Written evidence submitted by Chris Lukehurst (ECG0021)

Summary
- The vapour used in e-cigarettes is generally flavoured with sweet flavours.
- Persistent exposure of consumers to sweet flavours causes the palate to become accustomed to this sweetness and thus less sensitive to it.
- As the consumer palate becomes less sensitive to sweet flavour the consumer will seek out ever-sweeter flavours to satisfy their urge for sweetness.
- Thus consumers will seek out sweeter drinks and food – not only confectionary and desserts, but sweeter ‘savoury’ dishes as well such as BBQ sauces, cook-in sauces etc.
- Despite considerable effort on the part of Government and the Food and Beverage Industry to reduce sugar content in food and drink the consumer will increasing be seeking out sweeter products and consumer demand will pressure the industry to supply such products.
- Obesity, its affect on consumer health and its consequent costs to the NHS and the nation as a whole will continue to grow.

1. I am a Food Psychologist and have been researching consumers’ emotional responses to food and drink for nearly 15 years. My company has worked on the reduction of fat and salt in processed products and is now increasingly involved in working on the reduction of sugar in soft drinks. We have also observed how these changes in commonly consumed foods have affected the national palate as it adapts to less salt or sugar.

2. My concern regarding e-cigarettes is that they use predominantly sweet liquids to provide flavour – indeed I believe that this is a significant factor in their success and rapid growth. While I am not aware of any research in this area, it is my concern that regular exposure to these sweet flavours will result in the blunting of the consumers taste awareness to sweetness. In order to continue to receive the positive emotions provided by the sweet taste the consumer will have to ramp up the intensity of the sweetness that they experience.

3. While this may be of little consequence in terms of the vape flavours themselves – they will simply become sweeter but as no calories are consumed this will not matter as the consumer’s palate become less and less sensitive to sweetness this will also affect their enjoyment of food and drink. Just as we are reducing the quantities of sugar in soft drinks the consumer will be seeking sweeter and sweeter experiences in their food and drink experiences. This may result in a greater use of sugar in hot beverages, the desire for greater quantities of sweeter confectionary and desserts and even a greater demand for sweetened “savoury” dishes such as BBQ sauces, greater sweetening of pasta and cook-in sauces etc.

4. Despite a lot of work and legislation aimed at reducing calorie consumption the opposite continues to happen and obesity continues to grow. This trend could be further accelerated as an unintended consequence of e-cigarettes. A problem never traced back to its source as the two things appear to be unrelated to each other.

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