

NHPC 1332

**RESPONDENT INFORMATION FORM:
A CONSULTATION ON THE SCHOOLS (NUTRITION AND
HEALTH PROMOTION) (SCOTLAND) BILL**

Please complete the details below and return it with your response. This will help ensure we handle your response appropriately. Thank you for your help.

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1. Are you responding: (please delete (a) or (b))

(b) **on behalf of** a group/organisation?

go to Q3 and then Q4

ON BEHALF OF GROUPS OR ORGANISATIONS:

3. The name and address of your organisation **will be** made available to the public (in the Scottish Executive library and/or on the Scottish Executive website). Are you also content for your **response** to be made available?

Yes

SHARING RESPONSES/FUTURE ENGAGEMENT

4. We will share your response internally with other Scottish Executive policy teams who may be addressing the issues you discuss. They may wish to contact you again in the future, but we require your permission to do so. Are you content for the Scottish Executive to contact you again in the future in relation to this consultation response?

Yes

Improving the health and nutrition of Scotland's children
Consultation on the Schools (Nutrition and Health Promotion) (Scotland) Bill

Introductory Remarks

The British Heart Foundation Scotland welcomes the opportunity to respond to the consultation on this important topic.

Obesity is a key risk factor for Coronary Heart Disease (CHD). Obesity is a particular problem in Scotland in comparison to the rest of the UK.ⁱ The key contributory factors in the development of childhood obesity are diet and physical activity.

Scotland has led the way for the rest of the UK on the school meals agenda, especially through the internationally recognised *Hungry for Success*. However, as noted in the consultation, Scotland has very high levels of obesity, both amongst adults and young people, so there is no room for complacency. BHF Scotland believes continued radical action is required in the area of primary prevention to tackle obesity and that a strong food in schools policy will be a crucial element of this.

BHF Scotland fully supports the objectives of this Bill, although we also believe that the Scottish Executive needs to go further in order to tackle the epidemic of childhood obesity, especially in our most deprived communities. For example, BHF Scotland believes that more effort is needed to ensure that young people living in deprivation are able to get access to nutritious food on a regular basis: we welcome the decision of Glasgow City Council to ensure that all primary school children get a free school meal, and would urge the Executive to ensure that other local authorities have the flexibility and resources to deliver this kind of locally appropriate decision.

It is important to note that although the reduction in premature mortality in Scotland is of course extremely welcome, it needs to be matched by similar efforts in primary prevention i.e. measures which will prevent the development of risk factors for CHD, such as obesity. If not, in the future the health service in Scotland will be forced to cope with ever increasing numbers of people living with chronic diseases like CHD, and in need of expensive symptomatic treatment. It is estimated that there are already around half a million people in Scotland living with CHDⁱⁱ, and this figure looks set to increase.

On that basis we also support the view that the Bill would have been a suitable vehicle for encouraging physical activity in schools, the other important factor in preventing the onset of obesity.

Although there has been effort expended to encourage physical activity in schools through organised sports and traditional PE, BHF Scotland would like to see more of an emphasis on unstructured physical activity: this is especially important for young people at high risk of developing CHD, who might, for example, be physically inactive and overweight. We would like to see the Executive set out how young people can be encouraged to take part in unstructured recreational activity, in and out of school, possibly in a Play Strategy. Encouraging the least physically active young people to change their

lifestyle is a key challenge in tackling childhood obesity, and we hope that approaches to physical activity will not emphasise competitive sport and PE at the expense of less structured activities, which can be the most beneficial for those young people at risk of developing heart disease, as well as other serious conditions. We believe that this Bill could be a suitable vehicle for the delivery of such a strategy.

CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

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. BHF Scotland fully supports this objective, which was the one of the key themes of our Food4Thought campaign in 2005. There seems to be a real consensus emerging on this issue in Scotland, which is very welcome.

Schools should be places where positive nutritional habits are encouraged and nurtured, and BHF Scotland believes that all foods which fail to meet rigorous nutritional standards should be removed.

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, clearly all schools, regardless of their stature, should follow the same regulations, in the interests of fairness and consistency.

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

BHF Scotland supports this proposal, especially given the intention to introduce strict nutrient based standards for food in schools. Schools clearly have an important role to play in fostering and encouraging good nutritional habits among young people, and promoting their uptake is important.

Evidence to come out of our Food4Thought campaign showed that while many children expressed a desire to eat more healthily, some of them felt they weren't given a chance to do so. Young people from schools in deprived areas, for example, felt that healthier food wasn't easily available to them, and that they wanted something done about that: unlike young people from more affluent schools, whose food choices had often already been made for them. BHF Scotland strongly believes that schools should have a duty to promote the uptake of nutritional meals for all children, especially in areas of high deprivation, where it is particularly important that every child has a nutritious school meal each day.

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?

BHF Scotland supports this proposal. It is worrying that, in spite of the progress made since the advent of Hungry for Success, 30% of those pupils who were entitled to a free school meal did not take it.ⁱⁱⁱ It is imperative that the system of delivering free school meals is entirely anonymous, and we remain concerned that this isn't currently being achieved. We fully support the proposal to make this a statutory duty for local authorities.

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?

BHF Scotland believes that it is crucial that the Scottish Executive takes the opportunity presented in this Bill to allow local authorities to find solutions to issues around food in schools that are locally appropriate. For example, we find it extremely encouraging that Glasgow City Council has stated its intention to give all primary school children a free school meal by 2007, and we believe that the Executive should encourage other local authorities to find solutions that are appropriate for them. We therefore welcome the proposal to give local authorities the power to make these kinds of decisions around the provision of these other foods as well. In practice, it is clear that the Executive must also ensure that local authorities have the resources to make use of this flexibility and to deliver the solutions that are appropriate for each locality.

ⁱ *The Cost of Doing Nothing- The Economics of Obesity in Scotland*. Dr Andrew Walker, University of Glasgow.

ⁱⁱ Scottish Health Survey 2003; ISD Scotland Information Services (12 December 2005), NHS National Services Scotland

ⁱⁱⁱ Scottish Executive Press Release, 6 June 2006