



Children's Food Campaign

Children's Food Campaign

Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming
94 White Lion Street, London, N1 9PF
Tel: 020 7837 1228
malcolm@sustainweb.org
www.childrensfood.org.uk

April 2013

Children's Food Campaign's submission to the consultation on the reform of the National Curriculum

We are responding as an organisation.

The Children's Food Campaign wants to improve children's health and well-being through better food - and food teaching - in schools, and protecting children from junk food marketing. We are supported by over 150 national organisations. The Children's Food Campaign is co-ordinated by Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming and funded by the British Heart Foundation.

Our consultation response relates to the subject of Design and Technology.

The question numbers below correspond with those in the consultation document.

1. Do you have any comments on the proposed aims for the National Curriculum as a whole set out in the framework document?

A new and very welcome aim in the draft curriculum is to make it compulsory for all KS1-3 pupils to study food education and learn practical cooking skills. Irrespective of where the teaching responsibility officially sits in the curriculum, only a whole-school approach (including the implementation of the School Food Standards) will ensure that pupils receive the full health and life-skills benefits of these subjects.

2. Do you agree that instead of detailed subject-level aims we should free teachers to shape their own curriculum aims based on the content in the programmes of study?

We disagree. Our concern is that a lack of detailed subject-level aims could lead to the marginalisation of cooking, food education and growing in the Design and Technology curriculum. As Design and Technology is a foundation subject that already encompasses a number of different areas, we are worried that without detailed subject-level aims, cooking and growing could get pushed to the fringes of the school timetable. The Department for Education (DfE) should follow Scotland's good example by putting health and well-being, including practical cooking and growing skills, at the heart of the curriculum. Detailed subject level aims would also make everyone – schools, parents, the wider design and technology community and employers – clearer about what pupils are expected to learn.

Many teachers (particularly at primary level) are not adequately trained to teach cooking or growing and so more detailed subject-level aims would be useful to guide them. Without detailed guidelines, there is a greater chance that important aspects of food education, such as understanding food labelling or the relevance of basic hygiene skills, might be omitted. Specific curriculum guidelines would also provide a better basis by which to assess the healthiness of ingredients and recipes – especially important in schools which are no longer adopting, or meeting, the School Food Standards.

3. Do you have any comments on the content set out in the draft programmes of study?

We enthusiastically support the proposal to make cooking compulsory for Key Stages 1-3 and welcome the specific references to practical cooking skills and the emphasis on savoury dishes. However, we believe that fruit-based recipes and healthy desserts should be included in the repertoire, as pupils should also be shown how to make healthier alternatives to sugary, fatty, salty snacks and desserts.

We also remain concerned that the phrase 'may have to adapt the recipes and techniques they teach according to the facilities available' may offer an excuse for some schools to dedicate less time to practical cooking lessons. As kitchen space is needed to teach pupils 'basic cooking techniques' (KS2) and enable them to 'become confident in a range of cooking techniques' (KS3), providing teaching kitchens should be a priority and all schools should have access to one. The practical implications of this should not be ignored as there are a limited number of buses and mobile kitchens available and no guarantee that these will be available in the long-term. It is essential for there to be a capital budget for installing teaching kitchens and/or a minimum guide to what would be needed, so schools can prepare and plan to fulfil learning requirements. In the interim, schools should arrange to link up with nearby schools or colleges which have such facilities.

The KS1 programme of study should be amended to ensure that specific cooking skills are taught, alongside the basic principles of healthy eating. This is particularly relevant to this age group where practical skills often form the basis of their learning. Soup making, bread making, knife and cutlery skills are all easy to teach, even in schools with only limited facilities.

In addition, whilst we are pleased that horticulture is included within the draft design and technology curriculum, more significance should be given to the benefits of food growing and its connection with cooking, nutrition and our environment. Food growing is an integral part of nutrition and food education, and food provenance and its links to learning should be specifically noted in the curriculum. For example, horticulture could illustrate points made in the science curriculum (p104, Year 1, Plants; p126, Year 5, All living things / life cycles). Furthermore, the links between growing vegetables and fruit and their practical application in cooking should be further explored, for example, by growing food on site and then cooking recipes incorporating these foods. The recommendations set out in the *Food Growing in Schools Taskforce Report* are important when considering the practical implementation of food growing in the curriculum.¹

Like food growing, cooking can also be used to teach – or reinforce learning in – many other parts of the curriculum. Just two of the many examples where this could happen are:

- demonstrating how to make 'accurate measurements using standard units, using a range of equipment', described on p112 of the Science curriculum; and
- consolidating understanding of the use of 'basic equivalences between metric and common imperial units', described on p84 of the Maths curriculum.

¹ Food Growing in Schools Taskforce (March 2012), *Final Report*. Available: www.gardenorganic.org.uk/organicgardening/food-growing-in-schools.php

4. Does the content set out in the draft programmes of study represent a sufficiently ambitious level of challenge for pupils at each key stage?

The lack of detailed key stage descriptors makes it difficult to determine whether the level of challenge is sufficiently ambitious at each key stage. For example, it is not clear what the difference is between 'the basic principles of balanced eating' described at KS1 and 'the major components of a balanced diet' described at KS2. There should be greater emphasis in the programme of study on creativity, encouraging pupils to make progress from learning the basic skills to be more ambitious and adventurous in their growing, cooking and food presentation, and to take inspiration from professional chefs, celebrity cooks and gardeners. Creative food skills should also be encouraged because they increase children's enjoyment, thereby enhancing their learning experience.

6. Do you agree that the draft programmes of study provide for effective progression between the key stages?

We disagree. In our response to Question 4 above we note there is no indication of the difference between the 'basic principles of balanced eating' described at KS1 to understanding 'the major components of a balanced diet' at KS2 so it is hard to know how to progress from one to the other. Moreover, without adequate facilities and equipment, it will be difficult for pupils to be 'taught progressively more demanding practical knowledge, skills and crafts'. The lack of detail in the draft programme of study increases the risk that pupils could be taught a set of unrelated activities, rather than benefiting from a coherent and practical cooking and food growing experience as part of their food education.

The proposed changes to KS4 mean there is very limited scope for developing the cooking or food growing skills of children after the age of 14. We believe this is a significant missed opportunity to improve young people's cooking techniques, the menu of dishes they can prepare and their food education at a time when they are moving closer to living independently. It may also hinder students from taking up vocational training and careers in food, food technology, nutrition and horticulture.

8. Does the new National Curriculum embody an expectation of higher standards for all children?

No. For example, we are concerned that there seems to be no provision for pupils from lower income families who are unable to afford ingredients for cookery classes. Currently pupils in most schools are expected to buy and bring in their own ingredients for cookery classes and as a result some often do little cooking because they cannot afford the ingredients. The new curriculum should emphasise that practical cooking and growing skills should be taught to everyone and it should encourage schools to consider ways to include any pupils in financial difficulties. One option is that children who qualify for free school meals could also qualify for free ingredients for cookery classes. In addition, schools should look to provide common store cupboard ingredients such as eggs and flour, which would enable all pupils to experiment and investigate tastes and textures and to gain experience in preparing basic recipes. Ensuring all pupils are able to fully participate in cooking lessons would also help to address health inequalities.

As noted above, schools that have no access to kitchens are expected to 'adapt their recipes and techniques' but it is not made clear how high standards can be reached in practical cooking and growing skills without access to a teaching kitchen and growing area. Additional training and support should be provided to teachers at those schools, drawing on the expertise of organisations experienced in delivering cooking programmes with limited facilities.

10. To what extent will the new National Curriculum make clear to parents what their children should be learning at each stage of their education?

Currently the new National Curriculum does not make it clear to parents what their children should be learning at every stage of their education, or enable them to be sufficiently involved in that learning. Teaching about food, cooking and food growing could provide an invaluable opportunity to engage parents in their child's learning. For example, ingredient lists that are sent home could include a brief outline of learning aims for the session, thereby providing context and encouraging parents to reinforce learning and practical skills at home. This could also encourage children to take the lead in households where cooking is infrequent, increasing the amount of home cooking taking place.

11. What key factors will affect schools' ability to implement the new National Curriculum successfully from September 2014?

Alongside access to adequate cooking and growing facilities, the availability of high quality guidance, information and continuing professional development will clearly also be crucial to effectively implementing the new curriculum. In addition, as the *Food Growing in School Taskforce Report* concluded, a whole-school approach and the active involvement of school leadership is important. To achieve the best results, food education and practical skills (both cooking and food growing) need to be embedded across subjects, year groups, school food and lunchtime policies, extra-curricular activities and parental involvement.

The timing of lessons is another important consideration. The learning experience is diminished when lessons are too short to carry out food growing sessions and practical cooking from scratch and/or when parents are asked to do the preparation at home because there is not enough time in class. There is also the issue of providing adequate food storage facilities, so food prepared in lessons does not spoil before being taken home to be eaten and enjoyed by the whole family. Taking a dish home is also a good way for increasing pupil self-esteem.

12. Who is best placed to support schools and/or develop resources that schools will need to teach the new National Curriculum?

Responsibility to train teachers rests with the DfE. Practical issues for consideration include the training and qualification needed and responsibility for monitoring and assessing teaching practice. The time for teachers to undertake such training will need to be considered, as will the need for more food technicians and food technology teaching assistants in schools.

Those best placed to provide support and develop materials for cooking, growing and food education include: the Academy of Culinary Arts, Children's Food Trust, the Design and Technology Association, Food for Life Partnership, Garden Organic and many smaller organisations working with schools in their local area.

It is vital that the food and growing industries are not able to influence educational materials and training. For example, commercially sponsored 'education' packs are likely to undermine and distort healthy eating and nutrition principles as junk food companies will seek to present their products and brands in a positive and attractive light.

14. Do you have any other comments you would like to make about the proposals in this consultation?

Appetising and nutritious food, produced sustainably, is important for children's health, for their education and for their future well-being. The food and information about food children are provided with at school has a key role to play in shaping their present and future diet, and their behaviour and health.² A good diet can also contribute to children's mental health and well-being, and "underpins work to improve academic standards, improve behaviour at school and improve social equality".³ Conversely, a poor quality diet can impede children's ability to learn.⁴

Food can also bring wider benefits and educational opportunities, if it is produced, processed and traded in ways that contribute to thriving local economies and sustainable livelihoods – both in the UK and, in the case of imported products, in producer countries. Food that is produced in a sustainable way protects the diversity of both plants and animals (and the welfare of farmed and wild species), and avoids damaging natural resources and contributing to climate change.

As the World Health Organisation recognises, the school environment can make a big difference in improving children's diet-related health and well-being.⁵ Adopting food and nutrient-based standards for school food, introducing packed lunch nutrition and stay-on-site policies, and providing adequate facilities and space in the school day and on the school grounds for children to participate in cooking and food growing activities are all necessary components of a whole-school approach. As more parents struggle to afford healthy food for their families, the role of free school meals becomes more important too.

To create a positive and sustainable food environment in every school, the Children's Food Campaign recommends that, in addition to the proposed curriculum changes:

- food- and nutrient-based standards for food in schools apply to all schools, including academies and free schools;
- nutrient-based standards remain the framework which informs the food-based standards;
- Ofsted monitors food in schools and its impact on pupils' health and wellbeing;
- sufficient investment is provided for school kitchen facilities and training;
- mandatory minimum specifications for school kitchens and dining rooms are reinstated;
- free school lunches are provided for all children living in poverty;
- free school breakfasts are available for all children eligible for free school lunches;
- food growing is incorporated into the learning plans of all schools; and
- the government adopts an effective and cross-government approach to protecting children from the marketing of foods and drinks high in fat, salt and sugar.

Malcolm Clark and Giulietta Durante
Children's Food Campaign
www.childrensfood.org.uk
April 2013

² School Meals Review Panel (2005), *Turning the tables: transforming school food*. Available: www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk/assets/research-reports/Turning_The_Tables.pdf

³ Report by the Social Security Advisory Committee and response by the Secretary of State for Work and Pensions (March 2010), p10. Available: www.dwp.gov.uk/docs/ssac-rev-of-pass-bens-response.rtf

⁴ School Food Trust (2009), *School lunch and learning behaviour in secondary schools: an intervention study*. Available: www.childrensfoodtrust.org.uk

⁵ World Health Organisation (2011), *Healthy Nutrition in Schools*. Available: www.euro.who.int/en/what-we-do/health-topics/disease-prevention/nutrition/news/news/2011/09/healthy-nutrition-in-schools