



Education Catering: Trend analysis 2018/19

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 issue

The trend analysis of the UK averages highlights the following: -

- Primary school (LEA) pupil meal prices (average highest price) has increased to a five year high of £2.17.
- Secondary school pupil meal prices (average price) has increased to a five year high of £2.27.
- All meal uptake (primary and special schools) has seen a marginal decrease from 2017/18. However, meal uptake is 3.62% higher than the low reported in 2014/15.
- All meal uptake (secondary schools) is at a five year high of 49.60%.
- The food only cost (primary and special schools) remains consistent with 2017/18 at £0.81.
- Primary school lunchtime meals served per staff hour has seen a marginal increase from 9.13 in 2017/18 to 9.28 in 2018/19.

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.**

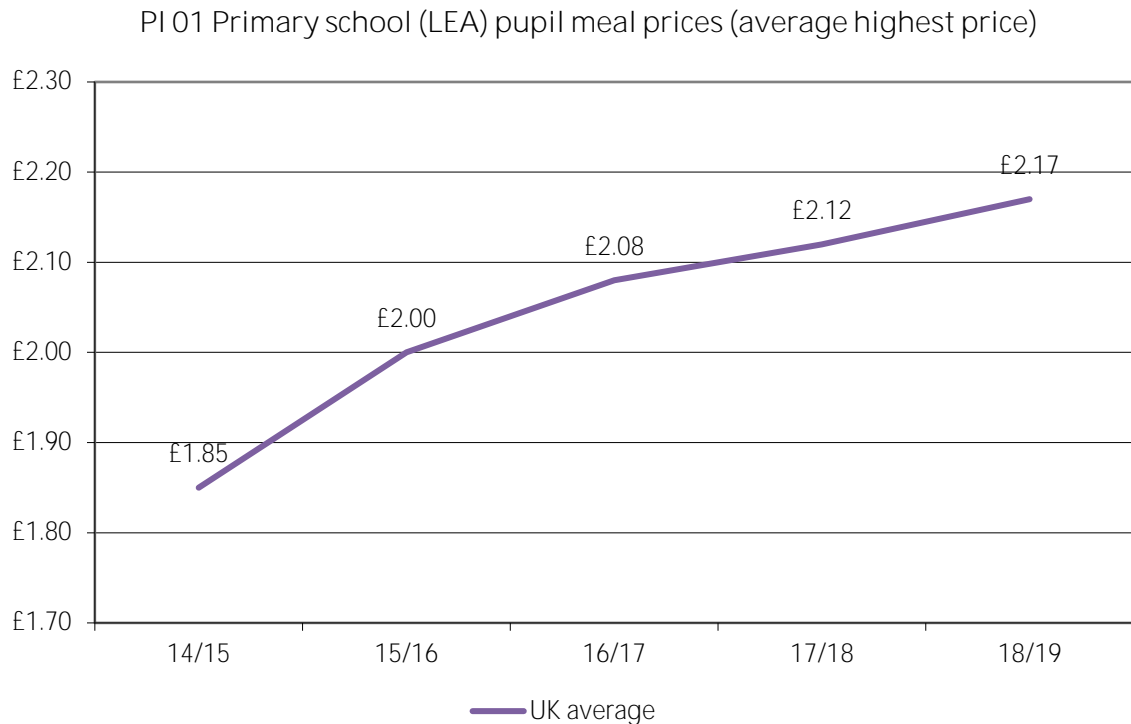
This trend analysis aims to provide participating authorities with a picture of what the service trends are, what this infers and what further activity and analysis individual authorities and their **benchmarking groups could consider. In this respect, it serves as a 'high level' guide only to highlight key challenges facing the service and may provide a strategic overview for those wishing to 'drill down' into the drivers, policies and processes which affect their group or individual service and financial outcomes.**

Trend analysis

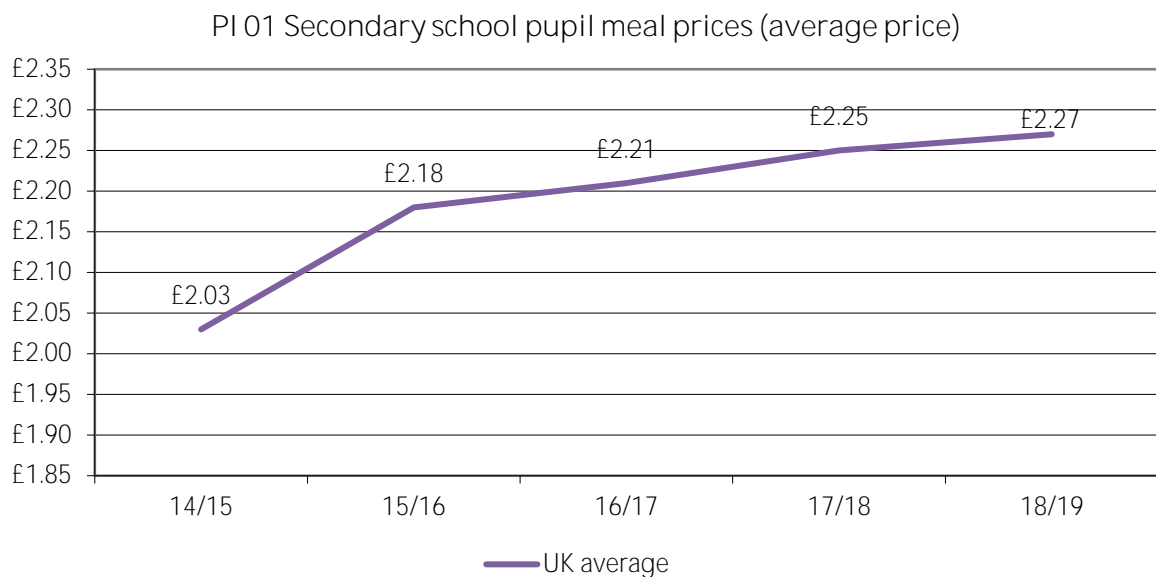
The trend analysis is based on 'service wide averages' across all family groups and within each country for the past 5 years.

Meal charges

Analysis of the data for the prices for primary school meal (LEA) pupil meals (average highest price) (PI 01) show an expected rising trend and an increase of circa 32p over the last 4 years. Scotland continues to maintain the lowest average charges (at £2.17).

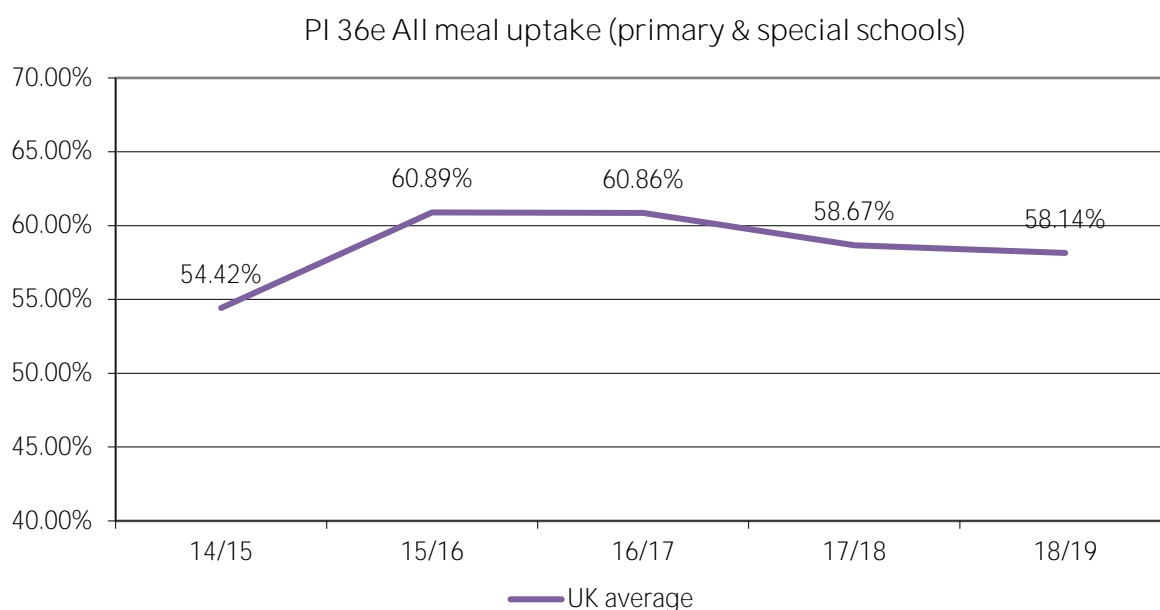
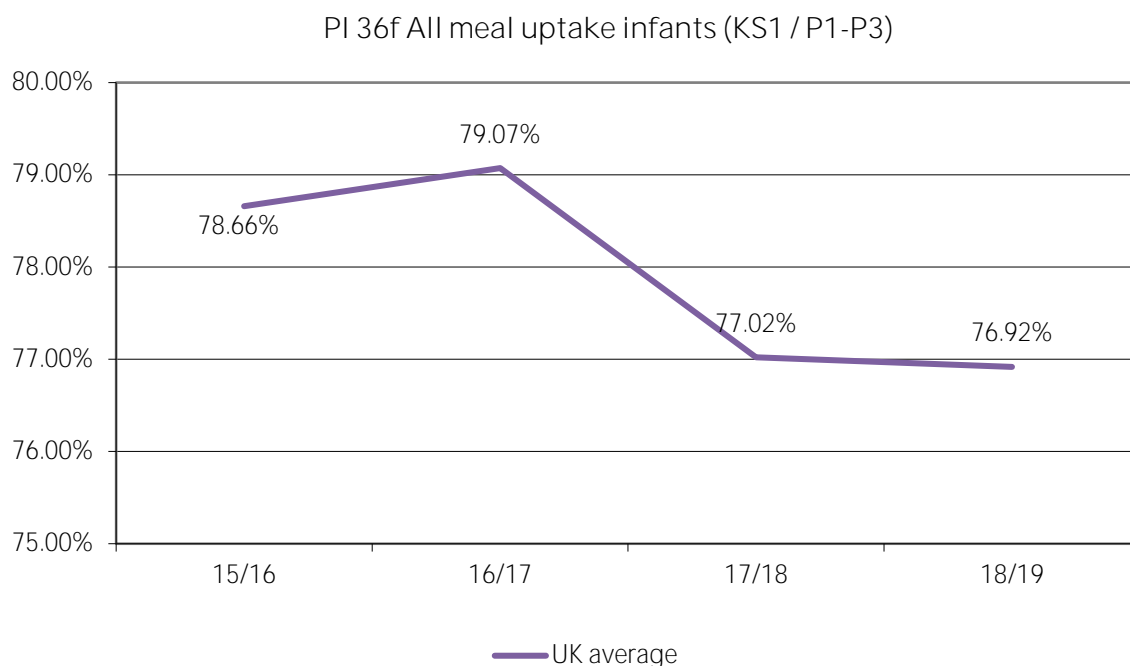


Average annual price increases in the secondary sector have increasingly fallen below inflation over the last 4 years and have risen by only 2p in the last year. Again, Scotland continues to maintain the lowest average charges (at £2.19).



Service uptakes

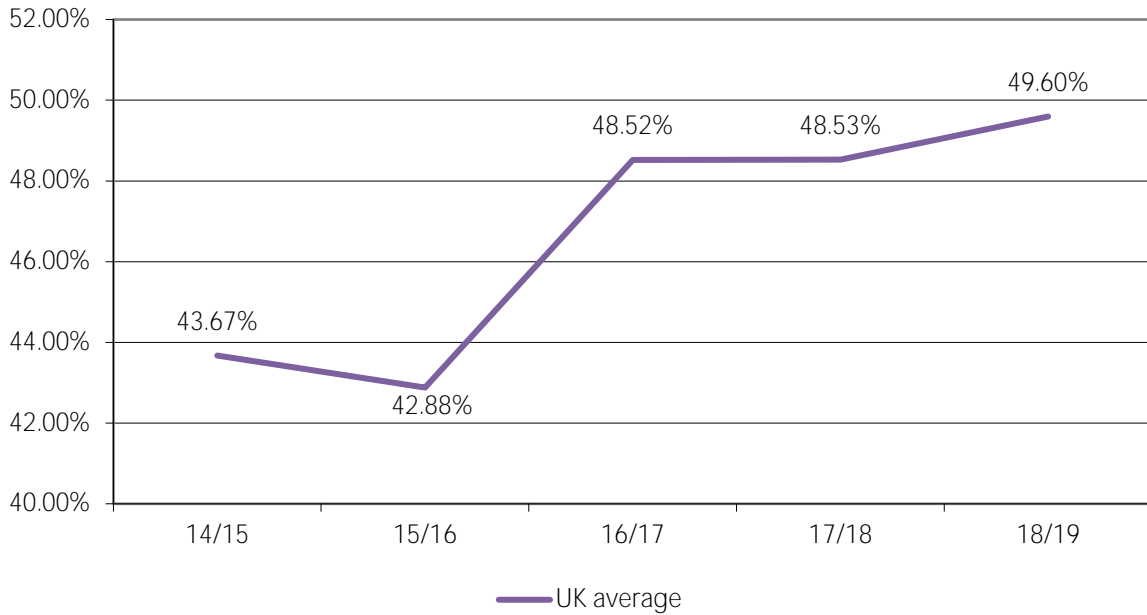
Taken across the UK as a whole, the apparent downward trend in all primary/special school meal uptakes largely reflects a fall from the peak achieved with the introduction of universal free school meals for infant children in England and Scotland only in 2014/15. This is evident in combined picture (UK wide) for infant meal uptakes below. However, the data shows that the reduction in uptakes has now stabilised from the drop recorded in 2017/2018.



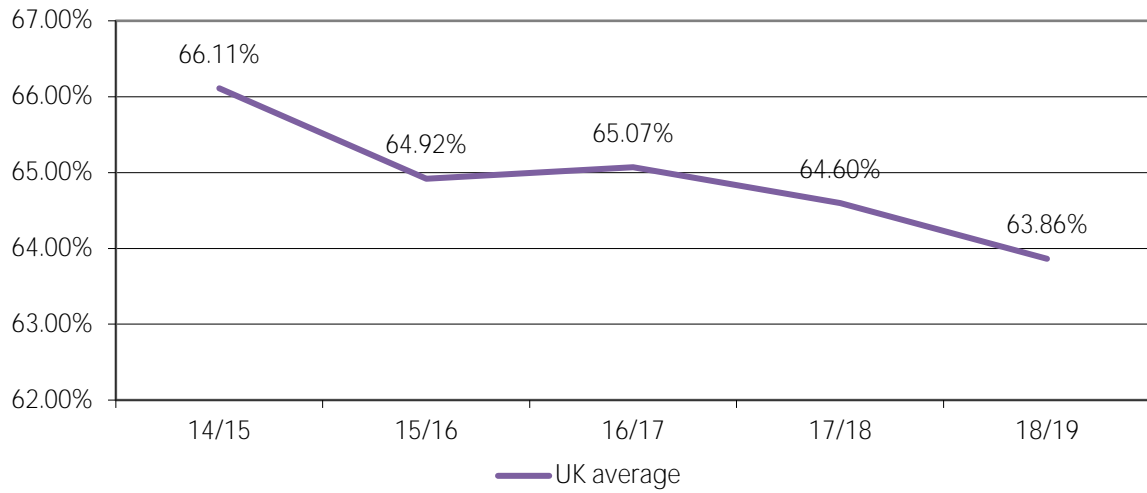
The longer-term trend shows an improvement in all meal uptakes in secondary schools. Against a continued decline in free uptake, but growth in paid meal uptakes, this is likely to reflect the ongoing focus on the food offer, dining environments, out of school competition and paid meal price management by schools and caterers, alongside local and national governmental awareness of the challenges facing this sector. Policies towards encouraging pupils not to leave school premises during lunchtime may also be contributing.

Individual authorities where universal credit has been introduced are reporting an increase in free school meal uptakes which can be attributed to pupils 'protected status' and an analysis of future data will allow the impact of the policy to be assessed as the universal credit role out continues and legacy benefits are replaced across the UK.

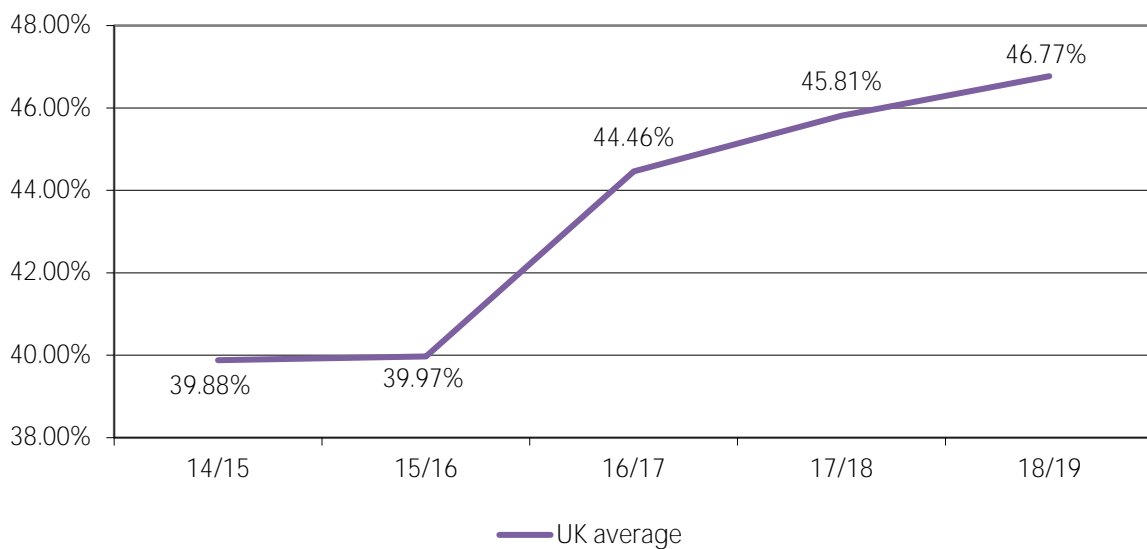
PI 36d All meal uptake (secondary schools)



PI 06c Secondary school free meal uptake (all authorities)



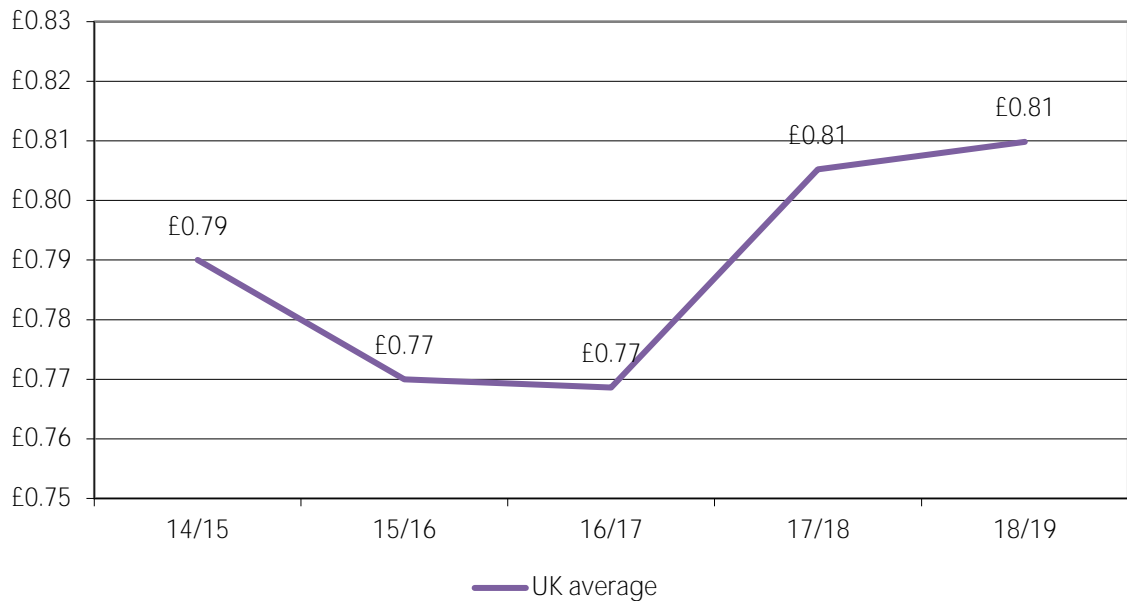
PI 10c Secondary school paid meal uptake (all authorities)



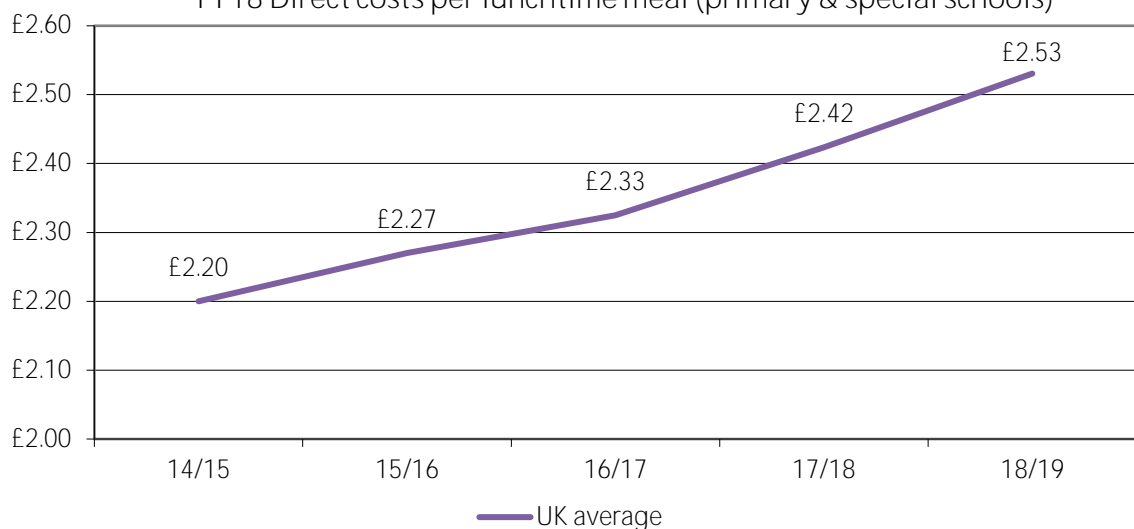
Key cost indicators

Following the 2017/18 rise in food only cost per meal (which was attributed in part to the fluctuation in the pound and global price volatility) 2018/19 has seen containment of this key cost across the UK, with variation across the countries being reduced to a range between 79 and 83 pence per meal.

PI 17a Food only cost per lunchtime meal (primary & special schools)



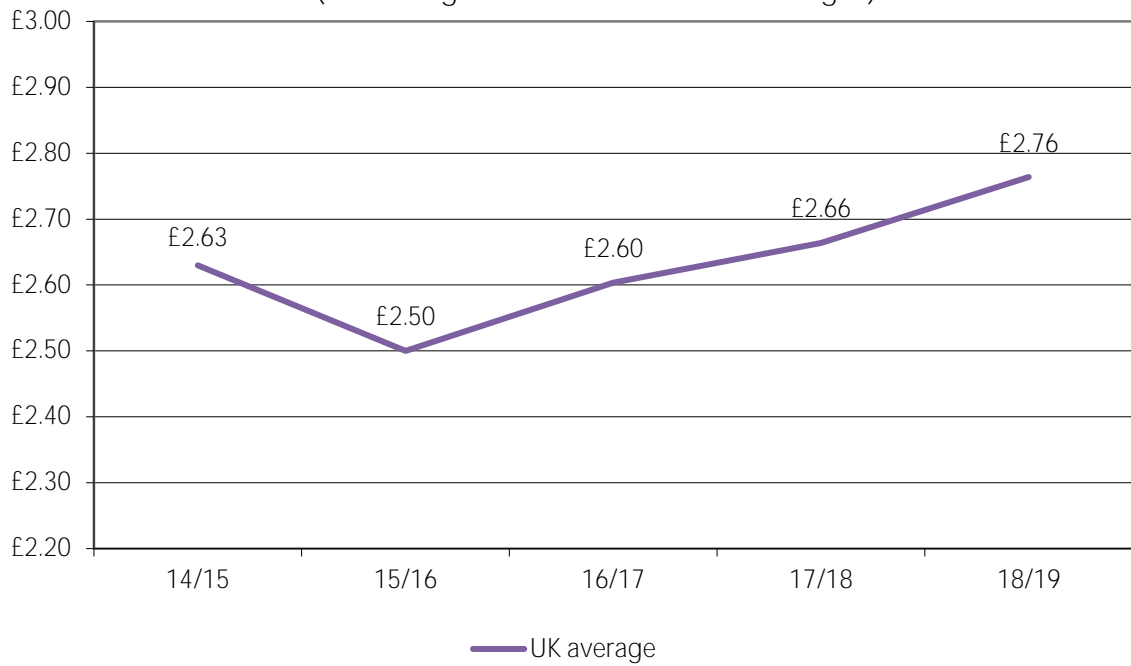
PI 18 Direct costs per lunchtime meal (primary & special schools)



With the inclusion of all service overhead (but excluding central establishment costs where still applied), movement in the total cost per lunchtime meal in primary/special and secondary schools is shown in the PIs below.

Notwithstanding movement in annual outcomes (which can reflect variation in the number of schools contained within annual data submissions) the long-term trend in each sector clearly reflects uptake movement over the last 5 years, which for secondary schools, has seen the containment of total lunchtime meal costs.

PI 11c Total cost per lunchtime meal - Primary & Special (excluding central establishment charges)



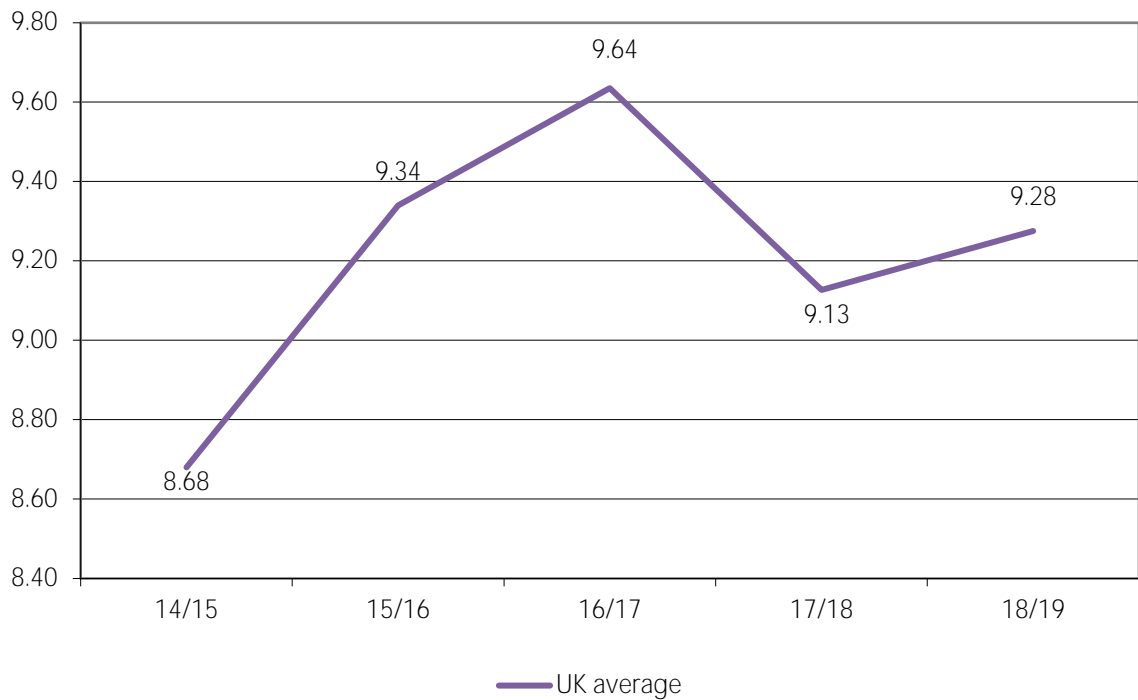
PI 11e Total cost per lunchtime meal - Secondary School (excluding central establishment charges)



Productivity

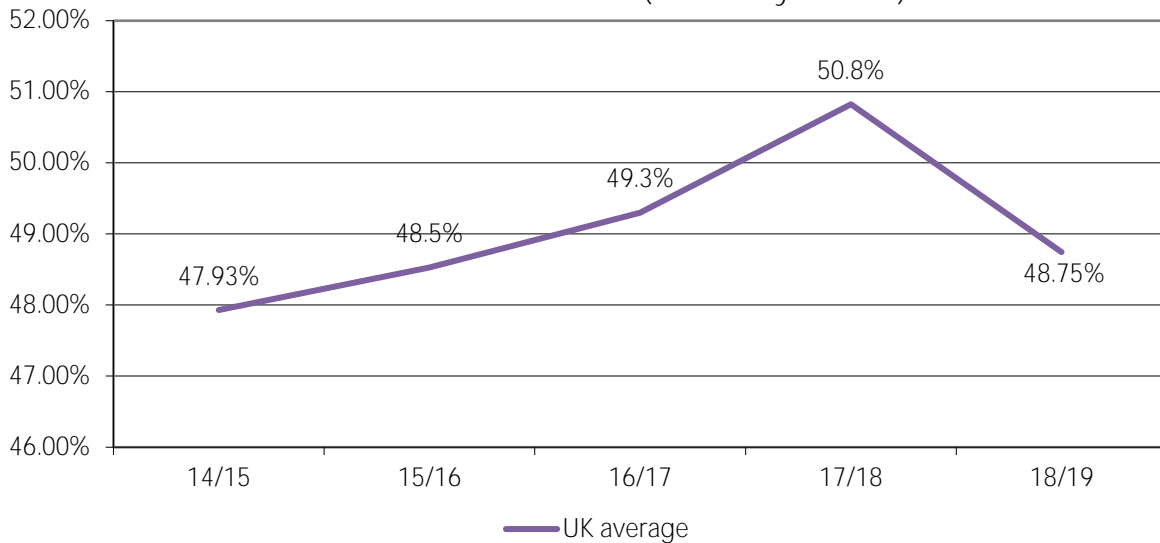
PI 13 primary school lunchtime meals served per staff hour shows the positive effect of Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) in the primary sector but the subsequent marginal decline in meal numbers from their peak in 2016/17, highlights the difficulty in reflecting a timely change in labour levels under declining uptakes. 2018/19 productivity levels are showing some recovery and will be supported by ongoing efforts to arrest further decline in primary and where applicable, growth in nursery meal numbers. Overall productivity levels remain positive.

PI 13 Primary school lunchtime meals served per staff hour



The data for the unit staff costs ratio secondary schools shows a fall against the previous trend, supported in part by the continued growth in all meal uptakes.

PI 20 Unit staff cost ratio (secondary schools)



Interpretation of data

This trend analysis collects and reports on the 'average' outcomes across a range of key performance indicators, to inform trends across the UK in this service. Where in previous Executive Summaries, 'country' variations in performance data has been highlighted, these will now be contained within bespoke or country specific reports, to better reflect the different legal frameworks, policies, funding arrangements, markets and operating conditions that exist in each. For example:

In England, increasing competition from both internal and external providers and the establishment of academy trusts, continues to offer both challenge and opportunity in terms of business retention and growth.

In Scotland, growth in nursery provision, impending changes to nutritional legislation and Government funding arrangements for free meals place greater responsibility on local authorities to balance growth and financial outcomes against child health objectives.

In Wales, the focus on free breakfasts and the absence of Universal infant free school meals has presented providers with a challenge in terms of meal costs and uptakes.

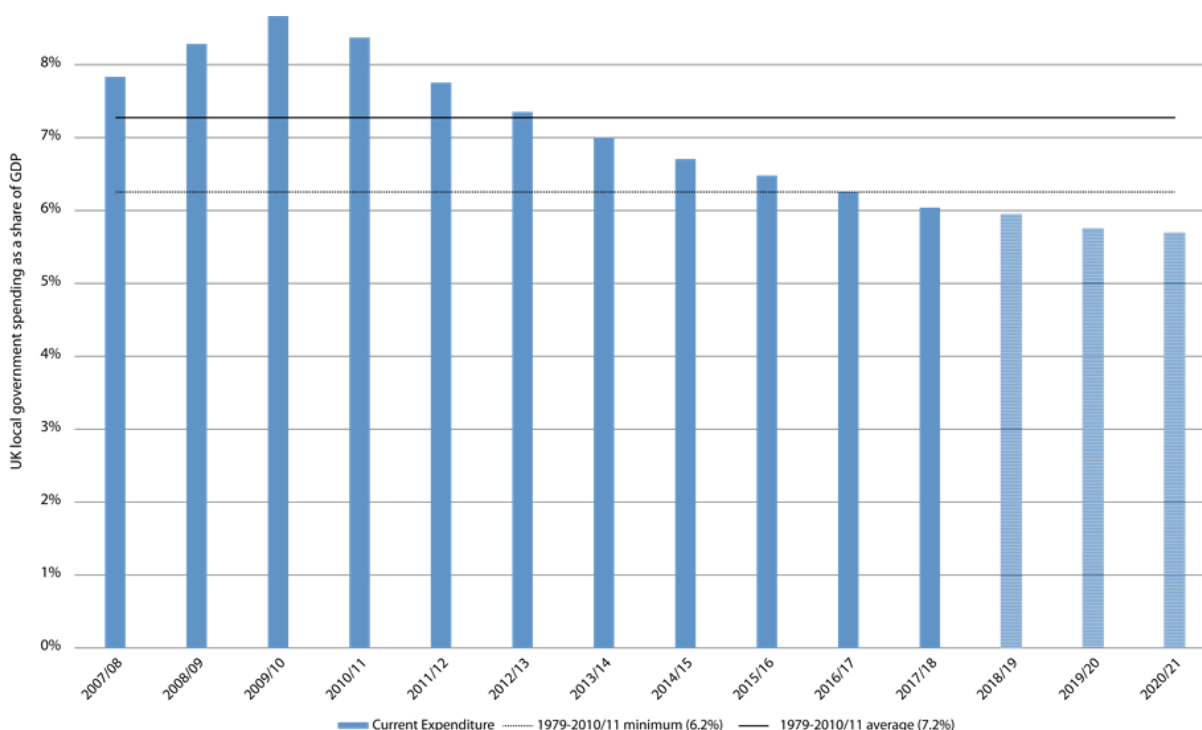
A common factor across the UK (and reflected in this summary) is that meal uptakes remain the key driver on productivity and cost outcomes in this service, requiring agility in and the timely **management of human and 'fixed cost' resources and increasingly, the use of IT to drive efficiency** in the collection, movement of and access to services and data, both for the caterer and for its school customers.

Individual authorities will no doubt have identified a wide range of reasons for any change in their own performance outcomes but understanding how comparative data can be used to inform improvement, will remain at the heart of the Performance Networks programme.

In this respect, APSE will continue to develop and reflect country and UK targets and update the PIs and supporting profile data sets which enable subscribers to **'drill down' into factors that affect evident variances in performance and support effective 'process benchmarking'** to drive continuous improvement in this service.

Future focus

In 2009/10, local government spending as a share of all spending in the economy reached 8.6 per cent, a high for the post-1979 period and only just below the all-time high (1975). In 2017/18, it fell below the previous post-1979 low of 6.2 per cent (1997/98). Since then, it has continued to head down. Including capital spending, total spending by local government as a share of GDP is now at a record low for the post 1948 period.



Source: *Neighbourhood services and sustainable local government, APSE 2019*

In addition, over the nine years from 2009/10 to 2017/18, the resources devoted to neighbourhood services across England, Wales and Scotland fell 27 per cent, equal to £8.9bn at 2017/18 prices. (Grouped under the broad headings of highways and transportation, environment and regulation, culture, and planning, neighbourhood services are roughly speaking what councils do

that is neither education, housing nor social care). This is against the background of a real fall in total UK local government spending over the same period of 19 per cent.

Performance management is increasingly being used by public service providers as a mechanism to withstand austerity and demonstrate value for money to a range of internal and external stakeholders. As W. Edwards Deming stated:

“Without data, you’re just another person with an opinion.”

Despite measuring and improving performance being critical to managing services effectively and for accountability purposes, the need for this has never been greater in order to know your own service and to be able to identify achievable cost savings and innovative approaches to service delivery. Otherwise, how do you know you are delivering what you want to deliver?

Information and data provides intelligence on how effective any service change is, to establish a starting point and to identify future targets. Performance measurement is also a mechanism to learn how other local authorities are meeting the challenges and the impact that their service changes is making in terms of cost, quality, productivity and customer satisfaction levels.

Data is also increasingly in demand at a national level as well and as a result, APSE performance **networks’ influence at a national level is growing**. APSE has been working with a range of government bodies and professional associations at a national level. This includes Defra (Waste Dataflow and the National Litter Strategy), Scottish Government and Zero Waste Scotland (Litter Strategy), Department for Transport, DMG, SCOTS, CSS Wales and the Improvement Service (Roads, highways and street lighting), the Society of Chief Officers of Environmental Health in Scotland, SCOTTS (Trading Standards), NABMA (Markets), Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government (Parks Action Group), SOLACE (corporate services) and the Department for Communities (Northern Ireland project).

In England, there is a focus on a more decentralised approach to performance improvement following the abolition of the previous national performance framework. This means that local authorities are responsible for their own performance and improvement and are accountable to local communities (rather than government or inspectorates). There is an increased emphasis on value for money, with a focus on data transparency and the use of data to hold public authorities to account. It is clear that the drive for performance improvement and publishing meaningful data on performance has not gone away, but is being designed around greater data transparency and public accountability at a local level.

In Scotland, there is a requirement to report the Local Government Benchmarking Framework indicators, which are a set of high-level indicators covering major service areas. APSE and SCOTS have been working with the Improvement Service in relation to collecting and providing data required for the national Local Government Benchmarking Framework, in particular on roads financial data. The purpose of this is to reduce the burden on councils of providing data to multiple national bodies and using existing reliable, established benchmarking models where possible. APSE have also been working with Zero Waste Scotland and Keep Scotland Beautiful on the monitoring system for the revised Code of Practice on Litter and Refuse 2018.

In Wales, councils themselves remain responsible for identifying their own improvement priorities, identifying and mitigating improvement challenges and risks and managing service performance. Local authorities openly and transparently report performance publicly on an annual basis. In addition, there is a small set of nationally co-ordinated performance indicators called Public Accountability Measures which are co-ordinated for benchmarking purposes by Data Cymru. External assurance and challenge is provided mainly through the audit, inspection and regulatory regime coordinated by the Auditor General for Wales. This voluntary, decentralised approach is similar to the approach taken in England which has created a greater need for information at a local level to measure value for money and to ensure accountability. In

addition, benchmarking through national organisations like APSE provides the national comparisons for continuous improvement purposes and a mechanism to measure your own performance against changing standards.

In Northern Ireland, under the Local Government Act (Northern Ireland) 2014, there is a duty on each council to secure continuous improvement in the exercise of its functions, to collect information relating to performance and to assess performance in previous financial years and as far as practicable, against the performance of other councils. APSE have been working with local councils in Northern Ireland to ensure that performance networks meets the responsibilities councils have under the Act. As such, existing, relevant modules have been refined and new performance modules have been created in conjunction with the Northern Ireland councils for planning, community development, economic development, arts and heritage, building control and corporate services. APSE continue to liaise with the Department for Communities over this development work. Four sets of reports for the Northern Ireland project have now been successfully produced; for 2015-16 to 2018-19.

Good performance information supports the decisions that lead to good directions, instructions and targets. APSE performance networks can assist local authorities by:

- Helping to set a clear baseline on which competitiveness, efficiency and value for money can be measured in a systematic manner.
- Identifying the impact of service changes and interventions for your own local authorities and for others.
- Assessing the quality, cost and competitiveness of the services that councils provide on a regular basis.
- Helping to report data in meaningful ways to both elected members and the public.
- Identifying direction of travel and pace of change with regard to service delivery.
- Identifying inefficiencies such as poor productivity and high cost.
- Supporting service improvement through process benchmarking and sharing best practice examples.

Alongside Advisory Groups and APSE Briefing Papers, Performance Networks will continue to provide a basis for learning from, sharing best practice and the measurement of outcomes from the service.

The issues raised in this briefing will also provide topics for discussion at the forthcoming APSE Facilities, Cleaning and Catering Management Seminar which will be held in Nottingham on Thursday 30 and Friday 31 January 2020. [For further details and to book your place - click here](#)

Vickie Hacking
APSE Principal Advisor

John Bedwell
APSE solutions Associate