



## **The 'Good Food' Case for the provision of Universal Free School Meals (UFSM) in Scotland: Discussion paper**

To: All Chief Executives, Main Contacts and APSE Contacts in Scotland. For information only to England, Northern Ireland and Wales

### **Key Issues:**

A working group of 15 organisations including APSE from across the school food sector produced a discussion paper on Scottish Government's commitment to the introduction of Universal Free School Meals for primary school children by 2022.

This briefing provides an overview of that discussion paper.

### **1.0 The Working Group**

The Working Group is comprised of representatives from ADES Resources Network, APSE, Argyll & Bute Council, ASSIST FM, Brakes Scotland, City of Edinburgh Council, COSLA, East Ayrshire Council, North Ayrshire Council, Nourish Scotland, Scotland Excel, South Lanarkshire Council, The Food Foundation, The Soil Association Scotland, The University of Edinburgh Business School and Zero Waste Scotland.

### **2.0 Recommendations**

The Working Group put forward a number of recommendations. This is a short summary of those recommendations:

1. Prioritise local procurement of ethical and sustainable produced school food ingredients; investing in a collaborative network of locally based intermediaries;

reviewing procurement legislation to mandate more local procurement; facilitating skills training for local suppliers; and ensuring food and drink manufacturing infrastructure is aligned to the needs of school food procurement

2. Adopt a 'whole school approach' to the provision of universal free school meals; this should include reviewing Better Eating, Better Learning; ensuring consistent provision; supporting teachers and school managers in delivering food education; raising the profile of the catering profession; investing in catering infrastructure and the dining environment; focusing on food waste reduction through pupil education and ownership; and creating links between schools and communities by treating school kitchens as community food hubs
3. Multi-year settlements with investment in school food provision and ensuring the funding is spent on the delivery of school food
4. Facilitate the co-production of all matters concerning the roll-out of universal free school meals with children and families, placing their voices front and centre
5. Ensuring wide stakeholder representation of all actors across the school food system in the free school meals expansion programme, developing a national recipe book of school meals that encourages regional and seasonal produce and actively promoting uptake of national recipes among local authorities and the public sector
6. Adopt a clear and measurable standard for good school food by revising and mandating Better Eating, Better Learning; encourage local authorities to adopt the Soil Association's Food For Life Served Here standard; draw on existing tools and methods to include indicators for the economic and environmental sustainability of school food; and develop school food service standards around dining room design, supervision and all aspects of children's dining experience

### **3.0 The 'Good Food' case for Universal Free School Meals**

The discussion paper outlined the 'good food' case for universal free school meals. Each section is summarised below:

#### **Sustainable procurement - prioritising local, ethical and sustainable ingredients**

Universal free school meals provide an opportunity to shape supply chains to the benefit of local authorities, local producers, communities and the environment. This kind of investment has positive effects in not only fostering pride and appreciation of quality Scottish food, but also in reducing food miles associated with the service and supporting Scottish businesses.

### **Prioritising local food procurement**

School food supply chains should be restructured to incentivise local businesses with those suppliers being supported to participate in the school food procurement process. This can be achieved through the provision of training and know-how to make sure they are able to participate in the tendering process. This maximises the spent in local communities and ensures that money spent generates additional value for the local economy.

### **Prioritising ethical and sustainable ingredients**

The use of ethical and sustainable school food ingredients supports the transition towards more environmentally sustainable food production systems, and it ensures that public money is being used to tackle other important issues such as biodiversity loss. Incentivising organic school food would lead towards more environmentally-friendly farming and food growing.

### **Refreshing the importance of the school food experience with a 'whole school approach'**

A 'whole school approach' is an important recognition of how the school food experience shapes children's early relationship with food and food behaviours. A whole school approach which considers things like the dining environment, the skills and knowledge of the staff, the quality of the meals and their links to other topics like food waste reduction,

is the best approach. The Scottish Government publication 'Better Eating, Better Learning' provides the foundation for the provision of this.

### **Consistent provision of 'Good Food'**

The cooking of healthy, nutritious and sustainably sourced meals from scratch using fresh, minimally processed ingredients that are both attractive and tasty are of the utmost importance. Maintaining those standards are how you get children to take up the option of school meals.

### **Raising the profile of the catering profession**

Recognising the important role catering staff play in the promotion of school meals is necessary. Investing in their skills and knowledge, and developing clear career paths allows for excellent staff to reach their potential and be retained within the service.

### **Supporting teachers and school management**

As part of the 'whole school approach', teachers and school management need to be supported with all of the necessary resources and guidance. Utilising existing food education resources through Curriculum for Excellent, Education Scotland and other bodies like The Royal Highland Education Trust will allow for excellent food education to take place in the classroom and beyond.

### **Investment in catering infrastructure & dining environment**

Investment in the eating environment and the catering infrastructure is of the utmost importance if the goals of universal free school meals are met. An attractive school food experience is vital in maintaining and increasing uptake, and the allocation of capital funding is essential for ensuring that existing facilities are upgraded to provide the necessary environments for the facilitation of universal free school meals.

## **Focus on food waste reduction**

The reduction of food waste is an important part of reducing the environmental impact of school meals. Investment is needed into research on the drivers and solutions of food waste so we can better understand how to tackle plate waste.

## **Creating links with the wider community**

School kitchens and canteens should be treated as community assets. There is an opportunity to build upon the community work undertaken during the pandemic, and resource them as community food hubs with wider socio-economic benefits. Schools can also benefit from the community, for example through educational visits to farms and food producers.

## **School meals are an 'investment', not a 'cost'**

School meals should not be viewed as a cost since long-term they can deliver many benefits across public health, environmental and socio-economic sustainability and climate change mitigation. Universal free school meals are so much more than just the food on the plate.

## **Placing the voice of children and families front and centre**

Children and families should be placed at the centre of the school meal experience and have the opportunity to shape it through measures like co-production of menus and should have a degree of ownership over procurement policies, food waste reduction policies, eating environments and other areas. This is important if we wish to see increased uptake.

## **Facilitating collaboration between stakeholders and across sectors**

Relationships with stakeholders and other sectors is an important part of school food provision, with strong mechanisms for the sharing of best practice.

### **The roll-out of Universal Free School Meals**

The roll-out of universal free school meals provides an incentive to identify the opportunities and challenges to its successful implementation, and for stakeholders to participate in wider conversations about shared policy objectives and goals. Stakeholder representation is an important part of ensuring that the maximum benefit of children, families, local communities and the environment is achieved.

### **Collaboration on recipes & menus**

The sharing of expertise and collaboration of local authorities in Scotland in recipe development is vital. The development and maintenance of a national recipe book of school meals that meet nutritional standards and can be adapted to the local context would be very valuable.

### **Develop robust common standards and methods for measuring impact**

Ensuring that targets are being met and that progress can be monitored on the standards for school meals is crucial to their success. Local authorities already collect a range of relevant information; extending existing tools and methods to indicators on important factors could be how we ensure the high quality and sustainability of school meals across Scotland.

## **4.0 APSE Comment**

As a member of the Working Group that produced the full discussion paper, APSE encourages our members to consider how the impact of bringing the Good Food Nation Bill into law will impact your authority.

APSE believes that this represents a unique opportunity not only to both invest in producing and serving food with a range of wide-reaching benefits for children and young people, communities, the environment and Scotland's economy but also for all local authority services and public sector partners to collaborate and develop key partnerships to help deliver the "good food case".

APSE asks our members to consider what has been outlined in the discussion paper, and to continue collaboration, the sharing of best practice, and the monitoring and comparison of standards that takes place in our network. APSE Scotland's Soft Facilities Management advisory group meetings regularly to discuss important issues for catering, cleaning and janitorial services. For more information on our advisory groups please [click here](#)

**Reminder: APSE has set up a COVID-19 Information Hub to deal with frontline service issues as they arise, ensuring greater resilience and learning between each other during this difficult time. You can access this hub by clicking [here](#) and you can also join our WhatsApp Support Network by clicking [here](#).**

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