



National Assembly for Wales' Children and Young People Committee Inquiry into Childhood Obesity

Written Submission from ACS (the Association of Convenience Stores)



1. ACS (the Association of Convenience Stores) is a trade association representing more than 33,500 stores in the UK and over 2,000 stores in Wales, campaigning for and issuing guidance to local shops on issues including the responsible retailing of food and drink. ACS welcomes the opportunity to respond to this inquiry and recognises the importance of tackling obesity among children in Wales.
2. Food and drink categories represent a significant proportion of products available in convenience stores, with over 60% of sales contribution made by food-based categories including chilled foods, canned and packaged grocery and fruit and vegetables¹. Fruit and vegetables represent an important growth category in the convenience sector; in 2012, sales of fruit and vegetables overtook the sales of confectionary as a proportion of sales for the first time, representing 5.9% of sales.
3. ACS recognises the importance of tackling obesity, particularly given the growing number of children who are obese in Wales and across the United Kingdom. With this goal in mind, ACS strongly encourages members to participate in initiatives including the Change4Life Convenience Programme. Many of our members, such as the Co-operative Group and Spar, are also signatories of the UK Government's Responsibility Deals to reduce calories, trans fats and salt in their products.

The Committee would welcome your views on the following points: the measurement, evaluation and effectiveness of health related programmes including Change4Life:

Change4Life Convenience Stores Programme

4. We would like to use our submission to highlight the contribution made by the convenience sector in Wales in combating childhood obesity in the Change4Life Convenience Stores Programme².

¹ ACS Local Shop Report 2012 pp. 9

² <http://www.nhs.uk/Change4Life/Pages/partner-convenience-stores.aspx>

5. The Programme was launched in November 2008, with the goal of encouraging retailers to sell more fruit and vegetables and for customers to eat more healthily. It was initially launched in twelve stores in the North East of England, given the prevalence of obesity in this region, and now also operates in several parts of the UK, including in Wales. Children were included in launching the Programme in stores, with fruit and recipe samples available at many of the launches.
6. The Programme was first launched in deprived areas, as people living in these areas often find it more difficult to access fruit and vegetables, resulting in a poor diet and health inequalities. Convenience stores are important outlets for low-income customers who shop more often at their local store; 31% of customers belonging to the DE social group shop regularly at their local shop, compared with 17% of AB customers³.
7. The Programme's objectives include: increasing sales of fruit and vegetables and improving the range and quality of products and communication about healthy eating in store.
8. The mandatory initiatives for retailers wanting to participate in the project include: appointing a fresh food champion to manage the category, using Change4Life branding in store, reviewing the range of fruit and vegetables and to produce a fruit and vegetable marketing plan. Optional initiatives include extending the space used to display fruit and vegetables and positioning them in a more prominent position in store.
9. Retailers opting to participate in the Project receive a training DVD, a guide on how best to display fruit and vegetables in store and Change4Life brand materials. Through using Change4Life materials in store and providing information for customers on healthy eating, the Change4Life initiative as a whole is promoted to customers, including to children and their parents.
10. Example outcomes from the project have included: increasing the range of fruit drinks and decreasing the range of carbonated drinks available in store, displaying fruit at checkouts instead of confectionary and increasing the sale of fruit and vegetables by moving them to a more prominent place in the store.
11. Some retailers have also gone beyond the original remit of the Programme to encourage their customers, particularly children, to eat more fruit and vegetables. For example, one Nisa store is supplying its local school with fruit for its tuck shop and cost price, which has led to a closer relationship between the store and the school.
12. Other advice offered to retailers on how to engage with children and local schools in ACSq: A Fresh Approach guide on successfully implementing the Programme include: establishing links with schools and the person responsible for links with the community and healthy eating, arranging for schools to make store visits to talk about healthy eating, offering prizes for healthy eating competitions and providing fruit and water on school sports days.

³ ACS Local Shop Report 2012

13. As part of the Responsibility Deal, ACS pledged to provide Change 4 Life materials to 1000 stores by the end of 2012. By implementing Change4Life in store, there has been a positive effect on consumer opinions of the sector in addition to some stores increasing the sale of healthier products by almost 50%.
14. Following the launch of the Programme in the North East of England, it was noted that while the general awareness of customers of Change4Life as a whole was just over 53%, awareness was much higher among parents with children aged 11 and under was 75%, showing the importance of Change4Life as a way to guide parents to ensure their children lead a healthy lifestyle.

Change4Life Convenience Stores Programme in Wales

15. In Wales, the Programme was used to launch the Healthy Retail Scheme at the beginning of 2012 in three stores in Blaenau Gwent: Brynithel Premier Convenience Store, Nisa Swffryd and Nisa Llanhilleth⁴. It was noted that in Blaenau Gwent, just 6% of adults were taking measures to lead a healthy lifestyle through diet and exercise.
16. Whereas both Nisa stores used the initiative to extend their pre-existing range, the Premier Store started selling fruit and vegetables for the first time, showing the value of Change4Life in showing retailers the benefits for them and for their customers of selling healthier produce in their stores.
17. A range of community activities were organised to raise awareness of the importance of a healthy diet to coincide with the launch, including a competition with two primary schools to design a healthy lunchbox and pupils from these schools also learnt about healthy eating in school assemblies.
18. In addition to the Change4Life Convenience Programme, ACS has also engaged with and supports the Healthy Corner Shop Project, which is led by the Riverside Community Market Association in Cardiff as part of the Cardiff Healthy City Programme.
19. This initiative was launched in 2012 in three stores in Splott, Grangetown and Riverside. The shops agreed to sell and prominently display fresh fruit and vegetables in an attempt to encourage customers to buy and eat more healthy food in these deprived areas of the city
20. ACS strongly believes that partnership programmes, such as the Change4Life Convenience Programme are the best way to ensure that all parts of the community commit to tackling childhood obesity in Wales, through access to healthy foods and information to parents and children in all parts of Wales.
21. ACS would welcome the opportunity to provide oral evidence to the Committee and to further discuss the Change4Life Convenience Programme and other measures convenience retailers are taking in order to tackle the important issue of childhood obesity in Wales.
22. For further information on how the convenience sector is tackling childhood obesity in Wales, please contact Mair.Roberts@acs.org.uk / 01252 533011.

⁴ Please refer to ACS' press release on the launch: http://www.acs.org.uk/en/Press_Office/e-bulletin/details/index.cfm/obj_id/6A910435-2095-4460-BBC5356B3E6BBE38