



# Holiday activities and food (HAF) programme in England

May 2022



Department  
for Education



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for Education

# Summary

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Our holiday activities and food (HAF) programme provides free holiday club places to children from low income families. It is led by local authorities and delivered with schools, community groups and other local providers.

We're investing over £200m a year to give children healthy meals, fun activities and free childcare places during the holidays. Over 600,000 children took part last summer, across every local authority in England.

It was well received last year, and positive feedback from parents, children and holiday clubs – published in a recent [external evaluation](#) report – included:

“Every child walks outside with a smile on their face.” - Staff member

“Me and my friends enjoyed it so much we never want to leave.” – Child

“[If they weren't at the club] I'll probably be eating unhealthy to be honest with you. When I go to [HAF club], they have healthy meals and it's been encouraging me to tell my Mum to cut down on the bad stuff.” – Child

“Normally, I keep to myself and not talk to anyone, and since I've been here like I've spoken to almost everyone.” – Child

# About the programme

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The **holiday activities and food (HAF) programme** provides free holiday club places for children from low income families, taking place in the Easter, summer and Christmas holidays in England.

In 2021, the programme was rolled out to every local authority in England, following a series of pilots between 2018 and 2020. It reached over 600,000 children in summer 2021, of which 495,000 were in receipt of free school meals.

The 2021 autumn budget and spending review confirmed that we will invest over £200m a year in the programme for the next three years.

As a result of this programme, we want children who attend this provision to:

- be active and eat healthily over the school holidays
- enjoy enriching activities which support resilience, character, wellbeing and wider educational attainment
- be safe and not to be socially isolated
- have a greater knowledge of health and nutrition
- be more engaged with school and other local services.

## **Eligibility**

- School age children in receipt of benefits-related free school meals
- Local authorities can also use 15% of their funding to support other children who they consider to be in need.

# Delivery model

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## Grants to local authorities:

- Each local authority receives Section 31 grant funding based on their number of FSM children.
- The funding is ringfenced, and LAs follow our [guidance](#) and report back on their delivery.

## Providers:

- LAs arrange holiday club places through different providers, including schools, private holiday club operators, charities and community groups.

## Core specification:

- Clubs operate for at least 4 weeks in the summer, 1 week at Easter and 1 week at Christmas.
- The clubs offer:
  - A healthy meal each day
  - Physical activities and enriching activities (eg arts, crafts, visits, learning)
  - Nutritional education for children, and food education for their families
  - Signposting and referrals for wider local services
- The clubs must have appropriate procedures, including safeguarding, health and safety.

# Our support for local delivery

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All LAs are able to access a range of support from both DfE and our national support partner, Childcare Works.

Childcare Works work alongside LAs to help review and measure their planning and delivery progress, share information, connect LAs together and offer direct support where needed.

## **Resources for delivery**

- Detailed DfE guidance and a grant determination letter
- Childcare Works advisers, resources, cluster meetings and webinars
- A knowledge hub, where local authorities share materials and discuss issues
- A communications toolkit for local authorities
- A resource pack highlighting local and national partnerships and materials

## **Local steering groups**

- Local authorities have steering groups to engage with local partners.
- This can include public health, schools, youth services, social services and safeguarding leads, charities, police.

# Findings from the summer 2021 evaluation

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In summer 2021, we commissioned Ecorys UK to undertake an external [evaluation](#) of the programme.

## **Attendance**

- Almost three quarters of a million children (735,000) attended HAF summer clubs, of which over 600,000 had their place directly funded via the HAF programme.
- 70% of attendees had not previously attended a free summer holiday club.
- Children had fun, with HAF clubs given an overall ranking for enjoyment of 8.5 out of 10 by children.

## **Outcomes for children**

- HAF children were more likely to engage in physical activity, compared to children who did not attend.
- Children often tried and enjoyed new things they would not otherwise have taken part in.
- There were positive signs that HAF was helping to improve socialisation and confidence.

## **Outcomes for families**

- There was evidence that HAF helped maintain employment, and HAF families found it slightly easier to find suitable childcare over the holidays.
- HAF families appear to have received more information about wider local services compared to non HAF attendees.
- HAF was felt to have benefited wider communities, through investment that provided positive activities for children and brought communities together.

# Opportunities

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- **The confirmation of three-year funding gives the programme confidence to take a long term approach,** both in terms of national and local delivery. Local and national partners can make strategic plans and invest in staff, training and local provision.
- **Supporting wider priorities:** the programme can play an important role in supporting low income families, access to affordable childcare, the labour market and local economies, public health measures (eg tackling obesity), post-Covid recovery and children's readiness for school.
- **Improving signposting and communications for parents:** This includes marketing the programme itself, as well as helping HAF families access housing, finance, social services, links to health and employment options, and wider childcare support through Universal Credit and tax free childcare.
- **Building partnerships:** The programme already engages with sports and arts organisations, businesses and other local and national bodies to enhance the clubs. There is an opportunity to build on these partnerships further over the next three years.