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Coca-Cola to Cut its Branding in Schools

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COCA-COLA has agreed to remove its branding from vending machines in Scottish schools under the first deal of its kind in the world to promote better nutrition among pupils.

The US fizzy drinks giant has also agreed to ensure that water and a still juice drink are supplied from these machines for pupils around the country.

The agreement to erase the world's biggest brand is being hailed as a breakthrough in the battle between the government and multi-national companies over the promotion of healthy products. It is expected to be copied in England and Wales.

Gillian Kynoch, the food and health czar for Scotland, negotiated the deal with Coca-Cola after a review of school meals recommended there should be no overt advertising of un-healthy food or drinks in dining halls and corridors.

Schools will soon be judged by inspectors on how they meet the new guidance on healthy eating, amid Scotland's drive to tackle an obesity epidemic which is blighting the nation's health.

However, some health campaigners criticized the Scottish Executive for not going far enough. The British Dental Health Foundation described the deal as a "missed opportunity", saying fizzy drink machines should have been removed from schools completely.

Ms Kynoch admitted the deal allowed Coca-Cola to maintain its presence in schools, but said a complete ban may have made it harder to encourage pupils to stay in schools during lunch-breaks. She said: "I think it is better to have responded the way they have, because it means we have encouraged them to sell healthier products to children

and we are encouraging children to buy healthier products from companies they would normally have associated with less healthy ones."

It is understood that Coca-Cola has machines in more than 100 Scottish schools and is installing the new models in conjunction with local authorities.

Under the new package, the main image on the new vending machines has been replaced with a graphic of an urban street scene, which has never been used anywhere else in the world. The pictures include young people running and cycling and promotes the need to drink enough fluid, rather than a particular drink.

Ms Kynoch said: "Coca-Cola has decided in Scotland to debrand their vending machines and to adopt for themselves a voluntary agreement that all of their machines in Scottish schools will stock a certain selection.

"Coca-Cola is the biggest brand in the world, and the logo has never been removed from their product in this way before. It is a big step."

She said Mars had also contacted her about "a similar piece of work".

Tom McCabe, deputy health minister, hailed the deal as an extremely significant step. "We have got a lot of evidence that learned behaviour starts very young and if we can start to impact on the food lessons that people learn at school, I think they are going to carry those lessons right throughout their lives."

Alan Halliday, Scottish director for Coca-Cola Enterprises, said: "In conversation with the Scottish Executive, particularly Gillian Kynoch, we were quite encouraged that they were trying to work with industry rather than against.

"They could have taken the usual government stance of taxing or banning, but I do not think that would have achieved what they were trying to do. We thought about how we could work with them to provide what they were looking for."

Mr Halliday admitted it was impossible to know how the changes would affect the brand. Coca-Cola in Scotland worked closely with colleagues in England and America, where a similar scheme is planned, to approve the alternative images for the vending machines.