

Submission to the Committee on Children and Youth Affairs on Tackling Childhood Obesity.

Submission by: The Association of Teachers of Home Economics (ATHE)

8th May 2018

The Association of Teachers of Home Economics (ATHE) very much welcomes the consultation by the Committee on Children and Youth Affairs on Tackling Childhood Obesity, and we are grateful for the opportunity to present our submission on behalf of our members who are Home Economics teachers.

Being faced, on a daily basis in schools, with the health of our young people we are only acutely aware of the challenge that exists around overweight and obesity. The fact that 1 in 4 children are obese (SafeFood, 2017) is alarming. This rising level of childhood and adult obesity is placing an ever increasing burden on individuals and society with the perpetuation of associated chronic diseases such as heart disease, cancer, type 2 diabetes, respiratory disorders and musculoskeletal conditions. However, in this submission we would propose that Home Economics, as a school subject, is ideally placed, in the context of the school setting, to work towards addressing this alarming health issue facing our society.

The new Junior Cycle Home Economics Specification (2017) starting in schools in September 2018 has a strong focus on health and wellbeing, teaching young people essential lifeskills in a practical, experiential way. A key strand of the Specification is Food, Health and Culinary Skills which focuses on developing *“a healthy, sustainable attitude and positive relationship with food through practical experiential learning. They apply their understanding of nutrition, diet and health principles in order to adopt a healthy lifestyle and make informed decisions that impact the health and wellbeing of themselves as individuals as well as within their families”* (DES, 2017, p.15). However, unfortunately this is still only an optional area of study. As a collective group of Home Economists, the ATHE strongly calls on policy makers to make Home Economics compulsory for all post-primary students in Ireland. Consequently, putting the food literacy of our young people to the forefront of the agenda.



Home Economics is the only school subject that teaches young people how to cook and prepare food which are essential life-skills for young people. Being able to cook for one self-ensures a dependency culture does not develop whereby people rely on processed and take away foods. Research demonstrates that if a young person can cook it can have a positive impact on their health, diet quality and confidence (Lavelle et al, 2016). Internationally, in countries such as Korea, Iceland, Japan and Finland, Home Economics is compulsory for all students to junior cycle equivalent in order to teach young people nutrition and food skills. These countries have superior health standards and prioritise Home Economics as a food education intervention.

Recommendation:

- The ATHE shares the view of the Department of Health (2016) that childhood obesity and health inequalities are critical issues that must be addressed. **Investment in making Home Economics compulsory on the school curriculum for all students in their Junior Cycle school years is vital.** Home Economics is the only school subject on the Irish curriculum that teaches young people food literacy and cookery skills. It is critical that all citizens of Ireland have the food and culinary skills and knowledge to provide nutritionally balanced meals for themselves and their families.

Signed:

Maria Hickey, President of ATHE

9th May 2018

References:

Lavelle F, McGowan L, Spence M, Caraher M, Raats M, Hollywood L, McDowell D, McCloat A, Mooney E, Dean M. (2016a) Learning cooking skills at different ages: a cross-sectional study. *International Journal of Behavioral Nutrition and Physical Activity*, 13:119 DOI 0.1186/s12966-016-0446-y.

Safefood. (2017). *Parenting is tough. You are tougher.* Retrieved May 2018, from www.safefood.eu: <http://www.safefood.eu/Start/Facts.aspx>

