

## Not Just Dinners! Food in a School Setting webinar – Tuesday 21<sup>st</sup> February 2023

### Transcription

Presentations are [saved here](#) on the YH Healthier and Resilient Food Systems Network pages on the Y&H Public Health Network website.

Please click the links below to direct you to each of the presentations.

- [Welcome and introduction: Kristin Bash, Chair of the YH Healthier and Resilient Food Systems Network](#)
- [Feed the Future: policy progress towards healthy, sustainable school food for all - Barbara Crowther, Coordinator, Children's Food Campaign](#)
- [The National School Breakfast Programme - Supporting schools to run a successful and affordable school breakfast provision - Louise Stevens, National School Breakfast Programme Schools Communications, Quality and Best Practice Officer, Family Action](#)
- [School Food Standards Compliance Pilot - Shivani Patel, Senior Strategy Advisor, Food Standards Agency](#)
- [The ultra-processed food content of school meals and packed lunches in the UK - Dr Jennie Parnham, Research Associate - Public Health Evaluation Unit, Imperial College London](#)
- [Panel – Q&A - Barbara Crowther, Louise Stevens, Shivani Patel, Dr Jennie Parnham](#)
- [Effect of Breakfast on Cognitive & Mental health and attainment: implications of food insecurity & the cost-of-living crisis Attainment - Professor Louise Dye, Leeds Nutrition & Behaviour Group, University of Leeds](#)
- [The development of the CONNECTS Food resource and next steps - Dr Wendy Burton, Research Associate at University of York](#)

#### Case Studies:

- [Rethink Food Transition Project - Helen Ingle, Public Health Manager, North Yorkshire County Council & Melanie Reed, Education Co-ordinator at Rethink Food](#)
- [The Halifax Academy community kitchen and garden - Fiona Black, Community & Partnerships Officer/Food and Nutrition Teacher, Halifax Academy](#)
- [Pupil-led Packed Lunches and School Meals - Siobhan Jennings, Nutritionist & Healthy Eating Advisor, Leeds City Council](#)
- [Implementation and evaluation of auto-enrolment processes for Free School Meals \(FSM\) across Yorkshire: A legacy project to inform regional and national policy - Maria Bryant, Professor of Public Health Nutrition, University of York & Dr Annie Connolly, Research and Engagement Lead, Children's Right 2 Food, The Food Foundation](#)
- [Panel – Q&A - Professor Louise Dye, Dr Wendy Burton, Helen Ingle, Melanie Reed, Fiona Black, Siobhan Jennings, Professor Maria Bryant, Dr Annie Connolly](#)

## **Welcome & Introductions – Kristin Bash, Chair of the YH Healthier and Resilient Food Systems Network**

We can start with the cost-of-living crisis. I think we're all aware that even though inflation has come down marginally, it is still high and embedded within the inflation number is even higher. Inflation around the most basic things that we all need to live around our housing, around our energy and of course around our food costs. So, what this is doing is pushing more and more people into food insecurity, realising that's only one part of school food. But there are an estimated 800,000 children living in poverty across the UK who are not eligible for free school meals as just one tiny sliver of the issues related to food that we serve in school. Thanks to London that 800,000 is going down a bit, but I'm sure our speakers will talk a bit more about this in the future.

Today we're speaking about solutions, not just the issues. Our speakers will be providing an expert overview of the issue, discuss current and developing policies, lead us through the evidence and then also highlight really good case studies and examples of local practise. We'll look at future development support, whole food school approaches, whole school approaches to food rather from teaching, to growing to eating and look at a range of issues related to food in schools.

We have a day split up into two main sections. There will be a panel question and answer at the end of each session, so please feel free to use the chat function to ask any questions. Make any comments that you would like to present to our speakers at the end of each section.

The first section will focus on an overview of the issues and current developments will have a short break at 10 past 11 and then the second session will pick up specific case studies, academic evidence and some key topics. So really looking forward to this today, quick bit of housekeeping if I could ask everyone to just have a look and keep your microphone turned off. So keep yourself on mute, keep cameras turned off unless you're speaking it will help with the large number of people we have on the call today and keeping the bandwidth free.

A reminder that this is being recorded again for those of you have joined since the beginning, when we gave the initial formal notice. And please again, just another reminder to add your comments in the chat and questions, because we'll be looking to pick those up for our speakers at the end of each session.

So with that very brief introduction to a huge topic, I'm very pleased to kick off by introducing our first speaker and many of you, I'm sure, know Barbara well, like to introduce Barbara Crowther. Barbara is the coordinator of the Children's Food campaign with Sustain. She joins Sustain in 2018, and she manages the Children's Food Campaign, which champions children's rights, parent power and government action to improve the food environment that children grow up in. This includes campaigning to end junk food marketing to children and other measures like the sugary drinks tax, as well as for all children to be able to have healthy, delicious planet friendly school meals every day, so as with great pleasure, that and gratitude that we welcome Barbara to our webinar today and I will hand over to you Barbara.

## **Feed the Future: policy progress towards healthy, sustainable school food for all - Barbara Crowther, Coordinator, Children's Food Campaign**

Barbara joined Sustain in 2018 and manages the Children's Food Campaign, which champions children's rights, parent power and government action to improve the food environment children grow up in. This includes campaigning to end junk food marketing for children and more measures like the sugary drinks tax, as well as for all children to be able to have healthy, delicious planet-friendly school meals every day.

Thank you very much everybody, and I really appreciate being invited to share with you in this webinar this morning. Kristin has done a pretty good introduction, but just to say that I'm sure many of you also know the work of Sustain, the children's food campaign is one of many campaigns that is under the big house and the alliance that is the Sustain alliance for better food and farming from sustainable food, food for the planet, Veg cities, sustainable food places which we run with the Soil Association, the Children's Food Campaign, the Real Bread campaign and much, much more including Local healthy food advertising policies, and I know it has been a really big area of work in this region and children's food campaign itself brings together quite a wide array of children's and health organisations from the Royal Colleges, Cancer Research, British Heart Foundation, as well as many different organisations working in the school food sector and academics working in the Food school food sector. What I'm presenting to you today is pretty much drawn from that, that web of expertise that we represent in the children's food campaign.

I don't think I need to rehearse some of these arguments, but I thought it was really important just to kick off this. webinar by talking about why we believe school food is so important and why school meals are so important, and I think in especially in this cost-of-living crisis and through the pandemic, there's been a huge focus on feeding children because we don't want any child to be too hungry to learn. And that's been really, really important and making sure that the children with the lowest incomes are not left out, but I think in that debate we've sometimes, failed to advocate why school meals are good for all of us and for all children, and that they lead all of society to be both healthier and wealthier. We know that children who take up school meals are likely to eat more vegetables, and we know that's massively different in relation to packed lunches and the quality of packed lunches, and especially the concerns around the quality of packed lunches in a cost of living crisis.

We know that uptake of school meals has been associated with doing better in school. That will be shown through the Universal Infant Free School meals programme and through the pilots that were run about 10 years ago in a number of boroughs. Recently, research from the team at the University of Essex, have shown that in the four boroughs that have rolled out universal Primary school meals, there is a correlation with a slowing down of obesity rates in those four boroughs. That's not to say obesity rates have gone into a net decline, but certainly the rate of growth of obesity prevalence has slowed down and that curve has started to kind of level off a little bit more. We think we're seeing those signs, but obviously that can only be delivered if the quality of food and health of food and the standards associated with school food can be upheld.

We know also that a universal approach to provision of school food is much more likely to reduce health inequalities and is much more likely to increase uptake even amongst those children who are already eligible through benefit related means testing but who, because of various barriers and social and stick and areas issues to do with stigma and not taking up their entitlement, or to do with the quality of the food and then most recently, impact on urban health together with Price Waterhouse Coopers has shown that for every pound invested in a school meal, there can be educational, health and economic benefits and from £1.38 they estimated in a scenario where the threshold for eligibility of school meals was lifted to all in Universal Credit and up to a return of £1.71 over a 20 year period for every one pound invested in school meals under a universal scenario. I've got the link in the presentation there and I've used this picture because it shows the three main political parties from Lord Bethel, from the Conservatives, Munira Wilson, the Education spokesperson for the Liberal Democrats and Stephen Timms from the Labour Party, together with the chair of the Food Foundation at a recent event we ran in Westminster and showing where we had a rare moment of political consensus, which was a beautiful contrast to the way school meals have been used. A little bit as a political football. We want to try and really sync how we can keep building that consensus at a local and national level.

I was asked to do a little bit of a policy overview in this webinar and I wanted to share this slide which is courtesy of Miles Bremner, the former director of the school Food Plan, now leading a group under the auspices of the School Food Review Group, which is chaired by Nick Capstick and the former CEO of the White Horse Academy network. And what we wanted to show is just the complex web of different issues affecting school food and I'm you know, looking at the sessions for today, we're going to go into a number of these in more details. So I'm not going to go into them, but at the centre of these, the child is kind of part of this web which includes access to breakfast clubs, whether or not the universal Infant free School meal programme, whether or not they're eligible for benefit related school meals. The school fruit and vegetable scheme, we could probably add in them the infant milk scheme as well, and sometimes afterschool clubs and holiday provision. And then, of course, food education to do with nutrition education, but also cooking skills in school. And each of those has a separate funding scheme. There's no real one single source of data on government revenues. And so each of those are coming into schools in different parcels and packages. And overall the system has become quite complex but we estimate and this is in England around 1.4 million is spent on sort of the year round school food interventions.

It's probably more than that because we don't know around. There's no real data around food education, and so this is kind of rough per meal per year estimates. And then on top of that, of course, we've got the additional interventions that are now taking place via the holiday activities and food programme estimated 220 million a year. And then also the Household Support Fund, which I know today, we've got the latest announcements on the £842,000,000 over the next 12 months, so that's actually gone up and from when I even wrote the slide and in the past year about 30%, the guidelines suggested 30% of that should be allocated to children. And I know that has played out very differently from one local authority to another in terms of whether councils felt they were able to, for example, use that money to continue to fund school food vouchers over the holidays in compliment to the Holiday Activities Fund, which at the moment only funds six weeks, four days a week, six weeks of the 13 weeks of the school holidays.

This complex web of funding going on and what we know is that the school food system has flaws which have been exposed and exacerbated by the pandemic. So all of this input is going in, but we know that this kind of a leaky bucket where, um, there's a lack of transparency over how some of those, some of that funding is being allocated, how much of that money is actually ending up in healthy school food on children's plates, children missing out through eligibility thresholds that insufficient, and then also the quality of food. And so there's just gaps and inconsistencies which are leading to challenges over uptake over quality and over affordability.

The School Food Review Group, which includes the school Food Matters Food Foundation and most of the big head teachers organisations, the local Authority Catering Association and many, many of the NGOs from child Poverty Action Group to Save the Children and others, and we've come up with five pillars for policy action and a lot of this is going to think it's going to be teased out by other speakers and later in this programme but under those five pillars, obviously the one that's had the most public attention has been the one around entitlement, the £7400 pound threshold of eligibility under Universal Credit for England. As Kristen said, 800,000 children estimated to be living in poverty still not eligible under that threshold. Universal Meals being expanded in pockets and but then the National School breakfast programme, currently working in around 2,500 schools when we estimate 7,500 and I know that Family Action will come and talk about that later.

We've also got issues of uneven quality and standards in procurement. So particularly around tendering and the weighting of quality versus cost in procurement and wanting to see that given a bit more of a balanced scorecard around quality. And that's not just quality in terms of the food itself, the sourcing, but also in terms of Environmental Quality and wanting to see stronger health and environmental focus in school Food Standards, and there's a big debate around the role of puddings and certainly the role of meat and the amount of meat and fish related protein versus plant based protein in terms of the planet and then also making sure that those procurement standards feed right the way down into the school system in terms of effective training and support for schools and their caterers.

Third pillar we've identified is around accountability, the lack of a system of monitoring and reporting, and calls for a better accreditation system. So, at the moment we've got the Soil Association, food for life system, but it's the only one that's really doing evidence-based reporting into whether or not school food meets a certain level of standards and so we'd love to see an accreditation system that includes the publication of school food policies and some form of light touch annual reporting at least. But the FSA is now running the pilot compliance scheme on school Food Standards and there is the issue around the change in school Food Standards as well. And so it'll be good to see what happens through that pilot and the school Food Review Group has fed into templates.

Lots of barriers that affect take up even where children are eligible, so I know there's been really interesting work done in in Yorkshire around data integration and automation of data, and certainly one of the big, big areas that we're trying to look at is how can we move towards auto enrolment, which requires a way of sharing data between DWP and the Department for Education. And then from those bodies back down into local authorities so that those barriers of registration and in any universal school meal scenario, we would need to do that for the pupil premium rather than necessarily free school meal eligibility.

They are also affected by things to do with menu design and dining facility designs, I know some caterers are doing fantastic work in involving children and young people in those things catering training and children's experience of the service. And then finally we don't have a clear picture some local authorities report through app say around uptake but there isn't a clear national picture of uptake.

Be able to see where it's working and where it's not, and that's an area that I know there's lots of expertise at local level, but we've not really got a good national platform, we're trying to see what we can we do to promote good practise and uptake and remove those barriers of uptake. Obviously, the biggest removal of a barrier of uptake will be a universal programme.

Then finally the funding is very complex and confusing as I outlined in the previous slide. And so there's some really interesting work going on with the school business leaders and the Association of School business managers around looking at whether there is, there's a way of simplifying the funding and bringing some of that together into one pot. There areas around how we link conditions of grant to funding as well, and certainly it's a local level, so that grants passed from schools through from local authorities through to through to schools does translate into good nutrition and that there's a good a good form in that links back into the accountability point. There are certain challenges to do with small school funding levels. attempt

Capital funding, obviously a key issue in any proposals to expand school meals, but also recognising their ongoing challenges in many schools around capital funding that affect their ability to provide a kind of a seamless and school meal service and then finally school fruit and vegetable scheme. And there was a proposal in the national food strategy to try and devolve that's currently centralised procurement through the NHS, but there's plenty of interest and arguments.

We're looking at how the budgets for school fruit and veg could be devolved back into that school level and linked into kind of other procurement and especially could then sort of help trigger more dynamic procurement and back into the system. And I think that's another area how do we make sure funding works so that we can also leverage local healthy supply chains and create that win-win in terms of local community employment and business through the school meal system.

I've skimmed over the big policy areas. I wanted to just say a little bit more about entitlement - a screen grab from the Superpowers of school meals. And I think what we're increasingly talking about in the Mayor of London's announcement yesterday is a real case in point that there are huge differences and a growing postcode lottery of entitlement. As you can see on this slide. And I probably don't need to rehearse it too hard, but that kind of gives you that sense of and certainly you've got children in London, children in Scotland and over the next 2-3 years children in Wales are going to have a much greater entitlement in Northern Ireland than children in other parts of England. And so that issue around levelling up, we actually are seeing in the system, which is getting more, it's getting more unequal, not more level. And in Northern Ireland there is a commitment to review eligibility and the means tested threshold is already higher, so whilst they're not

rolling out any universal programmes like the other devolved nations, there are certainly moves afoot to try and see what they can do to go beyond the current national government policy.

So we've been arguing for changes in entitlement and at the moment we've got 1.9 million children receiving benefit related free school meals. There are transitional protections under that Universal Credit roll out, which is inflating the numbers. And we were worried that Cliff Edge might be reached in March 2023. But it is now being extended a further two years due to the delays in Universal Credit but that is still leaving these 800,000 children in poverty and without access. I've listed here what's happening in Scotland and Wales, and we've had the 5th borough in London recently announced Universal Primary School meals until July 2024. And then, of course yesterday, the Mayor of London stepped in with a rather unexpected announcement of 130,000,000 for all London boroughs. And that's going to be a really interesting thing to see.

There are logistical and workforce challenges to how quickly all London boroughs might be able to step up. For that, there are politics involved and whether they're conservative led councils are going to accept that money. And because it's only for one year, it's emergency funding for one year. So there was yesterday a rallying call to all councils to take up the opportunity to do as much as they can. And then of course, we've got a couple of boroughs like Tower Hamlets who had been investing significant amounts of money who are now going to have extra budget now and are going to potentially shift their own internal budgets to piloting roll out of expanded eligibility and new quality and procurement options into secondary schools. And where I think it is much more challenging to try and provide primary meals for all.

We were calling for an increase to the national food strategy, the end Child Poverty campaign, the feed the future campaigns called for expansion to all children in households receiving Universal Credit. So far, those calls have literally fallen on deaf ears. And even amidst us calling for that change in threshold rather than universal, actually, what we started hearing increasingly from the ground, from teachers, from young people, from anti-poverty groups and from several councils that actually universal meals are the way to go, not just to change of eligibility threshold.

There's really growing momentum as we're seeing in Scotland and Wales for universalism. And now the Mayor has upped the ante on that. And we're seeing that happening around the world and not just in the UK. And then, as I say, we've got that cost benefit analysis to underpin that there's an economic pace in our favour.

The government has many, many ways of saying no. When we're talking about expanding eligibility to children. When they say we're keeping eligibility to review, that's a no. When they say we think the threshold is broadly at the right level, well, that's a no. When they say we've expanded school meals more than any and more children are receiving school meals today than any other government, that's a no! Expanding eligibility when they talk about using the household support grant, that's a no. And so, we're basically going to be relaunching in Sustain the children's food campaign on the 9th of March the International School Meals Day campaign to say Yes! Instead of saying no and we've made a film which is taking a cheeky poke at means testing of children. And these are some of our film stars in this photo who are going to be launching this campaign in a school in Wandsworth on the 9th of March on international Schools meals day. And we are going to be asking everybody who agrees that they want to see universal school meals across the whole of the UK by 2030 to stay, yes, and put themselves on our map of support. And people can do that, whether they're an individual, an organisation, a school, a council, an MP. And so we're making that available. And I really hope we can rally the people of Yorkshire and Humber and I'm going to leave it there. Thank you.

**Kristin Bash:** Just a brilliant overview and whistle stop tour. To be fair, there's so much to it, really valuable in setting the context in the landscape for everything else we will be discussing today when we pick up in the panel questions. I hope there's time to get into how we can as a network regionally support campaigns and as individuals. Some people are restricted on what they can do in terms of their roles, but just if anyone's interested in being more involved we might pick up a little bit of that.

## **The National School Breakfast Programme, supporting schools to run a successful and affordable school breakfast provision - Louise Stevens, National School Breakfast Programme Schools Communications, Quality and Best Practice Officer, Family Action**

The National School Breakfast Programme is funded by the Department for Education and run by Family Action to support schools in England to provide children with a healthy breakfast at the start of the school day. The programme has been running since July 2021 and runs until July 2024. The offer is available to all schools that have 40% or more children in IDACI bands A-F.

Today I'm just going to be giving you an overview of the National School breakfast programme. It is only a very short presentation, so just a quick overview and a little bit about the impact that we've actually seen from the programme as well.

So what is the National School breakfast programme? The National School Breakfast Programme is funded by the Department of Education and it's been delivered by a charity called Family Action, and we've had the contract, obviously, to support schools in England to provide children with a healthy breakfast at the start of the school day.

The programme is eligible to all schools that have 40% or more children living in a IDACI bands A to F areas, breakfast provision must be provided without any stigma and it needs to be provided free of charge to all pupils. That is something that we stipulate if schools come under the programme and breakfast has to be provided before or at the start of the school day and schools must not already be on a programme that's funded by anybody else.

What do schools get when they join? The programme has been running since July 21 and is running to July 2024 and the first year of the programme was totally free, with free food being delivered into schools and the remaining part of the programme is 75% subsidised, so schools pay 25% of the cost of food and delivery. We have a very simple food portal for ordering for schools, very knowledgeable school support team and some good practise sharing opportunities as well for schools which I'll talk about in a little bit more detail in a minute.

The food that we offer, we offer selection of cereals, including a gluten free options as well as porridge and bagels, which can be frozen or ambient, and basically schools can choose the model that they use to deliver their breakfast. So obviously we always tend to think of a traditional breakfast club, but a lot of our schools use models such as classroom breakfasts, bagel bars, maybe on arrival when they're just coming into school, some of the secondary schools, a lot of the primary schools have arrival, breakfast, they serve bagels in the playground. When children come into the school.

And a lot of schools have intervention breakfasts. Some run nurtured breakfast specifically for their nurture groups in their classrooms, and a lot of them ran multiple models. So some of them might have a breakfast club at the start of the day when children come in and then have bagels served in the classroom for all the children. So soft start to the day.

And all the schools on the programme have access to our portal where they can place, amend and cancel their orders, and they also have access to a large number of resources to support them, to run their breakfast provision as well. So we've got a large number of resources to help them to look at uptake and look at promoting their breakfast provision on that portal that they can access too.

As I said, we have a large support team and they're available from 9:00 to 5:30 Monday to Friday, and they can be contacted by e-mail, phone or via our portal and they are very experienced they're able to offer support and funding uptake orders and any methods of delivery to help schools look at how they can use their breakfast club.

We also, as I mentioned before, have a huge library of resources to support schools that are available on the portal for covering things such as food or drinks, support ingredient and allergen information, delivery guide support and how to use the portal, how to collect impact. Because obviously it's really important to look at

the impact that breakfast is having in their schools, how to support their breakfast provision and also lots of resources to promote their breakfast provision within the school.

Throughout the course of the programme, we've also been running a lot of virtual events for our schools to support them in covering topics such as impact collection game, giving them tools to collect impact within their schools, strategies to increase uptake of breakfast within school, ideas on how to fund their 25% contribution and any additional breakfast items, and also ideas for breakfast at home. Because it's not just about providing breakfast at school, it's also about supporting parents to provide breakfast at home. So we've given them a lot of material to help them support parents at home. And we also have a number of events of best practise sharing between schools.

Just to give you a breakdown of the types of schools that we have on the programme, as you can see, it is predominantly primary schools, but we do have a large number of secondaries as well and that has increased since the last programme that was run and a selection of special schools and some 6th forms as well.

So just to give you a little bit about the impact of the National School breakfast programme. We've not actually released data yet on our current programme because we're only part of the way through. But in our previous phase of the programme in 2020, 880 in NSBP schools responded to a survey and reported that the NSBP was important or extremely important in positively supporting some of these different areas. They also reported over 1/4 of reduction in late registrations and almost 1/4 reduction in behaviour incidents as well. On a recent head teacher survey that we carried out 84% of her teachers said that they had seen a significant reduction in the number of unhealthy, inappropriate food coming into schools since they started the National School breakfast programme.

We also know from previous research that having breakfast can have a really positive effect on attainment and research by the Education Endowment Fund in 2016 showed that year 2 pupils in schools have a breakfast club made additional progress in reading, writing and maths compared to other year 2 pupils.

And I know, Professor Louise Dye is going to be speaking to you later, but a study by the Leeds University found that students who ate a regular breakfast score 2 grades higher in the GCSE.

Based on the last figures we published, we know that over 270,000 children were estimated to be having a breakfast on an average school day, and this figure is now even higher.

And I thought it would be good to hear what schools have to say about the impact, not just hear it from us that breakfast is having in their schools. And these are quotes drawn from head teachers and breakfast leader surveys. And they're reporting a real impact on attendance and lates with children who regularly absent or regularly late now come into school on time to have breakfast. They've also reported impact on behaviour and concentration in class and less challenging behaviour. Reduction in unsettled behaviour in the morning and improved concentration and learning.

But as well as that, schools have really seen the positive impact it's had on wellbeing and mental health and breakfast clubs, allowing pupils to socialise with each other and form the relationships. And that's been so important post COVID and we've really seen the benefits it's allowed for soft pastoral holistic wellbeing checks by staff and an opportunity for staff to check in with pupils.

I realise that I've got very little time, so thank you for listening and I hope that this has given just a bit of an overview of the National School breakfast programme and the impact it's having on pupils and obviously I'll be available on the panel afterwards for anyone like to ask any questions. Thank you.



## **School Food Standards Compliance Pilot, Shivani Patel, Senior Strategy Advisor, Food Standards Agency**

Thank you and good morning everyone. In this session, I'll provide an overview of the pilot, the school Food Standards Pilot is a joint project between the Food Standards Agency and the Department of Education, supported by the Office for Health Improvement and Disparities to Design and test, a new approach for local authorities and assuring and supporting compliance with the school Food Standards.

I'll provide some background on the standards and the pilot, and then I'll explain the importance of the pilot, how the pilot works and the role of the FSA in this project.

So the school Food Standards are set out in the regulations for school food 2014. The purpose of the school Food Standards is to ensure that schools provide children with healthy food and drink options to make sure that children get the energy and nutrition they need across the school day. These standards define which foods and drinks must be provided, which foods are restricted and those which must not be provided. They apply to all food and drink.

They apply to all food and drink provided to people on and off school premises up to 6:00 PM, including school trips, breakfast clubs, tuckshops, mid-morning break vending machines and after school clubs. Compliance with a core food standard is mandatory for all maintained schools, including academies and free schools.

The current school Food Standards came into force on the 1st of January 2015. They were developed by the school Food Plan Standards Panel. The panel undertook to create a clearer set of food-based standards, accompanied by practical guidance that provided caterers with a framework on which to build interesting, creative and nutritionally balanced menus, and secondly were less burdensome and operationally cheaper to implement than the previous nutrient-based school Food Standards that were in place.

Professor Susan Jebb, who is currently chair of the Food Standards Agency while closely to help develop these standards in her capacity as a professor of diet and population health at the University of Oxford, Susan sat on a school through plan standards panel, and she held the positional projects manager for the work conducted by the panel.

Now a bit about how the pilot came about. In 2019, the government Commissioned Henry Dimbleby to write a national food strategy which made recommendations to the government that aimed to create a healthier, more equitable and sustainable food system. The strategy includes a significant focus on school meals and food education, which acknowledges the important role of that schools can play in supporting the health and wellbeing of children. The government's February 2022 levelling up White Paper then outlined several initiatives to implement some of the recommendations from the National food strategy and strengthen school food provision. This includes the school Food Standards pilot.

You know that school's play a crucial role in providing children with a healthy food to help them concentrate, develop and live a healthy and active life. Children spend a lot of their time in schools. We know that school lunch is the main meal of the day for many children and the school provides a significant proportion of a child's overall nutrition. Therefore, it's important that the food children have access to is healthy and will adequately support their development. School food is especially important in the current economic climate and as someone I think mentioned earlier, in fact 4,000,000 children have lived in homes without adequate access to food in October 2022. This has increased by 50% since April, compared to households without children, where the increase has been 26% in the same time frame. So we have an opportunity to use school meals as a nutritional safety net for children in these difficult times.

As mentioned earlier, this pilot is a joint project between the Food Standards Agency and the Department for Education and supported by OHID to design and test a new approach for local authorities and assuring and supporting compliance with standards. And this pilot seeks to test whether food safety officers carrying out routine food hygiene inspections are able to ask additional questions and make observations related to the school Food Standards to identify possible non-compliance. And secondly, where instances of possible non-compliance have been raised. Appropriate teams such as public health or food education within local authorities will be able to instigate a supportive intervention by increasing the levels of assurance with the standards, we hope to see greater levels of compliance and ultimately school children having access to healthier and more nutritious food.

There are 18 local authorities across England taking part in the pilot. They represent a range of authority, types, sizes and school food delivery models. All food establishments are subject to routine food hygiene inspections, which are carried out by food safety officers, and this pilot tests whether we can add a few questions on to these pre-existing routine inspections in a way that is not overly burdensome for schools or food safety officers. These additional questions relate to aspects of the school Food Standards, and they aim to identify potential instances of non-compliance with the standards. So food safety officers will ask questions, check menus and make observations to identify potential non-compliance where food safety officers find potential non-compliance. These will be passed to the local authority to consider how they can support schools to make improvements and it's important to note that food safety officers aren't making a judgement about possible non-compliance with the standards where it is identified. Where possible non-compliance is observed, the pilot is testing the feasibility that officers can share this information with the local authority team who could support the schools to improve compliance with the standards.

The pilot will develop across a number of phases. The first phase was the discovery phase. Prior to the pilot launching, we conducted initial Discovery works to help design the pilot in a way that minimises the burden on participating authorities. We worked with Kantar to gather insights on the school food landscape across the breadth of authorities involved in the pilot, including how the questions food safety officers will ask and observations they will make can support compliance with the school Food Standards. It also helps identify individuals or teams within schools and authorities who could have a role to play in assurance and support of the standards.

We use these insights to then inform the design of the pilot. We then launched the pilot in September 2022 and is expected to run for the full academic year. So from September 2022 to July 2023, as you can see from the timeline on the screen, the pilot's been split into two stages. Usability study, phase one and feasibility study, phase two. This is because we analysed data from the first half of the pilot to make necessary adjustments to the second-half of the pilot. This includes qualitative data from in-depth interviews that count are conducted with participating local authorities and food safety. Quantitative data that we received on the results of the school Food Standards checks by splitting the pilot into two halves and being iterative, we are ensuring we're testing an effective and improved approach. And the second phase of the pilot was actually launched yesterday. Then, once the pilot has ended, we will reflect on what the data tells us and consider our next steps and research findings will be published in accordance with the government Social Research guidelines.

So what's the role of the Food Standards Agency in this project? The Food Standards Agency is independent government department working to protect public health and consumers wider interest in relation to food in England, Wales and Northern Ireland as the only government body that looks solely at food, the FSA has a significant role to play in helping to improve and advance the school through system. It has the expertise to offer positive, friendly and unique challenge to help it short and effective pilot. In 2022, we published our new strategy for the next few years. It recognises that the Food Standards Agency needs to play a greater role in dealing with the major challenges in the food system, namely climate change and diet.

This project is an important part of how the agency is helping to live through system that is healthier and more sustainable.

I'm happy to answer any questions that you guys have today in the Q&A and if you have any questions after today we'd be happy if you could get in touch with us using the e-mail on the screen and we are also interested in getting your feedback on everything that I've explained. In particular what you guys think about the design of the pilot and what you think local authorities could be doing to respond to any possible non-compliance identified in the school Food Standards track. And again if you have any thoughts please do share later in the Q&A session or by emailing us for the e-mail on the screen and thank you for listening.

## **The ultra-processed food content of school meals and packed lunches in the UK - Dr Jennie Parnham, Research Associate - Public Health Evaluation Unit, Imperial College London**

Jennie is a Research Associate in the Public Health Policy Evaluation Unit, Imperial College London. She completed a NIHR School for Public Health funded PhD at Imperial, which involved using routinely collected data to evaluate nutrition welfare policies in the UK, such as the Free School Meals policy. Her main research interests include quantitative policy evaluation, public health nutrition, nutrition welfare and school food policies, ultra-processed food and health inequalities.

I'm here to talk about Ultra processed food content, school meals and patterns in the United Kingdom. And I just like to take this opportunity to thank everyone who worked with me on this project.

So to start off, I'll start by talking about food processing. It's important to recognise that most of the foods that we eat are processed to some extent and that's not bad. That's very normal. And it's just the amount of processing that is important. And this categorization and past 10 years have come about of Ultra processed food and it's this top category that's of most concern as these foods have undergone industrial level processes.

These are the kind of processes that you can't do in an average kitchen, and they likely contain artificial ingredients, the kind that you can't buy in an average store. These sought of processed foods have been designed to be really hyper palatable, very attractive, cheap, long lasting, and they've also very heavily marketed, especially towards children and families.

To give an example of how projects can both be minimally processed and ultra-processed, here's an example of strawberries in the unprocessed format, and they can be processed. This is something you could do at home into jam, and if you have the time and the inclination, or you could buy a processed version of that in the supermarkets. But then there are often ultra-processed versions of these projects. These are ones that have undergone processes. This is extraction and you can't really do at home and you can see by the list of ingredients they contain lots of extra ingredients to kind of maintain its structure, its colour. And really you can see the fruit content of that even though it's advertised as being healthy product. And it's really just essentially the sugar. And from the fruit and it's removed all of its helpful fibre, vitamins and minerals.

Equally, bread is another good example. You can't have a processed version of bread that doesn't have any extra ingredients. You can make that at home, or you might be able to buy that at some stores, but a lot of the bread that we see is actually auto processing contains a lot of added artificial ingredients.

Processed foods are a concern because the evidence is really strongly growing about their negative health impacts. Diets high in processed foods lead to overconsumption, and they also displace healthy foods in our diets. This is shown to lead to weight gain in both children and adults, and this is associated with increased health burdens such as cancer, heart disease, type 2 diabetes, and it's even associated with poor mental health outcomes such as depression.

And in the UK, unfortunately, we're world leading in the amount of ultra-processed food that we eat highest in Europe and second only to America and particularly concerning is the amount consumed by children. With up to 65% of their overall diet as ultra-processed foods.

So we know this about the overall diet, but we didn't know the picture in schools and as it's been mentioned, children consume a third of their diet at school. So it's an important area to look at. Now normally this is the part where I explain the school food system and, in the UK, but I appreciate that's not necessary for this crowd, but I just want to reiterate the point that due to the school Food Standards and the relative great control over school meals and compared to packed lunches, previous research has shown that the nutrient content of school lunches tends to be preferable to packed lunches. But as I mentioned there's never been studies before in the amount of processing that goes on there.

So to do this study, we got national dietary data from the national Diet and Nutrition survey. That's over 3300 children over an extended time period. And helpfully, this dietary survey asks people where they eat their meals and whenever at school, whether it's a school meal or a packed lunch. So we extracted just the data and school lunches, and we categorised it by the amount of processing as a percentage of calories consumed and we compare the different meal types. So school meals and packed lunches. We also compared primary school and secondary school students and we looked at different income levels as well. Happy to go into more details on the methods afterwards if needed.

So this is really our headline results. This graph shows the amount of processing as a percentage of energy. Whether it's a minimally processed to ultra-processed and also shows it by the different meal types and the different ages. There's a lot of information here, but don't worry, I'll break it down and just show the three main points I want to highlight. So I think the first thing to take away is that the amount of ultra-processed food consumed in all meal types and all ages is really quite high. It's over 50% and in all of these groups. The second thing to note is the big difference between school meals and packed lunches, which might not be a surprise to many people on this call. It's a 20% point difference between the amount of ultra-processed food consumed as a percentage of energy there. And the third thing to highlight is the difference between primary and secondary school children and in terms of the ultra-processed food that's consumed as we see an increase in the amount of ultra-processed food in school meals between primary and secondary school there.

Interestingly, when we looked at these results by income, we found some really interesting effects. So as possibly predicted by some people in secondary school, we see a clear association between income and the amount of ultra-process food consumed. And this was consistent between school meals and packed lunches in that the lower income children were more likely to have higher amounts of ultra-processed foods and that inequality was similar between packed lunches and school meals. However, when we look to primary schools, there was a similar income inequality in the packed lunches of primary school children. Interestingly, there is no income inequality in the school meals of primary school children showing that something's going right here in terms of mitigating that difference.

To sum up, I think the overall take home message is that the ultra-processed food intake in schools is quite high and that's regardless whether age income or the different meal types that are consumed. However, I think that we can look to more positive examples of school meals and primary schools to demonstrate that. You know, if they're done right, school meals can be a really equitable way of reducing exposure to ultra-processed foods and improving children's diets, especially when we compare this to packed lunches. But of course, as most things in public health, achieving a change will be definitely a difficult, multifaceted process, and I'm sure no one approach will do that in one go. But I think one suggestion is to look towards a Food Standards and is currently they don't make any mention of the overall guidance of ultra-processed food that can be served in schools. There have been some really interesting examples where this has been done. So for example in Brazil, the National school food programme in public schools, they've set a limit of 25% ultra-processed food. The Food for Life accreditation that happens in the UK, which I think is associated to the Soil Association that similarly has put 25% limit on ultra-processed foods served. So that's really interesting examples.

Thanks for listening and I'll look forward to any questions that might be on the panel. Thank you very much.

## Panel – Q&A - Barbara Crowther, Louise Stevens, Shivani Patel, Dr Jennie Parnham

**Kristin Bash:** We've had some good questions come through. I think, Barbara, I can start with you. It's not a question that came up, but it is a question around the increased cost of living, the increased food prices and the pressure that it puts on providing school meals generally and the amount of funding, is there any indication that funding levels are being considered to increase to keep in line with food inflation specifically? Any insight on how that's being approached and what schools will get to provide this?

**Barbara Crowther:** Yes, it's definitely a very live debate and has been the topic of conversations between various members of the school Food Review Group and the local authority catering associations with the Department for Education. Obviously, the per meal cost had been running well behind. It hadn't been changed for years, both on UIFSM and on benefit related meals. I know in Scotland they've increased the per meal quota. So it's definitely a live debate and I think that there's a real challenge as well because there's an aversion to trying to increase the per meal cost, because then that will knock on to the paid for meals and potentially could lead to more pupils falling out of the system and stopping uptake. And in terms of passing on the costs of those meals back to the parents and obviously the biggest threat to the viability of any school food supply chain is if you end up with a half empty dining room with children not taking up meals.

There are differing views within the catering sector on this as well. So some of our partners, like chefs in schools, they absolutely believe that you can still deliver healthier nutritious meals and especially if you incorporate a higher level of plant based foods such as lentils and pulses into school meals and mix those in with meat and things like cottage pies and stuff, and you can actually get that win-win over good nutrition and better environmental impact and still meet those costs within the funding packages. So it's part of a debate and obviously you've got caterers saying they want more per meal, not more expansion, but I think we can't play these two things off. I think we need an adequately funded expanded service that will give hopefully some economies of scale into that mix.

**Kristin Bash:** Yeah, excellent. Thank you. It's a tricky balance, Louise, that brings us to the school breakfast programme and I know we have some questions. I know the funding is limited and that the places are taken in the current programme but could you talk through a little bit how school might identify whether or not they would be eligible and just very briefly, how they might look into making an application if in fact funding were to be expanded in the future?

**Louise Stevens:** The programme isn't totally full at the moment, we're processing applications at the moment, which is why we've stopped accepting applications. But we're very open to people still applying and going on our waiting list for when places become available. We can obviously give them to those people and obviously we would like more disadvantaged children to be able to access their healthy breakfast at school. And obviously I think it's really important to look at the various options and consider how we'd actually achieve this. And really, that's got to be a question for the Department of Education because they're the people that are actually commissioning the programme.

Eligibility is based on the income deprivation affecting children index, if people aren't sure whether they fall within the criteria, if they just drop me an e-mail, I have put my e-mail in the chat and more than happy to go through with them whether they fit within that criteria.

**Kristin Bash:** Excellent, Thank you, Louise. I was recently involved on the public health organisations call for an expansion of the national breakfast programme just because it's so beneficial and universal by design so we shall see if that goes forward. Shivani, I know there's some questions. I know the FSA are essentially overlooking all of this, but I think the question is from the boots on the ground perspective, what can be done? I know this is a pilot programme to look at enforcing school Food Standards, but is there some indication about how local authorities can take action to support schools in order to meet these standards? Is that something that the FSA is looking in to at all?

**Shivani Patel:** So that is something that we are looking into as part of the pilot. When we did the initial discovery work, Kantar basically let us know as you guys are probably aware, that local authorities range in terms of the kind of structure and the teams within it. We are basically trying to look at how local authorities are going to respond to any possible instances and not compliance. And after that kind of determine next steps and kind of identified the best practise that goes on within local authorities.

**Kristin Bash:** Excellent. And I think just really quick, there was a follow up about when there are private caterers. So this is where schools who have opted out of the Council school meals catering service, do school standards still apply there? And how do they fall under the pilot at all? Or is that sort of outside the current scope of work?

**Shivani Patel:** So it's School Food Standards. And that falls under the scope of this work because we're trying to see how schools are complying with the standards and if we can improve compliance just to make sure that children do have access to that healthy school food. So as part of the pilot, we are trying to see how local authorities will respond, even if it is a private caterer to help them improve compliance.

**Kristin Bash:** Excellent. Thank you. Jenny, so there's two things that strike me and that I think some of the questions are about the first is the the variation between packed lunches and school provided lunches in terms of ultra-processed foods and also I would love to have your view on the current I'll call it tension, It's a bit of a balance between the paradigm. A framework of high fat, salt, sugar foods and ultra-processed foods. Because I know I've been involved in some quite lively debates, I think I will say about the difference between the two and I know it can be an area that causes confusion and my concern is that it causes so much confusion that people just throw their hands up.

**Jennie Parnham:** So the first question was on the difference between school meals and packed lunches. I think it's really interesting finding and I think it's something that a lot of people working in the field know intuitively. And I think this comes down a lot to the fact that packed lunch foods have been really heavily marketed. You know, the idea of ultra-processed food as they're designed to be convenient food. They're designed to be pre-packaged and that really lends itself quite nicely into the packed lunch format. And if you look at lots of individually packaged items that are perfect for you know, families who have limited time to put together at lunch and it lends itself to a format of being very highly processed equally with school meals the way that they're prepared. There's more time for them to be made from fresh ingredients, so I think that that speaks to a lot of that difference.

Of course the school food standards definitely helped to improve that quality. I think that those are two things that can really benefit themselves towards school meals being a really healthy alternative to the kind of school pressures of the food system that we have at the moment.

The definition of processing of that kind of Nova categorization and it only speaks to the amount of industrial processing and because of the design of these ultra-processed foods to being very high profile stable, it means that most of the ultra-processed food group are low in dietary quality. So they are high salt, fat, sugar foods, but it's not a comment specifically on nutritional content. I understand the confusion and everything, but I think that defining foods by their process content adds, in addition to that, and you know it's a nuance thing. I don't think in nutrition we can have one measure completely. It speaks to our food culture, the amount of fresh prepared food. And I think that processing is really important to think about is the it changes the structure. Like I mentioned, it can extract the important and good things like fibre and take it down and so it looks like it's come from fruit, but really it's not got their nutritional properties and there's so many things to go into.

**Kristin Bash:** I know. I asked you a huge question at the end, which I shouldn't have done that wasn't fair of me. But thank you for just a brief overview.

Barbara, very quickly can you mention the toolkit? Could you give a brief overview of where people can find it if they want to get more involved in the advocacy?

**Barbara Crowther:** We are producing a toolkit. There is a school food for all website in development, you can access it now to see a little bit of what we're doing and what we're building. But please don't click on any

links or sign up at this point. We're still building it and it'll be ready in a week's time. The second thing is we've got a declaration that we will use for councils, and we're going to put a toolkit and I will see if I can share that back with the organisers, we can get that circulated back to the Members of this network.

**Kristin Bash:** Excellent. I was actually going to suggest if it's not ready to be signed up to, we could circulate that to everyone attending when it is available if that's better?

**Barbara Crowther:** Yeah and get ready for the 9th of March. Because we are wanting some people to sign up a little bit ahead so it doesn't look blank on the 9th of March.



## **Effect of Breakfast on Cognitive & Mental health and attainment: implications of food insecurity & the cost-of-living crisis Attainment - Professor Louise Dye, Leeds Nutrition & Behaviour Group, University of Leeds**

Louise is a Chartered Health Psychologist and Professor of Nutrition and Behaviour at the University of Leeds. She has over 30 years of experience in the assessment of nutrition on cognitive function and psychological wellbeing including influential work on the effects of breakfast on cognitive performance and academic outcomes. Her recent research involves how to increase fibre in low income consumers including children ([www.h3.ac.uk](http://www.h3.ac.uk))

We've done a lot of work on the effect of breakfast and cognitive function. There is an advantage of having breakfast over no breakfast. When we look at studies of when children are fed breakfast in the morning verses days when they are not fed breakfast 20 out of 24 studies show a positive effect of breakfast and most of those were grain based breakfasts the kind of cereals and things that were very often included in school breakfast programmes and the effects of that breakfast depended a little bit on the calories that were delivered but generally lasted from immediately after breakfast up to about 3 1/2 hours. So the whole of a school morning and if you think about the fact that 80% of the curriculum is often taught in the morning, that's really quite important and the kind of cognitive domains that are affected are very relevant to learning in a classroom.

So attention, memory and cognitive function. And I think it goes without saying that if we look at undernourished children, we see much greater effects. What's really relevant I think for this audience is the work that Katie on the call and I did look at the effects of breakfast on academic outcomes. And that is one of our most cited papers, something like half a million people have now accessed that paper, which is great. But it also shows how important that is as an issue for the wider world.

What that showed was a very strong positive association between habitual breakfast consumption and academic performance. And there was some evidence that the quality of the breakfast was important there too. It was very important for subjects like maths, where it really matters if the kid is in the classroom. So things that increase attendance. It wasn't that breakfast will improve mathematical function or mathematical competence. But it's actually that that kind of combination with behaviour about being present and attentive. And it's consistent going across all socioeconomic groups. And then the recent study that we've published got a lot of media press, they presented it slightly differently. They said children who rarely eat breakfast had lower grades. Children who ate breakfast regularly, generally got two grades higher than children who didn't. And then if we look in the current climate around kids who say they are food insecure. So kids who have expressed some worries about there not being enough money for food at home. And we'll look at breakfast consumption in those children. What you see in red is the percentage of food insecure children who do not eat breakfast versus food secure children. And that comes from a large survey that's been done in Leeds over the last 10 years and this is just data from the last three years showing that food insecure children were much more likely to rarely eat breakfast. And you see there that it's something above 40% in secondary schools, whereas only half that amount of food secure children missed breakfast. And even when we look at primary schools it's more than double the percentage in food insecure children.

When we're thinking about the impact of food insecurity, one of those things that it impacts on is the likelihood of having breakfast. And I think that's one of the reasons that the school breakfast bill actually should have gained more traction than it did. Emma Lewell-Buck put together a private member's bill in 2020, and that was to give schools with evidence of need a free breakfast to all children.

Somebody talked about the IDACI bands earlier this morning, and the particular aim of the school breakfast bill was to focus on those children, those schools where they were 50% of them were in the UK, bands A to F but actually the bill had provisioned to provide it to all schools if the school requested it. It was very much evidence led that built on quite a lot of our own research. It was calculated to be very cost effective and a very simple and focused intervention.

It was read in Parliament, and it got cross party support. As I said they used our evidence on the academic outcomes. They also thought about the economic outcomes. What you find is that children who don't eat breakfast have 3% lower income over lifetime. That leads to less economic growth, and it increases inequalities in educational outcomes. It passed its first reading, but it was timed out. It's now a core part of the Labour manifesto.

And there's been some really interesting work again, economic work from Magic Breakfast, Heinz and pro Bono economics, where they have shown that if you give school breakfast provision for children completing key stage one, the benefits to the economy would be around £9000 per child. And actually 4000 of those lifetime benefits would go to government. So just to touch very quickly on food insecurity, we have some data here from two different sources, a survey that was done in Shropshire and the My health My school survey, which was done in Leeds and I'm going to show you three years of data here.

In Shropshire, we were able to ask three questions. Do you worry about not having enough food? I didn't go hungry, but I think my Mum or Dad or carer did miss meals because there wasn't enough money for food. Were you hungry but didn't eat because your family don't have enough money for food? What we saw is the rates during lockdown were about double the rates when the children returned to school, so food security kind of improved when the kids went back to school we were really interested in the impact on psychological wellbeing. So if I show you this here, we measured psychological wellbeing using a validated tool called the Warwick Edinburgh Mental Wellbeing Scale and what you see here on the right is that the children who said never to all of those questions, the first one being worried the second one Mum and Dad going without and the third one also going without themselves. You see that in the children who said never to those questions their mental wellbeing is significantly higher than children who said sometimes or a lot to those questions during lockdown.

It got better when they went back to school, but the pattern is essentially the same, just being worried about not having enough food at home is enough to make children's psychological wellbeing significantly worse than their food secure peers. I think that's something we should be really worried about.

In different data from Leeds, simple question "being worried about not having enough food at home". Food secure kids say that they enjoy life mostly strongly agree. You'll see a different pattern in the food insecure kids. Similarly in the response to a question on stressed and anxious, kids who were food insecure were much more likely to be stressed and anxious. They're also got much higher odds ratios of negative emotions, coping with those emotions, self-harm, caring for someone at home, feeling unsafe.

Then what we've been able to do is to look at a return to school breakfast intervention following COVID with support from Bagel Nash and Coop and others in Shropshire, we were able to give kids breakfast at school. It was a very COVID friendly grab and go bagel, but just want to finish with some of those quotes from those children about helping them work and concentrate, but also being great for those who don't get to eat breakfast and saving money.

Just to conclude, really important that we think about the importance of breakfast and also have a strategy to tackle some of those food insecurity issues.

## **The development of the CONNECTS Food resource and next steps - Dr Wendy Burton, Research Associate at University of York**

Wendy's research focuses on public health nutrition and childhood obesity prevention. She has recently finished work on a project aiming to support schools to implement a whole school approach to food and worked with school stakeholders to develop the CONNECTS-Food resource which she will be talking about today.

I'm Wendy Burton from the University of York. And I'm going to very briefly talk about a resource that we've developed to support schools to implement a whole school approach to food. I won't talk too long because we've got a short video which explains the resource and how it can help schools. But before that, I'm just going to give you a bit of background to the project. The connects food project is a collaboration between the universities of York, Newcastle, Leeds, Bradford and Belfast and we've also been working very closely with our Partnership Board, which includes the Department for Education, School Food matters and local authorities and we've also worked really closely with school stakeholders throughout, including head teachers, caterers, teachers and school governors.

We used a systems approach to develop the resource and this began by speaking to primary school pupils from 8 schools and we did an activity with them where we asked them to describe a typical school day from working up to going to bed. We used these discussions to tease out key moments throughout the day that might influence their food take. In the activity they describe things like whether or not they had time to eat breakfast in the morning, what they passed on their journey to school, for example sweet shops or a local Co-op or similar. What happened generally during their lunch breaks and also their eating habits at home. The next stage, once we'd gathered all that information we presented this information to school stakeholders in a series of systems mapping workshops.

In these workshops we invited head teachers, teachers, carers and parents and we had 81 in total across 11 workshops, so we had a really good representation of school stakeholders. We talked about the typical day in a life of a child, then we asked them to identify factors within the school food system that influence that child journey. I haven't got time to talk through this system's map and but this work is going to be published very soon, but very briefly, we identified 4 overarching domains and these included school leadership, culture and curriculum, child food choice, the school food offer, and the home environment.

When it came to actually designing the intervention, we used a code design approach and we asked the school stakeholders that had been involved in the systems mapping work, we invited some of them to be involved in the design of the intervention. These again included head teachers, carers, dietitian school food representatives to underpin the design of the intervention. We agreed with them what a whole school approach to food meant, and this included identifying key principles which underpin a school whole school approach to food This included the priorities of school leaders and the food curriculum, the school food provision, dining experience policy and culture, and stakeholder engagement. We looked at these principles in the context of the school system's map and we identified barriers and levers to achieve these principles, and from that, that's what underpinned the development of our resource.

The CONNECTS food resource is actually now available to schools, but this is where I'm going to show you a short demo video.

[Click here to view the video.](#)

We're currently in the piloting stage at the moment. We've got six schools that are involved, I'm doing some interviews with and they're going to give me some feedback on it. If anyone wants to know more about it, just get in touch.

## Case Studies

### **Rethink Food Transition Project - Helen Ingle, Public Health Manager, North Yorkshire County Council & Melanie Reed, Education Co-ordinator at Rethink Food**

Helen Ingle is a Public Health Manager at North Yorkshire County Council and works on Children's healthy weight and healthy schools.

Melanie Reed, Rethink Food Education Coordinator. Rethink Food is a not-for-profit organisation. Melanie has over 20 years' experience in primary education working as both a teacher and Headteacher.

Thanks everyone. I'm Helen Ingle, Public Health Manager at North Yorkshire County Council and also speaking on behalf of my colleague Ruth Everton, who's on leave this week, who was a was a big lead in this project and Melanie Reid, do you want to introduce yourself, Melanie? Hi, I'm Melanie Reed, the education coordinator for Rethink Food.

I'm going to talk a bit about the background to this project and a bit of the broader context. And then Melanie will come in and talk about the rethink Food Transition project.

The Rethink Food Transition Project came from a wider project which was the North Yorkshire Schools Aim project that we put forward as part of the childhood Obesity Trailblazer programme, which some of you might remember and been involved in so that was going back to 2019 so we got through the first phase of the trailblazer programme and we got funding to do some insight work in two secondary schools in North Yorkshire, one was in Scarborough, one was in Selby.

Our project was about the school zone, so it was about looking at a secondary school, the environment within the school, what was happening in the school to promote healthy eating, support active lifestyles, but also, it's about the zone around the school, what was going on around the school, what shops were there, what were they selling, what green spaces were there, what cycle track. It was about looking at that sort of zone, really a bit of a whole systems approach to childhood obesity. The aim was to create healthy food and physical activity environments within a school zone (the school environment itself, and the environment surrounding the school) so as to support active and healthy living. So that was the basis of our project.

In terms of the schools then, we did it in Selby. We commissioned a company called Magpie to come in and do some insight work in the school. They talked to pupils and staff and parents about healthy eating, food, physical activity barriers and facilitators. And there is a report on that if anyone's interested, very happy to share that report. It really looked at the detail of what was coming out from the community within that school. We did the same for the school in Scarborough, very different issues came out, which was really interesting and the needs that were identified from that project and things around some misconceptions around healthy eating and food and the transition from primary to secondary and so on.

Following on from that work, we then secured some funding from Selby District Council to fund the Rethink Food Transition Project. So that was a specific project.

There was other work going on, so I just wanted to touch on that really briefly before Melanie comes in to talk about the Rethink Food Transition Project. The other work we were looking at doing and addressing the other needs that came out of the report and the conversations we've had with the school staff as well, looking at the food offer, the dining experience, what space there was in the school, we brought the Healthy Schools award programme for North Yorkshire into the school so they've been working with the school. North Yorkshire Sport supported by developing activities for the excluded children and those from all lower income areas, and we're also looking at active travel.

One of the things that we were doing as part of this school zone project, our Trading Standards team came in to work with the school and look at their food offer. They worked with the catering team, running a programme called Healthier Choices, which is where they work with businesses mainly to look at their food and food offer and help them to put on healthier choices. We brought them in to work with the secondary school and over a couple of years, they made a lot of changes in the school, including got more salad and vegetables into the into the wraps and the sandwiches, and they changed the sort of breads that were being

used so all bread is now 50/50 or wholemeal and they got more vegetables into the main recipes. They got rid of some of the some of the more unhealthy meals and some of the sizes were double the sizes that they should have been, so they reduced the sizes. Also, the school managed to get some funding to get some outdoor canopies with heating and lighting, so they had more space for the children to go and sit at lunchtime and make that a better dining experience, they got an outdoor server as well and they did a lot of work around reducing the use of single use plastics and eliminated single use plastic bottles which is brilliant - they estimated that it's got rid of about 114,000 bottles going to landfill each year which is great. They stopped selling those water bottles in the canteen and they installed several water coolers, and all the children are encouraged to bring in a clean water bottle everyday which is great.

We commissioned Rethink food to come in and deliver the transition project. I'll hand over to Melanie now to and tell us about that.

Rethink foods are a not-for-profit organisation, and our aim is to provide 10 million hours of learning by 2030 through paid and funded projects. And obviously the year 6 Transition Project was one of these bespoke programmes that we put together. It involved Selby High School and three primary schools. The objective was to empower young people to make healthy food choices. It ran in the summer term 2022. Evidence was collected through a food behaviour survey that was completed at key points; at baseline, at the end of year six and then again in the October half term.

The first thing we did was to complete the baseline behaviour food survey and you can see some of the things there that the children wanted to learn about. But then the top three findings/concerns there was some misunderstanding about what is deemed as healthy foods and healthy foods high in fat and sugar, and we're consumed too frequently, especially crisps and chocolate, and children did not eat the recommended 5 portions of fruit and vegetables a day.

One of the programmes we offer is Rethink Food futures and this runs through the transition project each school was provided with a vertical growing tower seed to salad in 60 days. If you grow your own food, you're five times more likely to eat it yourselves and the children develop the role of scientists, farm and consumer through action learning methodology.

All content was accessed by the schools on our Rethink Food Academy learning platform, which through a combination of video teaching notes, downloadable resources and CPD for the adults delivering it around food security.

One of the things the children learn about is the United Nations Sustainability Goals place in food at the centre of this with a particular focus on goal three health and wellbeing. We incorporated the Eat well guide, looking at the different food groups and how often those food groups should be eaten.

We also look to eat to save the planet as well as their own health. So the impact of carbon footprint and water footprint as well. Then I want to add that during this activity, no crisps were consumed only fruit and things were taken for the children to eat. So the children use the traffic light system to look at saturated fat content of crisps and then put them in the right order. Next slide

We also supported their food choices through showing them how to use the Smart Swaps app, and they took home flyers so that they could download it with parental consent. Another session was run at Selby High School, so the children harvested the produce that they've grown and then they prepared and shared it together as a celebration. There was also a zoom Q&A session with Selby High School so the children could find out about the food offer.

Another task was that children wrote a letter to their year seven selves, which they then later opened at a key point. They pledged positive health and climate actions, and I think you can see from this that the things that they chose shows their knowledge and understanding about eating for health and the planet around health of the planet, healthy swaps and choices, the increase of number of portions of fruit and vegetables and reducing the frequency of unhealthy foods being consumed, such as wasting less food, having fruit not chocolate for snacks etc.

We used all the information that we've gathered to analyse and compare baseline, end of year six and year seven food behaviour surveys and the impact that was shown was that more children identified a wider range of healthy foods correctly and less children thought of unhealthy foods as healthy ones. There is a reduction in the frequency of the consumption of crisps, chocolate and sweets and most children then eating them a few times a week or less, there was a decline in the number of children visiting shops on the way home from school to buy snacks. Most children said that the year 6 transition project had made them think about their food choices, with some saying they do this a lot more now, and the vast majority of pupils said they'd completed some or most of the positive health and climate actions they pledged to do.

Some of the challenges were school recruitment and identifying that key person in school to run the project. We'd like to include more high schools within that and make clear links between Healthy Schools Award and the year 6 Transition project. We did look at how the transition project could be used to evidence Healthy Schools Award. And those links are already there.

### **Pupil-led Packed Lunches and School Meals - Siobhan Jennings, Nutritionist & Healthy Eating Advisor, Leeds City Council**

Siobhan is a Registered Public Health Nutritionist, graduating from Leeds Metropolitan University in 2008. Subsequently Siobhan achieved a post-graduate certificate in Nutrition and Business Management from Sheffield Hallam University in 2015. Siobhan has been working in the field of Nutrition for over 14 years. Siobhan has worked with the Health and Wellbeing Service as a Healthy Eating Adviser at Leeds City Council for over 12 years advising and supporting schools with food policy, provision and education. Siobhan also supports the Healthy Eating Strand of the Leeds Healthy Schools Programme and manages and coordinates delivery the HENRY 5-12 parent programme in Leeds. Her combined efforts and work with schools have transformed food culture, policy, pupil voice and provision in many schools across Leeds.

Thank you so much for that wonderful introduction and thank you to all of the speakers so far. It's so interesting to hear the breadth and the scale of everything happening across the country. And so as mentioned, I'm here to talk to you about two of the things that we did to support our schools. Firstly, our pack lunch toolkit and secondly, our pupil voice programme, the school food ambassadors. I know you've given a bit of a background to our service, but I am part of the health and wellbeing service, we have a number of colleagues that support our children to be healthy and safe and also resilient individuals. We do that through support through our school wellbeing website and also through one-to-one support with our schools and we have, as a service, been here for over 20 years and we do pride ourselves on having really strong relationships with our schools in Leeds.

I know you've mentioned some of these elements of our work in the introduction already, but just to give you a bit of an idea of the breadth of our work. We do engage with around 200 schools locally, but we also engage with over 660 schools across the country as well. And we continue to run our Healthy Schools Programme within our schools in Leeds and nationally. We also provide CPD for our schools, we have a training programme, we do face to face and also virtual training as well. We also coordinate the My Health, My School survey, Louise shared some data from that in her presentation as well.

Without further ado, I'd like to talk to you a little bit about our packed lunch guidance and toolkit that we developed back in 2014 originally. We really wanted to make sure that we were developing something that wasn't just another policy that was going to sit on the shelf and it wasn't something that was done to the pupils. We really wanted to make sure the schools were developing something with their pupils and also by the pupils as well. What we came up with was a comprehensive resource that comes in printed versions, but it's also an electronic document as well. This is one of our other toolkits that we print off for our schools and they get it on disc, and emailed to them as well. They have a toolkit which has a range of tools in it. I'll come on to speak to you about and also a guidance document that actually tells schools how to develop a packed lunch policy and we save all guidance because we acknowledged that not every school is ready for a packed lunch policy and actually a formal policy isn't necessarily the right route for every school because lots of schools are at different stages of engaging parents and improving healthy food across the day.

So as mentioned, the reason why we developed it was quite clear and I think most people will agree that the food in packed lunches still isn't anywhere near as balanced as in a school cooked meal. We know that there

are no national standards or regulations in place to support families who take a packed lunch, and we really feel that if we didn't do anything in schools, we are potentially at risk of widening that gap of health inequalities as we know, many families who aren't entitled to free school meals may go down the route of a packed lunch because they can't afford to pay for a school meal. And if schools are doing nothing to support those families, children are consistently having a meal that is of lesser nutritional quality than a school meal. We really wanted to make sure that we had a safety net and something that is protecting those children who do eat a packed lunch, whether it's out of choice or whether it's out of need.

So what we came up with in the toolkit was trying to develop something that was supporting the school because we all know that schools are under a lot of pressure and their time is very limited in a school setting and actually asking schools to do things like write letter, develop posters and assemblies, it really is a step too far for some of our schools. We wanted to make sure that the messages were consistent but without being too prescriptive around saying this is what your policy should look like.

We've got over 30 resources, which have all been done in a really nice child friendly design, and includes everything from a template policy (if they would like to go down that route) to surveys, to audit tools, to leaflets, posters, even text message templates or reminding parents when strawberries are in season or reminding them to bring water in, to lesson plans and case studies as well. So really, it's just a range of tools that schools can pull off to use as and when they need to fit the stages of their journey. And here's just some examples of some of the tools that you can find in there, different visuals and different ways of presenting ideas for what a healthy balanced packed lunch looks like.

One of the tools that we're most proud of, we had a student with us at the time and we provided the challenge of them to go into local shops to see if they could make up a three-week packed lunch menu at low cost that was school food compliant, and these were the photos that we took of that menu that they made-up and tried to kind of cost them out. This was quite a few years ago, so no doubt the cost of that would be more now that we did manage to create a three-week balanced packed lunch menu, was fairly low cost without actually going into a large supermarket, just some examples of the photos that we took. Now we are aware there are some processed foods in there, picking up on the presentation earlier. But for some families in Leeds actually having some processed foods in the lunch box may be the only option for them with the access to the shops and the budget that they have. So just really simple packed lunches and then here is just an example of what some of the packed lunches and lots of packed lunches in schools across Leeds and the country still do look like. And you can see the clear difference and we often show this in schools to children, they find it really interesting when we ask them to try and spot the fruit and the vegetables within that packed lunch and just compare it to the photos that they've just seen and actually providing those visuals is a lot more powerful than words sometimes.

Does it make a difference? Well, we have 71 schools across Leeds actually using the resource, and we actually ask our schools to pay for it. They make a very small investment and it doesn't cost them much to pay for it. But we do find they really value it. It saves them a lot of time, they like the fact that all the resources have the Leeds City Council logo on so parents and carers can see it's not just the school's decision, it's part of something across the city. The schools like the fact that the messages are consistent, so the way the letters are written, it's all done in a very positive way, so schools aren't feeling like they're coming across as the food police. And again, the child friendly design. There's lots of resources in there which are designed to be used by children to make it more meaningful and more powerful. And we have started to evaluate the impact of it, but it was only done on a very small scale, just purely down to the capacity of our service. But we do have some quotes from schools that have used the toolkit, which you can see here on the slide.

The next thing I'd like to talk to you about, linking in really nicely and empowering our young people is our school food ambassadors programme, which is all around creating young leaders for food in school and rather than me talking, I thought it would be lovely for us all to hear from some children today. So I'm going to stop sharing my screen and I'm going to hand over to some school food ambassadors from one of our schools in Leeds and they're going to tell you all about this programme, probably a lot better than I could.

I'm just conscious of time and I just thought it would be wonderful to actually hear from the children and it amazes me that school have actually been delivering school food ambassadors and for over 8 years which just shows that it is a really sustainable programme that we've rolled out across many of our schools and we think it's really important to have the children and young people there consistently taking part in different projects, whether it's around food waste or packed lunches or encouraging healthier eating in their school. And so far, we have over 100 schools in Leeds and also across the country who are using the toolkit that we've developed as well. We actually developed that one before we developed our pack lunch guidance and toolkit. So the kind of things that they do will hopefully improve school food. But really I guess it fits to the need of the school. If food waste is the issue, if it's dining room improvements or if it's making healthier choices and packed lunches, there are different projects that children can actually take part in, something else that we do when we train the children, they come out of school and we train 2 pupils from each school to become food ambassadors, we actually trained them on the school Food Standards and how to monitor compliance as well, which fits in really nicely with some of the presentations that we heard earlier.

So again, we have a guidance and toolkit which is all designed wonderfully and really child friendly that the children can use and lots of schools actually hand this over to the school council and they can set the project up as well. And just to show you some pictures from the training that we do with children. We have undertaken an internal evaluation, although we haven't had any formal evaluation with any universities yet, but if you would like to read the evaluation of this project, I have put a link here on the slide. We have also developed a toolkit around food policy and one supporting schools around increasing take up of free school meals as well.

Finally just to show you one of the campaigns that we did earlier this year was around increasing take up of free school meals and we launched this in January. We're really proud of the images and the designer that we've got here in Leeds that designs everything in a similar theme for our schools and we had a different message for each day of the week to support schools with raising the profile of school meals.

To summarise, my next steps and recommendations that we recommend to our schools doing something when it comes to packed lunches is better than nothing. So even if it is just making posters, making patterns, just fun giving out rewards, doing an assembly. Some schools really aren't ready to do a policy and it's something that perhaps then they're not quite sure about and we encourage them to use the toolkit and just pick out all the nice resources from that to make it positive. We would like to review our packed lunch toolkit when the school Food Standards are revised as well because we do know it could be improved in some of the messages in there around processed, increased fibre and reducing meat consumption as well.

For some time, we have been calling for some national recommendations for packed lunches that would support local approaches and we would absolutely love to evaluate both of our toolkits formally and find out what the real impact of this is happening within our schools. And finally picking up on one of the presentations today as well. If we did have universal school meals, this would significantly reduce the need for packed lunch policies in schools with less children having a packed lunch. Thank you so much for the opportunity to present, I've put all of our website addresses, e-mail address and Twitter handles on there. If people would like to get in touch. Thank you.

### **The Halifax Academy community kitchen and garden - Fiona Black, Community & Partnerships Officer/Food and Nutrition Teacher, Halifax Academy**

Working to promote food equality and sustainability is the underlying ethos of Fiona's drive. This is a person who has seen the rules and bent them. In the last year her work has been focused on developing a community kitchen within a secondary school and to alter how food is taught within a classroom.

Previous roles have included managing a floating support service, grants officer, development manager and project managing several charitable activities. Now, in the current political/cost of living crisis, all these roles are near merging to one. People need food now, but also to develop a greater understanding of how food can be grown and eaten more generally.



I work at the Halifax Academy and the phrase that I most often go to about all of the things that have happened since October 21 is to ask for forgiveness and not for permission. Since October 21, we've brought in £80,000 worth of external funding that supports our community kitchen, our community garden, a fruit and veg voucher scheme and lots of other things.

We started off with doing a pick three things shop if you like. It was more like a community, we used surplus basically and we've used Rethink from Melanie who spoke earlier with some of their products. We've got an SLA in place with them, and we pick up surplus food, we use that surplus food in our community kitchen and since September 21, we're close to 10,000 meals that we've given out to the community and that's predominantly from surplus foods. It's run by 5 volunteers in the community kitchen and it's from Rethink and it's from local organisations. It's from food that we grow and so we give out boxes of that each week. Since then, we now also have our pay what you feel option for staff where we've got a suggested donation of £2. You can read that how you want to, whether it's £2.00 per portion or whether it's £2.00 per the whole lot. It's up to up to that individual, we have a donations jar. We've also got a uniform swap. Our garden is turning into a community garden. The next slide is our garden, roughly this time last year, I was in my welly boots out in the back garden, which was going to be used for the training area, for a jog so it was just a blank space and then we were lucky enough to get some COP 26 legacy funding, which enabled us to buy a polytunnel and to start off with some raised beds and to repair some raised beds that we'd had from quite a while ago.

We now have a polytunnel and a year on we have a gardener who comes in who's being paid for from external funding. We have everybody in school, 1436 pupils, I think at the minute from reception right up until year 11 and all of those people have access to the garden. We have some pupils up in the garden right now from year one who are going to read some story books and having their packed lunches up there. We've got science clubs, we've got steam clubs, we've got loads of people who come. We've got some people who are now taking time out of their tutor times that they can go there twice a week to really utilise that space.

The food that we grow in the garden goes into loads of different things. I'm redesigning the entire curriculum for year 7-8 and 9, we're changing it from being food tech to food and nutrition. We use our products that are grown in the garden, in the food room. We combine that with an element of surplus, and we encourage children to eat in every lesson.

All of my classes are first thing in the morning and I can guarantee that pupils coming into my lesson and every single time will have access to food in that lesson, whether to have in the lesson at the time. This week we're going to a new rotation, we're doing tea and toast, so every child's encouraged to eat toast. Every child's encouraged to have a cup of tea or coffee. It's amazing how many year 8 and even year 9s that haven't made a cup of tea or coffee in their life. The bread that we've got in at the minute is from Rethink, we picked it up yesterday and surplus bagels. We talk about all of those elements in class. We're going on next week to do air fryer chips. I've got potatoes here that are about to go into the ground to start growing, when they get too past it, they go on to the windowsill and we chit them there.

We have designed the curriculum to make sure that it represents the seasonality of the food that we can get. When we take the children up to see the garden, a lot of them haven't been into a garden that grows vegetables. When we're able to, we'll get pupils to dig up the project so that they can see that as well. We have got Hydroponics Tower as well, which I've got some coriander seeds from the community kitchen that we use each week, they've just about exploded and ready to go into that. So that again, pupils can see the full site.

We link with lots of other people and we've got two after school cooking groups that use the produce as well. I've got one cooking group today and they entirely use the surplus produce that's produced and they kind of have a ready steady cook challenge, for the next time we're linking with some outside providers and Alison who's in the orange there from the Outback and they've also provide us with seasonal fruit and vegetables. So she's coming in to do that, budget cooking and we go into the classroom and take potatoes or whatever we can get with us. We often have to make up a lot of the lessons or the experiences on the spot. The experience in front of you is "guess where the seeds are" that was from a box of surplus food that was about to go in the bin that we took up to the garden in the summer and looked at where the seeds were and have quite a lot of guerrilla gardening. And I mean that term quite loosely where the kids, especially the

younger people, will taste the foods or pretend to be birds and sort of flop out around the place to see what happens to see what grows the last year we had one of our providers Suma gave us some extra seeds so they all tried seeds in the garden. We looked at the seeds, we looked at the surplus produce that we had and if it was squishy and, you know, talking about the consistency of food and playing with food, which you can do in primary. And you can do up to secondary, can also be incorporated quite easily, just depending on your group and your conversations with them. But we ended up having loads of sunflowers dotted around everywhere in the garden. From these experiences of pretending to be birds and chucking everything round. Actually, I can eat something and plant the rest of it in the ground or make it into sort of strawberry top tea, it doesn't need to be as big a thing as going back into our food room, although in the food room we are trying to keep it as practical as possible. People do it for half a term only, and it's based entirely on seasonal budget and surplus cooking.

We've got health and safety and all of that type of thing in there as well. We're really focusing on a different approach to food. There is a bit of the eat well guide, we discuss if it's right for people and how they're plates are made up at home, throughout the six lessons.

We've got options for staff now as well. They come along and they can get the produce themselves. We've got geraniums that are pretty much edible, so we encourage people to come along to pick things and to try things. We've got Hügelskultur bed being developed. We've got a several different leaf composters being developed, and we've got some wormeries that are starting to come together. We work with the pupils to try and make sure that they have an experience and we used to have the muddy hand gang where we were trying to encourage people to get as muddy as they could with their hands, because a lot of our demographic around here have cobbled yards. You're sort of happy valley came style and to encourage them to get as dirty with their hand as possible and to take things home so that they can grow there. We've got 5 volunteers and they all cook together and it goes up to 7 and we now work on a rota and pick the foods in there as much as possible.

The very last thing that I want to say and it's something that we do with public health is our fruit and veg voucher scheme. We offer families, they come and get a and veg voucher. It's £1.50. It's not part of the healthy start scheme, it available for any age and it's something that we do with public health and Becky, who's part of the food network. It's just a really quick win that loads of people could do and it takes limited resources within the process of trying to write it up so that people can take it on at different schools.

## **Implementation and evaluation of auto-enrolment processes for Free School Meals (FSM) across Yorkshire: A legacy project to inform regional and national policy - Maria Bryant, Professor of Public Health Nutrition, University of York, Dr Annie Connolly, Research and Engagement Lead, Children's Right 2 Food, The Food Foundation**

Maria is a Professor of Public Health Nutrition based at the University of York and the Bradford Institute of Health Research. She is a nutritionist with over 20 years' experience in the design and delivery of trials and related methodological research in the field of food, diet and obesity. Her methodological interests include development and evaluation of public health interventions, food systems, trials, cohorts, implementation evaluation, and applied health research.

Annie has been advocating for change in our food system on different scales for many years, from growing vegetables with primary school children and volunteering in food banks to coordinating campaigns for national policy change. She is currently enjoying spending a lot of time eating school dinners and talking with children in primary schools around Yorkshire.

Maria Bryant: Annie and I are here to talk about one of our projects that we're working on together about supporting free school meal auto enrolment across Yorkshire. This project sits within another project called Fix Our Food, a food transformation project that's been funded through the UK RI Transforming UK food Systems call and this covers the breadth of Yorkshire and generally sits within 3 subsystems. We work within regenerative farming, early years and schools and hybrid food economies. I don't want to spend too much time talking about it, just trying to give you a sense of some of the activities and how they're integrated.

There are multiple partners and organisations working with this project, so we're working with industry, retail, farming, academics and schools and school stakeholders. It's an action-oriented project, which means we don't just do the evaluation, we support the implementation, and we do advocacy work along with our partners such as the Food Foundation as well. For example, we've got a vertical farm in York and we're working with the University of Leeds Farm to test different processes and soil experiments and within the early years and school subsystem, our vision is that children as a default have the option to have healthy, tasty and sustainable food. Actually, although we're saying this is for all, all the work in our subsystem is targeted to those children that need it most and we have a number of different projects and activities within that subsystem, some of them overarching. We are in a relatively early stages of trying to recruit every single primary school across Yorkshire. We're learning as much as we can from the schools and we're also engaging with them to help them learn at the same time.

We're also doing some individual projects that respond to policy relevant questions. In 2021, we did the evaluation of the holiday activity and food programme in Yorkshire that fed into some of the policy decisions with Department for Education. We're also running a project at the moment looking to see if the free school meal allowance is sufficient for children to buy healthy, sustainable, tasty foods, so the one we're going to talk about today though, is the auto enrolment project with which fits under that.

Luckily, Barbara's introduced this to us already, so I'm sure many of you will be somewhat aware of this. There is an increasing rate of eligibility now, so increasing number of children that are becoming eligible for free school meals even at that really stringent criteria. And in Yorkshire it's estimated to be about 25% of children. But as Barbara said earlier, approximately 11% of children don't receive free school meals who are eligible for a number of reasons. There are some, but limited evidence in this area related to things like accessing barriers, stigma, shame or simply just administrative or technical burdens associated with that.

So just to repeat then that children are therefore going without, for whatever reason, they don't get that healthy meal every day and the families don't receive the benefit financially that they would get otherwise because they're having to pay for the school lunches.

In addition, for every child that is registered to get free school meals, there is an associated pupil premium, so this is money that's provided to the school for every child receiving free school meals. In primary schools that's £1385 per child per year, and in secondary schools it's £985 children, so it's not an insignificant amount of money.

What we're aiming to do then for this project is to support the setup of auto enrolment processes for free school meals across Yorkshire. This is going to be a legacy project across Yorkshire and we're going to implement, evaluate the implementation processes and the impact we're going to engage with stakeholders. We already have a learning event that Annie's going to talk about in a bit.

We are going to provide lots of free support and resources for schools whilst doing the evaluation at the same time. As I said now this is really important to get as many children as possible signed up for free school meals. But underpinning all of it is the drive towards national change so influencing national policy so that actually this is not just left the responsibility of local authorities and it's something that's done centrally. I think I'm passing over to you now Annie.

Annie Connolly: Hi everybody. Our aim of course is universal provision throughout for all children in primary and secondary schools however until we achieve that and even when we do achieve that, processes that automatically register children onto the free school meal or registered for free school meals is going to be really important, essential in fact, I think Barbara mentioned this earlier to ensure that schools receive the people premium funding. But what we wanted to do is just give a case study to show how massive an impact auto enrolment processes can have and with Sheffield's permission we are sharing some data that they've collected and we just wanted to tell you about the Sheffield story so.

Back in 2014-15, a Sheffield Council officer called Sarah Kavanagh, who's still leading on this project with Annabelle Hallam, her colleague, was working on a project on childhood poverty and what they had seen was a massive drop in the pupil premium that was going to schools because after universal infant free school meals were introduced because parents weren't signing up, and then they'd heard that people in the Wirral and Calderdale had introduced some processes to try and capture families or registered families for free school meals that were eligible. So they talked to them and then over a couple of years developed what they call their auto award process.

And much of the work that they had to do in order to put these processes in place was to convince the Council's legal department to allow them to use opt out processes. They wanted to use and they do use housing benefit data to then target families and write to them and say we'd like to check whether you're eligible for free school meals if you don't want us to do this, just let us know and we won't.

But that piece of work was a complicated one, and they had to do a data privacy impact assessment and kind of calm, very anxious legal people down. But they managed it. And they've been collecting data on the impact of this since that point and the last year that we have data for so 21-22 they found that they were able to register an additional 418 children. This meant that £128,500 in pupil premium went to schools, but just to show you the impact since 2016, these figures, we were really amazed by when we started talking to Sheffield. Nearly 6,500 children they've found and registered for free school meals and this has led to £3,800,000 in pupil premium to schools in Sheffield, which is an enormous amount and they believe that because of the Ever 6 policy which if you don't understand it is and I had to look this up because I'm always confused by these technical things, it's whereby schools receive pupil premium for six years, once a child becomes eligible for free school meals, even if they stop being entitled to it, and so they think that because of the auto award processes that they've brought in, Sheffield schools have benefited to the tune of about £10 million since 2016, which is obviously really impressive.

You should obviously never put a table in a PowerPoint slide, but some people like numbers, and I thought it might be interesting for some of you to be able to see, for instance, the number of objections and opt outs that they've had over the years and certainly last year, they only had two families that said no thanks, we don't want you to check that we're eligible. I think that's really interesting. It kind of shows that families retain some agency and of course, even if they're registered for free school meals, they don't have to eat them.

This breaks it down by year and you can see the impact it makes now, they spend a very busy month in August and they bring five or six members of staff in from other teams to undertake this work and it's an intense August and they don't ever get up get to go on holiday during that time. But as you can see it has a massive impact.

We're working really closely on the Fix Our Food project with Maria and the team and we are currently hoping to win some substantial amount of funding that will mean that we can employ someone full time to support local authorities to implement auto enrolment processes and undertake some evaluation and monitoring. We're quite hopeful that we'll be able to do that. What that will look like will be us essentially talking to local authorities that already have processes in place and then sharing those, looking at the barriers and the challenges and how they overcome them. I'm sharing that information amongst other local authorities in Yorkshire and beyond and then supporting local authorities, only in Yorkshire though to implement those processes and then hopefully collecting data on the impact. So basically, how many children they sign on and the pupil premium funding.

It is our goal to support the adoption of auto enrolment processes nationwide and once we have that data, we'll also do some advocacy work to put pressure on national government and the DWP to make free school meal auto enrolment, automatic on a national level so that parents don't have to apply and that reduces the burden on local authorities. One of the things that we are doing, whether we get funding or not is a webinar on the 30th of March that everybody is welcome to attend and our colleagues from Sheffield Council who have led on and continue to lead the auto award process are going to present the background and the problems and how they do it and lead a question-and-answer session. If anybody's interested in attending that, if you want to e-mail me. You're all welcome to come to the webinar and if you've got any questions about this work or any of the other work that we're doing, our Fix Our Food work then get in touch. Thank you.

**Panel Q&A - Professor Louise Dye, Dr Wendy Burton, Helen Ingle, Melanie Reed, Fiona Black, Siobhan Jennings, Professor Maria Bryant, Dr Annie Connelly**

**Kristin Bash:** Louise, can I ask you a quick question about your research and how important it is on the mental health impacts of school food and breakfast giving these tremendous impacts. What are the next steps, how has your work led to the development of interventions?

**Louise Dye:** Some of the slides that I showed you, I actually presented to a closed parliamentary briefing about a year ago, so that was really trying to get the message to politicians and policymakers that Food insecurity was having a massive impact on psychological wellbeing. This was straight out of COVID, but it was also the importance of that relationship being pervasive and lasting beyond lockdown, beyond return to school and even in the data that we have now from Leeds from this year, those relationships are still there. So I think the impact of it is rather about look at the numbers, look at the data that we've seen today from everyone in terms of eligibility for free school meals and the numbers that are increasing in terms of children who need to have access both to meals in terms of lunch, improving lunch boxes, whatever, but also being mindful of the fact that breakfast interventions are relatively cheap, relatively easy and actually encourage attendance at school. And I think the other aspect of that is that once you've got a child at school, the teachers and others can pick up on lots and lots of other things that are going on with those kids. And as I said, it's also in the Labour Party manifesto for free school meals, Universal free school meals, which is a good thing.

**Kristin Bash:** Wendy, with the CONNECTS Food website, and the work Helen and Melanie are doing, how do schools work to find capacity, how do they work to implement your interventions with limited budgets. So I don't know who kind of putting that out to Wendy. Helen.

**Wendy Burton:** This is something we are exploring in our pilot study actually, because we do expect that just because we've developed this resource, schools are not just going to start using it instantly. We do understand that there's barriers to implementing new policies and designing new policies. And so hopefully from the pilot study, we can get an understanding of what some of the barriers might look like and then maybe add on some potential additional components to the intervention of how we can support schools and their implementation of it.

**Helen Ingle:** I think we were asked about the Rethink Food transition project and how other areas might do that. We were in the same boat I guess; we did get some funding. There was only a small pot, we had about £8000 to do that project. Another £8000 to do some work around active travel. We've obviously tested this model out. We're now looking at how we can embed it and build it into a school system that might be through the curriculum developing resources and through our Healthy Schools award programme and looking at how we can build in work around transition and helping schools with that transition from primary to secondary and the work around food so that's another area we're looking at.

In terms of some of the food work we're looking at doing a webinar for our secondary schools to share some of the work we talked about that we've done in Selby High School and looking at the food offer and the catering and the trading standards team had gone in and done a lot of work with Selby High School. We're looking at doing some webinars to share some of those ideas and that information more widely and just looking at developing it as a bit of a package that can be then rolled out more widely than the Selby district.

**Fiona Black:** from working in a school, the resources and the time we were obviously completely thrown, my superpower as Annie will know is nagging and it's me it that have made things happen because I won't give up on it and I think there's probably somebody a bit like that at most schools that will be able to go, I'm going to do it, I'm going to do it, I'm going to do it and I'm not really going to sit down until something's a bit closer and with the resources I find more resources than ever get taken up, but it can be things like tutor time, we have a 2 minute silence, we have things on that go for the two-minute silence and I've now have two after school clubs running at the same time, we've got the head of our primary kitchen running one of them and we've got some external people coming in. I have potatoes sitting on the window sill chitting so that I can plant them in a couple of months-time and it is that finding the tiny wins without it being a stick to beat somebody over the head with or without it being I've got to do this. I think if those resources can be shared

all the time and shared every few months, then eventually they'll stick in a school because somebody will see it and they've got 5 minutes to fire it off and to do something else. But at the minute with schools, I think it's quite hit and miss because some days I can't type quick enough because the amount of work that you've got to do and then you've got to teach on top of it. So those resources to just have available would be amazing.

**Kristin Bash:** So to get started, you pretty much just decided to get started, if that's what I'm picking up that's amazing and a real lesson in inspiration to others that may in fact want to be doing the same. Helen, did you want to come in on this point?

**Helen Ingle:** Just very briefly something else to add really, the Rethink Food Transition project, but also the insight we did as part of the North Yorkshire School Zone project, a lot of that was going in talking to pupils, staff, parents doing surveys and one option for that is linking with your local universities and colleges, you're getting students in to do those as part of a project. There are other ways of getting people in to do that insight work gathering that data and identifying the needs in a particular school. And I think getting those links with academic institutions and partners is really key. So just another thought to add to how different areas might look at doing that.

**Kristin Bash:** I'm going to move on to ask a similar question to Siobhan in Leeds as the work that's going on there is just amazing with the school food ambassadors which looks tremendous, and it could be used as a building block to push other initiatives. How did that get started and how much time is required? How feasible or easy is it for schools to implement that programme?

**Siobhan Jennings:** I think it really depends on the size of the school and how much the school are wanting to put into it. We do have some schools that will get the toolkit, they'll come on the training and then they might only deliver it for one term. And we've had other schools where they have an after school club that meets every week with thirty children who are school food ambassadors, some small schools only have two or four children who delivered the programme depending on I guess, the scale of what they would like to improve and what they would like to do, I guess the more you put into it, the more you'll get out of it. The idea of having children involved in school food, it's not a unique concept there are lots of other authorities in other areas that are doing wonderful projects. There's no need to particularly use our resources as it's an idea that can be shared and delivered. But we find by doing everything for the schools and essentially spoon feeding some of the tools, it saves them a lot of time. And it means they're more likely to do it.

**Kristin Bash:** Can I just ask, are these resources available widely or just for people in the Leeds or West Yorkshire?

Fantastic. And can I just ask, I think this was, I don't know, are these resources available widely or is it simply for people in Leeds area or West Yorkshire?

**Siobhan Jennings:** Anybody can access the resources. I think we've got a school in Portugal that uses it and I know Jersey and Guernsey use the resources as well, so local authorities can also purchase the resources in an editable format that they wanted to make it their own, write their own foreword, put their own logos on to it. We're happy to do that as well.

**Kristin Bash:** Fantastic, thank you. There are a number of toolkits out there, so schools just need to choose which one is best for them across a wide range of options.

There was a really specific question asked about the Education Act regulation that requires families to request free school meals, could this be seen as an impediment to bringing this forward? Or has this been misunderstood? How could this impact auto enrolment?

**Maria Bryant:** This is very much related to what Annie spoke about in terms of the probably one of the biggest kind of headaches associated with this process and very much related to governance. There is a process, it's not straight forward I think is the answer to that, and that will be probably one of the biggest tasks that we have in supporting all the areas. But Annie, I don't know if you wanted to add to that question as well about where the funding comes from, whether it's from the local authorities, it's not, it's centrally funded.

**Annie Connolly:** No, but just to reiterate this because within local authorities the management of the free school meal system sits in very different departments. It might be in the benefits department or there might

be a specific one for free school meals. That is what makes this more complicated because we can't do a one size fits all, here you go, this will sort it out.

**Kristin Bash:** another question asked was is early years pupil premium included in your research?

**Annie Connolly:** I know that Sheffield as part of its processes it tries to step in at early years level to ensure that families are registered before they start school, there are lots of different stages that they get involved to flag up possible free school meal eligibility. But yes, within the wider work that we do at Fix Our Food, we think we will focus on early years as well as schools.

Kristin Bash: I guess the next thing I'll have to say is a shameless plug for the Yorkshire Humber Healthier and Resilient Food Systems Network, when you reach the next stage of your research and perhaps maybe looking to recruit schools from the region, we're happy to help to get that message out. Are you expecting this to happen any time soon? Are you looking to roll out to incorporate other schools?

Maria Bryant: we are going to do this whatever happens with the funding, we'll be working and supporting local authorities primarily. We're not going to be recruiting individual schools to that. We are doing that for the Fix Our Food project more generally. We are going to do it whatever the funding, it just means it will be a bigger, stronger evaluation.

**Kristin Bash:** Does anyone have any key points that they didn't make or that they wanted to respond to in terms of other speakers?

**Annie Connolly:** I just wanted to say that what Fiona talked about was about 10% of the amazing work that she does in Halifax, and we should probably have a webinar just with Fiona talking about all the different things she is involved in.

**Kristin Bash:** I want to thank all of our speakers, from both the morning and afternoon sessions. It has been a truly informational and inspiring session. We tried very much not to focus just on the problems but to bring solutions and bring ideas which I think we've done a very good job with in particular, just really showing that there's a way forward that can improve things. And I think that's really important for everyone.

We did have a glitch with the recording, we will be making a transcript available to everyone. We will also have the slides available, and a feedback form will be sent to everyone who's registered. And we would very much appreciate any thoughts, suggestions, ideas for new webinars or additional content. And in addition, just finding out what sort of impact this webinar has had, is really useful to us when formulating our next webinar. Thank you all very, very much. And with that I give you all one minute of your day back and thank you for coming.