

**SHARING GOOD PRACTICE ON THE
PROMOTION OF HEALTHY EATING IN
SCHOOLS**

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1. Background and aims of project

This research project was carried out as part of the remit of two ESRC Internships.¹ The aim was to identify and share different practices initiated by local authorities to promote healthy eating in schools. In addition there was particular interest in any existing local research or evaluations of these initiatives, whether funded by the local authority or jointly with for example a health board.

The research topic was selected in the context of the following issues:

- The recently signed Concordat between the Scottish Government and local authorities (COSLA) which sets out a framework for a new relationship based on mutual respect and partnership. Details online at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Resource/Doc/923/0054147.pdf>
- The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) Act (2007) which places new duties on local authorities in relation to health promotion, healthy eating and the nutritional requirements of food within schools. Details online at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Education/Schools/HLivi/foodnutrition>
- The current National Discussion on Food which is raising a number of issues pertinent to school meals and healthy eating in schools. Details online at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Business-Industry/Food-Industry/Discussion>
- The Hungry for Success policy initiative which has sought to revitalise the school meals service, setting benchmarks for nutritional standards for school meals and enforcing and monitoring performance management standards for schools. Details online at: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/library5/education/hfs-00.asp>

2. Key Findings

- The majority of local authorities (LA) have identified similar barriers and facilitators to healthy eating in schools
- There is a consensus that a 'whole schools' approach is the most successful method of tackling unhealthy eating. Everyone; that is parents, pupils and school staff, has to be on board.
- At the development stage, very many of the projects depend upon the energy and drive of one or two determined individuals
- Most schools depended on several different approaches to introduce change
- The size and financial costs of initiatives differs greatly, covering a very broad range. These stretch from LA-led, staffed and funded all-school projects to pupil-run healthy tuck-shops within individual primary schools.
- Where different approaches are employed by secondary schools and primary schools, these reflect the needs of the different age ranges.
- Two LAs provided detailed external assessments and evaluations of innovative and wide-spread initiatives in their areas. Other LAs have produced useful smaller scale assessments of pilot schemes and wider projects.

¹ PhD students work within government departments as part of a joint Scottish Government and ESRC (Education and Social Research Council) scheme which offers three month placements to ESRC-funded post-graduate researchers. Two PhD students worked on this project as part of their placements, David Chitakunye designing and carrying out the survey, Elaine Cooper conducting follow-up calls, analysis and writing up the report.

- For the most part the impact of the majority of projects has been assessed according to the perceptions of those stakeholders taking part (children, parents, school staff) rather than through fuller and more robust research designs
- Many of the smaller initiatives could be usefully disseminated to and copied by other LAs or individual schools.

3. Approach and Methods

All local authorities were initially contacted by e-mail. They were sent a covering letter and asked to complete an attached survey within an initial period of three weeks (letter and survey Appendix A). Follow-up e-mails and telephone calls increased response rates. Further e-mails and telephone calls to contacts identified in the received surveys and to further snowball contacts elicited useful details and clarification. Twenty-two of the 32 LAs originally returned surveys. Half of those returned included attachments providing further detail. Additional attachments and information were received in response to the snowball calls. *N.B.* At least one LA forwarded copies of the survey to each school and then collated the results before responding

4. Tackling Barriers to School Meals Uptake

4.1. There is a general consensus on specific issues which may be barriers to school meals uptake, although not all barriers identified apply equally to primary and secondary schools. Those include:

- Long queues*
- Time pressures, both on eating and the encroachment of time spent eating on time left over for play.
- Quality, quantity and novelty of food offered, especially for secondary schools where 'off-campus' options may seem more attractive*

4.2. Schools within different authorities tackle these perceived barriers in different ways, and most draw on a number of different strategies. The majority of examples given were of initiatives undertaken by individual schools rather than of authority-wide or authority-led projects, although schools may have had to seek permission for

* It is worth noting that both these factors are reflected in wider research findings as barriers to meals uptake.

some initiatives which involved time-tabling changes or central suppliers. Schools sought to reduce the barriers in the following ways:

4.2.1. Queues and Time Wasting

- Allowing pupils to pre-order their meals reduced waiting times and avoided the likelihood of popular choices running out
- Advertising the week's or day's menu in advance reduced delays caused by slow decision making
- Extending the time allocated for lunch and/or staggering different meal times for different age groups, reduced queues and time pressure
- Introduction of hand-held meal options, not requiring cutlery, reduced time pressures
- New technology in the form of online payments and pre-pay cards reduced waiting times
- Vending machines stocked with healthy choices reduced canteen queues
- An increased number of service and/or payment points reduced waiting time

4.2.2. Quality, Quantity and Food Novelty

- Pupil and parental involvement and consultation over menus appeared to produce more popular choices
- The introduction of taster sessions and food workshops on new menu items increased food range and acceptability.
- Incentives to try new foods in the form of certificate presentations and stickers (primary schools only)
- Introduction of lunchtime activities designed to encourage pupils to stay on site (secondary schools only; e.g case study.3)

4.3. As well as introducing measures to address perceived barriers, a range of projects were initiated with the more general aim of promoting school meals as a positive experience. These included:

- **4.3.1** changing the 'image' of school dinners by re-naming and re-designing the dining hall and menus.

Consultation with pupils and parents has produced a variety of new names for traditional activities. In different areas of Scotland, children are now eating lunch at the *Rendezvous*, *Fuel Zones* or in *Finnie's Fine Fare Restaurant* (named in honour of their catering supervisor). They are being offered *MEALS2GO*, *Meal Deals* and *Munchpots* and are enjoying healthy food promotions disguised as *Veginvasions*, *High Five for Fruit* and *Fruity Fridays*.

Dining halls have been redecorated and some LAs and individual schools have introduced background music and plasma screens as added attractions.

- **4.3.2. Marketing and promotion campaigns.**
Schools have brought local media on board to promote healthy eating through radio and local newspapers and internally have used posters, newsletters and increased parental involvement to raise awareness of initiatives.
- **4.3.3. The use of incentives to choose healthy options in the form of competitions and rewards in the form of stickers, certificates and access to leisure activities.** Areas with electronic payment facilities are experimenting with a points system with awards for healthy food choices.
- **4.3.4. Themed meal days, ranging from regular monthly events or menus based around a particular nation or culture – e.g. *Mexican* or *Italian days*, *St. Andrew's* or *Burns' days* – to those which provide an opportunity for children to dress up and eat themed food – e.g. *Pirate day*.**
- **4.3.5. Increased parental involvement.** There is a consensus that parental support is essential to successful school meals promotion. Most LAs (*of those which supplied details*) indicated that parents are being invited to a range of activities like taster sessions and food workshops and are being consulted over menus and given advance notice of meal plans.
- **4.3.6. Introduction of *top tables*.** Primary schools in different parts of the country have provided opportunities for pupils to eat more formally. Tables are laid with a cloth, napkins, 'proper' cutlery and china. These occasions are known variously as *family service*, *golden tables*, *social lunches* and so on. Sometimes older pupils act as 'hosts' to younger 'guests'. Some schools encourage older children to provide a 'table waiter' service to younger children.

Case study 1. Jamie Oliver in Auchnagatt?!

Among many initiatives being undertaken at Auchnagatt primary school in Aberdeenshire is their version of what they've named the *Jamie Oliver* promotion designed to encourage pupils to experiment with new tastes. Different children take it in turns each day to dress up in a chef's apron and cravat and offer samples of fruit and vegetables to their fellow pupils.

Case study 2. Fruity Fridays at Golfhill in Glasgow

All children at Golfhill primary school in Glasgow are given the chance to be involved in the Friday Fruit treat. Classes take it in turn to help prepare fruit kebabs, smoothies and popcorn and then sell them to their fellow pupils to raise money for school funds

Case study 3 Sporting lunchtimes at secondary

Portlethen secondary school in Aberdeenshire persuades pupils to stay on site at lunchtime with sporting events which attract team competitors and spectators. Staff help older students organise the contests and are now (August 2008) expanding the activities to include quizzes and other non-sporting events.

5. Wider initiatives

The approaches above are all intended to increase school meal uptake, but many LAs and individual schools have introduced additional projects in an effort to promote healthy eating in a more general way. Traditional tuck-shops, vending machines, packed lunches and even portion sizes were identified as potential barriers to healthy food promotion. Efforts to overcome these difficulties included:

- Providing healthy packed lunch advice for parents in the form of leaflets, talking shops, demonstrations etc
- Changes in portion sizes with monitoring of ratio of healthy to less healthy food stuffs
- Stocking vending machines with healthy items.
- Stocking tuck-shops with healthy items.
- Promoting the importance of healthy eating as part of the curriculum. One secondary school introduced *healthy meals on a budget* class for pupils in their last year.

Individual schools have also instituted bans on banning fizzy/sugar drinks, sweets, chocolate and crisps². Several primary schools involve the children in food preparation sessions where they make fruit kebabs, fruit smoothies, vegetable soup or healthy baked goods. Some schools take this further by selling these healthy options at pupil-run tuck-shops. One school runs (oversubscribed) parent and child cookery classes. One school has promoted a Vegetarian week.

6. Impact of initiatives

Many individual schools and LAs provided examples of the ways in which they are promoting healthy eating among school children. It is however more difficult to tell how successful these efforts or combinations of efforts have been.

6.1. Although many LAs reported that initiatives such as pre-payment systems and increased meal 'outlets' had increased meal uptake, few were able to supply figures. One secondary school reported a 25% increase in school meal uptake after banning first year pupils from going off-campus, but the ban coincided with an extensive revamp of the dining area and therefore it cannot be known which, if either, initiative played the bigger part.

Some individual schools reported significant increases of between around 25% and 33% in school meal uptake after introducing mixed packages of different measures, but again it was impossible to tell which, if any, strands of their approach had produced the best results. The results of some schools' initiatives may additionally have been confused because their timing coincided with participation of five LAs in the national SG free schools meal trial.

² Although unhealthy foods are now banned from schools under the terms of The Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007, the nutritional regulations do not apply to food brought into the school by parents or pupils, unless the school has a policy on this.

Other areas and schools were able to be more specific. North Ayrshire found that eleven schools offering *family service* had increased meals uptake by 32% and that secondary school meal uptake had increased by a monthly average of 15% after the adaption of the national *One Scotland* card system as a method of meals payment. East Ayrshire reported that uptake of school meals increased by up to 30% across 26 primary schools after menu changes to meet *Food for Life* criteria.

6.2. The effects of general healthy eating promotions were observed to include social and environmental benefits as well as an uptake in healthy eating. Those primary schools which had instigated packages of different measures to promote healthy eating reported experiencing similar benefits across schools: These perceived benefits included:

- healthy and 'home-made' tuck-shop items reportedly outselling or replacing the sale of unhealthier items
- an uptake in school meals consumption
- children displaying better behaviour, improved concentration, and more energy
- increased pride in school – less litter from healthy snacks;
- enthusiastic adoption of healthy ethos with pupils promoting the benefits of school lunches to new intakes and designing posters to encourage healthier habits. Staff and pupils organising joint healthy and social activities with lunchtime walks and home-baking sessions.
- the emphasis on the social aspects of eating generating a 'more relaxed' atmosphere.

6.3. Although a large majority of responding schools and LAs could not present statistical evidence about the impact of the various initiatives, the impression certainly within individual schools, was that a difference was being made. Pupils and parents invited to complete evaluation forms on different projects in different schools and those who were asked for views on the new approaches to school dinners were overwhelmingly supportive, although the appraisals of a few pupils were less conventional...

“I like free range chicken because they are happy”

“P1 to P3s should use plastic cutlery, but we shouldn't because we are older and more mature”

(P4 - P7 pupils at Stromness Primary School, Orkney, where the meat supplier no longer uses battery-raised hens)



'it has all the bad stuff squeezed out'

' tastier than chocolate'.

(Primary school children in Moray who had been enjoying the free fruit initiative explaining why they liked fruit juice)



"It is hard to know what is in the hot queue when you are too little to read the menu"

(Pupil at Stronsay Junior High school, Orkney)



Some responses illustrate the difficulties of trying to please all of the people all of the time. Parents at Dounby Primary school, Orkney, are commenting (*below*) on the same menu.

*"Good nutritious food and plenty of choice.
- good way to get kids to try different things that they may not try at home".*

" some of the dinners are a bit too fancy – the stir fry's, wraps etc, but that's because my children prefer more traditional meals"

"I think you offer them a good variety and it is up to us as parents to encourage them to try it."

"Plain food liked better than say stir frys, Pitta Pockets etc".



'Social dinners' at schools like St. Columba's primary in Bathgate, where children acted as 'hosts' and guests' , and Golfhill primary in Glasgow where they play background music, provoked lots of positive feedback.

"it teaches you to eat properly with knives and forks

"It is like a proper meal in a restaurant";

"It is fun using the napkin";

"The tablecloths make the dining room really happy";

"I feel like an adult".

"I can now work in a fancy restaurant as I can set a table."

“you get time to sit and chat without being rushed and disturbed”



6.4. Those LAs which had carried out assessments beyond individual schools also found that the perception was that healthy eating promotions were successful in challenging and changing attitudes towards food in schools and in the wider community. Some families reported a greater uptake of fruit and vegetables in the home and one school held a regular ‘healthy cafeteria event’ for people living in the area. There was some evidence that these changes of attitude were reflected in the choices being made.

Case study 4. *High Five for Fruit*

High Five for Fruit operates in 126 nurseries providing three pieces of free fruit to some 7,000 children each week. It is managed by Lanarkshire Community Food and Health Partnership³ (LCFHP), North Lanarkshire Learning and Leisure (formerly Education) department and NHS Lanarkshire. It began in April 2005 in response to HfS and records a 61% increase in the number of children eating fruit and vegetables within nurseries up to June 2007. The project is continuing and funding and design allows for full a evaluation and impact survey over three years.

Case study 5. *Veginvasion*

East Lothian Council launched *Veginvasion* in Spring 2008 as a follow-up to the success of their free fruit programme. Children in primaries 1 and 2 were given the opportunity to try a selection of raw vegetables as part of an educational package which provided teachers with literature, picture books and educational activities designed to encourage vegetable consumption. By June 2008 900 pupils had participated in the scheme and raw vegetables are now distributed with the free fruit programme. Initial feedback from teachers has been ‘very positive’ and a fuller evaluation is to be carried out. A full evaluation will be available later in the year. Details from: Marjorie Shepherd Tel: 01620 827236 mshepherd@eastlothian.gov.uk

Case study 6. *PANIC out of packed lunch*

East Lothian Council has addressed the problem of unhealthy packed lunches by providing primary school pupils with a specially designed leaflet. *Bright ideas to take the PANIC out of packed lunch*. The project was initiated after consultation – and tasting sessions – with a group of Primary 3 pupils and their families. It has been distributed and funded in partnership with NHS Lothian Oral Health Department. An audit of packed lunches at the school which first suggested the initiative reports a ‘marked improvement in the range’. A full assessment of the scheme is underway and will be available in Autumn, 2008. Details from: Marjorie Shepherd Tel: 01620 827236 mshepherd@eastlothian.gov.uk

³ A community led charity promoting healthy eating by supplying fresh fruit and vegetables to community groups. It supports 27 food initiatives and four community cafes.

Case study 7 Themed promotion days

Five primary schools in Fife produced a spread sheet on themed meal promotions. It reported an average increase of just under 10% in school meals uptake on the days on which they held themed lunches. (*French, Spanish, Chinese and Pirate*). The increase was not generally sustained on the following day but the themes provide an opportunity to experience different foods in an informal atmosphere.

Case study 8 Mystery Shopper

Midlothian came up with an innovative way of assessing the success of their healthy eating promotions in the form of a *Mystery Shopper* event. With the cooperation of the catering service a team of senior pupils conducted their own surveys of lunch provision. The team conducted site visits to the authority's secondary schools where they assessed meals on a range of criteria covering speed of service, quality, quantity, value and choice of portions and assessed the canteen environments for noise, crowding, sociability and decoration. The team found the quality of food and environment to be consistent across different schools. Recommendations that the range of some menus be extended and that in future there should be greater consultation with pupils have been taken on board

Case study 9 Pupil run healthy tuck shops

Moray Council conducted a tuck shop survey of their 46 primary schools in March 2004 and again in Spring 2008, so were able to produce comparisons about food stocked before and after the introduction of a range of different health promotions, including a *Be Bright, Eat Right* campaign promoting 'brain' foods and healthy eating workshops for pupils and families. The number of schools with tuck-shops increased from 21 in 2004 to 27 in 2008. Changing variables prevent an exact comparison being made but the responses suggest significant reductions in the availability of unhealthy snacks and increases in the promotion of healthier options. For example, the number of schools which reported selling crisps reduced from thirteen to seven and those which still sold crisps only sold low fat, reduced salt varieties. Tuck-shops which reported selling fresh and dried fruit and vegetables (carrots, cucumber, tomatoes, sugar snap peas) increased from eleven in 2004 to 22 in 2008. It was noted that some schools which had originally introduced cereal bars as 'healthier' options had subsequently withdrawn or replaced them because of concerns about their sugar and fat content. The number of pupil-run tuck-shops had doubled (7 – 14).

Case study 10 *Eat Well to Play Well* and *Eat Well To Do Well*

Renfrewshire Council and the Renfrewshire Community health Council have been working in partnership with the Food Standards Agency Scotland (FSAS) adapting the *Eat Well to Play Well* and *Eat Well To Do Well* resources to fit the purpose of a schools project. The resources aim to extend learning on nutrition and healthy lifestyles for primary and early years pupils. Earlier versions of the resources have been used in Renfrewshire schools and FSAS will be piloting the revised and updated versions in primary and nursery schools from October 2008 in Dundee and Moray LAs.⁴

⁴ For further information contact: Caroline Thomson, Food Standards Agency Scotland, Tel: 01224 285146 email:caroline.thomson@foodstandards.gsi.gov.uk, or Eileen Muir and Rona Young Community Dieticians, Russell Institute, Paisley, Tel: 0141 314 0710 email:eileen.muir@renver-pct.scot.nhs.uk or rona.young@renver-pct.scot.nhs.uk

7. Examples of best practice evaluations/assessment: Glasgow City Council and East Ayrshire

These two authorities have invested in major projects which have attracted wide interest in terms of their scope and development. The work in East Ayrshire to incorporate and promote locally-produced foods as part of a package of innovative meal reforms has in particular been held up both within the UK and further afield as a 'gold standard' and a benchmark of school food procurement. The work of both authorities has already received publicity and has been disseminated to the wider community in the form of academic papers and assessments. Detailed information about these projects is easily accessible elsewhere (*details below*) and on that basis only outlines of their projects will be provided in the context of this report.

7.1. Glasgow City Council has initiated a series of policies over several years which provide and promote healthy eating (and drinking) throughout the city's schools. Among these are:

- Glasgow's Big Breakfast – open access to free breakfast at all primary schools. The project began in 2002 and was operating in all primary schools by March 2003.
- Fruit Plus – free fruit has been supplied daily to all pre-school facilities, primary schools and special schools since August 2001.
- Fuel Zones – an informal canteen style of lunch provision which replaced traditional dining rooms in 1997. It was retained and modified in response to Hungry for Success with a reduction in processed food component
- Glasgow's Refresh – introduced in 2003. All pupils provided with access to free drinking water throughout the school day.

Glasgow has commissioned several detailed evaluations of these initiatives from the Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH)⁵. These include *Healthy Food Provision and Promotion in Primary and Secondary School: impacts in school and beyond* (2007) and *Healthy Food Provision and Promotion in Primary School: What impact is it having on food choices?* (2007). These are both available to download from <http://www.gcph.co.uk/>

7.2. East Ayrshire Council used the new funding provided by HfS (2004) to radically change the way food was procured for schools. The council set a target of meeting the recommendations provided by the Soil Association⁶ Food for Life program which advised that the food in school should promote food education including visits to organic farms and that school meals should be:

- 75% unprocessed
- 50% local

⁵ The Glasgow Centre for Population Health (GCPH) is a partnership between Glasgow City Council (GCC), Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board and the University of Glasgow, supported by the Scottish Government. A research and development centre, focused on health inequalities, it seeks to build a better understanding of Glasgow's health and its determinants, evidence of effective approaches for improving health in Glasgow, and new insights and thinking about population health, suited to the 21st century. <http://www.gcph.co.uk>

⁶ A UK environmental charity which promotes sustainable, organic farming. www.soilassociationscotland.org

- 30% organic ingredients
- Fulfilling the same nutritional targets as Hungry for Success

The initial pilot scheme has been extended to one secondary and 29 of the LA's 46 primary schools (August 2008) with plans to continue expanding the initiative as circumstances and funding permit. A three year marketing plan is in place (2008) to further develop healthy food promotion in schools. The evidence is that the project has been successful in improving the quality and variety of meals provided and producing positive social and economic benefits for the wider community. A Scottish Environment Protection Agency report (2008) forecast that each school taking part would produce annual CO₂ emission savings of 37.7 tonnes and annual carbon savings of 10.28 tonnes.

The council's approach to healthy food promotion has been the subject of several evaluations and academic papers. These include *Evaluation of a Pilot Scheme to Encourage Local Suppliers to Supply Food to Schools*, which is accessible at <http://www.Scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2006/07/27135746/21> . Links to other papers and assessments of the council's sustainable initiatives are available on <http://www.eastayrshireschoolmeals.com/links.htm>

8. Sustainability

8.1. Background

- Scottish Government policy is that public sector buyers should take account of relevant sustainable development objectives when awarding contracts for food and catering services.
- Additionally, the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act 2007 places a duty on local authorities and managers of grant-aided schools to have regard to any relevant guidance issued by Scottish Ministers on the application of the principles of sustainable development when providing food or drink in schools.
- The other issue which may impact upon sustainability contracts is the rules governing public procurement. These require the procurement of all goods and services to achieve *value for money* - which is defined as the optimum combination of whole life cost and quality to meet the customer's requirement. This can include sustainability issues which must relate to the contract in question.
- Public bodies are further required to comply with European Public Procurement law which states they must treat economic suppliers equally, without discrimination and act in a transparent and proportionate manner.

8.2. Although the award-winning⁷ standards set by East Ayrshire has attracted wide publicity, there is strong evidence that other LAs and individual schools across Scotland are also promoting sustainability and awareness of environmental impact in their food choices. Projects include:

⁷ Soil Association Food for Life, 2006, Guardian Public Services Award for Customer Services, 2005, British Institute of Facilities Management Sustainability Award, Highly Commended 2006

- New small scale pilots of local procurement schemes and the expansion of existing and successful local procurement schemes.
- The introduction and promotion of menus which feature local ingredients and/or traditional meals
- Educational visits for pupils to the *sources* of local ingredients, including fisheries and organic farms
- The increased use of local *suppliers* as well as local *producers*
- The use of school playgrounds, allotments and parks by pupils to grow fruit and vegetables which is incorporated into school meals
- The replacement in tuck-shops of traditional stock with *fair-trade* or organic products
- The promotion of a vegetarian week
- The adoption of the Soil Association *Food for Life* standard for school meals (see 7.2 above)

8.3. Some efforts to promote sustainability failed because of a perception by suppliers and producers that there was too much paperwork or 'red tape' involved for small businesses or because of confusion/concerns about the impact of EU public procurement rules (see 8.4). One school which tried to introduce raw carrot sticks as a tuck-shop product stopped because of concerns about 'health and hygiene legislation'.⁸ However other LAs and schools have successfully initiated projects which meet the guidelines suggested in the *Future for Food*⁹ discussion document on sustainable development and food procurement in schools.

Case study 11 Aberdeenshire

- Up to 20 of the smaller schools have become involved in gardening projects where staff and pupils have 'reclaimed' land to grow fruit and vegetables. The produce grown will be used by pupils and canteen staff in the school kitchens.
- Water supplied to schools and as part of *Mealdeal* menus comes from local manufacturer Sangs (Banff) Ltd who source their product from the Tarlair spring at MacDuff.
- The LA promotes its procurement policy with a set of poster maps which identify those local beef and dairy farms which supply meat and milk to schools under the banners *Local Milk to Local Schools for Local Bairns* and *Fae Fairm to Bairn*

Case study 12 The Levensgrove Project Primary and secondary schools in West Dunbartonshire are using ground in a public park to grow fruit and vegetables and enjoy work experience. The joint project involves education, ground maintenance and social work departments. Capital funds have been allocated to develop the site of about 1000 square metres. Twenty-six primary schools have already taken part and from August 2008 all primary schools are expected to include a weekly visit as part of their curriculum. Twelve secondary schools have pupils taking part in a rural skills training programme. Produce grown at Levensgrove will be harvested and used in school meals.

⁸ Information on how to handle food safely available online:

<http://www.food.gov.uk/healthierating/nutrition/schools/schoolfood>

⁹ Available online from <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/01/23111646/0>

Case study 13 Food for Life (see 7.2) East Ayrshire now has 30 schools in their Food for Life project. North Ayrshire has started the pilot in all eight schools on Arran, and is augmenting local supplies of milk, cheese and beef with organic dry goods. Food for Life Scotland records that a further five other LAs are at an early stage of introducing Food for Life pilot schemes and Highland Council has two Food for Life schools in operation.

Additionally more than 90% of schools in Scotland are now registered as part of the Eco-Schools international initiative designed to encourage whole-school action for the environment. Of those 21% have achieved the highest attainable Green Flag award. The project receives core funding from Scottish Government. Details of support available for schools which would like to join the initiative from: <http://www.ecoschoolsscotland.org>

9. End Notes

9.1. Limitations The research was intended to identify ways in which LAs and individual schools were promoting healthy eating and sustainability in the context of recent policy directives (see 1 and 8.1). Given the parameters within which the research was conducted, it was not intended to provide an in-depth portrait of healthy eating promotion or sustainability across all LAs in Scotland. However, despite these limitations, the responses from 22 of the country's 32 LAs do provide a useful and interesting snapshot of how some actors in education are responding to the challenges of improving the nation's diet and increasing sustainability. It also provides examples of good practice and potential inspiration for schools and LAs which are planning healthy food promotions.

9.2. Conclusions

The breadth, depth and originality of the different initiatives which have been undertaken across Scotland, and the enthusiasm of many local authority officials and school teaching and catering staff suggest that SG's policies on these issues have struck a popular chord. It can also be seen that while the policies may have acted as an incentive, many initiatives had already begun on the backs of determined individuals who were ahead of the curve.

Sustainability While it is inevitable that in most circumstances it is LAs which make decisions about authority-wide procurement practices, individual schools are also promoting sustainability initiatives and there is a degree of cross-over between those initiatives which promote healthier food choices and those which set out to increase sustainability:

- Projects which incorporate the '*plough to plate*' or '*fae fairm to bairn*' philosophy may encourage children to expand their menu choices if they have helped grow food or have visited the farmer or fisheries source, and additionally such food is an air-miles-light product of the local economy.
- The replacement of more traditional tuck-shop snacks such as crisps and fizzy drinks with fair trade or organic produce again promotes a healthier choice with a sustainable message.

- Some of those schools which are using variations on *top table service* (see **4.3.6.**) have noted that this initiative *feels* more 'eco-friendly' because there is less plastic and paper used. Plates and cutlery and settings are all re-useable and there seems to be less food wastage when children choose their own portion sizes. Using fewer paper products also reduces litter bulk.

Although some schools have concerns about hygiene rules (see **8.6.**) and would benefit from advice, there may be additional problems at LA level for departments trying to conduct local procurement tenders. The LA where all the local meat suppliers withdrew from the tender process had no choice but to look for a source further afield. The individual who was brokering the process believes that the problem came from a perception among the competing tenders that they would not hit the necessary benchmarks needed for success, and a concern about the amount of paperwork - 'red tape' - which would be involved. The complexities of the tendering process need to be explained and accessible in a clear, simple form across LAs and potential tender competitors alike to reduce the occurrence of this kind of confusion and to support individuals within LAs who are exploring this kind of option for the first time..

Healthy eating Some LAs and schools have invested time and money in substantial projects, refurbishing canteens, creating gardens, producing education packages and hiring marketing firms. Others have abandoned the easier profits of commercially stocked vending machines and tuck shops and re-stocked them with healthier alternatives – local produce and home made goods. Other schools have come up with innovative ideas; organising competitions and role-playing, inventing new and more attractive names for unloved vegetable dishes and presenting points and incentive certificates for children who make healthier choices. The project details suggest that, all of these approaches are dependent upon the goodwill and cooperation, beyond the call of duty, of committed individuals either at school or LA level. The inner city primary teacher who weekly visits the early morning fruit market where traders give her a good deal on produce and the canteen supervisor who turns up to cheer at school sports events and writes a regular 'news' column are two examples of those who are contributing a bit more than their job description. Some individuals seem to be so involved that it seems reasonable to ask whether some initiatives would survive without them.

It is also of interest to note that despite few obvious opportunities to confer on relevant issues there is a clear consensus among LAs and schools about what the main issues are.

All the evidence suggests that a whole school approach works best with the support of parents often considered crucial to achieving success. Parent-tasting sessions, early menu-distribution and banning less healthy snacks from the building all need parents on board. Schools are trying a variety of ways to involve parents in the process by alerting them to proposed menu-changes, offering advice on healthy packed lunches and inviting them to join their children at lunch time.

Some parents have signalled their support for the changes by asking for recipes for food their children have enjoyed at school¹⁰.

Practical barriers identified as impacting on school meal take-up and more general healthy food choices have been addressed with initiatives designed to increase ease of access and availability. Reduction of queues, different payment systems, expanded menus and free fruit distribution tackle those issues.

The findings also demonstrate widespread recognition that there are more subtleties at play than just a question of children 'preferring' the taste of less healthy processed food over more natural products and that schools are seeking ways to overcome these more abstract barriers. The evidence from the academic literature¹¹ is that children are wary of the unfamiliar. In homes and communities where undisguised fruit and vegetables are strangers at meal times, children need to be properly introduced to them before they can become friends. Many of the initiatives which have been presented recognise this and set out to provide opportunities for children – especially those of primary school age - to understand where food comes from, as well as to explore the new tastes and textures of the food itself. Different schools have chosen different methods of making those introductions. The objective however remains the same whether pupils are planting seeds in school gardens, turning carrots into smoothies or soup, attending family cookery lessons or being offered a 'crunchy courgette bite' by pals dressed up as chefs. While school staff accept that there may be 'fussy eaters' that cannot be reached, their efforts focus on the hope there are other children who may be tempted to try something new for the first time – and discover they like it.

While the perception is that the primary schools' focus on education about and exposure to healthy foods is working with the young children involved, other strategies are being employed by secondary schools where different factors may influence food choices. Again family involvement was encouraged and a whole school approach was considered to be effective. The topic of food choices has been introduced into different parts of the curriculum and pupils have been invited to design their own versions of healthy meals and menus to be used by canteen staff. Except for those comparatively few schools based in isolated areas, most secondary schools have identified 'competition' from off-campus fast-food suppliers as one of their biggest problems. At those schools the emphasis has been on making menus, dining areas and the whole 'lunchtime experience' as attractive as possible to encourage pupils to stay within the school grounds. Only one school

¹⁰ This reflects the findings of the Evaluation of the Free School Meals Trial (MacLardie et al, September 2008) which also reported interest from parents in obtaining copies of recipes for popular meals.

¹¹ J. Buttris, B. Stanner, A. McKeivith, C. Nugent, F. Kelly, F. Phillips & H.E. Theobald H.E. (2005) "Successful Ways to Modify Food Choice: Lessons from the Literature", *British Nutrition Foundation* (29): 333-343 • L. Cooke, (2007) "The importance of exposure for healthy eating in childhood: A Review", *Journal of Human Nutrition and Dietetics* 20 (4), 294-301 • T.M. Dovey, P.A. Staples, E. L. Gibson & J.C.G. Halford (2008) "Food neophobia and 'picky/fussy' eating in children: a review" *FoodInfo Online Innovations* 18 July • A. Sorhaindo & L. Feinsein, (2006) *What is the Relationship Between Child Nutrition and School Outcomes?*, Centre for Research on the Wider Benefits of Learning: London • L. Wood & C. Harper (2008) "The link between child nutrition and health: an overview of research in the UK" *School Food Trust* online: <http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/documents.asp?DocCatId=1>

reported the imposition of a ban on pupils leaving the school grounds and even then had only applied it to the youngest children. One secondary school reported the introduction of lunchtime attractions like quizzes and sporting events, but most had concentrated on re-decorating and 're-branding' the school canteen, increasing the food choices and trying to reduce the queues and other barriers identified by pupils as frustrating.

It should be emphasised that the nature of this survey has meant that examples given can only ever represent a taste of what is happening. There will inevitably be other schools and LAs implementing interesting and exciting initiatives which have not been celebrated in these pages.

The research demonstrates that schools and LAs across Scotland are embracing the challenge of encouraging healthy eating and promoting sustainability. Scotland's schools are as diverse as the country's geography and the variety of methods being employed reflect those differences. Inner city schools may find it harder to introduce pupils to the 'source' of their daily milk than those schools with neighbouring dairy farms, but many of the initiatives which have been developed are transferable across schools. The installation of plasma screens in dining rooms may be beyond most budgets. However many more of the examples cited would seem to be dependent upon goodwill and creative thinking, a resource, which judging by the research findings, many of Scotland's schools seem to have in abundance .

