



# **MARKETING OF FOODSTUFFS IN POST PRIMARY SCHOOLS IN IRELAND**

**Principal Investigators:** Drs Colette Kelly & Saoirse Nic Gabhainn

**Researchers:** Pauline Clerkin & Marie Galvin

Health Promotion Research Centre, NUI Galway

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**For further information contact:**

Ms Maureen Mulvihill

Health Promotion Manager

Irish Heart Foundation

4, Clyde Road

Ballsbridge

Dublin 4

Tel: (01) 6685001

Email: [mmulvihill@irishheart.ie](mailto:mmulvihill@irishheart.ie)

## **Executive Summary**

This survey was conducted to identify the level and type of marketing of foodstuffs in post-primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. The response rate from the various types of post-primary schools in Ireland is representative of the proportion of such schools in the country. A summary of the main findings is provided below.

This survey demonstrates a variety of food outlets e.g. tuck shops (53.2%), canteens (53.2%) and drinks vending machines (44.7%) in operation in post primary schools in Ireland, with a high proportion of schools also reporting a shop close to the grounds (64.4%). A variety of healthy foods are available through one or more of these outlets including juice (78.4%), sandwiches (73.9%) and fruit (62%). However, confectionary (74.1%), salty snacks/crisps (57.2%), fizzy/high sugar drinks (51.8%), diet drinks (50.2%) and biscuits, cakes and pastries (32.6%), which are of poor nutrient density, are also widely available.

Although the report of the National Taskforce on Obesity recommends that all schools should be encouraged to develop school polices to promote healthy lifestyles, just over a third of schools (36%) reported having a healthy eating policy in place. Of course, the existence of such policies does not guarantee successful implementation and indeed, some of the difficulties in putting the policies into practice were highlighted by a few respondents. These included food preferences of children and the availability and accessibility of unhealthy foods in the local school vicinity. Nonetheless healthy eating polices have been shown to positively impact on students' food choices and diets, and this survey illustrated that schools in Ireland are open to receiving guidance and support on these matters.

In terms of a policy on commercial sponsorship, only 7% of schools in Ireland have established a formal policy. With over one third of schools (38%) currently in receipt of commercial sponsorship, it is likely that a formal policy would help schools to communicate and negotiate with commercial groups more easily and enable them to introduce change, if required. The acceptance of commercial sponsorship appears in the majority of schools in Ireland to be influenced by a lack of funding for essential equipment, in particular sports equipment and IT equipment. The provision and

maintenance of physical activity facilities to schools, which is recommended in the report of the National Taskforce on Obesity, would help ease the financial vulnerability of schools and thus a reliance on commercial organisations for funding of such equipment.

This survey also illustrated that the majority of schools (87.3%) are in favour of a national, regularly reviewed code of practice in relation to industry sponsorship and funding activities provided to schools and local communities. Having a code of practice in relation to the provision and content of vending machines is also supported by nearly all schools (92.1%). These recommendations, which again are included in the report of the National Taskforce on Obesity, would help schools create an environment that encourages children to make healthy food choices.

In conclusion, the findings from this study emphasise the need for immediate action on implementing the recommendations for the education sector, of the report of the National Taskforce on Obesity. In particular, support from the Department of Education and Science should be made available to schools to assist with developing consistent school policies to promote healthy eating and active living. Moreover, action on developing a national code of practice in relation to industry sponsorship in schools and local communities is timely. Finally, a system to track sponsorship opportunities available to schools would also be useful so as to establish whether the use of schools as advertising and marketing venues is growing in Ireland.

## Context

The Irish Heart Foundation is working to reduce premature death and disability from heart disease and stroke. Tackling overweight and obesity form part of this strategy because these conditions can increase blood pressure and diabetes, which are risk factors for heart disease ([www.irishheart.ie](http://www.irishheart.ie)). Obesity is a complex condition that can affect all age groups and is not confined to one socio-economic group. Obesity increases the risk of several chronic diseases but it can also affect quality of life (Jebb *et al.*, 2003).

Obesity in children is an emerging public health problem, particularly in the Western World. Currently it is suggested that more than 300,000 children are overweight or obese in Ireland (Department of Health & Children, 2005). These figures compare poorly to rates in other countries. The Health Behaviour in School-aged Children (HBSC) survey showed that the levels of overweight and obesity in all Irish adolescent girls (10.5% and 12.6% in 13 and 15 year olds, respectively) were higher than the international average of 29 countries (Janssen *et al.*, 2005). It has been suggested that rates are probably rising at a rate of 10,000 per year (Department of Health & Children, 2005).

Environmental changes that have occurred over the last few years, such as a more sedentary lifestyle and the ready availability of energy dense foods, are the most likely underlying factors in the increasing prevalence of obesity. Indeed, this obesity-promoting environment has become known as ‘obesogenic’ (Swinburn & Egger, 2002) which encapsulates the social factors that have contributed to this public health problem. In Ireland the eating and physical activity patterns of children have been investigated and those of teenagers are currently under investigation ([www.iuna.net](http://www.iuna.net)). The factors influencing food availability and choice and the barriers to eating a healthy diet also need to be addressed. One of the obesity-promoting environmental factors that is of considerable interest is the marketing of foods to children. Television advertising, which is predominantly for foods high in salt, sugar and fat, has been shown to influence food choice, purchasing behaviour and consumption (Hastings, 2003). With respect to diet-related health, television advertising is associated with the adiposity of children and youth (McGinnis *et al.*, 2006).

Food marketing is not confined to television advertising and can occur through other media such as magazines, radio, cinema, mobile phones and outdoor advertising. The effects of such media advertising on food choice and diet have not been systematically reviewed to date. As well as numerous media, there are also a range of settings through which children are exposed to food marketing. The school environment is one such avenue and there is evidence of in-school marketing in a number of countries including Finland, Germany, the UK and Ireland (Matthews *et al.*, 2005). Investigating the extent and nature of food marketing to children was part of the 'Children, obesity and associated avoidable chronic diseases' project. This project was co-ordinated by the European Heart Network, which was part-funded by the EU, involving 20 countries across Europe. Matthews and colleagues found that schools represent a growing marketing opportunity for food advertisers in most European countries. Strategies include sponsoring events, linking food product purchasing to the provision of educational or sporting equipment, often involving token collection schemes and selling products in vending machines.

Hawkes argues that globally, in-school marketing is increasing but after reviewing the global regulatory environment that surrounds the marketing of food (including non-alcoholic beverages) to children, involving 73 countries, she found that many countries do not have specific regulations on in-school marketing; 33% of the countries surveyed were identified as having any form of regulation of this type and only a handful of countries place any restrictions on the sales of selected food products in schools. Interestingly, in-school marketing was second only to television advertising in terms of the amount of controversy that it has attracted in recent years (Hawkes, 2004).

The presence of commercial companies in schools in Ireland and the potential subsequent effects were recognised by the National Taskforce on Obesity when it recommended that a clear code of practice should be developed in relation to the provision and content of vending machines in post primary schools. Moreover, a national, regularly reviewed code of practice in relation to industry sponsorship and funding of activities in schools and local communities was also recommended (Department of Health and Children, 2005).

However, the extent of food marketing in post primary schools, which is thought to be predominantly for foods high in salt, sugar and fat (e.g. soft drinks, confectionary and savoury snacks), is unknown at present, to the best of our knowledge. Moreover, the different types of marketing employed, including sponsorship, branding, token collection and other promotional strategies need to be examined. By collecting this information, one can then proceed to work with schools and other bodies in trying to meet the recommendations of the National Taskforce on Obesity and thus provide an environmental context that makes it easier for children to eat a healthier diet and adopt a better lifestyle.

## **Aim**

The aim of this project was to identify the level and type of marketing of foodstuffs in post primary schools in the Republic of Ireland.

## **Objectives**

- To determine the level of catering and/or food provision within post primary schools in the Republic of Ireland, focusing on the type and amount of high energy dense foods.
- To measure the extent and nature of marketing from commercial organisations, across post primary schools in Ireland.
- To assess the attitudes of schools towards food marketing to children, within the post primary school setting.

## **Methodology**

A 40 item self-completion questionnaire was designed in consultation with the Irish Heart Foundation and was piloted with 10 schools. As a result of the pilot study and in agreement with the Irish Heart Foundation a number of questions were amended. The list of post primary schools was obtained from the Department of Education and

Science website ([www.education.ie](http://www.education.ie)) which was based on the 2005 school year and included a total of 741 schools. The Irish Heart Foundation recruited schools via a letter to Principals and follow-up phone calls where necessary. Questionnaires were returned in prepaid envelopes to the Irish Heart Foundation and were forwarded to the Health Promotion Research Centre for data inputting and analysis. Quantitative analysis was carried out using SPSS version 12.0. A number of open questions in the survey offered respondents an opportunity to comment on healthy eating policies, commercial sponsorship and the marketing of foodstuffs in their school. Qualitative data was exported for further textual, content-based analysis.

## Results

### 1. Schools Information

A total of 331 questionnaires were returned of the 741 that were distributed, yielding a response rate of 44.7%. All 26 counties were represented in the returned questionnaires. Just over half (52.7%) of the schools were located in towns while almost a quarter (24.1%) were located in cities. Smaller numbers were located in villages (15.5%) and in the countryside (7.6%).

**Table 1.1: Location of Schools**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Town	173	52.7
City	79	24.1
Village	51	15.5
Countryside	25	7.6

Over half of the returned questionnaires were from Secondary schools (52.9%) while a further third were from Vocational schools (33.6%). Fewer were received from Community schools and Comprehensive schools (13.4%).

The vast majority of schools were State funded (93.3%) with just under a third (32.6%) having disadvantaged status. Most of the schools were mixed gender (62.1%) while smaller numbers were single sex schools (female only: 20.9%, male only: 15.8%).

In most cases the person completing the questionnaire was the Principal (64%). Others who completed the questionnaire included SPHE co-ordinators (18.2%), teachers (8.5%), Deputy Principals (5.2%), school chaplains (1.2%), school secretaries (0.9%), home school liaison officers (0.9%), guidance counsellors (0.6%) and also one nurse and one health promoting school co-ordinator.

## 2. Food and Nutrition

Over half of the schools reported having a tuck shop (53%), all of which also had a canteen (a cafeteria within the school). Less than half (44.7%) reported having a drinks vending machine while fewer (28%) reported having a snack vending machine. Nearly two thirds (64.4%) stated that there was a shop located close to the school while 44.4% reported a fast food outlet close by.

**Table 2.1: Food outlets**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Shop close to school	212	64.4
School Canteen	175	53.2
Tuck Shop	175	53.2
Drinks Vending Machine	147	44.7
Fast Food outlet close to school	146	44.4
Snack Vending Machine	92	28.0

Respondents were asked to indicate which food and drink items students were able to obtain from within the school, through the canteen, tuck shop, vending machine or supplied free to the students. Table 2.2 below shows that just under a third of schools (32.6%) reported that biscuits, cakes and pastries were available through any of the schools food outlets, while yoghurt (49.5%), diet drinks (50.2%) or fizzy drinks

(51.8%) were available in approximately half of schools surveyed. Fruit was available in 62.0% of school outlets while 74.1% reported that confectionary (e.g. sweets, chocolate) was available.

**Table 2.2: Foods available to students within the school**

<b>Product</b>	<b>Vending Machine</b>	<b>Tuck Shop</b>	<b>School Canteen</b>	<b>Supplied free</b>	<b>Available in at least one outlet *</b>
<b>Water</b>	92 (29.1%)	105 (33.2%)	112 (35.4%)	82 (25.9%)	291 (92.1%)
<b>Juice</b>	72 (23.2%)	100 (32.3%)	113 (36.5%)	17 (5.5%)	243 (78.4%)
<b>Confectionary</b>	78 (24.4%)	143 (44.7%)	73 (22.8%)	0 0%	237 (74.1%)
<b>Sandwiches</b>	20 (6.5%)	71 (23.2%)	149 (48.7%)	12 (3.9%)	226 (73.9%)
<b>Fruit</b>	5 (1.7%)	71 (23.4%)	119 (36.1)	17 (5.6%)	188 (62.0%)
<b>Salty Snacks, crisps</b>	43 (14.1%)	107 (5.2%)	53 (17.4%)	0 0%	174 (57.2%)
<b>Milk</b>	2 (0.7%)	49 (16.9%)	109 (37.6%)	16 (5.5%)	160 (55.2%)
<b>Coffee or tea</b>	28 (9.5%)	22 (7.5%)	107 (36.3%)	17 (5.8%)	162 (54.9%)
<b>Fizzy /high sugar drinks</b>	68 (22.4%)	82 (27.1%)	47 (15.5%)	1 (0.3%)	157 (51.8%)
<b>Diet Drinks</b>	64 (22%)	69 (23.7%)	50 (17.2%)	0 0%	146 (50.2%)
<b>Yoghurt</b>	4 (1.4%)	42 (14.5%)	96 (33.2%)	10 (3.5%)	143 (49.5%)
<b>Biscuits, cakes or pastries</b>	12 (3.9%)	29 (9.5%)	70 (23%)	0 0%	99 (32.6%)

*\*Includes supplied free*

Just over half (50.6%) of respondents indicated that they believe that the foods available within the school meet the needs of the students.

### 3. Healthy Eating Policies

Just over a third of schools (36%) reported having a ‘healthy eating’ policy in place. The number of years the policy had been in place ranged from one to ten years (median 2.0, SD 1.5). A large majority of respondents (93%) indicated that school management and teachers (90.4%) had been consulted in drawing up the policy as well as students (87.7%). Parents were involved to a lesser extent (78.9%).

**Table 3.1: Consultation in drawing up the ‘healthy eating’ policy**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
School Management	106	93.0
Teachers	103	90.4
Students	100	87.7
Parents	90	78.9

All (100%) of those schools who have a healthy eating policy indicated that the aim of their policy is to increase consumption of healthy foods. Most (96.5%) also aim to educate students about food and nutrition and decrease the consumption of unhealthy foods. Fewer schools (89.5%) aim to improve food availability. Supporting teacher training in healthy eating and active living is a further aim of 70.5% of schools.

**Table 3.2: Aims of ‘Healthy Eating’ policies**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Increase consumption of healthy foods	114	100
Educate students	109	96.5
Decrease consumption of unhealthy foods	109	96.5
Improve food availability	102	89.5
Support teacher training	79	70.5

A small number (13.4%) also reported that the healthy eating policy refers to commercial sponsorship from food and drinks companies.

In schools where healthy eating policies were in operation, participants were invited to provide further details. A total of 53 responses were obtained. Replacing fizzy drinks, confectionary, deep fried foods and junk foods with healthy alternatives in the tuck shops and canteens was a common theme and deemed to be a basis from which to begin the process of implementing healthy eating policies. One teacher explained: *“we are targeting the food sold in the canteen and vending machines. We have banned caffeine containing high-sugar, soft drinks such as Coca Cola. We do not allow deep fried foods etc.”* (School 719). Another participant suggested employing a more holistic attitude: *“we have closed our tuck shop, removed vending machines. The school canteen does not offer enough healthy options. For this to work I feel it must be a whole school approach involving parents, management, ancillary staff and students”*(School 285). Eight contributors reported that the measures taken in their school were inadequate. Members of staff, who identified obstacles in the implementation of a healthy eating policy in the school, typically commented that *“it is extremely difficult to foster healthy eating in our school as the students will not purchase sandwiches, fruit drinks, food. They will leave the school to purchase crisps, fizzy drinks, chips etc...”* (School 141). Another noted that *“it is not working due to the availability of unhealthy options in the local shop, which they prefer”* (School 491). There were 11 respondents who noted that subjects such as Science, Home Economics, SPHE and Physical Education give staff the opportunity to teach and promote awareness of healthy food options as well as supporting campaigns each year which focus on aspects of healthy lifestyle.

**4: Commercial Sponsorship**

The majority of respondents (88.4%) reported that their school does not have a formal policy regarding commercial sponsorship.

**Table 4.1: Policy regarding commercial sponsorship**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
No	289	88.4
Yes	23	7.0
Don't know	15	4.6

Over one third of schools (38%) reported that their school currently accepts sponsorship from commercial companies.

**Table 4.2: Accept sponsorship from commercial companies**

	Frequency	%
Yes	122	38.0
No	180	56.1
Don't know	19	5.9

Schools that were not currently accepting sponsorship from commercial companies were requested to provide reasons. This invitation elicited 83 responses of which 32 regarded the marketing of food, sponsorship and commercial activity and interests in a school environment as inappropriate. As one school Principal observed: *“we are in the business of education. I don't allow access of commercial interests to children”* (School 382). Another respondent expanded on this issue: *“students are often seen as a convenient market to be exploited. We do not agree with this”* (School 652). The belief that a ‘healthy eating’ policy would be damaged by allowing commercial interests in the school place, was echoed by 8 participants: *“we feel they ultimately do not foster good eating habits – they make profit regardless. That is their goal and this philosophy is repugnant to our ethos”* (School 617).

Other recurrent reasons given for not accepting sponsorship were that it was neither sought nor proposed at any time ( $n=16$ ), *“never given the opportunity – no offers”* (School 239), lack of interest ( $n=12$ ), *“simply has not arisen as an issue”* (School 539) and lack of need ( $n=6$ ), *“not necessary”* (School 104). There were 4 contributors who expressed dissatisfaction with the idea of any outside involvement: *“we prefer to control available food/drink without pressures from commercial organisations”* (School 513). Three schools were unwilling to engage sponsorship but declined to give a reason. Three other schools simply reported that it was against stated policy.

However, a number of respondents ( $n=12$ ) acknowledged that they were in receipt of limited sponsorship due mainly to financial concerns: *“we have no other way of raising funds for such events as sports, transport, PE gear, computers, musicals etc.”*

(School 704). Another contributor commented that it was “*difficult to afford not to accept commercial sponsorship*” (School 457). These views are consistent with the findings in Table 4.4. below.

Those who reported accepting commercial sponsorship indicated that such a decision is usually made by the Principal in over half the schools (54%), by the Board of Management in 36% and by the Principal and staff together in 39% of schools.

**Table 4.3: Decision on sponsorship**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Principal	108	54.0
Board of management	72	36.0
Principal and Staff	79	39.3

Inadequate funding for essential school equipment, especially sports equipment, was the primary reason why schools accepted commercial sponsorship (91.6%) while small numbers indicated that the views of staff (11.7%), students (8.4%) and parents (7.8%) were also considered.

**Table 4.4: Reasons for accepting commercial sponsorship**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Inadequate funding for essential equipment	142	91.6
Views of staff	18	11.7
Views of students	13	8.4
Views of parents	12	7.8

Sports equipment (70.8%) were the products most frequently sponsored. A substantial number also indicated sponsorship of IT equipment (48.1%) and competitions and prizes (39.6%). Lower numbers reported sponsorship of educational materials (19.5%), vending machines (13%) and science equipment (9.1%). Less than 1% of schools referred to other sponsored items and events such as school concerts, student awards, trips, scholarships, fashion evenings, homework clubs, and landscaping of school grounds.

**Table 4.5: Products sponsored**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Sports equipment	109	70.8
IT equipment	74	48.1
Competitions and Prizes	61	39.6
Educational materials	30	19.5
Vending machines	20	13.0
Science equipment	13	9.1

In most cases sponsorship was obtained when the school approached the sponsor (62.8%) while lower numbers reported being part of a token/voucher collection (39.2%). Others were directly approached by letter (21.6%) while a few were involved in a competition (11.5%). Further methods of acquiring sponsorship included placing advertisements in magazines, linking a community based company with the school, an approach from a past pupil and drawing on the ‘AIB Better Ireland Programme’ financed by the Dormant Accounts fund.

**Table 4.6: How sponsorship was obtained**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
School approached sponsor	93	62.8
Token/ voucher collection	58	39.2
Direct offer by letter	32	21.6
Competition	17	11.5

A small number (7.4%) indicated that an incentive was offered to school staff to accept the offer. Equipment inducements were cited by four schools. Similarly, a small number (3.8%) noted that the school had incurred a financial outlay in relation to sponsorship such as cost of competition entry, cost of postage for tokens and the cost of prizes.

Over a third (38.6%) reported that sponsored products or merchandise contained logos while 9% contained corporate colours. A small number stated that sponsored equipment contained slogans (2.1%). Others ( $n=9$ ) specified the branding of the supplier's name and one contributor mentioned company vouchers.

**Table 4.7: Logos, slogans and corporate colours**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Logos	56	38.6
Corporate colours	13	9.0
Slogans	3	2.1

In cases where the school used branded equipment (49.7%), most of these (81.0%) use the equipment as it is, while a very small number (1.4%) offer a counter balancing message. No-one reported altering the equipment to disguise the logo or encourage brand recognition although one contributor stated that it depended on the brand. Over a quarter (28%) reported that information packs were offered to the schools by sponsoring bodies while lower numbers reported being offered vouchers or token schemes (21.9%), provision of business expertise (21.6%) and payments for advertising space (20.1%). Discounts on school equipment were reported by 19.8% and event sponsorship by 19.1%. Company employees helped with school activities in 14.9% of schools.

**Table 4.8: Services offered to schools**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Information packs	92	28.0
Vouchers or token schemes	72	21.9
Provision of business expertise	71	21.6
Payments for advertising space	66	20.1
Discounts on purchase of school equipment	65	19.8
Event sponsorship	63	19.1
Company employees helping with school activities	49	14.9

Subsidised visits of parties of students to concerts an exhibitions	23	7.0
Gifts in kind	23	7.0
Use of company facilities	20	6.1
Conference organisation for pupils/ teachers	10	3.0

A small number of respondents (13.5%) reported that the amount of sponsorship offered has increased over the past five years.

**Table 4.9: Sponsorship offered changed in 5 years**

	Frequency	%
Yes, substantially increased	40	13.5
Yes, substantially decreased	8	2.7
No change	93	31.3
Don't know	156	52.5

A similar number (12.9%) reported having accepted more sponsorship in the past 5 years.

**Table 4.10: Accepted more sponsorship in past 5 years**

	Frequency	%
Yes	38	12.9
No	179	59.3
Don't know	47	15.6
Never accepted commercial sponsorship	37	12.3

The main reason given by respondents for any perceived changes in sponsorship offers was that schools are an obvious choice for reaching children (28%). Some thought it reflected increased competition between companies (19.2%) or an economic boom (15.2%). Smaller numbers thought that changes were due to

goodwill from companies (11%), parental views (5.2%), students' views (4.6%), teachers' views (4%) and corporate responsibility (3.4%).<sup>1</sup>

**Table 4.11: Main reasons for change in sponsorship offers**

	Frequency	%
There has been no change	97	29.6
Schools are an obvious choice for reaching children	92	28.0
More competition between companies	63	19.2
Economic boom	50	15.2
Goodwill from companies	36	11.0
Parental views	17	5.2
Students views	15	4.6
Teachers views	13	4.0
Corporate responsibility	11	3.4

There were 14 responses to the request for any further opinions which differed from the suggestions in Table 4.11 above. Greater awareness of the potential benefits to both schools and commercial interests was cited. One member of staff commented that *“staff and Board of Management would discuss any sponsorship offered”* (School 549), while another noted that *“parents have sponsored events with the backing of their companies as their children attend the school”* (School 420).

In contrast, companies were seen to be taking advantage for their own gain, a point of view reflected also in responses to question 23a: *“companies exist to make profits. Supplying vouchers for school computers increase the number of parents etc. buying their products, therefore increasing profits”* (School 225). A regular theme is exemplified in the following remark: *“children are targeted en masse with marketing play in school. They are a captive audience. They are also easily manipulated into buying certain products. They have money nowadays”* (School 364).

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<sup>1</sup> These opinions were expressed as reasons for a change in sponsorship and not an increase or a decrease in sponsorship.

## 5. Attitudes to sponsorship

Half of respondents (50.1%) agreed or strongly agreed that they have severe moral reservations about the commercial sponsorship of school activities. Under half (46.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that the teaching staff are generally opposed to the commercial sponsorship of school activities and the promotion of company images on school premises. Just over a quarter (26.7%) strongly agreed or agreed that they would like their school to receive more commercial sponsorship. Over half (56.7%) strongly agreed or agreed that they believed themselves to be reasonably competent to negotiate sponsorship deals with business firms.

**Table 5.1: Attitudes to sponsorship**

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
I have severe moral reservations about the commercial sponsorship of school activities	77 (25.2%)	76 (24.9%)	90 (29.5%)	50 (16.4%)	12 (3.9%)
The teaching staff are generally opposed to the commercial sponsorship of school activities and/or promotion of company images on school premises	45 (14.8%)	97 (31.9%)	93 (30.6%)	64 (21.1%)	5 (1.6%)
I would like my school to receive a lot more commercial sponsorship	20 (6.7%)	60 (20%)	68 (22.7)	91 (30.3%)	61 (20.3%)
I believe I am reasonably competent to negotiate sponsorship deals with business firms	46 (15.7%)	120 (41%)	75 (25.6%)	41 (14%)	11 (3.8%)

Over half of the respondents (51.3%) indicated that they thought that sponsorship should be restricted in schools while 19.5% thought there should be more sponsorship activities. Of the latter, 51% were secondary schools, 30% were vocational schools and the remainder (19%) were community/comprehensive schools.

**Table 5.2: Change in sponsorship activities**

	<b>Frequency</b>	<b>%</b>
Yes, sponsorship should be restricted in schools	158	51.3
Yes, there should be more sponsorship activities	60	19.5
Don't know	51	16.6
No change	39	12.7

In terms of what approaches were needed to introduce change, a large number of respondents (81.1%) strongly agreed or agreed that there should be more communication between schools and industry. Similarly, 83.3% strongly agreed or agreed that there should be a voluntary school policy. Just under half (47.7%) agreed or strongly agreed that there should be a legislative approach to change. Fifty seven percent (56.7%) agreed that there should be a self regulatory code by industry while 72.9% agreed or strongly agreed that there should be training for Principals on these issues.

**Table 5.3: Approaches to introducing change**

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
More communication between schools and industry	100 (37.2%)	118 (43.9%)	39 (14.5)	6 (2.2%)	6 (2.2%)
A voluntary school policy	95 (35.2%)	130 (48.1%)	34 (12.6%)	10 (3.7%)	1 (0.4%)
Legislation	39 (15.1%)	84 (32.6%)	73 (28.3%)	45 (17.4%)	17 (6.6%)
A self regulatory code by industry	37 (15%)	103 (41.7%)	58 (23.5%)	29 (11.7%)	20 (8.1%)
Training for Principals	90 (32.7%)	112 (40.7%)	51 (18.5%)	16 (5.8%)	6 (2.2%)

Finally, a large majority (92.1%) strongly agreed or agreed that there should be a clear code of practice in relation to provision and content of vending machines in schools while 87.3% agreed or strongly agreed that there should be a national code of practice

in place in relation to industry sponsorship and funding activities in schools and local communities.

#### 5.4: Code of Practice

	<b>Strongly agree</b>	<b>Agree</b>	<b>Neither</b>	<b>Disagree</b>	<b>Strongly disagree</b>
A clear code of practice in relation to provision and content of vending machines in schools	180 (59.2%)	100 (32.9%)	13 (4.3%)	4 (1.3%)	7 (2.3%)
A national code of practice in relation to industry sponsorship & funding activities in schools & local communities	144 (48%)	118 (39.3%)	28 (9.3%)	5 (1.7%)	5 (1.7%)

### Discussion

The aim of this project was to identify the level and type of marketing of foodstuffs in post primary schools in the Republic of Ireland. The extent of involvement from commercial organisations and the attitudes of schools to such involvement also formed part of the objectives of the study.

The response rate from the various types of post primary schools (Secondary schools: 52.9%, Vocational schools: 33.6%, Community & Comprehensive schools: 13.4%) is representative of the proportion of these schools in the Republic of Ireland (54.8% Secondary, 33.3% Vocational & 11.9% Community/Comprehensive). The overall school response rate (44.7%) may generate concern although it is not dissimilar to response rates in other studies, e.g. 43% (Bennett & Gabriel 1999) and it is likely that refusal to take part was strongly influenced by the school's participation in other studies. This has been reported as the main reason for non-response in other studies (Vereecken *et al.* 2005).

#### *Food & Nutrition*

The school environment has been shown to have a strong influence on students eating behaviours and physical activity patterns (Weschler *et al.* 2000). The availability of food within or close to a school can influence school-children's health, either directly, from consumption of the items, or indirectly, from the messages these items convey

(Higgs & Styles, 2006). This survey demonstrates a variety of food outlets in existence in post primary schools in Ireland, with a high proportion also reporting a shop close to the school grounds (64.4%). Whilst it is likely that schools have little or no control over items on sale or purchased in shops, the availability of food within the school can be improved, which is necessary according to just under half the respondents.

The results from this survey illustrate that although nutritious foods such as milk, yoghurt, sandwiches and fruit are available in many schools, the simultaneous availability of confectionary, soft drinks, salty snacks and biscuits, which are recommended for consumption in small portions and only occasionally, are likely to hamper/discourage children from adopting healthy eating habits and attitudes. The presence of a canteen can facilitate the provision of nutritious balanced meals but with just under half of the schools without canteen facilities, improvements to the types of ready-to-eat foods and snacks (e.g. including dried fruit and nuts, plain popcorn) available within schools could contribute to healthier choices.

Despite the desire to improve food provision, it is a challenge for schools to balance providing for the nutritional needs of students' and pupils' preferences, which influences supply of the items sold by the school, and the extra income generated for schools. Yet, using vending machines as an example, it has been shown that healthy vending operations can be established in schools and leisure centres, that children enjoy the increased choice and flexibility, and that profits can be generated for the direct benefit of the school (Higgs & Styles 2006). The National Taskforce on Obesity recommends the development of a clear code of practice in relation to the provision and content of vending machines in post primary schools. It recommends that this code of practice should be developed by industry, the Department of Education and Science and schools' representative bodies (Department of Health and Children, 2005). The vast majority of respondents in this survey (92.1%) strongly agreed or agreed with developing such a code. Other initiatives that should support those schools interested in change include the new 10 year national nutrition policy, due to be published in 2007. It is anticipated that this policy will aim to increase the percentage of young people in schools who consume the recommended daily servings of food for a healthy diet, through implementing the Food and Nutrition Guidelines

for preschools, primary and post primary schools ([www.healthpromotion.ie](http://www.healthpromotion.ie)). The guidelines for post primary schools are in the process of being developed.

### *Healthy Eating Policies*

School food and nutrition policies can have an impact on students' food choices and diets (Vereecken *et al.* 2005; Wojcicki *et al.* 2006; Veugelers & Fitzgerald 2005; Lytle *et al.* 2006). These studies lend support to the broader implementation of policies that deal with food availability and food-related activities, which should help schools in Ireland create an environment/context where healthy food choices and behaviours are more easily promoted. The National Heart Alliance, Ireland (NHA, 2005) in its position paper states that the school environment should be guided by a health policy. Moreover, the National Taskforce on Obesity recommends that all schools should be encouraged to develop consistent school policies to promote healthy eating and active living, with the necessary support from the Department of Education and Science. Such policies should address opportunities for physical activity, what is being provided in school meals, including breakfast clubs and school lunches (Department of Health and Children, 2005).

The proportion of schools in Ireland (36%) with a healthy eating policy is in line with a study of secondary school Principals in Minnesota, USA (32%) (French *et al.* 2002). Secondary schools in Belgium-Flanders were seldom found to have food rules formalised (written), with approximately 15% of schools with written policies on biscuits, sweets and savoury snacks (Vereecken *et al.* 2005). However, it is difficult to make meaningful comparisons on the existence and nature of school food policies in different countries because of the distinct education systems as well as cultural differences, particularly in relation to food. For example, school meal provision varies considerably across Europe, e.g. in Finland and Sweden, there is a long established provision of free school meals to all school students, whereas Lithuania and the UK only subsidise meals for socio-economically disadvantaged groups (Young *et al.* 2005). Similarly in Ireland, the school meals programme provides some funding towards provision of food services for disadvantaged schools. Clearly, the provision of food in schools is likely to impact on the existence of school food policies and the how comprehensive it is.

The consultative process for drawing up a healthy eating policy appears to be popular for schools in Ireland. With just under two thirds of schools without a policy, certain obstacles possibly prevent or hinder policy development. Support for schools may be one factor for consideration and a guide to assist schools in developing meaningful policies may also prove useful.

### *Commercial Sponsorship*

In terms of a policy on commercial sponsorship, only 7% of schools in Ireland have established a formal policy, which compares to 14% of secondary schools in Greater London with formal policies on sponsorship (Bennett & Gabriel, 1999). It is anticipated that the Department of Health and Children's Food and Nutrition Guidelines for Post Primary Schools will recommend a voluntary policy on commercial sponsorship in schools be developed (Department of Health and Children, in press).

With over one third of schools currently in receipt of commercial sponsorship and almost 40% of schools obtaining sponsorship through token/voucher collection schemes, a formal policy may help schools to communicate/negotiate with commercial groups more easily and should help schools introduce change in the current situation, where desired.

Of the services offered to schools, information packs are the most frequently reported (28%) and the range of services on offer illustrates the extent of interaction between commercial organisations and schools. There is some similarity between countries in the types of services offered to schools. In the study by Bennett & Gabriel (1999), most sponsorship took the form of gifts of equipment (77%), followed by the sponsorship of competitions and prizes (65%), till voucher schemes (59%), loans of company employees (56%) and cash donations (56%). In the US, sponsorship of school events, token schemes, appropriation of space, sponsored educational material and privatisation, i.e. management of schools or school programs by private for-profit corporations are just some examples of how commercial organisations are involved with schools (see Molnar 2005 and Story & French, 2004). However, food sales remain the most prevalent form of commercial activity in schools in the US, primarily

the sale of soft drinks from vending machines (Story & French 2004). Sponsorship of vending machines was reported by 13% of schools in Ireland although the reported presence of drinks vending machines (45%) and snack vending machines was higher (28%).

In the US many school districts, teachers and parents criticised the extent of school marketing and among the actions taken, organisations were formed to determine the merit of corporate-sponsored educational material. In response, local school boards began to reduce the amount of commercial involvement in schools (Molnar, 2005). The qualitative data in this survey indicates the concerns of some teachers/Principals with regard to the appropriateness of commercial involvement in school activities. Just over half the respondents reported severe moral reservations about sponsorship of school activities and they perceived that just under half of their teaching staff were also opposed to such activities. However, just over a quarter (26.7%) strongly agreed or agreed that they would like their school to receive more commercial sponsorship. In addition, almost 20% reported that any change in sponsorship should incorporate more opportunities.

Notably, the acceptance of commercial sponsorship appears in the majority of schools in Ireland to be influenced by a lack of funds for essential equipment, in particular sports equipment and IT equipment. The financial vulnerability of schools, due to funding shortages, is also cited as one of the reasons for an increase in in-school marketing in the US (Story & French 2004). The National Taskforce on Obesity recommends that the Department of Education and Science should prioritise the provision and maintenance of physical activity facilities to address the issue of equity and access in all schools (Department of Health and Children, 2005). This should go some way to helping schools to be less reliant on commercial organisations for funding of such equipment.

In Ireland, there does not appear to be a system for tracking and monitoring any change in sponsorship opportunities in schools. Whilst the majority did not know or thought there was no change, 13.5% thought the amount of sponsorship offers had substantially increased. The main reason for the perceived *change* in sponsorship offers was the schools were viewed as an obvious choice for reaching children (28%).

The European Heart Network, in their report on 'The Marketing of Unhealthy Food to Children in Europe' found that whilst advertising budgets for television may be declining, small but rising proportions appear to be diverted to schools, as well as via the internet (Matthews *et al.*, 2005). Story & French (2004), state that from 1994-2004, the use of public schools in the US as advertising and marketing venues has grown.

The presence of commercial companies in schools in Ireland and the potential subsequent effects were recognised by the National Taskforce on Obesity when it recommended a national, regularly reviewed code of practice in relation to industry sponsorship and funding of activities in schools and local communities (Department of Health and Children, 2005). The majority of respondents in this survey report to being in favour of this recommendation, with 87.3% agreeing or strongly agreeing. Thus, it appears schools are open to changing the current situation of commercial sponsorship within schools, with 83.3% agreeing with a voluntary school policy and just under half (47.7%) agreeing to a legislative approach to change. Fifty-seven percent were in favour of a self-regulatory code by industry. Self-regulation is a system whereby industry actively participates in, and is responsible for, its own regulation. Existing European self-regulatory approaches aim to ensure that marketing promotions are responsible but they currently do not attempt to address the volume of advertising or other marketing practices and they are not being monitored in relation to their effect on children's diets (WHO, 2006). Hawkes (2005) reviewed what self-regulation of food advertising (*per se*) can and cannot do and argues that to address the problem of unhealthy diets, an independent body concerned with public health would need to guide such a process.

This survey illustrates the involvement of commercial organisations in post primary schools in Ireland. Whilst there is a desire for a change in this relationship by some, there are others who are interested in more sponsorship opportunities. This may be related to the lack of funding available to particular schools. The extent of in-school marketing in Ireland is small compared to the US but with a reported move away from television advertising it is possible that it may increase in this country. Thus, having policies in place in school and at the national level, which promote healthy environments will facilitate children in adopting healthier habits and attitudes.

At the European level, four broad national policy options to address the problem of marketing of foods and non-alcoholic beverages to children (in general) were discussed at a WHO Forum and Technical meeting held in May 2006. The meeting participants also recommended that WHO should develop guidelines to promote and support national action to substantially reduce the volume and impact of commercial promotion of energy-dense, micronutrient-poor food and beverages to children.

## **Conclusions**

Marketing of energy-dense, nutrient-poor foods to children can have an adverse impact on children's health. Schools are just one setting through which action can be taken to limit these effects. An environment in school that promotes healthy food choices and behaviours is fundamental for establishing healthy lifestyles. To facilitate this, school food policies need to be established through which issues concerning food availability and industry sponsorship can be tackled. This survey illustrates that schools need encouragement in these matters and are open to receiving guidance and support in implementing such policies. This should pave the way for implementing some of the recommendations of the National Taskforce on Obesity, which were published in 2005 and are still awaiting action.

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## Appendix 1

# Commercial Sponsorship in Post Primary Schools



## Section A: About your school

1. Please tick the relevant boxes to describe your school

- |                      |                          |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| Secondary School     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Vocational School    | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Community School     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Comprehensive School | <input type="checkbox"/> |

2. Where is your school located?

- |             |                          |
|-------------|--------------------------|
| City        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Town        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Village     | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Countryside | <input type="checkbox"/> |

3. Is your school fee paying?

- |     |                          |
|-----|--------------------------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

4. Does your school have disadvantaged status?

- |     |                          |
|-----|--------------------------|
| Yes | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| No  | <input type="checkbox"/> |

5. How many students are enrolled at present? \_\_\_\_\_

6. What is the gender composition of students?

- |             |                          |
|-------------|--------------------------|
| Mixed       | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Only Female | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Only Male   | <input type="checkbox"/> |

7. How many teaching staff do you have? \_\_\_\_\_

8. Please indicate your own position in the school

- |                  |                          |
|------------------|--------------------------|
| Principal        | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| Deputy Principal | <input type="checkbox"/> |

SPHE co-ordinator   
 Teacher   
 Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

**Section B: Food and nutrition**

9. Does your school have any of the following?

School canteen   
 Tuck shop   
 Drinks vending machine   
 Snack vending machine   
 Shop close to school   
 Fast food outlet close to school

10. Can students obtain the following items from within the school?

	No	Vending machine	Tuck shop	School canteen	Supplied free to students
Biscuits, cakes or pastries	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Confectionary (e.g. chocolate, sweets)	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Coffee or tea	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Fruit	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Fizzy drinks/high sugar drinks	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Juice	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Milk	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Water	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Diet drinks	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Sandwiches	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Salty snacks, crisps	<input type="checkbox"/>				
Yoghurt	<input type="checkbox"/>				

11. Do you think the foods available or food provision within your school meet the needs of your students?

Yes

No

12. Does your school have a 'healthy eating' policy in place?

Yes

No

**(IF NO, PLEASE PROCEED TO Q. 22)**

13. If yes, for how long has the healthy eating policy been established?

\_\_\_\_\_ years

14. In drawing up the policy, did you consult any of the following persons?  
More than one may apply.

School management

Teachers

Parents

Students

15. Does the policy aim to educate students about food and nutrition?

Yes

No

Don't know

16. Does the policy aim to support teacher training in healthy eating and active living?

Yes

No

Don't know

17. Does the policy aim to improve food availability within school grounds?

Yes

No

Don't know

18. Does the policy aim to increase consumption of 'healthy' foods?

Yes

No

Don't know

19. Does the policy aim to decrease consumption of 'unhealthy foods'?

Yes

No

Don't know

20. Does the policy refer to commercial\* sponsorship from food or drinks companies?

Yes

No

Don't know

*\* Note: Commercial companies are defined as those working to make profits on goods and services and does not include charitable organisations.*

21. If the 'healthy eating' policy includes any of the aims in Q14 through to Q19 please provide further details below

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---

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---

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### Section C: Commercial sponsorship

22. Does your school have a formal policy regarding commercial sponsorship?

Yes

No

Don't know

23. Does your school currently accept sponsorship from commercial companies? (e.g. supermarket voucher collection schemes)

Yes

No

Don't know

If no, please give reasons(s):

---

---

---

**(IF NO, PLEASE PROCEED TO Q. 33)**

24. Who decides on whether sponsorship is accepted or not?

Principal

Board of Management

Principal and staff

25. What are the main reasons for accepting sponsorship?

Inadequate funding for essential equipment

Views of staff

Views of students

Views of parents

26. What type of products are sponsored?

- Sports equipment
- Science equipment
- Vending machines
- Educational materials (e.g. books, maps, posters etc.)
- IT equipment (e.g. TV or computers)
- Competitions and prizes
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- 

27. Which of the following companies provide products or services?

- General food companies<sup>2</sup>
- Drinks companies
- Confectionary companies
- Snack food companies<sup>2</sup>
- Retailers/Supermarkets
- Newspapers
- Manufacturers of cleaning products
- Manufacturers of personal hygiene products
- Financial institutions

28. How was the sponsorship obtained?

- Competition
- Token/voucher collection
- Direct offer by letter
- School approached sponsor
- Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
- 

29. Was any incentive offered to school staff to accept the offer?

- Yes
- No
- If yes please give details: \_\_\_\_\_

---

<sup>2</sup> General foods includes bread, dairy etc; <sup>2</sup>Snack foods includes crisps, biscuits etc.

---

30. Has the school ever incurred a financial cost in relation to sponsorship?  
e.g. cost of competition entry?

Yes

No

If yes please give details: \_\_\_\_\_

---

31. Does sponsored equipment or other merchandise contain any of the following:

Logos

Slogans

Corporate colours (e.g. Mars' Black/gold/red, McDonalds' red/yellow)

Any other branding (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_

---

32. In cases where the school uses branded equipment, do the appropriate staff members:

Use the equipment as it is

Offer a counter balancing message, where appropriate

Alter the equipment to disguise the logo

Encourage brand recognition

Other (please specify): \_\_\_\_\_

---

33. Have any of the following services been offered to the school?

Use of company facilities for school use

Event sponsorship

Conference organisation for pupils and /or teachers

Subsidised visits of parties of students to concerts and exhibitions

Company employees helping with school activities

Provision of business expertise

Payments for advertising space

Information packs

- Voucher or token schemes
- Gifts in kind
- Discounts on purchase of school equipment

34. Do you think the amount of sponsorship offered by companies has changed over the last 5 years?

- Yes, it has substantially increased
- Yes, it has substantially decreased
- No
- Don't know

35. Do you think your school has accepted more sponsorship in the past 5 years?

- Yes
- No
- Don't know
- We have never accepted commercial sponsorship

36. In your opinion, what are the main reasons for the change, if any, in sponsorship offers? Tick as many as apply.

- There has been no change
  - More competition between companies
  - Economic boom
  - Schools are an obvious choice for reaching children
  - Goodwill from companies
  - Corporate responsibility
  - Parental views
  - Students' views
  - Teachers' views
  - Other (please specify) \_\_\_\_\_
-

**Section D: Attitudes to sponsorship**

37. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following statements:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
I personally have severe moral reservations about the commercial sponsorship of school activities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
The teaching staff in this school are generally opposed to the commercial sponsorship of school activities and /or promotion of company images on school premises	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I would like my school to receive a lot more commercial sponsorship	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I believe I am reasonably competent to negotiate sponsorship deals with business firms	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

38. In general, do you believe there should be a change in commercial sponsorship within schools?

Yes, there should be more sponsorship opportunities	<input type="checkbox"/>
Yes, sponsorship should be restricted in schools	<input type="checkbox"/>
No	<input type="checkbox"/>
Don't know	<input type="checkbox"/>

39. Please indicate how strongly you agree with the following approaches for introducing change:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
More communication between schools and industry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A voluntary school policy	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Legislation	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A self-regulatory code by industry	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
Training for Principals	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

40. Please indicate how much you agree or disagree with the following recommendations:

	Strongly agree	Agree	Neither agree nor disagree	Disagree	Strongly disagree
A clear code of practice in relation to provision and content of vending machines in schools (developed by industry, Dept. Ed & Sci and schools' representative bodies)	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
A national code of practice in relation to industry sponsorship & funding activities in schools & local communities	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

***Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire.  
Please return in the FREEPOST envelope provided.***