

Rt Hon Norman Lamb MP
Chair, Science and Technology Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

11th January 2019

Dear Norman,

Energy drinks and children Report

My thanks for your letter of 18th December, and my apologies for my delayed response as a result of the Christmas break. I am grateful to you for taking the time to set out your position and for clarifying the committee's position on a number of key points. The British Dietetic Association was very grateful for the opportunity to present to the committee, and were very encouraged by the thorough and probing questions from the committee both to our own members and to industry partners.

However, I hope you understand that we chose to publish such a strongly worded response to the report because we feared – and have been proved right in this regard – that manufacturers and retailers would use the committee's report in the media and in its considerable lobbying efforts with government as a means to oppose a ban altogether. While your report does conclude that a ban on the basis of qualitative evidence and societal concerns may be legitimate, it is clear that this aspect of the report is not being emphasised in media reporting, and instead the focus has been on the "lack of evidence" for a ban.

Given that we disagree that there is not sufficient evidence (especially qualitative) to support a ban we felt it necessary to respond in a robust manner. There is also the clear problem of undertaking quantitative research with children – we do not have a great deal of current experimental data on the impact of alcohol or tobacco consumption on children, for the very good reason that it would be unethical when we can extrapolate from adult studies and qualitative information.

Public health policy is not always dictated by quantitative evidence – as in the case for vaping being advocated as a safe alternative to cigarettes. A lack of robust evidence has not been seen as an obstacle to policy and we would argue the same applies in this case.

We have also consistently stated, both publicly and in evidence to your committee, that the argument that children consume caffeine from other sources such as coffee and tea is a red herring. Excess caffeine consumption, especially in short periods of time, regardless of its source, is harmful to health.

We agree that the sugar levy may well prove to be an effective measure for tackling the sugar content of these drinks, and agree that there should be additional research into this area – as all policy should be evidence based. However, we stand by our assertion that the evidence base for this issue is significant already and that action is required soon.

My thanks again for your letter, and I would be happy to meet to discuss this with you further, perhaps with some of my colleagues who have also raised issues with the report.

Yours sincerely,

Andy Burman
BDA Chief Executive