

NHPc 1089



Automatic Vending Association

1 Villiers Court, 40 Upper Mulgrave Road, Cheam,
Surrey SM2 7AJ

Tel: 0121 661 1112

Email: janette@ava-vending.org

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IMPROVING THE HEALTH AND NUTRITION OF SCOTLAND'S CHILDREN

Food in Schools other than Lunch

The Automatic Vending Association, AVA, represents vending operators, machine distributors and ingredient suppliers in Scotland as well as in England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Ireland. The overall refreshment vending market is worth £1.5bn with some 80% being in the workplace.

We are pleased to have the opportunity to participate in the consultation on the Health and Nutrition of Scotland's children. We are content for our response to be made available to the public.

We would be very happy to be contacted again by the Scottish Executive policy teams about this consultation or any future consultation.

Our comments relate solely to secondary schools. Vending is not offered to primary schools.

1. Do you agree that local authorities should be under a duty to ensure that food and drinks which they provide in their schools, including nurseries, meet defined nutrient standards?

YES, we agree that for main meals (including breakfast clubs and after school meals) there is a duty to ensure that the food which is provided meets defined nutrient standards.

Vending is not provided in primary schools.

Many secondary schools recognise and welcome the role vending can play in encouraging students to remain on site during breaks and lunch and are conscious that with schools open for longer hours and to more groups within the community, the provision of drinks and snacks

outside normal catering hours, which vending can provide, will be essential. It can also help generate funds for the school.

We believe that it is inappropriate to impose nutrient standards on refreshment and snacks taken outside main meals. With a wide variety of ages (from 11 to adult) potentially using the machines and looking for refreshment before or after an evening class, a 5 aside football match, a music lesson or other activity any such restrictions on use would be difficult and extraordinarily complex to manage.

2. Where children are attending independent schools, and where the provision of food and drinks are arranged or funded, by a local authority, should the food and drinks meet defined nutrient standards?

YES, we agree that students who are funded by the local authority at an independent school should benefit from the same standards as other schools at main meals.

Where parents have selected a specific independent school for their children we believe that they in conjunction with the school management should be responsible for the food provision.

As with other secondary schools we see no benefit in restricting the provision of other refreshment and snacks at times other than lunch.

3. Should local authorities be under a duty to promote uptake of school meals in their schools, including free school meals?

YES, but with secondary school children there will be many who would wish to enjoy their main meal in the evening with their family and would prefer a packed lunch.

We support caterers in the belief that vending can assist in provision of lunch time food. Vending machines provide an excellent additional service point for products such as sandwiches, rolls, yoghurts, fruit and drinks. Of course the additional service points provided by vending come at a cost. Chilled vending machines are suitable for keeping food at the correct temperature. They are not designed to rapidly reduce the temperature of food and items such as sandwiches will need to be loaded into the machine at the appropriate temperature having been chilled. Caterers will identify the necessary procedures as part of their HACCP-based food safety studies.

Products which pass through a vending machine automatically incur VAT, with some specific exemptions depending on the status of the

school and the caterer. Obviously some of the products sold through a vending machine attract VAT whether sold over the counter or via the machine. Others, such as sandwiches, when sold through the vending machine will be 17.5% more expensive than those sold over the counter. The increased price is likely to affect sales levels and thus the financial viability of using vending machines to support lunch service. If vending is going to assist in providing food rapidly in short lunch breaks this is an anomaly which must be addressed.

In discussions on food in schools one issue which is frequently not considered is the timing of breaks. It is assumed that there is a mid-morning break and a lunch break. However, we are aware of secondary schools where it is normal practice for the morning break to be taken as late as 12.00noon with lunch following at 1.15pm. In these circumstances it is hardly surprising that students are consuming their packed lunch or buying snacks at the noon break to stem their hunger and thus not requiring their lunch an hour later. This issue needs to be recognised and addressed.

4. Should local authorities be under a duty to ensure that those taking free school meals can do so anonymously, as far as is practicable?

YES

Technology which is available through use of a vending machine provides an excellent means of ensuring that children can take free food provision anonymously. Offering food vending, plated meals, sandwiches, fruit etc and utilising a pre-paid card or key system would enable all students to purchase anonymously from the machine. This system has advantages for both those on free school meals and those provided with cash by their parents to purchase their lunch in that it ensures that the money can only be spent in school and not at the local chippie.

The card or key system could also be used to control the times at which other products were available.

5. Should local authorities have the power to provide children in local authority schools with free drinks, fruit, vegetables, bread or cereal based snacks, which meet defined nutrient standards.

YES

Vending provides an excellent way of keeping these products at optimum temperature, secure and available to all.

In order for students to learn how to build a balanced diet it is important that their choice in school should not be unduly restricted and that there is scope for them to experience a range of products.

6. Should there be a duty on Scottish Ministers and local authorities to endeavour to ensure that all local authorities are health promoting schools?

YES

The encouragement of physical activity, practical knowledge of preparing and cooking meals and education on diet, nutrition and exercise are all essential to develop positive habits which can be taken into adult life.

7. Other comments?

Since change is being driven by the need to address the raised levels of overweight and obese children we believe the important factors are educating students on the value of a balanced diet, providing the opportunity to select a healthy lunch and being given the facilities and the chance to develop the exercise habit.

When it comes to provision of food other than lunch we welcome the introduction of breakfast clubs - where of course a vending machine serving cereal, fruit, yoghurt and milk would be a welcome addition without the need for, or the cost of, catering staff.

The Consultation Document does not give any information on the defined nutrient standards to be employed in Scottish Schools.

We strongly believe that the system adopted must be simple and clear. We welcome diversity of products and are not in favour of any restrictions other than for main meals.

If, as a result of this Review, changes do become necessary we would, of course, be keen to work with the appropriate agencies and schools to ensure that these are phased in smoothly and effectively.

We are aware that there are proposals for identifying so called "healthy" foods for other purposes but do not feel that any of these meet the needs of drinks and snacks offered other than at lunch times.

We are not in favour of any system which requires a register of products which meet a particular set of criteria. Whilst this may appear seductive in that all a potential consumer had to do was to check a website it has significant cost implications in establishing and maintaining a list of products which in the new climate are likely to change frequently.

Use of familiar brands also has the distinct advantage for those who suffer from allergies etc that they will know which products they can consume.

Our fellow trade associations representing food manufacturers will be making direct comments on products as well as on the time difficulties faced by manufacturers in developing and launching new products and the need to ensure product and machine compatibility to meet criteria which are not yet known.

Vending is able to accommodate whatever products are required to be vended but the business model must be commercially viable whether the machine is leased or purchased outright. The loss of vending driving the students out of school to purchase product unsupervised in local stores would be a disappointing outcome of this initiative.

Janette Gledhill
Director