

## **TRANSFORMING SCHOOL MEALS - SETTING THE STANDARD**

The next steps were taken today in the Government's transformation of school meals as a new School Meals Review Panel started work to develop tough minimum nutrition standards for primary and secondary schools.

Meeting for the first time today, the School Meals Review Panel includes dieticians and nutritionists; headteachers, governors and support staff; catering and industry professionals; and is chaired by the former Deputy Chair of the Food Standards Agency Suzi Leather. Observers from key Government departments and the Scottish Executive will also attend.

The Panel will advise on a major revision of current school meals standards aimed at delivering a reduction in pupils' consumption of fat, salt and sugar; and an increase in the consumption of fruit, vegetables and other foods containing essential nutrients, specifically to:

- recommend what form nutritional standards for schools should take in the future;
- strongly consider the introduction of nutrient-based nutritional standards, using the Caroline Walker Trust guidelines as a starting point; and in doing so to bear in mind issues of cost and implementation;
- advise whether there are grounds for restricting choice; or restricting or eliminating certain types of food or food ingredients from school meals; and recommend whether certain foodstuffs should be restricted or banned;
- advise on the costs and benefits of specifying proportions of fresh/unprocessed food; and in introducing hot food in all schools.

The panel has been asked to develop draft minimum standards to roll out to schools this Autumn, with the final version of the standards becoming mandatory from September 2006. It is anticipated that the Panel will analyse changes made to school meals through the *Hungry for Success* programme in Scotland, and other initiatives pioneered in schools and local education authorities in England.

An interim School Food Trust was also announced today. Comprising Suzi Leather as interim Chair, supported by chef and school food consultant Rob Rees and head teacher Chris Dean, the interim Trust will now work to develop the full Trust to become operational in the late summer. The School Food Trust will draw

together representatives from the food industry, caterers, nutritionists, food interest groups, schools and parents to give independent and practical support, advice and encouragement to Local Authorities, schools and parents to improve the standard of school meals; and work with key agencies to develop a ladder of qualifications for kitchen staff.

Welcoming the School Meals Review Panel, Schools Minister Jacqui Smith said:

"We are committed to transforming the food that is offered to pupils in our schools. Tough minimum nutrition standards developed by experts will support our significant investment to guarantee a minimum spend on ingredients, so that high-quality healthy food is on every child's plate. The new School Food Trust will give schools practical support to ensure that their additional resources are spent to best effect, and help parents ensure that their child has a healthy diet in school."

Suzi Leather said:

"No one should live a shorter or unhealthier life because they ate school food. No child should disrupt their and others' learning because they are hungry and cannot concentrate. No child should leave school knowing only how to open a packet or tin. No child should be bamboozled into eating a diet which harms them. Standards for school food should be the best we can do, not the most we can get away with."

## **NOTES TO EDITORS**

1. Suzi Leather has been active in food policy debates for many years, and has special interests in public health nutrition, diet and poverty and the needs of low income consumers. She was formerly the Deputy Chair at the Food Standards Agency and currently chairs the Human Fertilisation and Embryology Authority.

2. Rob Rees is an International Food Consultant, chef and former restaurateur. Formerly a Board Member of the Food Standards Agency he is currently General Governor and Trustee for the British Nutrition Foundation, Director Stroud and Mid Gloucestershire Education Business Partnership, Director Taste of the West and in 2003 was a finalist for the BBC Radio 4 Food and Farming Awards "best educator". He is Chairman of Health4Schools Project and a Member of the Gloucestershire Food Vision Team. For a decade now Rob has worked with teachers, young people and school communities in developing food projects that enrich delivery of the curriculum and enhance the health and well being of those involved and their families.

3. Chris Dean is currently Head at Icknield High School, Luton, where he has worked with Chef Dave Lucas to deliver high nutritional standards in the school's meals which has had a positive effect on behaviour and performance over the last three years. The school achieved the best GCSE results in Luton last year with 71% of its pupils achieving at least five A\*- C GCSEs.

4. From September and over the next three years, schools and local education authorities will be supported in transforming school meals with:

- £220 million new funding grants direct to schools and local education authorities to ensure they can transform school meals, including a minimum spend on ingredients of 50p per pupil per day for all primary schools, and 60p per pupil per day for all secondary schools, as well as providing increased training and working hours for school cooks;
- a School Food Trust to give independent support and advice to schools and parents to improve the standard of school meals;
- tough minimum nutrition standards developed by an expert panel to be rolled out to primary and secondary schools from September 2005, and becoming mandatory from September 2006;
- proposals to enable parents to work with schools and the School Food Trust to improve the quality of their child's school meal, with a dedicated 'toolkit' for parents;
- Ofsted to review the quality of school meals as part of regular school inspections from September, and to perform detailed inspections with nutritionists of the nutritional content of school food in a sample of schools in every local education authority;
- new guidance for schools and local education authorities in drawing up catering contracts to source healthy school meals' services and healthy food in vending machines, tuck shops, or breakfast clubs.
- a ladder of qualifications to meet the skills needs of all kitchen staff, from the basics of hygiene and nutrition through to more specialist preparation and cooking.
- new or upgraded school kitchen facilities where fresh produce can be prepared and served will be made a priority through the current school rebuilding and refurbishment programmes. The Government is investing £5.5bn in 2005-06 rising to £6.3bn in 2007-08 to improve secondary school buildings. Additional funding of £650 million for primary schools has already been announced for 2008-09 and 2009-10, and further details of this programme will be announced later this year.

5. The Department for Education and Skills will fund the school meals transformation with £235 million over three years, £220 million in grants to schools and local education authorities, and £15 million to the School Food Trust.

6. In addition, the Big Lottery Fund, as part of a strategic programme to promote well being, has decided to allocate up to £45 million to support healthy eating projects and initiatives for children, parents and their wider communities. The Fund will work in partnership with the voluntary sector, including the School Food Trust, the Soil Association and Sustain, local authorities, schools and the Healthy Schools Programme to develop the programme.

7. This builds on the commitments to improve school food and drink outlined in the Public Health White Paper, *Choosing Health: Making healthy choices easier*. The revision of school meal standards will help to deliver the aims of the White Paper to reduce the amount of fat, salt and sugar in children's food and to increase fruit and vegetables and other essential nutrients.