

Draft Food Strategy Consultation

Qualitative research

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1. Introduction

Background

- Opinion Research and Statistics (ORS) conducted an eight week public consultation on the draft Food Strategy.
- As part of the consultation, ORS were asked to conduct qualitative research into Londoners' **attitudes and behaviours towards food purchasing and consumption:**
 - What motivates Londoners in their food choices, and what the challenges are in feeding themselves and their families
 - Perceptions of food options in local area, and impact this has on behaviours
 - Working Londoners habits at lunchtime
 - Parents' views of fast food outlets near school
 - Views on sustainability including perceptions of imported food, and attitudes towards sustainability initiatives such as growing own food.

Methodology

- ORS conducted 4 focus groups in June 2018.
- There were a total of **30 participants**:
 - All were paid £40 to attend the session
 - All were C1C2DE social grade
 - Min 3 BAME per group
 - Split by age, sex, family status, and inner vs outer London.

Group 1	Group 2	Group 3	Group 4
30-45	30-45	19-25	19-25
Female	Male	Mixed	Mixed
Have children <18	Have children <18	No children	No children
Inner London	Outer London	Inner London	Outer London

2. Key findings

Key findings

1

Key factors determining what food participants buy and eat are environmental (price, availability, accessibility).

2

Busy work and family life also makes convenience a top priority.

3

Quality, taste and health benefits/impact are secondary factors.

4

Many want to eat more healthy and sustainable food, but price is an issue. Abundance of unhealthy food is also a barrier to overcome.

5

Banning new fast food outlets and junk food advertising show a strong stance against the industry, but may not have a large impact.

6

There is more support for pull factors (incentives) to eat healthy food, not push factors to discourage Londoners eating unhealthy food.

3. Food purchasing and consumption

Cost is one of the most important factors when buying food, more-so than nutritional quality

- Many would like to eat healthy food more often, but it is not affordable especially fresh fruit, veg, and fish.
- There was agreement that eating healthily is more expensive, with a big difference between the price of healthy vs. less healthy food.
- Unhealthy food seen as more cost-effective.
- Younger participants in particular appeared more price-sensitive, whereas parents are more willing to pay for better quality e.g. organic chicken vs. chicken 'filled with water'.

'The cost of affording a healthy diet' ranked as the biggest barrier to having a healthier lifestyle (Oct-17 poll)

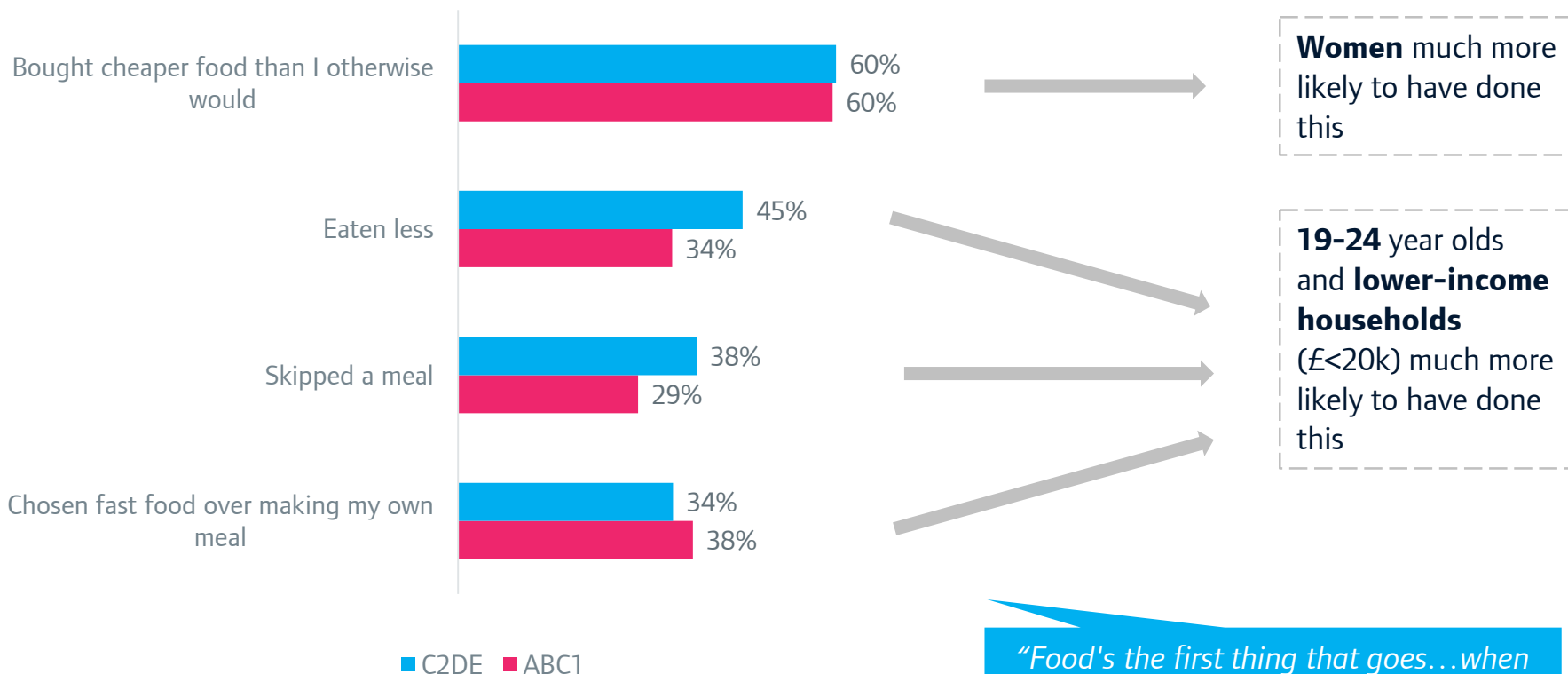
"I'd love to get more fish into the kids' diets but it's just too expensive."

"The prices are always going up, especially for fresh food. The healthiest seems to cost more I find."

"If I go to the butchers obviously you pay for what you get, it's quite different quality."

“Food’s the first thing that goes” – many Londoners cut down on food costs to save money

Have you done any of the following to save money?



Women much more likely to have done this

19-24 year olds and lower-income households (£<20k) much more likely to have done this

“Food’s the first thing that goes...when you get your gas, electric and mortgage in...if the bill’s there you are going to skip it to pay that bill.”

ABC1 social grades include senior managers, professional, junior managerial, administrative occupations. C1C2DE social grades include skilled manual, unskilled manual occupations and unemployed. These groupings are typically used by social researchers as measures of socio-economic status

All participants are price-conscious, but vary in their efforts to manage and reduce food costs

- Few participants said they skip meals and eat less.
- Most take other, less drastic measures to cut down on food costs.
- Women with children appeared the most committed to cutting costs.

Knows food is expensive, but doesn't do much about it

"I always moan that I have no money but I don't look at prices. I just chuck everything in."



Most participants are in the middle – price-conscious and take small measures to save, but don't do so consistently or proactively

Thinks seriously about cost and makes a big effort to eat cheaper

"We're on a budget so I'll get up, I've got a car, I will go to Smithfield, I'll get there at 2.30. Then I go to Billingsgate... I get home by 5 in the morning [but] I save a lot of money."

For participants, there are many ways to cut down on food costs, but there can be barriers to doing so



Planning meals

- ✓ Only buy what you need; reduces waste
- ✗ Need to be organised – difficult if busy



Buying frozen food

- ✓ Better value for money; reduces waste
- ✗ Need a freezer; meals not as healthy



Looking out for offers

- ✓ Better value for money
- ✗ Can feel 'cheap'; doesn't last long



Buying in bulk / doing a big shop

- ✓ Better value for money; reduces waste
- ✗ Need space at home; need a car



Buying from markets, butchers, grocers etc.

- ✓ Can be cheaper and better quality
- ✗ Not as convenient; may require travel

Food purchasing depends on convenience, availability and accessibility

- Most participants buy their food from wherever is closest (to home or on the way home), which for many participants is a convenience store with limited selection of healthy and fresh food.
- Large supermarkets are cheaper and have greater selection, but limited to participants who live close to one or have a car.
- Some like buying from markets or butchers, but lack of time and daily routine means these are not always convenient – the preference for many is to do all the shopping at one place.
- Online shopping is convenient but not reliable e.g. not as fresh and items are often substituted. Not many have done this.

But the problem isn't there is no good food – it's there is too much cheap and convenient bad food

- Participants do not think they are living in 'food deserts' – healthy food is available in their areas.
- But the decline in greengrocers and growth of convenience stores means most shop where there is some healthy food and also plenty of unhealthy food.
- There is an abundance of more convenient and cheaper fast food in shops and on high streets.
- The challenge is therefore overcoming the unhealthy food before getting to the good food.

"Usually when I'm shopping I'm hungry...I'll get something that I can just eat. Usually something healthy might not be the straightaway option to go to."

"In proportion to healthy food the junk food just outweighs it all the time."

"If only there was more quick ways to get healthy food. I feel like there's so many options for bad food, but no healthy fast food."

“Cooking is a chore” – participants prioritise meals that are quick, easy and convenient

- Many lack the time to cook good meals, especially if work long hours or have children.
- Most have regular go-to meals that are easy to prepare, but results in a lack of variety.
- ‘Cooking’ often involves prepared or frozen food – very few cook from scratch. The exceptions are those brought up with a strong food and cooking culture at home, e.g. BAME women.
- For some (especially younger groups and men), cooking is too much of a hassle and the lure of cheap and fast food is too much.

“I’m busy ferrying the children from this activity and that activity so we don’t eat dinner probably until about seven o’clock so time is really pushed for me...hence why we’ll have sometimes pasta which is easy.”

“I eat fish. Something that’s easy, put it under the grill for five minutes, done.”

“I never cook. If I have to get something I’ll get a takeaway or get a ready meal or something.”

A challenge for parents is cooking meals that the whole family will eat

- Meal choices depend on different tastes and dietary restrictions.
- Priority is to feed their family, more-so than serving healthy food.
- Some have to cook multiple meals for family members but these are often simple meals, ready meals, or oven food as they don't have the time to make something better for each person.
- As a result, the nutritional value and quality are compromised.
- Can be more costly, but it does mean they can avoid wasting food.

"With the kids it's like, yeah, just chuck it in the oven."



"I cook my little girls separately because she's fussy and she won't eat what we have. It's easy to chuck on nuggets one day or fish fingers."

There were some differences in attitudes and behaviours towards meals across groups

Older women with children

- Responsible for majority of food shopping, food budgeting and cooking.
- Some like cooking, but not the stress of doing so during the hectic week.
- Their own diet and meals can be restricted by what their partner or children want.

Older men with children

- Care more about food and diet since having children.
- Don't do much cooking but value home-cooked meals and good-quality food.

Younger women without children

- Cook more than male counterparts and plan meals more.
- Care more about nutritional content and often go for simple but healthy meals.

Younger men without children

- Generally less interested in food.
- Care more about calories than quality, and want tasty/filling meals from minimal effort.
- Limited skills and inspiration for cooking.
- Have more take-away or ready meals.

There are benefits to eating sustainable food, but price means this is not a priority for most

- Most don't think much into whether food is sustainable, ethical or environmentally-friendly, except when it comes to plastic packaging.
- Participants care most about food being organic, local and fresh because of the better taste, quality, and perceived health benefits.
- Also more concerned about food waste than environmental impact.
- Price is the main barrier – most do not think it is worth the extra cost.

Reasons for buying	✓ Better quality and taste
	✓ Healthier (sometimes debatable)
	✓ Better for environment (if less plastic)

Barriers to buying	✗ More expensive
	✗ Limited range (esp. in small shops)
	✗ Shorter shelf life = more waste

“Recently there's a lot of stuff around the plastic in the sea and that really is disturbing.”

“I've got no problem with buying organic or fair trade or sustainable food if the price is right.”

Lunch is a less healthy meal for most – due to lack of time when working and convenience

- Some bring in food from home (healthier and cheaper) but most buy food out fairly often.
- Prioritise something cheap and convenient, as have to eat their lunch on-the-go.
- Lunch is usually sandwiches or fast food, or very simple packed lunches from home.
- Some buy meal deals as they are good value for money, but include unhealthy food / drink.

“When I bring my own food I think it's healthy because it's cooked food from the night before. Other than that I get a sandwich but if I get a sandwich I'll have crisps and probably a fizzy drink or sugary drink so I know that it's not great.”

“When you're on the move you haven't got much of a lunchbreak, you've got to eat what you can.”

“I literally have a salmon and cream cheese bagel every day which I make at home to save money.”

It's harder to healthily out compared to at home – most are limited to affordable fast food

- Many try to eat healthy at home during the week, and indulge at the weekend as a treat (for themselves or family) or to meet friends.
- Eating out is expensive, especially with a family, so choose places that are affordable – often places that have deals for children.
- But healthy places are too expensive, so stuck with fast and less healthy food.
- Others treat themselves or family with take-away because it is cheaper than eating out.

"I'll try and eat healthy indoors and then if I do eat out I'll just have what I want."

"I don't think there's enough [healthy places], especially for how much the government's pounding down on people being healthy...in all different price brackets as well."

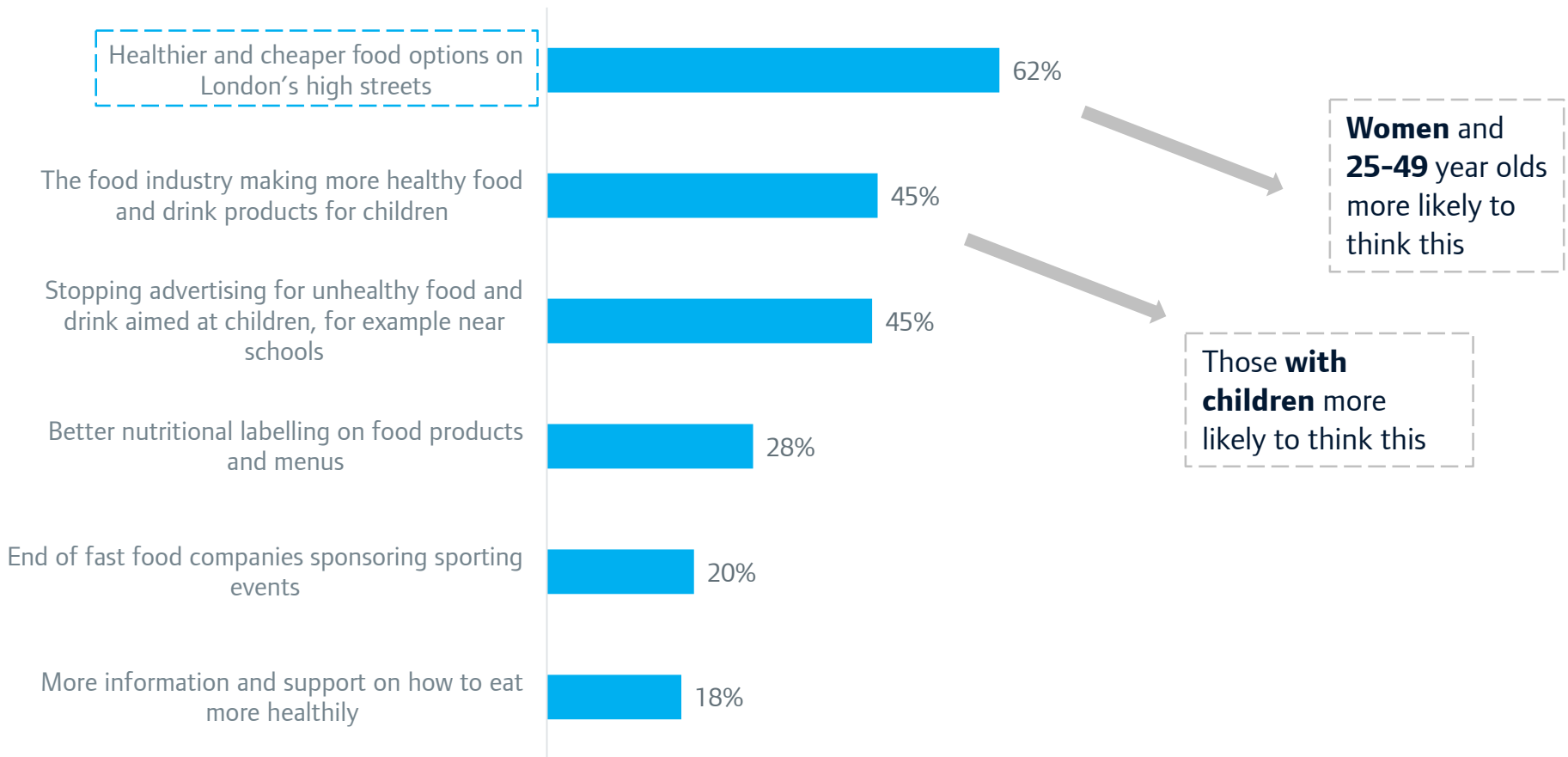
"If you're out and you're hungry, you're like, what am I going to eat that's healthy?"

"Takeout food. It would be really hard to find somewhere healthy around here."

4. Interventions to improve healthy eating

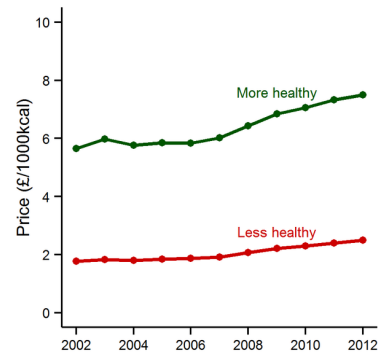
Cheaper healthy food is a priority

Improving healthy eating in London*



Cheaper healthy food is a priority

- Number one action is to reduce the price gap between healthy food and unhealthy food.
- Participants across all groups spontaneously mentioned the Sugar Tax.
- Instead of taxing unhealthy food, many participants want there to be more subsidies for healthy food.



“I think it would be effective if they lowered prices of fruit and vegetables because you're targeting the less wealthier of society. If you're putting more of a higher tax on the unhealthier stuff then you should lower the price of the healthy stuff to make it accessible to everyone.”

“You can't keep the healthy stuff at that ridiculous high price and then put a tax on that. It's not fair.”

There is support for banning new fast food outlets near schools, but it's too little too late

- Fast food outlets near schools is a major concern among all groups, and there is strong support for interventions to tackle this.
- However, participants feel that, because there are already too many fast food outlets near schools, banning *new* outlets will not solve the problem.
- Efforts should be made to dissuade teenagers from going to them in the first place, or to restrict those that are already operating.
- But need to accept the reality that fast food is the only affordable option for many teenagers. Some want alternatives, not restrictions.

"I agree they should ban any more, but that is not going to sort the problem out."

"They will find something else anyway. It's about educating them and getting them to change their habits."

"That's the only proper meal they get. They're thinking of cutting free school dinners as well so kids won't be eating all day. They can improve the chicken shops and work with them and offer much better food."

There are mixed views about banning junk food advertising e.g. on TfL or sponsorship of events

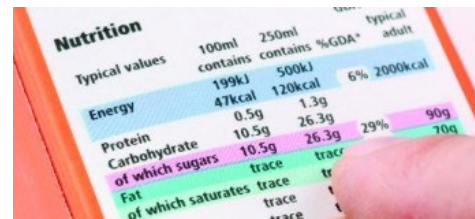
- Most support this as it shows commitment to tackle unhealthy eating and action against the junk food industry.
- Mixed views on how effective this would be in changing eating habits. Most don't feel they or their children are susceptible to junk food advertising, but appreciate others may be.
- Despite anti-industry sentiment and concerns over their intentions, some also think junk food industry plays a role in supporting grassroots sport.

Food labelling has a mixed effect on participants, but should be made simpler

- For some this is a key thing they look at, influencing what they buy.
- Others do not have time to assess content or are just not concerned.
- Regardless, there is distrust towards food content and labelling, especially when food is seen to be too cheap or is not UK/EU.
- Food labelling can also be confusing and misleading.



"We use our senses more when it comes to what we put in to our bodies. When I was growing up it wasn't even a question because mum went to the butchers every day."



"They say there is blah, blah percentage of fat per 100g and I think that throws people off... If they simplified it then it would be easier for everyone to understand."



"I feel like with a lot of junk food they do try and hide the bad stuff. Like in sugary drinks it only tells you how much is in half of it."

Participants think education is important, but will make little difference whilst barriers exist

- Many want better information (e.g. understanding of nutritional content and health implications) and more guidance (e.g. healthy recipes) for eating healthier.
- Participants across all groups want better education at school, but some think this is pointless if schools continue to sell junk food.
- Most have a good understanding of what a healthy diet is and how to eat more healthily. At the end of the day, cost, availability and convenience are most important.

“They have a can of Coke and a bottle of sugar next to it and then they will be telling us how much sugar is in there. That always makes me think when I see that.”

“If the parents do not have the knowledge then it has to come from somewhere so it should come from schools.”

“They tell us to eat healthy and didn't really give us that option...at school, the little salad pots would be really expensive so you'd just go for a burger and chips because it was cheap.”