

Ernie Brown
Scottish Executive
Bill Team
Area 3A
Victoria Quay
Edinburgh
EH6 6QQ

26th July 2006

Dear Mr. Brown,

Cancer Research UK Scotland response to the Scottish Executive consultation: *Improving the Health and Nutrition of Scotland's children, Consultation on the schools (nutrition and health promotion) (Scotland) bill*

Cancer Research UK Scotland is an operating division of Cancer Research UK. Funds raised by Cancer Research UK Scotland are applied for the general purposes of Cancer Research UK.

This year alone, Cancer Research UK will spend over £25 million in Scotland on some of the UK's best science and clinical research. These funds will be invested in the work of scientists, doctors and nurses in hospitals, medical schools, universities and research institutes in Aberdeen, Dundee, Edinburgh, Glasgow and Stirling.

After smoking, an unhealthy diet and excess bodyweight are the most important modifiable risk factors for cancer. In Scotland, eating habits are the second major cause of poor health.¹ Researchers estimate that a third of all cancers are caused by poor diet, alcohol consumption and obesity.^{2,3,4} Obesity and overweight in children can increase the risk of cancer in later life. Additionally, eating habits established in childhood often endure after many years. It is recognised that obesity in childhood sets the course for obesity in later life.

Cancer Research UK therefore believes that healthy eating and the prevention of obesity in children is an essential part of cancer prevention and is supportive of appropriate initiatives to enable children to make healthy choices more easily.

We welcome the opportunity to submit comments to the Scottish Executive's consultation on the schools (nutrition and health promotion) (Scotland) bill: *Improving the Health and Nutrition of Scotland's children*.

Cancer Research UK has responded to similar consultations in the past around healthy food choices. We stressed the importance of schools taking a lead in the promotion of healthy eating messages, ensuring that children learn about what

¹ Scottish Health Survey, (2000) as quoted on the Scottish Executive website, <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Health/health/19133/19651>

² Doll, R. & Peto, R. The Causes of cancer: qualitative estimates of avoidable risks of cancer in the Unites States today. J Natl Cancer Inst 66, 1191-308 (1981).

³ WCRF & AICR. 37-145 (American Institute for Cancer Research, Washington, 1997).

⁴ Willet, W. Diet, nutrition and avoidable cancer. Environ Health Perspect 103 Suppl 8, 165-70.

constitutes a healthy diet and offering healthy food and drink choices throughout the school day.

We base this on evidence that suggests obesity in childhood is linked to obesity in later life, which can increase the risk of cancer. We also responded to the School Meals Consultation in England in March 2006, supporting the work of the School Food Trust to offer children healthy food choices throughout the school day. We therefore believe it is appropriate to respond to a similar consultation in Scotland.

Cancer Research UK welcomes the thrust of the recommendations made by the Scottish Executive. We are particularly supportive of the core recommendation to introduce nutrient-based minimum standards for all food and drinks supplied by local authority schools.

We believe that a “whole school approach” to healthy eating is one of the ways to improve the diets and well being of children.

We have made specific comments on a number of the consultation questions below:

1. Do you agree that local authorities should be under a duty to ensure that food and drinks which they provide in their schools, including nurseries, meet defined nutrient standards?

Yes, we agree that local authorities should be under a duty to ensure that food and drinks which they provide in their schools, including nurseries, meet defined nutrient standards.

2. Where children are attending independent schools, and where provision of foods and drinks are arranged or funded by a local authority, should the food and drinks meet defined nutrient standards?

Yes, we support the proposal to include children who attend independent schools and whose food and drinks are arranged or funded by a local authority. The food and drink available should meet defined nutrient standards.

We would also welcome measures that were extended to cover all school children including those whose places are not funded by local authorities. This would ensure that all school children have the opportunity to enjoy healthy eating options during the school day.

3. Should local authorities have the power to provide children in local authority schools with free drinks, fruit, vegetables, bread or cereal based snacks, which meet defined nutrient standards?

Yes, we support the proposal that local authorities should have the power to provide children with free drinks, fruit, vegetables, bread or cereal based snacks which meet defined nutrient standards. As stated above we believe that a “whole school approach” to healthy eating is one of the ways to improve the diets and well being of children.

4. Should there be a duty on Scottish Ministers and local authorities to endeavour to ensure that all local authority schools are health-promoting schools?

Cancer Research UK believes there is an essential role for government intervention in public health. Important public health problems such as the rapidly increasing

incidence of obesity cannot be tackled by public information and advice alone. People need more help than this to alter behaviour. The Scottish Executive has an essential role in making the environment more conducive to making healthy choices and avoiding unhealthy ones.

We therefore support the proposal that there should be a duty on Scottish Ministers and local authorities to endeavour to ensure that all local authority schools are health-promoting schools. We also support the Scottish Executive's national strategy to raise levels of physical activity in schools.

For further information or clarification on any issue raised in this response, please contact the Cancer Research UK Public Affairs Department at publicaffairs@cancer.org.uk or on 020 7061 8360. We would also be happy to comment on further research or consultation exercises that the Scottish Executive may wish to carry out to assist with work in this area.

Yours Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Catherine Foot'.

Catherine Foot
Head of Policy Development
Cancer Research UK