



NEWS RELEASE

25.8.06

Lunch experience in nursery 'key to combating obesity'

An international conference on children, food and eating has recommended that three and four year olds in Scotland should enjoy a meal time experience as a fixture of their day.

Delegates at the conference, *An Appetite for Life? Young children, food and eating*, heard how prioritising lunch as a social experience for nursery age children, and ensuring they were involved in the preparation of food, could offset the likelihood of serious problems associated with food arising in later life, such as obesity.

The conference heard about attitudes to food and eating in Italian, German and Swedish pre-schools, and made comparisons with the Scottish experience.

Wendy Alexander MSP, co-chair of the conference, said:

“We need to confront the anxiety about food that exists in Scotland and many western nations. Our approach to food is shaped in the early years and this is the time that we must be ensuring a positive, relaxed and enriching experience of eating for children.”

She added:

“Why should Scottish children not have the same experience as three and four year olds in Pistoia, Italy, who enjoy the rituals of lunch as a part of their daily routine in the nursery?”

“In our Scottish nurseries we need more dough, and less play dough. We need to challenge the ‘production line’ style of catering in homes and schools, and ensure that the chip van outside the school gates becomes a thing of the past.”

Wendy Alexander and Children in Scotland's chief executive, Bronwen Cohen, will now be seeking a meeting with ministers to discuss the issues that have been raised by the conference.

Bronwen Cohen said:

“The Hungry for Success initiative has made a positive contribution to Scotland's schools – but it should now be extended to cover the early years. This will mean enabling children to stay within one nursery over the course of the day rather than be split between different services. Due to the part-time nature of the current entitlement, many nurseries do not offer a meal as part of their service.”

Lisa Harker, chair of the Daycare Trust, and co-chair of the conference, reiterated that the improvements in school meals in the primary sector made through Hungry for Success must now be extended to encompass the early years. She said:

“We would like to see the progress being made in primary schools reflected in the early years. We know how important healthy eating is to early development and so it is vital that we don't miss out on this crucial early experience.”

(ends)

For further information, please contact Chris Small

Tel: 0131 222 2419

Email: csmall@childreninscotland.org.uk