



Professor Gwynnyth Llewellyn
Chair, Healthy Sydney University

Professor Bruce Neal
Senior Director, Food Policy Division, The George Institute for Global Health

17 February 2016

Dr Michael Spence
Vice-Chancellor and Principal
Quadrangle A14
The University of Sydney NSW 2006

Cc: Mr Andrew Woodward, CEO, University of Sydney Union

Dear Vice-Chancellor,

Re: Marketing of Unhealthy Beverages on Campus - 'V' Energy O-Week Proposal

We write on behalf of Healthy Sydney University ('HSU') to express our concerns regarding the responsible marketing and promotion of unhealthy beverages on campus, as highlighted by a recent proposal from 'V' energy drinks to advertise during O-Week. A copy of the proposal is attached.

HSU is grateful for your support and leadership in making the University of Sydney a health promoting university. Supporting healthy people, building healthy places, and creating healthy policies and practices reflects the very essence of the University's vision for 'Leadership for Good'. As a health promoting university, our community can produce resilient, skilled, and healthy graduates who are empowered to make an impact on the broader community for the common good.

Since our inception in 2012, HSU has supported initiatives to drive healthier habits on campus, integrating health and wellbeing as not only a core value of the university, but part of its core business.

HSU-supported projects in 2016 include a healthy beverage initiative, which encourages staff and students to rethink their consumption of sugary drinks. In commencing this discussion, the University of Sydney community joins leading academic and health institutions in Australia and overseas that have begun restricting the promotion and availability of sugary drinks in response to growing evidence of their role in metabolic and chronic disease including obesity, diabetes, heart and liver disease, and dental caries.

Australians are among the world's largest consumers of sugary drinks. Despite Australian Dietary Guideline and Healthy Eating Guide recommendations to limit intake to 'only sometimes and in small amounts', data from the Australian Health Survey (AHS) suggests over 40% of males aged 14-30 consumed a soft drink on day prior to the survey. Just one 600mL serving of Coke - the most popularly sold serving on the Camperdown/Darlington campus - contains 16 teaspoons of sugar. A 500mL serving of 'V' energy drink contains 13

teaspoons of sugar plus additional stimulants (caffeine, taurine, guarana) that raise potential additional concerns. The Australian Medical Association emphasises the heightened risk of heart problems for young people who regularly consume energy drinks, highlighting their often hazardous consumption patterns, including frequent and heavy use, made more dangerous by the combination with alcohol.

These products offer no therapeutic benefit or nutritional value, yet remain incredibly popular with young consumers, largely due to clever and effective marketing. Globally, sugary drinks are one of the most heavily marketed consumer goods. Exposure to marketing messages increases consumer preferences for these products, normalises their use and purchase, and ultimately leads to greater consumption. The impact of, and possible regulatory solutions to limit the marketing of sugary drinks to young adults, is the subject of ongoing work at the University's own Prevention Research Collaboration in the School of Public Health.

It is therefore with dismay that we recently learned of a proposed guerrilla campaign by 'V' energy drink during Orientation Week at universities across Australia. According to the company's own brief (attached), the promotion sought to involve:

- Establishment of a 'faux library' marquee where 'real library walls' will be filled with used textbooks carved with 'V-shaped holes';
- Prizes including free product, 'fistfuls' of cash, and 'life-hack recommendations' such as 'sneak booze into anywhere by hollowing out a baguette';
- Brand ambassadors 'handing out sample cans like an energetic Christmas charity drive';
- Ongoing activity throughout the academic year involving 'sneaky ninja staff' being sent into campus libraries to hide V promotions and prizes among 'less helpful, less exciting actual books' with this activity being shared on social media.

Arguably the promotion breaches the Australian Beverages Council's Industry Commitment on Energy Drinks, specifically that no promotional activities be undertaken that encourage excessive consumption. Ongoing promotion in the University's libraries would also clearly contravene the *University of Sydney (Library) Rule 2011* that prevents the library from being used for commercial purposes.

Our recent discussions with the University of Sydney Union ('USU') suggest they share many of our concerns in relation to the proposal and have not authorised V to conduct the promotion on the University of Sydney campus in the form proposed. We applaud this action, though we note that V will still be present as an active, commercial sponsor at O Week.

O-Week's significance is billed by the USU to prospective advertisers as 'the largest tertiary orientation festival in Australia, and first opportunity for students to experience campus life.' USU promises advertisers the opportunity to build long term loyalty and engage with the University's influential youth market by gaining access to students on campus. The kind of high-profile activation proposed by 'V' creates a de facto association between these

products and the University, conveying the message that energy drinks are a normal and fun way to deal with the challenges of student life, without any hint of the possible and very real health impacts. Similar ‘activations’ have been conducted by Red Bull and other sugary drink companies in the past 12 months on our campuses.

The University’s commitment to promoting a healthy environment for staff and students is seriously undermined by these promotional campaigns and their products, which are glaringly inconsistent with the educational and research activities of the University. To display leadership for good in addressing the complex challenges of challenges of cardiovascular disease, diabetes and obesity that are now the leading cause of illness and death in Australia, we must create a campus environment that supports and promotes healthier choices.

This does not mean the University must necessarily interfere with the right of individuals to consume these products on campus, but rather it relates to the University’s equal right to elect not to profit from the promotion and sale of products associated with a strong and growing evidence base of harm.

As Vice-Chancellor, we seek to raise your awareness of such activities, and call on you to ensure they occur in a manner consistent with the University’s educational, research and health promoting aims. As we continue our conversation with the University community on healthier beverage choices, we would be pleased to meet with you and other appropriate groups or leaders, including the USU (copied), to discuss how to prevent this and future promotions on campus that jeopardise both the health of students and security of our facilities.

Yours sincerely,

The image shows two handwritten signatures. The signature on the left is "Gwynnyth Llewellyn" written in a cursive script. The signature on the right is "Bruce Neal" also in a cursive script, with the name "Neal" slightly smaller below "Bruce".

Professor Gwynnyth Llewellyn
Chair, Healthy Sydney University

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Attachments: V Energy Drink Campaign Proposal, December 2015.