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Mrs Jenny Randerson AM
National Assembly for Wales
Bae Caerdydd
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Dear Mrs Randerson

Response of the British Heart Foundation to the *National Assembly of Wales Consultation – Proposals for Healthy Eating in Schools Measure*

Introduction

Unhealthy diets are a cause of coronary heart disease (CHD), and BHF Cymru estimates that around 30% of CHD deaths are due to poor diets.⁽¹⁾ Dietary changes which would help to reduce rates of CHD include a lower intake of fat – particularly saturated fat – and salt, and increased intake of fruit and vegetables. This is particularly important in childhood, when dietary preferences are established.

The positive effects of a healthy diet on children are well-documented. As seen in the results of the UK Government's recent research into the Healthy Schools Scheme, nutritious lunches are an important step towards higher attainment among students.⁽²⁾ In addition, there is a wealth of anecdotal evidence suggesting that when children's diets improve, their behaviour does too. Children and young people who do well at school go on to lead healthier lives – helping to offset concerns about the long-term effects of diet-related illness, and the cost of those illnesses to the NHS.

General Comments

Proposals for a Healthy Eating in Schools Measure

Q1: Do you think that the proposed Measure will promote a holistic “all school” approach to healthy eating? Are there any additional powers that could be included in the Measure to further promote this approach in schools?

¹ www.heartstats.org

² 'Healthy schools and improvements in standards', report by the Health Development Agency, http://www.wiredforhealth.gov.uk/Word/improved_standards_05.doc. Schools which met the healthy school standards showed a greater rate of progress in national tests than those that did not.

The proposed measure is welcomed as it addresses the need for food and drink provided to students to meet nutritional standards. In doing so there is the potential to improve the health of all students, especially of students from families on income support, if this is combined with work to increase uptake of free school meals. In recent years, BHF Cymru has called for cooking classes to be compulsory for all children. We believe that strengthening the inclusion of nutrition within the curriculum, underpinned by compulsory cooking classes, will reinforce healthy eating messages and help to join up theory with practice.

However, in order for the measure to be a holistic approach it needs to address the totality of food in schools. This means that food brought into the school by pupils in lunchboxes needs to be considered as does other food entering the school e.g. purchased from school tuck shops on the way to school, from vending machines situated in schools or food to celebrate birthdays and other occasions. The use of food by teachers as rewards also needs to be monitored under this new measure.

A broader approach to school food will ensure consistency of messages about food throughout the school day and help to reinforce changes. The development of whole school food policies will help schools to achieve this and provide clarity for parents as to schools' expectations.

Appropriate professionals e.g. registered dieticians and nutritionists need to be involved in the delivery of the measure to ensure the quality of the implementation of training, nutritional analysis and support for catering staff. Registered dieticians and nutritionists need to ensure that the school's messages around food are accurate and evidence based.

Finally, BHF Cymru believes that the Healthy Eating in Schools Measure in Wales needs to be complemented by each school encouraging all children to be physically active. We believe that children and young people should be given opportunities to participate in a range of enjoyable physical activities at an early age so they will be more likely to continue being physically active throughout the rest of their lives.

Q2: The proposed Measure provides for Regulations which will specify nutritional standards to be introduced by Welsh Ministers. Do you think that this incremental approach will ensure that children, young people and parents are not alienated by the speed of the reforms?

An incremental process seems to be the most pragmatic approach to the implementation of changes. BHF Cymru believes that a staged introduction will help to ensure that caterers are able to deliver on the required standards which in turn will help to promote confidence amongst the whole school community in the changes being implemented.

However, in addition to the gradual introduction of nutritional standards, an active consultation and communication programme targeting parents and carers needs to run by each school. This is essential to ensure the success of the measure. BHF Cymru believes that by engaging parents in the process schools are more likely to gain their full support which will make implementation less challenging.

Food brought into school as well as food provided by the school needs to be considered in the proposal as this could otherwise devalue the strength of the changes made.

Q3: Are there any additional powers which should be added to the proposed Measure that would further improve healthy eating in schools?

BHF Cymru deems it necessary that appropriate powers for schools need to be included in the proposed measure to govern food brought on to the school premises.

Q4: Does the proposed Measure promote satisfactorily the principles of sustainable development in the provision of healthy school food?

BHF Cymru supports the measures outlined here to incorporate issues of the environment and sustainability into the proposals for healthy eating in schools. In particular we believe it needs to emphasise sustainable good practice regarding fish. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation estimates that 75% of the world's fisheries are fully exploited, over exploited or depleted³. The Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)⁴ verifies sustainable fisheries, and operates strict guidelines about management and stock recovery, and awards a label to products which meet these criteria. Details of fish which can be sourced sustainably are provided by the Marine Conservation Society's *Good Fish Guide*⁵.

Q5: Do you agree with the duties, responsibilities and reporting requirements proposed in the Measure for head teachers and governors? Will these requirements ensure that progress is made on improving healthy eating in schools?

There is more clarity needed as to what "the highest percentage possible" and what "reasonable steps" means in relation to the uptake of free school meals.

Catering staff will need training and/or schools need to work with registered dietitians/nutritionists in order to be able to implement nutritional analysis and monitoring the uptake of school meals.

Q6: Do you think that the duties, responsibilities and reporting requirements proposed for Assembly Ministers, Local Education Authorities and the Chief Inspector of Schools are sufficient to have a positive impact on the implementation and monitoring of healthy eating in schools?

The schools inspectorate will need support/training from registered dietitians/nutritionists to ensure that they are able to fulfil the reporting requirements adequately in relation to the 'healthy eating in schools' measure.

More clarity is also needed as to how an increase in healthy eating will be measured.

³ <http://www.fao.org/english/newsroom/news/2003/25379-en.html>

⁴ The MSC was initially established by the World Wildlife Fund and Unilever, but is now entirely independent. www.msc.org

⁵ The full list of MCS certified or otherwise sustainable fish can be found at: <http://www.fishonline.org/advice/eat/>

School progress reports should also include an action plan to rectify issues that it may highlight regarding difficulties in meeting the healthy eating requirements of the proposed measure.

Q7: There will be a financial cost as a result of the proposals in the Measure on the Welsh Assembly Government, Local Education Authorities, schools and to a lesser extent on Estyn. Will these proposals result in your organisation incurring financial costs, and if yes what will these costs be? (please quantify).

No. However, BHF Cymru can support schools with our free nutrition resources aimed at the PSHCE and science curriculum. Our social marketing campaign “Food for Thought” is aimed at 11-13 year olds and raises awareness of healthy eating with its core messages being supported by classroom resources. This kind of approach is unique because it targets young people directly using online technology. The website is at www.bhf.org.uk/food4thought This approach not only reaches the target audience but can also penetrate the home environment and teaching staff.

Conclusion

BHF Cymru believes that the provision of nutritious school food is an important step towards meeting Government targets in a number of key areas, including children's health, obesity, prevention of chronic disease including coronary heart disease, and reduction in health inequalities.

The curriculum, the food sold and provided on site, and whether or not children are allowed to leave the school during break times, are all important issues to be addressed by this measure. But so too is engaging with parents so that they are involved in the development of a Food Policy, and supported to transfer healthy eating messages to the home environment.

Whilst BHF Cymru believes that parents must be brought on board in this measure to improve children's health, we also believe that those parents who are in lower socio-economic groups must not be demonised if they provide their children with less healthy foods for financial reasons.

For further information please contact me, on 02920 382406, or email me at Lloydd@bhf.org.uk

Yours sincerely,



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