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**Opening Statement by Home Economics Department, St. Angela's College, Sligo**

**to the Oireachtas Committee on Children and Youth Affairs**

**Tackling Childhood Obesity**

**30<sup>th</sup> May 2018**

Chairman and Committee members, may I firstly introduce those of us who are here to represent the Home Economics Department, St Angela's College, Sligo. My name is Amanda McCloat and I am Head of Home Economics and alongside me is Dr Elaine Mooney, Lecturer in Home Economics. St Angela's College, is a College of the National University of Ireland Galway (NUIG) and delivers the only Initial Teacher Education Programme in Home Economics to Masters level educating third level students to become Home Economics teachers.

The Home Economics Department welcomes the consultation being undertaken by the Committee, and is most grateful for the opportunity to address the Committee today. As it is a core aspect of home economics, I would like to brief you on food education and specifically the contribution of Home Economics as a post-primary school subject in addressing the issue of childhood obesity.

We believe that prioritising the study of Home Economics in post-primary schools for all students is one of the most effective health promotion strategies available to combat poor dietary choices and unhealthy eating practices and consequently, assist in achieving the aims of *A Healthy Weight for Ireland 2016-2025*.

- Home Economics in schools is a comprehensive programme which incorporates nutritional knowledge and practical culinary and food skills, underpinned by scientific theory. It is taught in a sequential and integrated manner within a 'whole of school' approach.



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- Home Economics is the only school subject in which young people are afforded the opportunity to learn how to cook. It develops students' practical food and health literacy skills empowering them with not just the nutritional knowledge but also the practical hand on skills to integrate healthy food choices into their own daily eating habits. International research indicates that learning to cook as a young person is positively related to cooking confidence, good health and diet quality in later life.
- Notably, developing food, health and culinary skills is a key focus of the new Junior Cycle Home Economics Specification (2017) due to be implemented in schools in September 2018. The Specification comprises three strands; one of which is Food, Health and Culinary Skills which is underpinned by Health and Wellbeing element.
- Due to the practical nature of Home Economics, students engage in a critical way with food and health issues. There is an emphasis on the application of practical food and health literacy skills and includes menu planning; shopping; cooking; health and safety food skills; portion control; reading food labels; dietary analysis; food budgeting; sensory analysis; food waste etc.
- It is evident from international practice that Home Economics is considered key in many countries to the development of healthy populations. In countries such as Finland, Korea, Japan, Northern Ireland, Home Economics is a compulsory component of the curriculum in junior cycle education.

Never has there been such a fundamental need for compulsory food education for all students, and never has there been a better time to allow this to become a reality - with the new Junior Cycle Home Economics Specification set to be implemented in second level schools in September 2018.

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Therefore, we call on the Minister to implement the comprehensive curriculum of Home Economics as a compulsory component of Junior Cycle education in order to allow all our young people the opportunity to engage with practical food literacy skills and empower them to make the best dietary choices for their health.

In conclusion, Home Economics makes a unique contribution to the education of young people. While the solution to the obesity phenomenon is multifaceted, education emerges as a clear area of access. Home Economics is a comprehensive curriculum which teaches young people practical and theoretical aspects of food and the basic skills of how to prepare food for themselves and their families. Consequently, students will develop a confidence in choosing, preparing and cooking food. Home Economics is a key ingredient in a recipe for a healthy and happy life. It's time to wake up and get cooking!

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