

POSITION STATEMENT: Online Food Delivery Companies

KEY MESSAGES

- More than one quarter of adults and one fifth of children and young people eat food from out-of-home at least once a week, and online food delivery companies have grown in popularity over recent years
- Online food delivery companies are a convenient way for consumers to have a wide range of food and drink delivered to their doorstep, but there are concerns that less healthy options dominate the types of food available
- The Government should seek to understand how these platforms may be affecting public health

Overview

Food and drink purchased and consumed out-of-home have become common place in UK diets; a convenient option for busy households, or those who lack cooking equipment, facilities and skills. However, food available out-of-home tends to be less healthy, high in energy, fat, sugar and/or salt and contains less fruits and vegetables [1]. To meet the rising demand for convenience foods, online food delivery companies (FDC) such as Just Eat, Deliveroo and UberEATS have proliferated in recent years [2]. Online FDCs partner with food outlets to provide customers with a platform to easily browse menus, place orders and have food delivered to their doorstep. FDCs have enabled food businesses to drastically boost their revenue and increase their customer base [3]. This became apparent during the Covid-19 pandemic, orders to FDCs soared during the lockdowns. This led to many restaurants previously not operating on FDCs, such as Nando's and Pizza Express, to offer this service nationwide to compensate for profits lost [4].

As well as restaurant and takeaway food, FDCs also offer grocery delivery, an attractive option for busy households who may not have access to transport. Whilst shoppers may be tempted by special offers, discounts or free delivery, prices for grocery items are higher compared to buying direct from the supermarket and most companies add a fee of around £2 to every order [5,6].

FDCs spend hundreds of millions of pounds marketing their services, and many of the top FDCs have sport

Sponsorship deals. Deliveroo partnered with the English FA in 2019 which led to a surge in orders during high-profile games [7], UberEATS sponsored the 2018 FIFA World Cup and Just Eat were the official food delivery partner for UEFA Champions League 2022 [8]. Sport has a long history of partnering with less healthy food and drink brands, and such partnerships normalise and encourage the consumption of less healthy products alongside sport, which may contribute to weight gain and other diet-related issues on a population level [8].

What does the evidence say?

- JustEat, Deliveroo & UberEATS combined received 320 million site visits between January and October in 2020, a 20% increase from 2019 [9].
- The average UK adult spends more than £600 per year on food delivery apps [10].
- During the first 6 months of the pandemic, Just Eat takeaway orders soared by 76% [11].
- In 2020, it was estimated UberEATS drove an additional £360 million to restaurants across the UK – a 145% increase compared to 2019 [10].
- The top 2022 meals ordered on Deliveroo were burritos, pad thai, cheese burgers and fried chicken and for Just Eat, pizza, chips and noodles [12,13].
- A 2021 UK survey found ordering food via FDCs was on average 23% more expensive than ordering directly from the food outlet [6].
- Young adults with higher disposable income & education are the most prevalent FDC users [14].

Policy context

Since April 2022, all food businesses with over 250 employees are legally required to display calorie information on menus – this also applies to online FDCs [15]. Food businesses are being challenged to cut calories in their products by 20% by 2024, which could save the NHS £4 billion over the next 25 years [16]. A survey by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparity found 79% of respondents supported the legislation [4], however, public health practitioners argue that a broader range of measures are needed to promote a healthier food environment, such as restrictions on junk food marketing and promotions [17].

In December 2022, the Government announced they would be delaying the 9pm ban on TV & online junk food marketing until October 2025. The legislation, when passed, will mean FDCs marketed on TV and online will not be able to promote less healthy food and drink [18].

However, beyond the recently implemented calorie labelling legislation in the UK, there are few policies that apply to these platforms. Policymakers should consider how these platforms may be having an impact on public health, and if so, how these impacts can be negated. For example, through limiting the advertising and marketing activities including less healthy meal deals, but also exploring how healthier options can be more prevalent and visible on these platforms.

Our position and what we will do

Policy Change: We will continue to lobby the Government to improve the food environment and restrict less healthy marketing by implementing the National Obesity Strategy. We will continue to support local authorities to adopt the Local Government Declaration on Healthy Weight, which includes a commitment on improving access to healthier options and limiting less healthy options locally. For example, an advertising policy on a council estate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

For national Government:

- Consider extending the calorie labelling legislation to all food outlets, including those with less than 250 employees
- Encourage and incentivise FDCs to promote and offer discounts on healthier food options
- Online FDCs are a relatively new concept and the evidence base is still in its infancy, therefore commissioned research is required to understand how these platforms may be affecting public health

References

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