

31 October 2006

The Clerk to the Communities Committee
Room T.3.40
Tower 2
The Scottish Parliament
Edinburgh
EH99 1SP

Dear Mr Farrell,

STAGE 1: SCHOOLS (NUTRITION & HEALTH PROMOTION) (SCOTLAND) BILL

On behalf of the Scottish Food and Drink Federation (SFDF) I would like to thank you for the opportunity to submit evidence to the Communities Committee's Stage 1 deliberations on the Schools (Nutrition and Health Promotion) (Scotland) Bill.

SFDF represents the common interests of the food and drink manufacturing industry. We work to improve the environment in which the individual companies who make up the industry operate. In so doing, we aim to help our members operate in an appropriately regulated marketplace to maximise their competitiveness and to help ensure their products are safe and that consumers can have confidence in them.

SFDF is a devolved division of the UK industry body, the Food and Drink Federation (FDF).

SFDF Position: In Summary

SFDF has consistently advocated a 'Whole Diet, Whole Lifestyle' approach to promoting health. It is our view that this approach – with importance attached to physical activity as well as diet – is what will succeed in improving general health.

We are therefore encouraged by the importance the Schools (Nutrition and Health Promotion) (Scotland) Bill places on incorporating healthy living, food and physical activity into schools as a driver for improving the health of Scotland's children.

However, SFDF would urge that a pragmatic approach is taken to the application of nutritional requirements. After all, consumption of some foods with, for example, higher salt or fat levels is perfectly fine as long as they are not consumed all the time or to excess. On the other hand, an approach that effectively bans products from schools will do nothing to teach children how to construct a balanced diet and it is likely to drive them to eat out of school.

Furthermore, in order to be able to determine the likely impact of the proposed statutory "nutritional requirements" - still to be specified by Scottish Ministers - there is a need for clarity on what is intended.

It should be borne in mind that should the proposed statutory nutrition requirements effectively establish a legalised “fixed target” for salt, fat and sugar levels in food and drinks offered in schools, they would not allow the scope or flexibility required to be able to make phased reductions and so would effectively reduce the range of products and choices on offer in schools.

NB As you will be aware, our members remain committed to continuing to reduce levels of fat, salt and sugar in products and providing lower fat, lower salt and lower sugar options where technologically possible, safe and acceptable to consumers. This is one of the 7 commitments from the FDF Food and Health Manifesto. The Delivering on Our Commitments report, published in September 2005 shows the very real progress industry has made regarding product reformulation.

Therefore, in our view, the Target Nutrient Specifications (TNS) for school meals in place to assist caterers construct weekly menus that meet existing nutritional specifications should retain their current status as guidance.

With regard to healthy eating messages for school pupils, it is our view that these should not be about avoiding fat, sugar and salt or specific food products. Rather, they should be about eating less of these nutrients / foods and eating more vegetables, fruit and starchy carbohydrates.

SFDF believes that in order to successfully influence and encourage a change in lifestyles (including those of schoolchildren), there is a need for a widespread and widely supported public education campaign to promote healthier lifestyles – combining a balanced diet with physical activity. The industry is committed to participating, together with the rest of the food chain and advertising industries, in a Government led campaign of public education on healthy eating and healthy lifestyle.

These points are addressed in more detail in the attachment.

I trust that these comments will be taken into consideration by the Communities Committee during its Stage 1 deliberations.

Yours sincerely,

Flora A McLean
Director

STAGE 1: SCHOOLS (NUTRITION & HEALTH PROMOTION) (SCOTLAND) BILL

SFDF Comments

1. Health Promoting Schools

Given the importance of instilling good nutritional habits at an early age, SFDF acknowledges that the Scottish Executive has a role to play in terms of ensuring an appropriate context for all school pupils to learn about healthy living – balanced diet, physical activity, etc.

SFDF has consistently advocated a ‘**Whole Diet, Whole Lifestyle**’ approach. It is our view that this approach – with importance being attached to physical activity as well as diet - is what will succeed in improving general health.

SFDF believes that in order to successfully influence and encourage a change in lifestyles (including those of schoolchildren), there is a need for a widespread and widely supported public education campaign to promote healthier lifestyles – combining a balanced diet with physical activity. The industry is committed to participating, together with the rest of the food chain and advertising industries, in a Government led campaign of public education on healthy eating and healthy lifestyles.

Therefore, we are encouraged by the fact that the Bill seeks to place a duty on education authorities to ensure that schools are health promoting. We welcome recognition of the importance of physical activity as a key driver of health and the proposed active promotion of the benefits of a healthy lifestyle.

2. Statutory Nutritional Requirements and their Application

Given their respective roles in relation to the provision of school meals, it is unquestionably right for the Scottish Executive and education authorities to consider the quality of meals and the nutritional balance of what is offered across a weekly menu.

However, SFDF would urge that a pragmatic approach is taken to the application of the proposed ‘nutritional requirements’, which takes into account the possible impacts and potential for unintended consequences if some products are effectively excluded from schools. Afterall, consumption of some foods with, for example, higher salt or fat levels is perfectly fine as long as they are not consumed all the time or to excess. Therefore, including plenty of appropriate choices on school menus along with fruit and vegetables will ensure that an overall balance is achieved.

With regard to the Schools (Nutrition and Health Promotion) (Scotland) Bill, it is not clear to us what is intended in terms of the nature and scope of the ‘nutritional requirements’ regulations still to be specified by Scottish Ministers, making it difficult to determine their likely impact.

For instance, will setting ‘nutritional requirements’ on a statutory footing result in the current Target Nutrient Specifications (TNS) becoming statutory by default? If this is the case, the Scottish Executive will effectively be introducing “fixed targets” for fat, salt and sugar reductions. Our concern with this approach is that it could result in unintended consequences that run counter to the stated objective of increasing the uptake of school meals.

In our view, it is important that any “nutritional requirements” specified by Scottish Ministers should continue to allow sufficient scope for stepped reductions in salt, fat and sugar levels to be made gradually, over time, in order to allow children’s palates to adjust to the consequential changes in product taste and texture (and palatability).

If the palatability of food on offer is affected by the removal of this flexibility to make stepped / phased in changes over time or if a range of appetising choices are no longer available in school canteens, tuck shops or vending machines, school pupils are likely to vote with their feet and eat outside of school or bring their own lunch with them to school.

The reality is that “nutritional requirements” will only make a difference if school pupils actually consume the food and drink on offer.

Furthermore, effectively banning products that do not conform to the defined nutrient standards does nothing to teach children how to build a balanced diet. Children would benefit more from learning within the school environment how to balance their diets and make healthier choices from a less constrained offering; in this way they will learn the role that different foods can play in the diet and how some foods should be eaten more of while other foods should be eaten less of, but not actually need to be completely banned from the diet.

In addition, the costs associated with product reformulation to comply with new “nutritional requirements” can be significant. However, if sufficient time is allowed to reformulate products, some of these costs can be incorporated into a normal product development cycle. This would not be possible if the nutritional requirements effectively define “fixed targets”.

Therefore, in our view, it is important that the Target Nutrient Specifications currently in place to assist caterers meet existing nutritional standards retain their status as guidance.

3. Provision of Food & Drink within Defined Nutritional Standards during School Day

Children do get hungry between meals, especially if they are active. If children are being encouraged to be physically active then the provision of these snacks could be beneficial.

Therefore, for school food other than lunches, such as vending, SFDF would like to put forward an approach which proposes **Target Nutrient Specifications based on Guideline Daily Amounts (GDAs)**. This scheme will help children learn to manage consumption across all food categories rather than simply banning access to some foods for a limited specified period. (see appendix)

SFDF believes that the TNS GDA approach outlined in the appendix is more likely to teach children about how to eat appropriate portion sizes of foods that have higher levels of calories and/or fat, sugars and salt within a balanced diet. It would allow children to have a little of the foods they enjoy, without feeling guilty because they are banned, an approach that might create an increased desire for them.

This GDA TNS scheme would ensure that any snack-food available must provide no more than 10% of a child’s GDA for calories, saturated fat, sugars and salt but does not ban any category of food including confectionery. The scheme would also ensure that only drinks which do not exceed 5% of the child GDA for sugars and calories were provided in schools.

The proposed TNS GDA thresholds are simple to understand and have a clear, rational basis. They would be no more complicated to administer than outright bans, which we know from experience of proposed bans and restrictions in English schools, are fraught with anomalies. Indeed, we have proposed that an early evaluation of the English scheme is undertaken, the output of which could be considered in Scotland.

There is an opportunity through industry's proposals for managed change, to achieve lasting results in schools and beyond. Children will learn to manage their eating and manufacturers and caterers will be challenged and incentivised to product innovation. In this way, children's habits can be formed for life and there is the opportunity to introduce new, 'healthier options' for adults.

4. Promotion of School Meals

If the food and drink provided for school meals is appetising and good value then this can act as a driver for increased uptake. Children will also opt for foods that they are familiar with, so the lunches provided should not seem too dissimilar to what they enjoy and are familiar with.

However, any mechanism which seeks to ban products that fail to meet statutory "nutritional requirements" could have a negative impact on a local authority's ability to increase the uptake of school meals (and may actually create an increased desire for the banned foods). By restricting choice and the range of foods on offer, school children might opt for lunch elsewhere instead. Therefore, the unintended consequence of such restrictions might be a **reduction** in the number of children taking school meals, contrary to the stated aim of increasing the uptake of school meals.

Appendix

Outline of the GDA TNS scheme

In the context of the work of the Scottish Executive to develop Standards for School Food, SFDF proposes an approach to restrict the supply of foods which are particularly high in calories, saturated fat, total sugars and salt per portion for food which is to be eaten outside the lunch-time offering. This approach is linked to the development of a target nutrient specification (TNS) scheme using a GDA threshold based on portions.

The basis for such a scheme is as follows:

- It would be based on a 10% GDA threshold for calories, sat fat, total sugars and salt for children aged 11-18 years.
- For drinks, a 5% threshold is recommended for calories and total sugars.
- This approach would be applied to snack foods that are accessed by pupils from tuck shops and vending machines.
- It would also be applied to breakfast cereals served as part of a breakfast club meal and sandwiches that could be bought as a snack.
- The 10% threshold is in keeping with Caroline Walker Trust Guidelines which have been used as a basis for the nutrient standards for school meals.
- As well as having a nutritional basis the scheme must also be simple, so the 10% threshold should apply to all nutrients and to all food categories. No food categories would be excluded from the scheme or be banned from schools.

When this GDA TNS scheme was evaluated using a range of snack foods, including chocolate, breakfast cereals and sandwiches, 49% of products 'passed' and 51% failed on one or more nutrients. We therefore see this as an approach which does remove from vending and tuck shops the snacks which exceed certain nutrient thresholds for calories, saturated fat, sugars and salt. However it does not totally exclude any individual product category. Further, such an approach would encourage manufacturers to modify portion sizes and/or to change product composition, as well as to produce new products which would meet the criteria.

The Scottish Executive would need to give guidance on what products would be allowed in schools; with its alternative approach, industry would be willing to explore the idea of an independent accreditation process so that school caterers etc. would be clear about which products meet the scheme's criteria.

The Food and Drink Manufacturing Industry

The Scottish Food and Drink Federation (SFDF) represents the food and drink manufacturing industry in Scotland.

The food and drink manufacturing industry in Scotland has a gross output of around £6.5bn and accounts for circa £2.5bn of total UK exports and 11.8% of the UK sector workforce.

SFDF is a devolved division of the Food and Drink Federation (FDF), the voice of the UK food and drink manufacturing industry. As the largest manufacturing sector in the UK, food and drink manufacturers employ over 500,000 people and have a combined annual turnover of £70bn. UK food and drink exports in 2005 were almost £10bn.

The following Associations are members of the Food and Drink Federation:

ABIM	Association of Bakery Ingredient Manufacturers
ACFM	Association of Cereal Food Manufacturers
BCA	British Coffee Association
BCCCA	Biscuit, Cake, Chocolate and Confectionery Association
BOBMA	British Oats and Barley Millers Association
BSIA	British Starch Industry Association
CFA	Chilled Food Association
CIMA	Cereal Ingredient Manufacturers' Association
EMMA	European Malt Product Manufacturers' Association
FA	Food Association
FOB	Federation of Bakers
FPA	Food Processors' Association
GPA	General Products Association
IDFA	Infant and Dietetic Foods Association
MSA	Margarine and Spreads Association
NABIM	National Association of British and Irish Millers
NACM	National Association of Cider Makers
SB	Sugar Bureau
SIBA	Society of Independent Brewers
SMA	Salt Manufacturers' Association
SNACMA	Snack, Nut and Crisp Manufacturers' Association
SPA	Soya Protein Association
SSA	Seasoning and Spice Association
UKAMBY	UK Association of Manufacturers of Bakers' Yeast
UKTA	UK Tea Association

Within FDF there are the following sectoral organisations:

FF	Frozen Food Group
LDT	Lifestyle and Dietary Trends Group
MG	Meat Group
ORG	Organic Food and Drink Manufacturers' Group
SG	Seafood Group
VEG	Vegetarian and Meat Free Industry Group
YOG	Yoghurt and Chilled Dessert