

Holiday activities and food literature review

To: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in England,

For information: Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland

Key Points

A literature review was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) in 2018 to gain an understanding of the evidence available on the impact of school holidays on pupils, especially those from disadvantaged homes.

The report provides an overview of the reviewed published evidence on two potential effects.

1. Holiday learning loss, where pupils potentially lose academic skills and knowledge over the summer holidays. The review investigates evidence of the extent of holiday learning loss, who might be affected and what provision is effective to mitigate holiday learning loss.
2. Holiday hunger, where children and families are unable to afford sufficient nutritious food during school holidays. The review investigates evidence of the extent of holiday hunger, which children are affected and how they and their families can be supported during the holidays.

The review also covered evidence on existing holiday food provision, including best practice on encouraging participation and attendance among disadvantaged groups.

1. Background

A literature review was commissioned by the Department for Education (DfE) in 2018 to gain an understanding of the evidence available on the impact of school holidays on pupils, especially those from disadvantaged homes.

The resulting report was published on 16 December 2020 and it provides an overview of the reviewed published evidence on two potential effects.

1. Holiday learning loss, where pupils potentially lose academic skills and knowledge over the summer holidays. The review investigates evidence of the extent of holiday learning loss, who might be affected and what provision is effective to mitigate holiday learning loss.

2. Holiday hunger, where children and families are unable to afford sufficient nutritious food during school holidays. The review investigates evidence of the extent of holiday hunger, which children are affected and how they and their families can be supported during the holidays.

The review also covered evidence on existing holiday food provision, including best practice on encouraging participation and attendance among disadvantaged groups.

This briefing provides an overview of the report and outlines the key findings. A full copy of the report can be accessed via the following link: -

[Holiday activities and food literature review](#)

2. Holiday Learning Loss

The report states that the concept of holiday learning loss implies a stagnation or decline in academic progress during the long school summer holidays. There is evidence from the USA and other countries that poor pupils and ethnic minority pupils fall behind their better off peers significantly during the long summer break. However, it is commented that the evidence from the UK is limited.

Therefore, the report concludes that it is not apparent from the literature whether UK school pupils experience summer learning loss; although there was an assumption amongst teachers and educationists that they do, especially those from low-income households, who are already behind other pupils in attainment.

To determine the true extent of holiday learning loss in the UK, the DfE advises that this would require a robust programme of research to test pupils before and after the school holidays, with a further test at the end of the autumn term to validate the findings.

The report draws upon evidence about effective interventions from US literature due to there being more information available. It should be noted that the summer break in the US extends to 13 weeks and this should be taken into consideration when making comparisons with the UK.

In the US, formal summer schools may be less effective than broader enrichment activities, but it is reported that strong international and UK evidence shows that carefully monitored summer reading schemes are effective, especially those which have adult guidance and support built in.

The evidence also shows that the voluntary nature of summer learning provision can make it difficult to attract the pupils most at risk and dropout rates can be high if the programme contents and delivery are not appealing as well as educational. A youth work approach to learning through enrichment activities, rather than an instructional model was most supportive of accelerating summer learning. It was also concluded that the learning content needs to be somewhat different to the normal school curriculum and delivered in the context of the enrichment activities.

3. Holiday Hunger

This section of the report focused on the evidence on the prevalence and impact of holiday hunger in the UK in the context of poverty and food insecurity. It looked at examples of provision internationally for children who may be hungry and learns from examples of provision in the UK.

The report advises that there is no conclusive evidence on the extent of holiday hunger in England. The UK does not undertake official measurements of food, unlike many other developed countries, so although some authors have attempted to arrive at a speculative number of children who might be affected, for example Forsey (2017) who suggests three million, the actual number is officially unknown.

International evidence on food insecurity indicates that persistent or repeated episodes of hunger have a negative effect on children's physical, mental and emotional wellbeing and impact adversely on attainment and achievement at school.

4. Encouraging participation in holiday activity and food provision

The DfE conclude that the evidence from the US suggests that the best ways to encourage attendance include 'word of mouth' recommendations, verbal presentations to communities and calling door to door. Involving parents and carers can encourage participation and represents value for money in terms of marketing, while promotions such as competitions and free food for parents and carers have also been found to be effective in some programmes.

Inviting parents to participate means that information can be provided about nutrition, housing and welfare. Whole family cooking activities benefit families in understanding how to make the best of low-cost ingredients as well as being fun.

The report states that it is important to avoid stigma and makes reference to the Derbyshire school holiday food programme, which advises that the term "holiday hunger" is stigmatising to families experiencing hardship and should not be used when delivering provision. Close attention should be paid to the stigmatising effects on children, and parents and carers of provision that is too closely targeted.

The literature review also concludes that targeting should be broad rather than refined and neutral settings can aid participation: for example, facilities in parks or community centres rather than a church or school. Food banks were felt to be stigmatising locations for delivery.

In addition, the branding and marketing are important as there was evidence that young people are put off by the term 'club'. Time needs to be allowed to market provision to the community.

The greatest proportion of pupils on free school meals are those in Special Schools (35.7 per cent) and Pupil Referral Units (40.0 per cent). The report notes that the evidence on food insecurity shows that a higher incidence of mental, emotional and physical health problems occurs amongst children and young people who are food insecure. Therefore, the staffing of holiday activity and food provision needs to reflect the probability of a higher level of special needs and challenge in the targeted groups.

Evidence on food insecurity shows that children are affected emotionally and socially by a lack of food in the household even if they themselves receive sufficient food due to management of resources by the adults. Provision for children from food insecure households should include support for families as a whole especially in the light of the evidence to show that involving parents improves participation.

In concluding this section of the report, it is stated that polemic debate could be minimised through the objective collection of official data on food insecurity and its impacts.

Effective holiday activity and food provision

The evidence reviewed shows that the provision for children experiencing hunger in the school holidays is ad hoc, piecemeal, informal and largely run by local charities and volunteers. However, there is also evidence that this informality may allow for some flexibility and sensitivity to local contexts.

It is also stated that the evidence on effective holiday provision in the UK is limited, but there is some suggestion that services which provide consistent, easily accessible, enrichment activities beyond just lunch or breakfast, and which involve parents and children in the preparation of food are those which work best. Centres which invite parents and carers to meals allow for advice to be given on other topics such as benefits, housing and relationships.

What is the evidence on effective provision?

It is reported that this section of the review draws on the 17 examples identified, to ascertain what may be successful, sustainable, and any barriers to effective provision.

The DfE note that the information made publicly available on holiday clubs providing food and activities to counter hunger in the school holidays is minimal, vague and inconsistent. Only a few of the services have had an evaluation and, even in these cases, no consistent model of evaluation has been used, so comparisons about effectiveness are not accessible.

It is commented that the results of the research are consistent with those who described provision in the UK as ad hoc, unsupervised and unreliable and offering sporadic cover (Forsey, 2017; Lambie-Mumford & Sims, 2018). There is also a diverse range of provision, models and providers with extensive variation in opening hours, targeting and activity levels. There were also various methods for funding services.

Delivery styles

The DfE concludes that involving families and other age groups is an important element for several and highlights the following examples: -

- Food and Fun, a holiday enrichment programme run by the Welsh Government
- Holiday Kitchen in the West Midlands.
- St Helen's and Wigan provision that adopts a drop-in 'bistro' model for all age groups,
- Make Lunch and Kellogg's simply provide lunch or breakfast,
- Fit n Fed that offers activities and sports to the children.
- Holiday Kitchen that includes an element of communal food preparation to spread information to parents and children about shopping for and preparing nutritious meals at low cost.

Funding practices

The DfE conclude that there are a range of ways to fund provision currently, including grants from large food and soft drink companies. However, largely, the impetus is charitable with local volunteers and fundraising to offer a service to a local community. There is also evidence of an alternative, more corporate, approach to funding for example a social franchise model.

Evaluated projects

This section of the report discusses the providers who had been evaluated and therefore provide the most information on best practice and, sometimes, value for money for this review. The provision reviewed include: -

- A day out, Not a hand out
- Food and fun
- St Helen's Council
- Sheffield Council
- Feeding Derbyshire
- Kitchen Social Hub
- Holiday Kitchen
- Food and Fun Norwich
- Fit and Feed
- Family Action Holiday Hub
- Make Lunch
- Club 365

APSE COMMENT

The DfE invited bids from local authorities for the [Holiday Activities and Food Programme 2019](#), to pilot provision for the summer of 2019. Subsequently, the COVID-19 pandemic has resulted in increasing numbers of families becoming eligible for Universal Credit and has also highlighted the attainment gap between the financially secure and those less well off. In recognition of this the government announced the expansion of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme in 2021 and APSE supports the acknowledgment that local authorities can play a key role in supporting the provision.

The review undertaken by the DfE concludes that previous provision, as far it can be established is inconsistent. However, it is clear that there are examples of good practice and provision that is making a tangible difference to the community.

As a follow up to the Holiday activities and food literature review, APSE would like to see the evaluations from the 2019 pilots published to allow best practice to be shared.

On a final point, local authorities have demonstrated throughout the pandemic that they are effective in taking the leading role in providing services that are responsive to the needs of their local communities. Covid-19 is undoubtedly going to have a long-lasting impact on society. Therefore, APSE would like to see councils receiving the required level of funding to provide longer term and sustainable provision to meet the needs of and be able to support their communities in the years to come.

The [APSE National catering advisory group](#) and the [APSE Facilities, Catering and Cleaning Management Seminar 2021](#) scheduled on January 28 2021, provide the opportunity for local authorities to share best practice and network with colleagues delivering catering services across the UK.

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