

# School Food for All Webinar

## Panel discussion Q&A

On Wednesday 18 October, Sustain's Children's Food Campaign and Sustainable Food Places teams hosted a webinar on expanding School Food for All: a roadmap for local action. Speakers and panelists included:

- Darren Squires of Hull Food Partnership
- Shona Goudie of Food Foundation presenting on their research with West Midlands local authorities
- Judith Gregory of Cardiff Council and LACA Vice Chair
- Aimee Connolly and Sara-Jane Millar of the GLA
- Myles Bremner of Bremner & Co.
- Farihah Choudhury of Southwark Council

The webinar recording and presentations can be downloaded [here](#).

## Q& A answered live

### 1. As school meals uptake goes up, is there work to consider the dining experience and enabling pupils to have time to eat? For example seating/timings/additional access points.

**Farihah (Southwark):** We found through engaging different boroughs that funding toward this is mixed. Boroughs are choosing how they are administering funding to the schools themselves (including covering improvements around the above).

**Darren (Hull):** Those planning implementation need to be experiencing the dining experience in action. Census Day information is not going to give you the full info.

**Farihah:** We reflected this within our secondary school audit – some schools said they don't have the space or capacity to accommodate uplift of free school meals; example of one school that had to extend their dining room to do this.

We are also undertaking primary school visits to check the dining school environment – the idea is to get through to majority of primary schools in the next year to 18 months. We're also planning secondary school visits.

We had a workshop with secondary chefs recently – difficult to read from a menu what standards are being met and how children are actually receiving that food.

The best way to do this is to sit in a canteen and observe.

**Judith (Wales):** Length of school lunch time is real challenge and that's something that is out of their contact – it is the purview of the school board.

Our focus is on joined up approach - bringing everyone together on same page.

In schools with nurseries – capital funding includes dining development so we were able to give that to the schools, but even if they have this some places don't have enough space to accommodate.

## 2. How is the healthy meal bundle scheme being monitored?

**Fariyah (Southwark):** We are enforcing this through visits, check-ins, and stipulating about the grants that the £2.90 per pupil is only available to schools providing these healthy meal packages. We don't benefit from a centralised model so all schools have different contracts with different caterers. We are proactively working with schools to support them to offer healthy meals bundles

## 3. How did you identify the School Food Standards most frequently missed to base the healthy meal bundle on?

**Myles (Southwark/London):** Environmental Officers ask questions around school food standards compliance.

## 4. Is there an appetite to share more information and resources between the home nations?

**Judith (Wales):** We are in contact with Scotland and Northern Ireland regularly. LACA also hosts a four nations panel on school food every summer. We are happy to share information and the other nations would be as well.

## 5. Can you tell us more about the video done by the young people Darren in Hull worked with young people on issues affecting them the most (including school uniforms and school meals)?

**Darren (Hull):** What you saw was only part of the video, which delved further into the subject of school meals. It was a way of getting the debate on school meals started. The school uniforms point was to emphasise that food is a known leveler around attainment. We wanted to get the young people passionate about the issues. Young people want to make choices about their own campaigns, and we think it's important for them to have a voice.

## 6. What would you encourage any area to think about if they wanted to implement free school meals for all?

**Fariyah (Southwark):** Work very closely with your schools to understand their needs about school food and take it from there.

**Sara-Jane (GLA):** Engage with schools, delivery partners, staff, caterers, boroughs to understand needs and process.

**Aimee (GLA):** Learn from people who have done it before, engage in forums like this, talk to other boroughs, and even other countries who have rolled this out – Finland, Sweden, Denmark.

**Shona (Food Foundation):** Learn from others who are already doing this.

**Darren: (Hull):** See it not as a cost but as an investment.

## Questions answered directly in the Q&A monitor

### 7. Many primary schools in London have over 90% take up. With many schools including some in Southwark paying more than £2.65 per meal, how will the GLA meet the Mayor's promise that the shortfall will be met?

**Sara-Jane (GLA):** The GLA is funding all schools based on 90% of uptake. For any school that experiences higher rates of uptake, they will be able to claim the additional funding through providing evidence of higher rates in January and March 2024. This process has been developed in consultation with boroughs and schools.

**Aimee (GLA):** There is a contingency fund within the Mayor's programme for any extraordinary costs associated with implementation and we are working closely with boroughs to monitor implementation to address any individual challenges in schools as they arise. If boroughs have take-up higher than 90%, they will be able to provide evidence on this and receive additional funding. Funding at 90% take-up creates a buffer that schools can use for headroom as our evidence shows that take up is rarely higher than this and take up for UIFSM in London is 80-85%.

### 8. Is there evidence on what the main reasons for non-take up of free school meals are?

**Aimee (GLA):** We have done qualitative research on this and some of the barriers include a lack of knowledge, language barriers, a lack of time, overwhelmed by the process, fear around stigma, cultural reasons.

### 9. I would be interested to hear more about how you are supporting the enrolment onto the National FSM provision through this project.

**Aimee (GLA):** We are working with boroughs and schools to ensure that registrations for the national scheme don't fall and are sharing and supporting best practice through our webinars and resources online (including guidance and templates).

We also strongly encourage the adoption of a universal registration model which helped increase pupil premium income in Islington. Our central marketing to families also focuses on encouraging families to still register for the Government scheme.

### 10. Is there much evidence being gathered around consumption? I know that some schools have talked about the issues of food waste, particularly in regards to fruit and vegetables.

**Darren (Hull):** Big issue in primary school is food waste. We are working with one school to try to explore this further- and again the work is being co-delivered with some of the pupils. The methodology is based on a research project carried out by Hull University during Hull's original Universal Primary Free School Meals Provision initiative 15 years ago. Methodology included weighing all of the plates before free school meals and after. Research found that lots of the healthy food is being thrown away.

### 11. Any further insight/best practice that can be shared on how to organise and implement a school food audit with the school/early years settings would be appreciated.

**(Resource need noted to have case study/template resource on school food audits to share with the network.)**

**12. Is there a consistent measure across England for what 'take up' of a school meal means? Is it possible that different things are being classed as take-up in different areas?**

**Myles (London/Southwark):** There is school census day take-up (when schools record x3 times a year the take-up of the universal infant free school meal and those on benefit-related FSM). And then there is take-up as recorded by the caterers and the payment systems - (the full average rate).

**13. Cashless payment systems seem to be the norm in many secondary schools. Would anyone have detailed insight into the payment systems in primary? Especially where payment is a means to measure uptake (using MIS data)?**

**Myles (London):** I can definitely help with this - and happy to chat offline.

**14. It is great to hear about the work that is going on across the country. At the moment it appears that there is a bit of a patchwork approach. How do we share this overall best practice and these learnings as well as costing estimates to be able to roll this out further but also ensure that it works for individual schools and pupils?**

**Vera & Barbara (webinar co-hosts, Sustain):** this is something we can look at as convenors of best practice across our networks. We could host future webinars around these subjects or create an accessible hub for resources via the School Food for All website. Please do get in touch with us with further ideas.

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*Sustain: The alliance for better food and farming advocates food and agriculture policies and practices that enhance the health and welfare of people and animals, improve the working and living environment, enrich society and culture and promote equity. We represent around 100 national public interest organisations working at international, national, regional, and local level. [www.sustainweb.org](http://www.sustainweb.org)*