

Our Ref: R24/2004

27 February 2004

Catherine Le Galès-Camus
Assistant Director-General for
Noncommunicable Diseases and Mental Health
World Health Organization
CH-1211
Geneva
27-Switzerland

Richmond House
79 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2NS

Tel: +44 (0)20 7210 5150-4

Fax: +44 (0)20 7210 5407

liam.donaldson@doh.gsi.gov.uk

www.doh.gov.uk/cmo

Dear Assistant Director - General,

UK response to WHO consultation on draft Global Strategy

At the WHO Executive Board in January 2004, the UK strongly supported the development of the WHO global strategy and aligned itself with the statement made by Ireland on behalf of the EU and the acceding countries in support of having a global strategy on Diet, Physical Activity and Health. We congratulate WHO for its vision and drive to combat non-communicable disease world-wide.

In common with many other states, the UK is striving to cope with the burden of chronic diseases such as diabetes, cardiovascular disease and cancers. The UK believes that a global strategy will be an integrated, comprehensive and balanced approach to diet, physical activity and health, assisting member nations in taking co-ordinated and comprehensive approaches appropriate to their own public health concerns and help to achieve a healthier population.

It is important that the strategy focuses on the need for a fully integrated multi-sector approach embracing the public, private and voluntary sectors and all levels of government, to provide a supportive, health enhancing cultural and structural environment for each individual including potentially excluded communities of interest. This should be in addition to the consideration of the role of individuals and families.

We firmly believe that all stakeholders have a major role to play in assisting and empowering individuals to choose a healthier diet and increase their physical activity levels by facilitating both access and providing information. We welcome the WHO's recognition that capacity building is an important factor and acknowledge that member states will need to invest in this area.

The food industry has a vital role to play in assisting and promoting a healthy diet. The industry has a wealth of experience in the provision, development and successful marketing of foods, which can be harnessed to promote healthier diets. Action to reduce salt intakes in the UK, demonstrates that industry can and will take action when it is made a public health priority.

We welcome the WHO's acknowledgement of the need to develop and utilise international partnerships to support change. We note that, in the context of a global strategy, the discussion is largely confined to food partners (agriculture, the food industry etc). We would encourage the WHO to take the widest possible view in considering international partnerships which also influence physical activity (for example, the promotion of non-motorised travel) and opportunities for added value through the WHO's role in other relevant areas such as sustainability, safety, pollution, transport etc.

The UK supports the call for evidence based approaches. There is a wealth of international evidence on the links between diet and physical inactivity and later disease and it is important this forms the basis for a global strategy and is referenced. We in the UK recognise that the evidence relating to diet and chronic disease is complex due to the nature of available evidence. Nevertheless the conclusions and recommendations of the evidence base for the strategy are based on sound, well-established and emerging evidence, which we endorse. The dietary goals and objectives of the strategy reflect our own public health objectives as well as those of many other Member States.

The UK strongly supports the sentiments and goals of having a global strategy and recommends that member states be encouraged to support a strategy at the World Health Assembly in May which will lead to measurable health improvements. Each member state will take actions appropriate to their own populations, deciding what strategies are important for their citizens but the challenge requires world-wide collaboration to combat the increasing levels of chronic diseases.

Yours sincerely,



SIR LIAM DONALDSON
CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER