



A YEAR OF CHILDREN'S FOOD

A progress review of policy to address inequalities in children's food across the four UK nations 2020–2021

SECOND ANNUAL REPORT

CONTENTS

Introduction	3
Policy Progress Review Summary	4
Policy Progress on...	5
• Free School Meals	6
• Free Holiday Meals	10
• Healthy Start and Best Start Foods Schemes	13
• Transforming Food Environments	17
• Children's Right to Food	20
Young Food Ambassadors' Campaign Highlights in the Past Year	23
Conclusion	27
Appendix	
• Policy Progress Review Detail	28
• Glossary	34
• References	35
• Acknowledgements	37



INTRODUCTION

In April 2019, we published the final report from the [Children's Future Food Inquiry](#) – a year-long investigation into children's food insecurity across the UK. The process involved consultation with many children and young people, who helped to develop the [Children's Right2Food Charter](#) – a set of evidence-based recommendations from the Inquiry. The Charter sets out how Government policies and programmes can better support children to eat well in pre-school settings, at school and at home.

Each year we assess whether the four UK Governments have made progress against the Charter. Last year, we found that progress had been wholly insufficient given the urgency and scale of the problem of children's food insecurity in the UK¹. While some important steps had been taken, progress was patchy and inconsistent across the four nations.

This year, we have seen welcome progress on a few key recommendations. However, progress across the Charter as a whole remains slow, and inconsistencies across the four nations have widened. We summarise our findings in a traffic light rating, and then focus on five key areas that have been of particular importance for children's food policy over the past year. Long-term policy change is required to reduce

children's food insecurity, so our traffic light rating does not account for short-term emergency measures that were introduced in response to the Covid crisis.

The Covid-19 pandemic has brought unprecedented attention to the issue of children's food insecurity. In large part, this has been driven by England footballer Marcus Rashford's trailblazing [#EndChildFoodPoverty](#) campaign. Last year, the campaign focused on three key

policy asks to support children at risk of food poverty, based on recommendations published in July 2020 in *National Food Strategy: Part One (NFS: Part One)*², an independent Government review into the food system in England. The campaign received a groundswell in public support, with over 1 million people across the UK signing a petition urging Government to act³.

Our team of Young Food Ambassadors have used their own experience to put issues relating to poor food access at the centre of public and political debate (see page 23 for more details).

This July, the NFS published its final report, *National Food Strategy: The Plan (NFS: The Plan)*⁴ with updated recommendations on Free School Meals, the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme and the Healthy Start voucher scheme. Marcus Rashford's campaign is now advocating for these recommendations to be funded in the Government Comprehensive Spending Review in October.

Looking beyond the immediate Covid crisis, this report lays out the evidence and long-term policy pathways to ensure all children have access to a healthy and nutritious diet that will give them the best start in life, protect their health, and enable them to thrive in school and in later life.



POLICY PROGRESS REVIEW SUMMARY

This section reviews the progress made by each of the four nations in relation to the  Children's Right2Food Charter from last year to this year.

- NO POLICY IN PLACE
- COMMITMENT
- SOME POLICY IN PLACE
- FULL POLICY IN PLACE
- NOT APPLICABLE

*For further details on policy progress in the past year please see the **Appendix**. For further details on the current state of play of policy in all four nations please see the  **Children's Right2Food Dashboard's** Policy Progress section.

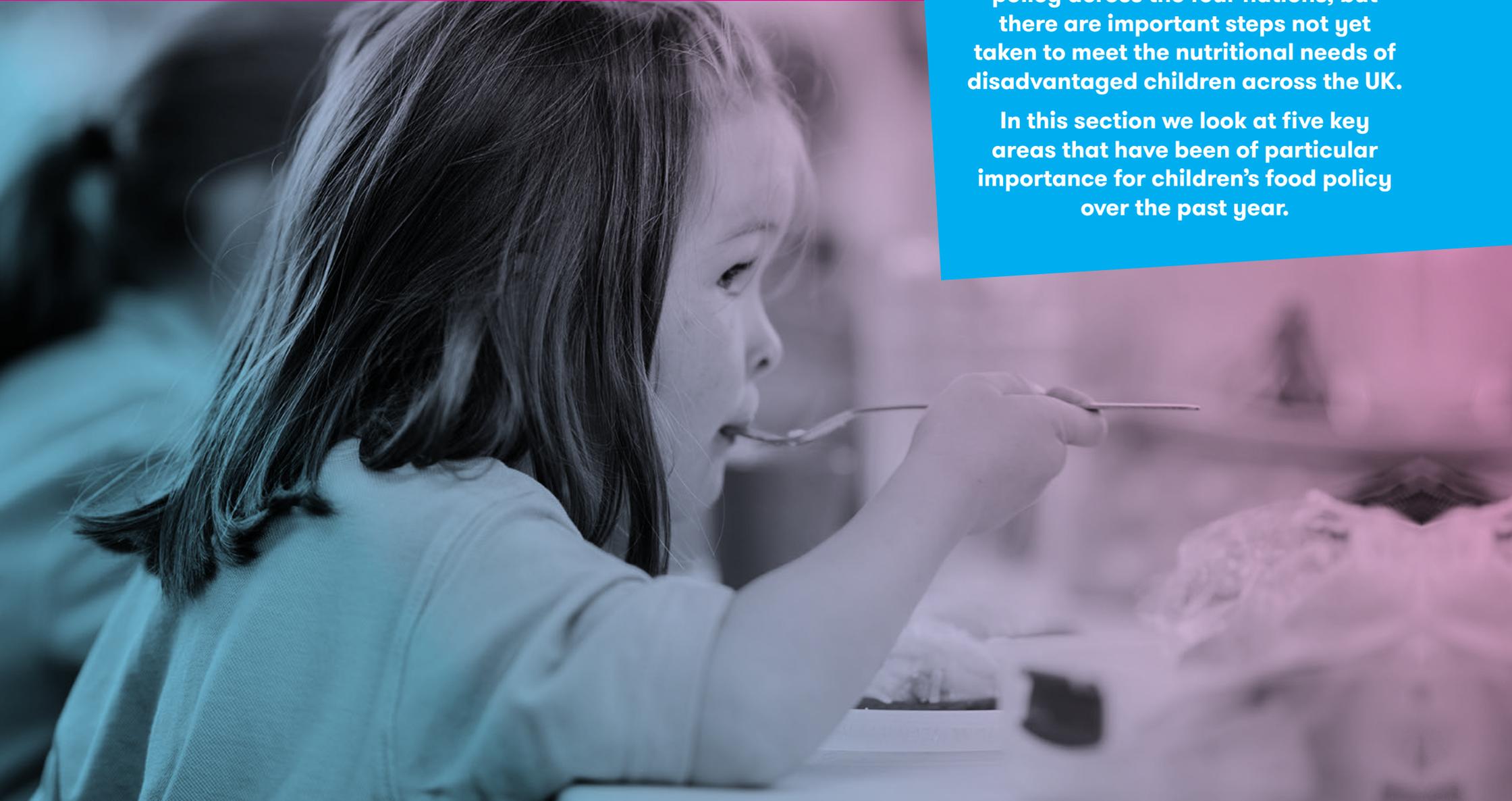
(Please note: we worked with our Young Food Ambassadors to update the Children's Right2Food Charter last year to reflect recent events including the Covid-19 pandemic, and therefore progress reported in this report is not always directly comparable to the original 2019 Charter).

		ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		NORTHERN IRELAND	
		MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
FREE SCHOOL MEALS	1.1. Develop a plan to deliver this Charter	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	1.2. Design and develop a monitoring system for school and nursery food	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	1.3. Design and test school food menus and better eating environments for secondary schools	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	1.4. Plan how to protect children's food security in future pandemics and emergencies	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
FREE HOLIDAY MEALS	2.1. Introduce Universal Infant Free School Meals	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	2.2. Put in place mandatory nursery food standards	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	2.3. Expand the Healthy Start scheme	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
HEALTHY START AND BEST START FOODS SCHEMES	3.1. Extend the offer of Free School Meals to more children in need	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	3.2. Expand holiday provision permanently	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	3.3. Ensure children with No Recourse to Public Funds can access Free School Meals	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	3.4. Provide free nursery meals	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	3.5. Increase the Free School Meal allowance for secondary school children	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
TRANSFORMING FOOD ENVIRONMENTS	4.1. Rename Free School Meals as the 'School Meal Allowance'	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	4.2. Poverty-proof school food	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	4.3. Develop guidance for schools on food education on food poverty	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	4.4. Increase funding for free breakfast clubs	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	4.5. Extend the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme to all children	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	4.6. Ensure all schools have facilities for children to drink tap water for free	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	4.7. Make laws that take food costs into account	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO FOOD	5.1. Make food packaging and marketing aimed at children more honest	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	5.2. Stop the advertising of unhealthy food	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	5.3. Add a premium to business rates for fast food outlets operating near schools	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	5.4. Make healthy food affordable	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

KEY AREAS OF POLICY PROGRESS IN THE PAST YEAR

The last year has seen some shifts in policy across the four nations, but there are important steps not yet taken to meet the nutritional needs of disadvantaged children across the UK.

In this section we look at five key areas that have been of particular importance for children's food policy over the past year.



POLICY PROGRESS ON FREE SCHOOL MEALS

CHARTER RECOMMENDATION:

Extend the offer of Free School Meals to more children in need: apply the income threshold of £14,000 per year used in Northern Ireland to the rest of the UK for more children to qualify.

- NO POLICY IN PLACE
- SOME POLICY IN PLACE
- COMMITMENT
- FULL POLICY IN PLACE

WHAT PROGRESS HAS THERE BEEN IN THE PAST YEAR?

ENGLAND

In 2020, Marcus Rashford led the #EndChildFoodPoverty campaign in support of three recommendations from *NFS: Part One*². This included a recommendation that eligibility for Free School Meals (FSMs) should be expanded to all children on Universal Credit or equivalent benefits. The current criteria only capture children in households earning less than £7,400 (after tax and benefits) and receiving qualifying benefits. However, the Government strongly rebuffed the recommendation on account of the large cost attached to the expansion.

For that reason, the recommendation was refined in the final NFS report published in July 2021⁴. The release of data measuring food insecurity by the Department

of Work and Pensions (DWP)⁵ allowed for a more targeted recommendation based on analysis of the number of children experiencing food insecurity by income threshold.

The NFS now recommends increasing the income threshold to £20,000 per year. It also recommends expanding eligibility to undocumented children and children with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF), some of whom have temporarily been able to access FSMs during the pandemic, but in the long-term do not qualify regardless of their level of deprivation or income.

The Government is due to respond to this recommendation in a White Paper in early 2022.

“WHEN SOMEONE WAS ON FREE SCHOOL MEALS AT MY SCHOOL, THEY WERE LOOKED AT LIKE THEY WERE SCRUFFY AND LOOKED DOWN ON. THEY WERE LAUGHED AT. WHEN PEOPLE WERE QUEUING FOR LUNCH, THEY HAD A DIFFERENT CARD AND STOOD OUT. NO ONE SHOULD BE LOOKED DOWN UPON BECAUSE THEY'RE ON FREE SCHOOL MEALS.”

TYLER, 18, YOUNG FOOD AMBASSADOR, BLACKBURN

SCOTLAND

Scottish Ministers set up a Social Renewal Advisory Board to propose how to renew Scotland as we emerge from the pandemic, producing a final independent report called *If not now, when?*⁶. Several recommendations relating to children's food insecurity were made including expanding free meal provision to all pupils, in the same way that hospitals provide free meals for all patients⁷.

In a bold move by the Scottish Government, they have confirmed that they will extend Universal Infant Free School Meals (which are currently available to children in Primary 1–3) to all children in primary schools⁸. This is being rolled out progressively, starting with Primary 4 children from August 2021, and Primary 5 children from January 2022⁹. This expansion will also extend to children with NRPF. Universal FSMs have the benefit of reducing stigma experienced by children who would qualify on a means-tested basis¹⁰, ensuring all children are treated equally at school regardless of income. They have also been shown to reduce the educational attainment gap between less and more affluent children¹¹ and reduce the likelihood of overweight and obesity¹². While Scotland has made great progress towards expanding FSMs to all primary school children, the income threshold for secondary children remains as low as England, at £7,500.

WALES

In February of this year, a Plaid Cymru amendment to next year's draft budget that would have extended FSM eligibility to all children on Universal Credit was voted down in a debate in the Senedd¹³. In the lead-up to the May 2021 elections, the Welsh Labour Party manifesto committed to review the eligibility criteria, extending entitlement as far as resources allow¹⁴. Since winning the election, this has been included in the *Programme for Government 2021–26* but no clear action has been taken on this review by the Government¹⁵.

This is despite research from the Child Poverty Action Group finding that children growing up in poverty in Wales are less likely to get a FSM than in devolved counterparts¹⁶. This is due to Wales having a tighter means-tested eligibility than Northern Ireland and not offering Universal Infant Free School Meals provision (meaning all children in the first three years of school would receive a free school lunch) like England and Scotland do. Wales instead opted to resource free primary school breakfasts¹⁷.



“I AM INSPIRED AT HOW FORWARD-THINKING THE SCOTTISH GOVERNMENT ARE ON FREE SCHOOL MEAL ALLOWANCE, WITH THIS YEAR'S ANNOUNCEMENT ON THE ALLOWANCE BEING EXTENDED TO CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE UP TO PRIMARY 5, WITH THE AMBITION TO GO FURTHER. LIKEWISE, I AM ENCOURAGED BY THEIR ONGOING ENGAGEMENT WITH FOOD AMBASSADORS LIKE MYSELF FROM SCOTLAND WHO EXPERIENCE FOOD INSECURITY ON HOW TO SHAPE AND DELIVER FOOD POLICIES THAT HAVE THE BEST INTERESTS OF YOUNG PEOPLE AT THEIR HEART. HOWEVER, ACROSS THE UK THERE ARE FAR TOO MANY DISPARITIES IN FOOD POLICY ENGAGEMENT.”

RYAN, 20, YOUNG FOOD AMBASSADOR,
GLASGOW

NORTHERN IRELAND

While there has been no progress in Northern Ireland in the past year to expand FSM eligibility, Northern Ireland already has much higher FSM eligibility criteria than other UK nations (with an income threshold of £14,000 per year) so remains ahead in ensuring adequate provision of FSMs to all school-aged children.

WHY IS FURTHER PROGRESS NEEDED?

Decisive policy change is imperative so every child at risk of food insecurity is guaranteed at least one meal a day during term time. At the moment, many children in need are still missing out. In August 2021, 2.4 million children in the UK had directly experienced food insecurity in the previous six months¹⁸.

Approximately 900,000 children living in poverty in England don't meet the eligibility criteria for FSMs. In Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively 55,000, 25,000 and 20,000 children living below the poverty line miss out on this much needed support¹⁹.

Food Foundation research shows that 17% of households with 8–17-year-olds who are not eligible for FSMs in the UK report not regularly having lunch from the school canteen due to it being unaffordable¹⁸. Instead, 97% of them report usually having a packed lunch and 3% usually skipping lunch. Packed lunches are generally less healthy than school food with less than 2% meeting

the school food standards²⁰. This means that children who are missing out on FSMs are having to resort to having a cheaper, less nutritious lunch due to the strict eligibility criteria.

The Covid-19 pandemic has both exacerbated and shone a light on the pre-existing issue of children's food insecurity. There is widespread political and public consensus that no child in the UK should go hungry, but debate around the best way to address the problem continues. FSMs have been shown to be an effective way of delivering a myriad of benefits to children including improving educational attainment¹¹, reducing obesity¹² and tackling food insecurity. School meals deliver greater nutritional value than an equivalent grant to households

because meals can be produced to high quality at low cost through economies of scale, and more children benefit from the social interaction of eating together at school and the opportunities which this brings.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN NEXT?

The UK Government needs to implement the recommendation from the NFS to expand eligibility in England by raising the income threshold to £20,000; while in Wales, the promise to review the eligibility criteria must be acted upon. Disparities between nations need to be eliminated to ensure that where children live in the UK doesn't impact their ability to access FSMs.

CHILDREN WHO ARE MISSING OUT ON FSMs ARE HAVING TO RESORT TO HAVING A CHEAPER, LESS NUTRITIOUS LUNCH DUE TO THE STRICT ELIGIBILITY CRITERIA.



EXPERT COMMENTARY



The Scottish Government's commitment to providing free lunches and breakfast to all primary pupils during term time and holidays shows significant progress and understanding of the importance of school food. What we need to see as part of that commitment is fair funding so that caterers across Scotland can continue to offer good quality, freshly prepared and nutritious food to our children and young people, enabling us to deliver the best quality meals possible. Not only is this commitment to universal provision good news for young people, but it also recognises the important role our hard-working catering staff play, as well as the value placed on our local food and drink suppliers.

The rigorous school food and nutrient standards that are in place in Scotland help to safeguard quality, providing meals that are healthy and tasty, and catering staff are keeping children and young people at the forefront of their planning.

What we would also like to see in future is further expansion and investment in school food for all pupils: a right to food should also be extended to all pupils in secondary schools and beyond.

We hope that lessons can be learned in Scotland and shared more widely across the rest of the UK, so that as many children and young people as possible can also benefit from the same level of investment in good quality school food.”

JAYNE JONES, CHAIR, ASSIST FM

ASSIST FM is the Association for all the Facilities Management providers within Scotland's 32 local authorities including school meal provision.



“WE HOPE THAT LESSONS CAN BE LEARNED IN SCOTLAND AND SHARED MORE WIDELY ACROSS THE REST OF THE UK, SO THAT AS MANY CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE AS POSSIBLE CAN ALSO BENEFIT FROM THE SAME LEVEL OF INVESTMENT IN GOOD QUALITY SCHOOL FOOD.”

JAYNE JONES, CHAIR, ASSIST FM

POLICY PROGRESS ON FREE HOLIDAY MEALS

CHARTER RECOMMENDATION:

Expand holiday provision permanently to support all children who normally receive Free School Meals when schools are closed.

- NO POLICY IN PLACE
- SOME POLICY IN PLACE
- COMMITMENT
- FULL POLICY IN PLACE

WHAT PROGRESS HAS THERE BEEN IN THE PAST YEAR?

ENGLAND

As recommended in *NFS: Part One*², in 2021 the Government significantly expanded its Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme to all children eligible for Free School Meals (FSMs) in England to cover the Easter, summer and Christmas holidays²¹. This is a big step forward from the small-scale pilot schemes run in 17 local authorities in the summer of 2020. Children attending HAF receive at least one hot meal a day, which should meet the school food standards.

The scheme supports families facing food insecurity and other disadvantages, not only by providing meals to children, but also by offering wrap-around services such as help with childcare, safeguarding and stimulating social activities.

The £220 million injection of funding covers provision for four days per week over one week at Easter, one week at Christmas and four weeks in summer. There has not yet been any funding committed beyond 2021. *NFS: The Plan* calls for at least a further three years of funding for HAF to be committed to by Government⁴.

SCOTLAND

The *If not now, when?* independent report⁶ recommends investment in school meal replacement during the holidays (including cash first approaches and other support), as well as holiday activity programmes that provide good food. The Scottish Government has taken both on board in 2021.

For the summer of 2021, the Scottish Government allocated local authorities £20 million to provide targeted provision of holiday activities, to help improve the wellbeing of children from low-income families and those particularly impacted by the adverse effects of the pandemic²². Food provided was required to meet the school food standards²³.

In a further positive development, the Scottish Government committed to funding the provision of targeted support for FSM-entitled primary and secondary pupils during all holiday periods from August 2021⁹. Taking into consideration learnings from the Covid pandemic, Scotland's local authorities have been given the flexibility to determine the most appropriate method of delivery, be it through vouchers, food parcels or direct cash payments.



WALES

● The Welsh Government has committed to provide for children on FSMs during the school holidays (either in the form of cash, vouchers or food parcels) throughout the 2021–22 academic year²⁴.

This comes alongside a commitment to build on the success of the School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP). The school-based summer programme, which was first piloted in 2015, received funding from the Welsh Government for 2021 of £4.9 million, a £2.2 million increase on the previous year²⁵. This will support 14,000 children aged 7–11 living in areas of social deprivation to eat healthier and get active.

Despite this positive step, the programme needs to expand further to reach its full potential. Currently over four-fifths of children eligible for FSMs do not have the opportunity to benefit from the programme²⁶. Furthermore, the year-on-year funding commitments from the Welsh Government make it challenging to plan further than one year ahead.

**MORE THAN 1.4 MILLION CHILDREN
AGED 8-17 IN THE UK REPORTED
EXPERIENCES OF FOOD INSECURITY
DURING THE 2020 SUMMER HOLIDAY**

WHY IS FURTHER PROGRESS NEEDED?

The holidays can be a particularly hard time for households at risk of food insecurity when the safety net of FSMs is removed. Parents often face increased costs from childcare and food bills, as well as less income due to being unable to work while caring for their children. Food banks show a surge in demand over the summer³². More than 1.4 million children aged 8–17 in the UK reported experiences of food insecurity during the 2020 summer holiday³³.

This year, we have seen significant investment in tackling the problem of children going hungry during the school holidays across the UK – largely driven by the emergency response to the Covid crisis. The steps taken by each UK nation show that holiday food insecurity is receiving the recognition it deserves as an important issue. However, progress is still needed to plug gaps in support, ensure the provision is sufficient and reach a fully

NORTHERN IRELAND

● Before the Covid-19 pandemic, there was no provision for children on FSMs during the school holidays in Northern Ireland. However, since the first lockdown direct payments of £13.50 per child per week were made to families of children entitled to FSMs during term time lockdowns and the holidays, and the Government has committed to continue this during all holidays until Easter 2022^{27, 28}. A proposal to bring a Private Members Bill to the Assembly on tackling holiday hunger by making this permanent was approved by the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and is currently going through Assembly²⁹.

Local authorities are also developing individual plans to address child food poverty during the school holidays^{30, 31}. However, there is only short-term funding in place and a lack of a joined-up approach.



comprehensive solution to tackling food insecurity during the holidays long-term.

Furthermore, there are many children living in poverty (including children from families with NRPF) who are not currently eligible for FSMs that also miss out on access to holiday schemes.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN NEXT?

Sufficient multi-year funding for holiday provision is required across all four nations to ensure that no child at risk of food insecurity falls through the cracks during the holidays. The commitment by the Scottish Government to permanently fund holiday provision for children with low household income needs to be fulfilled beyond the 2021–22 academic year, and this example should be followed by the other four nations. Longer-term funding would give local authorities the ability to plan, and provide sufficient time for a full evaluation of the scheme. Evaluations of holiday provision are crucial for assessing if current provision is adequately providing for children at risk of food insecurity, then allowing modifications and expansions of the schemes to be introduced as required to fill any gaps identified.

“WE WANT TO SEE NORTHERN IRELAND AS A LEADER IN ENDING FOOD POVERTY BY TAKING A RIGHTS-BASED AND CROSS-CUTTING APPROACH TOWARDS PROTECTING AND PROGRESSING THE RIGHT TO FOOD.”

ELLEN FINLAY, CHILDREN IN NORTHERN IRELAND



EXPERT COMMENTARY

“The commitment by the Minister for Education to continue with direct payments during school holidays until 2022 is to be welcomed. However, a more permanent solution is required. A current Private Member’s Bill is going through the Assembly to make direct payment permanent. Local Authorities (Councils) are developing their own holiday hunger responses; however, the efforts are piecemeal and lack a joined-up approach.

Holiday hunger requires much more than meals. Children in Northern Ireland’s holiday hunger projects work in partnership with community partners and business to implement solutions to improve the well-being of all children and young people in Northern Ireland, through food, physical activity, and learning. It is this working in partnership and addressing these issues that will ensure that no child goes hungry.

We want to see Northern Ireland as a leader in ending food poverty by taking a rights-based and cross-cutting approach towards protecting and progressing the right to food. A recent survey explored public attitudes to rights with 86% supporting the right to food. We are delighted that so many support the right to food and will continue to advocate to ensure it is enshrined in law and appropriate legal and regulatory structures introduced to guarantee its protection, respect and fulfilment.”

ELLEN FINLAY, CHILDREN IN NORTHERN IRELAND

Children in Northern Ireland work to make Northern Ireland a society where all children are valued, treated fairly and able to flourish, including campaigning on ending holiday hunger in Northern Ireland.

POLICY PROGRESS ON THE HEALTHY START AND BEST START FOODS SCHEMES

CHARTER RECOMMENDATION:

Expand the Healthy Start scheme: increase its value and the number of children who benefit from it, encouraging support from retailers (in England, Wales and Northern Ireland).

● NO POLICY IN PLACE
● COMMITMENT

● SOME POLICY IN PLACE
● FULL POLICY IN PLACE

WHAT PROGRESS HAS THERE BEEN IN THE PAST YEAR?

ENGLAND / WALES / NORTHERN IRELAND

As recommended in *NFS: Part One*², Marcus Rashford's #EndChildFoodPoverty campaign last year called on Government to increase the value of Healthy Start vouchers from £3.10 to £4.25 (in line with the value of Scotland's Best Start Foods scheme at the time) and extend eligibility to all children on Universal Credit or equivalent benefits. In November 2020, the UK Government committed to increase the value in England but declined to address eligibility³⁴. It was later announced that the increase in value would also apply in Wales³⁵ and Northern Ireland³⁶. This increase in voucher value was introduced in April 2021, marking the first increase in value for over a decade, which was desperately needed to keep up with inflation and increasing food prices.

There has also been a commitment to digitise the scheme moving from paper vouchers to electronic cards to make it more user-friendly, but this has yet to come to fruition³⁷. Furthermore, it is concerning that all current beneficiaries will have to reapply when digitisation does come into effect as this could reduce uptake.

ENGLAND

● The final NFS report⁴ made further recommendations regarding Healthy Start. It once again recommended that the Government expand Healthy Start eligibility, but modified the ask to all households earning £20,000 or less after benefits in England (aligning with its recommendation on expanding FSMs and HAF). It also argued that eligibility to the scheme should be raised from children under the age of four to under age five, to make sure children can benefit from the scheme until the time that they start school and can begin to access FSMs.

Additionally, given the low uptake of the scheme, it proposed several strategies to increase uptake including a public-facing communications campaign, simplifying the application process and working with frontline healthcare professionals to encourage them to help eligible families to apply.

Following a legal challenge, the Government announced it would extend eligibility of the scheme to families who do not qualify because of their immigration status (for example, children with NRPF). A consultation on this has been committed to but no date has been confirmed³⁸.



WALES

● The Healthy Weight Healthy Wales (HWHW) strategy's new delivery plan for 2021–22²⁵ lays out the Welsh Government's imminent priorities for the strategy (published in 2019 laying out a long-term plan to reduce obesity levels³⁹). The priorities include raising wider awareness of the Healthy Start scheme among professionals and the public in order to drive uptake, and reviewing the scheme to consider the impact it is having on providing nutritional support to low-income families.



“THE HEALTHY START VOUCHERS HAVE BEEN A GODSEND, I JUST HOPE THE PEOPLE WHO NEED THEM CAN GET IT. I DON’T KNOW WHAT I WOULD HAVE DONE WITHOUT THEM. ESPECIALLY DURING LOCKDOWN, I’VE HAD TO MAKE MEALS STRETCH.”

GANIAT, MOTHER OF THREE, LONDON

RETAILERS ADDING VALUE

In advance of the increase in the voucher value last year, retailers stepped forward to supplement the value of the vouchers spent within their stores. For example, Sainsbury's topped up the vouchers by £2, Waitrose by £1.50 and Tesco, Iceland and Co-op by £1. However, not all of these top-ups were across all the nations creating further regional inequalities. Through promotions, in-store signposting and communications, retailers have also played a key part in driving uptake of the scheme – something Marcus Rashford and Tom Kerridge have also done with their Full Time cookery school launched in April 2021 to deliver low-cost weekly recipes through Instagram. Thanks to retailers adding value to the scheme and increased awareness generated by the #EndChildFoodPoverty campaign's focus on Healthy Start, between September 2020 and July 2021 we have seen a further 62,000 parents access the scheme across England, Wales and Northern Ireland⁴⁰. It is imperative that retailers continue to support the scheme.

SCOTLAND

● The Best Start Foods scheme was rolled out in August 2019 to replace Healthy Start in Scotland. It offers a prepaid card to use to buy healthy food from pregnancy until a child's third birthday (one year younger than the Healthy Start scheme). In August 2021, the value of the card increased from £4.25 per week to £4.50⁴¹.

In the Scottish National Party's 2021 election manifesto⁸ they pledged to increase eligibility by around 50% to all in receipt of Universal Credit but it is not yet known when this will come into effect. They have also taken measures to increase uptake by combining the application for Best Start Foods with application for the new Scottish Child Payment⁴².

The Government's Social Renewal Advisory Board have further recommended that the Scottish Government improve the scheme by collaborating with local food businesses⁶.

WHY IS FURTHER PROGRESS NEEDED?

The Healthy Start scheme plays a key role in tackling dietary inequalities and is an effective way of supporting low-income families to eat more nutritiously. Research has found the scheme increases spending on fruit and vegetables by 15% and improves the overall nutrient composition of families' shopping⁴³. This is particularly important given that children under five in the poorest 20% of households eat on average three portions of fruit and vegetables a day, instead of the recommended five portions⁴⁴. This is on average one portion less than those in the richest 20% of households⁴⁴.

However, eligibility for the scheme is very low – currently available to families who earn £4,896 or less a year from employment. In England, just 58% of pregnant women and children aged under four who are living in poverty are eligible. In Wales and Northern Ireland, 70% and 80% are respectively.

Furthermore, uptake of the Healthy Start scheme is worrying low and a significant number of eligible families are missing out on support that they're entitled to. Across England, Northern Ireland and Wales, more than 40% of people eligible for Healthy Start are not registered for the vouchers⁴⁵. There are several contributing factors to this, including lack of awareness, difficulties applying (such as language barriers due to the form only being available in English) and difficulties using the vouchers. Much more needs to be done so that those eligible for the scheme can benefit.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN NEXT?

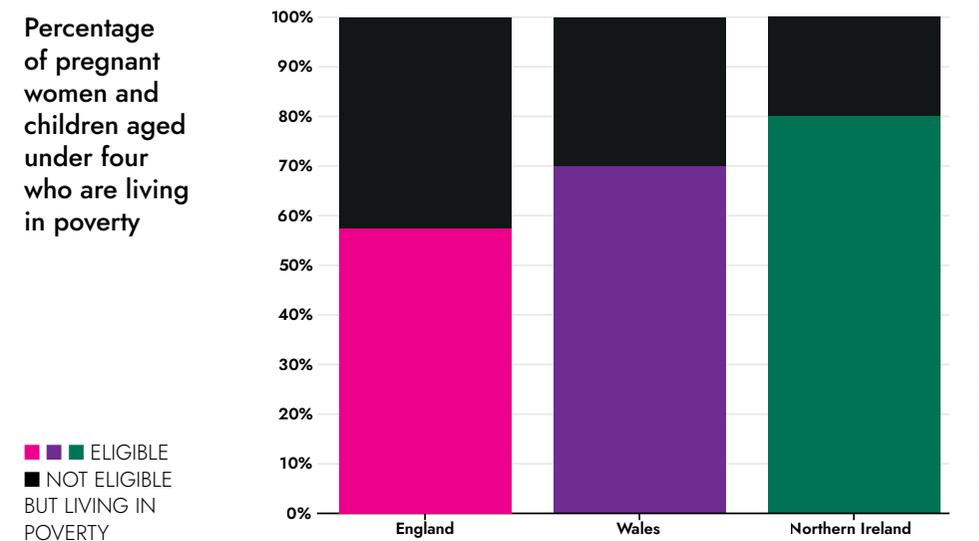
Healthy Start eligibility needs to be expanded in line with the recommendation in the NFS, with equivalent expansion in eligibility for the scheme in Wales and

Northern Ireland. Government needs to deliver on the commitment to permanently expand to children with NRPF in a timely manner to prevent children from missing out any longer. Expanding the size of the scheme would also make it easier for retailers to justify continued investment in supporting and promoting it. Additionally, Scotland should also raise the eligibility age for Best Start Foods scheme to children under five.

Governments need to make concerted efforts to drive up uptake of the scheme through working with businesses and healthcare professionals, as well as delivering on the commitments to digitise the scheme. A communications campaign to promote the new digitised version of the scheme including a specific focus on reaching frontline healthcare professionals is urgently needed to ensure that there is awareness of the forthcoming changes to the scheme.

“MORE THAN 40% OF THOSE ELIGIBLE FOR THE [HEALTHY START] VOUCHERS ARE STILL NOT REGISTERED FOR THE SCHEME, AND I'M CONFIDENT THAT THE MAJORITY OF THESE PARENTS CAN BE FOUND IN COMMUNITIES JUST LIKE MINE, WHERE I GREW UP – NO INTERNET, NO HIGH STREET, NO WORD OF MOUTH.” MARCUS RASHFORD, OPEN LETTER IN THE BMJ, AUGUST 2021

Percentage of pregnant women and children aged under four who are living in poverty



EXPERT COMMENTARY

“At Co-op we’ve long supported the Healthy Start scheme as a means of ensuring that everyone, including children, have access to the nutritious food they need in order to thrive. We recognise what a valuable role the scheme plays in getting targeted financial support to vulnerable families enabling them to buy healthy food for their children.

The pandemic shone a light on the acute challenges facing too many families so we are proud to have topped up the value of vouchers used in our stores by £1, meaning that the hundreds of thousands of vouchers redeemed with this supplement will have gone even further in making a difference at a time of unprecedented financial need. The digitisation of Healthy Start can only be a positive step forward in making it easier for more of the families that could already be taking advantage of the scheme to benefit from it. We believe that urgent action is needed from Government to ensure that the shift from vouchers to cards promotes higher take up of the scheme.

However, too many families simply aren’t accessing the support they are entitled to. At the Co-op we’re committed to continuing to play our part to raise awareness and promote better take up of Healthy Start, through our stores and through the grass roots organisations that we work with in the communities we serve. We fully support and endorse the recommendations in the National Food Strategy Independent Review in relation to the Healthy Start scheme as clearly widening the eligibility criteria, and encouraging greater take up through more comprehensive communication, would only build on the success of the scheme to date.”

PAUL GERRARD, DIRECTOR OF CAMPAIGNS & PUBLIC AFFAIRS, THE CO-OP

“URGENT ACTION IS NEEDED FROM GOVERNMENT TO ENSURE THAT THE SHIFT FROM VOUCHERS TO CARDS PROMOTES HIGHER TAKE UP OF THE SCHEME.”

PAUL GERRARD, THE CO-OP



POLICY PROGRESS ON TRANSFORMING FOOD ENVIRONMENTS

CHARTER RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Make food packaging and marketing aimed at children more honest: clear labelling and reduced marketing and promotions of unhealthy food.
- Stop the advertising of unhealthy food on TV, near schools, online and on social media.
- Add a premium to business rates for fast food outlets operating near schools.
- Make healthy food affordable: retailers and fast-food chains should make sure healthier options are cheaper than unhealthy ones.

● NO POLICY IN PLACE
● COMMITMENT

● SOME POLICY IN PLACE
● FULL POLICY IN PLACE

WHAT PROGRESS HAS THERE BEEN IN THE PAST YEAR?

ENGLAND

Driven by concerns of the increased risk of serious illness and death from Covid-19, the UK Government published a new Obesity Strategy⁴⁶ in July 2020 setting out actions to help both adults and children to be a healthy weight. Despite the clear link between obesity and food insecurity⁴⁷, the strategy makes no direct mention of food insecurity or how this impacts on diet quality.

However, it has been encouraging to see some clear commitments in the strategy to improve food environments given the role they play in influencing the food young people buy and eat. Healthy food options are often not the most accessible with people from lower income groups more negatively impacted⁴⁹.

As announced in the Obesity Strategy, offers for unhealthy foods such as 'buy one get one free' and promotions in prominent locations in supermarkets and online will be restricted from October 2022⁵⁰. Furthermore, despite push back from the food industry, a commitment has been made to introduce a ban on advertising of unhealthy food and drink online and a 9pm watershed on TV by the end of next year⁵¹. Lastly, as of April 2022 large businesses will be required to display calorie information on menus and food labels⁵². However, while labelling can potentially help to educate citizens to make more informed decisions, it doesn't make healthier options more available or affordable.

The NFS recommended a reformulation tax on salt and sugar⁴, which would have the positive effect of making unhealthy food more expensive, but wouldn't directly make healthy food any more affordable for those on low incomes. However, the recommendation states that revenue generated from this tax should be used to fund the improvements in FSMs, HAF and Healthy Start so that families with children on low incomes aren't adversely affected.

"IN COLLEGE, YOU CAN GET A BURGER AND CHIPS FOR £2 - I KNOW IT'S NOT THE FOOD I SHOULD BE EATING, BUT I CAN'T AFFORD IT. IT GETS YOU INTO BAD HABITS AND IT STICKS WITH YOU FOR THE REST OF YOUR LIFE."

JANI, 19, YOUNG FOOD AMBASSADOR, HUDDERSFIELD



WALES

● A key pillar of the HWHW strategy³⁹ is to create healthy food environments. Similar to England's recent developments, the priorities of the HWHW delivery plan for 2021–22²⁵ include working with stakeholders to promote positive marketing and restrict advertising of unhealthy food and drink, and consulting on mandatory calorie information for the out of home sector. Additionally, they intend to work with the UK Government on how to improve marketing and labelling on infant food and drink – something the UK Government committed to consult on in 2019 but has not actioned. They have also re-committed to launch a detailed consultation on takeaways located near schools (previously delayed due to Covid).

WHY IS FURTHER PROGRESS NEEDED?

In both England and Wales, several positive commitments have been made but we are waiting for them to be put into action. In Scotland and Northern Ireland, there are no comprehensive strategies to address the serious challenges that inequalities and food environments pose to children eating well.

Advertising spend on food is disproportionately allocated to high fat, salt and/or sugar (HFSS) food and drink, resulting in high exposure of children to these ads. Young people in Britain are exposed to an estimated 15 billion online ads for HFSS foods every year⁵³. In contrast, only 2% of total advertising spend on food and drink is spent on advertising for fruit and

vegetables⁴⁹. Research shows that restrictions could prevent excess consumption of HFSS, improve lifelong food preferences of children, and therefore improve long term health and wellbeing⁵³. Unfortunately, there are gaps in the restrictions that are being introduced in England – namely that sports sponsorship and brand advertising will still be permitted – which could undermine the potential positive impact of the ban.

While progress is being made on advertising, marketing and labelling, making healthy food more affordable continues to be largely overlooked in current policy. Calorie-dense, low-nutrient foods are often the cheapest options – calorie for calorie, more healthy food is three



“FROM EXPERIENCES OF EATING BAD FOOD – BURGERS, CHIPS, TAKEOUT, I SLOWLY STARTED TO NOTICE IT WAS TAKING A TOLL, AN IMPACT ON MY MENTAL HEALTH – FEELING INSECURE, AND LAZY. WHEN I

EAT HEALTHY FOOD, I HAVE SO MUCH MORE ENERGY.”

RABIYA, 19, YOUNG FOOD AMBASSADOR, HUDDERSFIELD



ONLY 2% OF TOTAL ADVERTISING SPEND ON FOOD AND DRINK IS SPENT ON ADVERTISING FOR FRUIT AND VEGETABLES

times more expensive than less healthy food⁴⁹. This puts low-income households at further disadvantage. We see this manifesting in large dietary inequalities between income groups when comparing actual intakes with recommended intakes. The poorest fifth of UK households would need to spend 40% of their disposable income on food to meet the Government-recommended Eatwell Guide costs compared to just 7% for the richest fifth⁴⁹.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN NEXT?

Our food environments need to be reoriented in favour of making healthy diets the default. The commitments that have been made by England and Wales are a promising start towards this, and we need to see these implemented across the whole of the UK.

If the NFS recommendation on taxing salt and sugar is taken on board by Government, it needs to be implemented alongside measures which ensure that people on low incomes can afford sufficient, healthy food. This includes ensuring that wages and social security are sufficient for everyone to be able to afford to eat a diet that protects their health.



“WE ARE AT A MOMENT IN TIME WHEN WELSH GOVERNMENT HAS A GOLDEN OPPORTUNITY TO INTEGRATE POLICY DECISIONS ACROSS DISCIPLINES WHICH IMPACT ON CHILDREN’S RIGHT TO FOOD.”

KATIE PALMER, FOOD SENSE WALES

EXPERT COMMENTARY

“Progress against the Healthy Weight Healthy Wales strategy has been hampered due to the pandemic. However, progress is being made and together with renewed and new commitments in the 2021–26 Wales Programme for Government there are plenty of reasons to be optimistic about the potential for change in Wales. For example, the commitment to build on the School Holiday Programme presents opportunities to increase the number of schools across Wales providing ‘food and fun’ during the summer holidays and the review of eligibility criteria for Free School Meals opens the door to all children living in poverty being able to access a free school meal. We are at a moment in time when Welsh Government has a golden opportunity to integrate policy decisions across disciplines which impact on Children’s right to food. With the backdrop of the Government’s Wellbeing Objectives, Socio-economic Duty and Children’s Rights legislation, Government will be making important decisions on eligibility criteria for Free School Meals, reviewing Food in Schools standards, overseeing the development and implementation of the new Curriculum in Wales and consulting on measures to improve the food environment.”

To maximize the impact of each of these opportunities, they must not be viewed in isolation and need to be integrated with policy across the broader food system and welfare framework. And this also requires collaboration and support across the nations; especially in areas that do not have devolved responsibility and/or require additional funding to implement. Without this clear support and collaboration there is a risk of children growing up with vastly different experiences and opportunities depending on where they live in the UK widening inequalities across geographies; something we are seeing with different eligibility criteria for Free School Meals across the four nations.”

KATIE PALMER, FOOD SENSE WALES

Food Sense Wales aims to influence and impact on how food is produced and consumed in Wales, ensuring that sustainable food, farming and fisheries are at the heart of a just, connected and prosperous food system.

POLICY PROGRESS ON CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO FOOD

WHAT PROGRESS HAS THERE BEEN IN THE PAST YEAR?

ENGLAND

Following concerted campaign efforts by many organisations, including The Food Foundation, the first data measuring household food insecurity levels across the UK (including in children) were published by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) in March 2021⁵. Government will now be publishing annual food insecurity data, allowing tracking of the trends. Measurement of food insecurity is an important step in understanding the scale of the problem of people in the UK being denied the right to food, and allowing the Government to see action is required.

The UK Government has failed to respond to a letter sent by two leading international experts who act as Special Rapporteurs to the UN Human Rights Council about concerns regarding food insecurity in the UK. The letter, sent in August 2020, requested a response within 60 days but has been ignored.

RIGHT TO FOOD

A campaign spearheaded by Ian Byrne MP, partnering with Fans Supporting Foodbanks, has been calling for access to food to be made a legal right for all. The campaign has been supported by Right to Food Cities, including Liverpool and Manchester, who advocated for legislation on the right to food to be recommended by the NFS. However, the NFS didn't comment on a rights-based approach to food insecurity.



SCOTLAND

Following the lack of response from the UK Government to the Special Rapporteurs' letter, the Scottish Government produced a position statement setting out the ways in which Scotland is taking a rights-based approach to food insecurity⁵⁴, demonstrating that they understand the importance of this issue. The report details the various policies in Scotland, including reporting that Scottish Ministers are developing a non-statutory statement on food policy that will consider the right to food, based on proposals that were made for the Good Food Nation Bill⁵⁴. (The Good Food Nation Bill was due to be laid before parliament in the past year but was cancelled due to Covid-19.) Additionally, in 2020, a consultation ran on a Private Members Bill with cross-party support to incorporate the right to food into law, but did not progress further in the last parliamentary session⁵⁵.

The Scottish parliament recently passed the pioneering United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Incorporation Bill which will see Scotland legislate the UNCRC⁵⁶.

The convention covers all aspects of a child's life and sets out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that all children everywhere are entitled to, inclusive of the right to food. The UK ratified the UNCRC in 1991 and is obligated to uphold the convention, but Scotland is the first of the four nations to incorporate it into law.



WALES

The Welsh Government previously consulted on "commencing the socioeconomic duty" which requires public bodies to consider how their decisions might help to reduce inequalities. The legislative process was delayed due to Covid-19 but in April 2021 this came into force⁵⁷. The recognition by Government of its duty to protect citizens from inequalities is a very positive step. Going forward, this needs to be demonstrated by recognising the right to food in all relevant policies.

NORTHERN IRELAND

As one of their key recommendations, the Expert Advisory Panel for the Anti-Poverty Strategy in Northern Ireland has advised that an Anti-Poverty Act should be introduced that includes "A legal duty to ensure that children are well-nourished and free from 'food insecurity'"⁵⁸. They emphasise that food aid is not the solution to hunger and that instead a social security system which provides people with enough money to buy food and wages that match the cost of living are required.

"I WOULD LIKE TO SEE MORE ONGOING REGULAR DISCUSSIONS BY ALL FOUR GOVERNMENTS IN THE UK BETWEEN GOVERNMENT MINISTERS AND OFFICIALS, AND BETTER PROGRESS IN RELATION TO THE ASKS SET OUT IN OUR RIGHT2FOOD CHARTER THAT WAS UPDATED AFTER THE FIRST MAJOR LOCKDOWN IN 2020. THIS YEAR IS SO IMPORTANT IN TERMS OF FOOD POVERTY AFTER THE RELEASE OF THE NATIONAL FOOD STRATEGY"

RYAN, 20, YOUNG FOOD AMBASSADOR,
GLASGOW

WHY IS FURTHER PROGRESS NEEDED?

A shocking number of children in the UK have had their right to food violated during the pandemic. This hasn't improved in recent months, remaining higher than the already unacceptably high levels pre-pandemic: 2.5 million children live in households that reported suffering experiences of food insecurity over the past six months in August 2021³³. It is likely that as the economic impact of the pandemic continues to be felt that children will continue to be impacted by the consequences.

We must move away from the short-term solutions and emergency food aid that has been relied so heavily on during the pandemic. Food banks are not a solution that protects dignity – families should have the resources and be empowered to buy what they need to feed themselves and their children a healthy diet. We need to recognise that poverty is at the heart of the problem, and prioritise policies that will address the underlying causes.

The Children's Right2Food Charter sets out the long-term policy change that is needed to ensure all children in the UK have the right to food. This progress review has demonstrated that radical progress is still urgently required if we are to eliminate child food poverty.

WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN NEXT?

We need strong commitments from all four Governments to eradicate children's food insecurity in the UK. There is an urgent need to develop comprehensive policies based on the recommendations in the Children's Right2Food Charter to ensure that all children in the UK have their right to sufficient, healthy food.

Comprehensive monitoring and tracking of children's food insecurity is required to assess and evaluate the scale of the problem and whether action taken is effective in reducing it. Despite DWP having recently introduced measuring of this (and their reporting of extremely high levels of food insecurity among benefit

claimants), no single authority in Government has designated oversight on food insecurity or responsibility to tackle it. There needs to be a designated authority in Government who has oversight of these data, with powers to inform and initiate action at the national and local authority level in response to the data.

This mandated authority needs to commit to eradicating children's food insecurity in the UK, in line with the Sustainable Development Goal of Zero Hunger by 2030. In line with a wider agenda emerging on the right to food, policies need to be developed by involving the people directly affected by

FOOD BANKS ARE NOT A SOLUTION THAT PROTECTS DIGNITY - FAMILIES SHOULD HAVE THE RESOURCES AND BE EMPOWERED TO BUY WHAT THEY NEED TO FEED THEMSELVES AND THEIR CHILDREN A HEALTHY DIET.

experiences of food insecurity to ensure effective solutions are reached.

Previously, we had called for a Children's Right2Food Commission. We still believe this is needed but given that the NFS has proposed a Good Food Bill to be introduced to parliament, we think this will create a vehicle for strengthening accountability and action on children's food by relevant Government departments, and we will be proposing the measures needed in the Bill to achieve this.

YOUNG FOOD AMBASSADORS' CAMPAIGN HIGHLIGHTS IN THE PAST YEAR

Over the last year, our Young Food Ambassadors have put issues relating to food access, Free School Meals and holiday provision at the centre of public debate. They continue to bang on the door of policymakers to act on their Charter.

COVID-19: SPEAKING OUT ABOUT FOOD ACCESS

As the Covid-19 pandemic ripped through the country, and the huge number of children missing out on meals during school closure was laid bare, the Ambassadors made an appeal through the media for swift Government action, giving countless interviews on live TV, on the radio and in print.

Through lockdown, the Ambassadors turned their phones into recorders to produce their own podcast series to raise awareness of the complexities of food poverty. The first Right2Food Podcast, *Lockdown Life*, was launched on the Food Programme in July 2020 with our Food Ambassadors Shane and Jani co-presenting with Sheila Dillon. Now the Ambassadors have three series under their belt and the 2021 Investigative Food Work Award from the Guild of Food Writers.



SUPPORTING THE MARCUS RASHFORD CAMPAIGN

Marcus Rashford launched #EndChildFoodPoverty last autumn, supported by a food industry task force and with the Ambassadors' help. The campaign started on social media, and Marcus shared many of the Ambassadors' own stories to raise unprecedented awareness of child food poverty in the UK.

The Ambassadors and Dame Emma Thompson also had the chance to meet with Marcus in Manchester to discuss campaign plans – footage later used in Marcus' BBC documentary aired in late 2020.

In October, Marcus launched a parliamentary petition to end child food poverty, backed by the Ambassadors. Eighteen-year-old Jani and Children's Right2Food Campaign Ambassador Emma Thompson showed their support on ITV's Good Morning Britain on launch day. In just a few weeks, the petition broke records for reaching more than 1 million signatures at breakneck speed.



“I CAN'T BELIEVE WE'VE REACHED A MILLION SIGNATURES. IT JUST SHOWS HOW MUCH PEOPLE CARE ABOUT THIS BUT ALSO HOW MUCH PEOPLE ARE SUFFERING. CHANGE IS COMING, AND THIS IS NOT THE END.”

JANI, 19, YOUNG FOOD AMBASSADOR, OCTOBER 2020



Petitions
UK Government and Parliament

Closed petition

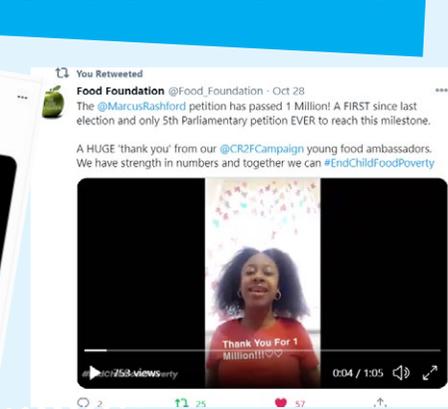
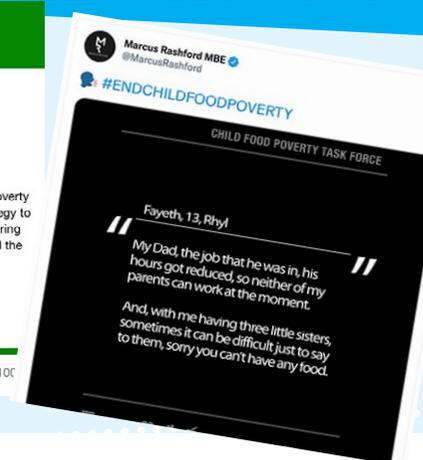
End child food poverty – no child should be going hungry

Government should support vulnerable children & #endchildfoodpoverty by implementing 3 recommendations from the National Food Strategy to expand access to Free School Meals, provide meals & activities during holidays to stop holiday hunger & increase the value of and expand the Healthy Start scheme

▶ More details

1,113,887 signatures

Show on a map 100



Press release

Young Food Ambassadors meet with Children's Minister

Ambassadors joined by Dame Emma Thompson to discuss the importance of healthy eating and activities

Published 27 November 2020

From: [Department for Education](#) and [Vicky Ford MP](#)**MEETING WITH POLICYMAKERS**

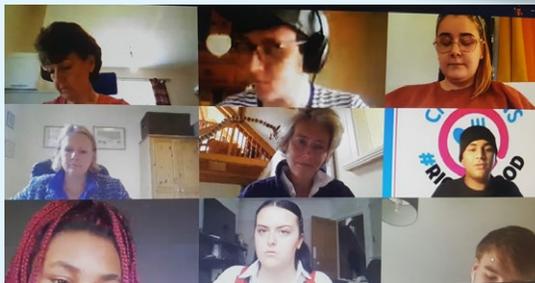
The Ambassadors and Dame Emma Thompson first met with Children's Minister Vicky Ford and Health Minister Jo Churchill last summer. They discussed the Right2Food Charter and the urgency of action given the impact of Covid on young people.

In the autumn, the Ambassadors had a further meeting with Minister Ford following the Government announcement to expand holiday provision and Healthy Start (see pages 10 and 13 for details). At this meeting, the Minister committed that her Department for Education (DfE) officials would meet regularly with the Ambassadors to gain their views on school food policy areas.

In December, the Young Food Ambassadors and Emma Thompson met the Leader of the Opposition, Keir Starmer, and his shadow education team Kate Green and Tulip Siddiq. They discussed children's right to food priorities, and the young people made the case for expanding eligibility of Free School Meals to more children, asking the Labour team to support them.

In early 2021, the Ambassadors presented to DfE's advisory board on the Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) scheme. Their presentation was sent out to local authorities delivering the programme. In a letter from Prime Minister Boris Johnson to Marcus Rashford, the Ambassadors are given a special shout-out: "I know colleagues at the Department for Education are especially grateful for the excellent presentation from the young food ambassadors at a recent HAF advisory group."

Our Scottish Ambassadors had the opportunity to meet with the Scottish Government ahead of the May 2021 elections. They had an engaging discussion on the Scottish National Party's (SNP) commitments to year-round holiday provision and Universal Free School Meals in primary school.



"I'M SO GRATEFUL FOR THE ENERGY AND DEDICATION SHOWN BY THE YOUNG FOOD AMBASSADORS, WHO HAVE SHARED THEIR EXPERIENCES WITH ME OF SCHOOL FOOD AND HEALTHY EATING."

VICKY FORD, NOVEMBER 2020

"I KNOW COLLEAGUES AT THE DEPARTMENT FOR EDUCATION ARE ESPECIALLY GRATEFUL FOR THE EXCELLENT PRESENTATION FROM THE YOUNG FOOD AMBASSADORS AT A RECENT HAF ADVISORY GROUP."

PRIME MINISTER BORIS JOHNSON, LETTER TO MARCUS RASHFORD, FEBRUARY 2021

MAKING A YOUTH MOVEMENT: VALLEY FEST

In July 2021, the Ambassadors joined forces with 80 other youth activists at the first ever Youth4Food Festival at Valley Fest, Somerset. They played a key role in firing up a youth movement, sharing ideas on how to influence food policy and make youths' voices count. The Ambassadors spoke on panels, gave keynote speeches and took part in a question time event on the National Food Strategy.

“IT HAS BEEN A PRIVILEGE TO SEE THE CAMPAIGN THAT WE WORK SO VERY HARD ON GAIN TRACTION IN THE MEDIA AND BEING IN THE PUBLIC EYE. ALTHOUGH WE HAVE HAD MANY HIGH-PROFILE SUCCESSES LIKE WINNING THE FOOD WRITERS GUILD AWARD, FOR ME THE MINOR WINS MEAN THE MOST, LIKE PEOPLE ASKING ME HOW THEY CAN GET INVOLVED TO CHANGE THE FOOD LANDSCAPE IN THE UK. HOWEVER, MORE DOES NEED TO BE DONE. I WANT TO SEE HARD POLICY CHANGE AND TO DELIVER ON OUR CHARTER, IN THE HOPES OF REACHING AS MANY CHILDREN AS POSSIBLE!”

BETH, 16, YOUNG FOOD AMBASSADOR, WALES



CONCLUSION

In our last report on policy progress on the Charter, we highlighted how the first few months of the Covid-19 pandemic had shone a light on the severe inequalities in children's food access and revealed the need for immediate policy action to address the issue of children's food insecurity. We advised that our Charter offers a set of clear, evidence-based solutions to Government to address these issues. A year later, we remain committed to supporting the implementation of the Charter.

In this report, we've again scrutinised policy progress across all four UK nations in relation to children's food security. We've revealed how the Covid-19 pandemic has propelled Government forward in progressing some key areas of policy, such as new commitments to tackle obesity and the expansion of holiday provision. However, we've also seen a disappointing lack of action that has left the nutritional needs of many disadvantaged children unmet across the UK. Children in food-insecure households continuing to miss out on Free School Meals is a case in point.

The recommendations in the Government-commissioned National Food Strategy for England provide Westminster with a clear roadmap towards tangible, long-term improvements for children's diets through reforming three public food measures – the Healthy Start scheme, Free School Meals and the Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme. These need to have sufficient, long-term funding, and be extended to all children who need them. Unacceptable disparities in these policies across the UK must also be overcome through much closer coordination between Westminster, Holyrood, the Senedd and Stormont to align policy frameworks and share learnings of good practice.

With solutions set out, it's up to the Governments to shift the dial and accelerate improvements on children's food insecurity. Young people have made their plea for progress and public support is behind them. All children deserve equal access to healthy, affordable food so they can thrive at school and lead bright, healthy futures. Achieving this goal is both necessary and possible. Let's hope the coming year brings the decisive action so clearly needed.

WITH SOLUTIONS SET OUT, IT'S UP TO THE GOVERNMENTS TO SHIFT THE DIAL AND ACCELERATE IMPROVEMENTS ON CHILDREN'S FOOD INSECURITY.



APPENDIX

POLICY PROGRESS REVIEW DETAIL



RECOMMENDATION 1.1.

Develop a plan to deliver this Charter: secure evidence to support policy decisions, drive cross-departmental action and share best practice across the four UK nations, reporting progress to parliament

ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		N. IRELAND	
MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

UK

The first data measuring household food insecurity across the UK were published by the Department of Work and Pensions in March 2021¹⁵. Government will now be reporting on this annually allowing tracking of the trends.

In response to the Covid pandemic, a Food to the Vulnerable Ministerial Task Force was temporarily set up by Government. *NFS: Part One* recommended that this task force was continued for a further year to July 2021 with responsibility for agreeing cross-departmental actions where necessary to support those who cannot access or afford food. However, this recommendation was not taken on board⁵⁹.

SCOTLAND

Although not specific to this Charter or to children, the Scottish Government published a report setting out the actions being taken in Scotland to protect human rights and ensure access to food for people on low incomes⁵⁴.

RECOMMENDATION 1.2.

Design and develop a monitoring system for school and nursery food to prove that money spent on school food is truly delivering quality meals for children

ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		N. IRELAND	
MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

ENGLAND

As part of its recommendation for an "Eat and Learn Initiative", *NFS: The Plan*⁴ recommends an accreditation

scheme is introduced that would require schools to, among other things, account for how school food funds are spent, comply with school food standards and ensure catering staff are trained to deliver quality meals. A White Paper responding to the National Food Strategy is expected from Government within six months of the NFS publication (by January 2022).

RECOMMENDATION 1.3.

Design and test school food menus and better eating environments for secondary schools with input from young people that align with school food standards

ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		N. IRELAND	
MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

SCOTLAND

As part of the process of reviewing their School Food regulations, the Scottish Government commissioned the Children's Parliament to undertake a consultation with children and young people to inform the review⁶⁰. The Government's Social Renewal Advisory Board also recommends that pupils should be involved in reviewing school meals⁷.

RECOMMENDATION 1.4.

Plan how to protect children's food security in future pandemics and emergencies: no child should ever be subject to hunger or poor quality food in a crisis again

ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		N. IRELAND	
MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

NO PROGRESS.

**RECOMMENDATION 2.1.**

Introduce Universal Infant Free School Meals in Wales and Northern Ireland to replicate existing schemes in Scotland and England

ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		N. IRELAND	
MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

NO PROGRESS.

RECOMMENDATION 2.2.

Put in place mandatory nursery food standards to fix the current variable food standards in pre-school settings

ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		N. IRELAND	
MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

NO PROGRESS.

**RECOMMENDATION 2.3.**

Expand the Healthy Start scheme: increase its value and the number of children who benefit from it, encouraging support from retailers (in England, Wales and Northern Ireland)

ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		N. IRELAND	
MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

UK

NFS: Part One recommended that the value of Healthy Start should be increased to £4.25 per week (from £3.10)². The increase in value was successfully introduced by Governments across England, Wales and Northern Ireland in April 2021. Similarly, the Best Start Foods payments in Scotland (the equivalent of Healthy Start) increased to £4.50 per week in August 2021⁴¹.

ENGLAND

Following a legal challenge, the UK Government has committed to expand the eligibility of the Healthy Start scheme to children with No Recourse to Public Funds. They are currently doing so on a 'temporary' basis until a full consultation has been held, but a date for this has not been confirmed³⁸.

*NFS: Part One*² also recommended extending eligibility to everyone on benefits, but was not committed to by Government and has therefore been revised in *NFS: The Plan*⁴ to expand the scheme to all households with pregnant women or children under five who are earning under £20,000 per year. It has also made some specific recommendations to increase uptake.

WALES

The HWHW strategy priorities for 2021–22 include raising wider awareness of the Healthy Start scheme among professionals and the public in order to drive up uptake, and reviewing the scheme to consider the impact²⁵.

SCOTLAND

Scotland have also taken measures to increase uptake by combining the application for Best Start Foods with application for the new Scottish Child Payment in order to make it easier for people to apply for multiple benefits in one go⁴².

A HEALTHY LUNCH EVERY DAY

RECOMMENDATION 3.1.

Extend the offer of Free School Meals to more children in need: apply the income threshold of £14,000 per year used in Northern Ireland to the rest of the UK for more children to qualify

ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		N. IRELAND	
MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

ENGLAND

NFS: *Part One* recommended that eligibility of FSMs should be extended to all children on Universal Credit or equivalent benefits². This was revised in the second report to increase the income threshold to £20,000 per year from the current level of £7,400⁴.

SCOTLAND

The Government's Social Renewal Advisory Board recommended that free meal provision be expanded to all pupils⁷. The Scottish Government has committed to universal FSMs for all primary school children. This will be rolled out progressively, with Primary 4 children receiving them as of August, and Primary 5 children due to receive them from January 2022⁹.

WALES

A Plaid Cymru amendment to next year's draft budget that would have extended eligibility to all children on Universal Credit was voted down in a debate in the Senedd¹³. Following this, the new Programme for Government has committed to review the eligibility criteria and extend as far as resources would allow¹⁵.

RECOMMENDATION 3.2.

Expand holiday provision permanently to support all children who normally receive Free School Meals when schools are closed

ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		N. IRELAND	
MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

ENGLAND

The HAF pilot programme was expanded to England-wide following the recommendation in NFS: *Part One*³⁴. NFS: *The Plan* calls for funding to be secured for the next three years⁴. Importantly, it also recommends that proper evaluation of the programme is required to assess whether concerns that it isn't currently comprehensive enough are founded.



SCOTLAND

The Government's Social Renewal Advisory Board's *If not now, when?* independent report⁶ recommended investment in holiday meal provision.

Funding of £21.75 million to provide targeted support to children on FSMs during the holidays in 2021–22 is being allocated to councils and can be used for direct payments, vouchers or food parcels⁹.

For the summer of 2021, the Scottish Government allocated local authorities £20 million to provide targeted provision of holiday activity programmes²² which provide food that must meet the school food standards²³.

WALES

The Welsh Government has committed to provide funding for children on FSM of £19.50 per week over school holidays in 2021–22 financial year²⁴. In addition, they have increased funding for the School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP) to provide for 14,000 children²⁵. SHEP did not run during 2020 due to Covid-19 (but funding was reallocated to FSM vouchers during the holidays, and a further £2.6 million was allocated to a Summer Holidays Activity Programme).

NORTHERN IRELAND

The Department of Education will provide payments of £13.50 per week to FSM-eligible children during all school holidays until April 2022^{36,61}. A proposal to bring a Private Members Bill to the Assembly on tackling holiday hunger by making this permanent was approved by the Speaker of the Northern Ireland Assembly, and is currently going through Assembly²⁹.

RECOMMENDATION 3.3.

Ensure children with No Recourse to Public Funds can access Free School Meals, continuing the commitments made during Covid-19

ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		N. IRELAND	
MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

ENGLAND

The NFS recommendation on expanding FSM eligibility to more children explicitly states that this should include children in need on No Recourse to Public Funds⁴. This would also make them eligible for free HAF places. Children on NRPF have been granted temporary access to FSM during the pandemic.

SCOTLAND

The expansion to universal eligibility in primary schools would mean that children with NRPF would also be able to access FSMs. However, no steps have been taken regarding ensuring secondary-school-age children with NRPF are guaranteed access to FSM, although local authorities have the power to provide them on a discretionary basis.

RECOMMENDATION 3.4.

Provide free nursery meals to children who are entitled to free childcare

ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		N. IRELAND	
MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

SCOTLAND

The Scottish Government had planned to introduce free



nursery food to all children in funded early learning care (ELC) as part of a wider expansion of ELC from August 2020, but was delayed due to Covid¹⁸. Both the expansion and free nursery meals have been introduced as of August 2021⁶². In addition, the new Scottish Milk and Healthy Snack Scheme has now been introduced which will provide free milk and a portion of fruit or veg per day to all pre-school children⁶³.

RECOMMENDATION 3.5.

Increase the Free School Meal allowance for secondary school children: raise the £2.70 currently allocated per meal per child to £4.00

ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		N. IRELAND	
MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

NO PROGRESS.



RECOMMENDATION 4.1.

Rename Free School Meals as the 'School Meal Allowance' to remove the negative associations felt by many children

ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		N. IRELAND	
MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

NO PROGRESS.

RECOMMENDATION 4.2.

Poverty-proof school food including protecting the anonymity of children who receive Free School Meals and making sure no child misses out on cooking classes due to lack of money

ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		N. IRELAND	
MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

ENGLAND

As part of a recommendation to expand food education in schools, NFS: *The Plan* advocates that ingredients for cooking classes should be freely provided for all children in early years and schools⁴.

SCOTLAND

The Scottish National Party (SNP) manifesto committed to remove curriculum charges for core subjects including home economics⁸.

RECOMMENDATION 4.3.

Develop guidance for schools on adding learning about food poverty and the right to food to the curriculum as part of food education

ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		N. IRELAND	
MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

NO PROGRESS.

RECOMMENDATION 4.4.

Increase funding for free breakfast clubs so that no child starts school on an empty stomach

ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		N. IRELAND	
MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

ENGLAND

Funding for the National School Breakfast Programme was extended for a further two years⁶⁴. However, the funding per child has been greatly reduced, and concerns have been raised that it is insufficient⁶⁵.

WALES

The Welsh Government's Programme for Government 2021–26 promises to maintain their commitment to provide free breakfasts for all primary school pupils¹⁵.

SCOTLAND

The Government's Social Renewal Advisory Board recommended that breakfast provision be extended to all children eligible for FSM⁷.

The Scottish National Party election manifesto committed to provide free breakfasts for all primary school pupils⁸, and they have additionally committed to trial free breakfasts in secondary school⁶⁶.

RECOMMENDATION 4.5.

Extend the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme to all children to support children to eat healthily even when budgets are tight at home

ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		N. IRELAND	
MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

NO PROGRESS.

RECOMMENDATION 4.6.

Ensure all schools have facilities for children to drink tap water for free: payment for bottled water should be banned on school premises

ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		N. IRELAND	
MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

SCOTLAND

The Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2020 state that every pupil must have access to free drinking water across the day⁶⁷.

RECOMMENDATION 4.7.

Make laws that take food costs into account when considering changes to support or wages for families

ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		N. IRELAND	
MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

NO PROGRESS.



HEALTH BEFORE PROFITS

RECOMMENDATION 5.1.

Make food packaging and marketing aimed at children more honest: clear labelling and reduced marketing and promotions of unhealthy food

ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		N. IRELAND	
MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

ENGLAND

Following a consultation, from April 2022 large businesses will be required to display calorie information on menus and food labels⁵². From October 2022, offers for unhealthy foods such as 'buy one get one free' and promotions in prominent locations in supermarket and online will be restricted⁵⁰.

WALES

The HWHW strategy 2021–22²⁵ priorities include working with stakeholders to promote positive marketing, consulting on mandatory calorie information for the out of home sector and working with the UK Government on how to improve marketing and labelling on infant food and drink.

RECOMMENDATION 5.2.

Stop the advertising of unhealthy food on TV, near schools, online and on social media

ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		N. IRELAND	
MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

ENGLAND

England have committed to introduce a ban on advertising of HFSS food and drink online and a 9pm watershed on TV by the end of 2022⁵¹.

WALES

The priorities of the HWHW delivery plan for 2021–22 include restricting advertising of unhealthy food and drink²⁵.

RECOMMENDATION 5.3.

Add a premium to business rates for fast food outlets operating near schools

ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		N. IRELAND	
MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

WALES

The HWHW strategy delivery plan for 2021–22 has re-committed to launch a detailed consultation on takeaways located near schools²⁵. This was delayed due to Covid-19.



RECOMMENDATION 5.4.

Make healthy food affordable: retailers and fast food chains should make sure healthier options are cheaper than unhealthy ones

ENGLAND		SCOTLAND		WALES		N. IRELAND	
MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021	MID 2020	MID 2021
●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●

ENGLAND

The NFS recommended the implementation of a reformulation tax on salt and sugar, which would have the effect of making unhealthy food more expensive but wouldn't directly make healthy food any more affordable for those on low incomes⁴.

WALES

The HWHW 2021–22 delivery plan re-commits to launch a detailed consultation setting out how improvements can be made to balance between price promotions and healthier items in shops, and considering where hot food takeaway stores are located in communities and near schools²⁵. This consultation had been delayed but the Welsh Government has committed to drive this forward over the next year.

GLOSSARY

- **Free School Meals (FSMs):** a means-tested Government programme for school-age children to receive a free school lunch every day during the school term. The scheme is for children in families earning less than £7,400 per year (after tax and benefits) in England and Wales, £7,500 in Scotland and £14,000 in Northern Ireland. The amount which entitled children receive on their cards varies between £1.90 and £2.80 per day across the nations and across primary and secondary schools.
- **Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) – England and Scotland:** all children are entitled to a free lunch in the first three years of school.
- **Best Start Foods scheme – Scotland:** a means-tested Scottish Government scheme for pregnant women and children under the age of three in low-income households, providing a prepaid card worth £4.50 per week which can be used to purchase formula milk, cow’s milk, pulses, eggs, or fresh, frozen or tinned fruit and vegetables. (Equivalent to the Healthy Start scheme in the rest of the UK.)
- **Healthy Start scheme – England, Wales and Northern Ireland:** a means-tested Government scheme for pregnant women and children under the age of four in low-income households, and all mothers under 18, providing vouchers worth £4.25 which can be used to purchase formula milk, cow’s milk, pulses, or frozen, fresh or tinned fruit and vegetables.
- **Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme – England:** a Government programme that provides holiday clubs free to children that are registered for Free School Meals. The Holiday clubs involve healthy food and enriching activities.
- **School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP) – Wales:** a school-based programme supported by the Welsh Government that provides healthy meals, education, physical activity and enrichment sessions to children in areas of social deprivation during the summer holidays.
- **No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF):** an immigration condition that prevents access to public funds such as benefits. Children living in households who have migrated to the UK and been granted leave to remain with the condition that they have No Recourse to Public Funds cannot claim Free School Meals.
- **Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales (HWHW) strategy – Wales:** a long-term strategy to prevent and reduce obesity in Wales legislated through the Public Health (Wales) Act 2017. Goals are set until 2030 but the 2021–22 delivery plan sets out milestones for the initial phase of the strategy.
- **Obesity Strategy – England:** the strategy outlines actions the UK Government will take to tackle obesity and help adults and children to live healthier lives. These include public health campaigns, expanding weight management services, and introducing policies that will help reshape food environments. This strategy has built on several previous obesity strategies including the Childhood Obesity Plans Chapters 1, 2 and 3.
- **National Food Strategy (NFS) – England:** an independent review commissioned by Government into the food system from ‘farm to fork’. *The NFS: Part One* report was published in July 2020 making three key recommendations on children’s food. The second and final instalment of the National Food Strategy (*NFS: The Plan*) was published in July 2021 providing updated recommendations as well as many other recommendations. The Government has six months to respond to these recommendations with a White Paper. (For the purposes of this report, recommendations made by the National Food Strategy do not count as policy progress unless there has been a commitment by Government to deliver them.)
- **If not now, when? report – Scotland:** a Social Renewal Advisory Board was set up by Scottish Ministers to make proposals that can renew Scotland once we start to emerge from the pandemic. The final report *If not now, when?* sets a course towards this future. The Board’s discussions were informed by the work of nine ‘policy circles’ – one of which was food. It makes several recommendations on addressing children’s food insecurity, many of which were included in the Scottish National Party’s manifesto for the 2021 election.
- **School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme (SFVS) – England (and parts of Scotland):** a Government programme that entitles every child in the first three years of state-funded schools to a piece of fruit or vegetable each school day in England and some local authorities in Scotland.

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Our Children's Right2Food Campaign is a nationwide initiative led by young people to ensure every

child in the UK can access and afford good food. Led by Young Food Ambassadors from across the UK and coordinated by the Food Foundation, the campaign calls for government action to tackle children's food insecurity and inequalities in childhood obesity, and puts forward its vision in the **Children's #Right2Food Charter**.

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Impact on Urban Health

PROJECT FUNDER

We are extremely grateful to our Children's Right2Food project funder, Impact on Urban Health

Impact on Urban Health is committed to achieving health equity by helping urban areas become healthier places for everyone to live. Impact on Urban Health is part of Guy's and St Thomas' Charity. **Visit: www.urbanhealth.org.uk**



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