



Rt Hon Mims Davies MP  
Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Sport and Civil Society  
Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport

23<sup>rd</sup> January 2019

Dear Rt Hon Mims Davies MP,

**Re: Mandatory Regulation of HFSS Food and Drink Partnerships with Football Organisations**

We write to Ministers in response to this January's launch of a new sponsorship partnership between the English Premier League and Coca Cola GB. This is the latest in a series of high fat, salt or sugar (HFSS) brands associating themselves with national football organisations, and we are now urging UK Government to establish mandatory regulations stopping further marketing of HFSS products through the 'National Game'.

Football has been used in the UK for many years to market food and drink products to fans that are high in fat, salt and sugar. Marketing channels include club-based and league-based sponsor partnerships (Gatorade, Cadbury, Coca-Cola), broadcast media advertising (Domino's Pizza), pitch side advertising (Monster Energy Drink) and grassroots programme sponsorship (McDonald's, Mars), all of which look to influence the consumer habits of fans, including children and young people.

It is now well established that the UK is experiencing a child overweight and obesity crisis which will cost the NHS billions of pounds per year if trends are not reversed. Data from the National Child Measurement Programme (2016/17) shows that one in five (20.6%) of all Reception Age children are classed as overweight/obese, and an even higher figure of over one in three (34.2%) of all Year 6 school children are classed as overweight/obese. Regarding marketing and consumption of sugary drinks (including sports and energy drinks), there is a specific impact on the oral health of children, plus an additional financial burden on the NHS due to extraction of children's teeth, operations for which increased between 2013 and 2018 by 18% to a total of 45,077 per annum at a cost of £38.9m.

Partnerships between HFSS brands and football organisations and sports competitions are *not incidental*. By linking themselves to clubs, players, leagues, competitions and grassroots participation, these companies are attempting to associate their brands with a healthy and active lifestyle, thereby minimising the public scrutiny of their contribution to the UK's childhood overweight and obesity crisis.

Whilst parental and individual responsibility undoubtedly has a significant role in reversing this trend, recent research from the Institute for Fiscal Studies has found that 50% of all food and drink TV advertisements seen by children aged between 4 and 15 years old are for HFSS products, despite regulations banning such brands on children's TV (*Children's exposure to TV advertising of food and drink*, Institute of Fiscal Studies, May 2018). It is clear that UK Government has also recognised this problem. Indeed, the issue of sports organisations taking sponsorship from companies promoting unhealthy products is highlighted in UK Government's 2015 *Sporting Future* strategy document, stating:

*'Sponsorship is an area where a number of sports, and individual clubs, have adopted a responsible approach, for example around sponsorship by companies marketing alcohol or high fat, sugar and salt (HFSS) foods. We will continue to discuss with sports the scope for voluntary agreements in this area.'* (P.54 - *Sporting Future: A New Strategy for an Active Nation*, HM Government, 2015)

Regardless of a renewed focus on 'responsible sponsorship', since this strategy document was published in 2015, clubs, leagues and governing bodies have entered into *new partnership* deals with companies

marketing HFSS products (including Mars, McDonalds, Carabao, Coca-Cola), showing that we need a much tougher stance on this issue from UK Government that is not based upon voluntary agreements.

UK Government's ground breaking *Childhood Obesity: A Plan for Action* published in August 2016, and *Chapter 2* of the *Plan* published in June 2018, has started to address *some* of the key issues associated with reducing levels of childhood obesity such as reformulation, calorie reduction and restrictions on marketing of HFSS products. Yet, despite the huge role football plays in children's lives, there are still no restrictions on HFSS food and drink brands entering into lucrative partnerships with football organisations, despite evidence being provided to the Health Select Committee recently calling for UK Government to:

*"...investigate ending sponsorship by brands overwhelmingly associated with HFSS products of sports clubs, venues, youth leagues and tournaments. Campaigns are currently calling on sports associations to disassociate themselves from junk food brands, but if sports associations will not act, the Government must step in."* (P.17 - *Childhood Obesity: Time for Action*, Health Select Committee, May 2018)

In May 2018, Healthy Stadia and Sustain (The Alliance for Better Food and Farming), drafted an open letter to football organisations asking them to reconsider future partnerships with companies promoting HFSS products, in particular the increasing prevalence of 'sports' drinks and 'energy' drinks partnering with football. The letter was supported by hundreds of football fans, and over 60 experts in the field from clinical research, sustainability, local public health leads, oral health and from within sport itself.

Following up support for this issue by football fans, on 28<sup>th</sup> July 2018 a motion was carried by members of the Football Supporters Federation (FSF) at its AGM to work with Healthy Stadia to ensure that:

*"further restrictions should be put in place by Government to limit the use of football as a marketing platform for HFSS brands...to ensure that fans' voices are heard in protecting children and young people from such marketing tactics"*.

With overwhelming evidence that the marketing of HFSS food and drinks products is directly associated with the childhood obesity crisis in the UK (See: Boyland, E et al. 2016), and recognition of this issue by UK Government, experts in the field, and most importantly by football fans themselves, we now ask UK Government to revisit this issue within the context of sports sponsorship. We argue that now is the *right time* to bring forward regulatory mechanisms that prohibit further sponsorship partnerships between HFSS brands and national football organisations in the UK, something that was successfully achieved in the case of tobacco sponsorship and sport as far back as 2003.

Healthy Stadia and the FSF would be delighted to discuss this issue with representatives from DDCMS and/or DHSC in due course, and we look forward to hearing back from you with acknowledgment of this letter.

Yours Sincerely,



**Dr Matthew Philpott**  
**Executive Director, Healthy Stadia**



**Mr Malcolm Clarke**  
**Chair, Football Supporters Federation**

**CC:** Rt Hon Matt Hancock MP; Steve Brine MP; Dr Sarah Wollaston MP

**Healthy Stadia** works with governing bodies, stadium operators and clubs across Europe to develop sports venues as health promoting settings. Healthy Stadia specialises in developing evidence-based guidance and interventions addressing the key lifestyle risk factors of physical inactivity, poor diet and tobacco for stakeholders, benefitting the health of fans, staff and local communities.

**The Football Supporters' Federation and Supporters Direct** - together the Unified Football Supporters' Organisation - is an inclusive, independent, democratic organisation working with supporters, governing bodies, leagues and clubs to drive positive change in football through supporter engagement at every level of the game.