



NHS Health Scotland – Evaluation of Universal Infant Free School Meals in Scotland: Second monitoring report of changes in school-meal uptake

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 information on the second monitoring report of changes in school meal uptake which is being led by NHS Health Scotland.

Details of the full report and other related documents can be accessed by [clicking here](#)

1.0 Introduction

The second monitoring report of changes in school meal uptake, as part of the Evaluation of Universal Infant School Meals in Scotland, was released in October 2016. The data has been collected using the Healthy Living Survey ([click here](#) to access a copy of the full analysis of the 2016 Health Living Survey) which collects data on school meal uptake on a typical day in February each year. The data is being used to monitor whether the three key outcomes below are being achieved (these outcomes were developed as part of the theory of change for the free school meal policy see figure 1):-

- School meal and free school meal consumption increases
- this may lead to cost savings for families
- this may lead to improvements in children's diets

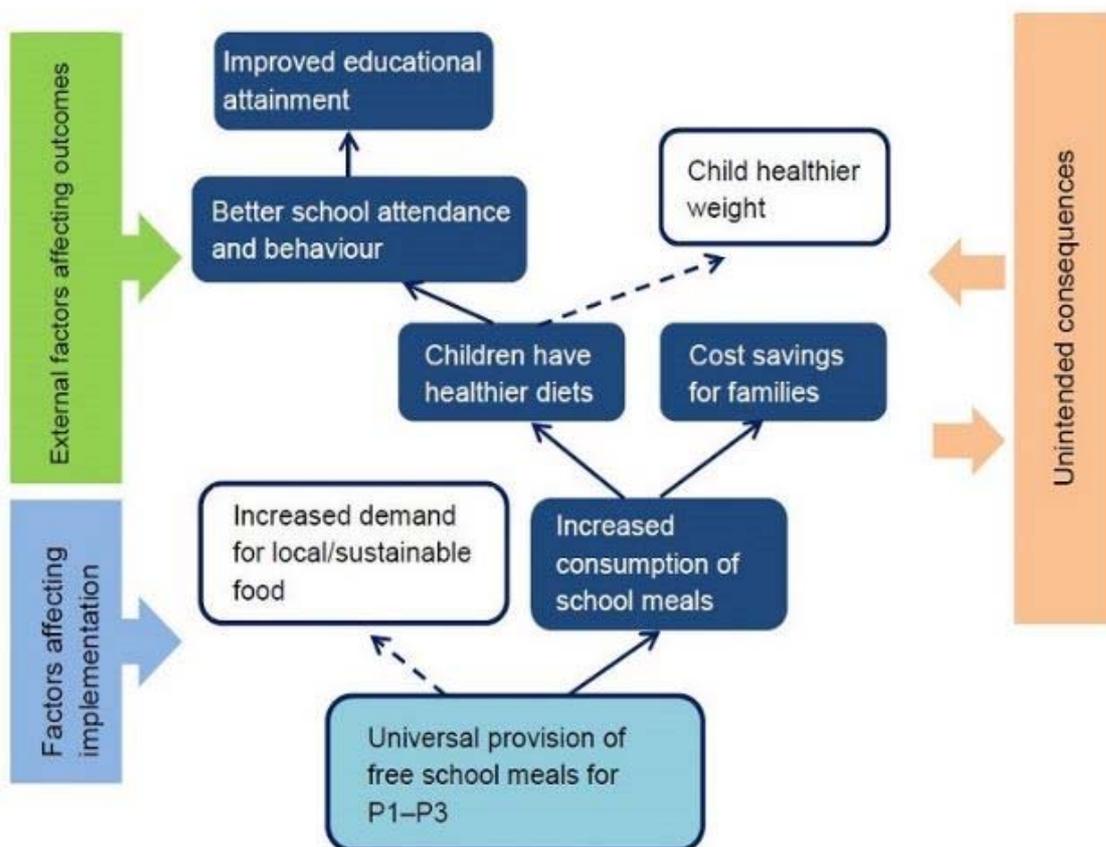


Figure 1 Theory of change for universal free school meals for P1-P3 from “Evaluating universal free school meal provision for P1 to P3 in Scotland: A briefing note for stakeholders” 2014.

This report provides an update on the monitoring from the first report which was published in 2015. A full copy of the first report can be found by [clicking here](#)

APSE has previously published a number of briefings on the Policy and Evaluation of Universal Free School Meals, these are available on the APSE briefing pages by clicking [2014](#), [2015](#) and [2016](#).

2.0 Update from Rachel McAdams, NHS Health Scotland

Rachel McAdams from NHS Health Scotland has kindly provided an update on the key findings from the second report:-

Universal infant free school meals, Scotland: an evaluation

In 2015 the Scottish Government introduced universal free school meals for primary 1-3 (P1-3) pupils.

This policy had the potential to...

1 provide financial savings for families



an average saving of...

£380

per child per year

2 provide nutritional benefits to children...

... as research suggests school meals are healthier than packed lunches



In 2016

P1-3 free-school-meal uptake increased for the second year.



More than 4 in 5 P1-3 pupils took a free school meal

The proportion of all primary pupils taking a school meal (free or paid) also increased for the second year.



2 in every 3 primary pupil lunches were school meals

Free-school-meal uptake varied across schools and local authorities in Scotland.

This means that the financial benefits were not evenly distributed across Scotland.



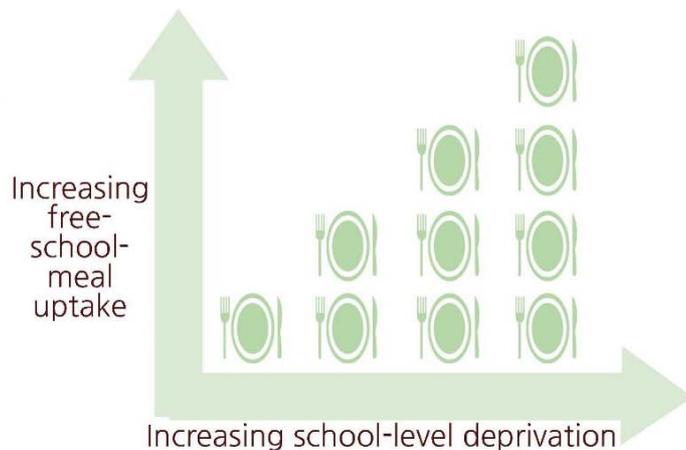
Small, remote and rural schools had the highest free-school-meal uptake.

Large urban schools had some of the lowest uptake rates.

Free school meals and inequalities in Scotland, 2016.

Analysis shows the primary schools with the highest deprivation levels had the highest free-school-meal uptake...

...suggesting the most deprived families benefited the most from free meals.



Recommendations

Continued monitoring of school meal uptake data would allow:

- 1** assessment of the longer-term impact of universal infant free school meals on lunch choices of eligible children, especially after they move into primary 4
- 2** monitoring of the impact of universal infant free school meals on school-meal-uptake among older non-eligible primary pupils
- 3** identification of schools and local authorities with lower levels of free-school-meal uptake which may require support to increase uptake.

Find out more: healthscotland.com/freeschoolmeals

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. APSE will continue to keep our membership up to date on the evaluation and future monitoring reports, as well as all other areas within Soft FM services.

As can be noted from the key findings outlined above, free school meals continue to make a positive impact within communities. The analysis highlights that in terms of inequalities, primary schools with the highest deprivation levels had the highest uptake of free school meals, which suggests that those from the most deprived families are benefitting most from free school meals. It is also important to recognise at this time, the significant investment which is required to provide this vital service which helps meet many of the big policy agendas including tackling inequality and obesity in Scotland. The current/ future financial pressures facing local authorities means that it is increasingly important to ensure funding for this service is retained/ protected. APSE and its membership would also be keen for the recommendations to see the results of further analysis beyond P3 realised, as this would help to further strengthen the importance of this service not only to those within P1-P3 but also beyond.

These and other key issues for Soft FM services were raised during our recent Scottish Soft FM seminar held at the Glasgow Marriott. All presentations from the day can be accessed by [clicking here](#) and includes our keynote address from Shirley Spear, Chair of the Scottish Food Commission.

The next Scottish Soft FM advisory group is scheduled for 7 February 2017 where these and other important issues will continue to be discussed. As previously highlighted these meetings are free for all APSE Scotland members (elected members and officers) and should you wish to attend please [click here](#) to complete our sign up form.

Louise Melville
Principal Advisor