

THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL FOOD CATERING SUMMIT

Wednesday 25th March 2009 – Queen Elizabeth II Centre, London

INTRODUCTION

The history of school meals is complex and the service has been on the receiving end of a number of Government reforms over the years.

The Education Act of 1980 de-regulated the school meals service. Local Education Authorities were only required to provide free school meals to those children entitled, they could charge whatever price felt appropriate for school meals for paying pupils and there was no requirement to meet any nutritional standard. Some authorities scrapped their catering services altogether and many school kitchens were turned into classrooms. This transformed schools meals from a 'health and welfare' service into a commercially competitive operation and pupils became customers.

De-regulation in the 1980's meant no nutritional standards so menus could be adapted to reflect society's move towards a fast food culture. It also spawned a multi-choice catering operation which meant that cash cafeterias and multi-choice menus became the norm in Secondary schools, the style of service that continues to this day.

Compulsory Competitive Tendering (CCT) was introduced through the 1988 Local Government Act and obliged Local Education Authorities to put school meal contracts out to tender. This approach resulted in a 'cheapest is best' basis upon which the meals service had to survive.

In 1999, the Local Government Act introduced Fair Funding - with mandatory delegation for school meals to all Secondary schools from 2000 and the option for Primary and Special schools to receive delegated responsibility if they wished, the effect of which was to cause fragmentation of the school meals service.

In 2005, Jamie Oliver's campaign to transform school meals drew attention to the fact that the school meals service was severely under-funded and succeeded in securing new Government investment. However, his TV series painted an overly derogatory picture of food quality and school cooks' culinary capabilities which resulted in negative parental reaction and a major downturn in school meal uptake both in Primary and Secondary schools.

The School Meal Review Panel was formed in 2005 followed by the School Food Trust which was charged with transforming school food. In 2006, the Government introduced new legislation – Food based Standards – for school meals. Following this, school meal uptake, particularly in Secondary schools, saw further decline.

Nutrient based Standards became law in Primary schools in September 2008. Because of the complexities of the required content for Nutrient based school food, menus now have to be prepared using computer software at a significant cost as well as time investment. Nutrient based Standards will be law in Secondary schools from September 2009. For the past 20 years, Secondary students have had wide food choices but from September, they will only have the option of set meals.

With Secondary school meal uptake having already been affected by decline, LACA will raise a number of vital issues on the viability of Nutrient Standards in Secondary schools. The key question being asked is how can Nutrient Standards work in Secondary schools when there are few schools with stay on site policies for lunchtimes, lunch hours are now averaging 30 minutes so how can you feed upwards of 1000 students set meals and kitchen and dining areas cannot cope with new food preparation and the increased numbers? Plus the important point that today's teenagers will not choose the new food on offer.

LACA, together with a number of other leading organizations, academic researchers, dietitians and health experts, believes that Nutrient Standards could bring the demise of the Secondary school meal service in this country. The Association has called this Summit to bring to the urgent attention of politicians and the wider community the seriousness of this issue and the level of concern. If the Government is serious about the importance of school food in altering young people's eating habits and its contribution to reducing the levels of obesity then they must act now and amend the law so that common sense can prevail. LACA will be unveiling a more workable solution to school food provision within Secondary schools at the Summit.

THE IMPORTANCE OF SCHOOL FOOD THE LACA SUMMIT PANEL

Chairman of the Panel: **Tam Fry**, Honorary Chairman, Child Growth Foundation

PANEL MEMBERS

Neil Porter - *Chairman, Local Authority Caterers Association (LACA)*

Patricia Fellows - *Independent Catering Consultant and Past LACA Chairman*

David Laws MP - *Shadow Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, Liberal Democrats*

Tim Loughton MP - *Shadow Minister for Children, Schools and Families, Conservative*

Frank Dobson MP - *Labour*

Rosemary Molinari - *Chief Executive, Education Leads*

Clarissa Williams - *President, National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) (invited)*

Clare Collins - *National Chairman, National Governors Association (NGA) (invited)*

Professor Jack Winkler - *Director, Nutrition Policy Unit, London Metropolitan University*

Christine Lewis - *National Officer in Education, UNISON (invited)*

Jeanette Orrey - *School Meals Policy Advisor, Soil Association*

OUTLINE PROGRAMME

10.00 **Welcome and Opening Address**
Neil Porter, Chairman, LACA

10.15 **Patricia Fellows**, *Independent Catering Consultant/Past LACA Chairman*
Pat will ask the question - Are Nutrient compliant menus really feasible? From her comprehensive work in testing the analysis capability of the available computer software in devising menus, Pat Fellows will highlight the considerable cost and time factors involved in practice. She will also refer to the inconsistencies and the variable results that occur in devising Nutrient compliant menus. Is food preparation an art or science and how can theory relate to practice and the realities of a real school environment?
The most important question is - will computer analysis result in menus that appeal to teenagers?

10.25 **The Political View**

Three Members of Parliament give their personal or Party views on school food provision today.

We hear from:

David Laws MP, *Shadow Secretary of State for Children, Schools and Families, Liberal Democrats*

Tim Loughton MP, *Shadow Minister for Children, Schools and Families, Conservative*

Frank Dobson MP, *Labour*

Q & A session

10.45 **The School Management View**

It is now widely accepted that without the full support, co-operation and leadership from those in school management, establishing a whole school food policy and healthy eating culture within individual schools cannot be achieved. Funding and responsibility for school meals rests with individual schools and caterers cannot provide the services without investment by the school. But what do those in education feel their role and responsibilities should be? What do they believe is the place of school food in education? What are the cost implications versus the benefits? We ask:

Rosemary Molinari, *Chief Executive, Education Leads*

Clarissa Williams, *President, National Association of Head Teachers (NAHT) (invited)*

Clare Collins, *National Chairman, National Governors Association (NGA) (invited)*

Q & A session

11.05 **The Practical View**

What is the point of Nutrient based menus if they are not attractive to Secondary students, who then opt out of the service to buy food elsewhere en route to and from school or at lunchtimes? Without other measures to offset the potential for young people to continue eating unhealthily such as buying snack food outside the school gates, what good will Nutrient Standards actually do?

What are the implications for the staff employed in the school meals service if Secondary students reject Nutrient compliant meals? Local authorities will not sustain declining meal uptake which in turn could impact on the hours and pay of kitchen staff as well as, ultimately, affect job prospects.

There are examples of exemplary practice in a small number of Secondary schools whilst there are also some pilot schemes being undertaken – but how can the full implementation of Nutrient Standards be successfully achieved across all? We find out from:

Dr Jack Winkler, *Director, Nutrition Policy, London Metropolitan University*

Author of “The School Fringe – What Secondary school pupils buy from the shops around their schools” (2008)

Christine Lewis, *National Officer in Education, UNISON (invited)*

Jeanette Orrey, *School Meals Policy Advisor, Soil Association*

Jeanette Orrey comments on the practical challenges of implementing Nutrient Standards in Secondary schools as well as her view on overcoming the obstacles and barriers.

11.30 **Q & A session**

11.45 **Coffee Break and Networking Opportunities**

12.15 **School Food – Contributing to Future Generations**
Sandra Russell, *Immediate Past Chairman, LACA*

This session examines the plethora of Government health initiatives and asks the question how important are all the school food improvements in achieving the long terms goals for the health of the next generation and would increasing Free School Meal entitlement help?

12.45 **Overview of the morning’s presentations and debate**
Tam Fry, *Chairman of the LACA Summit Panel*

13.00 **Closing Comments**
Neil Porter, *National Chairman, LACA*

13.10 **Lunch**

14.00 **Press Briefing**

15.00 **Close**