

Evaluation of universal Free School Meal (FSM) provision for P1 to P3 in Scotland: Update

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 provide an update on the evaluation currently being undertaken by NHS Health Scotland.

- Background on universal FSM and the evaluation.
- Update on the NHS Health Scotland evaluation and findings so far.
- Details on the evaluation next steps.

1.0 Introduction

In January 2015, Scottish Government's universal free school meal provision for all P1 to P3 school children was launched in Scotland. Some of the key expected outcomes from this new policy included 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.

As universal FSM is part of Scottish Government's wider effort to change Scotland's relationship with food, NHS Health Scotland is currently undertaking an evaluation of the universal FSM programme in Scotland. The aims of the evaluation include:-

- 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.

The evaluation has three strands which cover research from parents, research from schools and local authorities and finally monitoring of school meal uptake.

APSE has previously published briefings on the background of the universal FSM policy and the evaluation available here [briefing 14-01](#) and [briefing 15-04](#)

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 finds to date from the evaluation. This update is as follows:-

NHS Health Scotland is interested in understanding what works to reduce inequalities in health. We are leading the evaluation of the Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) programme in Scotland.

The evaluation has 3 strands (find out more by following the links below):

- Research with parents ([click to find out more](#))
- Research with schools and local authorities ([click to find out more](#))
- Monitoring school meal uptake ([click to find out more](#)).

Findings so far

Findings from the research with parents and monitoring school meal uptake were published at the end of October 2015. Some of the key findings are summarised below.

Parents:

Overall parents were very supportive of UIFSM. They identified several benefits including financial and time savings. Parents also felt that their children benefitted nutritionally from school meals, which they believed to be healthier than packed lunches.

Parents welcomed tasting sessions and many reported this influenced uptake of school meals. Some parents had concerns about potential increased demand on the dining environment following increased school meal uptake.

Universal free school meals: Scotland, 2015

Scottish parents identified 3 benefits
of universal free school meals

- 1 Financial savings**
on the cost of school meals/packed lunches
- 2 Time savings**
on preparing packed lunches
- 3 Nutritional benefits**
as they believe school meals are healthier than most packed lunches

Overall Scottish parents are supportive of universal free school meals

In Scotland free school meals for all P1 to P3 pupils were introduced in January 2015. NHS Health Scotland is evaluating the policy. Find out more: healthscotland.com/freeschoolmeals

NHS
Health Scotland

Download the full report here: <http://www.healthscotland.com/documents/26326.aspx>

Monitoring school meal uptake:

School meal data, collected through the Healthy Living Survey was used to monitor whether:

- There had been an increase in the consumption of school meals
- More families were benefitting financially (by changing to free meals)
- More children were benefitting nutritionally (by changing from a packed lunch to a school meal).

This research suggested that school meal uptake in Scotland increased in 2015. It appears that this was due to increased free meal uptake amongst P1-P3 pupils. Increased free meal uptake suggests that more families are benefitting financially in 2015.

Free school meals: Scotland, 2015

In Scottish primary schools in 2015, free school meal uptake **increased**



An extra **98,813** primary pupils took a free school meal



In a year this could amount to savings of **£380** per child

and a total saving of **£37.5M** for Scottish families



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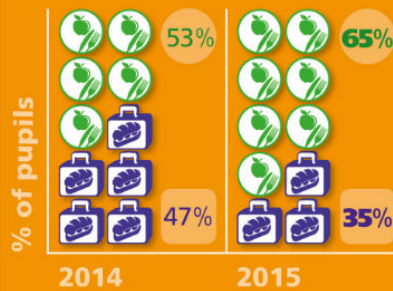


Free school meals: Scotland, 2015

Research suggests that **school meals are healthier** than packed lunches



The proportion of primary pupils in Scotland taking a school meal **increased** in 2015



In Scotland free school meals for all P1 to P3 pupils were introduced in January 2015. NHS Health Scotland is evaluating the policy. Find out more: healthscotland.com/freeschoolmeals



Changes in both school meal uptake and free school meal uptake varied across local authorities and schools. However analysis suggests that pupils and families from the most deprived schools continue to benefit the most from school meals in 2015.

Download the full report here: <http://www.healthscotland.com/documents/26327.aspx>

Next steps

The research with schools and local authorities is due to report in March 2016.

Keep up to date on our website: healthscotland.com/freeschoolmeals

For further information contact:

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3.0 APSE Comment

APSE continues to demonstrate our commitment to improving school food through a number of our services including our APSE briefings, Scottish Soft FM advisory group (attendance of which is free for Council officers and elected members) and our Performance Networks service which allows local authorities to benchmark their performance against others across a range of indicators within education catering services. We will provide a further update on the evaluation following the release of the report on research with schools and local authorities in March 2016.

For your general information the **Better Eating, Better Learning – A guide to getting started** is now available by [clicking here](#). As well as the main guide there are a range of supporting resources including a power point presentation introduction to Better Eating, Better Learning which Education Scotland will add to over the coming months. In addition to this the **Better Eating, Better Learning: A Guide for Children and Young People to Assess School Food** is also now available and can be accessed by [clicking here](#). The Children and Young People Guide aims to showcase and celebrate the work of the six schools who participated in the BEBL project led by Children in Scotland. The guide provides ideas of how pupils can evaluate school food (using the experiences of the project schools as a starting point) and highlights what pupils and teachers could learn from each individual project.

APSE will continue to keep our membership up to date on the evaluation and all other areas within Soft FM services. Our recent seminar held at the Westerwood hotel, Cumbernauld focussed on issues including promoting buying local and providing real opportunities within Soft FM services. All presentations from the day can be accessed by [clicking here](#) and includes a presentation from Graham Young, Industry Development Director for Scotland Food & Drink.

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