

Mandatory calorie labelling in the Out of Home sector – Policy Position

Policy Position

Obesity Action Scotland **supports mandatory calorie labelling** in the Out of Home sector and would like to see it implemented to all out of home food businesses in Scotland. Mandatory calorie labelling should also apply to children's menus to enable parents to make an informed choice.

For mandatory calorie labelling to be effective, equitable, and fair it has to **apply to all businesses equally**. For micro, small and medium sized businesses, there needs to be adequate support, advice and guidance provided to enable these businesses to implement calorie labelling.

Calorie labelling information should be provided at points of choice to ensure consumers can make an informed choice when they are making a decision to purchase. This includes in physical premises and online, including delivery apps.

A reference statement such as 'Adults need around 2,000 calories per day' should also be included as part of the calorie information provided.

The out of home sector contributes a significant proportion of daily calories consumed, and almost all people in Scotland have eaten out in the last year.

Mandatory calorie labelling in an effective policy as it can help consumers reduce their calorie intake, by providing calorie information at the point of choice. It can also encourage businesses to reformulate the products they sell, to contain less calories and make them healthier.

There are high levels of public support for calorie information in the Out of Home sector, with 60% of people surveyed supporting the measure.

Why mandatory calorie labelling is needed in the out of home sector

- Between a fifth and a quarter of our calories are consumed out of homeⁱ.
- The majority of food and drink purchased and consumed out of home is unhealthy and high in fat, salt and sugar. The top 10 food items purchased in the out of home sector are predominantly unhealthy products, such as soft drinks, confectionary, and cakesⁱⁱ.
- In Scotland, more than 96% of people have eaten out of home in the last yearⁱⁱⁱ.
- We're failing to meet the Scottish Dietary Goals and are consuming too many calories, as well as too much fat, salt and sugar. The energy density of the average diet in Scotland is 40% over the recommended levels in the dietary goals^{iv}.
- There is often a lack of awareness among consumers of the calorie content of items they purchase and consume out of home^v. Without calorie information available, consumers are unable to make an informed choice and select healthier options.
- Evidence from a study we undertook found that one average bag of chips contained around half (938kcal) of the daily calorie intake recommended for women but this information was not available for consumers when making their purchase^{vi}.

Evidence of effectiveness

- Providing consumers with calorie information at the point of choice can help lower calorie intake^{vii}. This is especially the case when provided alongside contextual information indicating recommended daily calorie intakes^{viii}.
- A recent rapid review conducted by Food Standards Scotland found that providing calorie information in the out of home sector can result in up to a 115-calorie reduction per meal, with a mean reduction of 47 calories. Whilst this reduction might appear to be a small number of calories, when aggregated across the whole Scottish population and taking into account how often people eat out of home, it could lead to a significant reduction in calories consumed^{ix}.
- Mandatory calorie labelling can encourage businesses to reformulate the items they sell and offer on their menus, to contain less calories, making them healthier, with a greater proportion of healthier food on offer to consumers^x.
- Evidence shows that consumers support the provision of mandatory calorie labelling in the out of home sector. In polling we commissioned in August 2022 using a Scottish sample, 60% of respondents supported adding calorie information to menus when eating out, whilst only 20% opposed. The polling also found there are high levels of support for adding calorie information to menus and apps when ordering food online – 61% support, only 18% oppose^{xi}.

Why calorie labelling should be mandatory for all businesses

Calorie labelling should be mandatory for all businesses in Scotland, including micro, small and medium sized businesses. Adequate support, advice and guidance must be provided to these businesses to enable them to implement calorie labelling.

- Micro and small businesses make up a significant proportion of out of home businesses in Scotland, and account for a large proportion of visits in the out of home sector.
- Of the 19,445 businesses providing food and accommodation services in Scotland in 2019, 19,300 were considered micro, small or medium sized (employing no more than 249 staff)^{xii}. Therefore, if only large businesses with 250 or more staff were included¹, this would exclude almost all out of home food businesses from having to provide calorie labelling information.
- School children tend to shop in micro and small businesses at lunchtime. Evidence shows that the most popular outlet category where food was purchased were chip shops and local fast food outlets^{xiii}.
- Small and micro food businesses predominantly sell fast food. Evidence from a study we undertook in Glasgow where one street has 30 outlets selling chips to takeaway, all but one of the food premises was a small or micro independent business^{xiv}.

Additional information and exemptions

We believe that exemptions should be as minimal as possible to reflect the fact that eating out of home makes up such a significant part of our diet.

As suggested by the evidence, a reference statement like 'An adult needs around 2,000 calories a day' should also be provided as part of the calorie information.

¹ 250 or more employees has been chosen as the baseline figure, as in England it is only businesses employing 250 or more staff in the out of home sector that are required to provide calorie information by law

Provision of calorie information on menus and at points of sale should be the default option. Menus without calorie information should be available for consumers who request them.

ⁱ Quirk S. (2018) Out of home in the UK: Ingredients for sustained growth

ⁱⁱ Food Standards Scotland (2020) The Scottish Diet: It needs to change
https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/downloads/Situation_Report_-_The_Scottish_Diet_It_Needs_to_Change_%282020_update%29.pdf

ⁱⁱⁱ Food Standards Scotland (2021) The impact of the Covid-19 on the Out of Home Sector in Scotland. Report prepared by Kantar
https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/downloads/The_Impact_of_COVID_19_on_the_Out_of_Home_sector_in_Scotland_Report_PDF_Kantar_Report.pdf

^{iv} Food Standards Scotland (2020) Situation Report: The Scottish Diet: It needs to change
https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/downloads/Situation_Report_-_The_Scottish_Diet_It_Needs_to_Change_%282020_update%29.pdf

^v <https://www.nesta.org.uk/press-release/brits-drastically-underestimate-calories-in-snacks/>

^{vi} Obesity Action Scotland (2018) Chips to Go Factsheet <https://www.obesityactionsotland.org/media/1203/chips-factsheet2.pdf>

^{vii} Crockett RA et al. (2018). Nutritional labelling for healthier food or non-alcoholic drink purchasing and consumption. Cochrane Database of Systematic Reviews.

^{viii} Sinclair et al. (2014). The influence of menu labelling on calories selected or consumed: a systematic review and meta-analysis. Journal of the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics, 114(9), 1375-1388

^{ix} Food Standards Scotland (2022) Rapid Evidence Review: How Effective is Calorie Labelling in the Out of Home Sector?
https://www.foodstandards.gov.scot/downloads/FSS_-_NSP_-_CL_-_Calorie_Labelling_-_Rapid_Evidence_Review_FINAL_-_22_March_2022.pdf

^x West C, Howie F (2018) An Evaluation of a Pilot on the Use of MenuCal within Small and Medium Scottish Food Businesses. Main Report

^{xi} <https://www.obesityactionsotland.org/media/1854/policy-polling-august-2022.pdf>

^{xii} Scottish Government (2020) Businesses in Scotland 2019 <https://www.gov.scot/publications/businesses-in-scotland-2020/>

^{xiii} Wills WJ, Kapetanaki A, Rennie K, et al. (2015) The influence of deprivation and food environment on food and drink purchased by secondary school pupils beyond the school gate. Report produced by the University of Hertfordshire under a contract placed by Food Standards Agency. FS411002

^{xiv} Obesity Action Scotland (2018) Chips to go <https://www.obesityactionsotland.org/media/1203/chips-factsheet2.pdf>