

**Children's Food Campaign response to
National Curriculum Review - Call for Evidence
14 April 2011**

Introduction

The Children's Food Campaign aims to improve young people's health and well-being through better food – and food teaching – in schools and by protecting children from junk food marketing. We are supported by over 150 national organisations and co-ordinated by Sustain: the alliance for better food and farming (for more information see www.childrensfood.org.uk).

This response has been circulated to all supporting organisations for their comments, and so represents campaign policy.

Children's dietary health

Currently, the diet of most children in the UK fails to meet guidelines for health. Some 86% of children eat too much sugar and 92% eat too much saturated fat¹. In England, the average fruit and vegetable intake for girls aged 5-15 is 2.6 portions and for boys 2.5 portions², which compares poorly to the World Health Organisation recommendation of at least five portions a day.

Children's dietary health, in particular childhood obesity, is widely recognised as one of our most pressing public health problems. Currently 33.4% of children are overweight or obese by the time they finish primary school³, while the Foresight Report on obesity estimated that, without action, 55% of boys, and 70% of girls, could be overweight or obese by 2050, with obesity costing the country £45 billion a year⁴.

The health consequences of poor dietary health are distressing and are also associated with:

- **Some cancers**, including three of the most common cancers: breast cancer, bowel cancer, and prostate cancer.
- **Type 2 Diabetes**. This used to be known as Adult Onset Diabetes but due to the rise of childhood obesity it is now also diagnosed in children and adolescents⁵.
- **Heart disease**
- **High blood pressure**, which is the largest cause of strokes and heart attacks.
- **Dental problems**
- **Mental health problems**. Research has suggested a link between mental ill health and sugar, fat and food additives in the diet⁶.

¹ Office of National Statistics (2000) *National Diet and Nutrition Survey: young people aged 4 to 18 years*. Volume 1: Report of the diet and nutrition survey. Norwich: Office of National Statistics

² Deveril, C. (2002) Fruit and vegetable consumption. *Health Survey for England 2002*. London: Department of Health

³ NHS (2010) *National Child Measurement Programme: England, 2009/10 school year. December 2010*. NHS Information Centre

⁴ Foresight (2007) *Tackling obesities: future choices*. London: Government Office for Science

⁵ Revill, J. (2003) UK faces child diabetes epidemic. London: *The Observer*. 8 June 2003

⁶ Van de Weyer, C. (2005) *Changing Diets, Changing Minds: how food affects mental health and behaviour*. London: Sustain

The role of education

The Government's recent public health white paper, *Healthy Lives, Healthy People*, emphasises the importance of individual responsibility in improving people's health. Such a strategy requires, amongst other things, that people have the knowledge, skills and ability to make healthy choices for themselves and their families. It is therefore vital that the education system equips every child with such skills.

In addition to enabling individuals to prepare nutritious meals for themselves and their families, research shows that practical cooking skills are vital to understanding the importance and make up of a healthy diet.⁷ Without these skills and knowledge, people do not have the freedom to exercise meaningful control over their diet and food intake, and tend to over-rely on pre-prepared or takeaway foods.

In particular, concern is salt consumption: most people in the UK eat more salt than is recommended, yet 75% of the salt we eat is found in processed foods⁸. If children aren't taught basic cooking skills at school then they are more likely to eat more processed foods and therefore unnecessarily high levels of salt. Salt increases blood pressure in people of all ages; a high salt diet during childhood will increase blood pressure, predisposing children to high blood pressure and the associated health conditions (most significantly heart disease and stroke) later in life.

This review

We recognise that the stated intention of this review of the National Curriculum is to "slim down" the compulsory curriculum. However, we believe that the small amount of practical cooking teaching currently required (a total of 24 hours at Key Stage 3 – less than 1% of teaching time at this Key Stage) fulfils an important role in equipping pupils with valuable life skills which empower them and their future families to lead healthy lives. This position informs our response to the following questions:

SECTION C: GENERAL VIEWS ON THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM

6a. What do you think are the key strengths of the current National Curriculum?

One of the strengths is the provision for at least 24 hours of practical cooking lessons for all pupils at Key Stage 3 (age 11-14). As explained above, ensuring that children learn basic cooking skills gives them the essential skills and knowledge they need to take responsibility for their own diet and the health of their families in future.

6b. What do you think are the key things that should be done to improve the current National Curriculum?

Practical cooking lessons should be introduced from the earliest stage of children's education by extending the existing provision so that all pupils receive at least 24 hours of tuition in basic cooking skills in each of the first three Key Stages (ages 4-14). This would enable children to develop greater skills, and to positively influence their eating habits at an earlier age.

⁷ Caraher, M., Dixon, P., Lang, T., Carr-Hill, R. (1999) The state of cooking in England: the relationship of cooking skills to food choice, *British Food Journal*, 101 (8) p.590 - 609

⁸ Consensus Action on Salt and Health (2011) *Eat less salt*. Available <http://www.actiononsalt.org.uk/less/index.html> [14 April 2011]

7b. Do you think that the proportion or amount of lesson time should be specified in any way in the National Curriculum; eg for particular subjects and/or within particular key stages?

✓ Yes

Comments: In the case of practical cooking skills, the specification of a minimum number of hours is essential as it ensures that all pupils learn these important skills. Schools are still able to decide how cooking is taught and have the freedom to allocate additional time to lessons according to local circumstances and the needs of their pupils.

SECTION E: Other subjects currently in the National Curriculum

Design and Technology

16a. **Design and technology** is currently a compulsory National Curriculum subject, with a statutory Programme of Study, at Key Stages 1-3. In future, do you think **design and technology** should continue to be a National Curriculum subject?

✓ Yes

16b. If yes, please tick all key stages to which this should apply.

- ✓ Key Stage 1 (5-7 years)
- ✓ Key Stage 2 (7-11 years)
- ✓ Key Stage 3 (11-14 years)

Comments: At least 24 hours of practical cooking lessons should be included in a statutory Programme of Study at each of the first three Key Stages.

SECTION J: IMPLEMENTATION

35. What other arrangements, if any, need to be considered in implementing the new National Curriculum, and how they should be addressed?

Comments: It is important that provision of practical cooking lessons across Key Stages is supported by adequate teacher training, capital funding for the installation and maintenance of food teaching equipment and facilities, and inspection to ensure that the minimum requirements are being met in all schools.

SECTION K: OTHER ISSUES

36. Please use this space for any other evidence or views you wish to feed into the review at this stage.

Comments: We are gravely concerned that cooking skills may be lost from the curriculum. This is because the teaching of practical food preparation skills not only

has significant health benefits, but also gives rise to educational benefits⁹. As these are not always immediately apparent, and may be subordinated to more traditional academic subjects, there is a risk that the provision of these skills in all schools may be lost. We urge the review panel to engage in joined-up policy-making and bear mind the Government's other priorities - particularly encouraging personal responsibility for healthy lives – in assessing the importance of cooking skills.

In addition, we would like to see practical food-growing *taught* in all schools. As our recent report, produced jointly with a range of educational and gardening organisations, demonstrates, such activities can provide a range of educational benefits, including:

- Teaching enterprise skills;
- Building community spirit and a sense of citizenship;
- Encouraging children to lead healthier lives;
- Reducing environmental impact; and
- Raising educational standards.¹⁰

Because food growing activities can be a *means* of teaching curriculum subjects, we recognise that it may not be appropriate for food-growing to be timetabled as a National Curriculum subject itself. Instead, we urge the Department to ensure that, just as every school has adequate ICT equipment, every school has a food-growing garden which all pupils are involved in during core teaching time, and that teaching staff have the appropriate skills to make use of these facilities.

We also draw the Review panel's attention to the cross-curricular links that can be made with cooking and food preparation, including mathematics (weighing/measuring, calculating cooking times and nutritional information), science (chemical changes during cooking), geography (origins of food ingredients), history (changing diets).

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It is not necessary to keep this response confidential.

⁹ For example, Ofsted (2008) *Education for a technologically advanced nation: Design and Technology in schools 2004/07*. Manchester: Ofsted

¹⁰ Children's Food Campaign (2010) *Every school a food-growing school*. London: Sustain