

APSE Allergens and Allergen Management roundtable follow-up survey

To: All Contacts

1 Overview of the survey

On 4 March 2025, a roundtable discussion was held with a representative from the Food Standards Agency regarding allergens and allergen management. During the session a range of questions were raised.

The questions were compiled into a survey to enable a snapshot to be gained of the challenges and solutions regarding managing allergens in school catering.

This briefing provides an overview of the responses received to the survey.

2 Responses

65% of responses were from authorities in England, 5% of respondents from Northern Ireland, 30% of respondents were from Scotland and 5% of respondents from Wales, enabling a snapshot to be gained from across the UK.

Details of the questions and an overview of the responses received are outlined below.

2.1 What policy do you have in place to identify when a child requires a special diet e.g. a letter from a medical professional

To establish the children presenting with allergens that the catering service is required to cater for and manage, there needs to be a policy in place to identify when a child requires a special diet.

From all the responses received to this question, the majority of caterers report that they require written information from a health professional, either in the form of an email, letter or completion of a special diet request form.

The reason cited for this approach is to ensure the catering service has a health professionals' confirmation of the allergen/s and what the requirements are for the child.

2.2 How does your authority manage allergens in kitchens with limited space

The survey sought to gain an understanding of how authorities manage allergens in kitchens that had limited space. The graph below provides an overview of the responses.



100% of the respondents report that they have the challenge of preparing school meals for children with allergens where there is limited space. The survey asked the respondents to provide further information regarding how this is managed. The information provided is summarised as follows: -

- There is complete clean down between preparing allergen meals and food from the standard menu
- The dishes for children with allergens are prepared first,
- There is a clean down of the area and once prepped the food is stored

separately.

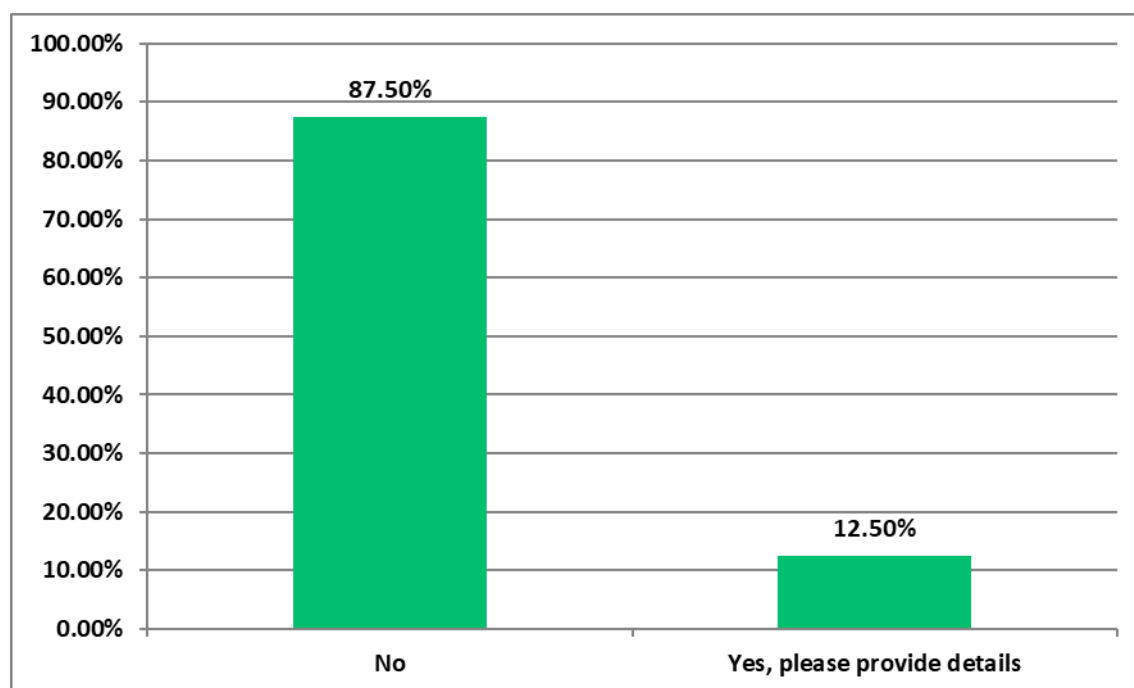
- Separate equipment is used where possible
- Training is provided for all staff to ensure that they are all aware of the procedures
- Meals for children with allergies are prepared separately in school production kitchens
- Limiting the allergens entering the kitchen by reducing common allergen products in the menu e.g. Not using eggs
- PPE is changed after preparing allergen meals

It is clear from the responses that producing the meals for children with allergies requires well managed processes, requires additional preparation and there is additional training required for the frontline staff.

2.3 Does your authority offer vouchers or a payment to families with a child with allergens when the catering service is unable to offer a free school meal

In the circumstances where the catering service is unable to provide a meal there was some discussion regarding whether vouchers were supplied to the parents.

The graph below highlights the responses to this question.

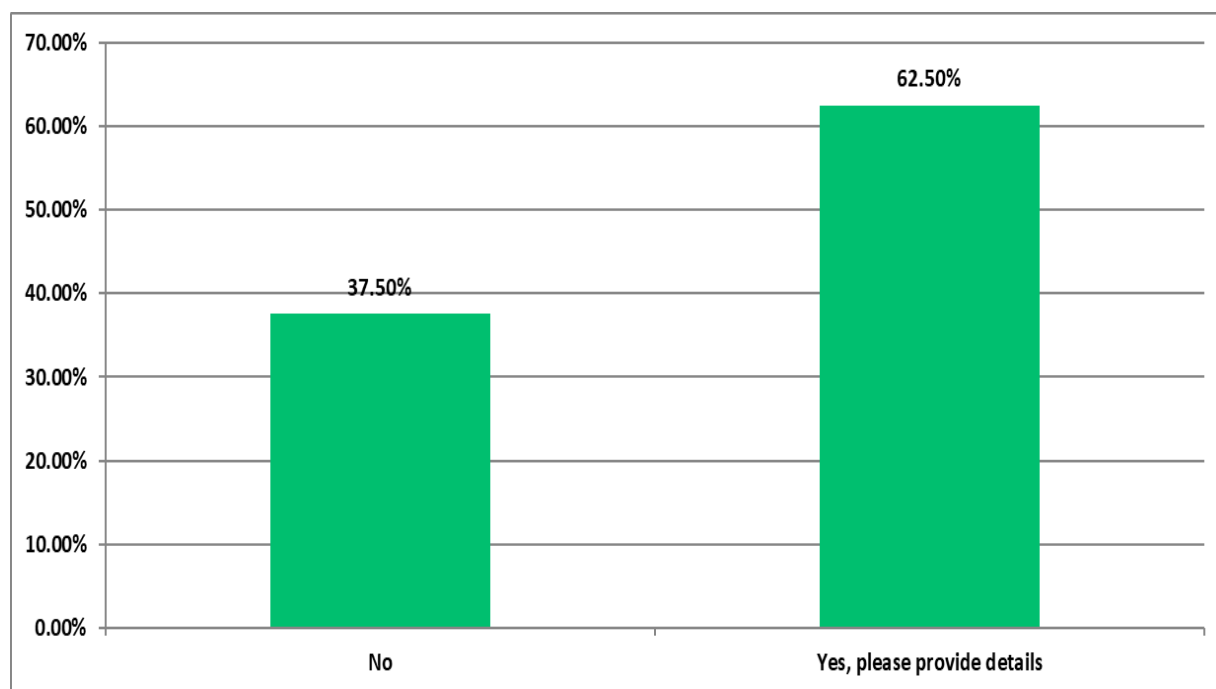


The vast majority of respondents, 87.50% report that they do not provide vouchers. With 12.50% advising that they did. In the comments associated with this question, it is stated that in the case where vouchers are provided, these are arranged between the family and the school and not directly through the local authority.

2.4 Does your authority provide any support / advice to schools regarding allergens and allergen management for activities that take place outside lunchtime e.g. breakfast clubs, afterschool clubs or holiday provision

The lunchtime meal is just one meal provided as part of the school day, and there is food provided at provision such as breakfast clubs, therefore the survey sought to understand if local authority caterers provided support and advice regarding allergens in relation to this type of provision.

The graph below highlights the responses received.



The majority of respondents, 62.50%, report that they did provide this type of support and below there is a summary of what form the support takes: -

- The catering service carries out an advisory visit/inspection. Offers verbal advice, written advice and other such resources
- The catering service has helped and provided information when asked
- An Allergy Awareness campaign to schools has been conducted and there is the offer a

- E learning allergy course to all catering staff and education staff
- Access to advice and staff training is provided on a consultancy basis

2.5 How does your authority get support from the schools regarding allergen management

Following discussions at the roundtable, the survey asked how the authority gained support from schools regarding allergen management.

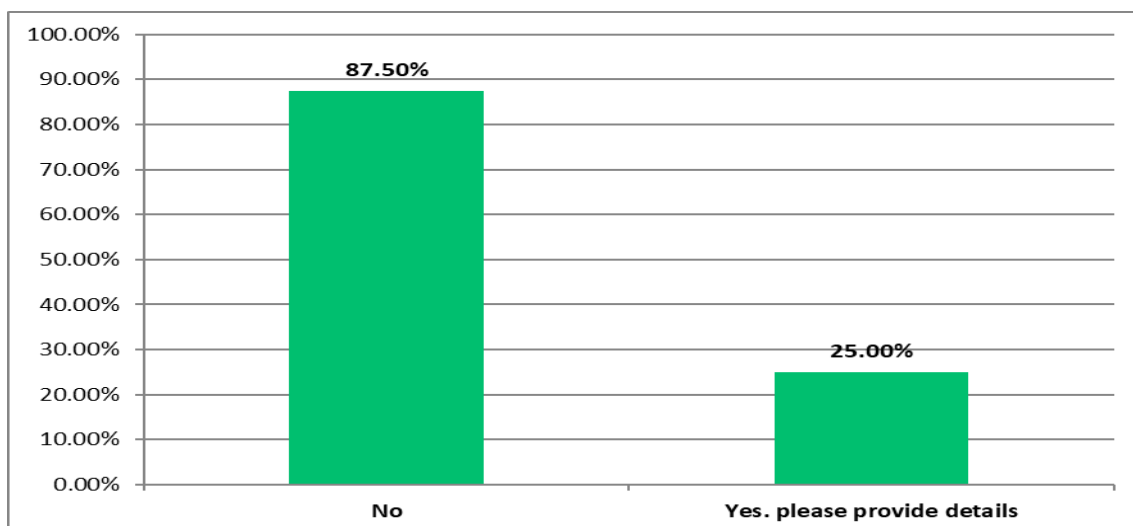
87.50% of respondents reported that they gained support from schools, and this was achieved as follows: -

- The catering service asks for medical information for the child and a meeting is arranged between parents, child and caterer, success of these is dependent on how engaged all parties are
- Meetings are held with headteachers and following the meeting, updates are provided to the school.
- The authority provides an allergen and intolerance policy and procedure which sets out the tri-party responsibilities for communicating and managing allergies within educational establishments. For clarity, the tri-parties are 1) parent, 2) school and 3) authority catering service
- A special diet request form, completed in conjunction with dieticians and school nurses

2.6 Does your council have a specific policy for children with an Avoidant / Restrictive Food Intake Disorder (ARFID)/ Autism or Sensory disorders

The school food environment can be challenging for children with an AFRID diet and sensory disorders. Therefore, the survey sought to understand if local authority catering services had a specific policy in place for managing this.

The graph below provides an overview of the responses received.



The majority of respondents, 87.50% state that they do not have a specific policy in place. However, in the comments associated with this question it is clear that although there is not a policy in place, the catering service meets with parents and the school to establish the requirements and implements measures to support the children.

APSE Comment

From the discussions at the roundtable and at the APSE Education Catering Network, local authority caterers are reporting that the number of children presenting with food allergies has increased and the type of allergies has become more complex.

The tragic events surrounding the death of Natasha Ednan-Laperouse, have served to highlight the consequences when catering for allergies is not managed effectively. Therefore, it is essential that local authority caterers have clear processes in place, that staff are well trained on these processes and there are regular reviews to ensure compliance.

It is clear from discussions and the survey that despite the challenges, in terms of budgetary constraints, physical barriers such as the size of kitchens and other complexities associated with catering for children with special diets, the vast majority of local authority caterers are doing everything possible to ensure that the child can receive a school meal.

To assist caterers, there is a variety of guidance and resources available, for example

[Allergy guidance for schools - GOV.UK](#) and [Food allergy education for teachers | Food Standards Scotland | Food Standards Scotland](#).

Research campaigns and resources are also available on the **Natasha Allergy Research Foundation** charity website <https://www.narf.org.uk/natashas-allergies>

In addition, the [APSE Education Catering Network](#) is a forum for local authority caterers to share best practice and hear from colleagues how they are overcoming the challenges on the range of issues that the education catering sector is facing.

Vickie Hacking
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www.apse.org.uk

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