at the University of Crete's school of medicine, said: "If smoking does predispose people to having adverse outcomes during Covid-19 it is a funny position to be giving ventilators but selling a product that leads to worse outcomes."

Greece has one of the highest smoking rates in the EU. Nearly a third of adults are smokers, according to 2014 figures.

The World Health Organization reports that smoking kills more than 8 million people across the globe every year.

Moira Gilchrist, a vice president at PMI, said: "We were happy to help the Greek government fulfil a critical need by sourcing this lifesaving equipment."

In the United States, Governor of Virginia Ralph Northam has asked if tobacco companies can help tackle the coronavirus outbreak by producing personal protection equipment.

Header image: A photograph released by the Greek Ministry of Health showing hospital staff using the ventilators

Public Health England paid group linked to Big Tobacco

TBIJ thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2020-03-20/public-health-england-paid-group-linked-to-big-tobacco



Doctors have criticised the organisation responsible for protecting the nation's health over its work with a vaping pressure group that is itself linked to the world's largest multinational tobacco company.

Public Health England paid £40,000 for a series of YouTube videos co-produced by the New Nicotine Alliance (NNA) and held numerous meetings with the group, despite its ties to Philip Morris International, an investigation by the Bureau has revealed.

A strict international treaty, to which the UK is a signatory, severely limits contact between tobacco companies and ministers and public health officials, but the rules do not apply to the NNA, which says it campaigns for alternatives to cigarettes in order to protect public health.

It claims to be "completely independent" but has also described a proposed ban on smoking in the UK as "sinister" and naive. Moreover, a complex network links the group to the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World, an influential and well-funded organisation that the World Health Organization has branded a front group for Philip Morris.

The Foundation was set up in 2017 by Philip Morris, which pledged \$1bn in funding over 12 years to the "independent body" to support research into alternatives to tobacco. However, many researchers have refused to accept grants from the Foundation, arguing that it is an attempt by the cigarette company to rehabilitate its image.

Until recently, two directors of a communications agency that has been granted more than \$3m from the Foundation were also members of the NNA's board.

When contacted by the Bureau, Public Health England said it would not have worked with the NNA if it had known about those links.

Earlier this month Jo Churchill, the health minister, told parliament the government "remain firmly committed" to the strict international treaty which prevents tobacco companies influencing health policy

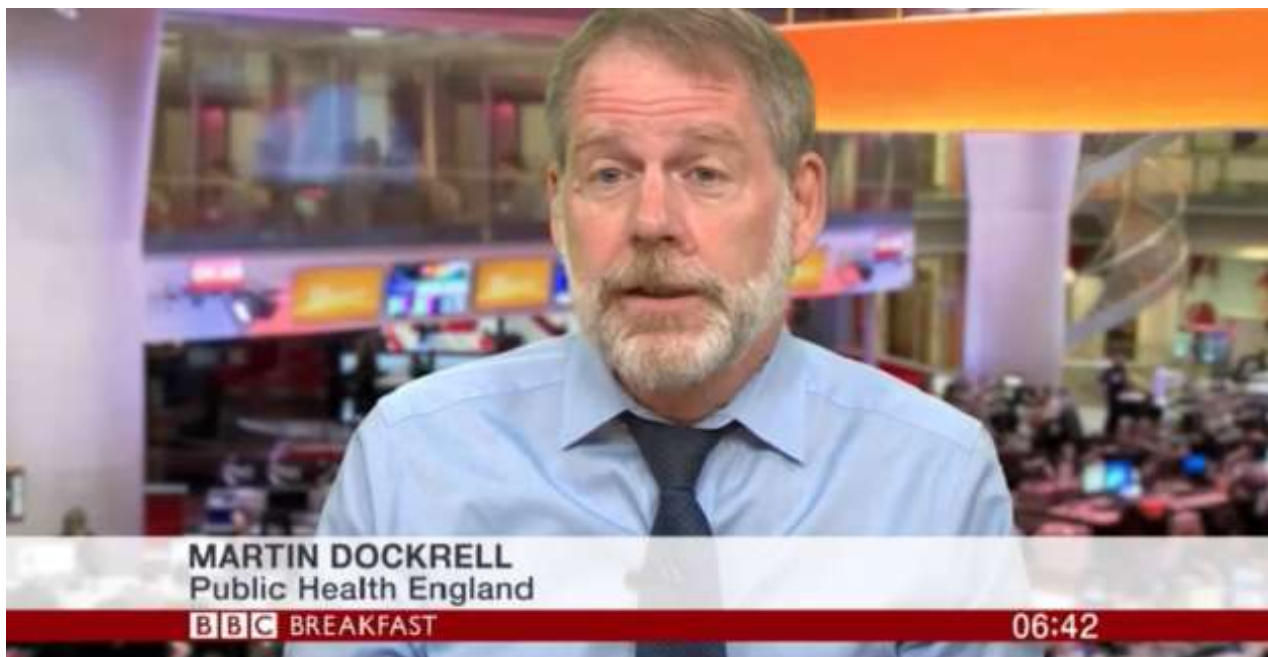
Martin McKee, professor of European public health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, said: "It is totally unacceptable for people with links to the tobacco industry to be engaged with official bodies involved in public health. This demands complete transparency and avoidance of anything that can, in any way, raise suspicions of inappropriate influence."

The NNA said it did not receive any direct funding from the tobacco industry. Martin Cullip, the group's chairman said: "We are a tiny organisation built on the work of volunteers trying to represent the interests of smokers and vapers who are at last finding a cheap, effective and pleasurable way of quitting smoking."

Long-standing links

Links between Public Health England and the NNA stretch back several years. In 2017 it commissioned the National Centre for Smoking Cessation and Training to co-produce a series of YouTube videos with the NNA. The films, which promote switching to vaping from cigarettes, have racked up almost 450,000 views. The NNA confirmed it had received £7,000 from the £40,000 contract.

In 2019, PHE's head of tobacco control, Martin Dockrell, presented an academic paper written by Louise Ross, the vice-chair of the NNA, to regional directors of public health, commissioners, clinicians and stop smoking practitioners. Ross accompanied him to these meetings. PHE also organised for Ross to speak to two NHS trusts on how vaping can help people quit smoking.



Martin Dockrell

The NNA's indirect links to the Philip Morris-funded Foundation are similarly long-term.

Up until July last year, the NNA was a member of the International Network of Nicotine Consumer Organisations (INNCO), which says it does not accept industry money but has received \$100,000 from the Foundation.

Moreover, two former NNA board members, Professor Gerry Stimson and Paddy Costall, also ran Knowledge-Action-Change, a company that has produced reports and organised events funded by the Foundation since 2017. The company has received \$1m and been granted \$2m more.

The creation of the Foundation is part of a wider strategy by Philip Morris, which claims it wants to “unsmoke the world” and eventually stop selling cigarettes. It has offered to partner with the government to fund local stop smoking services and make more alternatives to cigarettes available in the UK.

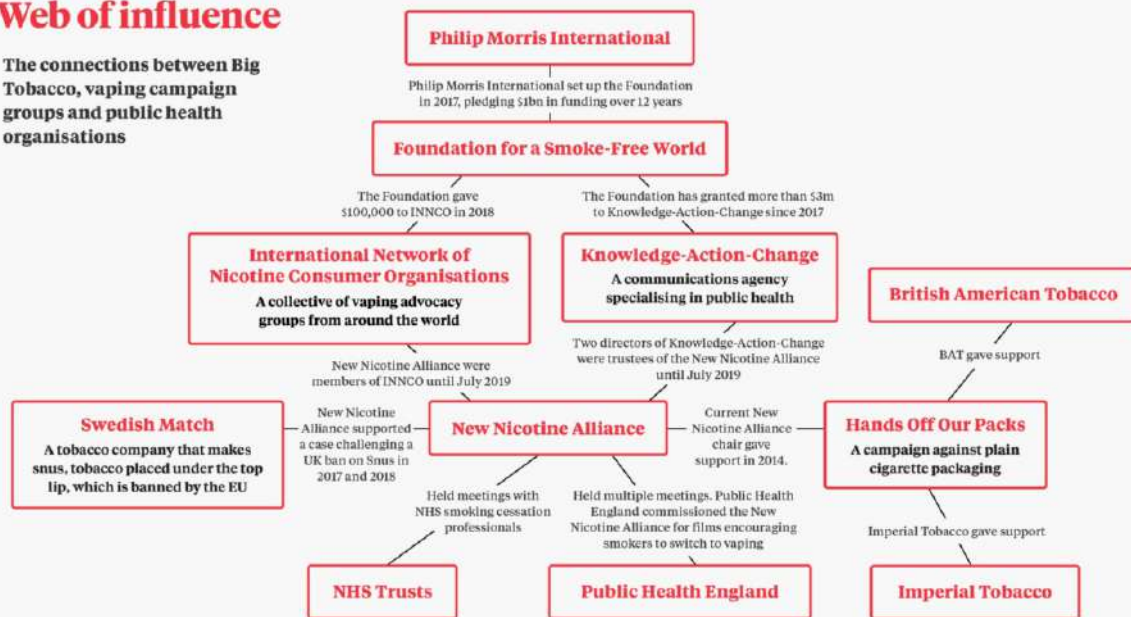
Although Philip Morris's offer was rebuffed as unethical by the Department of Health, the NNA “cautiously welcomed” the proposals at the time and said Philip Morris has “potential to deliver genuine benefits”.

More recently the NNA seems to have tried to distance itself from the Foundation, after leaving INNCO “due to differences concerning future strategy, including funding arrangements”.

Costall and Stimson have resigned from the board. Links to Big Tobacco remain, however, including through the NNA's chairman Cullip, who campaigned against plain cigarette packs for an industry-backed group in 2014. Cullip joked in 2017 that he had a “pathological hatred of public health and tobacco control”.

Web of influence

The connections between Big Tobacco, vaping campaign groups and public health organisations



Emily Maguire for TBIJ

Independent or industry?

Stimson, a respected academic who has held posts at Imperial College London and the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, was the NNA's chairman when it was established in 2015. At that time he already had links to a tobacco company; his company Knowledge-Action-Change had worked with Nicoventures, an e-cigarette subsidiary of British American Tobacco.

He remained on the NNA board until July last year. During that time, hundreds of thousands of dollars that can be traced back to Philip Morris flowed through Knowledge-Action-Change.

Even after Stimson stood down from the board, the NNA held onto ties to Knowledge-Action-Change. One of his employees sat on the NNA's board until January this year, and Ross, the NNA vice-chair, is listed as a mentor for a Knowledge-Action-Change scholarship programme funded by the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World.

Stimson told the Bureau: "Knowledge-Action-Change focuses on harm reduction as a key public health strategy grounded in human rights. Our staff have over forty years of experience of work on drug use, HIV, sexual health, prisons, and now tobacco harm reduction. We want to see an end to tobacco-related death and disease."

As a registered charity, the NNA is not obliged to reveal its donors but claims to be "completely independent of commercial interests in relevant industries". It has said it "operates on an annual budget that would not even pay for the sandwiches at a typical public health conference". But questions remain over the source of its funds.



Professor Gerry Stimson speaking at an event in Malawi for Knowledge Action Change



At the time of the event, Stimson was still on the board of the New Nicotine Alliance. Last year, NNA trustees attended events in cities across the UK as well as in Malawi, Kenya, Nigeria, Brazil, France, Sweden and Poland. A number of these events were organised by Stimson's company and funded by the Foundation. The NNA also received

the proceeds of a charity raffle at an e-cigarette trade expo held in London last year.

The NNA told the Bureau neither Knowledge-Action-Change nor the tobacco industry had paid for travel or hospitality on any of these trips.

Against smoking and against a smoking ban

When the government revealed its plans to make England “smoke-free” by 2030 in July, the NNA came out staunchly against them. It described banning cigarettes – the product the group claims it protects people from – as “sinister” and “a dangerously naive idea”.

It said the plan would only be feasible if the government and public health groups engaged directly with the industry, which is severely restricted by the World Health Organization treaty.

Cullip, the NNA’s chairman, also campaigned against plain packaging for cigarettes. In 2014, he was pictured delivering 2,500 letters to Downing Street with Hands Off Our Packs, a group supported by the cigarette companies British American Tobacco and Imperial Tobacco.

Health bodies in the UK continued to work with the NNA even after it supported a case brought by a tobacco company against the Department of Health in 2017.

Swedish Match, which sells smokeless products and until 2015 was in partnership with Philip Morris, argued against EU-wide rules that banned “snus”, a small bag of tobacco that is placed under the upper lip.

The NNA’s intervention in the case led some health groups to question its stance on the tobacco industry.

Documents released to the Bureau via freedom of information requests show officials at the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (Nice) raised concerns about whether the group’s role in the Swedish Match case compromised its independence. The World Health Organization alleged the case suggested that the group was “working to further the interests” of the tobacco industry.

Cancer Research UK severed ties with the NNA last year over some members’ possible links to the tobacco industry.

Public Health England said: “We are grateful to the Bureau for revealing the NNA conflicts of interest and had we known of these in 2016 we would have ensured they were not sub-contracted on the project.”

Cullip said: “We represent the interests of millions of ordinary people who are taking the initiative to improve their own health at their own expense by quitting smoking and yet are facing a giant worldwide campaign led by lavishly-funded American prohibitionists to stop them.”

The tobacco industry, McKee said, “exerts its influence in many ways, often hidden from public gaze. Most recently, concerns have centred on its role in the e-cigarette business, where it seeks to portray itself, bizarrely, as part of the solution to the smoking epidemic. Governments have committed to shunning this industry under an international health treaty, but there is a need for constant vigilance.”

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Header image: A stall at Vape Jam, an e-cigarette trade expo. Proceeds from a charity raffle at the event went to the NNA. Credit: Getty Images

PMI sidesteps global health treaty to lobby councils

TBIJ thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2020-03-20/philip-morris-sidesteps-who-treaty-to-lobby-local-councils



One of the world's biggest tobacco companies is using its pledge to "unsmoke" Britain as a cover to seek to regain influence in Westminster and with councils across the UK, experts have warned following an investigation by the Bureau.

A covert lobbying offensive by Philip Morris International to create a market for Iqos, a product which claims to "heat not burn" tobacco, has involved the company ignoring ministerial warnings and rules designed to limit tobacco industry influence.

Evidence obtained by the Bureau of Investigative Journalism has revealed that:

Philip Morris wrote to government ministers and offered to work directly with local authorities and even schools, notwithstanding rules preventing tobacco companies influencing public health policy

Despite this proposal being rejected on "ethical" grounds, the company then approached local councils directly with the same offer – even suggesting the use of Philip Morris-branded "quit" or "switch" vans

Philip Morris has hired a former minister, No 10 advisers and lobbyists close to Boris Johnson to seek to gain access to officials, doctors and public health experts as part of its extensive lobbying efforts□

Participants invited to at least one of these events, including NHS workers, were left in the dark on Philip Morris's sponsorship□

The findings raise questions as to whether former officials may have broken bans on lobbying work, and whether Philip Morris tried to sidestep rules on tobacco companies' dealings with governments.

Since Iqos's UK launch in late 2016, Philip Morris has hired lobbyists with strong links to the Conservative party, sought to build a network of allies in cash-strapped local council and NHS services, and spent millions of pounds on public relations campaigns urging smokers to quit or switch to alternatives such as Iqos.

Philip Morris has positioned Iqos as a "reduced risk" alternative to cigarettes and an essential element of the government's drive to make England "smoke free" by 2030.

However, there is no consensus on the evidence around heated tobacco products and their dangers, including the degree to which they are less harmful than cigarettes. There are also questions about how effective such products are in helping people to quit.

"Philip Morris is desperate to rehabilitate its image with decision-makers so it can influence public policy to the benefit of ... Iqos," Deborah Arnott, the chief executive of Action on Smoking and Health, said. "While it trumpets its commitment to a smoke-free future ... in low- and middle-income countries it continues to aggressively promote smoked tobacco brands like Marlboro. Now is not the time to open the door to Philip Morris and allow it back into the fold."

In late 2017 Philip Morris wrote to Theresa May with an offer to support local stop smoking services, a proposal it reiterated in adverts placed in British newspapers.

The offer was quickly rebuffed. Writing to Peter Nixon, the managing director of Philip Morris UK, the health minister Steve Brine reminded him of the UK's commitments under an international treaty to protect public health policies from interference from the tobacco industry.

The World Health Organization treaty severely limits the tobacco industry's interactions with officials. Its provisions are echoed in a voluntary public declaration, the Local Government Declaration on Tobacco Control, which applies the same rule to local councils.

WHO FCTC ARTICLE 5.3

In setting and implementing their public health policies with respect to tobacco control, Parties shall act to **protect these policies from commercial and other vested interests of the tobacco industry** in accordance with national law.

Forms of Tobacco Industry Interference



Preventive interventions: the cost-effective "best-buys" |
Riyadh| 10-12 September, 2012



The World Health Organization has strict rules to protect public health policies from the tobacco industry

"In working within the spirit of this commitment," Brine wrote, "we do not believe it is ethical to accept funding to support local stop smoking services from a company that is still committed to producing tobacco products."

Rather than heed the minister's concerns, Philip Morris instead bypassed the government and directly approached officials in local authorities.

Just weeks after Brine's letter, Philip Morris wrote to Burnley council with an offer to support stop smoking services in the area. "We are obviously interested," the council chief replied, suggesting a meeting.

Burnley has some of the highest smoking rates in the country. Council spending on stop smoking services is under severe pressure and across the country funding has fallen by more than a third in the past four years.

In general, Iqos stores have opened in affluent metropolitan areas, such as Canary Wharf and Kensington in London, as well as central Bristol and Manchester, rather than places with higher levels of deprivation and smoking.



The Iqos shop in Kensington, west London Iqos



Iqos

Philip Morris assured Burnley council officials that its offer would not involve the company advising smokers on quitting: "Philip Morris does not have the expertise to be giving cessation advice," it said. Instead, it could potentially supply unsuccessful quitters with discounted or loan devices of smoke-free products through Philip Morris's "switching programme". It sent a mocked-up image of a Phillip Morris-branded quit/switch mobile cabin.

Burnley council said: "We were approached by Philip Morris, we listened to what they had to say, we rejected their offer."

Philip Morris also approached Tory councillors it met at the Conservative party conference in 2017, where the company bought a "large and prominently positioned stand" to promote Iqos. The company also exhibited at the conference in 2018 and 2019, and has paid for a stand at the Local Government Association (LGA) conference in recent years, which it claimed led to dozens of approaches, some of which discussed potentially "partnering to end smoking locally". The LGA told the Bureau it will no longer allow Philip Morris and other tobacco and vaping companies to exhibit at its conferences.

A councillor at the Royal Borough of Windsor and Maidenhead with responsibility for children's services subsequently met with Philip Morris and the borough's public health lead. Philip Morris floated the idea of sponsoring work around quitting smoking in schools. The proposal was not pursued by the borough.

As well as contacting councils directly, Philip Morris has also farmed the job out to the lobbying agency run by the Tory strategist Sir Lynton Crosby, CT Group. James Dee, one of its lobbyists who now works for a Conservative MP, approached officials in Leicester city council in April 2019 with Philip Morris's offer of help. Northumberland, Lancashire and Norfolk county councils were also targeted. None responded to Philip Morris's offer.

"Local authorities will not be fooled by Philip Morris's attempts to paint itself as a public health partner," says Nick Forbes, leader of Newcastle city council, who has led efforts to protect councils from tobacco influence. "The tobacco industry has constantly attempted to whitewash its role in spreading death and serious illness around the UK. This is just another example of Philip Morris trying to disguise its financially motivated strategies as a moral choice."

This view is backed up by leaked internal emails that show Philip Morris attempted to use its offer of local funding as a way to leverage weaker rules on advertising heated tobacco products.

Concerns were raised over whether Kate Marley, a former adviser to David Cameron, may have breached a lobbying ban when she promoted Iqos at the Conservative party conference just over a year after leaving Downing Street. Philip Morris employed Mark MacGregor, a former chief executive of the Conservative party, as head of corporate affairs until last month.

Numerous parliamentary events have given the tobacco giant other inroads into politics.

In 2018 Philip Morris was able to launch its “Hold My Light” stop smoking campaign in parliament, even branding the barriers at Westminster underground station. As recently as last month, Philip Morris invited MPs to “discover more about smoking in your area” at yet another event in parliament, this time hosted by Ben Bradley MP.

Mark MacGregor on Twitter

HoldMyLight campaign to help smokers go smoke free comes to Westminster.

Philip Morris has also used the services of the former Conservative health minister Stephen Dorrell, an influential figure in UK health circles. In September 2019 Philip Morris paid for the drinks at an event organised by Public Policy Projects, an advisory firm chaired by Dorrell, aimed at healthcare and public health professionals and billed as an opportunity to discuss how to deliver the government’s plans to help people to quit smoking.

Local public health chiefs, stop smoking officials and NHS staff were told about a Philip Morris-commissioned survey that showed the need to educate frontline workers on the benefits of e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products to smokers who want to quit. Participants were unaware, however, about Philip Morris’s sponsorship of the wine and canapé reception that followed the debate.

Philip Morris told the Bureau: “We believe that open dialogue is the only way to solve a complex problem. Decisions on the future of public health are often made behind closed doors without any public accountability or scrutiny. Where we are excluded, we work hard to ensure that our views are heard.”

Forbes, of Newcastle city council, said that Philip Morris’s actions represented an attempt to paint itself as a public health partner for local authorities. “As long as the company remains in the tobacco business anywhere in the world, local authorities should have no dealings with them in any form that we can avoid.”

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Header image: A mock-up of a Philip Morris branded Quit or Switch van in Blackpool

Loophole lets Juul advertise to children at the cinema

TBIJ thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2019-11-23/loophole-lets-juul-advertise-to-children-at-the-cinema



The e-cigarette company Juul has escaped censure by the UK's advertising watchdog after running adverts before films watched by children as young as 15.

Vaping companies are banned from advertising on television, radio, online and in newspapers and magazines in the UK.

However, in September this year adverts promoting Juul's vaping device ran before screenings of *Angel Has Fallen*, an action film starring Gerard Butler that was rated 15 in the UK.

Jonathan Trimble, chief executive of the ad agency And Rising, said it "makes little sense" to allow ads for vape products targeted at those as young as 15.

"Since all advertising is designed to create desire, you are priming a younger audience ahead of time and just as likely influencing under-age usage," he said. "They are already surrounded by celebrity usage and images on Instagram. Adding the concept of 'addiction without consequences' in broadcast environments such as films is more likely to hurt than help."

Juul has been accused of helping to cause a youth vaping epidemic in America through its early influencer-led marketing campaigns, which were hastily pulled after a crackdown from US regulators and lawmakers.

Cinemagoers complained to the Advertising Standards Authority (ASA), saying the advert was inappropriate because it is illegal to sell vaping products to children. They also said the advert did not make clear the risks of vaping, that e-cigarettes should not be promoted as a substitute to cigarettes, and argued the ad might encourage non-smokers to start smoking.

The advertisement purported to show five former smokers talking about how they made the switch to Juul. It was created by Gutenberg Global, a subsidiary of Adam & Eve/DDB, the agency behind the much-loved John Lewis Christmas adverts.

Vue cinemas defended the ad placement on Twitter, saying “while people from the age of 15 will attend the film, a lot of people over the age of 18 will be in attendance”.



The action film *Angel Has Fallen*, starring Gerard Butler, was rated 15 in the UK. Under current regulations ads for e-cigarettes are allowed to run in films if less than a quarter of the audience are children. In the US, Juul has committed to not advertise in media outlets where 15% or more of the audience are under 21. The Cinema Advertising Association (CAA), the UK body responsible for determining what a movie's audience will look like, predicted only 6% of those watching *Angel Has Fallen* would be children.

The advert also ran during 18-rated films, including Quentin Tarantino's *Once Upon a Time in Hollywood*, starring Brad Pitt and Leonardo DiCaprio.

The CAA added the Juul advert was unlikely to appeal to people under 18 because it “featured actors well in excess of 25 years of age who appeared in clearly upper-middle-class domestic settings”.

The ASA threw out the complaints, saying there were no grounds for a formal investigation.

Last year the ASA relaxed e-cigarette guidelines to allow health claims to be made in marketing without the authorisation of the UK's Medicines and Health Products Regulatory Agency. The ASA is due to review that decision but has yet to finalise how the review will work.

By contrast, the Scottish government is weighing up a complete ban on the advertising and promotion of vaping products to "protect children, young people and non-smokers from these products".

A study by the Centre for Substance Use Research, which was funded by Juul, found one in ten adults who had recently taken up Juul had never smoked a cigarette.

Vaping and tobacco companies and organisations have been lobbying for looser advertising restrictions. Juul employs Hanover, a UK public affairs agency which also represented the Advertising Association, an industry body. The association has campaigned for soft touch e-cigarette regulation in the past.

Juul kicked off its first major marketing blitz in the UK in July as part of its plan for international expansion. Its UK campaign has included outdoor advertising, an "educational PR campaign and local brand ambassador activity".

Half of 14 and 15-year-olds have tried vaping

Many more young teenagers are vaping regularly than national figures show, suggests a survey of thousands of Year 10 students by local councils.

Roughly one in ten pupils — age 14 or 15 — in Calderdale, West Yorkshire, vape at least once a week, while almost half (45%) had tried it. In Blackpool 49% had tried vaping, while in Kirklees 1 in 20 Year 9 students, some as young as 13, were regular vapers.

The national Smoking, Drinking and Drug Use Among Young People survey, which took place last year, said only 3% of 14-year-olds vaped regularly, and just over a third had tried it.

The Blackpool and Kirklees figures, compiled from anonymous surveys of school children, also contradict previously widely disseminated data from YouGov.

The YouGov data, commissioned by anti-smoking charity Ash, has been seized on by vaping industry body UKVIA to claim "vaping uptake amongst young people remains uncommon". Ash's survey found that only 1.7% of those between 11-18 vaped at least once a week.

Illustration by Rebecca Hendin

Government vows to protect health policy from Big Tobacco after Bureau investigation

 thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2020-03-06/government-vow-to-protect-health-policy-from-big-tobacco-after-bureau-investigation



The government has pledged to defend public health policy from tobacco companies lobbying for relaxed regulations after Brexit.

Last night the health minister Jo Churchill reiterated the government's commitment to a landmark treaty that restricts contact with the tobacco industry during a parliamentary debate called in response to last week's *Dispatches* "The Secrets of Big Tobacco".

The programme, co-produced by the Bureau and ITN Productions, showed that Philip Morris International (PMI), which makes 800 billion cigarettes a year, had proposed a bill to end restrictions on adverts for vaping and alternative tobacco products once EU regulations no longer apply in the UK. In return the company would back a £1 billion fund for local campaigns to encourage smokers to switch from cigarettes to the new products.

This would be in breach of the World Health Organization's convention banning governments from allowing tobacco companies any influence over health policy.

Bob Blackman, the Conservative chairman of the all-party parliamentary group on smoking, asked Churchill if the government would stick to the convention post-Brexit. She told the Commons that the UK would “remain firmly committed to the convention... during the transition period and beyond”.

Blackman said he was “delighted by the government’s confirmation that it will continue to ensure that tobacco companies have no place in shaping public health policy”.

Churchill’s remarks were also welcomed by Hazel Cheeseman, the director of policy at Action on Smoking and Health. She said: “The government’s unambiguous rejection of tobacco industry interference is extremely welcome but we must continue to be vigilant. PMI and other tobacco companies will continue to try and shape public health policy in their own interests and the government must hold firm to its commitments.”


PMI said it supported the government’s commitment to make England smoke-free by 2030. “To realise this ambition, millions of current smokers need to be persuaded to quit altogether or switch to less harmful alternatives. Critical to this will be putting in place a regulatory framework that ensures smokers have the facts about alternatives and that tobacco companies are pushed to phase out cigarettes.

“We have made this point time and time again to MPs, civil servants, local councillors, journalists and the broader public. What this story really shows is that Philip Morris has been consistent in its efforts to make smoke-free 2030 a reality.”

The Bureau has been investigating PMI, the world’s largest multinational tobacco company, and its attempts to be seen as “part of the solution” to the problem of smoking, which kills eight million people a year. In the UK PMI is marketing itself as “smoke-free” and promoting e-cigarettes and Iqos, a product that produces nicotine by heating tobacco. At the same time it is aggressively selling cigarettes in Indonesia, its largest market.

The Bureau’s investigation is part of its Smoke Screen project looking at Big Tobacco, which previously looked at Juul’s international expansion. The project is funded by Vital Strategies, which has no editorial control over the Bureau’s stories.

The 'Unsmoke' screen: the truth behind PMI's cigarette-free future

 thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2020-02-24/the-unsmoke-screen-the-truth-behind-pmis-cigarette-free-future



The crowd screamed as Calvin Harris began his set at 2019's Djakarta Warehouse Project, one of Asia's biggest dance music festivals. The floor pulsed. As each song built, fans jumped up and down, climbed on each other's shoulders or swayed as they filmed the DJ on their phones.

Opposite the main stage was a sleek building made of solid glass and red lights, with everything a festivalgoer needed to relax: sofas, televisions, Playstations – and cigarettes for sale. The Marlboro Penthouse gave Philip Morris International (PMI), the world's biggest multinational tobacco company, an opportunity to promote its cigarettes to 90,000 young attendees.

Throughout the festival there were bright Marlboro signs over bars and benches where people sat smoking. There was a Marlboro "Discover Room" with interactive red, blue and yellow booths, echoing cigarette branding, and an arcade game. The festival's shops sold only Marlboro-branded cigarettes and the company employed attractive saleswomen to roam around promoting the products.

That heavy promotion was curious, as three years earlier, PMI's chief executive had made a claim so surprising it had made headlines all over the world. He had announced a new ambition for his company: to phase out cigarettes entirely.

In 2017 PMI officially laid out its vision for a "smoke-free" future. André Calantzopoulos, the previously camera-shy chief executive, started giving interviews about his company's "transformation". He wanted to switch smokers to PMI's new range of cigarette alternatives, which he said would improve public health.

Two years ago PMI said it could stop selling cigarettes by 2030 in the UK. A global campaign called "Unsmoke Your World", promoting the idea that anyone could become an "Unsmoker", was released a year later. PMI could be "part of the solution" to smoking, executives said. It hired advertising, PR and lobbying companies to promote a narrative of a new purpose-led, responsible business.

Yet careful scrutiny of its activities and internal documents by the Bureau reveals that much of the campaign is more spin than substance – just as the recent advertising of Marlboro cigarettes to young Indonesians would suggest.



The Marlboro Penthouse at the Djakarta Warehouse Project Instagram



Marlboro is Philip Morris International's largest brand Instagram

The Unsmoke mission is a marketing campaign for PMI's new range of cigarette alternatives and a blatant attempt to rehabilitate the company's image so it can once again seek to influence policy and regulations. Arguably, it has succeeded: although smoking rates have fallen in the past decade, PMI's profits and share price have increased.

Some experts fear that if the company's narrative is taken at face value PMI will continue to sell billions of cigarettes worldwide while promoting itself as "part of the solution" to smoking. It could lure a new generation into addiction with its new products, whose long-term health risks are unknown, and discourage people who might have quit altogether from doing so.

"The multi-billion dollar tobacco industry will do everything they can to stay in business," said Dr Vinayak Prasad, head of the World Health Organization's tobacco control division. He believes that what PMI is saying is far from reality.

"If they really want to be a part of the solution, they should go tobacco-free, not smoke-free. If they are genuine about a tobacco-free society, they will readily embrace anything to reduce the demand for all forms of tobacco products."

Dr Moira Gilchrist, a vice-president of PMI, told the Bureau: "Our vision is that one day smoke-free products will replace cigarettes. The sooner the world transitions away from cigarettes, the sooner we can stop making them."



Iqos on display at a promotional event Stanford University

The era of Iqos

Calantzopoulos makes a point of using PMI's flagship product, a sleek gadget that looks like a cross between an iPhone and an expensive pen. It is called Iqos, which is widely believed to be an acronym for "I Quit Ordinary Smoking" – although this is consistently denied by the company – and is now available in 52 countries worldwide.

It looks like an e-cigarette, or vape, but there is a key difference: it contains tobacco, where e-cigarettes only hold a nicotine solution. PMI has developed sticks of tobacco, called Heatsticks or Heets, which are inserted into the Iqos device and warmed to 350 degrees Celsius (much lower than the 800 degrees of a burning cigarette) until tendrils of aerosol are released. This mimics the rituals of smoking and gives users a satisfying kick of nicotine while inhaling fewer carcinogens.

Calantzopoulos, a Greek electrical engineer who has spent 35 years working for PMI, says he was smoking a pack a day until he switched to Iqos, his personal journey neatly echoing that of his company.

PMI calls Iqos a heated tobacco or "heat-not-burn" device; it is part of a new class of products sitting between vapes and traditional cigarettes.

There is a consensus that switching to vaping offers the best health benefits to smokers after quitting or using patches, gum or prescription drugs that lower cravings. Heated tobacco products release fewer harmful chemicals than cigarette smoke, but more than

e-cigarettes do. Neither product has been around long enough for experts to be sure that reducing the levels of toxic chemicals also reduces overall rates of disease.

Some studies have also found that Iqos emits higher levels than cigarettes of other chemicals, but not the ones known to be dangerous. Although these are not toxic in the short term, it is not known if they could have health effects over a longer period of use.

PMI said its testing on Iqos showed the concentrations of these chemicals “are below the level of toxicological concern”.

Some question why, if PMI wants to be “part of the solution” to smoking, it chose to heavily promote a heated tobacco product rather than an e-cigarette, when the potential health benefits of the latter are widely considered greater.

The answer comes down to economics, said Erik Bloomquist, a tobacco industry analyst. PMI could more easily adapt its cigarette manufacturing to make Heatsticks, while the profit margins for many e-cigarettes, especially those where users change the liquids and heating coils themselves, are miniscule.

Iqos was first launched in Japan, where e-cigarettes are banned, and within four years gained nearly 16% of its overall tobacco market. Experts believe its introduction has led to falling cigarette sales. Iqos has also been a hit in South Korea, Russia and Italy.

PMI say that 10 million smokers have switched to Iqos since it was launched. Calantzopoulos’s new ambition is to switch 40 million smokers from cigarettes to PMI’s alternative products by 2025. He describes the situation as a win-win: better for the smoker, and better for PMI, which can get better profit margins from Iqos if it is subject to lower taxes than cigarettes.



Andre Calantzopoulos, PMI's chief executive Getty Images

The company's executives are working hard all around the world trying to persuade governments not to tax Iqos like a cigarette, to the chagrin of the World Health Organization (WHO), which has advised against such a concession.

PMI said Iqos helps smokers who find vapes unappealing give up cigarettes. "What is most important is that adult smokers have access to a product that they are able to switch to and completely quit smoking cigarettes." The company said it lobbied governments "because products like e-cigarettes and heated tobacco products should not be banned".

Calantzopoulos will be wary of the backlash faced by Juul, the maker of America's most popular e-cigarette, over accusations its early marketing appealed to teenagers. The company denies it ever targeted children but has since faced congressional hearings, federal investigations and hundreds of lawsuits.

It is against this backdrop that Calantzopoulos maintains he only wants Iqos targeted at the world's 1.1 billion adult smokers. However, a small Italian study found nearly half of people who had tried the product had never smoked.

PMI appears to have at times recruited occasional or social smokers to promote its devices. "I don't smoke often, maybe only when I am at a party or having a glass of wine with some friends, but I was interested to find out about this device because it didn't seem like just another electronic cigarette," Gabriele Gzimailaite, a London fashion blogger told her readers in November 2017.

Gzimailaite, who has 120,000 Instagram followers, had been flown out to Milan by PMI for an Iqos party, where she posed against an Iqos-branded wall and posted pictures of the device.

Four months later PMI paid for her stay at the luxurious Rosewood Hotel in London, which has launched Iqos-friendly rooms. Gzimailaite posted a picture of herself posing in a marble bubble bath, drinking a glass of rosé with her black Iqos and a magazine at her side. Another non-smoker has also promoted Iqos.

Calantzopoulos' promise not to target non-smokers or teenagers is disingenuous, activists say. They argue that if PMI convinced its existing customers to switch to Iqos without attracting new ones, as it claims it wants to do, the company would go out of business within a generation.

"The main purpose is to incite smokers who could be quitters to stay consumers of their products," said Pascal Diethelm, president of Oxysuisse, a Swiss NGO dedicated to tobacco prevention. But even that could not sustain the company indefinitely – those smokers will die. PMI needs young people to create a new market, he said.

He points to investor presentations which appear to show PMI using the "theory of diffusion of innovation". This is where there are "early adopters" of a product, who tend to be richer and more privileged than the rest of the population. As this group adopts the product they serve as influencers on the rest of the market, including young people. Diethelm believes this is why Iqos is being marketed as a luxury, hi-tech, aspirational product.

A visit to an Iqos shop does nothing to dispel this belief. It looks like an Apple store, with big museum table-cases displaying the latest devices. Colourful products are displayed in a rainbow on the wall, and young, hipster shop assistants stand ready to help.

While smoking rates fell in Japan after the introduction of Iqos, public health experts are concerned that not all smokers will switch completely from cigarettes. Independent studies and PMI's own research show that many people tend to carry on smoking while using the device, negating the health benefits.

"Iqos probably falls halfway in between e-cigarettes and cigarettes on a toxic exposure scale," said Richard O'Connor, professor of oncology at Roswell Park Comprehensive Cancer Center. "So basically there would be no real benefit to somebody who uses both products at the same time."



Stanford University

Behind the smoke screen

Despite the PR push, PMI's stated aim of phasing out cigarettes is not matched in a number of its business practices.

Its revenues from alternative products shot up from 0.2% in 2015 to almost 20% in 2019, but the vast majority still came from cigarettes. The company sold more than 740 billion cigarettes worldwide in 2018 and is only reducing its production by a few percentage points a year.

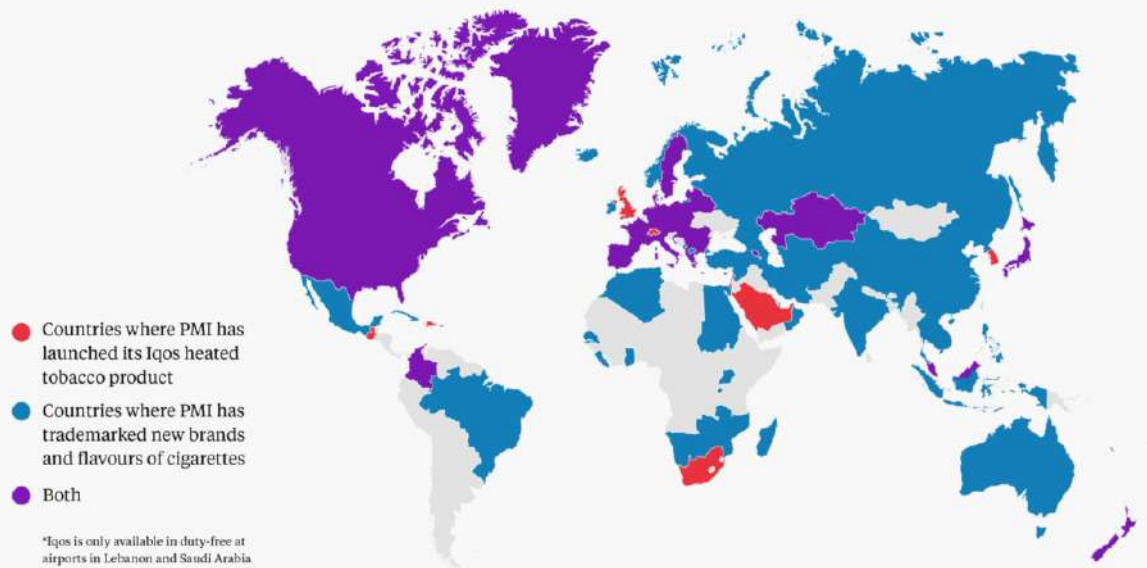
Calantzopoulos has also repeatedly reassured investors that PMI wants to remain a leader in cigarettes and will not give up market share to its competitors.

Since it announced its aim to stop selling cigarettes, it has acquired a new cigarette company, launched a new brand, and added enticing new flavours such as Splash Mega Purple and Fusion Summer. It has also launched legal action against anti-smoking policies in countries like the Philippines, and has carried on advertising cigarettes in countries that permit it.

An Indonesian advert for Marlboro Red, a PMI brand

Some pupils in Indonesia can see PMI's cigarette advertising mere steps from their schools' gates. Young people attending festivals in Buenos Aires are offered PMI cigarettes in promotions with beer. Children visiting corner shops in Mexico can see Marlboro's "fusion" cigarettes next to sweets.

North/south divide



Emily Maguire for TBIJ

“There’s a certain disingenuousness to the whole thing,” said O’Connor, who until recently sat on the US Tobacco Products Scientific Advisory Committee advising the FDA. He believes the company could easily switch many more people away from cigarettes if it wanted to.

“They can stop marketing cigarettes and market the heck out of Iqos and actively encourage people to use it. If you want to shift the market and you control most of that market, you could easily do it. They might lose a few share points on their stock, but I think it would be a much more rigorous demonstration that they really are changing.”



From pariah to “part of the solution”

Tobacco is still the leading cause of preventable death around the world, killing eight million people a year and harming millions more. There is now indisputable evidence that smoking causes multiple types of cancer, heart disease and respiratory illnesses, killing up to half of those who light up.

In 2006 Judge Gladys Kessler issued an extensive and damning set of findings during a landmark judgement against Philip Morris US, from which PMI later split. She cited evidence of the company's decades-long campaign to hide the hazardous effects of smoking and secondhand smoke. Philip Morris had lied about the addictiveness of nicotine; manipulated nicotine levels to keep people addicted; misled the public about the health benefits of "low tar" or "light" cigarettes and marketed cigarettes to teenagers.

Philip Morris had "marketed and sold their lethal product with zeal, with deception, with a single-minded focus on their financial success, and without regard for the human tragedy or social costs that success exacted," she said.

By the start of the 21st century PMI and the other tobacco companies were seen as pariahs in most industrialised countries, where social norms around smoking were changing. In 2003 an international WHO treaty was launched and widely adopted, mandating countries to adopt tried-and-tested policies to stop smoking. These included restricting contact with the industry and resisting its attempts to interfere in policy, entrenching tobacco companies' status as distrusted outsiders.



The health warnings on UK cigarette packaging are in line with the WHO treaty Alamy

"I think they [tobacco companies] could just see that the summit of the power and untouchable space that they inhabited for a very long time was not guaranteed for them anymore," said Professor Johanna Cohen, director of the Institute for Global Tobacco Control at John Hopkins University.

By 2014, when Iqos launched in Japan, PMI knew it needed to change its image. Internal documents uncovered by Reuters in 2017 reveal it feared measures such as litigation and bans on political contributions, charitable donations and tobacco industry market research.

It launched a 10-year plan called "Normalisation". Its new objective was to "establish PMI as a trusted and indispensable partner, leading its sector and bringing solutions to the table".

To achieve this it would "be 'for' something", establishing a "forward-looking, motivational and credible" purpose statement.

It would also "balance the debate" by exposing the "double standards" of anti-tobacco campaigners and amplifying the voices of people who favoured harm reduction – those supportive of offering smokers alternative products.

PMI planned to foster relationships with politicians, international organisations, NGOs, academics, scientists, researchers and the media, to promote its new purpose and products.

In the UK PMI hired Pagefield, a PR company, to help to launch Iqos. In a blog post, the company describes the work as a good example of "helping distrusted companies gain acceptance". Pagefield described the success of its strategy: "purpose was put before product and that made for a more captivating story".



PMI's stand at the Conservative party conference TBJJ

Normalisation in action

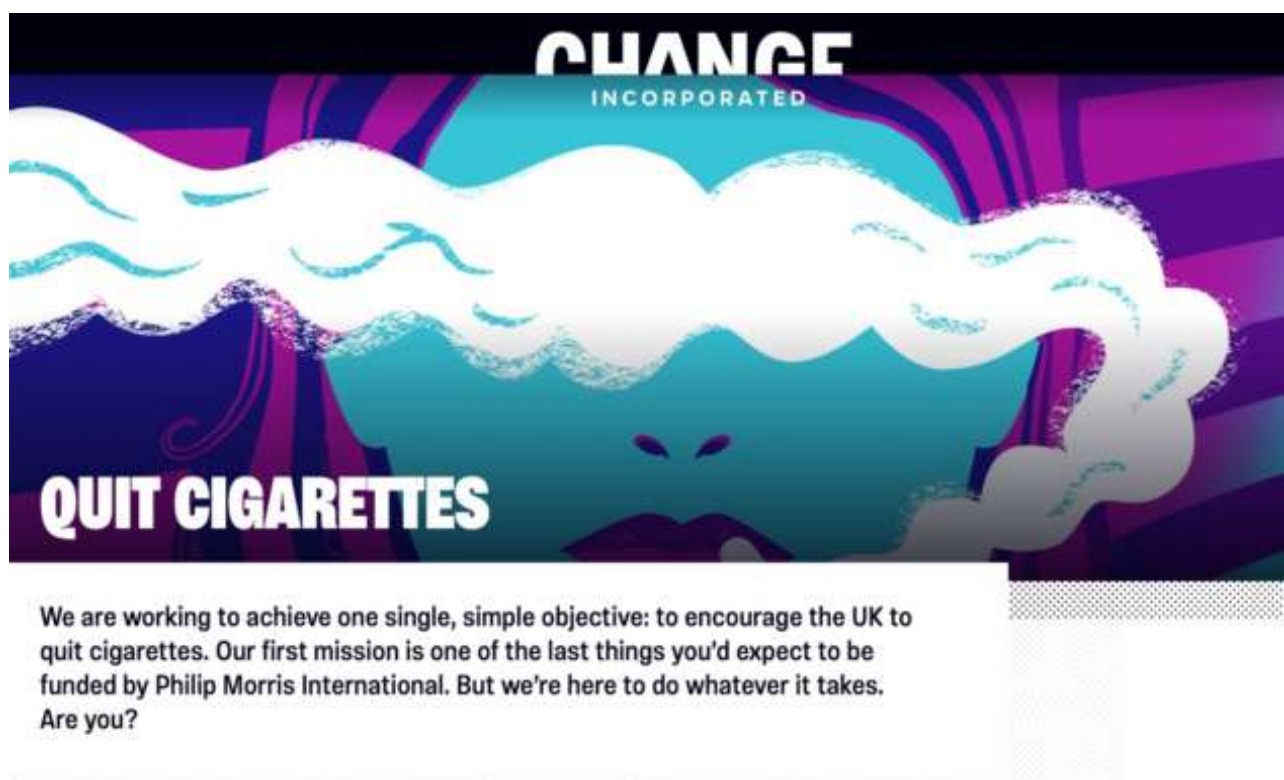
The normalisation strategy appears to be in full swing in the UK. After Iqos was launched, PMI executives appeared on ITV's *Good Morning Britain*, BBC Radio 4's *Today* programme and BBC World News' *Hardtalk* describing the company's transformation. It bought newspaper adverts and paid for events. It even funded a new website by Vice, Change Incorporated, that would publish articles on ending smoking, and sponsored Gay Star News's health section.

As promised, it also forged relationships with politicians. In July 2018 it hosted a session in Westminster on how the company could work with MPs to "deliver a smoke-free future" with the Scottish MP Ross Thomson. It put up a stand at the Conservative party conference every year from 2017 to 2019, promoting its campaign to British politicians and their teams.

Despite its flagship product not being an e-cigarette, it was a founding member of the UK Vaping Industry Association (UKVIA), which funds an all-party parliamentary group on vaping, giving it access to British politicians.

PMI has always tried to rehabilitate its image, but its move into cigarette alternatives gave it a more persuasive message, said Deborah Arnott, chief executive of the campaigning public health charity Action on Smoking and Health.

“The coal industry spent an awful long time saying it supports green measures when what it was doing in practice was very different, the same is true for PMI,” she said. “We need to continue to protect public health policies. You can't partner with the industry or allow the industry to determine the policy agenda because commercial vested interests mean shareholders' needs will always take priority.”



CHANGE
INCORPORATED

QUIT CIGARETTES

We are working to achieve one single, simple objective: to encourage the UK to quit cigarettes. Our first mission is one of the last things you'd expect to be funded by Philip Morris International. But we're here to do whatever it takes. Are you?

Vice's supplement, sponsored by Philip Morris International

PMI's PR offensive took place on several different battlegrounds. In 2017 it announced it was setting up an independent organisation, the Foundation for a Smoke-Free World, to pay for research on ending the smoking epidemic – and it would hand over \$80m (£61m) a year for 12 years to this new non-profit. In a massive publicity coup a former WHO executive, Derek Yach, was hired to lead it.

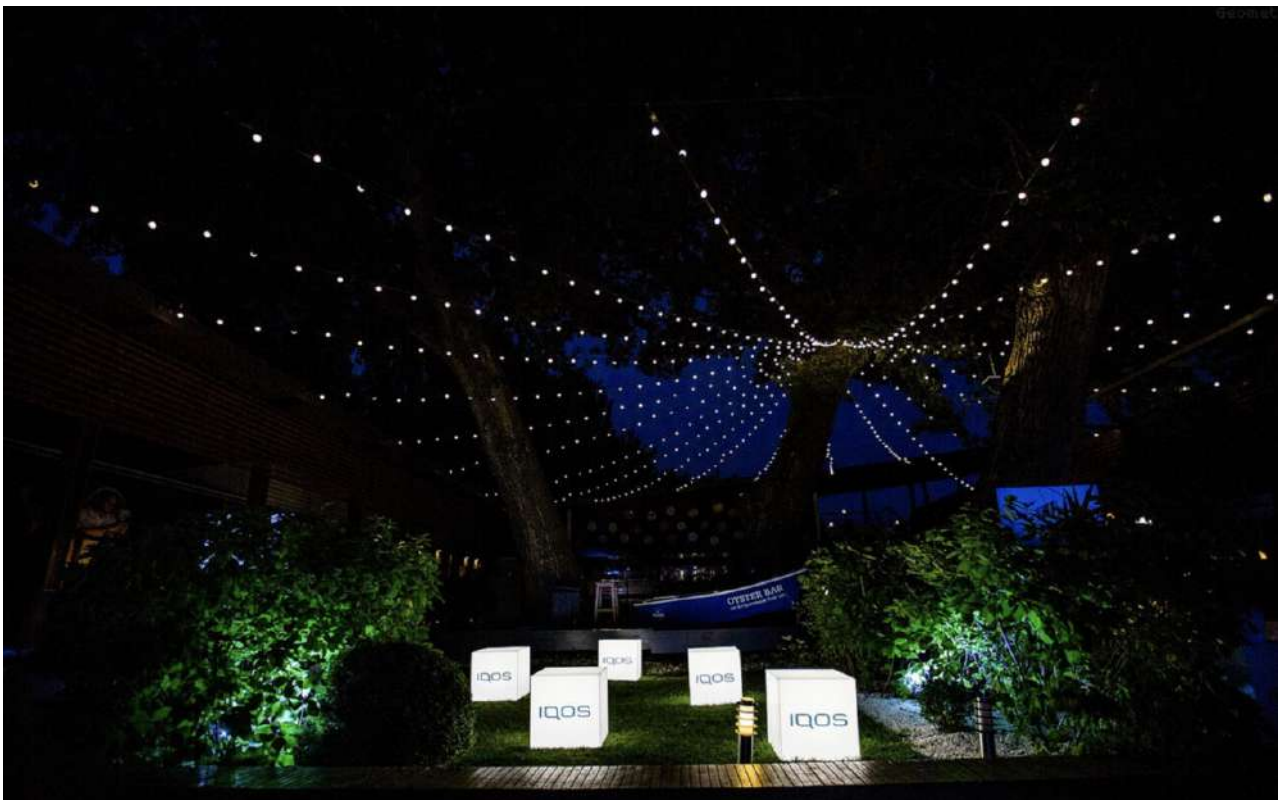
The WHO itself publicly refused to engage with the Foundation, identifying it as an organisation that “further[s] the interests of the tobacco industry”. It told governments and the public health community to follow its lead. The Foundation was soon being described in some quarters as a front group for PMI.

The Foundation says it “funds research, promotes innovation, and supports collaborative initiatives to accelerate progress in reducing harm and deaths from smoking”. Its health research grants have been largely focused on harm reduction, not ending smoking, in line with PMI’s needs to normalise and legitimise cigarette alternatives like Iqos. Some of the recipients of its grants have links with the tobacco industry.

An analysis by the University of Bath of the Foundation’s latest published tax returns reveals that it spent more on hiring PR and communications agencies than scientific research. The university is the research partner of STOP, the global tobacco control campaign. Tess Legg, co-author of the Bath report, believes that the Foundation is not simply a scientific research organisation.

“The Foundation is promoting PMI’s rhetoric on harm reduction, next generation products and the role the tobacco industry wants to play in science and policy-making, but often without the reader or the listener being aware that these messages are funded by the tobacco industry,” she said.

The Foundation said its 2019 tax returns would show it is now spending most of its budget on research. A spokesman added: “There is no tobacco industry influence on the Foundation’s work.”



“This changes everything”

The April 2019 launch of Iqos in Tirana, Albania, drew a fashionable crowd. Guests walked down a white carpet flanked by palm trees and lit by spotlights until inside an Iqos-branded tunnel they were met by hostesses in futuristic dresses. Hands emerged from velvet curtains to hand them champagne.

TV screens on the wall played videos of erupting flames. “Stop burning, start heating,” the text read as a gold Heatstick slipped smoothly into the Iqos device.

There have been similar launches for Iqos products all around the world, some headlined by Jason Derulo or Jamiroquai. PMI has also sponsored Iqos-branded parties for Playboy magazine in Germany and Cosmopolitan magazine in Russia.

In the UK, where advertising of both the device and Heatsticks is banned, marketing is limited to PMI’s website, Iqos shops and displays in vape shops. But where regulations are looser, PMI is advertising Iqos far more aggressively.

Its campaign features social media influencers, events, collaborations, glass-fronted shops and an army of brand ambassadors, according to a report compiled by Stanford University. “The advertising tries to portray Iqos as aspirational, high tech, healthy, fashion-conscious, clean, fun and link it with fashion, travel, leisure and relaxation. Some adverts imply Iqos helps make people more successful in romance by improving their kisses and their teeth, as well as being a good way to show love to family and friends,” Professor Robert Jackler, who led the research, said.



Iqos sponsored a party for Cosmopolitan Magazine in Russia Stanford University



The company's product launches are accompanied by concerts and parties Stanford University

Instagram posts show Iqos with coffee, alcohol and food. Young, attractive, professional people are shown laughing, socialising or looking happy with their devices. Some ads show Iqos with surfers and runners, implying it is a product to suit healthy, outdoorsy lifestyles.

Elsewhere, Stanford researchers uncovered examples of explicit health claims, including a post from Iqos's Instagram page in Japan that promoted it as a way to avoid lung cancer, emphysema and heart attacks when compared with smoking, which an expert said is not backed up by evidence. PMI disputes some of Stanford's findings.

In the US and UK PMI cannot legally claim Iqos can help quit smoking or lower the risk of disease. The UK Department of Health wrote to PMI in 2018 to tell the company to stop sending posters advertising the device to convenience stores.

PMI was forced to suspend its own social media influencer campaign when it emerged in May last year that the company had hired models who were under 25, against its own internal guidelines. But the Stanford researchers have uncovered an Armenian account that featured attractive young influencers posting about Iqos.

The researchers also found Instagram posts that seemed to target even younger teenagers. Instagram posts from Ukraine and Armenia showed young-looking girls posing with pastel-coloured Iqos devices. Others posed the devices against a backdrop of ice creams, palm trees and seashells.

"It has used the exact same strategy and the exact same images it used to make Marlboro the most popular cigarettes for kids worldwide," Matt Myers, president of the Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, said.

"If governments don't respond strongly and directly, Philip Morris International will use Iqos to renormalise tobacco use and reach a whole generation of young people who otherwise never would have smoked."



Stanford University
"Smoke free"

Dr Reto Auer, a doctor and researcher at the universities of Bern and Lausanne, bought an Iqos after seeing adverts that said it did not produce smoke. He smoked it in the office as his colleagues watched, noticing black charring on the Heatstick and that it smelt like burnt tobacco.

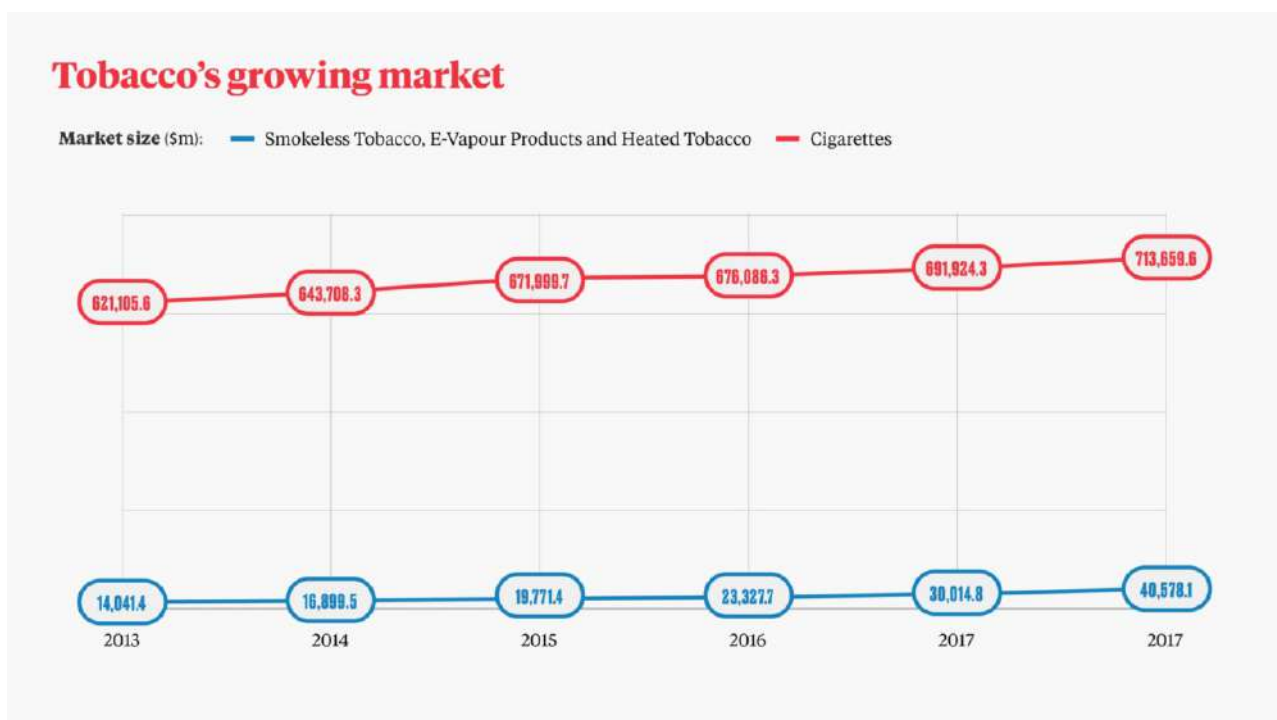
Suspicious that the charring suggested incomplete burning, called pyrolysis, his team set up a study to determine whether Iqos produced smoke or not. Their conclusion? It did.

“Basically what the Iqos is is a portable toaster,” he said. “If you leave your bread long enough, it will become black. At what point do you say your toast is burnt? Is that bread vapour that comes out of your toaster? No, we call it smoke.”

Auer and his team believe PMI is “dancing around” the definition of smoke to avoid indoor smoking bans. In Japan, while smoking is banned indoors, Iqos is not; there are “no smoking, Iqos only” signs. “If you have only the Iqos indoors, and all other cigarettes outside, then you have no competitors,” Auer said.

In countries including Japan, Romania, Ukraine, Vietnam, Russia, Czechia, and Spain, PMI has created its own cafés and lounges, where menus pair coffees with particular flavours of Heatstick. It has launched a global network of “Iqos-friendly spaces”; bars, hotels, restaurants or public areas like beaches where people can freely puff on their Iqos.

Mapping Iqos’s launches reveals a pattern. Iqos has mainly been promoted in countries that have introduced smoking or tobacco advertising bans and where cigarette sales were falling, according to [Bath’s analysis](#). “They needed something else to make profit in the future in those countries because people were stopping smoking,” said Karen Evans-Reeves, co-author of the report.



Emily Maguire for TBIJ

Within the UK there are Iqos shops in London, Manchester, Bristol and Cardiff, but none in Hull, Burnley or Mansfield where PMI’s research shows smoking rates are highest.

Dr Gilchrist, a vice-president of PMI, said: “For PMI, the long-term business opportunity is to convert adult smokers who would otherwise continue to smoke cigarettes to better alternatives.

“A campaign coordinated by American special interest groups, all of whom are seemingly funded by the same source — Bloomberg Philanthropies — are dedicated to just one mission. Under the guise of promoting public health, they are working to rob adults who smoke of their right to choose scientifically substantiated better alternatives to continued smoking.”

The Bureau’s Smoke Screen project, scrutinising the tobacco industry which kills millions a year, is funded by an NGO, Vital Strategies, which is in turn funded by Bloomberg Philanthropies. The Bureau is a not-for-profit predominantly funded by grants from dozens of foundations and fully discloses all of its funders. Neither Vital Strategies nor Bloomberg Philanthropies has any say over the Bureau’s journalism.



One in five teenagers in Indonesia smoke Gembong Nusantara/TBIJ

Iqos has yet to be launched in Indonesia, PMI’s biggest market for cigarettes. There, more than two thirds of men and nearly one in five teenagers smoke. People in their 30s are dying of heart-related diseases linked to tobacco. Videos of toddlers addicted to cigarettes appear regularly.



Cigarettes are on sale alongside sweets and fizzy drinks Gembong Nusantara/TBI
Calantzopoulos's desire to phase out cigarettes may be genuine, but he is hamstrung by an obligation to maximise profit for shareholders, which rules out suspending cigarette advertising or sales.

Perhaps Indonesia's smokers will eventually all quit or switch to alternatives. Under the neon lights of the Marlboro Penthouse, that day seems a long way off.

This story is produced in partnership with Dispatches. The Secrets of Big Tobacco: Has Philip Morris International Really Given Up Smoking? is available on All4


A version of this story has been published by Haaretz in Israel, The Kyiv Post in Ukraine, Malaysiakini and The Korea Centre for Investigative Journalism

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Header image: An Iqos promotional event. Credit: Stanford University

Juul spreads over the world as home market collapses in scandal

 thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2019-11-21/juul-spreads-over-the-world-as-home-market-collapses-in-scandal



The embattled American vape company Juul is pushing foreign governments to ditch strict e-cigarette regulations as it aggressively expands across the globe in an attempt to offset lost profits in the US.

Juul, which sells sleek e-cigarettes and flavoured nicotine “pods” that have become a craze among American teenagers, is planning to enter new markets in Europe, the Middle East, Africa, South America and Asia. As it expands, the company has spent millions of dollars lobbying politicians in an attempt to pre-empt or roll back relevant regulations on products in several different countries.

The Bureau of Investigative Journalism can reveal Juul has met politicians, regulators and officials to lobby on vaping rules, putting forward health claims it cannot legally make in the US. It has also launched glossy marketing campaigns that attempt to portray the company as a responsible alternative to smoking – a far cry from the adverts that first landed the brand in hot water in the US.

The company has come under intense pressure in its home market and is facing hundreds of lawsuits as well as state and federal investigations into claims its early advertising hooked a generation of teenagers on nicotine.



What is Juul?

Juul's founders Adam Bowen and James Monsees met over smoking breaks at Stanford University, where they studied product design. Intrigued by the idea of making smoking less harmful and more socially acceptable, they turned their final thesis into an e-cigarette company, Ploom, in 2007, which became Pax Labs in 2015, and Juul Labs in 2017.

The Juul device has gone through many iterations since the prototype. It now looks like a high-end USB stick, its sleek design a far cry from some clunkier competitors, earning it the title of "the iPhone of e-cigarettes". A puff delivers a vaporised dose of nicotine, the addictive substance in tobacco.

The company also sells pre-filled nicotine pods that click into the device and act as a mouthpiece, which come in flavours like "apple orchard", "mango nectar" and "alpine berry".

Juul borrowed a process developed by the tobacco company RJ Reynolds to make its cigarettes more palatable when developing its nicotine formula; the company uses benzoic acid, a common food preservative, to produce "nicotine salts". This prevents the throat irritation that normally occurs when smoking.

It also means a higher dose of nicotine can be inhaled directly into the lungs, entering the bloodstream more quickly. Researchers say this combination allows users to get a puff that matches the addictiveness of a Pall Mall cigarette.

Juul's stronger pods contain 59mg/ml of nicotine, meaning one pod is the equivalent to a pack of 20 cigarettes. The stronger pods are banned in the UK and Europe under EU regulations, where nicotine strength is capped at 20mg/ml.

In the UK, at £10.99 for a set of four pods, Juul costs roughly the same price as the average pack of cigarettes while delivering more nicotine. And unlike cigarettes, which burn out, users can keep vaping on until the device runs out of battery, which takes about a day of use.

Although Juul's influencer-led early marketing would later prove a problem, it created a trend that propelled the company from a small start-up to a market leader in the US. In late 2017 it held 32% of the market; by November 2018, it had 76%. As it grew, Altria, one of the "big six" tobacco businesses, invested \$12.8 billion for a 35% stake. Juul forecast revenues of \$3.4 billion for 2019, triple what it generated in 2018, according to Bloomberg.

Juul's meteoric rise ended when concerns over the teen vaping "epidemic" in the US led to congressional hearings and multiple investigations into its early marketing practices. While e-cigarettes expose users to fewer carcinogens than traditional ones, scientists are still learning about the health effects of vaping, especially on young people. The damaging effect of nicotine on teenagers – harming the part of the brain responsible for memory, attention and learning – is well known, but the long-term effects of inhaling the vapour are unknown.

In October 2019, as the outcry raged in the US, Altria wrote down \$4.5 billion of its investment in Juul, and adjusted its predictions about the company's international sales.

Despite the mounting criticism in the US – including a raid by the Food and Drugs Administration on Juul's offices – investor presentations show that Altria is confident international revenues can offset the predicted slump in US growth. It hopes Juul's global sales will match domestic ones within four years.

Juul is requesting private meetings with ministers and ambassadors across the world to promote its e-cigarettes, influence countries' vaping laws and stop taxes being slapped on its products. Lobbyists have suggested Juul devices can help people quit nicotine altogether, a claim the company would be banned from making in the US, according to transcripts of meetings seen by the Bureau.

Its lobbying offensive even includes offering to help governments write e-cigarette rules, despite the fact that tobacco companies are banned from interfering with public health policy under an international treaty.

Juul said it wants to work with regulators and policymakers to provide "an industry point of view on regulations".

Experts are worried other countries could face their own teen vaping "epidemics" if Juul is not adequately regulated as it expands.

"Cigarettes are not cool in most communities. But Juul is cool with youth in a number of communities," said Dr Vinayak Prasad, head of tobacco control for the World Health Organisation (WHO). "That's a hugely powerful strategy for the tobacco and related industries, to let these products get in and capture significant market share, getting 6-8% of the young people addicted to nicotine. That's a huge market for the future."

"Apart from the known harmful effects of nicotine on the developing brain, nicotine is addictive and could lead people, particularly young people, to take up more harmful forms of nicotine or tobacco consumption."



Juul's early advertising has been criticised for appealing to a young audience



A recent wave of mysterious lung illnesses, causing dozens of deaths and thousands of hospitalisations in the US, has compounded Juul's troubles, although most of the cases were linked to black market products and not Juul devices.

However, the cases have re-ignited fears over the safety of e-cigarettes and a public health debate in which the benefits of switching smokers to a less harmful product are pitted against the risk that non-smoking teens take up vaping.

"The iPhone of e-cigarettes"

Juul was launched by Pax Labs in 2015, and within three years was America's most popular vape. Dubbed "the iPhone of e-cigarettes", it combined slick design with enticing flavours like "cool cucumber" and "creme brulée".

Its first advertising campaign, Vaporized, featured young models posing and dancing against brightly coloured backgrounds. Its ads appeared on huge screens in New York's Times Square and page spreads in *Vice*. It threw yacht parties, hosted rooftop cinema clubs and held concerts. The brand even funded summer camps for children as young as eight and went into schools, advertising e-cigarettes as "totally safe".

The devices, which could be used discreetly and without releasing much vapour, surged in popularity. High school students bragged of taking puffs during lessons without anyone noticing. A language evolved among teenagers: "ghost ripping" meant taking a discreet drag; "Juuling" became a verb. On YouTube and TikTok, teens shared tips on blowing rings and shapes with vapour and decorating their Juuls with stickers.



One of Juul's events in LA Stanford Media Library

Smoking rates in America fell sharply from 2013, with e-cigarettes like Juul contributing to the decline. Yet vaping has been accused of creating a new public health problem: addictions among non-smoking teenagers. In 2011, 16% of high school students regularly smoked and just over 1% vaped; the number of smokers fell to 8% in 2018, but the number vaping soared to almost 21% – more than had smoked before e-cigarettes took off. The FDA declared it an “epidemic” and said Juul was responsible.

Juul said: “We have never marketed to youth and do not want any non-nicotine users to try our products.”

Juul has been hit with hundreds of lawsuits in which Americans claim they were not warned about the potential dangers of vaping, or that the products contained nicotine. Juul disputes this. Some allege they have suffered respiratory issues, seizures, strokes,

mental health and behavioural problems as a result of their addiction to Juuling. Lisa Vail, from Florida, told the Bureau she believes her 18-year-old son Daniel died from respiratory problems due to a heavy Juul addiction.

The company has until May next year to submit an application to the FDA to continue selling its products. It will need to prove they are “appropriate for the protection of public health”.

A host of cities and states have already tried to ban vapes like Juul or flavoured nicotine, including a blanket ban in its home city, San Francisco. As it fought these measures, Juul's bill for lobbying in Washington soared from \$120,000 in 2017 to more than \$3m in the year so far.

Elsewhere, it gave nearly \$19m to support PropC, a ballot measure to overturn San Francisco's vape ban, which was unsuccessful. It set up The Switch Network, recruiting members of the public to contact state and local politicians to promote vaping. Critics accused it of “astroturfing”, dressing up a well-funded lobbying campaign as a grassroots movement.

Stefanie Miller, an investment adviser who specialises in regulatory risks, said the backlash against Juul in the US will severely constrict its American market. “I would be very concerned if they weren't simultaneously trying to grow in other markets,” she said.

Altria told investors it expects hardly any earnings from Juul this year as it expands abroad. Juul has launched in 21 countries outside the US, including Canada, Russia and much of Europe, but has plans to open in more markets across Europe, the Middle East and Asia-Pacific, and has advertised for jobs and lobbied governments in South America.

Amid the backlash at home, the company made extensive efforts to show it has changed and suspended all “active” lobbying in the US – but the Bureau uncovered a very different picture across the world.

Rewriting the rules

For decades tobacco companies lied about the lethal effects of their products and tried to subvert government policies that would harm their profits. In 2003 a landmark international treaty from the World Health Organisation was ratified by more than 180 countries. One key clause asks governments to protect public health policies from the vested interests of tobacco and e-cigarette companies, limiting interactions and avoiding partnerships.

Yet the Bureau has found concerns that Juul is seeking to shape how countries write the rules that will govern its products, in violation of the treaty.

In a private meeting with a government minister in Vietnam in August this year, lobbyists said Juul was working with a “number of ministries” formulating the country's new decree on vaping. They offered to consult with the Ministry of Health on the new law, according

to a transcript of the meeting seen by the Bureau. Vietnam is a signatory of the WHO treaty. Juul told the Bureau the interaction did not violate the treaty.

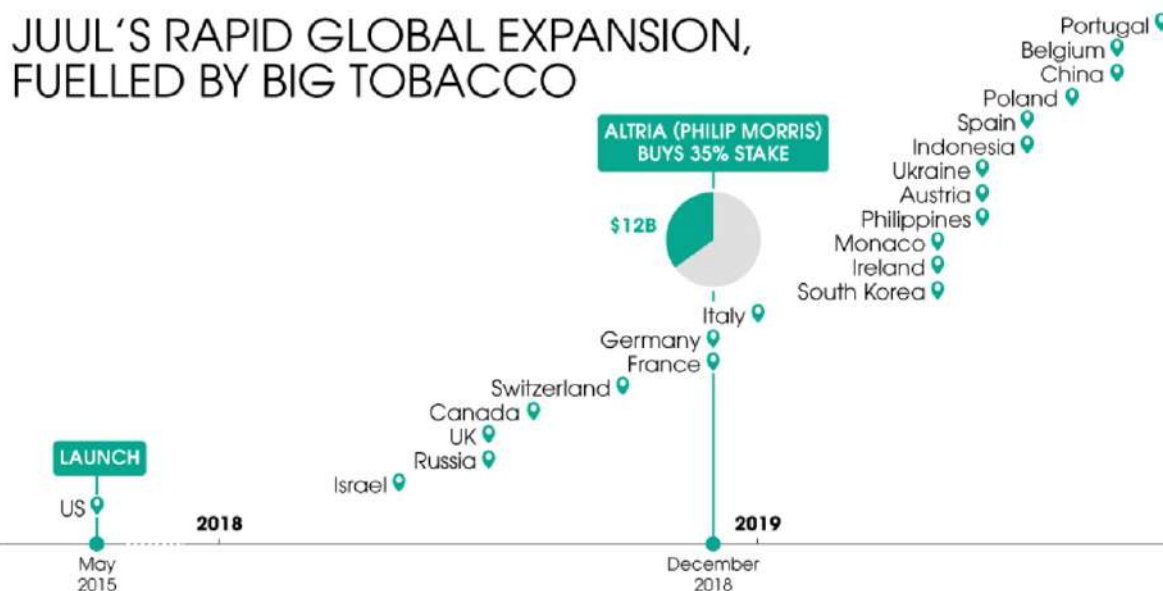
“Juul clearly has a systematic global strategy to meet with government officials in private behind closed doors,” said Matt Myers, president of the Campaign for Tobacco Free Kids. He added that in his opinion the strategy violated the WHO treaty and repeated methods the tobacco industry has used to undermine reasonable regulation. “[It] is exactly what the tobacco industry did: replace good science and good evidence with well-paid lobbying and PR firms which operate in secrecy.”

Juul lobbyists have also been telling officials the company’s products can help people quit smoking, a claim the company cannot make in America because the FDA has not approved e-cigarettes for smoking cessation. To do so, the FDA would have to review the evidence, only some of which backs the claim; other studies have shown people continue to smoke and vape.

“When Juul tells government officials outside the United States that its products have been shown to help people quit using nicotine altogether it is inconsistent with the evidence, it is inconsistent with their internal documents, and it reflects a willingness to say things that they know aren’t true,” Myers said.

In the meeting in Vietnam a Juul lobbyist claimed its products could help wean people off nicotine entirely. He said: “What you can do, is when someone transits from a cigarette to Juul you can eliminate the combustion and you can offer them lower strength pods over time [...] Over time with our technology we can then address the second phase and migrate people down nicotine to zero consumption.”

The lobbyist added that the company is looking to explore whether vitamins could be vaped as a more effective way to get them into the bloodstream, which concerns experts who say there have been no long-term studies on the safety of absorbing nutrients through the lungs.



Jack Hagley

An ambassador from a southern African country, who wanted to remain anonymous, told the Bureau that Juul lobbyists gave him the same pitch. He said: "They said they had success stories of people heavily addicted to smoking who switched to Juul and then quit nicotine altogether."

The lobbying is as persistent as it is pervasive. Juul approached the Mexican government repeatedly, but its representatives were told they would get no further meetings, as there are strict controls on ministers' contact with tobacco companies.

In Indonesia, campaigners are concerned about Juul's rise. At Cilandak Town Square, a shopping centre in Jakarta, the Juul shop – its largest in Asia – sits near a Baskin Robbins and a Starbucks. Experts fear the brand is targeting young people.

Dr Rafendi Djamin, of the Indonesian National Civil Society Coalition on Tobacco Control said that the company was aggressively expanding, while e-cigarette regulations had been in limbo for two years. He said: "It has set up kiosks in places that teenagers hang out." He fears a rise in teen vaping on top of the country's soaring teen smoking rate. "Vaping in public has become stylish for young people. They idolise vaping."

Move fast and break things

Juul has been fighting restrictions on its products since its global expansion began. Its first international market was in Israel, where it launched in May 2018. Within three months, it had been banned by the government because officials believed Juul's stronger nicotine pods were "a grave risk to public health". Juul launched legal action, with the case to be heard this month, and began a pro-vaping PR campaign.



A minimart in Bali, Indonesia, decked out in Juul advertising

In India, Juul was said to have captured a third of the booming e-cigarette market before it had formally launched. In preparation, the company hired PR companies and thinktanks to seed the media with messages about the benefits of e-cigarettes. However, just as Juul was set to start selling there officially, the central Indian government banned vapes, fearing e-cigarettes were a growing health risk to young people.

Soon Plume Vapours and another local e-cigarette importing company, filed petitions against the ban. When the case was opened at a Calcutta court in October, two Juul officials were said to be sat beside Plume's founder. Defending the ban, the Indian solicitor general Aman Lekhi told the court this was a "proxy case for Juul". Juul told the Bureau it has "supported Plume Vapours in the past" but is not part of the legal case.

After launching in the Philippines in June this year, Juul is now fighting the government's proposal to raise taxes on e-cigarettes. Juul's stronger 5% nicotine pods, which are banned in the EU, would be badly hit.

During hearings in the Philippine senate in September, Kenneth Bishop, President of Juul Labs Asia-Pacific, claimed that Juul's products should be taxed less because they were less harmful. He also told legislators that the company was now acting responsibly. He said: "We have done some things that we are not proud of in the past but we have taken aggressive and industry leading actions to mitigate any risks of exposing our products to youth or appealing to youth."

Yet, fearing a surge of vaping-related illnesses as the US has seen, the Philippines' Department of Health has now asked all hospitals to formally report any cases.

Shane MacGuill, an analyst at Euromonitor, told the Bureau Juul's rapid expansion and "move fast and break things" mentality could harm its perception among regulators and the public.

"I think people in general don't really feel comfortable with where [Juul] think nicotine should be used and shouldn't," he said, "They sort of drove a cart and horses through all of that. And I think it's really a time for reflection for them."



"He was like a drug addict" — 13-year-old hooked on Juul

In March Jennifer* picked up her 13-year-old son Joshua* from a counselling session. Over the past six months he had changed from a happy, outgoing child to one riddled with anxiety. His Tourette's syndrome meant he had always suffered from involuntary

movements, called tics, but he never appeared to have mental health problems before.

That night, he started begging for a mango-flavoured Juul. When Jennifer refused to buy him one he became distressed. "He had a meltdown," she said, "that's when we realised how bad it was."

Joshua had been caught with a Juul before but his parents had no idea he was addicted. They believed it explained the profound personality changes they had witnessed in their son: Joshua had become constantly anxious, regularly calling his mother and asking her to take him home from school and retreating from his friends. They had thought it was because he was being bullied, and had taken him out of public school and enrolled him in a private school.

After the meltdown, Jennifer and her partner asked Joshua why he was using e-cigarettes. He said he loved Juul's mango flavour and it helped with his Tourette's, making him feel more relaxed and in control of his tics. "He loved the buzz, he loved the way it tasted," Jennifer said.

They realised the extent of his addiction at Easter, when they travelled to stay with family. Joshua spent the holiday crying and begging for nicotine, saying it was the only thing that made him feel better. "He was like a drug addict," Jennifer said.

A day later, he sent his mother a text message saying he was going to kill himself; that without nicotine he felt out of control. His parents immediately took him to an outpatient behaviour centre and he began counselling with a specialist in nicotine addiction.

But his parents couldn't stop him Juuling. He paid people on social media to bring a device to his house. He would ask total strangers for a hit. His mother banned him from the school locker room because children were using e-cigarettes there, despite the school searching bags.

Things came to a head in May when his mother found him raging and crying after school. He had taken a hit of Juul before baseball practice and hit another pupil over the leg with a bat. "That was the straw that broke the camel's back," Jennifer said.

Jennifer started testing Joshua using nicotine strip kits she bought online. Despite her best efforts to keep him away from e-cigarettes, he would often test positive. "In his mind, it helped him if he was having issues with kids. If anyone bothered him, it relaxed him... But he didn't bother to think about how it can affect you mentally."

Finally, in September, the family heard some news that made Joshua take stock of his addiction. A family friend's 27-year-old daughter was rushed to hospital with pneumonia and died; her family blamed her death on her vaping habit. "It became real," Jennifer said. "The consequences became real to him."

Joshua continued with counselling, and his mother has kept randomly testing him for nicotine. As a result, he has not used a Juul in two months. His parents are suing the company, claiming he will deal with the effects of a nicotine addiction for the rest of his life.

Jennifer believes Juul's marketing and flavours was attractive to children like Joshua. She wants to see more severe consequences for shops that sell e-cigarettes to minors. She understands the devices can help people switch from cigarettes, but believes the controls to stop teenagers becoming addicted to vaping aren't adequate. She said: "If it's helped you that's great. But there are so many things that need to be done and put in place prior to putting it on the market to protect those it wasn't intended for."

Juul said it was focusing on underage use and developing technology to curb underage access. A spokesperson added: "With that in mind, we disagree with the allegations made in these claims and look forward to presenting the facts."

**names changed to protect identities*

Additional reporting by Rahul Meessraganda, Sharon Kelly and Ben Stockton

Illustration by Rebecca Hendin

Vaping giant Juul pushes for more addictive e-cigarettes

TBIJ thebureauinvestigates.com/stories/2019-11-23/vaping-giant-juul-pushes-for-more-addictive-e-cigarettes



The vaping giant Juul is lobbying for stronger and more addictive e-cigarettes to be sold in the UK after Brexit, despite being blamed by many for a teen vaping “epidemic” in the US.

The company has worked behind the scenes to build a substantial PR and lobbying operation across Westminster, including hiring executives with ties to government, an investigation by the Bureau has found. It is also working to lift stringent advertising restrictions on its products.

Juul’s public affairs playbook appears to mirror that of the drinks industry, which has faced years of criticism over fostering a binge-drinking culture among young people. Juul has hired the same PR agency used by Diageo – which owns Smirnoff and Guinness – and employs several of its former staff.

In a submission to the Department of Health last year obtained by the Bureau under Freedom of Information rules, Juul said that Brexit offered an opportunity to relax advertising restrictions and review the “arbitrary limit” on the strength of nicotine in e-cigarettes set by the European Union.

Juul joined the UK Vaping Industry Association (UKVIA) earlier this year, a trade group which is also calling on the government to strip back strict EU laws. The Department of Health has pledged to “identify areas where we can sensibly deregulate”.

The company is facing a huge backlash in the US, its home market, where more than a quarter of high school students vape, and is embarking on an ambitious global expansion plan, partly funded by an \$12bn investment from Altria, the maker of Marlboro cigarettes and Juul's largest shareholder.

The Bureau has tracked Juul's lobbying in countries all over the world, revealing the UK as a key market, where the company has seen "rapid growth" since its launch last year.

Some of the fruit and dessert-based flavours on sale in the UK have been pulled from US shelves after criticism that they appealed to children. Juul's UK products contain much less nicotine than its US pods – which are strong even for that market – because regulations set the limit on nicotine content at 20 mg/ml.

Juul and UKVIA say the government should lift this "arbitrary" cap after Brexit. Martin McKee, professor of European public health at the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine, said: "It's insane. Given everything that's going on at the moment, it's mad.

"The trick is to get people addicted to nicotine and that's going to be easier with higher concentrations so it's not surprising that [the industry] wants to do that ... But why would we want to when we've seen what has happened in the US?"

UKVIA said: "Allowing for a range of nicotine strengths provides heavy smokers with the tools they need to make the switch away from cigarettes, which are far more harmful than vaping."

Pushing the limits

The government has already committed to a post-Brexit review of the EU's e-cigarette regulations. It will "reappraise" these restrictions, which in effect ban advertising on TV, radio, in print and online.



In the US Juul sells pods at 5% nicotine strength — the limit in the EU is 2% Getty Images

UKVIA – which also represents major tobacco companies, including Philip Morris International and British American Tobacco – says EU laws “severely curtail the ability of the industry to communicate the public health potential of vaping to smokers”.

Some restrictions have already been lifted. UKVIA and tobacco companies – along with Public Health England (PHE) and a handful of other health groups – supported the Advertising Standards Agency when it relaxed guidelines last year, so that health claims made in marketing materials no longer require authorisation by the UK’s Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency.

Professor Dame Parveen Kumar, of the British Medical Association, opposed the changes and said any further weakening of ad rules needed “serious thought” about the potential impact on public health.

Professor Jonathan Grigg, a paediatrician and leading expert on the effects of air pollution, echoed her concerns, saying the devices “should not be visible to young people in any way”. He added: “There’s absolutely no reason why these devices can’t be behind the shutters that we see for cigarettes until we absolutely know what the long-term effects of these devices are.”

Public Health England says it has a “balanced policy”. As vaping is significantly safer than smoking, it believes any barriers to smokers accessing e-cigarettes should be kept to a minimum. But critics are calling for it to re-evaluate its laissez-faire stance and raising questions over its seemingly positive attitude towards the vaping industry.

The criticism intensified after dozens of deaths in the US caused by vaping-related respiratory illnesses. The majority of cases are believed to have been caused by black market products, but some have blamed Juul for the dramatic rise in vaping among teens generally, after the company ran a controversial ad campaign centred on young models and social media influencers.



Juul's US advertising campaign was criticised for appealing to a young audience



Their UK adverts have a much more sombre tone

UKVIA phoned PHE to ask if they were going to make a statement on the US deaths. In an email to an official on PHE's tobacco control team in August, UKVIA said: "It was good to speak to you earlier, and thanks for your information that PHE's are [sic] planning to put

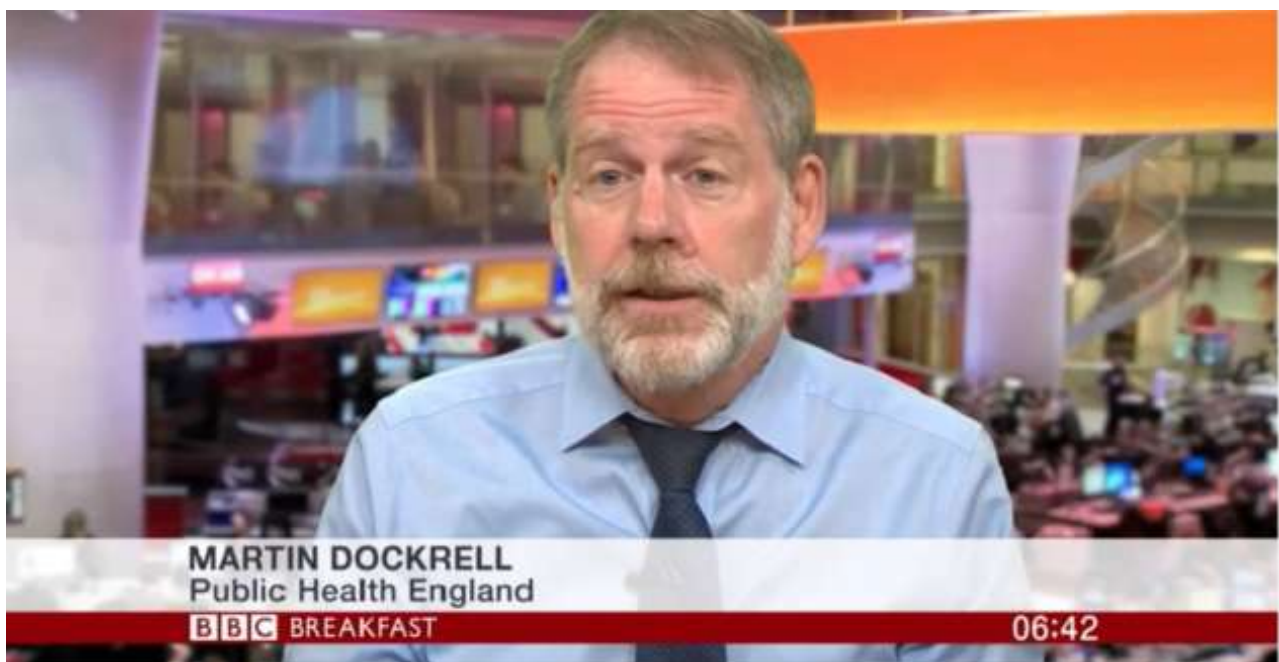
out a statement.” It added: “UKVIA is very happy to engage with PHE to provide any advice or guidance and share best practice too.”

PHE’s statement said “a full investigation is not yet available” but added that “unlike the US, all e-cigarette products in the UK are tightly regulated for quality and safety”.

A month later Martin Dockrell, the head of tobacco control at PHE, was interviewed on BBC *Breakfast* and told viewers that none of the deaths in the US were linked to products sold in the UK. Later that week, a mother in the US filed a wrongful death lawsuit against Juul. She believes Juul is responsible for the death of her teenage son, who was a heavy user and suffered from breathing difficulties. The case has not yet been heard. PHE said Juul’s higher nicotine pods are not available in the UK.

The Bureau understands that PHE has consulted the US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention about the death of a Briton believed to have been linked to vaping.

Martin McKee said: “Public Health England keeps saying [vaping] it’s not a problem even when there’s plenty of evidence it is a problem ... It’s dug itself into a hole and it can’t get out.”



Martin Dockrell BBC

PHE told the Bureau: “Smoking kills around 220 people a day. PHE’s independent e-cigarette reviews are world leading and the evidence is clear that, while not without risks, vaping is a fraction of the risk of smoking and an effective way to quit. But we are also clear, if you’ve never been a smoker, don’t vape.”

Juul said in a statement: “We go above and beyond to combat the issue of youth access, appeal and use of vapour products, while at the same time ensuring that adult smokers maintain access to a product that is helping millions of them switch from combustible cigarettes.”

Schmoozing and boozing

After an onslaught of federal and congressional investigations in the US, Juul promised to stop lobbying in Washington – but in the UK, where no such promises have been made, it has been doing just the opposite.

In May, Juul hired Max Chambers, David Cameron's former speechwriter, as its UK director of government and public affairs. Prior to joining Juul, Chambers worked for Public.io, a company set up by one of his former Downing Street colleagues that works to help secure public sector contracts for its tech start-up clients. The job kept Chambers in contact with senior members of government, with ministerial disclosures showing he met with the Cabinet Office and the Home Office early this year. Juul said Chambers had "no involvement in the formulation of e-cigarette regulation in the UK" and had no involvement with Juul while he was in Downing Street.

As near-daily reports about Juul's role in a teen vaping "epidemic" hit the press in the US in September, Chambers was on the party conference circuit, with Juul sponsoring panels at Labour and Conservative events. At the Tory party conference, Juul held two closed events for MPs and their special advisers. It also sponsored health panels at a non-partisan political conference in August, with the junior health minister Nicola Blackwood as one of the speakers.

In September last year, James Kent, then the special adviser for health to the prime minister Theresa May, disclosed that he'd received "USB chargers" as a gift from Juul. The Bureau has learnt that Juul met with Kent to discuss how e-cigarettes could help adult smokers "move away from combustible cigarettes".



James Cleverly appearing at a Juul-sponsored event at Manchester Art Gallery for Conservative Party conference attendees

To build its lobbying team, Juul has turned to two agencies with clout – Hanover Communications and Freuds. Both have also been employed by the drinks industry; Juul has hired at least 10 former Diageo employees to work in its London office, including its director of finance, and appears to be emulating Diageo’s approach to lobbying for self-regulation.

The British Beer and Pub Association, of which Diageo is a member, works with Hanover and launched ‘Challenge 21’ in response to growing calls to stop underage sales. A self-regulated age-verification scheme in pubs and retailers, it was seen by some as an attempt to stave off stricter legislation.

Both Juul and UKVIA have endorsed a similar scheme for e-cigarettes.

Hanover enjoys strong connections to government, particularly the Department of Health and its agencies, having worked in the past for both PHE and the NHS. The company’s chief executive was once Sir John Major’s press secretary, and Hanover’s head of health, Andrew Harrison, worked at the department in the 1990s with Simon Stevens, now the head of NHS England. Hanover said it has no “ties” with public health agencies.

In May, the health secretary Matt Hancock attended a breakfast hosted by Hanover. A few months later, Emma Dean left her job at Hanover to become a special adviser at the Department of Health.

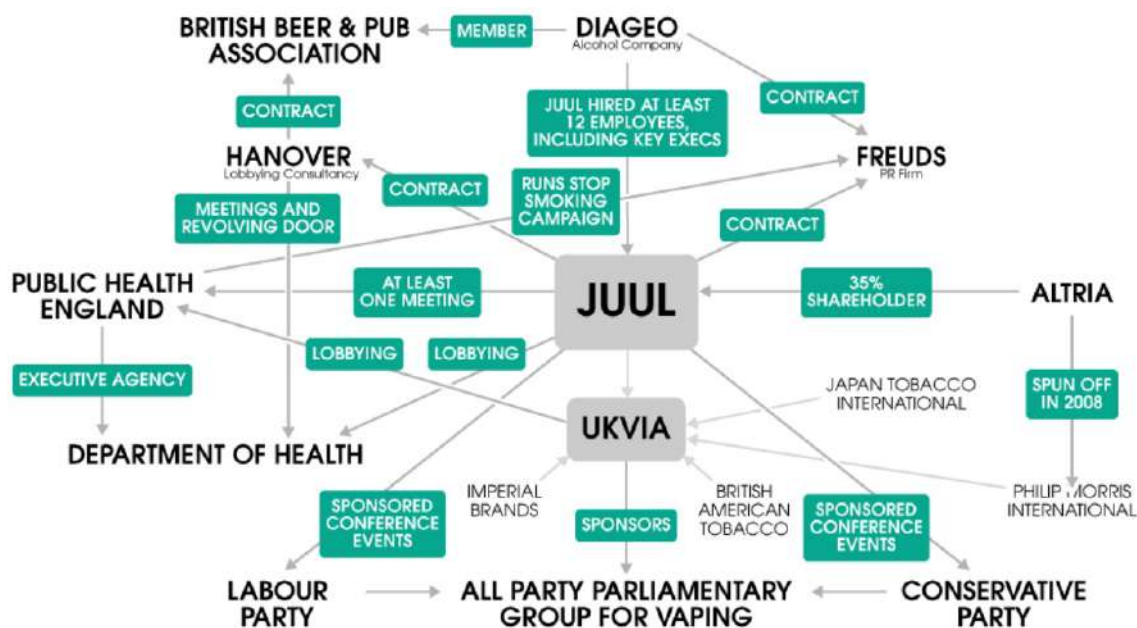
Freuds, meanwhile, has faced conflict of interest concerns after the agency was brought in to launch PHE's stop smoking campaign. Freuds said it stopped working for Juul earlier this year and it "will never work for a tobacco company". However, Juul's largest shareholder is tobacco giant Altria, which sells Marlboro cigarettes in the US.

The executive who led the Public Health England and Diageo accounts for Freuds was hired by Juul as director of marketing communications last year, according to LinkedIn.

Until recently, Juul was conducting a "confidential search for a chief medical officer", according to an email sent to one of the UK's leading e-cigarette experts seen by the Bureau. The chief medical officer would report to Juul's CEO and have a "significant impact on the future of the organisation", the recruiter said. As well as someone who could oversee Juul's research, they would also be responsible for "partnership with the medical and research communities, regulatory stakeholders, and industry".

In July, Politico reported Juul had hired an expert in the effects of nicotine on the teenage brain as its executive medical officer in the US. The move was criticised by some as mimicking a Big Tobacco tactic to create credibility and buy influence.

Juul told the Bureau it is no longer recruiting for the position of chief medical officer.



Jack Hagley

Beyond Westminster

Juul's lobbying efforts extend beyond the Westminster bubble. The company has been careful with its public image in the UK, making clear in its advertisements that it is only intended for adult smokers trying to quit. But the Bureau's findings suggest that behind closed doors the company has been eager to seek to influence strict EU regulations.

PHE met with Juul employees in April last year, before its UK launch, to discuss EU legislation. While PHE is required to disclose the meeting, official records state “the discussion related to regulatory issues and was commercial in confidence”.

PHE told the Bureau: “We are ranked top in the world for resisting interference from the tobacco industry with PHE cited specifically for our transparency.”

During another private meeting with EU tax officials in March, Juul argued any tax on e-cigarettes should be based on the volume of the liquid, not on the strength of nicotine. While the EU does not require member states to place any additional tax on e-cigarettes – as it does for regular cigarettes – it is reviewing whether it should. Britain does not put a specific tax on e-cigarettes, but about half of EU member states do.

Juul’s proposed rules, which lift the limit on nicotine content, would pave the way for it to sell its stronger pods in Europe without any increase in price.

Matt Myers, president of Campaign for Tobacco-Free Kids, which has closely monitored Juul’s rise in the US and its emergence as a global business, said: “Juul is following the worst of what the tobacco industry does, hiring high paid, well-connected PR and lobbying firms to overcome the lack of science, the wrongful behaviour and public health concerns.

“It is hard to miss the irony that Juul and its defenders point to the United Kingdom, where it claims smoking cessation is up and no youth crisis exists, even as it is fighting to undermine the very laws and regulations that have prevented the youth epidemic in the UK.”

Illustration by Rebecca Hendin