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**Recommendations for National Food and Nutrition
Guidance for Early Years Settings in England**

Volume 1: Main report

Advisory Panel on Food and Nutrition in Early Years

5 November 2010

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1 Acknowledgements

1.1 Members of the Advisory Panel on Food and Nutrition in Early Years

List of Members of the Advisory Panel on Food and Nutrition in Early Years

Name	Organisation/position
Chair	
Anthony Williams	Reader in Child Nutrition and Consultant in Neonatal Paediatrics, St George's, University of London
Advisory Panel Members	
Louise Allen	Nutrition Executive, Food and Drink Federation
Lucy Cooke	Senior Research Associate, University College London
Sue Coates	Director of Communications, National Childminding Association (NCMA)
Helen Crawley	Reader in Nutrition Policy, Centre for Food Policy City University and Director of Caroline Walker Trust (CWT)
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Neil Leitch	Chief Executive, Pre-school Learning Alliance
Helen Moylett	Senior Director, early years, National Strategies
Julia Neall	Together for Children, Local Programme Advisor for South West
Sue Owen	Director, Well-being, National Children's Bureau (NCB)
Claire Schofield	Director of Membership, Policy and Communications National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)
Jessica Williams	Paediatric Dietitian and early years Health Promotion Specialist, Directorate of Public Health, NHS Bristol and British Dietetic Association (BDA)
Observers	
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Bo Emecheta	Child Wellbeing and Welfare Team Leader, (DfE)
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Laura Sharp	Research Nutritionist, School Food Trust (the Trust)
Tricia Fruin	Project Coordinator - early years, School Food Trust (the Trust)

1.2 Acknowledgements

The Panel would like to acknowledge the following specific contributions by members. Copies of these papers are available on request from the Secretariat.

- Papers by Dr Helen Crawley, Reader in Nutrition Policy, Centre for Food Policy City University and Director of Caroline Walker Trust (CWT) lead of sub-group 1: Guidance, Standards and Monitoring.
 - Setting food and nutrition standards for children from the age of one up to five years in early years settings: An initial review of options/points for discussion
 - Developing Food and Nutrient-based Standards and Guidance for early years settings
 - What does food based guidance need to look like to ensure average nutrient requirements for pre-school children are met?
 - 'Rationale and Options for Further Food and Nutrition Guidance and/or Standards – section 4 of this report.

- Papers by Neil Leitch, Chief Executive, Pre-school Learning Alliance lead of sub-group 2: Provision, Practice and Training
- Presentation by Elizabeth Elsom, Divisional Manager early years and childcare – 'Inspecting the Early Years Foundation Stage' and reviewing the report
- Presentation by Gwyneth Rogers, Team Leader, Food and Animal Health, LG Regulation – 'LG Regulation coordinated survey on nutrition in nursery schools'
- Presentation by Sue Powell, Principal Trading Standards Officer, Hampshire – 'Nursery School Meals Project in Hampshire 2009-2010'
- Presentation by Dr Ffion Lloyd-Williams, Research Fellow, University of Liverpool – 'Young children's food in Liverpool daycare settings: a qualitative study of pre-school nutrition policy and practice'
- Presentation by Mike Parker, Managing Director of HM Partnerships – Nursery Nutrition and Food Provision in Liverpool'
- Presentation by Richard Watt, Professor and Honorary Consultant in Dental Public Health, University College London – 'Initial findings from developmental phase of a family centred nutrition intervention in children's centres in Islington and Cornwall'
- Attendance at the 4th Advisory Panel meeting and presentation on 'Helping fussy eaters' at the 5th Advisory Panel meeting by child psychologist Dr Lucy Cooke
- Professor Tony Bertram and his team at the Centre for Research in Early Childhood (CREC) for conducting focus groups with practitioners, parents and children
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- The individuals who completed the on-line questionnaire to provide feedback on existing guidance
- The practitioners who completed the on-line questionnaire to give their views of food and nutrition in early years settings
- School Food Trust Colleagues, Lesley Wood (Data Analyst), Alex Scott (Research Nutritionist) and Michael Bullock (Correspondence Manager).

Front cover photo: by kind permission Pre-school Learning Alliance

2 Executive Summary

The Advisory Panel on Food and Nutrition in Early Years (the Panel) was set up to consider the case for improved standards or guidance on food and nutrition for early years and make recommendations to the Department for Education (DfE, formerly DCSF) to inform the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework review. The remit from DfE was for recommendations relating to children aged 1-5 years.^b

The Panel has not made recommendations on timetables for implementation of revised guidance and/or standards because the Panel's recommendations will be feeding into the EYFS review which carries its own timelines for implementing change.

In order to frame recommendations, the Panel agreed, in its remit, to:

- Gather, develop and consider evidence on the need for provision of improved guidance and/or standards
- Provide expert advice
- Work in sub-groups to collect evidence and make recommendations relating to nutrition, catering practices, procurement, training, administration, monitoring, funding and other areas agreed by the Panel; to seek the views of those with relevant experience or practice in relation to food and nutrition in early years settings; and to make oral and written presentations to the Panel as appropriate

The Panel met on five occasions between February and October 2010. The Panel membership included a diverse range of representative bodies with knowledge and experience of working in early years settings and/or in child nutrition. Expertise, evidence and experiences were shared, and additional evidence was collected through a series of small projects designed specifically to inform the views of the Panel. The full terms of reference of the Panel are given in Appendix 1. A preliminary review of food and drink provision in early years settings¹⁰ provided useful background to the Panel's deliberations.

2.1 The importance of early intervention

By the time children join Reception class in primary school (their final year in the EYFS), over one-fifth have become either overweight or obese. By Year 6, over one-third of primary pupils are overweight or obese.⁷¹ Young children eat far less than the recommended five portions of fruit and vegetables each day in both low income and other households.¹ Dental health in young children is deteriorating.² Rickets³ is re-emerging, and Type II diabetes⁴ is appearing among children.

This evidence strongly suggests that healthier eating before age five plays a vital role in developing good nutritional health. Better eating habits in the early years will also lead to better eating at school so that children might be expected to appreciate the healthy, tasty food that is now provided at primary schools.

2.2 Protecting children's nutritional health

The EYFS framework currently requires that:

^b The Advisory Panel recognized that children under one year of age attend early years settings. Guidance on healthy infant feeding practices and weaning have been published by the Department of Health (DH)¹⁶ and the World Health Organization (WHO),¹⁵ and was therefore excluded from the remit for the Panel.

- Where children are provided with meals, snacks and drinks, these must be healthy, balanced and nutritious
- Those responsible for the preparation and handling of food must be competent to do so
- Fresh drinking water must be available at all times.

Children from all social backgrounds attend regulated early years settings. They all need nutritionally balanced food and drink provided across the range of different settings to agreed standards. If this can be achieved, children and their families, especially those who come from disadvantaged backgrounds, will experience eating practices that promote better growth and nutrition, helping them to reach their full potential, and contribute to a reduction in health inequalities.

The Panel considers the provision of nutritionally balanced food and drink to be essential in protecting the current and future health of all young children (Recommendation 1).

2.3 Clarifying current regulations

The overwhelming view of providers, practitioners, local authorities and parents^c was that there is a need for clear, practical guidance that defines the term 'healthy, balanced and nutritious' in the current EYFS welfare requirements (see above, 2.1) so that the EYFS regulations can be implemented consistently across all early years settings (Recommendation 2). Regulated early years settings vary much in character (from nurseries attached to primary schools to childminders), and the journeys of individual children through childcare also vary across each day or week. It is important that there is a unified infrastructure within which guidance can be implemented and providers can be confident that local and individual choice can be exercised without compromising overall standards of health and nutrition (Recommendation 3 and Recommendation 4).

Limited current evidence from early years settings suggests that there is over-provision of sugar and salt with under-provision of energy, fat, iron and zinc.⁷⁴⁻⁷⁷ Sometimes there is over-provision of fruit, vegetables, and dietary fibre too. After reviewing current guidance⁸⁰ and considering and testing different models (Appendix 18, Section 5.4), the Panel concluded that food-based guidance that would support the provision of appropriate levels of energy, foods and nutrients at different ages was the best way forward (Recommendation 4). This is termed 'food-based guidance within a nutrient framework'; it sets out menus, portion size recommendations, and information about specific foods, e.g. milk and fish.

Evidence from primary schools in England shows that since the introduction in 2006 of clear and unambiguous mandatory standards for school food, primary pupils taking school lunches are eating more healthily. Their diets include more fruit and vegetables and less fat, sugar and salt.⁵ Related evidence suggests that healthier eating in primary schools is associated with better learning outcomes.^{6 7} It is likely that the introduction of clearer, more comprehensive guidance on how to address the dietary imbalances that currently exist in early years settings will similarly help to improve growth, health, wellbeing, learning and development.¹⁸⁻²⁰

2.4 Dissemination and implementation of the guidance

Views from Panel members and evidence collected from practitioners and providers suggest that guidance needs to be widely disseminated, not just to those directly involved in early years provision but to parents as well (Recommendation 11). For

^c Based on Panel member views, submitted evidence, and evidence collected on behalf of the Panel (see Section 4).

providers and practitioners, this needs to be accompanied by training and assistance with evaluation (Recommendation 5 and Recommendation 8). This serves two purposes:

- *It reduces the burden on providers.* Many providers are individually spending time and effort developing extensive guidance and menus for their own settings. This burden would be substantially reduced if comprehensive guidance and menus were available nationally. Evidence collected on behalf of the Panel suggests that this would be welcomed by the majority of providers and practitioners
- *It engages providers in a process of self-evaluation and quality improvement.* Evidence suggests that clearer guidance is best supported by providing training and tools for self-evaluation. These could be integrated with providers' existing quality improvement processes. This helps to engage providers and practitioners in delivering healthy eating in early years settings; it increases the likelihood that all children attending early years settings are getting good quality food in all of the settings that they may attend across the day; it reduces the burden on local authorities and early years providers and practitioners to develop self-evaluation tools independent from existing quality improvement processes; and it promotes gathering of appropriate evidence for external inspections.

Evidence from the implementation of the standards for school food⁸ suggests that professional support helps to reinforce positive aspects of local implementation (Recommendation 7).

2.5 Developing local infrastructure

Implementing healthy lifestyles

Early years settings provide an ideal opportunity to engage both children and parents in practical ways (through learning and play, informal conversations with providers, participation in cooking and gardening activities, etc.) to encourage healthier eating habits at home (Recommendation 6). Policy directed towards supporting children's development, learning and healthy lifestyle needs to be integrated with practice in early years settings, taking advantage of the opportunities to engage parents about the family's and child's food preferences. It is a specific legal requirement of the EYFS that each child has a key person who develops a close relationship with the child and the family. The key person can reassure parents about what food will be provided and respond sensitively to any cultural or medical needs.

This process of engagement could be enhanced substantially if all early years settings had policies, which combine the promotion of healthy eating with learning about eating skills (e.g. using a knife and fork) (Recommendation 6). This in turn helps parents and their children to engage fully in developing a healthy lifestyle, so enhancing consistent practice both at home and in early years settings.

Fostering diverse and flexible childcare

The introduction of clear and comprehensive guidance and support on food and drink provision in early years settings, together with training on implementation and self-evaluation, will give early years practitioners a benchmark against which to guide and assess their own work each day. This in turn will encourage providers and practitioners to develop good practice, clarify for parents the extent to which healthy food is being provided, and ultimately help parents to choose the place best suited to their childcare needs. Dissemination of guidance across all settings (regulated and unregulated) and made freely available to parents and carers will also support the development of consistent provision across the day (Recommendation 11).

2.6 Monitoring implementation and linking to quality improvement processes

Early years organisations, individual providers and practitioners, and Ofsted play complementary roles that are key to monitoring implementation and supporting the quality improvement process of early years provision. Increasingly, this process is likely to depend on clear guidance and support to develop evidence through self-evaluation. Third sector organisations should continue to work with early years providers to conduct needs analyses in order to support the development of good processes for quality improvement (Recommendation 8). This could be enhanced by regular themed inspections by Ofsted of food and nutrition in early years settings (Recommendation 9).

2.7 Basing change on evidence

There is limited recent evidence on food and drink provision in early years settings, and virtually none on consumption. Given the evidence in primary schools that the introduction of mandatory standards for school food has been associated with improvements in both consumption⁵ and learning outcomes,⁶ it is a priority to gather nationally representative evidence on provision and consumption of food and drink in early years settings. This would describe the diversity of provision geographically and by setting, and provide a baseline against which the impact of introducing clearer guidance might be evaluated (Recommendation 10). There is also a need to demonstrate how the achievement of healthier eating affects learning, growth and development in early years settings.

2.8 List of recommendations

Recommendation 1: All children are entitled to receive adequate amounts of nutritious food. This is a basic element in protecting their current and future health, learning and development. Providing healthy, balanced and nutritious food and drink must remain a statutory component of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) welfare requirements. Additionally it should be viewed as integral to the EYFS learning and development requirements.

Recommendation 2: Government should respond to the need expressed by the majority of providers, practitioners and parents to provide clear and practical guidance on meeting the nutritional requirements of children attending early years settings.

Recommendation 3: Government should introduce guidance that comprehensively describes adequate food and nutrition provision in early years settings. Implementation would be voluntary but should be encouraged and should be supported by suitable resources, training and include self-evaluation tools.

Recommendation 4: Department for Education should introduce guidance that underpins the provision of a range of important nutrients through clearly defining the type, frequency and amounts of foods that could be served. The Panel recommend adoption of the model described in this report. This is termed 'food-based guidance within a nutrient framework'.

Recommendation 5: Practitioners and supporting staff (e.g. cooks, health visitors) in early years settings should be offered training enabling them to provide children with appropriate food and drink suitably tailored to their needs. An important aspect of this process is learning to work with families to support individual children's nutritional requirements.

Recommendation 6: All early years settings should integrate the aims of achieving healthy eating and learning through food by applying or adapting their policies and practice on health, wellbeing and education. This approach should involve parents and children and be based upon the guidance recommended by the Panel.

Recommendation 7: All local authorities should have access to a suitably qualified professional who can, if required, offer advice on interpreting the guidance within the context of individual settings. This should be a registered public health nutritionist or dietitian who has experience of working within the sector.

Recommendation 8: Quality improvement processes for early years settings should include the evaluation of food and drink provision. Local authorities and third sector organisations should work in partnership to assist settings with self-evaluation of food and drink provision against the guidance recommended by the Panel.

Recommendation 9: The Department for Education should commission Ofsted to conduct a themed inspection of food and nutrition in early years settings at regular intervals. This should evaluate the impact of the guidance on children's wellbeing, health, development and learning. Her Majesty's Inspectors undertaking the themed inspection should be supported by registered public health nutritionists or dietitians.

Recommendation 10: Nutritional provision should be evaluated systematically to measure the changing patterns of both food provision and consumption throughout the child's journey across the diverse range of settings attended.

Recommendation 11: The guidance recommended by the Panel should be disseminated in such a way that it is freely available and accessible to parents, regulated and unregulated early years settings.

3 Background

3.1 Setting up and scope of the Advisory Panel on Food and Nutrition in Early Years

1. In September 2008 the EYFS⁹ was introduced. Since then, it has been a statutory requirement that all registered early years settings and schools in maintained and independent sectors deliver, and are inspected against, this framework. In advance of the framework being reviewed in September 2010, the Department for Children, Schools and Families (DCSF; now the DfE) approached the School Food Trust (the Trust) to conduct a preliminary review of food, nutrition and healthy eating guidance in early years settings.¹⁰
2. The review highlighted the need for more comprehensive, detailed and coherent food and nutrition guidance that could be readily accessed and delivered in all early years settings in England. It noted that the three devolved administrations had recently published guidance: Wales (2009),¹¹ Scotland (2006)¹² and Northern Ireland (2005)¹³ whereas the existing early years food and nutrition guidance for England related to the 2001 standards.¹⁴
3. In February 2010, following the publication of the preliminary review DCSF (now DfE) commissioned the Trust to set up and manage a multi-disciplinary Advisory Panel on Food and Nutrition in Early Years ('the Panel'). A list of the Panel members can be found in section 1.1
4. The Panel was set up to consider the case for introducing strengthened guidance and/or standards for food and drink provision in regulated early years settings. The Panel was tasked with gathering, developing and considering evidence on the need for improved food provision and/or strengthened nutrition guidance for children aged 1 to up to 5 years. The Panel was also asked to advise, if it recommended strengthened guidance/standards, what would need to be done practically to implement them, and what impact they may have on early years settings. The terms of reference of the Advisory Panel on Food and Nutrition were published on the Trust's website in February 2010 and are listed in Appendix 1.
5. The preliminary review¹⁰ was used to devise The Panel's work plan. It worked through the tasks set out in Box 1, collecting further evidence where gaps were identified.
6. The EYFS Framework applies to children from birth up to the age of five years. However, the work of the Panel has primarily focused on nutritional requirements of children from the age of one year up to the age of five years.^d The Panel recognises that birth to the age of one year is a fundamental time to ensure adequate nutritional intake of infants but acknowledges the existing guidance for feeding children of that age published by World Health Organisation (WHO)¹⁵ and the Department of Health (DH)^{16 17} including guidance on breastfeeding and weaning infants. The Panel was asked to align any recommendations on food and nutrition for 1 up to 5 year olds with this existing guidance for children under one year of age.

^d Defined as 'children from birth to 31 August following their fifth birth day'

Box 1: Tasks in the Panel's Work Plan

- 1:** Consult with a wide range of early years stakeholders including practitioners, providers, caterers, children and their parents to see what steps have already been taken towards healthy food and drink provision
- 2:** Conduct a needs analysis and gap analysis and evaluate whether the guidance currently available addresses appropriately the nutritional requirements of children aged from 1 up to 5 years
- 3:** Evaluate current guidance to see if it is appropriate for the target audiences, including food providers, parents and carers, and those providing facilities for early years care
- 4:** Examine the evidence for (a) strengthened and more consistent guidance or (b) mandatory standards for the food and drink provided in early years settings
- 5:** Develop recommendations for guidance and/or mandatory standards for food and drink provided in early years settings
- 6:** Examine the scope of the guidance or standards in terms of number of food groups, energy and nutrient requirements, and restrictions on the provision of some food types, salt and suitable drinks
- 7:** Make recommendations regarding any necessary updating of current guidance for the various target audiences, including food providers, parents and carers, and those providing facilities for early years care
- 8:** Work with local authorities (LAs) to develop guidance on clear structures to support provision of healthy food in early years settings
- 9:** Provide direction for LAs on the provision of current guidance for the various target audiences, including food providers, parents and carers, those providing facilities for early years care
- 10:** Examine training needs, current scope, and modes of delivery relating to provision of healthy food and drink in early years settings
- 11:** Suggest an appropriate timetable for the delivery of changes in the provision of catering services in early years settings and make recommendations
- 12:** Examine the procurement and funding implications relating to the delivery of changes in the provision of catering services in early years settings (including the cost of ingredients, equipment, and facilities) and make recommendations
- 13:** Explore issues relating to the monitoring and evaluation of provision of catering services in early years settings and make recommendations.

7. The EYFS framework applies to all settings regulated and inspected by Ofsted including:

- Nursery and reception classes in maintained primary schools
- Maintained nursery schools
- Sure Start Children's Centres providing childcare
- Day nurseries in the private, voluntary and independent sectors
- Childminders
- Other registered settings e.g. sessional providers.

8. The Panel was not asked to consider unregulated childcare settings such as mother and toddler groups as these are not required to meet the welfare requirements of the EYFS.

9. This report and recommendations of the Panel are being submitted to the independent review of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) framework to inform their consideration of the health aspects of the framework. The review of EYFS was announced by the coalition Government on 6 July 2010 and is due to report in Spring 2011.

10. The EYFS review has held a public call for evidence between 2 August and 30 September 2010 inclusive. The response to this call for evidence was very positive and the review received over 3,000 responses. Of these, over 1700 commented on the importance of food and nutrition in early years settings and the need for practitioners to have adequate guidance to help them.

11. The following report outlines the evidence gathered by the Panel to address the tasks indicated in Box 1, including six pieces of data collection carried out to consider the views of those working in the early years sector. The report then details the development and modelling of guidance and finally sets out 11 recommendations for the EYFS review to consider.

3.2 The importance of early intervention to ensure current and future health and nutritional status of young children

12. Healthy eating habits in the years before school are important because they impact on growth, development and achievement.^{18 19 20} A recent review of health inequalities by Marmot published in February 2010²¹ identifies the early years as a crucial time to intervene to reduce health inequalities across the life course. Quality of early years experiences can have a fundamental impact on all aspects of human development, physically, emotionally and intellectually.

13. Recent evidence shows that the window of opportunity for improving child nutrition spans the period from pre-pregnancy through the first two years of life (that is, the 1,000 days between conception and a child's second birthday). This is the period when children are in greatest need of adequate amounts of nutritious food, preventative and curative health care, and age-appropriate care practices for healthy development. It is also when interventions are most likely to prevent nutritional problems from setting in. There is consensus that the failure to achieve children's full potential for physical growth and brain development during this period is largely irreversible. This has repercussions in human capital formation and so the most cost-effective interventions focus on this window of opportunity.²² Early years are also important to develop healthy eating habits for life.

14. Providing an adequate nutritional intake during the first years of life enables children to grow and develop to their full potential physiologically and psychologically and lead a healthy life.¹⁷ Evidence suggests that interventions to promote the initiation and duration of breastfeeding and good nutrition in early years reduce the prevalence of later obesity and associated chronic diseases such as cardiovascular disease, diabetes, and some cancers.²³

15. The current health status of children in England, the increasing number of children now attending childcare before the age of five, and the positive nutritional outcomes associated with nutritional standards in primary schools⁵ suggest a need to ensure children from birth to five are also provided with a healthy, balanced and nutritious diet throughout the day. Achieving this goal will encourage greater acceptance by both children and parents of the improved provision of healthier food in primary schools, and hence has potential to encourage an increase in the take up of school meals. It is therefore potentially beneficial to consult and work with a range of early years providers and practitioners to develop clearer guidance about food provision in early years settings.¹⁰

3.3 Achieving a healthy lifestyle in the early years

16. Healthy lifestyle is a complex mixture of behaviours that contribute to nutritional, physical, emotional and social wellbeing. These in turn depend on access to healthy food and drink, opportunities for physical activity, and interactions with family, friends,

and environment that, in balance, produce the conditions for optimum development and expression of the child's full potential.

3.3.1 Defining a 'healthy' balanced diet

17. In order for the population to be 'healthy' it is important that food provision supports dietary reference values (DRVs) which were set by the Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy (COMA) in 1991.³⁸ DRVs are evidence based estimates of nutritional requirements that have been set to ensure the population achieves short and long-term health by reducing the risk of nutrition-related ill-health and disease (such as obesity, diabetes, coronary heart disease, stroke, cancer and alcohol dependence).

18. Estimated average requirement (EAR) values describe levels of energy intake likely to meet the needs of 50% of the population. For total fat, saturated and non-milk extrinsic sugars (NMES) DRVs are the recommended maximum contribution these nutrients should make to the population's diet. For total carbohydrate and non-starch polysaccharide (NSP) the DRVs are the recommended average intake for the population. For protein, vitamins and minerals, reference nutrient intake (RNI) values are set at levels of intake considered likely to meet the requirements of 97.5% of the population. For many nutrients, lower reference nutrient intake (LRNI) values are also set at levels of intake considered likely to be sufficient to meet the needs of only 2.5% of the population.²⁴ In addition, the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) in 2003 recommended a target salt intake to be achieved by populations of infants and children.²⁴ This does not represent an optimal or ideal consumption level for infants and children but an achievable population goal.²⁴ Appendix 22 outlines the EAR energy values (Table 12), the DRV's for nutrients (Table 13) and the population salt intake target for children aged 1 to 2 years and 3 to 4 years. Derived nutrient values for children aged 1 to 4 years are also shown (Table 14).

19. It is recommended that individuals aim to consume a varied and balanced diet to ensure that these DRVs are met. For the majority of the population (from the age of five years), achieving dietary balance requires consumption of: plenty of fruit and vegetables; foods rich in starch and fibre such as bread, cereals and potatoes; consuming moderate amounts of meat, fish, eggs, nuts, beans, pulses, milk and dairy products (choosing reduced fat versions where possible); consuming food and drink high in saturated fat and sugar occasionally and if alcohol is consumed it is consumed sensibly.²⁵ However, the nutritional requirements of young children aged 1 up to 5 years old differ somewhat from those of older children and adults. The definition of a nutritionally balanced diet for this population group requires special consideration and differs from that depicted by the 'the Eatwell plate'²⁵ which is used to guide consumption among children over five years of age and adults. Adopting such guidance for children under five years of age is inappropriate since they will not receive an adequate balance of nutrients for their needs.

20. The Healthy Start Scheme replaced the Welfare Food Scheme in 2006²⁶ with the aim of improving the diet of children from birth to four years. It provides parents with vouchers that they can exchange for milk, fresh fruit, fresh vegetables and infant formula. The scheme also provides free vitamin supplements for pregnant women, mothers who are breastfeeding and for children under four years old. It aims to engage with parents from early pregnancy to ensure that they are provided with information on healthy eating and the appropriate use of vitamin supplements. The Panel considers it the responsibility of the parents, and not the early years setting, to administer these supplements. The Panel agrees that early years settings should aim to provide children with adequate amounts of nutrients through the provision of appropriate food and drinks.

3.3.2 Physical activity status and recommendations

21. In addition, it is important to balance energy intake with energy expenditure in order to avoid excessive deposition of fat. Taking part in physical activity helps to achieve energy balance and prevent excessive weight gain. It also benefits psychological wellbeing, increases social interaction, improves self-esteem, skeletal health and growth, and plays a part in reducing other adverse health-related risks.²⁷ Physical activity also helps children to develop basic physical skills such as balance and coordination which support their future development.

22. The most commonly accepted definition of physical activity is 'any bodily movement produced by the muscles resulting in energy expenditure above the basal level'.²⁸ The guidance for adequate levels of physical activity that should be achieved is different for children and adults. The Chief Medical Officer (CMO) of England has recommended that children and young people should achieve at least 60 minutes of moderate intensity physical activity each day.^{e 29}

23. The Health Survey for England 2007³⁰ found that 99% of girls and boys aged 2 to 15 years had participated in at least some form of physical activity during a seven-day period. The most common types of activity for both boys and girls were active play and walking (93% and 91% for boys, 88% and 91% for girls). However, the results show that not all children are meeting the recommended levels of physical activity. Only 72% of boys and 63% of girls aged 2 to 15 years participated in physical activity for at least 60 minutes on all seven days surveyed.

3.4 Working with parents to achieve the health needs of their children

24. The Panel recognises that children's health is the collective responsibility of parents, guardians, early years staff and carers, and health professionals. It is the right and responsibility of parents to guide and advise their children to ensure they grow and learn to make healthy choices.³¹ However, it is also the responsibility of Government to provide services that support these objectives, particularly in relation to the provision of appropriate food and drink delivered by strategies that encourage children to eat well.³¹ The EYFS framework recognises that parents and families are central to a child's wellbeing, and early years practitioners support this relationship by sharing information thus extending learning into the home.⁹

25. Anecdotal evidence suggests that children may show different eating behaviours when they eat within or away from the home. Coupled with this, early years settings provide an educational environment where children are continually learning and developing. Focus groups and psychological research have shown that the educational context within which food is introduced has a powerful impact on eating behaviours. There is therefore an ideal opportunity within the early years setting to support and encourage children to eat well, particularly by overcoming fussy eating behaviours, which are apparent in ten to twenty per cent of children under five years.³² More information on strategies that address fussy eating is provided in section 5.7

26. The Panel recognises these opportunities and made a decision that any guidance recommended for early years settings should:

- Provide early years practitioners with the tools to talk to and discuss with parents the individual needs of the child, the food and drink provided in the settings and the

^e The current recommendations for adequate levels of physical activity are under review. The Department of Health will be publishing revised recommendations and guidance in the near future.

- reasons for these choices
- Be accessible and appropriate to support parents, if they want it, in helping their children to eat well at home
- Enable parents and early years practitioners to ensure consistent healthy eating messages are provided across the day, in early years settings and in the home environment.

3.5 Policy Context: An outline of early years health and education policies and programmes in England

27. Improving early years food and nutrition guidance straddles a number of policies and programmes within the DfE^{33 34} and the DH.^{35 36 37} Relevant reports^{38 39 40} and specific children's health and education policies and programmes introduced by UK Governments over the last 30 years are outlined in Figure 1, Appendix 2.

3.5.1 Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS)

28. Since September 2008 it has been a statutory requirement that all registered early years settings and nursery schools, nursery classes and reception classes in maintained and independent sectors deliver, and are inspected against, the EYFS. The EYFS builds on and has now replaced the statutory Curriculum Guidance for the Foundation Stage,⁴¹ the non-statutory Birth to Three Matters framework,⁴² and the National Standards for Under 8s in Day Care and Childminding.⁴³ The EYFS framework was designed to help children achieve the five Every Child Matters (ECM) outcomes.³⁴

3.5.1.2 Existing food and drink requirements in EYFS

29. One of the key aims of ECM³⁴ is to promote health. The EYFS framework includes standards relating to health and emotional wellbeing of children from birth to five. The legal requirement on food and drink in the EYFS specifies that:

- Where children are provided with meals, snacks and drinks, these must be healthy, balanced and nutritious
- Those responsible for the preparation and handling of food must be competent to do so
- Fresh drinking water must be available at all times.

30. In addition to the requirements stated above, the EYFS framework⁹ guidance also states that providers should be aware of children's dietary requirements and provide appropriate food and drink to meet individual needs.

31. The current mandatory standards for school lunches provided in maintained nursery schools and nursery units in maintained primary schools are outlined in Schedule 5 of the Statutory Instrument (2007) Education Regulations 2007 (Nutritional Standards and Requirements for School Food) (England)⁴⁴ (amended 2008).⁴⁵ These apply to maintained nursery schools and nursery and reception classes in primary schools but not to private, voluntary and independent settings, or to food provided at times other than lunch.

32. With regard to food hygiene the EYFS framework states that:

- Providers should be aware of their responsibilities under food hygiene legislation including registration with the relevant local authority Environmental Health Department⁹
- Where there is group provision, food hygiene matters should be included in induction and on-the-job training which is available to all staff.

3.5.2 EYFS staffing ratios and qualification requirements

33. In the EYFS framework⁹ there are clear, specific legal requirements for the ratios of staff to children depending on the type of settings and the level of qualification of staff. The requirements set appropriate levels of competence and the minimum number of staff that must be present with a maximum number of children at anytime. An outline of these requirements can be found in Appendix 3, Table 1.

34. It is a specific legal requirement of the EYFS framework⁹ that adults looking after children must have appropriate qualifications, training, skills and knowledge.

- Childminders must have attended a training course within six months of registration and must hold a current paediatric first aid certificate at the point of registration. First aid training must be approved by the local authority and consistent with the guidance set out in 'Practice Guidance for the Early Years Foundation Stage'⁴⁶
- Providers should be aware of their responsibilities under food hygiene legislation including registration with the relevant local authority Environmental Health Department.

35. Ofsted inspect against the EYFS framework which sets out the qualifications and training requirements and guidance for staff:

- In settings, other than for childminding, all supervisors and managers must hold a relevant Level 3 qualification (as defined by the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC))
- At least half of the other staff must hold a full and relevant Level 2 qualification (as defined by CWDC)
- All managers should have at least two years' experience of working in an early years setting, or other suitable experience
- All staff should have induction training (including health and safety, child protection policies and procedures), and providers should help their staff in improving their qualification needs by drawing on training made available by the local authority and other sources.

36. In addition the EYFS framework sets out statutory guidance to which providers should have regard. Details of this can be found in Appendix 3.

3.6 Existing support available to meet the requirements of the EYFS

3.6.1 Food and drink requirements

37. The EYFS framework provides little specific guidance on appropriate food provision. Local authorities may provide more specific non-mandatory guidance than that set out in the EYFS to support settings in meeting the requirements of the framework. In addition most local authorities and national professional early years organisations have

quality improvement processes for early years settings to follow and many of these include food and nutrition elements (see section 6.4.3)

38. In 2005, the Department for Education and Skills (DfES; now DfE) produced guidance for school caterers on implementing nutrition standards for lunches in maintained nursery schools and nursery units within maintained primary schools.¹⁴ This guidance was not updated when the Regulations for food and drink provision in primary, secondary and special schools were introduced.^{44 45} The 2005 guidance¹⁴ includes:

- A broad stipulation that lunch provision should be based on four food groups: starchy foods, fruits and vegetables, milk and dairy foods, and meat, fish and other non-dairy sources of protein. One item from each group should be provided to each pupil at lunchtime on each day. Numbers of portions, portion sizes and restrictions on foods high in fat, salt and sugar are not stipulated
- Information about what constitutes a healthy diet, to whom the nutritional standards apply, good catering practices including information on cooking methods, planning menus, monitoring checklist and pricing
- Examples of sources of calcium, folate, zinc and iron are listed in the guidance but specific guidance on the nutritional content of foods and meals is not stipulated.

3.7 Guidance versus standards for early years provision

39. The Panel considered differences between 'guidance' and 'standards'. A dictionary⁴⁷ definition of 'guidance' is: 'the act or function of guiding; leadership; direction advice or counselling' whereas a 'standard' is something 'considered by an authority or by general consent as a basis of comparison; an approved model, a rule or principle that is used as a basis for judgment'.

40. The term 'standard' implies a clearly defined set of measures against which an assessment of compliance can be made. For example standards are used in Regulations relating to the food and nutrient content of school catering that providers must meet in law. They can provide the basis for an inspection process which could be implemented by Government or relevant inspection bodies. They may be useful for benchmarking, even if not legally enforced.

41. 'Guidance' can offer definitions as rigorous as those set out in standards if supported by appropriate advice on implementation, auditing and monitoring, but would not impose a legally-based regulatory framework.

3.8 Diversity in the provision of early education and care in England

3.8.1 Free nursery education and care

42. Until August 2010, all three and four year olds were entitled to a free nursery education place consisting of 12.5 hours a week for 38 weeks of the year.⁴⁸ In January 2009, a total of 92% of children aged three years and 98% of children aged four years (1,155,500 children) were accessing some free nursery education.⁴⁹ In 2010 the coalition Government extended entitlement to 15 hours per week for all three and four year olds with effect from September 2010.⁵⁰ The free entitlement to 15 hours of nursery education each week will also be gradually extended to every disadvantaged two year old, and will be funded by additional investment of around £300 million by the end of the spending period 2014-15. This is a key part of the new fairness premium

which will give the poorest children a better start in life and increase the number of places available from 20,000 to around 130,000 over the next four years.

43. The previous Labour Government also funded a pilot scheme⁵¹ to evaluate the effect on the most disadvantaged two year olds of free entitlement to between 10-15 hours of childcare. The pilot provided over 13,500 such early education places for disadvantaged two-year-olds between 2006 and 2008. Each child received between 7.5-12.5 hours of early education per week for a total of 38 weeks. The majority of families (90%) received all their free hours attending the pilot place for all 38 weeks. Among the 10% of families who did not utilise their whole entitlement, 36% stated it was because the child was unhappy and 22% because provision was not good quality. Most families (82%) attended settings for the free hours only. The main reasons parents cited for taking up entitlement were to acquire social advantage for the child (79%), to develop confidence mixing with adults (43%), educational advantage (46%) and an opportunity to develop speech and language (29%).⁵¹

44. Early years settings illustrate great diversity in the types of provision available to offer both free and paid nursery education and care. The DfE presented to the Panel a paper based on the 2009 Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey.⁵² Diversity exists in the organisation of settings, numbers of children attending, the composition of the workforce, staffing ratios and qualifications and types of premises.⁵³ The following section summarises the diversity of provision and considers its implications for provision of food and drink. Appendix 3 provides further detail.

3.8.2 Early years providers and places

45. The 2009 Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey⁵² identified a total of 103,000 childcare and early Years providers offering 2,442,100 places in total. More detail is provided in Figure 1 and Figure 2.

46. In 2009 the total number of children attending childcare and early years settings was 2,992,900.⁵² The majority of places in full and sessional daycare are taken up by children under five years of age (97% and 98% respectively).⁵² In comparison the vast majority of the places in after school clubs (86%) and holiday clubs (79%) are occupied by older children aged between 5 and 14 years.⁵²

47. Since 2001 there has been an increase of 81% in the number of providers of full daycare from 7,800 providers in 2001, to 14,100 in 2009.⁵² Conversely, the number of sessional providers has fallen from 14,000 in 2001 to 7,800 in 2009.⁵²

48. The drop in the number of sessional providers over recent years could, in part, be due to increasing parental demand for childcare that covers longer hours. In 2008, one in five full daycare providers (18%) said they had changed from offering sessional care; 70% attributed this to parental demand for longer hours.

49. This change in the type of provision offered increases the likelihood that children are receiving a large proportion of their food intake whilst attending an early years setting. This increases the importance of ensuring that settings are suitably equipped with appropriate facilities and with knowledge that enable them to provide food and drink meeting the nutritional requirements of the children in their care.

50. Full daycare provision is predominantly offered by the private and voluntary sectors (88%). In addition, provision of sessional care is also more likely to be owned by the voluntary sector (67%).⁵² A breakdown of ownership of some childcare providers is summarised in Figure 3, Figure 4 and Figure 5. The ownership of after school and

holiday clubs was not included in these figures as they are predominantly occupied by children over five years old and therefore not relevant to the Panel.

51. The ownership and type of early years provision has particular importance to the facilities available for food and drink provision. Not all premises used to deliver early years care are purpose built.⁵³ Many providers of sessional care, which predominantly falls in the voluntary sector, share premises with other community groups, e.g. church groups may have limited facilities available to store, prepare and cook food. This consideration also applies to childminders using their own home to provide services. Conversely, provision through nursery or reception classes within a maintained school is likely to access the kitchen facilities of the school.

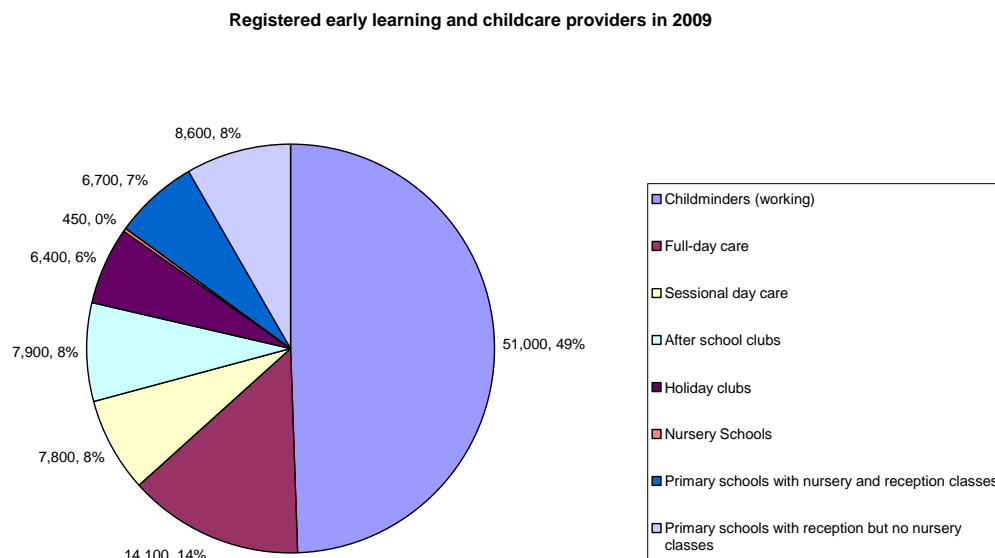


Figure 1: Number of Early Learning and Childcare Providers by type of provision
Source: Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey 2009⁵²

Registered early learning and childcare places in 2009

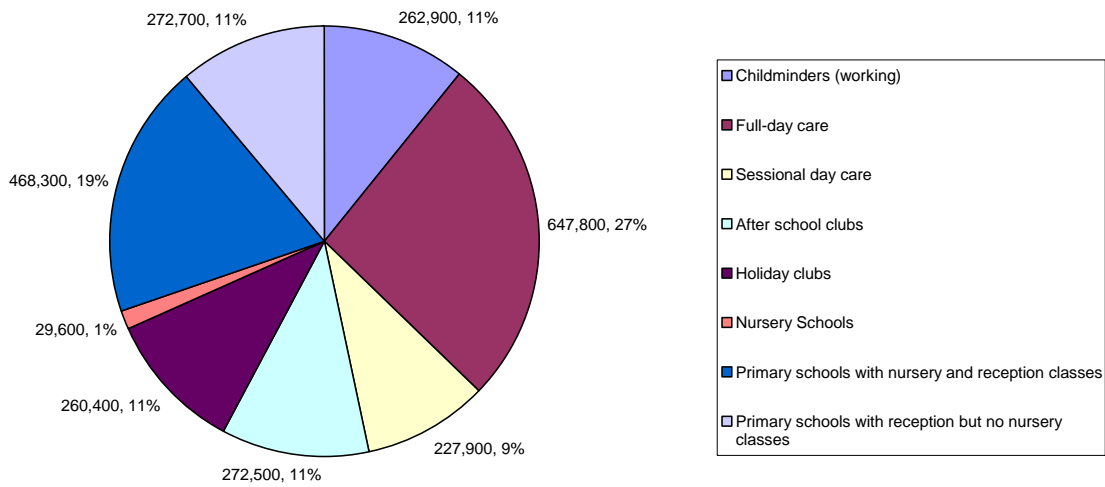


Figure 2: Number of Early Learning and Childcare Places by type of provision
Source: Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey 2009⁵²

Ownership of full day care providers in children's centres

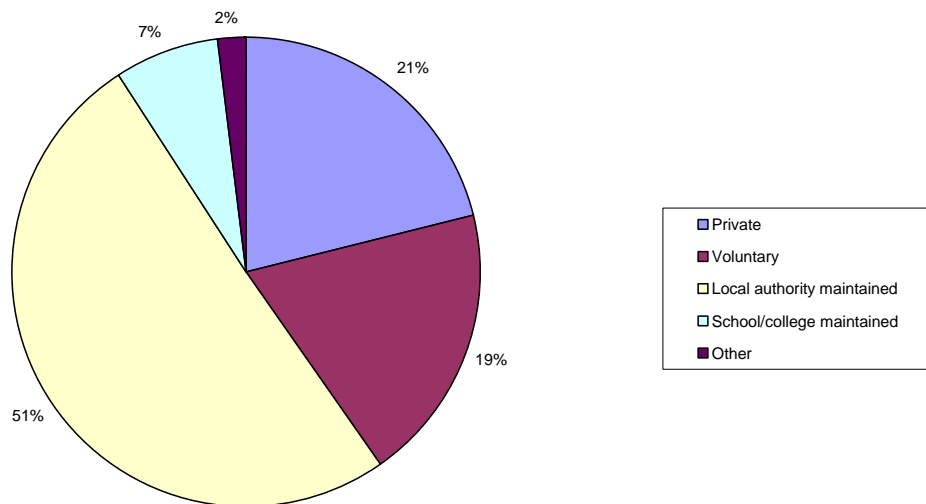


Figure 3: Ownership of full daycare provision
Source: Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey 2009⁵² extract from table 3.5 page 34

Ownership of full day care providers

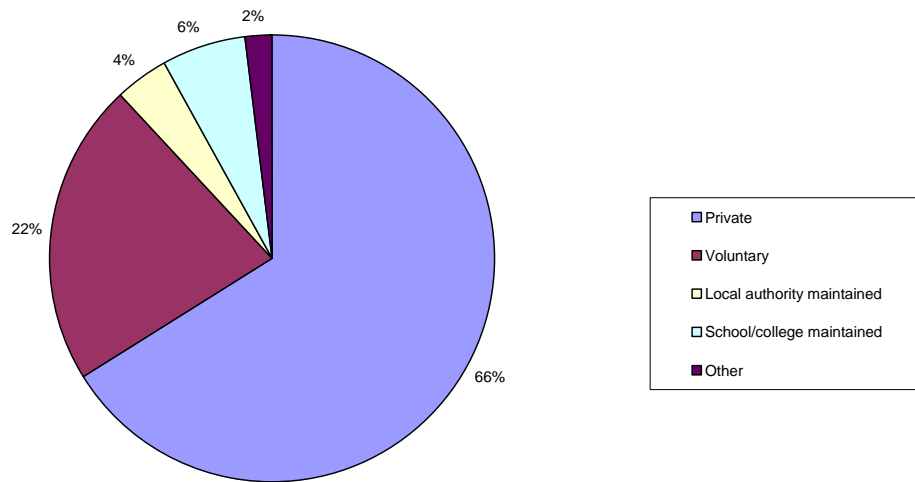


Figure 4: Ownership of full daycare provision through children's centres

Source: Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey 2009 extract from table 3.5 page 34

Ownership of childcare providers offering sessional care

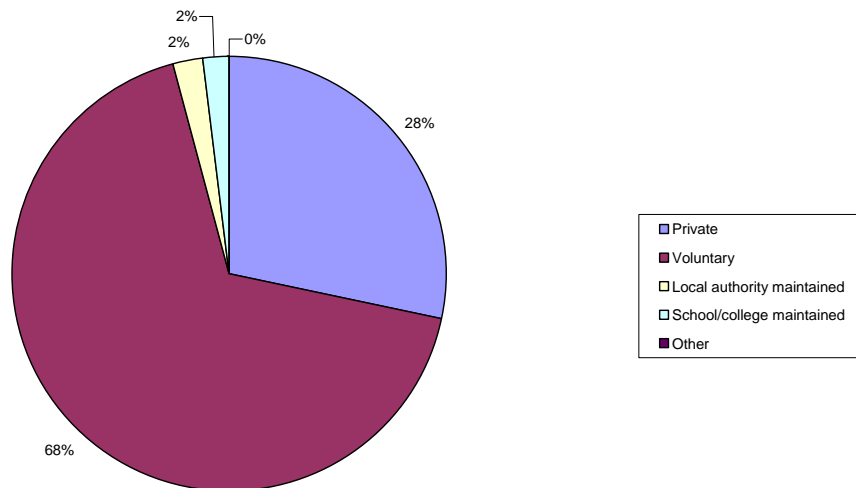


Figure 5: Ownership of sessional care provision

Source: Childcare and Early Years Providers Survey 2009⁵² extract from table 3.5 page 34

3.9 An international perspective of food and nutrition in early years settings

52. The Trust undertook a literature search using the search engine Google to ascertain an international perspective of food and nutrition in early year settings. Grey literature searches were also conducted through relevant Government, health organisation and early year provider websites. The Internet search provided little evidence on the action taken in other countries on food and nutrition in early years settings and was limited in scope by poor accessibility of documents from websites in English.

53. The search indicated that some countries recognise the provision of healthy food and drink as an important aspect of early years education and have taken steps to support early years settings in providing healthy food and drink. The following section summarises these actions.

54. An article published in 2006⁵⁴ provides an overview of food provision in nurseries across Europe. It provides a table examining structural and educational factors, nutritional standards and degree of parental involvement in ten European countries. (Appendix 4).

55. The three devolved administrations of the UK have all produced guidance for feeding children in early years settings.^{11 12 13 14} A summary of each country's guidance is given below. Appendix 5 provides more detail.

56. England: Maintained nursery schools and maintained nursery units within primary schools are required to meet the regulations set out in schedule 5 of The Education Regulations 2007⁴⁴ (Nutritional Standards and Requirements for School Food) (England) (amended 2008).⁴⁵ For more information on these regulations please refer to paragraph 31.

57. Northern Ireland: In 2005 the Health Promotion Agency for Northern Ireland published 'Nutrition matters for the Early Years: Healthy eating for the under fives in childcare'¹³. The guidance provides day nurseries, play groups and home-based child carers with practical advice and information on a range of nutritional issues and in particular gives advice on how to ensure a healthy diet is provided for the children in their care. In summary the guidance includes:

- Food-based guidance similar to that produced by the Caroline Walker Trust⁵⁵
- Guidance on providing food across a week e.g. processed meat products should be provided no more than once every five days
- Information on weaning, menu planning, sample menus, feeding children with special dietary needs, food safety, provision of food as rewards and at celebrations, physical activity and developing a food policy.

58. Scotland: In 2006 the Scottish Executive published 'Nutritional Guidance for Early Years: Food choices for children aged 1-5 years in childcare settings'.¹² The guidance aims to help early years providers meet the health and wellbeing standard three of the National Care Standards – Early Education and Childcare up to the Age of 16. It is based on the Caroline Walker Trust (CWT) guidelines.⁵⁵ The Scottish publication does not include guidance on infant feeding but covers:

- Food-based and nutrient-based guidance. The food-based guidance aims to meet the nutrient-based guidance and provides information on meal frequency and cooking methods

- Nutrient-based standards for meals and a snack suitable for age groups, 1-3 years, 4-5 years and 1-5 years old. These are based on a percentage of the Dietary Reference Values (DRVs)³⁸ for the appropriate age range. One meal should provide 30% of daily average energy requirement; a combined meal and snack should provide 40% (both include drinks). The standards indicate energy and nutrient provision from one meal averaged over five meals
- Recommendations for serving specific foods across a five-day menu cycle, e.g. red meat should be provided on a minimum of two-days in a week
- Menu planning, including sample menus and information about special diets, physical activity, developing a food policy, working with parents and training staff.

59. Wales: In 2009 the Welsh Assembly Government produced 'Food and Health Guidelines for Early Years and Childcare Settings'. This piece of guidance also builds on the guidance produced by the CWT⁵⁵ and the Scottish Executive.¹² The guidance is food-based only and does not include nutrient-based guidelines. In summary it includes:

- A recommendation that a minimum of a three-week menu cycle is used
- Additional guidance on breast feeding and weaning, developing positive eating habits, oral health, menu planning and example menus, special diets, food hygiene and safety, developing a food policy and training staff
- A recommendation about the frequency with which foods should be provided across the whole day and at each meal. It includes guidance on limiting the provision of foods high in salt, sugar and fat but does not provide specific guidance on the frequency that these foods should be restricted across the menu cycle.

60. Australia: Australia has national and state guidance on healthy eating for preschool children. For example the Council of Australian Governments, National Quality Standard for Early Childhood Education and Care (2009)⁵⁶ states that 'Healthy eating and physical activity are embedded in the program' and that 'Healthy eating is promoted and food and drinks provided must be nutritious and appropriate to the age of the child'.⁵⁶ Legislation for early years settings includes the Queensland Childcare Act (2002)⁵⁷ and the New South Wales Children's Services Regulations.⁵⁸ The latter specifies that the food and drink provided to children in childcare settings must be: nutritious; adequate in quantity; varied; offered at frequent intervals; appropriate to the developmental needs of the child; any special dietary needs of the child; and appropriate to the culture and religion of the child. Information sharing is a common theme. Guidance covers sharing of information, display of menus for staff, children and parents to see, and record keeping. Written instructions from parents about their infant's diet is especially important if he or she is being bottle-fed or has any food allergy. Other guidance covers the practical issues of safe food preparation, handling and storage. Food allergies are included in some guidance which may recommend storing food brought in from home separately so that there is no cross contamination. The South Australia Childcare Nutrition Partnership produced a checklist for settings to use when planning suitable menus.⁵⁹ The checklist includes serving sizes and restricts the frequency of high fat meals to once a week.

61. United States of America (USA): Menu planners and sample menus feature in some guidance packages including United States Department of Agriculture, Nutrition Team, Building Blocks for Fun and Healthy Meals.⁶⁰ An example is the Kindergarten Initiative in Pennsylvania USA⁶¹ that combines parental involvement, healthy eating nutrition and farm visits.

62. Canada: The Ottawa Day Nurseries Act 1990⁶² requires 'where the child is in attendance at mealtime, a meal consisting of at least one serving from milk and milk

products, one serving from meat and alternates, one serving from bread and cereals, and two servings from fruits and vegetables'. Access to drinking water is stipulated as compulsory, and healthier drinks such as water, milk, or diluted fruit juice are promoted as the early years settings feel they have a role to play in improving oral health.

63. Europe: The overview of food provision in nurseries and schools across Europe published four years ago⁵⁴ suggested that seven of the ten countries reviewed namely, Austria, Belgium (Flemish) Denmark, France, Italy, England and Scotland have nutritional standards for nursery meals. Spain, Sweden and Switzerland did not have standards.

3.10 Nutritional and anthropometric status of children aged 1-5 years in England

64. In the last 15 years national^{63 64} and regional^{65 66 67} studies of the dietary intake of children aged 1 to 5 years have reported insufficient intake of energy, iron, zinc and vitamin D, whereas intakes of saturated fat and sodium have been higher than recommended.⁶⁸

65. Appendix 6 shows the prevalence of overweight and obesity in children between 2 and 5 years of age as recorded in the Health Survey for England.³⁰ Between the ages of 2 and 5 about a quarter of children are overweight or obese.

66. Each year since 2005 the National Child Measurement Programme (NCMP)⁶⁹ has weighed and measured children in Reception (aged 4-5 years) and Year 6 (aged 10-11 years). The results are used to inform local planning and delivery of services for children. Appendix 7 shows the annual prevalence of overweight and obesity since 2005. The prevalence quoted for 2005/06 should be treated with caution since data collection and coverage were limited.⁷⁰

67. In 2008/9⁷¹ more than one in five (22.8%) Reception children (4-5 years olds) measured were either overweight or obese, but the prevalence of obesity has not increased since 2007. At primary school entry in 2008/9 13.8% of boys were overweight and 10.2% obese compared to 12.6% and 8.9% of girls respectively. The prevalence of overweight and obesity increases in both boys and girls by Year 6.

68. The results from the NCMP 2008/09⁷¹ show that the highest prevalence of obesity (above the national average) is found in areas with the highest level of deprivation. Data on the prevalence of underweight, overweight and obesity by deprivation and ethnicity are provided in Appendix 7 and Appendix 8.

69. The NCMP reported the prevalence of underweight in 2007/08⁷² and 2008/09⁷¹ only. The proportion affected is relatively small (1%) and there was no significant difference in the prevalence of underweight between boys and girls in this age group.

3.11 Food and drink provision in early years settings in England

70. Studies have been carried out both nationally and regionally on the quality and nutritional content of food and drink provided by early years settings to children under five. These have highlighted some concerns.

71. It is important to note that findings presented in this report relate to the provision of food and drink in early years settings. They do not relate to consumption within the

setting nor to overall dietary intake. There are insufficient national data available on food consumption by children while they are attending early years settings but clearly it is likely to be lower than estimated provision.

72. In 2006, Ofsted carried out a survey investigating healthy eating in 110 registered early learning and childcare settings across England.⁷³ Ofsted judged providers on the regulatory framework at the time of the study (the National Standard 8: food and drink) in addition to asking additional questions about healthy eating. The national standard and the report do not define 'healthy eating'. Inspectors judged 74% of childminders and 64% of daycare providers to be 'good' or 'outstanding'. Those who received a rating of 'good' not only provided children with 'healthy food' (not defined) but also explained the importance of a healthy diet and lifestyle. Where providers were judged not to be meeting the appropriate standards, the usual reasons were: lack of regular drinks and nutritious snacks; a lack of understanding by staff of individual dietary needs; the need to improve the range of 'nutritious snacks' (not defined); and failure to encourage children to make healthier choices.

73. In 2008, The Soil Association in partnership with Organix researched the quality of food provided to young children using an online questionnaire completed by 487 nursery workers in England and Wales.⁷⁴ The published report alleged that nurseries were regularly providing children aged 1 up to 5 years with snacks containing added fat, sugar and salt, confectionery, meat products, and deep fried foods such as chips. The survey also highlighted insufficient fruit and vegetable provision, and use of meat products with a low meat content. Very few nurseries regularly provided children with oily fish. The report also examined a number of manufactured food products provided by nurseries and concluded that some contained additives banned under EU law covering food and drink sold for children under three years.⁷⁴

74. The Soil Association's report highlighted poor understanding of children's individual dietary needs with regard to allergies and religious practices. It also reported that less healthy foods were provided in nurseries offering a higher number of places to children from low-income families. The report suggested only 40% of Sure Start centres, which were initially set up to target children from low income families, provided fruit or vegetables at snack times. The provision of healthy nutritious food is most important where there are high numbers of children from low-income families who are known to have poorer diets than children from high-income families.⁷⁴

75. In 2007, East Sussex Trading Standards carried out a survey looking at food provision in ten nurseries across the county who had volunteered to take part.⁷⁵ A total of 600 children were registered in the ten nurseries, of whom 329 were usually supplied with a meal. Food provided across a week was sampled and submitted for laboratory analysis. The results were compared to the CWT food-based and nutrient-based guidelines.⁵⁵ The survey found that nurseries were providing too little energy and portion sizes of fruit and vegetables that were too large. Only two of the ten nurseries were providing children with appropriate portion sizes. Some nurseries were following adult healthy eating advice and thus providing a low fat diet with excessively large portions of fruit and vegetables. This contributed to the inadequate provision of energy and fat. The survey concluded that nurseries are confused about what constitutes a healthy diet for children aged under five years.⁷⁵

76. In 2009, following the survey by East Sussex Trading Standards, a larger, national survey of the nursery food was conducted by LACORS (Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services now known as Local Government Regulation, LGR). The results were published in April 2010.⁷⁶ The LACORS survey consisted of 118 nurseries from

29 local authorities across England all of which volunteered to take part. The methods used built on those used by Trading Standards in the East Sussex survey.⁷⁵

77. The LACORS survey⁷⁶ showed that the majority of nurseries were positively engaged with the concept of healthy eating and were keen to provide balanced, nutritious meals and snacks for their children. However none achieved the standards of nutrient provision described in CWT guidelines.⁵⁵ There was wide variation in the extent of compliance with these guidelines⁵⁵ but some common themes were identified which included:

- Energy: some nurseries fell short on meeting energy requirements whereas others exceeded them.
- Carbohydrate: the frequency of starchy carbohydrate portions was occasionally too low perhaps because fruit was the main food provided at snack times. Often the provision of sugar was too high.
- Fat: where the provision of fat was not sufficient for children's needs this was attributed to the provision of semi-skimmed milk rather than whole fat milk;
- Fibre: provision was too high in most nurseries and many appeared to follow the recommendation for adults.
- Sodium/salt: levels were high in the vast majority of nurseries. Dietitians commented on the frequent use of high sodium foods such as packet and tinned foods, sausages, pizzas, soups, bread, cheese and breakfast cereals. Those nurseries that cooked from scratch were closest to achieving the population target for salt.
- Iron: most nursery meals were found to be low in iron.
- Portion sizes: the amount of food given to children varied across nurseries. Sometimes portion sizes were too large and other times too small. Similarly it was common for nurseries to omit the afternoon snack and to serve a 'high tea' at around 4 p.m.
- The provision of oily fish was variable with many nurseries not offering it at all.
- In some cases nurseries were providing menus more suitable for a healthy adult diet rather than tailoring it to the specific nutritional requirements of children aged 1 up to 5 years.⁷⁶

78. Similar findings were reported in a smaller survey carried out in 49 nurseries in Liverpool,⁷⁷ sampled from 130 nurseries and pre-schools locally. In this study the nursery menus were nutritionally analysed using a menu planning and nutritional analysis software programme and compared to the CWT nutrient-based standards.⁵⁵ The nutritional analysis was carried out across the day in the settings. The main findings were:

- Limited assessments of menus were carried out by providers for example only 4% of the nurseries had obtained professional input from a nutritionist to review their menus.
- Very few nurseries were aware of any food and nutrition guidance: 61% of caterers reported they received only a 'little' advice on healthy eating and this was often not specific to children's dietary requirements.
- Nurseries provided a good variety of fruit as a snack on a regular basis. However the provision of vegetables was less common as practitioners perceived them difficult for children to eat.
- None of the lunch menus was compliant with the CWT nutrient-based standards.⁵⁵ Tea (evening meal) provision was the least compliant. Menus consistently failed to provide sufficient energy, carbohydrate, iron and zinc.

- Provision in 85% of settings exceeded the population target for salt. Most of the sodium originated from gravy and bought-in sauces. Only one nursery added salt during cooking.
- There was diversity in the ability of the different settings to meet the CWT standards,⁵⁵ from 'good' to 'very poor'.
- There was no consistent difference between private and public sector in standards of food and drink provision.⁷⁷

79. Table 3 compares with CWT standards the nutrient analysis from the LACORS and Liverpool surveys. In general they accord in showing under-provision of energy (as fat and carbohydrate) iron and zinc. This coexists with over-provision of salt.

Table 3. Comparison of the nutrient analysis of nursery lunch provision against the CWT⁵⁵ nutrient-based standards from the LACORS⁷⁶ and Liverpool⁷⁷ studies

Nutrient	Nutrient standard of an average lunch		LACORS ⁷⁶	Liverpool ⁷⁷
		Max/min		
Energy (kcal)	387		↑↓	↓
Fat (g)	15.0	Max	↓	↓
Saturated fat (g)	*	Max		
Carbohydrate (g)	51.6	Min	↓	↓
NME Sugars (g)	11.4	Max	↑	↓
Fibre (g)	*	Min	↑	
Protein (g)	4.7	Min		↑
Iron (mg)	2.4	Min	↓	↓
Calcium (mg)	110	Min		↑
Zinc (mg)	1.9	Min		↓
Vit A (µg)	130	Min		↑
Folate (µg)	*	Min		
Vit C (mg)	9	Min		
Sodium (mg)	270	Max	↑	↑
Salt (g)	0.7	Max	↑	↑

*CWT did not set a specific nutrient-based standard for this nutrient

80. A smaller study carried out in Cheshire and Merseyside in 2006⁷⁸ found that there were positive catering practices in some but not all nurseries. Encouragingly, grilling and oven cooking were the most common cooking methods used for foods that might be traditionally fried such as fish fingers. The majority of early year settings (26/29) did not add salt to vegetables, rice, pasta or potatoes during cooking. There was also widespread use of unsaturated fats such as sunflower oil, just under half (14/29) of the early years settings interviewed did not add any fat to vegetables or potatoes during preparation demonstrating that healthy food preparation messages are filtering through to some caterers.

81. The Panel also received some anecdotal evidence from Bedfordshire Healthy Under-5's Award Team about their concerns in relation to food and drink provision in early years settings. One concern related to the provision of food in nurseries where primary schools had responsibility. In these settings children were provided with half a primary school portion, which was considered insufficient. In addition, vegetarian dishes did not contain sufficient non-meat sources of protein and the use of low-fat dairy products appeared to be commonplace. The main findings were:

- A lack of any consistent, accessible, practical guidance to support early years settings meet the requirements of the EYFS and provide healthy, balanced and nutritious food appropriate to children under five years old
- A lack of awareness of existing food and nutrition guidance appropriate to children under five years old
- A lack of knowledge about what constitutes a healthy diet for children under five years old.

82. On a more positive note, early years settings are often enthusiastically engaged in the promotion of healthy eating and show a willingness to provide healthy food for the children attending their settings. The results of the surveys described suggest that this enthusiasm needs to be matched with enhanced availability of guidance and support if settings are to provide food and drink that meets the nutritional requirements of children under five years.

3.12 The contribution of food and drink provision in early years settings to the total dietary intake of pre-school children

83. The decision to extend free entitlement of early years education to three and four year olds from September 2010⁵⁰ (Section 3.8.1) is likely to increase the number of children eating in early years settings. Coupled with this, the number of places available in full daycare settings is much higher than in previous years, totalling 647,800 places. It is possible that children attending full daycare could be receiving the majority of their food intake through the setting. This highlights the importance of ensuring that provision is adequate.

84. Currently there are few data on the number of children receiving meals and snacks through early years settings or on the number of meals and snacks provided by settings per day. The 1995 National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS)⁶³ does not provide data on this. It is therefore difficult to quantify the contribution to pre-school children's total dietary intake made by food provided in early years settings. The NDNS rolling programme is now underway but there are no specific questions about whether a child participant attends a nursery or childminder during the diary period. The survey asked respondents where each meal / snack was consumed but the number of respondents specifying nursery or childminder was very low suggesting that participants may not report information consistently. The second phase of the NDNS is due to be carried out in 2011 and in combination with the above may provide a better indication of food and drink consumed by participants in an early years setting. The main stage fieldwork of the Diet and Nutrition Survey of Infants and Young Children (DNSIYC) is scheduled to commence in January 2011. DNSIYC will be the only national survey providing detailed information on the diet and nutrition of individuals aged from four months to 18 months. The findings of the survey are due in September 2012 and will provide an up-to-date picture of the nutritional intakes of this age group.

85. Early years food provision should be viewed as helping to protect young children's welfare and health by:

- Providing good quality, nutritious food
- Offering a model of provision that enhances the wellbeing of all children, especially those from poorer backgrounds.

3.13 Educating for child wellbeing: Whole Food Policies and existing guidance for practitioners in the EYFS

86. The EYFS is built around four themes underpinning effective practice in the care, development and learning of young children. These principles together underpin effective delivery of the EYFS and thus provide the overarching context for food provision.

87. EYFS principles are:

- A Unique Child - every child is a competent learner from birth who can be resilient, capable, confident and self-assured
- Positive Relationships - children learn to be strong and independent from a base of loving and secure relationships with parents and/or a key person
- Enabling Environments - the environment plays a key role in supporting and extending children's development and learning
- Learning and Development - children develop and learn in different ways and at different rates and all areas of learning and development are equally important and inter-connected.

88. These four guiding principles put the legal requirements (including food and drink) into context, and describe the holistic and personalised way in which practitioners should support the development, learning and care of young children. Food and meal times should be promoted as enjoyable experiences where children and adults relax and enjoy each other's company – not as endurance tests or opportunities for solely getting the right fuel inside children. Children can also be involved in growing and harvesting the food served as well as eating it.

89. Practice cards support practitioners to plan appropriate activities based on the needs and interests of individual children. Principles into Practice card 1.4 Health and Well Being reminds practitioners that 'Being physically healthy is not simply about having nutritious food. It also includes having a clean and safe environment; appropriate clothes; healthcare; mental stimulation; access to the outdoors and loving relationships'. The practice card includes a section entitled 'Reflecting on Practice which asks practitioners to:

- Think about the food that your setting encourages children to enjoy.
- How do you encourage children to know about and choose healthy snacks?
- How are foods from different cultures presented to children – as a novelty or as something for which they may develop a taste?
- How do you help children to learn about the food chain and planting, growing, gathering, preparing and using different foods?

90. The EYFS Practice Guidance⁷⁹ situates the information and practice outlined on the EYFS 'Principles into practice cards' in the six areas of learning: Personal, Social and Emotional Development; Communication, Language and Literacy; Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy; Knowledge and Understanding of the World; Creative Development and Physical Development. Food and nutrition are seen as integral to wellbeing which falls under the core theme 'A Unique Child'. There are two case studies

taken from 'Learning, Playing and Interacting – Good Practice in the EYFS'⁷⁹ in Appendix 9.

3.14 Conclusions

91. The evidence presented clearly demonstrates the crucial role that food and drink provision plays in protecting children's current and future health, learning and development.

- Providing healthy, balanced and nutritious food and drink must remain a statutory component of the EYFS welfare requirements. Healthy food should be viewed as integral to the EYFS learning and development requirements, thus ensuring that young children are nourished adequately to achieve a healthy weight and are encouraged to eat well.
- There is a substantial prevalence of overweight and obesity in children under the age of five years. At the same time, provision of food energy in early years settings appears not to meet the estimated average energy requirements of children attending. In some instances this is because the food provided there is qualitatively more appropriate for older children and adults. There is no information describing how provision in early years settings relates to young children's overall dietary intake; however there is clearly a need to disseminate consistent and practical information about the type, quantity and quality of food young children need in order to enhance consistency of provision between settings and the home.
- Under provision of energy, carbohydrate and essential minerals such as iron and zinc co-exists with excessive provision of salt and sugars. This suggests that clear, practical guidance is required to explain what the current EYFS Regulations mean by 'healthy, balanced and nutritious'. Such clarification will help providers and practitioners meet the nutritional requirements of children in their care.
- The guidance should clearly define the type, frequency and amounts of foods that could be served. It should be disseminated to make it freely available and accessible to all early years settings (both regulated and unregulated), and to parents, to ensure that consistent advice and messages on healthy eating are conveyed.

4 Current status of food and drink provision in early years

92. The Panel was set up to gather, develop and consider evidence on the need for provision of improved food and nutrition guidance and/or standards for children aged 1 up to 5 years. It was tasked with consulting a range of early years providers and practitioners, local authorities, parents and children to gain their individual perspectives.

93. The Panel therefore undertook a range of fact-finding activities between March and September 2010 to inform its recommendations. This has provided useful insights that inform the recommendations. The process included:

- Submissions of evidence by stakeholders (Appendix 10)
- Open website posting of a voluntary, on-line feedback form aimed at all individuals working in early years settings and intended to gather their response to a summary of existing guidance developed by the School Food Trust⁸⁰ (Appendix 11)
- Voluntary, on-line questionnaire to be completed by a representative sample of early years practitioners (Appendix 12)
- Interviews with early years consultants from a representative sample of 15 local authorities (Appendix 13)
- Focus group discussions with early years providers, parents and children in a representative sample of six local authorities (Appendix 14)
- Interviews with 15 early years practitioners to establish information on procurement and finance (Appendix 15).

94. A summary of the findings from each of these data collection exercises can be found in the appendices specified above.

95. These six data collection exercises provided the Panel with an overview of the current status of, and some issues related to, food and drink provision in early years settings. The findings are grouped into themes and presented in this section as follows:

- Guidance and standards
- Provision and practice
- Training
- Monitoring
- Procurement and finance.

4.1 Strengths and weaknesses of the evidence base

96. The information available to the Panel through submissions of evidence and data collection has been valuable and has provided great insight into the provision of food and drink in the early years sector. It provides new evidence and strongly supports the anecdotal information and experiences shared by Panel members throughout their discussions. However, it is important to acknowledge some strengths and limitations associated with the methods used.

97. The Panel received 35 submissions of evidence, 98 responses to the voluntary on-line feedback form and 92 responses to the voluntary on-line practitioners' questionnaire (4.4% response rate). These are low response rates. There are several factors which could have attributed to the low response rate of the on-line practitioners questionnaire: as a consequence of the timetable imposed on the Panel it was necessarily distributed at an unfavourable time of year for early year settings (the first two weeks of the new autumn term); not all early years settings have access to IT

facilities or are familiar with completing an on-line questionnaire; and finally no incentives were offered.

98. The sampling method used for the online practitioners questionnaire ensured that a nationally representative sample of early years practitioners was targeted. Because completion of the on-line feedback form (Appendix 11) was entirely voluntary, the responses are likely to reflect the views of those with an interest in this aspect of their work. Consequently, the results may not reflect the views of practitioners as a whole. The findings from these two questionnaires are nevertheless similar, providing a measure of internal validity and confidence in the findings.

99. It is important to note that the information gathered, particularly from the local authority interviews (Appendix 13) reflects the current situation within local authorities. It may not apply in the future if local authority structures are reformed.

100. The research into procurement and finance of food and drink provision in early years settings (Appendix 15) was not quantitative. Thus it may not provide information representative of a broader population. Amongst the individuals interviewed there was very little awareness of the costs of providing food and drink in early years settings; the majority of practitioners interviewed were unable to provide specific information on current spend on food and drink per child, per meal or on the associated costs of labour and facilities.

101. The research reports submitted to the Panel in response to its open call for evidence carry some caveats such as small sample sizes and limited coverage. The survey by LACORS⁷⁶ was conducted in private nurseries only, and half of the research we received was from one geographical area of the country. The results from these studies may not be representative of all early years settings across the country though many similarities were observed.

102. Despite the methodological limitations described, consistent responses were obtained from different audiences. Taken together the findings provide a strong evidence base for the recommendations made in this report.

4.2 Views on guidance and standards

103. All the evidence gathered suggests a lack of awareness and use of existing published authoritative guidance relevant to provision of healthy food and drink in early years settings. For example, 44% of practitioners stated that they rely on their individual experiences to plan menus. This was supported by findings from a research project carried out in Southampton that found early years settings were planning menus based solely on their own knowledge.⁸¹ Where guidance was being used it was often inappropriate for 1-4 year olds: for example over half of the local authorities interviewed, and a number of examples of guidance submitted to the Panel, were based on the Eatwell plate.²⁵ This does not depict a dietary pattern appropriate for children below the age of five years. Almost all 91% of the individuals who responded to the question 'How useful was the existing guidance?' stated that the summary of existing guidance on food and drink provision in early years settings was either 'very', or 'quite' useful. The most popular sections were those on 'healthy food and drink for children aged from 1-4 years', 'examples of foods to avoid' and 'links to references and further information'.

104. Early years practitioners, local authorities and parents all wanted more guidance on how settings might provide healthy food and drink though the proportion responding

to the question 'Would you like further guidance on food and drink provision in early years settings?' varied by stakeholder:

- 13 out of the 15 local authorities interviewed said yes even though five out of the 15 had already developed their own food and nutrition guidance.
- Half of respondents answering the voluntary on-line feedback form (Appendix 11) reported they would like more guidance.
- A third of practitioners responding to the on-line questionnaire (Appendix 12) also reported they would like more guidance.
- All of the practitioners and parents in the focus groups (Appendix 14) said they would like more guidance.

105. Although the evidence shows that the summary of existing guidance for food and drink provision in early years settings was useful for the vast majority of respondents, the responses to the practitioners' questionnaire suggested that some settings were already using and were satisfied with existing guidance. The majority of local authorities interviewed and practitioners and parents involved in the focus groups strongly supported the need for more guidance to be made available. A respondent from one local authority said:

"EYFS states that children should be provided with healthy balanced and nutritious snacks and drinks, but we need to specify what this is"

106. It was evident that any future guidance on food and drink should be clear, concise, consistent, universal, practical (e.g. include portion size information and example menus) and accessible to all.

107. The local authorities interviewed stated that guidance on food and drink should be national as it

"[...]carries more gravitas than regional and would be taken more seriously"

108. The parents interviewed in focus groups were very surprised that there was no statutory regulation to ensure settings provided appropriate nutrition and healthy food. As one parent stated:

"That beggars belief, it simply doesn't make sense."

The general view of parents with older children was that they were aware that this was in place for schools and they felt this should be extended to early years settings. One parent pointed out that should be an obvious priority of Ofsted. She said:

"These will be children of the future in 10 or 15 years time and it would be normal to understand nutrition if it were fed in now."

Another parent commented that:

"The child's primary perception is through the mouth and therefore eating is a crucial part of development."

She went on to state:

"It's as important as reading and writing."

109. Stakeholders were asked if they felt the guidance should be made compulsory for all early years settings. Forty per cent of practitioners and 13 of the 15 local authorities interviewed agreed with this statement. Most practitioners and parents in the focus groups also felt that statutory nutritional guidelines might be beneficial but some practitioners had concerns that it might discourage settings from providing food at all. Practitioners and parents cited the possibility of increased cost as the main reason for this concern. Parents also raised a concern that they do not want to feel they are being told what to feed their children.

110. Local authorities made the following statements about compulsory guidance for early years settings:

“The fact that there is legislation for school age children makes it seem slightly silly that our most vulnerable children have no legislation”

“Access to fresh drinking water in the EYFS has been a really useful pointer to focus on for development work in settings. There is very little legislation of statutory requirements, and consequently we have very little responsibility to hold”

111. Much of the local guidance^{82 83 84 85 86 87 88 89} submitted to the Panel in response to its call for evidence was linked to training courses and often associated with award schemes. The Panel recognised training as key to interpretation and implementation of guidance. It also recognised that awards can be valued by settings in recognition of their achievements.

4.3 Food and drink provision and practice

112. The evidence collected on food and drink provision and practice in early years settings shows that a large number of settings and individuals working in these settings are engaged in providing some food (either meals or snacks) for children in their care. Seventy per cent of individuals responding to the on-line feedback form (Appendix 11) had either a written, or unwritten food policy and a number of healthy award schemes have been developed locally based on the National Healthy Schools Programme (NHSP). It was clear from the focus groups that although parents were not aware of the food policies within early years settings they were aware that the settings had a ‘healthy’ policy. One parent said:

“Healthy, healthy, healthy. I am very unsure of the policy in the Café but I do know that the policy at the nursery is to give healthy food, but I am not aware of where the policy is.”

113. Seven research reports^{76 77 78 81 90 91 92} were submitted to the Panel which show the current status of food and drink provision and practice in England. The results from three pieces of research^{76 77 78} have been outlined in section 3.11 They consistently show that settings want to provide healthy food and drink but paradoxically do not often meet the nutritional requirements of the children attending.

114. Two studies carried out in Liverpool^{77 78} looked at the provision of food and drink in early years settings. The main findings were:

- There was little knowledge of a healthy diet for children under the age of five and for those that had little knowledge there was a lack of awareness of any available guidance to support them with this

- Menus do not meet the Caroline Walker Trust (CWT) guidelines⁵⁵
- Settings often relied on pre-packaged foods.

115. Submissions of evidence indicate that a number of areas have developed healthy award schemes. The Panel see this as a positive step though there can be drawbacks. In particular much time has to be invested by health professionals to monitor settings and ensure they are developing or maintaining their provision to meet set criteria associated with the award. This issue is considered further in Appendix 10.

116. The interviews with local authorities show a lack of uniform local structures to take responsibility of practices associated with the provision of food and drink in early years settings. However, it was encouraging to find that local authorities had good relationships and links with their local Primary Care Trust (PCT) which enabled them to acquire specialist food and nutrition advice when required. Local authorities would often draw on the expertise of a range of health professionals including public health nutritionists, dietitians and oral health specialists.

117. The quantity and type of evidence submitted to the Panel proves how dedicated the early years sector are to providing nutritionally appropriate meals and snacks to the children in their care. However, it also shows that current efforts may not be sufficient, and further investment is required.

4.4 Training about early years food and drink provision

118. The Panel was tasked with examining training needs, current scope, and methods of delivering training relevant to provision of healthy food and drink in early years settings. Training was defined by the Panel as providing instruction and practice for all relevant staff (including nursery owners, managers, caterers, midday supervisors and child minders and others responsible for early years services) to ensure they are able to implement successfully the guidelines or standards.

119. The Trust's preliminary review¹⁰ highlighted an absence of accredited qualifications available for early years catering staff and gaps in the National Occupational Standards relevant to early years settings. The Panel recognised that some training is fundamental to the successful implementation of guidance and/or standards. For a transformation in food and drink provision and practice to take place, it will be essential for all staff (nursery owners, managers, caterers, child minders and others responsible for early years services) to have access to appropriate information and training on how to implement the guidance and/or standards so that they are well informed and empowered to deliver appropriate provision and practice.

120. A number of organisations have suggested that training in food, nutrition and healthy eating should be mandatory for all early years workers, as part of commissioning policy.⁹³ Others have suggested that this staff training should be the responsibility of the Department for Education (DfE).⁷⁴

121. The Panel consulted with the Children's Workforce Development Council (CWDC) to gather information on the new Level 3 qualification. The Level 3 Diploma for Children and Young People's workforce qualification which the CWDC has developed contains a mandatory learning outcome unit about food and nutrition. This requires candidates taking the early years pathway to 'understand how to ensure children in their early years receive high quality, balanced nutrition to meet their growth and development

needs'. The assessment criteria which underpin the units include the following: plan balanced meals, snacks and drinks for children in their early years, following current government guidance on nutritional needs; recognise why it is important to follow the carer's instructions in respect of a child's food allergies or intolerances; identify balanced meals, snacks and drinks for children in their early years following current government guidance on nutritional needs; describe methods of educating children and adults in effective food management.

122. The single Level 3 Diploma for Children and Young People's Workforce (early years pathway) qualification was introduced in September 2010. This is the only qualification that CWDC grants to assure occupational competence in the Qualification and Credited Framework (QCF). All existing Level 3 full and relevant qualifications (for example National Vocational Qualifications (NVQs) or current equivalents) will still meet the requirements of the National Minimum Standards (NMS) but the new Level 3 has been developed for future learners entering the early years workforce. The Panel considered the structure of the Level 3 Diploma for Children and Young People's Workforce as illustrated in Appendix 3, Figure 2 and Figure 3. The CWDC also mapped the current food and nutrition content within the Level 2 and Level 3 qualification as outlined in Appendix 3, Table 2 and Table 3.

123. The Panel considered the current learning outcomes of the core and optional units of Level 3 qualification. It recommends that the food and nutrition content of the CWDC Level 3 qualification should be a core element to ensure that all providers and practitioners have the knowledge and skills to interpret and implement the strengthened guidance. Inclusion as core unit will ensure that practitioners and providers receive sufficient training to provide the 'consistent sound advice' identified as the main need of the early years workforce. It was noted that the unit outline is broad. In the 'Caring for babies' module, there was no reference to breastfeeding and supporting families to continue whilst in childcare – something that early years settings are required to support. It was also highlighted that practitioners must 'be able to provide for the nutritional needs for babies less than 18 months', but for children aged from 18 months to 36 months they just have to 'understand how to provide for the nutritional needs'. This begs a question as to whether "understanding" is sufficient to enable provision for children over 18 months. It will be necessary after the guidance has been developed and tested to have a further dialogue with the awarding bodies such as CACHE and Edexcel who develop the materials for the Level 3 qualification to ensure that any further training on food and nutrition is appropriately supported by resources and delivered by suitably qualified professionals such as registered public health nutritionists or dietitians who have relevant experience of working within the sector.

124. The Panel received seven submissions of evidence relating to training courses on food and nutrition for early years settings.^{94 95 96 97 98 99 100} This suggested variation in the availability of, access to, and attendance on training courses related to food and nutrition provision. The content and delivery of some of the training courses needs further evaluation. See Appendix 10 for details.

125. An evaluation of a training programme⁷⁸ conducted in Merseyside and Cheshire showed that the training course improved the knowledge of the individuals attending it. This was accompanied by a move to provision of food and drink more appropriate for the needs of the children attending the settings involved in the programme.

126. Nearly half (43.9%) of the practitioners questioned reported they had received no training in food and nutrition. The practitioners taking part in the focus groups also identified training as a factor constraining their ability to provide healthy food and drink in their settings. Research carried out in Southampton showed practitioners had a lack of awareness of training opportunities. Difficulties in being released from the setting to attend training was cited by practitioners as a barrier.⁸¹

127. Responses to the on-line practitioners' questionnaire from those who had attended a training course on food and nutrition showed that 50% had attended training provided by the local authority. In contrast, the practitioners taking part in the focus groups identified limited training provided by the local authority. Interviews with local authorities highlighted that within the majority of local authorities the organisation and provision of training on food and nutrition for early years settings falls with either the Workforce Development Team (WDT) or the School Improvement Team (SIT). Currently local authorities reported being able to provide training that is either free or subsidised; half day sessions cost around £5 and full day sessions £20. Local authorities indicated that this may in the future be compromised by budgetary restrictions. It was noted that Section 13 of the Childcare Act 2006¹⁰¹ requires local authorities to secure the provision of information, advice and training, whether delivered by themselves or by others, to meet the needs of local providers and support sufficiency of childcare provision. This provision includes training and support in meeting the requirements of the EYFS.¹⁰² Local authorities indicated training provision is usually related to current needs. For example, a training course would be developed if a number of Ofsted inspections in their area highlighted issues around food and drink provision, and settings would be encouraged to attend and share good practice.

128. Local authorities provide training and professional development support to many private, voluntary and independent (PVI) providers and also work with a range of PVI organisations on joint EYFS training as well as commissioning bespoke training from them.

129. Each of the third sector national early year bodies has also developed its own food and nutrition course tailored to the needs of its constituents. For example the Pre-School Learning Alliance offers a six-hour workshop to help staff to promote healthy eating and nutritional best practice in early years settings. NCMA has recently developed an online 'Home-based unit' as part of the Level 3 Diploma for the Children's Workforce. E-learning is offered as an option for completing the course alongside traditional class tutoring and distance learning options. Take up of the e-learning unit has been encouraging. The majority of home-based providers have access to IT facilities with 77 per cent of NCMA's members saying they have access to the internet.¹⁰³

130. Training programmes that incorporate food and nutrition have been developed by other organisations including BTEC National Certificate in Early Years. In addition, Sustain/London Early Years Foundation and Good Food Training for London (a School FEAST centre) are designing and piloting a Level 3 qualification for cooks working in nurseries and children's centres. The School Food Trust has worked with the Training Development Agency (TDA) for Schools to develop new units for the Level 2 'Certificate in Supporting the Wider Curriculum in Schools' qualification. These units include

‘supporting children and young people at meal or snack time in schools’ and could be adapted in line with the guidance the Panel has suggested for the early years workforce.

131. Current food and nutrition courses for early years practitioners mentioned by local authorities include HENRY (Health Exercise Nutrition for the Really Young Programme) The HENRY training programme focuses on four areas: parenting and relationship skills: healthy eating (nutrition and eating habits),: physical activity and emotional wellbeing. Local authorities also offered training on a wide range of topics including: breast feeding; weaning; oral health, food hygiene; providing healthy food on a budget (for parents, carers and staff) and practical cookery courses. Another local authority mentioned the ‘Healthy Conversation Training’ provided by the University of Southampton. This course helps practitioners approach parents and steer them into finding their own answers through conversation.

132. The above evidence suggests that training needs to be flexible, affordable and accessible to meet the diverse needs of settings and the workforce. It also needs to be delivered through academically accredited routes.

4.5 Monitoring

133. The interviews with local authority early years consultants (Appendix 13) explored the methods used to monitor food and drink provision in early years settings. Maintained nurseries and nursery classes within primary schools were found to be more closely monitored than other early years settings as they are likely to be part of Healthy School Schemes. Currently, food and drink provision in other early years settings may not be monitored at all. Even where processes exist monitoring seems to be performed only on an *ad hoc* basis.

134. Local authorities highlighted that where monitoring or auditing had been carried out, positive outcomes had been achieved. Some of the views expressed are captured in the following quotations:

“Regular contact via monitoring with and between settings has led to creating uniform best practice guidelines for example the availability of water at all times”

“Monitoring has helped to incorporate food and drink in the setting's annual improvement plan”

“Auditing settings' food and drink provision has led to frequent target for settings for example developing their snack time. This is an example of how a holistic approach to food supports children's independence. This is a fairly common practice in most LAs but we often get resistance to change. We use the results of audits from other settings to help those settings reach that point, i.e. peer-to-peer support”

135. The submissions of evidence identified the monitoring process as one of the strengths of the Healthy Award schemes in early years settings (Appendix 10). All the award schemes submitted to the Panel adopted a self-assessment approach to achieving the award criteria. Although this might be perceived by some as burdensome it was generally considered a useful mechanism for continuous improvement in the quality of provision.

136. Parents in the focus groups felt that food and drink provision in early years settings should be monitored by Ofsted.

4.6 Procurement and finances

137. Economists from the DfE economists were commissioned to undertake an 'in house' small-scale qualitative study to gain insight into the way in which the procurement and financing of food provision is organised in various early years settings (Appendix 15). Although this piece of research was relatively small and gave no quantitative information it highlighted that there was great variation in the procedures adopted by early years settings, not only in terms of finance and procurement but also with regard to facilities and staffing. Settings did not include reference to the pricing of food and drink in their food policies nor did they have much knowledge of the full economic costs associated with food and drink provision.

138. The scale of food provision varied significantly in the settings surveyed. These ranged from an independent childminder providing meals for one child to a nursery catering for up to 140 children per day, so arrangements and facilities for the cooking of food varied considerably. With the exception of childminders who prepared the food for the children in their care, meals were predominantly catered in-house, usually by dedicated cooks and kitchen staff. In a few cases non-catering staff were also involved with food provision. Lunchtime supervisors might, for example assist catering staff or carers with snacks or baby food and re-heating previously prepared food.

139. The majority of providers preparing hot food on site had purpose-built kitchens. Childminders used their own home kitchens. In most settings meals were eaten in individual nursery rooms, with the children sitting together around the classroom tables which were cleared and cleaned for meal times.

140. The interviews showed that many early years settings were not able to estimate specific costs for food and drink provision or any associated costs such as labour and facilities. There were several variations in the way in which food and drink costs were covered and these reflected the type of setting. For example, in local authority maintained nurseries the cost of a meal was covered by the local authority and parents were asked to contribute to the cost of snacks. However, private, voluntary and independent providers all funded food and drink from the fees charged.

141. Only five settings could provide any specific information on food and drink spend per child per day. This ranged from £1.45-£5.00 and covered a different number of meals and snacks in each setting. Respondents were better able to report the charge per day per child. These ranged from 13p for a biscuit, 50p for a snack to £5.00 per day for a mid-morning snack, lunch and tea.

142. None of the settings interviewed could use the early education entitlement funding to purchase food, as this is not permitted. They also stated that they are not allowed to charge top-up fees to cover cost of food and drink. As a result they have had to absorb these costs of food and drink or ask parents to provide a packed lunch. This might impact particularly on low-income families. Although current statutory guidance states

that 'providers can make a reasonable charge for meals provided to children during the day', local authorities are legally required to secure free provision. This requires them to ensure that providers do not place any conditions of access on the entitlement, including payment for meals.

143. The coalition Government has now increased the number of hours of free nursery education entitlement and made the entitlement flexible. This could mean that a greater number of children eat a meal in an early years setting increasing cost pressures on food.

144. Respondents to the practitioner's questionnaire and practitioners who took part in the focus groups identified cost as the main barrier to providing healthy food and drink in their settings. It is interesting to note that practitioners in these focus groups who provided healthy food and drink were able to do this relatively cheaply and did not feel that cost should be a barrier.

145. There was wide variation in the way settings procured food. Some settings purchased from supermarkets or cash-and-carry outlets, while others used only smaller local shops. Some settings used both. Local shops included greengrocers, fishmongers, butchers and a farm shop. Two settings grew their own vegetables onsite, encouraging the children to get involved with the planting, picking and preparation of vegetables. In these cases additional vegetables were purchased from external sources

146. The evidence highlights the importance of providing guidance on procuring healthy food at low costs. This is necessary to overcome a perception that cost is a barrier to healthy food and drink provision.

4.7 Conclusions

- The evidence submitted to and collected by the Panel demonstrated a need for clear, practical and ambiguous guidance on the provision of food and drink in early years settings. This view was strongly expressed by all respondents including providers, practitioners, parents, and those involved in evaluation and inspection.
- It was felt equally strongly that the provision of healthy, balanced and nutritious food and drink must remain a statutory component of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EFYS) welfare requirements.
- Guidance must be accessible to all providers, parents, and those involved in evaluation and monitoring if it is to be consistently applied. Respondents particularly recognised the key role of parents and the need for partnership working with them to embed good and consistent practice.
- Training is needed to underpin the consistent implementation of guidance across all early years settings. Food and nutrition education (including relevant aspects of health and safety) should form a core component of all training for early years providers and practitioners. It should be accessible, flexible and affordable. Where possible, it should build on existing programmes, and all courses should be accredited.
- Evaluation and monitoring will be an important aspect when implementing new guidance. It nurtures engagement with delivery of provision of healthy food and

drink, and helps to ensure that provision is reaching a minimum standard across all early years settings.

- The costs of provision, procurement, training and evaluation need to be more clearly elucidated in order to maximise efficiencies. Routes to available financial support need to be better highlighted and the EYFS review should examine these closely.
- Comprehensive information is needed on the national provision, consumption, and procurement of food and drink in early years settings, and on the implementation of guidance, training, evaluation, monitoring and finances needed to support more consistent delivery of healthy food.

5 Food and nutrition guidance and standards

5.1 The development of Guidance

147. The Panel was asked to consider whether further guidance or standards are needed in early years settings and, if so, to offer options which might replace those in the current EYFS Statutory Framework (see paragraph 29). The Panel's decision was based on a review of existing standards and guidance, evidence collected on behalf of the Panel, and a wider consideration of the extent to which the nutritional needs of children attending early years settings were being met.

148. The Panel recognises from the evidence submitted that:

- Existing DfE guidance was not providing the information sought by practitioners nor having a clear impact on the quality and quantity of food and drink being provided in early years settings
- Numerous practitioners and catering providers are working towards more detailed and comprehensive guidance for their own services
- There is room for improvement in the provision of food and drink in early years settings.

149. The Panel considered the development of school meal standards, as set out in 'Turning the Tables', the report of the School Meals Review Panel.¹⁰⁴ It also reviewed the CWT nutrient-based standards described in 'Eating well for under 5s in childcare',⁵⁵ in addition to the evidence already set out in chapter 4. Current guidance for food and drink provision in early years settings has been summarised on the School Food Trust website.⁸⁰

5.2 Principles underpinning recommendations

150. Before proceeding to the development of guidance or standards to be recommended, it was necessary for the Panel to make explicit the principles underpinning their development. In broad terms, the recommendations from the Panel were framed to address the following:

- The wellbeing of the child should be at the centre of all recommendations. Recommendations should recognise and be consistent with meeting the developmental needs of children as embodied in the EYFS framework.
- Recommendations should ideally be very practical in nature, and not depend on specialist knowledge or resources.
- Recommendations should take into account the diversity of early year settings. This is evident in the variation in developmental stage attained; the social, cultural and ethnic context; and the duration of attendance encountered.
- Training relating to implementation of the guidance or standards should be accessible and affordable for the target audience.
- Practitioners should be able to evaluate their own practice. This should be achievable within every early years setting, and should relate explicitly to external monitoring processes.

151. Guidance or standards on food and nutrition should ideally be:

- Based on best current evidence for healthy nutrition in young children; based on foods and portion sizes which ensure the provision meets the nutritional requirements of young children.

- Capable of implementation by practitioners in every early years setting (from childminders to reception classes in primary schools) without specialist knowledge or equipment.
- Informed by current best practice and the experiences of early years practitioners.
- Achievable,^f allowing a wide range of foods and drinks to be served appropriate to the needs of all children, taking into account their developmental stage and their social, cultural or ethnic background.
- Supported by practical tools that enable implementation by all those associated with early years settings (early years staff, support workers, health professionals, volunteers, parents and guardians).
- Appropriate to enable every child to satisfy their individual learning needs relating to experiencing a variety of food tastes and textures, mealtime experiences, and socialization, appropriate to age and developmental stage.

5.3 Existing policies guidance and best practice covering food and drink provision for children under five years old

152. There were many existing policies and pieces of guidance about food and drink provision for children from birth up to the age of five years that had to be considered in recommending guidance. These relate to both the home and early years settings. These policies and the sources are listed in Appendix 16.

153. The Panel considered these and included them in the recommended guidance where appropriate. The Panel acknowledges that guidance on feeding children under one year of age already exists and decided it could not make recommendations to improve this existing guidance (see paragraph 6). It points out the importance of ensuring that infant feeding advice is consistent both with any guidance that might be introduced and with the other information that settings and families may receive. This point is highlighted in the rationale provided for Recommendation 4.

154. The Panel identified several issues as key to best practice and these are summarised in Appendix 17. They included:

- Making sure food is appropriately textured during the weaning process
- Offering finger foods to infants
- Drinking from a cup
- Offering a varied diet
- Ensuring meals and snacks are appropriately timed
- Following food hygiene and food safety guidance

155. Some of these are specified in the guidance outlined in Appendix 19.

^f Experience suggests that current salt targets for children under five years are difficult to consistently adhere to and are a population goal. The guidance recommended by the Panel will allow settings to consistently adhere to 125% population target.

5.4 Review of options for more detailed standards/guidance for food and drink in early years settings:

156. The Panel considers the provision of food and drink that meets the nutritional requirements of children to be very important in protecting the current and future health of all young children. Therefore the Panel agreed that the welfare requirements around food and drink should remain in place.

157. The 'do nothing' option (simply leaving in place the existing EYFS regulations) was considered but dismissed by the Panel because the evidence collected clearly showed that current food and drink provision in early years settings is inadequate. Recommendations need to be strengthened to provide a clear, concise and practical definition of a 'healthy, balanced and nutritious diet'.

158. Seven options were considered for developing more detailed standards/guidance for food in early years settings. Appendix 18 appraises each of these in detail, listing the advantages and disadvantages and ranking them in order of priority for consideration by the Panel. The priority ratings were subjective, but show which options the Panel felt most closely satisfied the principles set out in paragraph 151. The seven options are briefly summarised below:

Option 1 - Narrative extension of the current EYFS Framework. The current welfare requirements for food and drink could be extended with further explanation and detail in a narrative format. This was considered to have limited value as there would be insufficient detail to provide an adequate basis for guidance.

Option 2 - Food-based standards. These would suggest the types of food and drinks that are appropriately served throughout the day. For example it could be suggested that all main meals should contain two portions of fruit and vegetables. Food-based standards provide suitable detail about provision of foods in specified food groups but even with menu plans, detailed guidance on portion sizes and food composition would be required in order to ensure nutritionally balanced provision across the day. This option was accorded low to medium priority for further consideration.

Option 3- Food-based standards with more detailed specifications for specific foods and ingredients. Food-based standards could be expanded to list particular ingredients or foods which should not be served in early years settings, or which must comply with certain compositional standards. By being more specific about which foods to include or exclude, the likelihood of balanced provision across a number of settings increases. This was considered a medium priority for consideration, as more detail regarding menu plans, and recipes were thought likely to be helpful.

Option 4 - Food-based standards, specifications for foods and ingredients and specified serving size/amounts. This extends the concept of food-based standards and requires providers to show that they are following guideline portion sizes that achieve the balance of foods in the diet in the right proportion to meet nutritional requirements. This idea of using portion size and food type can be seen in the menu planner programme 'little people's plates'.¹⁰⁵ The specification of food type (e.g. through Target Nutrient Specifications (TNS))⁹ could benefit the provision of appropriate levels of salt, fat and sugar but may complicate procurement and monitoring. This raises the importance of the need for supporting software, self-monitoring and associated training. This option was accorded a medium to high priority for consideration, as more detail regarding portion sizes would be helpful.

⁹ Target nutrient specifications for manufactured foods which provide target maximum values for total fat, saturated fat, total sugar and salt for manufactured products and target minimum values for protein for certain manufactured vegetarian products.

Option 5 - Food-based standards, specifications for foods and ingredients and specified serving size/amounts based on a nutrient framework. In addition to food-based standards and some restriction on ingredients and foods to be used in early years settings, nutrient-based standards could be used as a framework to ensure the types of foods and portion sizes are likely to meet nutritional needs appropriately. This was considered a high priority for consideration as application of the nutrient-based framework to plan menus would improve the balance of food provision in different settings across the day and would complement menu plans and portion size recommendations.

Option 6 - Food-based standards, specifications for foods and ingredients and nutrient-based standards. This applies the model for current school food standards with enhanced specification of ingredients and foods for early years. Providers need to ensure that they meet food-based standards and that menus achieve, on average over a period of a week or more, a set of nutrient-based standards which are based on the current recommended energy and nutrient intakes for children aged from 1 up to 5 years. Standards such as the CWT⁵⁵ standards fit this model. Scottish guidance¹² has nutrient-based standards as appendices and Welsh standards¹¹ use CWT⁵⁵ nutrient-based guidance for menu planning examples. This was considered a medium priority for consideration; while it increases specificity of recommendations regarding amounts of energy and nutrients appropriate to each type of meal, it complicates the management of cross-setting provision and monitoring. It also raises issues about the appropriateness of provision by age and activity level within mixed groups whose demographic composition may vary from day-to-day. Furthermore it would not easily lend itself to monitoring of compliance.

Option 7 - Nutrient-based standards alone. This would allow menus to be compiled from any foods, providing that the overall balance of the menu met the average energy and nutrient requirements of children aged 1 up to 5 years (Appendix 22). This was considered a low priority for consideration since, although it potentially increases flexibility of provision, it may not be appropriate for all settings and so it is difficult to monitor. Menu planning to ensure the appropriateness of provision across the day would place an additional burden on providers.

5.4.1 Modelling menus to test different guidance options

159. To inform discussions around the amount and type of food-based guidance that was needed, the Panel undertook some menu modelling to test different formats for the guidance. They modelled:

- Food-based guidance alone
- Food-based guidance with additional portion size information
- Food-based guidance with additional portion size information and specific guidance around some meals and snacks and foods to be included on a weekly basis, using data taken from menus planned using nutrient-based standards.

160. The modelling exercise showed that the guidance should combine food-based guidance with information about portion sizes and particular foods and snacks that were selected from menus met a nutrient framework. The list of foods to avoid, limit or restrict was drawn from existing guidance for early years and from knowledge of foods that would not allow menus to meet nutrient-based standards (for example because they are too high in salt or sugar content). Once theoretical menu plans had been devised based on the guidance, it was field-tested in a range of early years settings (see section 5.6 A sample menu that meets the guidance is given in Appendix 20.

161. In modelling the guidance, and reflecting on evidence submitted to the Panel, it was clear that there were several foods and practices for which it would be appropriate to provide specific guidance. These are listed below, together with the rationale for the guidance agreed by the Panel.

5.4.2 Using half size primary school meal portions for nursery units

162. Evidence was submitted suggesting that half size primary portions were often used where early years settings had food provided by a primary school kitchen. The School Food Trust did a nutritional analysis of typical half portion sizes of an average school lunch over a period of a week. The nutritional analysis showed that providing half size portions of primary school meals that meet the school food regulations would not provide sufficient energy, carbohydrate, iron or zinc for children aged 1 up to 5 years. The Panel strongly discourage this approach to provision. The results of this modelling exercise can be found in Appendix 21.

5.4.3 Ensuring menus are nutrient sufficient

163. In order to correct some of the nutrient shortfalls that occurred when menus were modelled with food-based and portion sized guidance alone, a number of additional pieces of guidance specific to meals and snacks were agreed by the Panel. These have been included in the guidance recommended in Appendix 19 and are also summarised below:

- A good variety of breakfast options is needed to ensure that this meal offers sufficient zinc and vitamin A, and is not too high in salt
- Snacks should include a carbohydrate food or dairy food and fruit and/or vegetables. They should be varied across the week to ensure that they provide sufficient iron and are not too high in salt
- Main meals in most settings will be a main course and a dessert. Children should be offered main meals at lunchtime and at teatime in childcare settings if these meals are the main providers of food energy and nutrients to children during these parts of the day
- Portion sizes at teatime need to be sufficient to meet energy needs and a good variety of foods should be offered. Meals should always include meat, fish, egg, beans or another source of non-dairy protein
- Main meals should use ingredients low in salt, and flavour should come from using good quality ingredients, herbs and spices. Salt should not be added when cooking food or at the table.
- A good variety of dishes that provide iron and zinc should be offered. Including at least two pulses and vegetable-based main meals in omnivorous menus and only one cheese-based main meal a week in vegetarian menus, will help to ensure menus provide the right balance of micronutrients.

5.4.4 Milk to offer in early years settings

164. The Panel considered the impact of choosing milks with different fat contents as the main milk drink on the energy and nutrient composition of menu plans and specific meal occasions. Current guidance states that children aged 1 to 2 years should be offered whole milk, but it is generally recommended that children aged 3 to 4 years can have semi-skimmed milk as their main milk drink if they eat well at meal times. Overall, replacing whole milk with semi-skimmed milk as the main milk drink or with cereals had

little impact on overall energy provision, but reduced provision of vitamin A by around 15%. Saturated fat provision fell by around 20%. The Panel agreed that:

- All children under the age of two should have whole milk for their main milk drink
- Where all children in early years settings are over three years of age, semi-skimmed milk is likely to be an appropriate option for the majority of children as the main milk drink.
- Where only one type of milk is served as the main milk drink to mixed age groups this should be whole milk.
- Skimmed milk and 1% milk should never be served as the main milk drink in early years settings.
- Additional advice on the choice of milk drinks for children under the age of five (including information on milk other than cow's milk) is given in Appendix 16.

5.4.5 Diluting 100% fruit juice when served with meals in early years settings

165. The Panel recommend that diluted 100% fruit juice or 100% fruit-based 'smoothies' are an appropriate option as a drink with main meals (lunch and tea). Fruit juice is unlikely to contribute to tooth decay and tooth erosion if consumed as part of a mixed meal and there is limited daily exposure to fruit sugars and fruit acid. There is, however, some debate about the dilution of fruit juice needed. The Panel considered the impact of a range of 100% fruit juice dilutions in menu models and concluded that a dilution of one part 100% fruit juice to one part tap water was appropriate when fruit juice is served with meals (for example, 50ml of fruit juice with 50ml of water added). It is recommended that children under five years are not given fruit juice (diluted or otherwise) between meals as this is linked to tooth decay and tooth erosion.¹⁷ Diluted 100% orange juice will provide a greater amount of vitamin C than diluted 100% apple juice or pineapple juice.

5.4.6 Encouraging moderate salt intakes in children aged 1 up to 5

166. The Panel acknowledged that the target for average salt intake recommended for each age group does not represent an optimal or ideal consumption level for infants and children but a population goal.²⁴ The menu modelling highlighted that the target for 1 up to 5 year olds was difficult to achieve, particularly if manufactured sauces and meat, fish or meat alternative processed products were used frequently and if sandwiches were regularly served as the main course for tea. Research submitted to the Panel^{76 77} also found that settings consistently failed to meet the CWT nutrient-based standard⁵⁵ for salt and this was often associated with the use of manufactured sauces and stocks. Current salt targets for 1 up to 5 year olds are difficult to achieve alongside all the other guidance for this age group and when using foods typically available that are good choices of other nutrients such as breads and cereals. The Panel agreed that it would be acceptable to set guidance allowing menus planned over a week or more to have a maximum of 125% of the current population target for salt for this age group at present.

5.4.7 Ensuring children in early years have enough – but not too much – fibre in the diet

167. The Panel considered the impact that higher fibre foods may have on children under the age of five since it is important that the diets of young children are energy

and nutrient dense when appetites are small and energy and nutrient needs relatively high. The Panel considered menu plans modelled with a variety of white and wholegrain cereal products (for example white, brown and wholemeal bread; white and brown rice and pasta) and concluded that a mixture of these products should be included in menu plans daily and over a period of a week. Using a combination of products will allow children to try different tastes and textures but will not create diets which are too bulky.

5.4.8 Including oily fish in menu plans

168. There is currently a food-based standard that requires primary and secondary school lunches to provide oily fish once every three weeks across a menu cycle. This recommendation originated from the Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition (SACN) which endorsed 'the population recommendation to eat two portions of fish per week, of which one should be oily'.¹⁰⁶ On the basis that school lunches should supply about one third of a child's energy requirement, the SMRP¹⁰⁴ concluded that it seemed reasonable to suggest that school lunches should only need to supply one third of a child's oily fish requirements i.e. a third of a portion per week or one portion per three weeks. This recommendation also reflected concerns about the sustainability of fish supplies.

169. The Panel agreed that it was sensible to extend this recommendation to early years so that children become accustomed to the taste of oily fish. It is important to note that oily fish contribute other important nutrients as part of a balanced diet. The Panel agreed that early years settings should recommend that providers buy and source oily fish (and all fish) from sustainable stocks. Advice on how settings can consider environmental issues in the food they buy is provided in Appendix 23.

5.4.9 Food-based standards within a nutrient framework: rationale for recommendation

170. After due consideration of all the evidence submitted and the modelling work undertaken, the Panel concluded that the most helpful model on which to base guidance for early years settings would incorporate food-based standards within a nutrient framework. This approach ensures the provision of key nutrients by providing variety in the amounts and types of food offered, without burdening individual settings with calculations to ensure nutrient-based standards are met.

171. Childcare provision in England is varied in setting type, the number of children looked after at one time, and the resources and facilities available to providers. From the submissions received and the evidence collected, the most important aspects of guidance for this group are practical support, advice and examples. The most useful guidance would therefore be that which clearly describes the types of foods and drinks, and amounts of each that will, on average, provide children from 1 up to 5 years with the amounts of energy and nutrients they require.

172. The nutrient framework used to underpin the food-based standards comprised: energy and the nutrients protein, total fat, total carbohydrate, non-milk extrinsic sugars (added sugars), vitamin A, vitamin C, iron, calcium, zinc and sodium (salt). The Panel agreed that if menus are planned around the levels recommended for these key nutrients, all other nutrients are likely to be present in amounts that meet requirements. There are no specific recommendations in the United Kingdom which specify the proportion of dietary energy that children aged one up to five years should receive from fat, but most are likely to be able to eat well with a proportion similar to the 35% suggested for the rest of the population if they follow the guidance proposed by the Panel. An amount close to this has therefore been suggested here.

5.5 Development of guidance for food-based standards within a nutrient framework

173. The aim of guidance on food and drink provision is to ensure that children are offered a choice of meals and snacks that will meet their nutritional needs, as well as being interesting and varied in taste, colour, flavour and texture. Children's patterns of attendance in early years settings are considerably varied. For example, a child might be in one setting for just an hour, be in a setting for the entire day, or attend multiple settings throughout the day or week. It is therefore important that guidance provides practical approaches to the provision of food to ensure that menus are balanced across the whole day. In practice, this means that menu plans should set out meals, snacks and drinks which could be offered in a given setting at a given time of day, but which across the whole day will provide a healthy balance that will help to meet the nutritional needs of each child.

174. A suggested set of food-based guidance (with menus and portion sizes) that meets the nutrient requirements of the average 1 up to 5 year old is provided in Appendix 19. The guidance is set out by food group and by meal type and describes the importance of each food group, foods to include, suggested portion sizes and the frequency of which to include them as well as foods to avoid or limit. It also gives some specific meal, snack and food-based guidance to simplify implementation. The potential to achieve standardised intakes using this flexible approach is desirable and should ensure that some of the commonly reported inadequacies in nutrient provision can be overcome. A sample one-week menu listing all meals and snacks required to meet the food based guidance and the average energy and nutrient requirements for 1 up to 5 year old children is included in Appendix 19. This demonstrates how the guidance could be put into practice.

175. Early years providers would not be expected to prove that the foods and drinks served over a period of a week or more meet nutrient-based standards. They would, however, be expected to offer the types and amounts of food and drink outlined in Appendix 19, and demonstrate, if asked, that they had done so. If providers choose not to offer these types of foods and drinks they would be expected to show how their menus had been developed to meet the nutrient requirements of children of this age and/or explain why the foods and drinks offered varied from the foods and drinks recommended. One of the aims of the guidance was to ensure that providers could monitor their food provision themselves. The guidance is thus designed to aid providers in planning menus and facilitate comparison between the menus compiled and the guidance that has been developed. A checklist to help settings check their menus meet the guidance; this may be found at the back of the guidance in Appendix 19.

5.6 Evaluating the guidance: feedback from early years settings

176. The guidance compiled by the Panel aims to provide early years settings with advice on the types and amounts of foods and drinks to serve to children aged from 1 up to 5 years and to provide examples of meals and snacks that fulfil this guidance. The guidance was evaluated in a range of early years settings to see if childcare practitioners could interpret the guidance in their own menu planning.

5.6.1 Core principles of menu planning:

177. Prior to evaluation of the guidance consideration was given to how menus can be developed across the day in a number of settings. Below are some core principles that should be followed when planning menus around the guidance these were conveyed to the early years settings before they evaluated it:

- Menu plans should be designed for periods of a week or more.
- Each meal or snack i.e. breakfast, mid-morning and mid-afternoon snacks, lunch and tea should meet the appropriate guidance for the time period so that if children move from one childcare setting to another they will not miss out on energy and essential nutrients.
- Menus should be varied each day and across meals on different days, so that children in all-daycare receive a variety of foods each day they are present in an early years setting.
- Meals and snacks should be varied not only in the types of foods served but also in the taste, texture and colour of the food served. Consideration should be given to planning menus around seasonal ingredients.
- It is important that food available in early years settings meets the needs of all those present and children have experience of food from different cultures. All children must feel accepted and enabled to make healthy food choices relevant to their background regardless of race, language, culture and religion.
- Children should have the opportunity to have second helpings if they are hungry.
- Children are unlikely to consume more energy than they need if they offered a range of healthy meals and snacks that meet the guidance recommended in this report, if they eat a good variety of food offered and if they are physically active at play. On the other hand they are likely to eat excessive amounts of energy if they regularly eat energy dense foods (such as biscuits, cakes, confectionery, and savoury salted snacks) or regularly consume sugar-sweetened drinks.
- Children should have access to drinking water throughout the day and be encouraged and enabled to drink water if they are thirsty.

5.6.2 Feedback from early years settings on implementation of the guidance

178. Five practitioners were asked to amend their current menu plans in line with the guidance and provide feedback. Practitioners were asked to comment on how easy they found the guidance to follow and understand. They were also asked to consider the impact it would have on their current provision in terms of the foods purchased, cooking skills needed, time required to prepare food, potential cost implications, daily routines and any other factors they thought relevant. The menu plans that practitioners developed following the new guidance were then analysed to see how well the food-based standards, recipes and portion sizes used met the underpinning nutrient framework.

179. The guidance was evaluated with two childminders, in two nurseries, and with a caterer who provided food for children's centres. Due to time constraints the pilot sites were chosen opportunistically and time was not available for settings to put the guidance into practice. This feedback therefore represents initial impressions and thoughts from the settings approached. The Panel suggests that further piloting of the proposed guidance would be necessary to support any plans for implementation.

180. Overall, practitioners reported that the guidance was clear and simple to follow and that they would be able to plan the food they served by following it. Analysis of the menus provided by the practitioners showed that they were able to create menus broadly in line with the nutrient framework, except for salt, which remained higher than recommended. Information on foods to avoid, typical portion sizes to offer and examples of suitable meals and snacks were welcomed. Guidance according to food group and meal type (breakfast, lunch and tea) was also appreciated. The biggest changes to current menus by all providers were in snack provision; in increasing the amount and choice of food on offer at teatime; and in the variety of desserts. Practitioners felt that more time might be required for food preparation, and forward planning would be needed where settings had a cook for a limited period each day. In some settings, additional training was highlighted, and it was suggested for some that there would be a small increase in food costs.

181. Overall practitioners welcomed the guidance because it provided an opportunity to reflect on current practice and make changes to their provision using evidence-based recommendations that would be consistent across all settings. They commented that the guidance would also help families to understand the rationale for the food provided in the settings. Settings requested additional menu plans, recipes and food photographs to support them in meeting the guidance.

182. Following the piloting of the guidance, some refinements were made to increase clarity, to enhance the rationale and to make food safety issues more explicit.

5.7 Social, cultural and environmental aspects of the standards: encouraging eating well in early years settings

183. As well as providing guidance on the food and drink that should be offered in early years settings, the Panel also recognised the importance of providing guidance on a number of other issues to highlight the central role that food plays. This guidance relates to the social, cultural and environmental aspects of food in the lives of children in early years settings.

184. The evidence submitted to and collected by the Panel shows that practitioners would like more guidance on managing fussy eaters. The Panel invited expert opinion from a research psychologist who specialises in helping families by encouraging children to eat healthily. Her summary offered insight into the challenges faced by parents and early years practitioners and examined the scientific evidence-base for supporting strategies that can be used to overcome fussy eating.

185. Both 'fussy eating' and neophobia (fear of new foods) are considered normal developmental stages in young children. Evidence shows that fussy eating affects about 10-20% of children under five.¹⁰⁷ Severe selective eating is rare and generally has its roots in early feeding difficulties or significant health problems.¹⁰⁷ Neophobia typically emerges in the latter half of the second year of life in all children and is thought to be an innate predisposition.¹⁰⁸ Although, fussiness and neophobia are thought by some to be behaviourally distinct, they can both be helped using similar techniques. Management techniques include:

- **Modelling**
 - Seat fussy eaters with good eaters at mealtimes – modelling is very powerful and it has been shown that children will adopt the food preferences of their peers if they eat together regularly.¹⁰⁹
 - Practitioners should eat with children where possible and talk enthusiastically about the taste of the food. In one study, enthusiastic modelling by teachers was effective in maintaining children's new food acceptance across five mealtimes.¹¹⁰
- **Exposure**
 - Regular and repeated opportunities to taste new foods, results in increased liking and consumption although as many as ten to fifteen tastings may be required.¹¹¹
 - If children are resistant to trying new foods, negotiate smaller and smaller tastes and make sure the child has a get out clause – they can spit it out into a tissue if they really don't like it.
 - The point about repetition is important, but the child must actually taste the food for preference to be altered; simply putting it repeatedly on his or her plate will not work. As many as ten tastings may be needed to effect a change in children's acceptance of a new food.
- **Rewards**
 - Liked foods should not be used as reward to encourage consumption of disliked foods. Foods used in this way simply become even more valued than those disliked.¹¹² It is generally recommended that food should never be used as a reward or punishment. Recent research has demonstrated that small sticker rewards increased both liking and consumption of a previously disliked vegetable. The effect persisted in both the short term and longer term after rewards had been withdrawn.¹¹³

- **'Pressure to eat'**
 - Never force children to finish everything on their plate. Children who are made to eat everything on their plate learn to dislike the foods they are pressured to eat¹¹⁴ and these aversions may last into adulthood.¹¹⁵

186. We have summarised other current good practice on how to encourage children to eat well in early years settings in Appendix 23. The guidance in the appendix considers the following areas of good practice:

- **Listening to children**

It is important that children are listened to and included when planning menus, planning activities around food and when talking to families about food.

- **Listening to and communicating with parents and guardians**

Parents and guardians should be included in discussions around food provision in early years settings. Childcare settings offer an opportunity to support families to eat well and to provide helpful information about food choices.

- **Respecting our children's future**

In order to meet national targets for reducing the green house gas emissions which contribute to climate change, it is important that everyone thinks about reducing the impact they make on the environment. Food production, processing, transport, cooking and waste all impact on the environment. Early years settings should consider how to make their food service more sustainable.

- **Food for all**

The needs of children from all backgrounds, religions and cultures in early years settings need to be met appropriately.

- **Supporting children with special dietary needs**

Children with special dietary needs arising from medical conditions or physical difficulties associated with eating should be supported in taking an equally active role in choosing meals as other children in a setting.

- **Timing of meals, snacks and drinks**

Young children need to eat regularly during the time they spend in early years settings so it is important that settings and parents work together to ensure that the timing of meals and snacks meets the needs of each child.

- **The eating environment**

Meal times should be calm and quiet where possible, and distractions such as the television avoided while children are eating. Eating together at a table, with appropriate child sized cutlery, plates and bowls can encourage young children to eat well.

- **Celebrations and special events**

Children will have the opportunity to experience special foods and drinks associated with celebrations and special events at home. Early years settings may wish to offer imaginative ways of celebrating events which fit with their healthy food policy.

- **Bringing food from home**

Where food is brought from home this should fit in with the settings food policy, should be safe for all children who may come into contact with it and should be stored and reheated safely where necessary.

- **Helping fussy eaters**

Strategies that can help settings to encourage fussy eaters to try a variety of foods are described in paragraph 185.

- **Learning through food**

There are many opportunities to use food in learning, for example through songs, stories, role play, craft activities, gardening, cooking and helping at mealtimes.

- **Food hygiene and safety**

It is important that all those who prepare food for young children or who help children to eat understand the importance of food hygiene and food safety, and have received appropriate training where necessary.

5.8 Conclusions

- Current DfE guidance does not provide the information sought by practitioners and providers on practical ways in which to provide healthy food and drink in early years settings. In consequence, numerous providers have been developing their own guidance, but this is demanding of professional time, costly and not always consistent. The desire for clear, practical guidance was strongly expressed by all parties engaged in the provision of food and drink in early years settings, as well as by parents and third sector organisations whose members are responsible for provision.
- The principles underpinning the guidance must put the wellbeing of the child at the centre of any recommendations, and support each child to satisfy their health and learning needs; they must reflect the diversity of both the children and the settings; they must ensure that guidance is practical and achievable, and capable of implementation without specialist knowledge; and they must regard training and evaluation as integral aspect of implementation.
- Following a review of the options available, the Panel agreed that food-based guidance within a nutrient framework would provide the best basis for implementation that would be consistent across early years settings. Such guidance could ensure that children are offered a choice of meals and snacks that will meet their nutritional needs, whilst being interesting and varied in colour, flavour and texture. It could also be applied in a consistent way across the day and in different settings, helping to meet the needs of children in childcare for just a few hours or across whole days or weeks. The approach was modelled in a number of different formats, and evaluated in real-life settings.
- The Panel agreed that the guidance needed to address issues relating to specific foods (milk, fruit juice etc.) as well as the social, cultural and environmental dimensions of provision such as encouraging learning and appropriate eating behaviours.

6 Monitoring and Evaluating Change

6.1 Assessing compliance and measuring outcomes

187. The Panel was asked to develop evidence and make recommendations relating to monitoring the provision of food and drink in early years settings.

188. Monitoring can take two forms which are not mutually exclusive and may be complementary:

- Self-monitoring, through which individual settings independently assess their provision and practice against guidance or standards
- External monitoring, whereby an external agency (e.g. Ofsted, Trading Standards, Environmental Health Officers, LA Early Year consultants) visits the setting to assess provision and practice against guidance or standards.

189. If changes to current guidance are made there will be a need to evaluate at local and national level:

- Whether changes have improved outcomes for children
- Whether any further changes are required
- The extent to which individual settings vary in implementation of guidance.

6.2 Self-evaluation

190. Regulated early years settings are expected to evaluate their practice and provide evidence of good practice as well as identifying areas needing improvement. Early years settings are encouraged to record their outcomes in a self-evaluation form such as Ofsted's early years self-evaluation form (SEF). Settings can provide evidence that they meet the EYFS welfare requirements for food and drink in section three of the SEF. Local authority consultants and development officers from NDNA, PLA and NCMA and other third sector organisations could ensure that food and nutrition is included in any future quality improvement processes.

191. Early years settings would need to demonstrate that the food and drink they provide complies with any strengthened guidance and/or standards introduced. The methods adopted would be determined by the nature of guidance or standards issued. For example food-based guidance could be self-monitored using a checklist. On the other hand nutrient-based standards would require more complex processes and settings would need to access menu planning, nutrient-analysis software as well as professional dietetic support in order to ensure that information is accurately generated and interpreted.

192. Checklists have been used successfully in other educational settings to establish accurately and clearly how well requirements are met. They can help settings to see where they are not meeting the requirements and identify main actions required to help them achieve specified criteria

193. The Panel recommended that the self-evaluation tools used by early years settings should be adapted to enable managers to conduct a needs analysis of their food and drink provision that will identify areas of good practice as well as gaps in training provision and facilities (see Recommendation 9). The School Food Trust has developed two checklists to help schools to demonstrate that they are meeting the

School Food Regulations. The School Food Checklist is a web-based tool that helps schools assess whether the food and drink is compliant with the food-based standards. The Trust has also recently undertaken a collaborative project with Trading Standards in West Midlands and the Department of Health to develop an Audits and Inspections toolkit which enable schools and catering providers to:

- Compile a set of recommended minimum evidence to demonstrate compliance with the food-based and nutrient-based standards
- Evaluate evidence of compliance with the food-based and nutrient-based standards against the recommended minimum evidence.

6.3 Healthy award schemes

194. Nine of the 35 respondents to the Panel's call for evidence on current practice described healthy eating award schemes developed for early years settings. These were largely derived from the National Healthy Schools Programme (NHSP) and principally involved self-assessment.^{116 117 118 119 120 121 122 123} In some cases this was combined with a visit from a health professional, dietitian or registered public health nutritionist who verified the setting's portfolio of evidence, which was often a checklist tool. Local authorities interviewed suggested that settings valued the healthy award schemes. Although the Panel noted that they might be better connected to local quality improvement processes, this would reduce burden and duplication of effort (see rationale for Recommendation 8).

6.4 External Monitoring: Ofsted inspections

195. It is a statutory requirement that all those providing early learning and childcare for more than two hours a day on more than six days a year should be registered with Ofsted. Such settings are inspected against the EYFS framework.⁹ Settings operating for less than 14 days a year may claim exemption from Ofsted.

196. The exception is early years provision for children aged 3 to up to 5 years delivered by a school directly to its pupils. This type of provision does not have to register with Ofsted but its effectiveness is considered part of the school inspection carried out by Ofsted. Schools must still meet the requirements of the EYFS framework.¹²⁵

6.4.1 Ofsted: Inspections of registered early years provision to measure the extent to which children adopt a 'healthy lifestyles'

197. Ofsted must inspect all settings registered on the early years register on 1st September 2008 at least once by 31st July 2012.¹²⁴ One early years inspector carries out each inspection unless the setting is large or offers very complex provision.¹²⁵ The type of provision (size and opening hours of the setting) influences the time taken to complete an inspection visit. Inspections of small part-time settings take two to three hours whereas larger providers of full daycare require an average of six hours.¹²⁶

198. The statements relating to food and drink provision fall under the 'Safeguarding and Promoting Children's Welfare' element of the welfare requirements. It is important to note that, although settings may be exempt from the learning and development requirements of the EYFS framework, the Children Act 2006 requires all providers to comply with the welfare requirements as these implement fundamental safeguards for children.¹²⁵

199. Inspectors make four main inspection judgements:

- The overall effectiveness of the early years provision
- Leadership and management of the early years provision
- The quality of the provision in the EYFS
- Outcomes for children in the EYFS.¹²⁶

6.4.1.1 Outcomes for children in the Early Years Foundation Stage

200. Inspectors make judgements on the five outcomes of Every Child Matters (ECM) in making their judgement on 'Outcomes for children in the EYFS'. Thus they evaluate the extent to which children enjoy their learning and achieve well; feel safe; learn to lead healthy lifestyles; make a positive contribution; and develop their skills for the future. When making the judgement on outcomes inspectors consider 'the extent to which children know and understand how to lead a healthy lifestyle' and 'the extent to which children adopt a healthy lifestyle'.¹²⁵ The key elements that inspectors consider are the extent to which children:

- Understand and adopt healthy habits such as good hygiene practices
- Are active and understand the benefits of physical activity
- Make healthy choices about what they eat and drink.

201. Meeting the welfare requirements for food and drink is part of the provision judgement. Failure to meet the welfare requirements contributes to the judgement on leadership and management. Inspectors' main focus in relation to food and drink provision tends to be food hygiene and safety rather than nutritional provision. There are over 90 requirements of the EYFS framework, of which food and drink is only one. Thus it cannot be guaranteed that this aspect is covered at every inspection.¹²⁶

202. Inspectors judge the setting on children's progress and achievements and their experiences during the day of inspection. As the inspector is sometimes only present in the setting for a short period of time, it is not possible to inspect every element of the EYFS. The self-evaluation form (SEF) helps to inform the inspector about practice they may not observe directly. Settings can complete an early years self-evaluation form (SEF). Although it is not a mandatory requirement, it allows the setting to evaluate and improve provision in relation to the requirements and good practice guidance of the EYFS.¹²⁷

203. The SEF provides the inspector with an indication of the strengths and weaknesses of the setting and identifies areas where the inspector may wish to focus his or her observations.¹²⁵ This is particularly important in relation to food and drink provision, an area in which inspectors may not have sufficient dietetic knowledge to make accurate evaluation of nutritional content. Questions on the SEF relate to key judgements the inspector will make during the visit.¹²⁷ Where early years provision is provided within a school, the school can include the self-evaluation for early years provision within its overall self-evaluation.¹²⁵ Settings can, if they wish, provide other forms of quality assurance/self-evaluation documentation for review by the inspector.

6.4.1.2 Summary of grade descriptors on the extent to which children adopt a healthy lifestyle

204. Inspectors make a graded judgement on a four-point scale of the extent to which children adopt a healthy lifestyle, using the grade descriptors in Appendix 24. Inspectors use evidence provided in the SEF or other quality assurance documentation and their own direct observations, discussions, scrutiny of menus and other documents

to assign the grade that corresponds to provision observed. Judgements are particularly influenced by:

- The length of time children attend registered provision
- Whether it is particularly good or, conversely, whether it fails to meet a legal requirement.

205. Inspectors must take into account evidence from all aspects of the inspection when making their judgements. Thus judgements made on the extent to which children adopt a healthy lifestyle could affect the overall judgement for 'Leadership and Management' as well as ones about children's outcomes.

6.4.1.3 Ofsted themed surveys

206. Periodically, Ofsted also conducts themed surveys within the education settings it inspects, including early year settings. The last themed survey on healthy eating was undertaken by inspectors in 2006⁷³ prior to the introduction of the mandatory EYFS.⁹ The findings from this survey suggested that some early years settings were found to be outstanding and very few were not committed to providing 'good' food and drink. However it was noted that most settings lacked professional guidance in this area.

6.4.2 External Monitoring: other agencies

207. The Panel identified other monitoring processes carried out by some local authorities, Environmental Health Officers (EHOs), Trading Standards Departments and national early years organisations. The processes vary in formality, frequency and content.

6.4.2.1 Local authorities

208. The Panel identified evidence which indicates that that some local authorities play a role in supporting all early years settings to provide healthy food and drink, not just those which they maintain, The extent to which they monitor food and drink provision in early years settings is influenced by local priorities and funding in this area. Most local authorities and national professional organisations have quality improvement processes that early years settings follow; many of these include food and nutrition elements (see section 6.4.2).

6.4.2.2 Trading Standards Departments

209. Trading Standards Departments are responsible for enforcing over 80 Acts of Parliament including the Food Safety Act 1990 which prohibits the sale of unfit or adulterated food, controls the quality, standard and claims made for food, and controls its description, advertising and labelling.¹²⁸

210. From April 2009 to December 2010²⁹ Trading Standards teams across England participated in a LACORS national survey of nutritional provision in nursery schools. Council Food Standards Officers were involved in sampling food from nursery schools. These samples were then nutritionally analysed to assess how well settings met the nutritional requirements of an average three year old.⁷⁶ This work was described in section 3.11. Subsequently at least one Trading Standards team has developed food and nutrition guidance for local early years settings. This has focused on areas of food and drink provision, which the survey identified as lacking.⁸⁵

211. Participating councils commented that they made useful links with partners including: regional government offices; government departments; public analysts; PCTs; wider National Health Service contacts; dietitians; other councils; and many internal local authority services. The latter included healthy schools officers, early years / children's services, catering and cleaning services, family services and school meal developers. These links were identified as an important aspect of public health improvement work.⁷⁶

212. The LACORS survey not only provided some indication of the current food and drink provision in early years settings but also demonstrated how Trading Standards Departments can link with other partners in monitoring food and drink provision in early years settings.

6.4.3 External Monitoring: National organisations quality assurance schemes

213. The National Quality Improvement Network (NQIN) and the National Strategies Early Years Quality Improvement Support Programme (EYQISP) as well as the local authority bespoke Quality Assurance schemes and the three national stakeholders, provide quality assurance support to a range of early years settings across the country. These enable settings to ensure they provide the highest quality care and education for children under the age of five. They help settings to compile evidence for their SEF and Ofsted inspections. All three require additional resources and support.

6.4.3.1 National Childminding Association (NCMA)

214. The National Childminding Association (NCMA) has developed a quality assurance scheme 'NCMA Quality first' for individual registered childminders in England and Wales.¹²⁹ This scheme is available at three different levels. Childminders can choose at which level they submit, depending on their level of training and experience as a childminder.¹³⁰

215. Childminders are provided with a resource pack that facilitates compilation of a portfolio of supporting evidence.¹³¹ They are given a year to complete this process and an assessment of the childminder at home is also conducted to observe their relationship, contact and communication with the children.¹³¹ Childminders who successfully complete the scheme are awarded a certificate valid for three years¹³¹ during which time the childminder may choose to work towards the next level of award.¹³² This scheme will close at the end of 2010 but any childminder with Quality First approval will retain this status for the three year period of their acquisition.

6.4.3.2 National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA)

216. The National Day Nurseries Association (NDNA) offers an online quality improvement scheme 'e-Quality Counts' specifically tailored to the nursery sector.¹³³

"e-Quality Counts supports nurseries through the process of self-assessment, reflection, planning, development and implementation to promote quality improvement and to achieve a recognised reward with a certification mark."¹³³

217. One of the fifteen sections of e-Quality Counts relates to nutrition, food service and oral health. The scheme is based on the EYFS requirements, the Common Core

and Every Child Matters and follows quality improvement principles.¹³⁴ It is designed to assist the nursery's Ofsted inspection by enabling it to demonstrate effective practice in the SEF and throughout the inspection process. Accreditation is valid for three years, after which nurseries must be reassessed.¹³⁵

6.4.3.3 Pre-school Learning Alliance (PLA)

218. The Pre-school Learning Alliance (PLA) offers the settings it manages and its members the opportunity to take part in their quality improvement scheme 'Reflecting on Quality' which accredits settings for delivering the highest standard of education and care for children.¹³⁶

*"The scheme provides a framework for supporting and recording the quality improvement process and for celebrating achievement"*¹³⁶

219. The scheme has three stages. The first requires settings to observe and reflect on how team members work together and how the developmental needs of individuals link to the development of the whole setting. The second involves identifying what works well and what needs to be improved. The final stage provides an opportunity to reflect on practice development and celebrate attainment. This is achieved through working on a case study together with parents, the local authority and the wider early years community. It may also be used as a marketing tool.¹³⁶

220. The scheme does not impose additional standards but supports settings to meet the EYFS requirements through the use of the EYFS practice guidance and other resources from the Pre-school Learning Alliance, the local authority and Ofsted.¹³⁶ Settings receive a certificate upon completion of the first stage and this is maintained through regular engagement. All settings have a verification visit once the third stage has been completed.¹³⁶

6.5 Future evaluation of strengthened guidance or standards

221. The national evaluation of revised guidance or standards could take several forms. For example it might be undertaken as a national early years food survey adapting the protocol of the 2009 Primary School Food Survey.⁵ The introduction of strengthened guidance or standards for food and drink in early years settings could impact on:

- Food and drink provision in early years settings
- Catering practices
- Eating patterns and nutritional intake of children aged from 1 up to 5 years
- Numbers of children eating at different meal occasions within settings
- The development of the six areas of learning outlined in the EYFS namely personal, social and emotional development, communication, language, literacy, and problem solving, reasoning and numeracy skills. Knowledge and understanding of the world; creative and physical development
- Parental knowledge of a healthy balanced diet appropriate for their child and the influence on food and drink choices outside of the setting
- Children's involvement in the changes made to the food and drink provision and the degree to which they accept these changes
- Catering costs and revenue.

222. Each could be evaluated at baseline and then regularly (every four years). Such evaluation would build a much needed stronger evidence base; current data on the

nutritional quality of food and drink provision in early years settings are very few (Recommendation 10)

6.6 Conclusions

- Monitoring, whether as a self-evaluation or carried out by external agencies, is an essential part of implementation. It helps to ensure that provision is consistent with the guidance, and is consistent between settings and across the day.
- Self-evaluation helps to provide evidence that guidance is being implemented effectively and to highlight areas that need improvement. It also provides evidence for providers, parents, and external agencies that the guidance is being implemented in a way that meets the needs of the children. Appropriate training is needed to support robust self-evaluation. Self-evaluation can also be linked to healthy award schemes.
- External monitoring in relation to food and drink provision is carried out by Ofsted in registered settings as an aspect of inspecting the 'Safeguarding and Promoting Children's Welfare' element of welfare requirements. Inspectors are expected to make judgements across a wide range of criteria, of which food is only one. Self-evaluation forms an important part of the information provided.
- Other agencies that provide external monitoring include local authorities and Trading Standards. In addition, the national third sector organizations have quality assurance schemes to help ensure that settings provide the highest quality care and education for children under five years of age.
- An understanding of the effectiveness of evaluation schemes following the introduction of new guidance and training is needed, and could be linked to a national survey of provision and consumption of food and drink in early years settings.

7 Conclusions and recommendations

7.1 Overview

This report outlines the urgent need for universal guidance on the provision of food and drink in early years settings. The key elements of the response to this need are:

- Guidance
- Training
- Monitoring and self-evaluation
- Supporting infrastructure
- Evidence base.

These elements have been elucidated chapter by chapter in this report. Crucially, the evidence relating to each of these elements – what has been done in the past, what is wanted, what is lacking, plus the views of the Panel members themselves – have all been used to help frame and support the Recommendations set out below.

The overall view of the Panel is that improvements to child nutrition in early years settings would be best served by the introduction of voluntary food-based guidance, supported by portion size information, and set within a framework that helps to meet the energy and nutrient requirements of young children.

The changes to the EYFS framework recommended by the EYFS review are scheduled to take effect in September 2011. Therefore the Panel did not feel it was necessary to make any recommendations on the timelines in which recommended guidance should be implemented.

7.2 Recommendations, rationales and options

Each Recommendation is followed by a Rationale. Where the Panel has felt it appropriate, options relating to the implementation of each Recommendation have been included.

Recommendation 1: All children are entitled to receive adequate amounts of nutritious food. This is a basic element in protecting their current and future health, learning and development. Providing healthy, balanced and nutritious food and drink must remain a statutory component of the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) welfare requirements. Additionally it should be viewed as integral to the EYFS learning and development requirements.

Rationale 1.

- The majority of children attend early years settings before they reach school age. 92% of children aged three years and 98% of those aged four years (roughly 1,155,500 3-4 year old children) access their free entitlement (paragraph 42).
- The EYFS framework can therefore support an environment in which children learn about healthy eating and are well fed (paragraphs 86-90). It also presents opportunities to work with families and encourage change towards a healthier diet and lifestyle (paragraphs 24-26).
- Children are growing and developing rapidly in the early years of life. Providing an adequate nutritional intake is vital if they are to achieve their full potential (paragraphs 12-14).
- Social and educational inequalities strongly affect what children eat. The Marmot review²¹ identified the early years as a crucial time to intervene in order to reduce health inequalities across the life course (paragraph 12).

Recommendation 2: Government should respond to the need expressed by the majority of providers, practitioners and parents to provide clear and practical guidance on meeting the nutritional requirements of children attending early years settings.

Rationale 2.

- Practitioners and parents recognise the importance of healthy eating for young children (paragraphs 108 and 112).
- Practitioners are unclear as to how to interpret and meet the food and nutrition requirements of the EYFS as they are currently expressed. They consistently told the Panel that they want clear and practical guidance defining what 'healthy' and 'nutritious' mean in practice. The guidance needs to describe the types, frequency and amounts of food they should provide for different ages (paragraphs 103, 104).
- Parents also supported the introduction of guidance. Some of those parents who were interviewed as part of the focus groups expressed surprise that guidance on food and nutrition in early years settings did not already exist (paragraph 108).
- Local authorities also asked for national guidance; indeed most wanted it to be compulsory. The local authority representatives interviewed suggested that guidance should be viewed as a way of helping parents to choose between EYFS settings for their children. They also felt guidance would facilitate benchmarking and ensure consistent provision (paragraphs 107, 109, 110).
- The Panel identified a number of local initiatives offering Healthy Early Years Awards based upon local guidance (paragraphs 81, 111, 112, 115, 133, 194). The provision of national guidance could relieve both local authorities and providers of much duplication of effort.

Recommendation 3: Government should introduce guidance that comprehensively describes adequate food and nutrition provision in early years settings. Implementation would be voluntary but should be encouraged and should be supported by suitable resources, training and include self-evaluation tools.

Rationale 3.

- Evidence submitted to the Panel suggests that many early years settings are not currently meeting the nutritional requirements of children in their care. Many are providing food that is more appropriate for older children and adults. This leads to under-provision of energy, carbohydrate and some essential minerals such as iron and zinc, whilst salt and added sugars are provided in excessive amounts (paragraphs 70-81).
- The Panel found that practitioners are keen to address these problems through an infrastructure that incorporates guidance, training and evaluation of provision (paragraphs 119, 120, 124, 125, 126, 127, 134, 135). Each aspect will be important to ensure effective implementation. The infrastructure needs to be flexible so that it meets the needs of diverse settings and individuals working in them.
- Appropriate resources are needed to support practitioners in putting the guidance into practice. One of the key principles adopted in developing the guidance was assurance that changes suggested are achievable in early years settings (paragraph 180).
- Training is needed because currently there are no accredited nutritional qualifications meeting the needs of early years workforce. There are also gaps in the National Occupational Standards relevant to early years settings (paragraph 119).
- Nearly half (43.9%) of the practitioners questioned had received no training about food and nutrition (paragraph 126). Those taking part in focus groups also identified training as a factor limiting their ability to provide healthy food and drink in their settings (paragraphs 126, 127; Appendix 14).

- Attendance at local training courses relating to food and nutrition for early years settings is not consistent across settings. The quality of training also varies (paragraphs 124, 126, 127).
- The introduction of guidance should be followed by evaluation (paragraph 133-136). The guidance recommended by the Panel lends itself to simple evaluation linked to current quality assurance processes (paragraph 213). A simple checklist could be devised for this purpose (paragraphs 175, 192).

Recommendation 4: The Department for Education should introduce guidance that underpins the provision of a range of important nutrients through clearly defining the type, frequency and amounts of foods that could be served. The Panel recommend adoption of the model described in this report. This is termed ‘food-based guidance within a nutrient framework’.

Rationale 4.

- The current under-provision of key nutrients (paragraphs 70-81) needs to be addressed in a way that meets the demands of practitioners and parents. It must go further than requiring provision of ‘healthy’, ‘balanced’, and ‘nutritious’ food and drink because these terms are poorly understood and inadequately defined (paragraphs 70-81 and 103-105).
- The Panel considered the format that guidance might take and evaluated seven different options (paragraph 158). Nutritional modelling was conducted to identify how well each of the approaches might meet the nutritional requirements of young children (paragraphs 158-169). The Panel also considered the feasibility of applying each option in early years settings, recognising the extent of variation in catering facilities (paragraphs 177-181).
- The Panel agreed that food-based guidance (supported by information on portion sizes) within a nutrient framework would provide the most useful and consistent guidance. This shows practitioners how to provide nutritionally balanced meals by using foods from different groups in appropriate quantities. The guidance can be presented as a range of menus supported by recipes and illustrations that can be easily understood and implemented (Appendix 19).
- Evaluation of the draft guidance was carried out on a small scale in five settings (two child-minders, two nurseries, one children’s centre). Feedback from practitioners and the menus developed showed that the guidance could be implemented effectively with little effort. All the practitioners welcomed it (paragraphs 178-181). The Panel also considered the regulatory context in which guidance might sit. Options were:
 - National guidance implemented voluntarily (no primary legislation): The arguments supporting this approach were:
 - It meets the needs of stakeholders for more specific, easily understandable and practical guidance (paragraphs 103-104).
 - Most practitioners would prefer guidance to be voluntary (paragraph 104-105, 109).
 - Promulgation of national guidance could support local initiatives and alleviate duplication of effort thus reducing the associated administrative burden and addressing inconsistencies between settings.
 - Parents would be able to see whether settings had introduced guidance and were evaluating whether provision was in accordance with the guidance. This might help to inform their choice of an appropriate setting for their child.
 - Statutory Regulation supported by national guidance: The arguments supporting primary legislation specifying minimum standards of provision are as follows:
 - Local authority stakeholders argued that compulsory standards would facilitate evaluation and monitoring at local authority level (paragraphs 107, 109; Appendix 13).

- Compulsory standards would enforce consistency of provision across all types of settings and demonstrate to practitioners and parents that provision was consistent in quality (paragraph 109).
 - Statutory regulation might be required should voluntary implementation fail to demonstrate impact following evaluation.
- On balance, the Panel decided that voluntary guidance would meet the needs of practitioners without imposing excessive burden on providers. The Panel also felt that voluntary guidance would address the concerns of parents without being overly prescriptive and allow for diversity that would meet the needs of individual children and of settings.
- The Panel stressed the importance of settings aligning such guidance with current infant feeding advice. Practitioners and providers should consult existing sources of guidance such as those published by WHO and DH when providing for children under one year of age (paragraph 6).

Recommendation 5: Practitioners and supporting staff (e.g. cooks, health visitors) in early years settings should be offered training enabling them to provide children with appropriate food and drink suitably tailored to their needs. An important aspect of this process is learning to work with families to support individual children’s nutritional requirements.

Rationale 5.

- Training is required to give practitioners the confidence they need to help parents deal with common concerns, for example about fussy eating. Practitioners identified training as a factor constraining their ability to provide healthy food and drink (paragraphs 126, 127; Appendix 12, Appendix 14).
- The main barriers to undertaking training were reported to be cost and lack of available training programmes (paragraph 126; Appendix 12).
- Training needs to be flexible, affordable and accessible to meet the diverse needs of settings and the workforce (paragraph 132) but it also needs to be delivered through academically accredited routes.
- The following strategies could be employed to overcome these barriers:
 - The food and nutrition content of the CWDC Level 3 qualification should be designated as core learning. This would offer providers and practitioners the knowledge, skills and confidence to interpret and implement the strengthened guidance (paragraph 123).
 - A ‘train the trainer’ approach could be adopted to cascade delivery of food and nutrition training. Such learning should include principles of food hygiene, food safety, nutrition, and strategies that will encourage children to eat. This approach could be adapted to the diverse environments of early years settings including home-based care. Organisations within the third sector could play an important part in delivery (paragraphs 129, 130).
 - Distance learning could be provided; for example an on-line interactive course could be developed by appropriate accrediting institutions. This would offer universal access to training in a timely way and be accessible by all practitioners, including those working from home. Delivery could be enhanced by the use of appropriate media, and provision of one-to-one support (via forums, telephone, face to face visits) from qualified health professionals (paragraph 129).
- Regardless of the approach adopted, curriculum development would benefit from the advice of an early years consultant on how to integrate training into the context of existing guidance and practice relating to health and personal, social and emotional development. The curriculum should also be informed by advice from a health promotion specialist with the knowledge of child nutrition (such as a dietitian or registered public nutritionist) as well as a child psychologist who can advise on matters such as encouraging children to eat well.

Recommendation 6: All early years settings should integrate the aims of achieving healthy eating and learning through food by applying or adapting their policies and practice on health, wellbeing and education. This approach should involve parents and children and be based upon the guidance recommended by the Panel.

Rationale 6.

- Integration of policy and practice will be key to effective implementation of the guidance. Existing health, wellbeing and education policies could be applied to assist implementation. The majority of settings questioned had a food policy though it was not always written (paragraph 112). The sections of the EYFS Practice Guidance where food and nutrition are already mentioned (e.g. in areas of learning and development such as Personal, Social and Emotional Development, Problem Solving, Reasoning and Numeracy, Knowledge and Understanding the World and Physical Development) (paragraphs 86-90) could be updated and strengthened to show how existing health, wellbeing and education policies can be applied, as could the existing links on the website and CD Rom. It may, for example, be appropriate to add information about sustainability of food supply, and providing a mealtime environment that encourages sociability and eating (paragraphs 183-186; Appendix 23).
- Parents and children should be consulted about policy. This can help to achieve consistency in provision between home and the early years setting. It may also help to reinforce the child's learning about food and eating (paragraphs 24, 25).
- The educational context within which food is provided powerfully influences eating behaviour (paragraph 25). Offering children a variety of foods, repeating exposure and eating together helps children to experience and accept a range of nutritious food (paragraph 185). Practical activities such as growing food, food preparation and cooking, food tasting, laying the table, selecting dishes to go on the lunch and snack menus, and using food in play all help to involve children in their learning (paragraphs 88, 89: Appendix 23).

Recommendation 7: All local authorities should have access to a suitably qualified professional who can, if required, offer advice on interpreting the guidance within the context of individual settings. This should be a registered public health nutritionist or dietitian who has experience of working within the sector.

Rationale 7.

- Five practitioners provided feedback on implementation of the guidance recommended by the Panel. The feedback shows that it could be readily interpreted and implemented in diverse settings (childminder, nursery, children's centre) without professional support (paragraph 178-182). However the implementation infrastructure should recognise that specialised advice on menu planning may sometimes be required, for example to address provision within settings that cater for children from a wide range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds.
- Every child is unique and some may have complex physical, emotional, behavioural or medical needs that influence their nutritional requirements and eating behaviour. Whilst practitioners can discuss these with parents, additional professional support may be required to adapt the guidance.
- Analysis of the 2010 School Meal survey suggests that there is a correlation between access to professional nutritional support and compliance with the School Food Regulations.⁸
- People employed to offer such advice should have competences similar to those listed by the School Food Trust in its independent review: 'Nutritional analysis support packages

for school lunches: A guide to current models'.¹³⁷ This sets out a person specification for registered public health nutritionists and dietitians.

Recommendation 8: Quality improvement processes for early years settings should include the evaluation of food and drink provision. Local authorities and third sector organisations should work in partnership to assist settings with self-evaluation of food and drink provision against the guidance recommended by the Panel.

Rationale 8.

- Most local authorities and national professional organisations have well-established quality improvement processes that early years settings already follow. Many of these include food and nutrition provision (paragraph 213) (Appendix 13). These offer a foundation for auditing food and drink provision through third sector and local government partnership (paragraph 134).
- It is important that early years settings use consistent approaches to provide a clear benchmark that will enable parents to compare different settings and select the most appropriate provision for their child.
- Quality assurance processes should identify training gaps and deviations from good practice. Peer-to-peer support can be a helpful way of sharing good practice (paragraph 134).

Recommendation 9: The Department for Education should commission Ofsted to conduct a themed inspection of food and nutrition in early years settings at regular intervals. This should evaluate the impact of the guidance on children's wellbeing, health, development and learning. Her Majesty's Inspectors undertaking the themed inspection should be supported by registered public health nutritionists or dietitians.

Rationale 9.

- Ofsted seem best placed to do this because they currently have the remit to inspect settings against the requirements of the EYFS (paragraphs 136, 195-206).
- A themed inspection of food and nutrition in early years settings would determine the extent to which guidance has been implemented nationally. The last themed inspection was published in 2006 and primarily focused on the place of food in the curriculum rather than food and drink provision (paragraphs 72, 206).
- Ofsted's inspectors do not have sufficient technical knowledge to assess how well settings meet the nutritional requirements of children (paragraph 206). Public health nutritionists or dietitians should collaborate with Ofsted to transform the guidance into grade descriptors.

Recommendation 10: Nutritional provision should be evaluated systematically to measure the changing patterns of both food provision and consumption throughout the child's journey across the diverse range of settings attended.

Rationale 10.

- The Panel found that evidence on food and drink provision in early years settings is very limited (paragraphs 70-71). Currently there are no nationally representative data about provision, choices and consumption. The available data are not based on random samples (paragraphs 73-79) and mainly reflect provision in full daycare settings.
- None of the studies identified by the Panel measured the child's food consumption against provision (paragraph 71). Consumption could vary significantly from provision.
- Settings vary in the type of childcare they offer; anecdotal reporting suggests that children move between settings across the week and even during the same day (paragraphs 48,

49). Some children may attend an early years setting only for a few hours each week; at the other extreme some may receive most of their meals there during the working week. There are no longitudinal data describing individual children's patterns of attendance across the week, nor any on the range of meals provided and amounts served or consumed at each (paragraph 71).

- The Panel identified this lack of data on consumption as a significant evidence gap. It recommends that data should be collected to describe individual children's journeys through the diverse range of settings attended. Such data are essential to establish whether the recommendations the Panel has made form an adequate safety net of nutritional provision.
- The Panel suggested collecting this information through the following approaches:
 - **A dedicated survey of provision and consumption in early years settings.** This should be conducted *as soon as possible* to assess (a) the nature and range of individual children's journeys through childcare settings and (b) the associated provision and consumption of food and drink, together with information on procurement practices, training and financing and their association with the quality of provision and adequacy of consumption. A more comprehensive dietary survey could assess the contribution of food and drink provided in early years settings to total dietary intake of children aged from 1 up to 5 years. Both surveys could usefully be repeated after three years in order to monitor the impact of the introduction of the guidance recommended by the Panel. The sample should include a cross-section of early years settings in England.
 - **The National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS)** programme could have an enhanced sample of children aged from 1 up to 5 years in order to identify the quantities of food and drink consumed in early years settings of different types (paragraph 71), but the NDNS in its current form is not designed to capture information on provision, procurement, training or financing.

Recommendation 11. The guidance recommended by the Panel should be disseminated in such a way that it is freely available and accessible to parents, and to both regulated and unregulated early years settings.

Rationale 11.

- Disseminating the Panel's guidance together with the support of implementation and evaluation tools would encourage diversity in the types of regulated childcare offered (paragraph 44). It would also inform parental choice by describing best practice.
- Dissemination would also help to ensure that consistent advice is delivered across both regulated and unregulated settings (such as family and toddler groups).
- Sure Start Children's Centres may have a role in dissemination because they work in partnership with and provide support to all settings within their locality. Dissemination should be further supported by other professionals, for example health visitors.

8 Abbreviations

8.1 Abbreviations

APFNEY	Advisory Panel on Food and Nutrition in Early Years
BDA	British Dietetic Association
BMR	Basal Metabolic Rate
BTEC	Business And Technology Education Council
CMO	Chief Medical Officer
COMA	Committee on Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy
CREC	Centre for Research in Early Childhood
CWDC	Children Workforce Development Council
CWT	Caroline Walker Trust
DH	Department of Health
DCSF	Department for Children, Schools and Families
DfES	Department for Education and Skills
DfE	Department for Education
DNSIYC	Diet and Nutrition Survey of Infants and Young Children
DRV	Dietary Reference Values
EAR	Estimated Average Requirement
ECM	Every Child Matters
EHO	Environmental Health Officers
EYFS	Early Years Foundation Stage
EYQISP	Early Years Quality Improvement Support Programme
FEAST	School FEAST
FSA	Food Standards Agency
HENRY	Health Exercise Nutrition for the Really Young Programme
HMI	Her Majesty's Inspector
LA	Local authority
LACORS	Local Authorities Coordinators of Regulatory Services
LGR	Local Government Regulation
LNRI	Lower reference nutrient intake
MRC	Medical Research Council
NHSP	National Healthy Schools Programme
NCB	National Children's Bureau
NCMA	National Childminding Association
NCMP	National Child Measurement Programme
NDNA	National Day Nurseries Association
NDNS	National Diet and Nutrition Survey
NHS	National Health Service
NMES	Non-milk extrinsic sugars
NQIN	National Quality Improvement Network
NSP	Non-starch polysaccharides
NVQ	National Vocational Qualifications
Ofsted	The Office of Standards in Education
PCT	Primary Care Trust
PLA	Pre-school Learning Alliance
PVI	Private Voluntary and Independent
QCF	Quality and Credited Framework
RNI	Reference nutrient intake
SACN	Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition
SEF	Self evaluation form

This document has been prepared by the Advisory Panel on Food and Nutrition in Early Years for consideration by the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) review. It does not necessarily represent the policy of the Department for Education (DfE).

SFT	School Food Trust
SIT	School Improvement Team
SMRP	School Meals Review Panel
TDA	Training and Development Agency
TNS	Target nutrient specification
TRUST	School Food Trust
USA	United States of America
WDT	Workforce Development Team
WHO	World Health Organisation

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