



Update on Reforms to the Welfare Food Scheme

***A briefing paper from the Scottish Community Diet Project
Spring 2004***

From Spring 2004 an estimated 800,000 people across the UK will receive vouchers for free fruit and vegetables as a result of recent reforms to the Welfare Food Scheme.

Originally created in 1940 as a wartime measure to protect the health of young children during years of rationing, the UK Health Department launched a public consultation on proposals to reform the Welfare Food Scheme in October 2002.

The 14 proposed changes were based on the findings of a scientific review of the scheme carried out in 1999 by the Panel on Child and Maternal Nutrition of the Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy (COMA). The aim of the proposals was to "reform the current, outdated scheme, to better meet the nutritional needs of pregnant women and children, and to provide greater support for breastfeeding and parenting."

Over 500 written responses were made during the consultation period, and views were also received through a number of active listening events held around the UK, including a round table discussion event held in December 2003 by the SCDP. (To download notes visit www.dietproject.org.uk). Although views of respondents varied, they demonstrated strong overall support for the need for reform. A summary of the responses was published in March 2003. Please visit www.dh.gov.uk and search for 'Healthy Start' for more information.

On 12 February 2004 the UK Health Department published its response to the consultation exercise and made recommendations as to how the new scheme will operate. Currently, parents eligible for the scheme only receive tokens for liquid milk and infant formula milk. Under the new scheme these tokens will be replaced with weekly vouchers that can be used to buy fresh fruit and vegetables, as well as milk, from a wide range of participating retail outlets including milkmen, greengrocers, retail pharmacies and community food initiatives as well as supermarkets.

Qualification for the scheme is based on factors such as low income or receipt of tax credits. The vouchers will be worth at least £2.80 per week to families with children aged over one year old. Families with children aged between 0 and one year will receive vouchers worth a least £5.60 per week. All pregnant women under the age of 18 will also be eligible for the scheme, regardless of family income.

Registration for the scheme will involve the completion of an application form and getting it endorse by a health professional, such as a doctor or a health visitor. Health professionals will continue to have an important role in advising beneficiaries

about health and nutrition, including breastfeeding, and in promoting the appropriate use of vitamin supplements. As at present, vitamin supplements will continue to be an additional benefit within the scheme, although the formulations of supplements are under review.

The new reforms also mean that children in nursery will be offered a choice of milk or fruit instead of just milk as at present. Draft regulations will be published for consultation in spring 2004 and changes to the scheme will gradually be introduced from the end of 2004.

If you have any concerns, comments or questions about the changes, please email the Healthy Start mail box (healthystart@doh.gsi.gov.uk).

The SCDP will continue to update this paper over the coming months.

Further information:

October 2002: Healthy start proposals for reform of the Welfare Food Scheme

http://www.dh.gov.uk/Consultations/ResponsesToConsultations/ResponsesToConsultationsDocumentSummary/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4017124&chk=BPDET8

This document details the responses to the consultation, held between October and December 2002, on the Healthy Start proposals for the reform of the welfare food scheme. Contact details for obtaining hard-copy DH publications.

November 2002: Scottish Community Diet Project's Round Table Discussion about the Healthy Start proposals with community food projects in Scotland. Please look under round table discussion notes in www.dietproject.org.uk

March 2003: Healthy start the results of the consultation exercise

http://www.dh.gov.uk/PublicationsAndStatistics/Publications/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidance/PublicationsPolicyAndGuidanceArticle/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4010140&chk=gxzBnu

This document details the responses to the consultation, held between October and December 2002, on the Healthy Start proposals for the reform of the welfare food scheme.

February 2004: Healthy Start : Reform of the Welfare Food Scheme: Response issued 16 February 2004

http://www.dh.gov.uk/Consultations/ResponsesToConsultations/ResponsesToConsultationsDocumentSummary/fs/en?CONTENT_ID=4017124&chk=BPDET8

In October 2002 the Department launched a public consultation on proposals to reform the Welfare Food Scheme. These proposals were based on the findings of a scientific review of the scheme carried out in 1999 by the Panel on Child and Maternal Nutrition of the Committee on the Medical Aspects of Food and Nutrition Policy (COMA). On 12 February 2004 the Department published its response to the consultation exercise.