

Supplementary written evidence submitted by NASUWT (END0027)

This briefing sets out the Union's response to issues raised by the Monster Energy Company in its supplementary submission to Committee (END0024).

Introduction

1. The NASUWT welcomes the opportunity to comment on the issues raised in the supplementary submission of the Monster Energy Company (Monster) to the Committee's Inquiry into Energy Drinks.

Comments

2. While noting the issues highlighted in Monster's supplementary submission, the NASUWT stands by the written and oral evidence it has shared with the Committee.
3. The Union further notes that many of the contentions set out in Monster's submission do not reference this evidence directly but make general observations about the validity and reliability of the research base drawn on by the NASUWT and others in calling for steps to be taken to tackle the consumption of energy drinks by young people.
4. Having considered Monster's submission carefully, the NASUWT is not persuaded that any of the points made by the company would justify a policy decision to leave matters as they stand currently. It occurs to the Union that Monster has not set out a coherent case for continued inaction in this critical area. The Union continues to hold that the evidence presented by Dr Amelia Lake, Professor Russell Viner and Ms Annabel Gipp, as well as other evidence that it has cited, make a compelling case for restricting the ability of young people to access and consume energy drinks.
5. It should be noted in this context that the NASUWT's view is shared by many of the UK's leading food and drink retailers that have, quite correctly in the Union's opinion, moved to restrict the sale of energy drinks to those under 16 years of age. It should be further noted that the British Soft Drinks Association (BDSA) in its evidence to the Committee acknowledged the potentially adverse consequences of energy drink consumption by young people.
6. The NASUWT would also draw the Committee's attention to the testimony of a significant number of teachers and school leaders who are in no doubt that the consumption of energy drinks has an adverse impact on pupils' learning, behaviour and general participation in school life. The Union was clear in its evidence that while it is not possible to claim that excessive consumption of energy drinks can cause poor pupil behaviour, the unequivocal experience of many teachers and school leaders is that such consumption can exacerbate it. The Committee will be aware of those schools that have moved to prohibit the consumption of energy drinks on their premises and the positive implications for pupil behaviour and learning they have observed subsequently. Such evidence should not be dismissed lightly.

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7. Monster suggests that the consumption of other caffeinated products, including tea and coffee, by young people means that a particular focus on the consumption of energy drinks is inappropriate. With respect, this contention fails to address the specific concerns associated with the consumption of energy drinks by young people. It is accepted that children under the age of 16 have always consumed products containing some levels of caffeine, including on the way to and from, as well as at, school. However, it is the relatively recent increase in the consumption of energy drinks specifically that has been associated by teachers and school leaders with the concerns highlighted in the NASUWT's evidence, rather than the other products cited by Monster in its submission.
8. To be clear, the NASUWT is not calling for any restrictions to be placed on the sale or marketing of energy drinks to adults. In the Union's view, adults are free to decide for themselves whether or not to consume Monster's highly-caffeinated products. However, the NASUWT believes that given the weight of concern about the consumption of energy drinks by young people, it is responsible to restrict their availability on the basis proposed by the Union.

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