



Briefing 15/04 January 2015

Evaluating universal free school meal provision for P1 to P3 in Scotland and how local authorities can get involved

To: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in Scotland

For information only to England, Northern Ireland and Wales

Key Issues:

The purpose of this briefing is to advise APSE members on NHS Health Scotland's evaluation of universal free school meal provision (universal FSM) for primary one to primary three schoolchildren in Scotland and how local authorities can get involved in the evaluation programme.

This report includes:-

- Background on universal FSM
- An update on the evaluation provided by Rachel McAdams, NHS Health Scotland
- Contact details for local authorities that wish to get involved in the evaluation programme

1.0 Introduction

As of January 2015, the Scottish Government launched a new policy that means all school children from primary one to primary three are now entitled to a free school meal with the following expected key outcomes: increased uptake of school meals, monetary savings for families currently not receiving free school meals and increased demand for food from local/sustainable sources as well as improved behaviour, improved educational attainment and healthier diets. APSE previously published a briefing on the background of the universal FSM policy available [here](#).

Alongside the publication of '[Better Eating, Better Learning](#)', which APSE helped launch in Edinburgh in May 2014 with the Scottish Government, and many other reports and discussion documents into [improving food choices in the school community](#) and [addressing Scotland's unsustainably high levels of diet-related illnesses](#), universal FSM is part of a wider coordinated effort by Scottish Government to change Scotland's relationship with food.

NHS Health Scotland has recently undertaken an evaluation of the universal FSM policy with a portfolio of studies currently being finalised with its partners which includes Scottish Government, University of Stirling, University of Glasgow and University of Edinburgh as well as Education Scotland. Local authorities are being encouraged to share their experiences and thoughts on the implementation of universal FSM as part of this process.

The full report and list of proposed studies is available here:

<http://www.healthscotland.com/uploads/documents/24423-Free%20School%20Meals%20Evaluation%20Briefing%20Note.pdf>

2.0 Update from Rachel McAdams, NHS Health Scotland

Rachel McAdams from NHS Health Scotland has kindly provided an update for APSE members on the evaluation programme. This update is as follows:-

Firstly the evaluation team would like to thank the APSE members who took the time to complete our short pre-implementation survey in November. Your contributions have been very informative for the study on local variation in implementation and uptake of universal FSM in particular.

Below is a brief update on the evaluation programme:

Monitoring school meal uptake study

The annual Healthy Living Survey conducted by the Scottish Government will go ahead in February and this year will be collecting school meal data for P1-3 and P4-7. The evaluation team hope to analyse and report on the learning from this in Summer 2015.

Understanding the social patterning of and motivations for universal FSM uptake and cost-savings for families study

Growing up in Scotland study is underway. We expect to report on the learning from this in late 2016.

Local variation in implementation and uptake of universal FSM study

NHS Health Scotland has commissioned a collaboration of academics led by the University of Stirling to undertake an evaluation of the implementation of universal free school meals for P1 to P3 during 2015. The details of this study are outlined below.

Aims of the evaluation

- 1) To identify key variations in implementation, i.e. those which may impact on the intended outcomes described in the theory of change.
- 2) Identify factors that may be contributing to differences in universal FSM uptake across schools and local authorities, as monitored by the annual Healthy Living Survey on school meal uptake data.
- 3) Identify the common barriers and facilitators to implementation and describe how these were overcome or utilised by local authorities and schools.

- 4) Identify and measure any unintended consequences of implementation and uptake, both positive and negative, and whether and how schools/local authorities attempted to mitigate any unintended negative consequences
- 5) Identify learning to further improve the implementation and uptake of universal FSM for all P1 to P3 pupils.

Methods

- *School case studies:*

9 individual schools, across 3 local authorities, will be asked to act as case study schools. Local authorities approached to participate will include a mostly rural, mostly urban and mixed type.

Phase 1 (Jan-Jun 2015) will involve observational visits to school and interviews with key staff. During Phase 2 (Aug-Sep 2015) schools will be revisited and one key staff member re-interviewed for each school.

- *Local authority experience:*

Phase 1 (Jan-Jun 2015) will involve a survey of all local authorities targeted at individuals responsible for the implementation of the policy, such as catering and facilities managers and nutritional consultants.

Phase 2 (Aug-Sep 2015) will follow up with a cross section of 6 local authorities with interviews with 3 key individuals.

- *Parent discussion groups:*

Between January and June 2015 a series of 6 discussion groups will be held with parents of children in P1 to P3 from across 3 local authority areas.

There will be 2 reports from this study available in June 2015 and January 2016.

The evaluation team are keen that APSE members are given the opportunity to participate in the evaluation and are kept up to date on our findings over the next year.

3.0 How to get involved

For further information on the evaluation or to raise any concerns please contact either:

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4.0 APSE Comment

APSE welcomes the introduction of universal free school meals for primary one to primary three schoolchildren which we hope, with its potential as one of the best invest to save schemes available for the public purse, will be a stepping stone to extending this offer to all primary schoolchildren; preventable diet related illnesses are a considerable strain on our health service and it is encouraging to see real progress towards tackling this issue. APSE hopes that these upcoming evaluations and studies by NHS Health Scotland and its partners will allow our member authorities to have their experiences with the implementation of universal free school meals taken into account which will help inform future decisions by the Scottish Government in this area. APSE would encourage our membership to actively participate in this evaluation.

APSE has continually demonstrated our commitment to improving school food through our work launching 'Better Eating, Better Learning' with the Scottish Government in Edinburgh, our Performance Networks service that allows local authorities to benchmark their performance against others across a range of indicators within education catering services, and our Soft FM advisory groups that allow senior officers and elected members to come together and discuss changes with their colleagues.

Discussions on the impact of universal free school meals will continue at APSE Scotland Soft FM advisory group meetings over the course of the year. The next meeting is scheduled for 3 February 2015 at Chatelherault Country Park in Hamilton, attendance is free for Council officers and elected members. Douglas Eadie, the lead researcher of the study on local variation in implementation and uptake of universal FSM will be in attendance to answer any questions you may have about the evaluations. To book your place please e-mail Garry Lee at glee@apse.org.uk or call the Scotland office on 01698 459051.

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