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INVESTOR IN PEOPLE

Consultation on
New Nutritional Standards
for School Meals and Other Food in
Schools

Response Booklet

Deadline: 30 June 2006

March 2006

CONSULTATION ON NEW NUTRITIONAL STANDARDS FOR SCHOOL MEALS AND OTHER FOOD IN SCHOOLS

You are probably aware the Government, working in partnership with schools and education authorities, is providing additional funding to ensure that real improvements are made to the quality of school meals. The purpose of this investment in school meals is to improve their nutritional value and thereby contribute to improving children's health and well-being.

The current initiative to improve the nutritional status of school meals has a number of components, not least of which is the provision of additional funding to the school meals service to ensure that the minimum expenditure on the food content of meals will not be less than 50p in Nursery, Primary and Special Schools and 60p in Secondary Schools.

However, in addition to this, research has shown that if we are to encourage children and young people to regularly consume healthier options there must be:

- robust quality standards against which meals are assessed;
- training, guidance and support for staff who prepare school meals;
- acceptable forms of food provision in school tuck shops and vending machines;
- education on nutrition as part of the school curriculum.

This is known as a whole school approach to food in schools.

Work is already well underway to deliver this whole school approach to schools in Northern Ireland as follows:

- Some 800 schools, representing over one-half of the total number in Northern Ireland, are participating in the initiative to improve nutritional standards. This shows an accelerating trend aimed at including all schools as soon as possible. These schools are being supported by the appointment of nutritional standards co-ordinators in each Education and Library Board area, whose role will include providing training and guidance to school meals staff and other school staff on

how to improve the nutritional status of school meals as part of a whole school approach.

- In addition, the Minister for Education, in announcing the new policy on school meals, made it clear that vending machines must link in with the same healthy standards as school lunches. This effectively means replacing crisps, chocolate and sugary fizzy drinks with water, juice, milk, fruit and healthy snacks. A copy of Angela Smith's statement of 16 November 2005 to the NI School Caterers Association's Annual Conference is included in Annex A at the end of this booklet.

- From the 2006/07 school year the Education and Training Inspectorate will be evaluating the nutritional quality of meals in schools. It will also be examining schools' general approaches to promoting healthy eating.

We would now like to seek your views on several aspects of the initiative including the details of the proposed food-based Standards, a timetable for its introduction and views on food supplied to pupils outside the school canteen.

ABOUT YOU

We would be grateful if you could provide the following information:

Name:

Organisation Represented:
(if applicable)

Address:

Town/City:

Postcode:

Signature: **Date:**

Please select one category from those below that best describes you:

Parent Principal

Teacher Member of Board of Governors

School Caterer Pupil

Education and Library Board Union Representative

Food Manufacturer Food Supplier

Dietitian/Nutritionist Other Health Professional

Other (please specify)

If you are a Principal, Teacher, member of a school Board of Governors, parent or pupil please select the category of school or schools below with which you are associated. Mark all the boxes that apply:

Nursery Primary

Special Post-Primary

FOOD-BASED STANDARDS – SCHOOL MEALS ONLY

The Government is currently proposing that specific food-based standards be applied to schools in England. These standards generally reflect (with minor variations) the position in Northern Ireland where an increasing number of schools are joining the Nutritional Standards programme. The standards are:-

Food Standards	
Fruit and Vegetables	Not less than 2 portions per day per child, at least one of which should be salad or vegetables, and at least one of which should be fruit.
Oily Fish	On the school lunch menu at least once every 3 weeks.
Deep Fried Products eg chips, roast potatoes, other fried potatoes, garlic bread	Meals should not contain more than two deep fried products in a single week.
Processed Foods	Should not be reformed/reconstituted foods made from “meat slurry”.
Bread (without spread)	Available unrestricted throughout lunch.
Confectionery and savoury snacks	Not available through school lunches.
Salt/Highly Salted Condiments	Not available at lunch tables or at the service counter.
Drinks	The only drinks available should be water (still or fizzy), skimmed or semi-skimmed milk, pure fruit juices, yoghurt and milk drinks with less than 10% added sugar, or combinations of these (eg smoothies).
Water	Easy access to free, fresh, chilled drinking water.

We would welcome your view on these standards.

Comments

NUTRIENT-BASED STANDARDS

The Government is also proposing that specific nutrient-based standards be applied to schools in England. These are outlined in the table below. The figures are for the recommended nutrient content of an average lunch over five consecutive school days.

Nutrient Standards	
Energy	30% of the estimated average requirement (EAR)
Fat	Not more than 35% of food energy
Saturated fat	Not more than 11% of food energy
Total carbohydrate	Not less than 50% of food energy
Non-milk extrinsic sugars (loosely termed “added sugars”)	Not more than 11% of food energy
Fibre	Not less than 30% of the calculated dietary reference value (see below)
Protein	Not less than 30% of the reference nutrient intake (RNI)
Iron	Not less than 40% of the RNI
Zinc	Not less than 40% of the RNI
Calcium	Not less than 40% of the RNI
Vitamin A	Not less than 40% of the RNI
Vitamin C	Not less than 40% of the RNI
Folate	Not less than 40% of the RNI
Sodium	Not more than 30% of the SACN recommendations

EAR: Estimated Average Requirement
RNI: Reference Nutrient Intake
SACN: Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition

We would welcome your view on these standards.

Comments

WHOLE SCHOOL FOOD POLICIES

(This considers food consumed by pupils other than as part of the main lunchtime meal.)

The Minister has indicated that vending machines should link in with the same healthy standards as school lunches and we propose that food provided by schools in other areas is also covered. However, we would like to know whether or not you agree. (The Department for Education and Skills in England is consulting on draft standards for these areas which have been recommended by the independent School Food Trust. A copy of the proposed standards is included in Annex B.)

1. Should appropriate standards be applied to:

- | | | | | |
|-----------------------|-----|--------------------------|----|--------------------------|
| ■ vending machines? | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ■ breakfast clubs? | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ■ after school clubs? | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ■ tuck shops? | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| ■ break time snacks? | Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> | No | <input type="checkbox"/> |

Comments

2. Should schools take steps to prohibit pupils from:

- leaving school premises to purchase food locally? Yes No
- ordering food to be delivered to the school? Yes No

Comments

Any other suggestions to encourage the development of a Whole School Approach?

Suggestions

TIMETABLE FOR NEW NUTRITIONAL STANDARDS

At present the proposal in England is to introduce new food-based standards in ALL schools by September 2006.

Do you consider this timescale is right? Yes No

If your answer is no what do you think should be an appropriate date for introducing food-based standards? Date:

Comments

COST OF SCHOOL MEALS

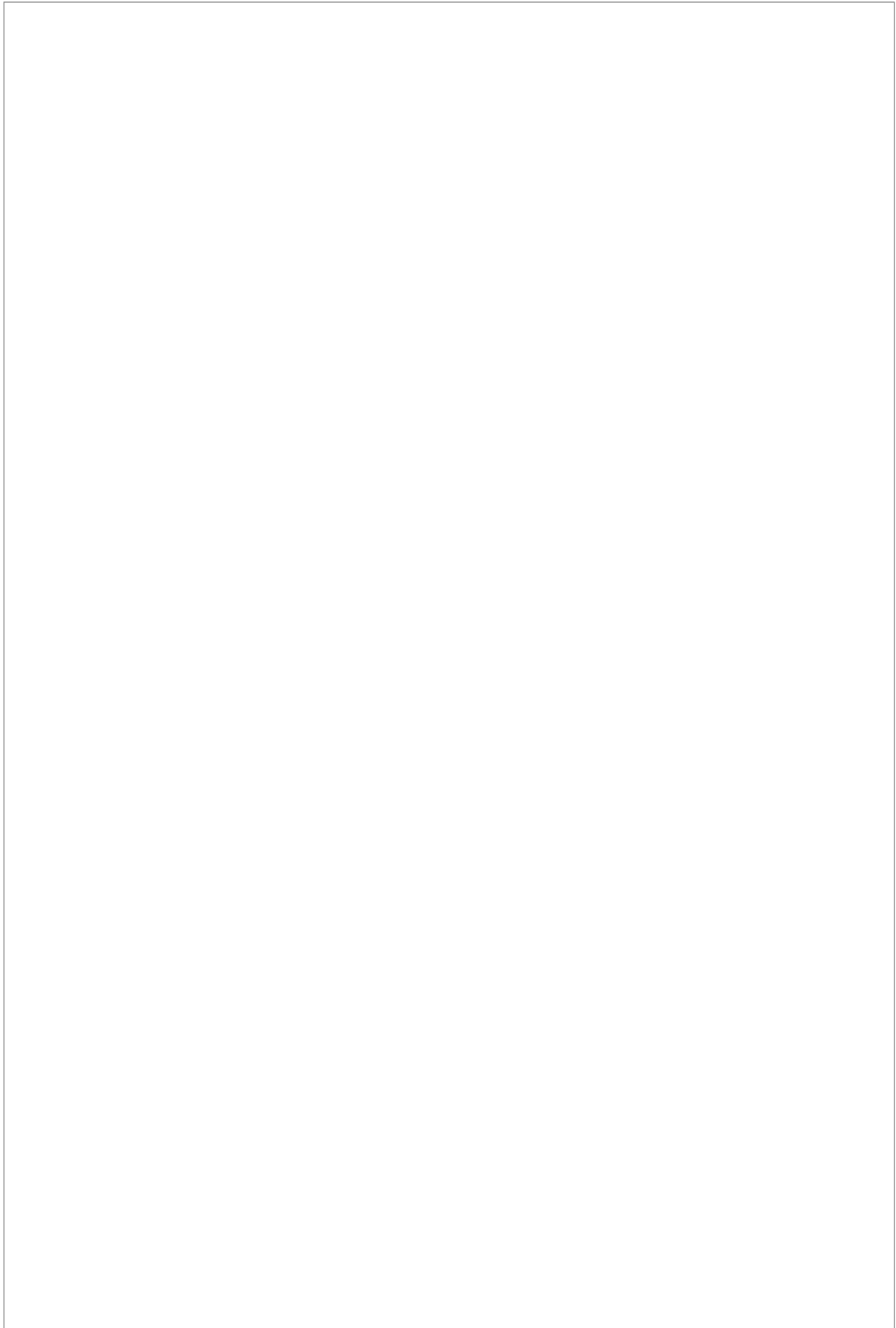
The cost of school meals is met through a combination of expenditure from Education and Library Boards and other school authorities, schools and parents.

Is enough financial priority being given to school meals? Yes No

Would parents be prepared to pay more for higher quality meals? Yes No

Comments

Any other comments on the nutritional standards proposals?



HOW TO RESPOND

Please send your response to Schools Administration Branch – Meals Section, Department of Education, Rathgael House, Balloo Road, Bangor BT19 7PR. Responses should be sent to arrive no later than 30 June 2006.

Alternatively you may submit your response before the deadline via the online form which can be found at www.deni.gov.uk.

The Department will publish a summary of responses following the completion of the consultation process. If you would prefer your response to be treated as confidential information, please write to the Department clearly stating your reasons for non-disclosure.

If the Department is asked to disclose responses under the Freedom of Information Legislation, we will take into account any request for confidentiality. However, confidentiality cannot be guaranteed.

The Department will handle appropriately any personal data you provide in accordance with the Data Protection Act 1998.

For further information about confidentiality of responses, please contact the Information Commissioner's Office or see the website at <http://www.informationcommissioner.gov.uk>.

Please contact the Department if you require the response booklet in other formats:

By writing to: Schools Administration Branch – Meals Section
Department of Education
Rathgael House
Balloo Road
BANGOR
BT19 7PR

By phone: 028 9127 9442

By fax: 028 9127 9319

By e-mail: nutritional.standards@deni.gov.uk

**SPEECH BY ANGELA SMITH,
MINISTER FOR EDUCATION**

**NI SCHOOL CATERERS ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE
WEDNESDAY 16 NOVEMBER, CARRICKFERGUS**

I would like to thank the Northern Ireland School Caterers Association for inviting me to their annual Conference. I am particularly pleased to be able to join you on this occasion as the discussions here highlight a matter which has rightly attracted considerable attention since the famous Jamie Oliver school meals programmes earlier this year. There is currently no sign of this interest waning. Such an emphasis is warmly welcomed by Government as it is already leading directly to significant changes in eating and drinking habits in our schools in Northern Ireland.

Before I highlight a few key developments in the drive towards healthy eating choices members of the School Caterers Association have asked me to point out that NI has in fact been in the forefront of change for some time. A booklet was produced on Nutritional Standards in schools here some years ago. After a number of delays a pilot scheme was introduced in 2004/05 involving some 100 schools. NI had therefore already made significant progress before the high profile developments recently in England.

Presently a further 100 schools have just been added to the programme with another 200 scheduled to join in January. This total of some 400 schools represents around one-third of all schools here and provides clear evidence not only of an accelerating trend but also highlights the sheer volume of change over a relatively short period of time. The initiative is of course underpinned by additional funding which is primarily targeted at ensuring that the minimum expenditure on the food content of meals should not be less than the national standard of 50p in primary schools and 60p in secondary schools. Education and Library Boards are also in the process of recruiting Nutritional Co-ordinators to help schools to implement the new food standards. They will also be involved in detailed training arrangements for the many hundreds of canteen staff.

However, I am the first to acknowledge that these significant developments will inevitably cause some uncertainty and concern regarding many practical issues

such as future meals costs, volume uptake, implementation problems, etc. In this context I would point to the evaluation exercise on the 100 pilot schools which produced generally very positive results. For example, it established that many pupils welcomed the opportunity to try out alternative healthy choices such as tortilla wraps, chicken fajitas, paninis, turnips, cabbage and cauliflower. These selections in fact helped to reduce the uptake of less healthy options such as chips. Also it was found that with proper management food wastage rates over a period of time did not increase. One very positive outcome was that schools found that the transition to the new nutritional standards was not as difficult as originally envisaged.

It is important to remember that good nutrition is a public health as well as an education issue. The rapid increase in levels of obesity in children is one of the reasons why it is so important that children receive healthy, nutritious food in school. In August 2004, when I was Minister for Health, I established the Fit Futures taskforce to examine options for tackling obesity. I understand that the taskforce will report its conclusions and recommendations to the Ministerial Group on Public Health in the next few weeks. However I know from our close involvement in the work of the taskforce that it will emphasise the importance of taking a whole-school approach to improving food in schools and of involving parents.

This will mean addressing not only school meals, but also other areas of food provision in schools such as tuck shops and vending machines. Whilst it is acknowledged that vending machines do provide an important source of revenue for some schools many of their contents at present run contrary to our whole drive towards healthier eating and drinking choices. That is why I recently announced that vending machines in all schools here must link in with the same healthy standards as school lunches. That means replacing crisps, chocolate and sugary fizzy drinks with water, juice, milk, fruit and healthy snacks.

There is quite a lot of anecdotal evidence that many schools have already taken action in this area either by removing machines or by only providing healthy choices. Nevertheless much more work needs to be done in order to make progress quickly while at the same time ensuring minimum disruption in schools.

In order to achieve this I have therefore decided to take the views of all schools by way of a consultation exercise to determine not only a preferred timetable for introducing changes to the contents of both machines and school meals but also to establish how schools can best help in contributing to whole-school food policies. This could, for example, include a pupil's home environment by taking account of

the impact of packed lunches and other food which is brought into schools. The key message here of course is that while we in Government can provide healthy foods and drinks in schools this only accounts for one-sixth of all meals which a young person consumes. The fact remains that success will be limited without the wholehearted support of parents and the food industry generally. I am absolutely committed to supporting the development of a holistic approach to food in schools in partnership with colleagues in the wider education and health sectors.

Finally, I wish to re-emphasise that Government, working in partnerships with schools and education authorities, is determined to ensure that real improvements are made to a meals service which has not historically been accorded a high enough priority. Accordingly, as further evidence of the Government's commitment I am announcing today that from the 2006/07 school year the Education and Training Inspectorate will be examining schools' general approaches to promoting healthy eating. In addition, 2 specialists will be recruited to work with the Education and Training Inspectorate and to evaluate the nutritional quality of school meals. These nutritional specialists will work with the Inspectorate as from the next school year.

I should also add that home economics will have a statutory role within the revised curriculum. As a result of the opportunities provided by the new home economics curriculum, it is to be expected that young people in the future should be able to demonstrate skills in the safe, hygienic, healthy and creative use of food. Home Economics will have a key part to play in equipping young people with the knowledge and practical skills to identify and prepare healthy food options and I have asked the Education and Training Inspectorate to report on its success in doing so.

In conclusion I am certain that the combined efforts of Government, the Schools Catering Service and the schools themselves will succeed in transforming school meals for the undoubted benefit of future generations.

Thank you.

STANDARDS FOR FOOD OTHER THAN LUNCH IN SCHOOLS

The following standards for food sold in schools through vending machines, tuck shops and at break times, breakfast clubs and after school have been proposed by the independent School Food Trust and are the subject of consultation by the Department for Education and Skills in England:

- (i) no confectionary should be sold in schools;
- (ii) no bagged savoury snacks other than nuts and seeds (without added salt or sugar) should be sold in schools;
- (iii) a variety of fruit and vegetables should be available in all school food outlets. This could include fresh, dried, frozen, canned and juiced varieties.
- (iv) 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;
- (v) 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 per cent added sugar) or drinks made from combinations of these, eg smoothies, low calorie hot chocolate, tea and coffee. Artificial sweeteners could be used in yoghurt and milk drinks; and
- (vi) every school should have a whole school food and nutrition policy, preferably reflected in its single School Plan.

The Trust also recommends that only food-based standards should be applied to school food other than school lunches. They advise that it would be inappropriate to set standards expressed in nutrient terms for food services for the whole school day.

Response Booklet

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School Meals and Other Food in Schools