



Education Catering: Trend analysis 2015/16

This briefing provides details on the performance information available from APSE's performance networks service looking at performance indicators and current policy issues for councils who deliver education catering services.

Key issues

- School Meal uptake in the primary sector has climbed above 66% in England and above 60% in Scotland following the introduction of Universal Infant Free School Meals.
- The UK average productivity stands at 9 meals served per staff hour
- Average food cost per meal stands at 76 pence

Overview

The APSE performance networks programme for education catering provides performance indicators for price, service uptake, key cost indicators, productivity and qualitative measures for the service throughout the UK. Further, the programme continues to capture a significant amount of management data to support more detailed 'process benchmarking' of the service including its contribution to child health promotion and sustainability.

As in previous years, our analysis also highlights variances arising from the distinct policy approaches between Scotland, England and Wales, and reference is made to previous year outcomes where clear **trends or 'direction of travel' are evident.**

With data now captured for universal free meal uptakes (in England and Scotland) **across this full year, these are reported below alongside previous 'high level' uptake PIs** where year on year (trend) analysis remains relevant and possible.

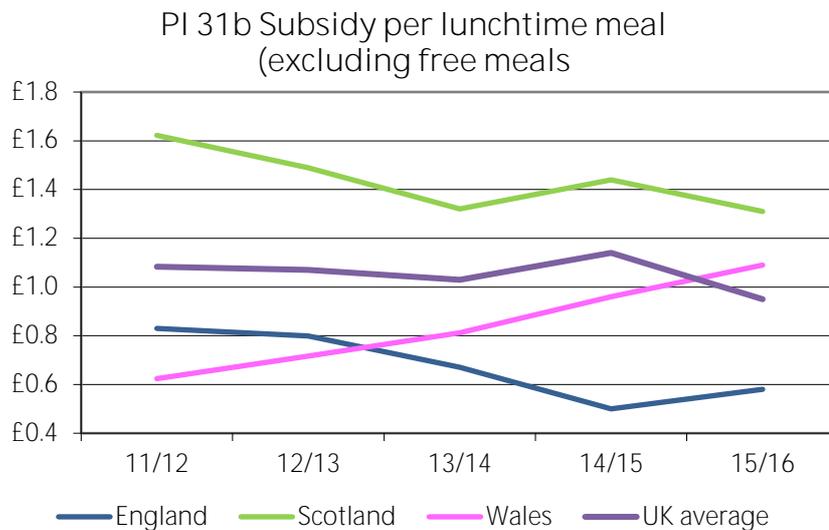
Trend analysis

The trend analysis in this executive summary is based on 'service wide averages' across all family groups and within each region (England, Scotland and Wales – where relevant) for the past 5 years. These averages across all returns to the programme can contain spikes or variations caused by any change in the profile or number of subscribers making returns to the programme.

Meal charges

With the full year effect of universal free school meals in England and Scotland, the reliance on annual increases in paid meal charges and income (to maintain or reduce subsidies) has been offset by the usually higher meal rate income derived from Central/School and UIFSM meal rate funding.

Further, the increased uptake secured under UIFSM is clearly evident in the reduced unit (total cost per meal) outcomes for England and Scotland further reducing subsidy levels in these regions. In the absence of UIFSM (and its impact upon meal uptakes and unit costs), Wales continues to support year on year increases in its lunchtime meal subsidies in addition to the funding of free breakfast services across the primary sector.

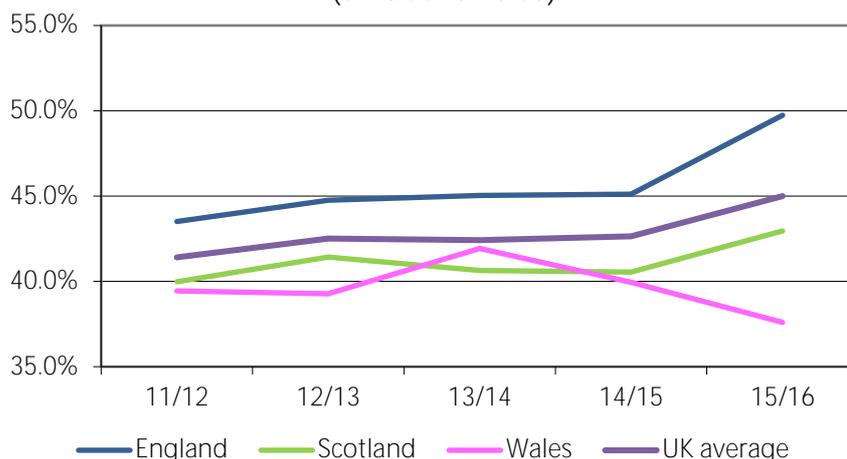


Service uptakes

In previous years, we have reported both free and paid meal uptakes in the key primary and secondary sectors, which continue to link closely with both financial outcomes and the services contribution to child health objectives.

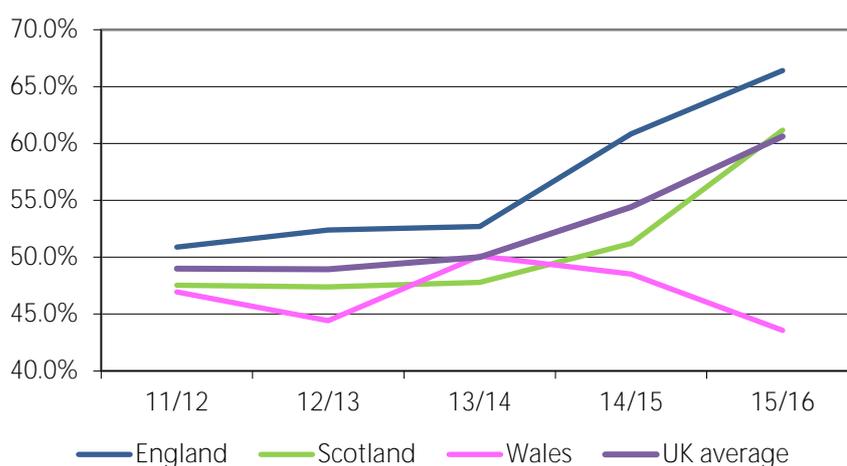
With the full year effect of UIFSM (free meals) for younger pupils in Scotland and England, we have shown below the movement in paid and "all meal" uptakes in the primary sector as a basis for more viable analysis of the initiatives contribution to both financial and child health outcomes.

PI 08c Primary school paid meal uptake
(all authorities)



Initial concerns about the potential impact of UIFSM on older (KS2/Junior) paying pupil uptakes are clearly not evident in outcomes on PI 08c, where only Wales shows a two year fall on the high achieved in 2013/14.

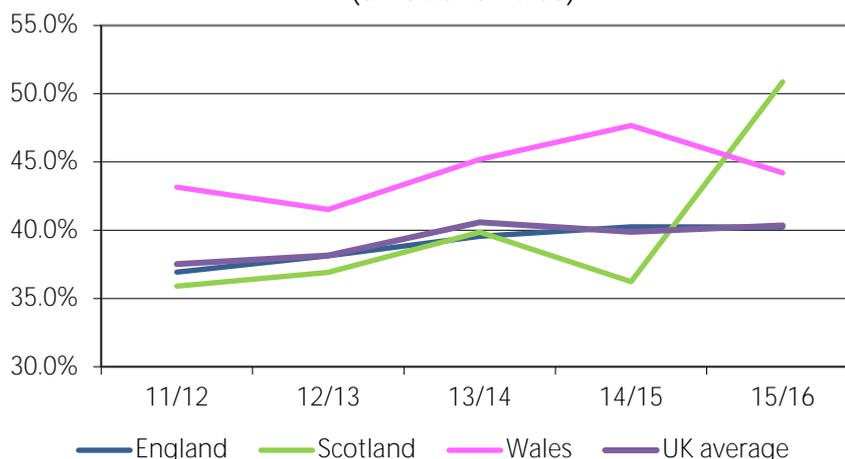
PI 36e All meal uptake (primary & special schools)



The graph above (PI 36e) highlights the full year effect of UIFSM for 2015/16. As reported last year, the figures in 2014/15 reflect the later introduction (part year effect) of UIFSM in Scotland.

Whilst there appears to be a fall in lunchtime meals served, data from Welsh authorities reporting the service of free breakfasts show an increase of 2 points to 82% in 2015/16.

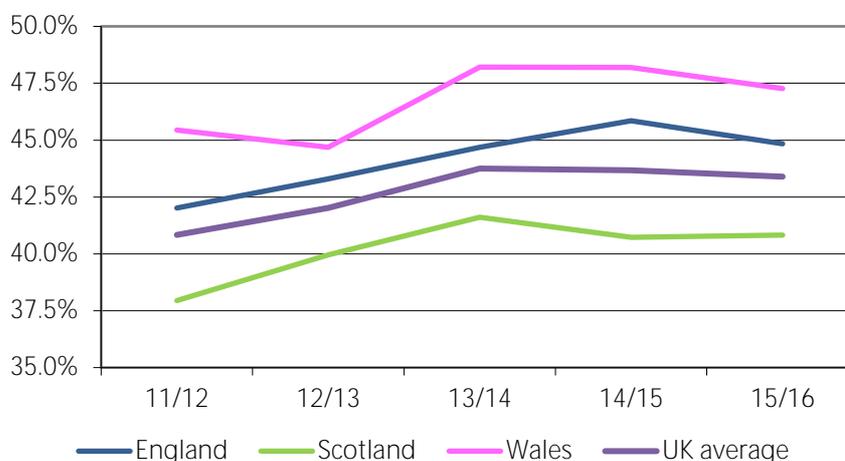
PI 10c Secondary school paid meal uptake
(all authorities)



The underlying long term trend in the secondary sector shows a small but continued year on year growth in paid meal uptakes, the average across the UK being supported by a material rise in Scotland during the last year.

The apparent dip in England on PI 36d (overleaf) may reflect a change in the number and profile of secondary schools included in returns for 2015/16 and will be subject to further analysis in second batch reports, including any statistics on the impact of academy transfers affecting this region.

PI 36d All meal uptake (secondary schools)

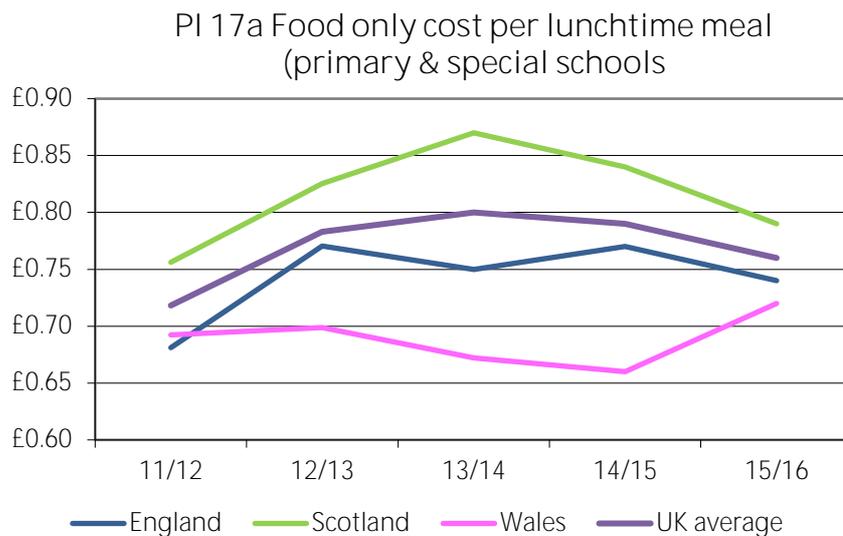


All meal uptakes in the secondary sector show no real movement over the last 3 years where Wales however, continues to achieve higher uptakes on meal charges broadly in line with those applied in England. Whilst Scotland continues to charge less and serve fewer secondary meals, more than half of Scottish authorities have applied above inflation increases during 2015/16 whilst achieving a marked improvement in secondary school meal uptakes.

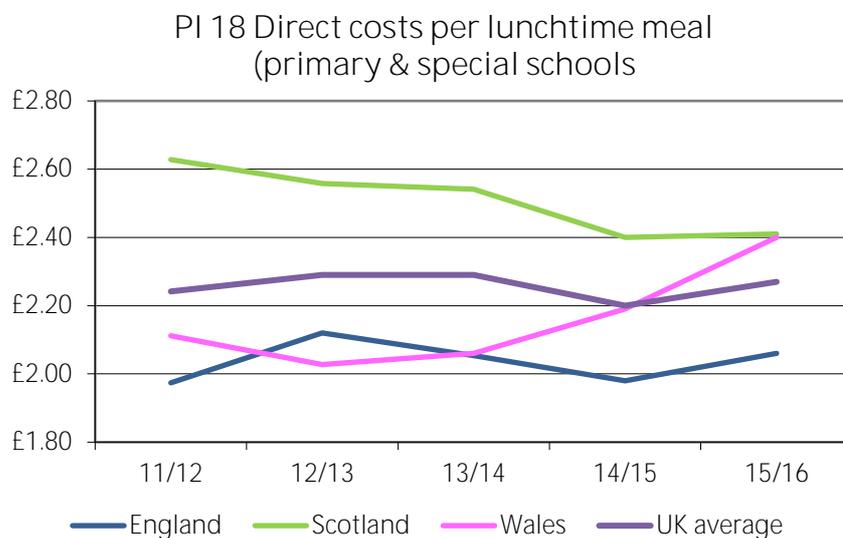
Key cost indicators

After a marked variance across the UK in Food only cost per meal in the primary and special school sectors, there appears to have been some convergence in 2015/16, with Scotland in particular showing the greatest movement from a high point average of 87p in 2013/14.

The return to food based standards arising from the school food plan may have contributed to the small fall in England and the increased use of the 'Food for Life Catering Mark' across the UK may be another factor in the regional convergence of this indicator.

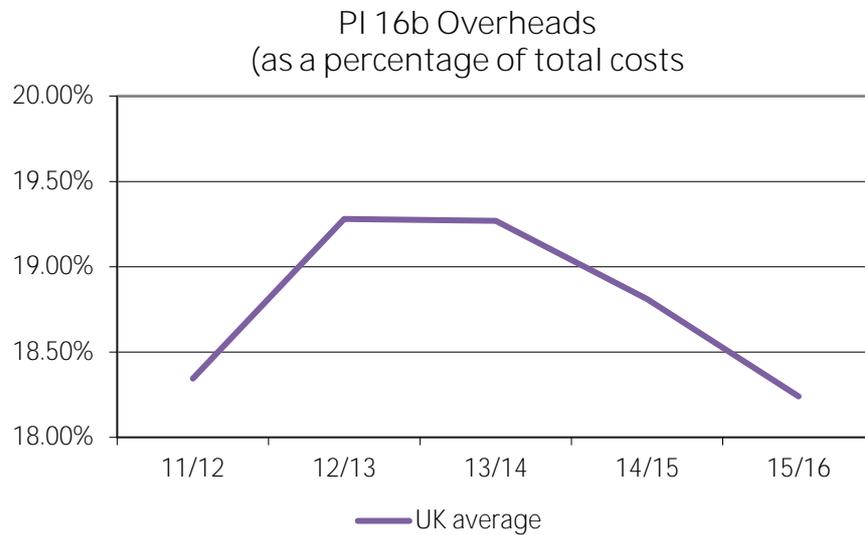


With a continued move towards local authority driven and now the 'national living wage', many authorities have used the introduction of UIFSM to offset the effect on direct (and overall) meal costs as evident from the graph below. Without the associated rise in uptakes, data from Wales shows the effect of a marked increase in direct labour rates, together with the reported rise in food only costs.

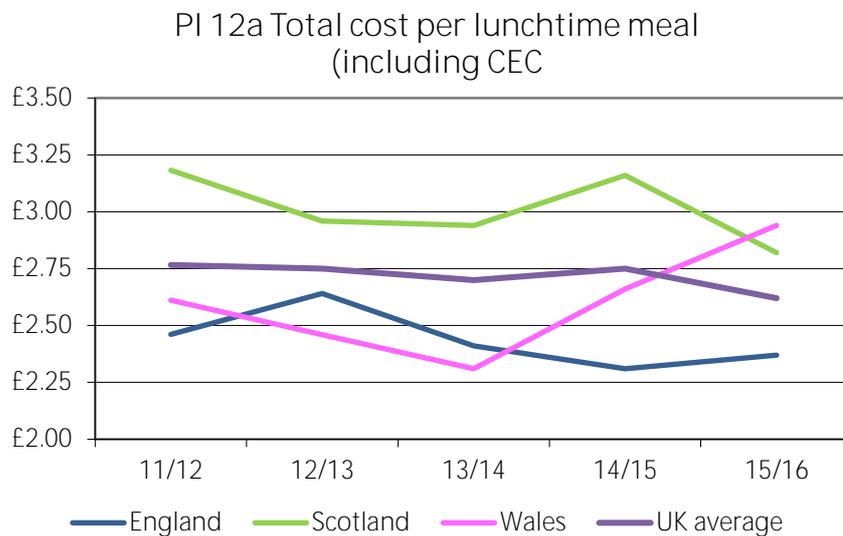


As a percentage of total service costs, overheads across the service have fallen again (aided by increased uptakes in all but Wales) as predicted last year.

Contributing to this outcome, central establishment charges (CECs) as a percentage of total cost, have fallen in every region from an average across the UK of 4.82% in 2014/15 to 4.60% in 2015/16.



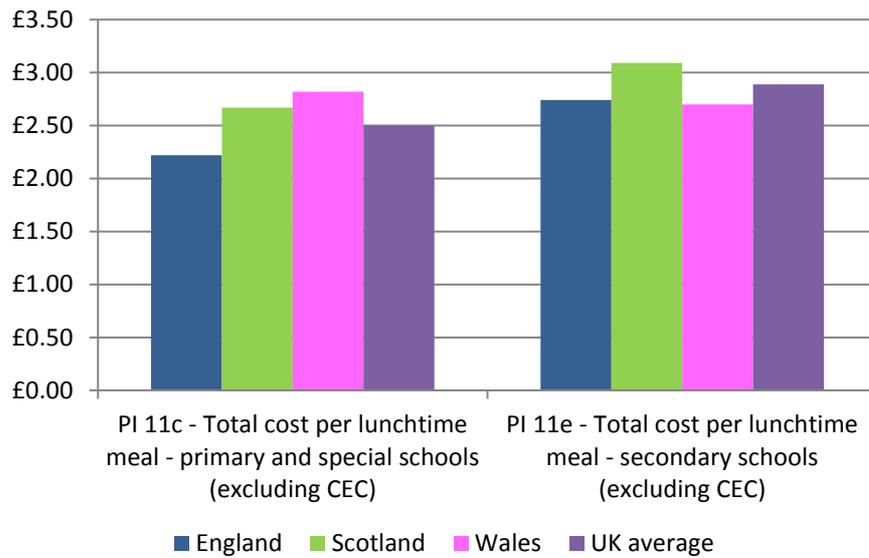
The impact on total costs per meal across all sectors is shown in the graph below.



To aid in more detailed analysis of this PI, from last year, the programme collected and reported on this and other high level PIs by sector (primary, special and secondary schools).

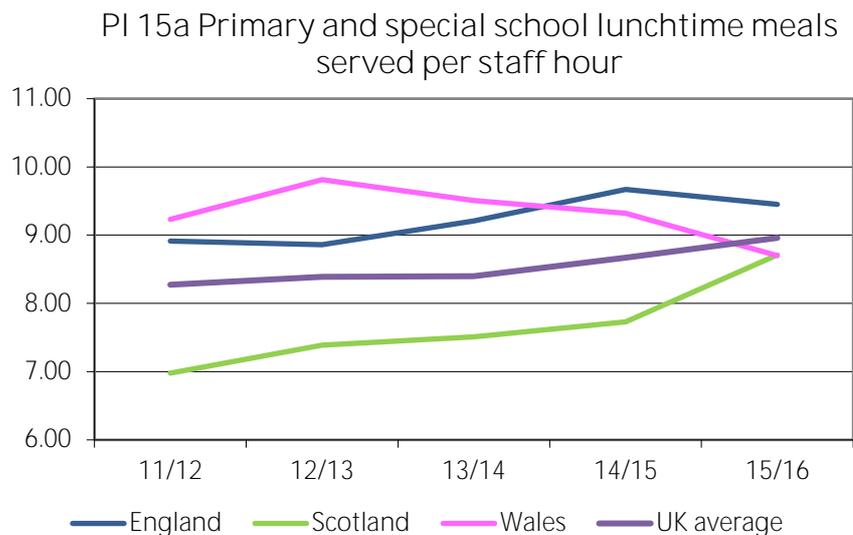
The following graph shows how the total cost per meal varies between these sectors in each country, where only Wales continues to report a lower net costs in

the secondary sector, supported by consistently higher uptakes - well above UK average.



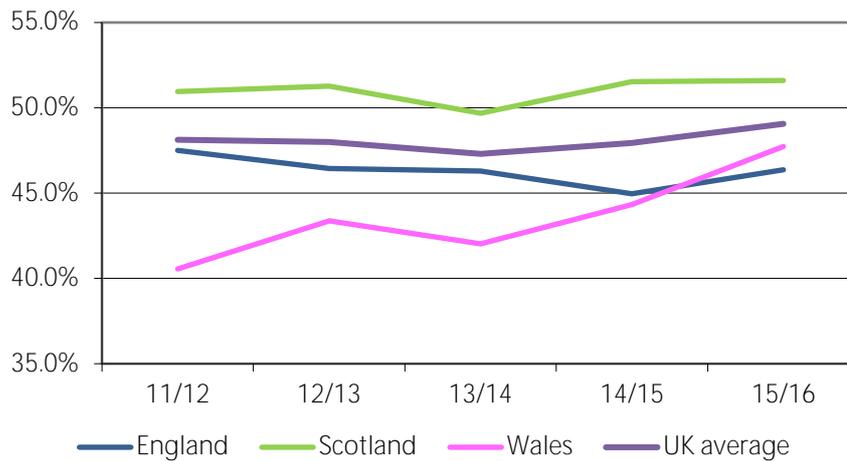
Productivity

The following graphs clearly highlight the link between productivity and meal uptakes, where England and Scotland benefit from UIFSM in the Primary sector, the full year effect of which is evident in the current year for Scotland.



Despite the apparent fall from its high in 2012/13, the reported average for Wales does however, continue to reflect well on a service characterised by a high number of small primary schools (as reported last year) and where the rise in secondary staff ratios is likely to reflect the growing expectations from individual schools who increasingly seek a level of independence in the procurement of non-educational services as reflected in government policy in other parts of the UK.

PI 20 Unit staff cost ratio (secondary schools)



Quality assurance and stakeholder consultation (PI 23) and human resources (PI 24)

The upturn in these PIs reported last year has continued into 2015/16, particularly in the area of 'stakeholder consultation', where 'engagement' with 'the customer' has always been of critical importance to business retention and growth.

Further, the minor adjustments of the criteria used to drive the scoring of PI 23 (made last year relating to QA procedures and 'qualifications') do now better reflect the value of bespoke QA processes and training against the 'system assurance' characterised by the national QA programmes and qualification previously used to drive this PI.

PI 23 Quality assurance and stakeholder consultation process
PI 24 Human resources and people management



Nutrition and healthy eating

The number of staff trained in food nutrition continues the long term trend of improvement, the average across the UK now standing at a 5 year high of 73% - up 4 points on last year.

The number of schools offering a breakfast service (as a percentage of all schools) has moved in each country as shown in the following 5 year table.

	England	Scotland	Wales
2011/12	13.1%	19.7%	53.8%
2012/13	20.6%	23.7%	54.6%
2013/14	14.1%	32.8%	60.1%
2014/15	14.8%	25.8%	68.5%
2015/16	14.6%	26.9%	68.2%

Whilst the majority of PIs covered by this report relate to the lunchtime provision of school meals, outcomes on these should be set against the wider objective of **'child health' outcomes which for subscribers in Wales, includes a reported average uptake of breakfast meals at 82% across 68% of all of their primary schools.**

Sustainable procurement and the environment

The following table shows the reported average percentage of food sourced from local suppliers across the UK over the last 5 years.

11/12	12/13	13/14	14/15	15/16
34.84%	30.29%	31.85%	37.42%	25.94%

As noted in our introduction to 'trend analysis' this data may be subject to 'spikes' caused by any year on year change in the number or profile of submissions to the programme and any variance in subscribers interpretation of the programmes guidance on 'locally sourced' products. This will be the subject of review and further analysis at this year's catering workshop at the performance networks seminar in Blackpool.

The other PIs generated in this category remain broadly in line with outcomes reported last year, i.e. only a reported 8% of all schools (mainly secondary) still use some element of disposable cutlery or crockery and the over 86% of all schools where the service provider operates or agrees targets for reduction in energy consumption.

Interpretation of data

As noted in previous years, area based variations in policy and approach to this service continue to be reflected across the full range of indicators maintained and reported by this programme and in making (particularly country) observations, we **are conscious that subscribers will wish to 'drill down' into factors, processes and policies that affect evident variances between the geographical areas.**

The full year effect of UIFSM in both Scotland and England is clearly evident in uptakes and overall cost outcomes in 2015/16, making the containment of (or reduction in) in meal rate costs and charges possible, against the substantial improvement in front line staffs pay rates driven by **local and national 'living wage' policies over recent years.**

New uptake PIs for Infant and junior aged pupils (key stage 1 and 2 in England and Wales) show a reported average for the year at 80.1% in England and 76.7% in Scotland and these will be tracked and reporting in future years trend analysis.

In Wales, the uptakes cost and charges for lunchtime meals are offset for parents in terms of cost, child health outcomes and by the early day child care coincidentally afforded by the national policy of free breakfast provision. This policy does however continue the trend of rising council subsidies against the direction of travel in other regions of the UK.

Having collected data on 'highest' and lowest' parental charges made by schools within each authority over the last two years, there remains little evidence of price discounting (for child health, social or commercial reasons) between individual schools and in England, the charges made by academies only differ from and are **higher than 'state schools' by an average of 2p per meal.**

As ever, engagement with schools (and academies in England) along with the policies and initiatives established by governments and strategic stakeholders in each country will continue to require robust performance measurement tools to establish transparency in baselines, develop future business cases and set realistic targets against which both financial and child health outcomes can be achieved and measured.

In this respect, APSE will continue to develop and reflect regional and national targets for service improvement (under UIFSM, breakfast services etc.) in the education catering performance networks programme, its PIs and supporting profile data sets.

John Bedwell
Associate, APSE Solutions

Rob Bailey
APSE Principal Advisor