

## **Consultation response from the National Heart Forum**

**Consultation:** Transforming School  
Food: Standards for  
School Food Other than  
Lunch

**Consulting body:** Department for Education  
and Skills

**Date:** March 2006

## Transforming School Food: Standards for School Food Other than Lunch

### Consultation response from the National Heart Forum

28 March 2006

#### ***General remarks***

The National Heart Forum (NHF) warmly welcomes the opportunity to comment on the proposals being put forward by the School Food Trust, and seeks to support the work and investment of the Department for Education and Skills and the School Food Trust (SFT) to date to improve the provision of food in schools.

NHF was closely involved in the preparation and publication of the updated Caroline Walker Trust guidelines<sup>1</sup>. This response reflects the recommendations made in that report.

The implementation of standards that constrain choices to healthy choices across all school food is extremely important in creating a healthy food culture and experience for children. Children are often conservative in their tastes unless encouraged to try different foods from an early age. By offering healthier ranges of food consistently throughout the day contributes to a widening of children's experience of food. It will help to challenge the distinctions that can arise between 'food I like to eat' (salty or sugary snacks) and 'food I have to eat' (school lunch).

We are disappointed that the SFT does not support the use of nutrient-based standards for food services other than lunch. The government has accepted that existing food-based standards are demonstrably inadequate for school lunches. It seems illogical therefore to propose them for breakfast and after-school meals. We are particularly concerned as it ignores the real need of those children who are in school from 8am to 6pm – often in the holidays as well – and for whom we have a special duty of care.

We are not convinced by the SFT's argument that by applying nutrient-based standards to meals other than lunch "there is a danger of overburdening schools and caterers and diluting the future hard work necessary to meet lunch standards." With this in view, the new CWT guidelines now include standards – supported with practical example menus – for breakfast and after-school snacks. Without the protection of nutrient-based standards, schools could serve children cereals containing as much as 40% sugar every

breakfast time, and white toast and jam every tea-time in perfect conformity with official standards.

**We recommend that nutrient-based standards be applied consistently to all meals offered in schools.**

**1. Do you agree that no confectionery should be sold in schools?**

Yes. There is no nutritional justification for selling confectionery in schools.

**2. Do you agree that no bagged savoury snack other than nuts and seeds (without added salt or sugar) should be sold in schools?**

Yes. There is no nutritional justification for selling these products in schools.

**3. Do you agree that a variety of fruit and vegetables should be available in all school food outlets? This could include fresh, dried, frozen, canned and juiced varieties.**

Yes. Schools should ensure that all food and drinks sold in vending machines and tuck shops fits into the whole-school food policy. This policy should promote the provision of a variety of fruit and vegetables, with restrictions on foods and drinks that are high in fat, sugar or salt.

The school environment provides the ideal opportunity to help children achieve the target of at least five portions of fruit and vegetables a day. The CWT guidelines recommend that children who attend breakfast club or those who attend after-school club should be encouraged to have at least one vegetable or fruit snack at each meal occasion. Those attending both breakfast and after-school clubs and having school lunch should have had the opportunity to have at least four different portions of fruit and vegetables in the school environment.

**4. Do you agree that children and young people must have easy access at all times to free, fresh, preferably chilled water in schools so that children do not have to depend on going to the lavatory to get water?**

Yes. Schools may wish to allow children and young people to carry their own water bottles throughout the day and should provide facilities for them to refill their bottles.

**5. Do you agree that the only other drinks available should be bottled water (still or sparkling), skimmed or semi-skimmed milk, pure fruit juices, yoghurt and milk drinks (with less than 5% added sugar),**

***drinks made from combinations of these eg. smoothies, low calorie hot chocolate, tea and coffee?***

Yes.

***6. Do you agree that artificial sweeteners could be used in yoghurt and milk drinks only?***

It is our view that unsweetened drinks should be offered wherever possible. If artificial sweeteners are to be permitted in yoghurt and milk drinks, then highly sweetened varieties should be avoided.

***7. Do you agree that every school should have a whole school food and nutrition policy, preferably reflected in its single School Plan?***

Yes. We would encourage the SFT to refer to chapter 4 of the CWT guidelines (reference 1), and to encourage schools to adopt the recommendations as the basis of a successful whole-school food policy. We are pleased to see the need for a school food policy endorsed by Ofsted in its recent report *Healthy Eating in Schools*<sup>2</sup>. We believe that the best way to ensure that a school food policy is adopted and maintained is to make it subject to the Ofsted inspection remit.

***8. How effective do you think these recommendations would be in improving the eating habits of children and young people?***

Implemented alongside the proposed nutrient-based standards for school lunches, these recommendations would, in our view, help to increase pupils' consumption of fruit and vegetables and to reduce many pupils' intake of salty, fatty snacks and sugary carbonated drinks.

To ensure that food offered at breakfast and after-school also contributes nutritional benefits to pupils, we would urge the SFT and DfES to press for legislation that will permit the extension of nutrient-based standards to non-lunch meals.

***9. How could schools best manage the practical implications of moving to these proposed standards?***

It will be important that school and catering staff are supported and encouraged to manage both the *supply* of healthy options and to generate consumer *demand* for them. Information is currently available from the Food Standards Agency and the Food in Schools Programme on healthy vending in schools. Non-governmental organisations including Sustain, the Health Education Trust, the National Governors Council and the CWT have all

produced useful resources to help involve staff, pupils and relevant professionals in developing school food policies.

It would be an appropriate role for the SFT to build on these resources, providing guidance and support to schools and caterers on switching provision to healthier options and marketing new products to pupils.

***10. What additional guidance would schools need to implement these proposed standards?***

Please see comments in response to question 10.

***About the National Heart Forum***

The National Heart Forum (NHF) is the alliance of 50 organisations working to reduce the risk of coronary heart disease in the UK. Member organisations represent the medical and health services, professional bodies, consumer groups and voluntary organisations. Members also include many individual experts in cardiovascular research. Government departments have observer status.

The views expressed in this submission do not necessarily reflect the opinions of individual members of the alliance.

Submitted by Jane Landon on behalf of:  
National Heart Forum  
Tavistock House South  
Tavistock Square  
London  
WC1H 9LG

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<sup>1</sup> Eating Well at School Nutritional and Practical Guidelines. 2005. [www.cwt.org.uk](http://www.cwt.org.uk)

<sup>2</sup> HMI 2625. [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)