



Dev Sharma



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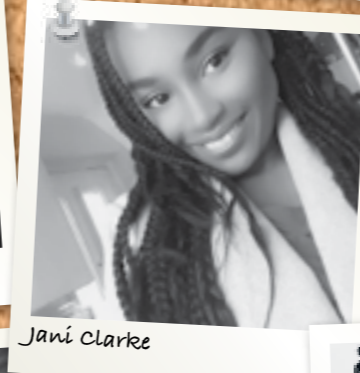
Asha Eva-Dodsworth



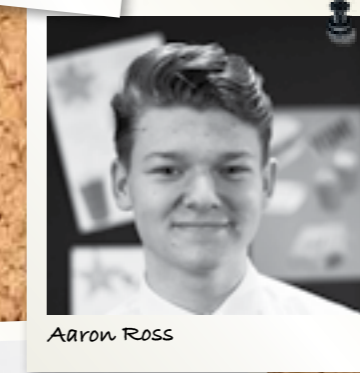
Jacob Kennedy



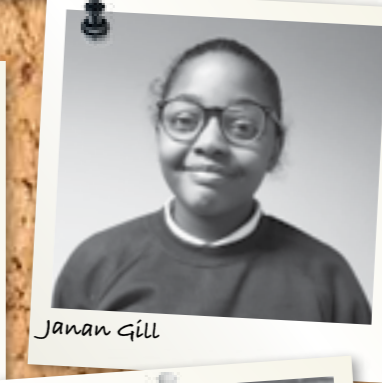
Tia Clarke



Jani Clarke



Aaron Ross



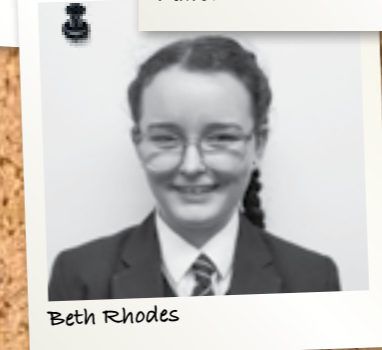
Janan Gill



Corey McPartland



Rabiya Hussain



Beth Rhodes



Arta Bareme



Klaudia Welke



[www.foodfoundation.org.uk/  
childrens-future-food-inquiry](http://www.foodfoundation.org.uk/childrens-future-food-inquiry)

# CHILDREN'S FUTURE FOOD INQUIRY





# EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

CHILDREN'S #Right2Food



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## The scale of the challenge

In a society that believes in compassion and justice, it is unacceptable that children's development is being restricted by the effects of poverty. The number of children experiencing symptoms of food insecurity, or whose family income is evidently insufficient to afford a healthy diet amounts to between 2.5 and 4 million; between 20% and 30% of all children in the UK. We cannot allow this to continue.

One in three children (4.1million) are living in poverty in the UK. For their families to be able to afford the Government's recommended diet, they would have to spend an estimated 35% of their income on food, once their housing costs have been taken care of. This is not a realistic option, given the restrictive effects of the rising cost of living, prevalence of low-paid, insecure jobs, and the freeze on benefits. On average, after housing costs, households with children spend around 18% of their income on food. A proportion of children living in poverty experience food insecurity. UNICEF estimates on the basis of a small but nationally representative survey that 2.5 million (19%) British children live in food insecure households. This means that there are times when their household does not have enough money to acquire enough food, or they cannot buy the full variety of foods needed for a healthy diet.

## The devastating consequences

Hunger is an extremely debilitating experience. It damages physical health. It is a cause of great personal distress. It is a social harm. Food insecurity brings profound anxiety and stress into family life which can trigger depression, aggressive behaviour in children, a sense of hopelessness, and overwhelming stress for parents struggling to give their children the best start. It affects children's school attendance, achievement and attainment: children who are hungry in class cannot concentrate or may be disruptive. In addition, the long summer holidays are estimated to result in weeks of learning loss for some children through a combination of social isolation, low levels of stimulation and activity, and poor diets. Food insecurity also affects the quality of children's diets, which brings increased risks of obesity and poor child growth.

The magnitude and importance of childhood food insecurity requires systemic change, rather than short term, ad hoc projects.

## Our findings

We focus on three food settings that characterise children's lives: pre-school settings, school and home, and examine the policies and programmes in place that are intended to support children to eat well. We look at these settings in all four UK nations. We document the evidence on whether these policies are reaching children living in poverty, and we present the views of children and those who work with them on how these policies work in practice.

CHILDREN'S #Right2Food

**“WE HAVE SPOKEN TO CHILDREN WHO HAVE SHOPLIFTED FOR FOOD, SCAVENGED FOR FOOD FROM BINS, EATEN TISSUE PAPER TO FEND OFF HUNGER, BARTERED FOR FOOD AT SCHOOL, SOLD DRUGS FOR FOOD, AND MUGGED OTHER CHILDREN FOR MONEY FOR FOOD.”**

LAURENCE GUINNESS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE,  
THE CHILDHOOD TRUST



## EARLY YEARS AND PRE-SCHOOL

**Lack of support for breastfeeding:** The first 1,000 days of a child's development from conception to their second birthday is the most important for laying down the foundations for health and development. Breastfeeding protects both the short-term and long-term health of both mother and baby, and is a more cost-effective way to feed a baby than buying infant formula. But many women who want to breastfeed do not get the support they need and the impact of this on poor households who struggle to afford costly formula milks is greater. This, in addition to weak legislation controlling the promotion of formula milks and supporting breastfeeding at work means that breastfeeding has become the exception rather than the norm across the UK.

**Policies not reaching those in need:** There are some policies in place to support parents bringing up babies in low income households, but we find their coverage is often very poor, and large numbers of households living in poverty miss out. As one example, the Healthy Start scheme provides a food voucher and coupons for free vitamins which only reach an estimated one third of young children living in poverty. The food voucher, currently worth £3.10 per week, has not been adjusted since 2009 and is not index linked nor aligned with the government's own estimates of the cost of fruit and vegetables. Scotland is about to launch an improved version of the scheme called Best Start Foods.

**Food missing in early years and pre-school provision:** Free childcare available across the UK (with extra provision for those on a low income living in England, Scotland and some areas of Wales from age two) has a very high uptake in

low income communities. In some areas, children can apply for free meals but the eligibility criteria are very narrow. Where food has to be paid for, it is likely that many parents in low income households send their toddlers with packed lunches to avoid unaffordable nursery meals. Packed lunches are often much less healthy than a cooked meal – indeed, just 1% of school packed lunches meet school food standards. There are no mandatory nutritional standards covering food served in childcare settings (except those attached to schools), though in Northern Ireland, pre-school settings have to comply with school food standards.

**“THESE ARE MY FAVOURITE BISCUITS. I’VE HAD THEM FOR SIX YEARS, SINCE 2012. NO-ONE ELSE LIKES THEM. I HAVE 19 FOR LUNCH.”**

CHILD ATTENDING SUMMER HOLIDAY PROVISION

## AT SCHOOL

**Inconsistent provision of free school meals:** Once children start school, for those trapped in poverty the food they eat during the school day is particularly important because the food at home may be insufficient or inadequate. Up to age seven, children in Scotland and England benefit from free school meals regardless of their family income, and uptake is reportedly high, but there is no universal provision in Wales and Northern Ireland. Children in England, and some in Scotland, benefit from the Free Fruit and Vegetable Scheme which provides them with a piece of fruit or a vegetable each day, but again Wales and Northern Ireland do not have the scheme. In Wales, all children in primary schools are entitled to free breakfast, but uptake is low among children living in poverty.

**Low income children at a disadvantage:** When children move up to junior school (from age seven), meals must be paid for unless families are earning less than £7,400 per year (net income and before benefits are taken into account). The income threshold is higher in Northern Ireland at £14,000. Children gave us many examples of those who they thought should be in receipt of free school meals but were not. These children were typically bringing in packed lunches to avoid paying the £2-£2.60 a day for a primary school meal, and we heard many stories of sparse or even empty lunch boxes taken to school in the hope that someone would fill them.

**Free school meal safety net has too many holes:** At secondary school, children typically visit the school dining hall and pay through an electronic card or fingerprint system. When we polled a nationally representative sample of 1,469 11-18-year-old children, we found that 23% of those

not receiving free school meals had gone without lunch because they couldn't afford it. The Inquiry also heard from several organisations who work with migrant children whose families had no recourse to public funds (NRPF) who were entirely excluded from free school meals. The exact numbers of children affected by NRPF are unknown. The case studies we heard about these particular children were extremely distressing.

**Free school meal allowance does not buy a meal:** Many children told us the free school meal allowance of £2.30 was insufficient to buy a meal, and precluded the purchase of a breakfast or snack in break time. The young people at Prestatyn High School in Wales made a film about this. Many of them felt that being on free school meals was stigmatised, and the scheme needed rebranding. Children also told us that in some schools they had to spend their meal allowance on purchasing bottled water as water was not freely available.

**Healthier school meals come at a price:** The children widely reported that healthy foods were the most expensive, and there were not enough healthy options. While there are school food standards enshrined in law in all four UK nations, there is very little formal monitoring of adherence to these standards, except in Scotland, and the young people reported countless examples of standards being breached.

## AT HOME

**Children bombarded with unhealthy food:** The children raised a number of concerns about their food environment out of school. The young people in Glasgow made a film about the advertising, marketing and promotion of junk food in their own communities, where junk food is often cheap and irresistible, even though they knew it was bad for them. Others spoke about food advertising on social media which depicted food they could never afford to eat. While there are some policies in place to restrict junk food marketing to children, there are significant loop holes which leave children highly exposed. They felt more could be done to address these issues.

**Cost of convenient, healthy food out of reach:** The children also talked about the price differential between healthy and unhealthy food, particularly in cases where parents didn't have time to cook from scratch. We found a number of neglected policy levers (e.g. regulating price promotions) which could help to redress the imbalance of price between healthy and unhealthy options. The proliferation of fast food outlets across the UK, particularly in deprived areas, was also highlighted. In Blackburn where two of our young Food Ambassadors live, 39% of all food outlets are selling fast food – the highest rates in the country. These often provide a more attractive alternative to school lunch, offering student discounts and frequently congregating within the vicinity of schools (in fixed sites or mobile vans). Policies to control this proliferation are starting to be used, but they represent an area ripe for further action by local authorities.

**Healthy food deserts during the holidays:** A number of experts contributing to the Inquiry highlighted the seasonal nature of food insecurity driven by school holiday

**“A BOY IN OUR CLASS SOMETIMES COMES TO SCHOOL WITH JUST TWO COLD FISH FINGERS.”**

A CHILD WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE INQUIRY

periods when childcare and food costs increase. The long summer break is an exciting opportunity for some children, but for others it is a time they dread. They may face long periods of social isolation with nothing to do, uncertainty as to where their next meal will come from and an awareness of the financial pressures on their families. A multitude of community programmes providing free activities and food for children and their families have been set up in recent years to respond to the needs of children who are, or should be, entitled to free school meals. However, the coverage of these programmes is extremely patchy and there is no clear national framework to support their delivery. Currently Wales is the most advanced, having made investment and a long-term commitment to its School Holiday Enrichment Programme.

## Conclusion

We face grave situation with children's food which is in urgent need of systematic leadership and action from all four governments across the United Kingdom. The vast majority of parents want to feed their children well, and this generation of parents and children is more aware than previous generations of the importance of healthy eating. But the odds are stacked against low income households: for many a healthy diet is not affordable, and less healthy food is available everywhere and heavily marketed to parents and children alike. Other costs of living have increased, and incomes have stagnated or declined. As a result, we are seeing more children and young people growing up in food insecure households where they can't rely on having enough to eat each day, with serious consequences for their quality of life, and for the mental and physical health of the next generation. Moreover, children living in poverty are eligible for vastly different levels of food provision and services depending on where they live. This is a postcode lottery with devastating, life-long consequences. Minimum standards are urgently needed.

The Inquiry's young food ambassadors have developed their #Right2Food Charter that could, if implemented, loosen the grip of food poverty on children. We commend this charter to the government.

**"IT'S RIGHT THAT WE HAVE A SAY IN WHAT WE EAT. WE THINK THERE NEEDS TO BE A NEW, INDEPENDENT CHILDREN'S FOOD WATCHDOG, WITH YOUNG PEOPLE INVOLVED IN THE LEADERSHIP, TO MONITOR AND IMPROVE OUR FOOD."**

YOUNG FOOD AMBASSADOR'S RIGHT2FOOD CHARTER

We recommend that an independent watchdog for children's food be established immediately to provide energetic and committed leadership to deliver quick results. Children and young people need to be involved in its leadership. It could possibly be housed by the Food Standards Agency in all four nations, staffed by secondees from relevant departments, networked across nations and with an independent board reporting to parliaments and informing the Children's Commissioners in all four nations. In the first instance the Watchdog must consider conducting a full economic costing of a series of actions which would even out provision across the UK and expand it where necessary. These actions are listed on page 56. Through this mechanism we hope to ensure that 2020 marks a true turning point for children's food across the UK.

What we feed our children is a defining factor of our nation's values. There is incredible leadership being shown in all corners of the British Isles, which demonstrates that food can build communities and underpin health and wellbeing. But millions of children are missing out on the opportunity to lay the foundations of a better future. This must change.

## Scope of the Inquiry

This Inquiry focuses on the food situation of children living in poverty across the UK. It draws on a wide variety of evidence but places a central focus on listening directly to school-age children about their experiences. This is the first attempt to directly and systematically seek the views of children and young people living in poverty across the UK.

There are many factors that determine what children in low income households eat. Some of these factors are a direct consequence of insufficient financial resources, but others are not and can be more readily attributed to the environment around them such as their home, school or neighbourhood. We considered all these factors in this Inquiry.

The Inquiry has sourced a wide variety of evidence over a 12-month period. This included:

1. Workshops with nearly 400 children between 11 and 16-years-old in 13 different locations around the UK
2. An academic review of child food insecurity commissioned by the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR)
3. Polling of young people aged 11-18 years
4. More than 100 submissions of evidence from people working with children
5. A UK wide policy review
6. Secondary analysis of government data on the affordability of a healthy diet.

This report has been developed by members of the Inquiry Committee and the Inquiry's fifteen young Food Ambassadors with support from the Food Foundation.



# STRUCTURE OF THE INQUIRY REPORT



The report has been developed by the Inquiry Committee and the Inquiry's fifteen young Food Ambassadors.

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For each of these we examine the policies and programmes in place which are intended to support children to eat well, and compile available data on their coverage across all four UK nations in these settings. We also present the views of children and those who work with them about how these policies work in practice, illustrating these views with quotes drawn directly from young people or those who submitted evidence to the Inquiry. We present some case studies which help to illustrate the lived experience of food insecurity. For each setting we present a best practice example demonstrating that policy and practice change are possible.

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# CHILDREN'S #Right2Food CHARTER

IT'S NOT RIGHT THAT CHILDREN ARE HELD BACK BY POOR DIETS AND HUNGER.

OUR CHARTER TELLS YOU HOW YOU CAN CHANGE THIS AND HELP US UNLOCK OUR POTENTIAL.



## 1 THE HEALTHY LUNCH GUARANTEE

All children need a healthy lunch to grow and thrive, whether in nursery or school, term time or holidays and especially if times are tough at home.

### THIS CAN BE ACHIEVED BY:

- Providing free nursery meals to children who are entitled to free childcare – as promised in Scotland.
- Increasing the offer of free school meals to a wider group of children throughout age bands (as in Northern Ireland)
- Expanding the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme so all school children can benefit (primary and secondary)
- Including migrant and undocumented children without recourse to public funds in free school meals
- Introducing mandatory food standards in all nurseries as in Northern Ireland
- Expanding holiday provision programmes that are educational, fun and provide access to healthy food as a right to all young people
- Introducing Universal Infant Free School meals in Wales and Northern Ireland.

## 2 THE HEALTHY FOOD MINIMUM

It's right that our parents and carers are supported to put healthy food on the table.

### THIS CAN BE ACHIEVED BY:

- Expanding the Healthy Start voucher scheme by increasing the voucher value and increasing the number of children who benefit. This should build on Scotland's creation of 'Best Start Foods'
- Introducing financial holiday allowances for school holiday periods for lower income families
- When considering changes to support or wages for families, make laws that take food costs into account, and unlock the constraints of poverty on what we can eat.

## 3 THE CHILDREN'S FOOD WATCHDOG

It's right that we have a say in what we eat. We think there needs to be a new, independent Children's Food Watchdog, with young people involved in the leadership, to monitor and improve our food.

### THIS CAN BE ACHIEVED BY:

- Monitoring and inspection of school and nursery meals
- Development of guidance for schools for food education including learning about UK food poverty, how it can be solved and the right to food in our curriculum
- Development of a national menu and best eating environments for secondary school students designed by young people that meets school food standards
- Stimulating learning on the best approaches to improving children's food across all four nations.

## 4 HEALTH BEFORE PROFITS

It's right that children's health come before the profits of big business.

### THIS CAN BE ACHIEVED BY:

- Stopping marketing aimed at children on packaging. Ending promotions of unhealthy foods and replacing these with health warnings similar to those featured on cigarette packets
- Tackling marketing of junk food on TV, near schools, online and on social media
- Increasing business rates for fast food shops near schools and using the funding to support food education and extended school day projects.

## 5 STOP THE STIGMA

We shouldn't be made to feel ashamed. In a decent society no-one should be struggling to put decent food on the table.

### THIS CAN BE ACHIEVED BY:

- Renaming free school meals as the "school meal allowance"
- Increasing the meal allowance for secondary school to a minimum of £4 per day, and allowing it to be used at any time of day and carried over between days
- Banning water being sold in schools and making it freely available for everyone throughout the school day
- "Poverty proofing" our schools to ensure that no one is left out of activities like cookery and ensuring those on free school meals are kept anonymous.

### PLEASE NOTE

The recommendations in this report cover areas of policy which have varying levels of devolution across the four UK nations. They are addressed to all four governments, local authorities, schools and businesses, according to their powers.

# WHO'S BEHIND THE INQUIRY?



## 15 YOUNG FOOD AMBASSADORS

**AARON ROSS, 20,**  
EASTERHOUSE, GLASGOW, SCOTLAND

"People struggle to afford to pay rent and buy food for their families and themselves. Most people don't want to ask for help as they are too ashamed or embarrassed about the issue. I wanted to be a part of this project to bring awareness to the rising issue of food poverty, and to help by providing better support to those in need."

**ARTA BARENE, 15,**  
PORTADOWN, NORTHERN IRELAND

"Food poverty is a growing issue that can affect us all at some point in our lives. There is a huge stigma around this issue, meaning not many want to admit that they may be struggling. We need to combat this stigma so food poverty is no longer a 'taboo' topic and people can access the help they need."

**ASHA EVA-DODSWORTH, 12,**  
WALNEY, BARROW-IN-FURNESS, ENGLAND

"I have been brought up in a single-parent family. Mum has always done her best to provide for us but treats have been few and the food shop has always been done on a budget. I know people who experience food poverty and I want to help them."

**BETH RHODES, 12,**  
PRESTATYN, WALES

"Last year I was diagnosed with Type 1 diabetes. I had to learn a lot about food and nutrition in a short period of time. Food nutrition for young people is really important in all areas of their lives, from school, to home, to ensuring children have a balanced diet during the school holidays."

**COREY MCPARTLAND, 15,**  
DARWEN, ENGLAND

"I have experienced food poverty from a young age. Most people don't understand what it is about. It's not right that young people go hungry, or can't access or afford the food they like or want. By speaking out we can change this."

**DEV SHARMA, 14,**  
LEICESTER, ENGLAND

"My friends have warm food at school thanks to free school meals, but then at home have nothing. It absolutely sickens me that they only have two meals a day, and I want to do everything within my power in my role as an ambassador to stand up for thousands of children around the UK."

**FAYETH JONES, 12,**  
RHYL, WALES

"I am a young carer and a volunteer at The King's Storehouse Foodbank. Everyone should have the same chance in life and not go through food poverty. Everyone should know about healthy diets and should be educated that not everyone can afford to get food."

**JACOB KENNEDY, 17,**  
PARKHEAD, GLASGOW, SCOTLAND

"Food poverty has never happened to me but I hope that by becoming a Food Ambassador I can help my community and develop a better understanding of the issues concerning food insecurity."

**JANAN GILL, 10,**  
LAMBETH, LONDON, ENGLAND

Janan has experienced food insecurity for most of her life. At its most acute, her mother was forced to choose between feeding Janan and her four older siblings or paying the rent. She wants people to have empathy towards families with empty cupboards.

**JANI CLARKE, 16,**  
HUDDERSFIELD, ENGLAND

"Growing up in a single parent home does sometimes have its problems with providing food, so I think mixing my passion with giving young people a voice and providing them with a basic need such as food couldn't be more brilliant."

**KLAUDIA WELKE, 17,**  
PORTADOWN, NORTHERN IRELAND

"People do not feel comfortable speaking about food poverty; their self-esteem is down. We shouldn't feel ashamed because we don't have as much as other people. If people open up then others will help."

**OLGA LENKIEWICKZ, 13,**  
GLASGOW, SCOTLAND

"I like watching movies and roller skating and I strongly believe that tackling food poverty is a very important topic that needs to be talked about."

**RABIYA HUSSAIN, 16,**  
HUDDERSFIELD, ENGLAND

"My passion for food isn't just because it tastes good, it's because I know what it's like to not have the right amount of food in your system to keep you going. I need people to know that food inequity is a thing, and people who may be suffering need to know they can get help."

**SAVANNAH ROSS, 16,**  
EASTERHOUSE, GLASGOW, SCOTLAND

"So many people struggle on a day-to-day basis with money, and after paying rent there may only be a few pounds left over which could get you a meal from any fast food restaurant and that could fill your tummy for the whole day. Life is not as easy as everyone makes it out to be."

**TIA CLARKE, 16,**  
DARWEN, ENGLAND

"Food poverty happens all around me. When you are hungry you get in a mood. Then you are in a mood all day and you just want food. To tackle food poverty, schools should get more involved – they should look at pupils' personal experiences, and the government should help as well."



## INQUIRY COMMITTEE MEMBERS



### SHARON HODGSON MP (CO-CHAIR)

"It was a great privilege to co-chair this important Inquiry into food insecurity amongst young people, and to hear from them directly about their own experiences of accessing food. I was taken aback by some of the things the Committee heard, and I hope that the government will also be shocked into action as a result of this report. That so many children and young people are going hungry in this country is shameful, and I believe that the government must take urgent action to ensure that children and families have access to affordable and healthy food."



### ANNE-MARIE TREVELYAN MP

"Children are tomorrow's generation. The voices of children have been central to this report, providing a roadmap of how we can better support our children and families to eat well for the benefit of all."



### IAN LUCAS MP

"This report highlights the urgent need to address children's food so that every child can have a fair start, regardless of where they live in the UK."



### ALISON GARNHAM

CHIEF EXECUTIVE, CHILD POVERTY ACTION GROUP

"There can be no stronger reason to act on child poverty than to hear from children themselves about the hunger they experience and the policy failure to stop it and it's ultimately only by addressing inadequate family incomes that we can finally respond to the problems the children in this report are telling us about. This report sets out some first steps to follow to begin to bring child hunger to an end."



### KERRY MCCARTHY MP

"This is a very important and timely report, highlighting the often-hidden problem of child hunger. It's shameful that in a country like Britain so many children are regularly missing meals, or, because of family circumstances or where they live, rarely get to eat good, healthy food. During this Inquiry we heard directly from the children themselves, with compelling accounts of their own experiences and those of their classmates: these are voices the government must not ignore."



### FRANK FIELD MP

"Too many children in our country are in poverty and are hungry. We must urgently work together to ensure that every child has their minimum food needs adequately met."



### DR PHILIPPA WHITFORD MP (CO-CHAIR)

"It is clear that children can only learn and develop if they are well nourished and in good mental health. While it was very positive to hear of food security initiatives happening across the UK, it was also heart-breaking to hear our young Food Ambassadors describe their experiences of hunger, its impact on their ability to concentrate in school and the constant stress they and their families are facing. Indeed, when chairing my evidence session with them, I had to put my glasses on to hide the fact I was crying!"



### THE LORD BISHOP OF DURHAM

"Listening to the voices of children and young people themselves on what it feels like to have times of hunger that distract them from schoolwork and life more broadly is disturbing. We need to heed the challenges such hunger poses."



### LORD DAVID WATTS

"The findings in the report are stark and have revealed the reality for so many children living in the UK. We all have a role to play, and we must work together to improve children's food for this generation and the next."



### PAULINE LEESON, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, CHILDREN IN NORTHERN IRELAND

"To ensure no child goes hungry and to demonstrate how hunger and its underlying causes are impacting on families this report is vital in hearing the voices of children and young people. Children in Northern Ireland will be using this vital learning tool to continue to advocate for systemic change in Northern Ireland to eliminate food poverty."



### MATTHEW REED, CHIEF EXECUTIVE MARIE CURIE AND FORMERLY CHIEF EXECUTIVE, THE CHILDREN'S SOCIETY

"This Inquiry is of national importance. The voices of the children who took part are loud and clear and should cause every policy maker who has the power to change their future to sit up, take note and act."



### BRUCE ADAMSON, CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE'S COMMISSIONER FOR SCOTLAND

"Food insecurity is a violation of children's human rights. Children have the right to be free from hunger, food insecurity and malnutrition. Food insecurity impacts negatively on children's physical health, mental health, and developmental outcomes. The young Food Ambassadors working on the Inquiry have been acting as courageous human rights defenders: defending their own rights and the rights of others. Through their Charter they demand change from decision makers and they must not be ignored. Child poverty and food insecurity must be recognised as a significant children's human rights issue, and a sustained, systematic and human rights-based approach at both national and local levels is needed to tackle and eradicate it."



### RUTH SMEETH MP

"I am pleased that this report has allowed the voices of young people to be heard. Some of their experiences are heart-breaking. We should all learn from the bravery and dignity that they have shown in telling their own stories."



### PROFESSOR RUSSELL VINER, PRESIDENT, ROYAL COLLEGE OF PAEDIATRICS AND CHILD HEALTH

"Child poverty is predicted to increase over the next decade and lies at the root of many risk factors for infant mortality and children and young people's health. Every child has the right to the best possible health, and it is imperative that we do more to tackle poverty and inequality – with children and young people at the centre. That's why this #Right2Food Charter, developed by young people themselves, is hugely welcomed. At RCPCH we have long been calling on Government to take action in many of these areas, and we urge them to take forward these recommendations as a matter of priority."



### ROBERTA BLACKMAN-WOODS MP

"This is an excellent report which has come out of a hugely important and timely Inquiry. Hunger, particularly in children of school-age, is becoming more and more evident every day. Not eating properly has a huge impact on children's educational attainment and their wider development. It is really important that the government addresses the need for universal free school meals for school-age children, and the findings of this report make it easier to do so."

# CONTRIBUTORS

INQUIRY COORDINATION	Food Foundation with advice and support from Lindsay Graham and Dr Rys Farthing
WORKSHOPS WITH CHILDREN AND YOUNG PEOPLE	Fixers
PROJECTS WITH YOUNG PEOPLE	Fixers
RECRUITMENT OF THE YOUNG AMBASSADORS	Fixers
POLLING OF CHILDREN	Childwise
ACADEMIC LITERATURE REVIEW	National Institute for Health Research (NIHR)
PORTAL	Dr Jo Pike, Leeds Beckett University
ORGANISING EVIDENCE HEARINGS AND LAUNCHES	Children in Northern Ireland, Children in Scotland, Children in Wales, Food Sense Wales
ANALYSIS OF EVIDENCE SUBMISSIONS	Professor Iain Wilkinson, University of Kent
POLICY ANALYSIS	Food Foundation (Jenny Sutherland and Indu Gurung) and Nourish Scotland
PROVIDING POVERTY DATA	Department for Work and Pensions



THE INQUIRY WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN POSSIBLE WITHOUT THE FINANCIAL SUPPORT PROVIDED BY:



WE ARE EXTREMELY GRATEFUL TO THE LARGE NUMBER OF PEOPLE WHO PROVIDED COMMENTS ON THE DRAFT REPORT. THEY ARE TOO NUMEROUS TO MENTION, BUT THEIR INPUT WAS INVALUABLE. THANK YOU.

## INQUIRY AMBASSADOR

DAME EMMA THOMPSON

We are living in uncertain and turbulent times with much division appearing in so many areas of our society. We are also witnessing an ever-widening gap between those who have and those who have not. Across the country we see families struggling to make a living and it is now estimated that over four million children in the UK are living in poverty.

Poverty means many things, but one of the most devastating effects of living below the bread line is not having access to affordable and healthy food. Food insecurity is now being experienced by children across the UK at unprecedented levels. For millions of our children not having a hot meal at school or home is a regular occurrence and this can lead to stunting, illness and an inability to concentrate or learn at school. This is the sort of social picture we used to read about in Dickens.

What is it really like for these children who so often hide their suffering as they are ashamed? What is it really like to not know where your next meal is coming from? What can adults learn from children's lived experiences of food insecurity? And what do the younger generation believe can be done to alleviate the suffering of so many of our children?

We need to urgently deliver strong, robust policies to tackle the issues which the Inquiry has highlighted. I can't believe the spectre of hungry children and helpless parents is stalking this very rich country in the 21st century and I feel deeply ashamed about it.

Teachers, Carers, GP's, Youth Workers and hundreds of young people have fed into this report. It represents a unique opportunity for us to hear directly from those experiencing the effects of food insecurity every day, and the report's recommendations provide crucial direction for building a healthier future.

# WHY THE INQUIRY?



Over recent years, there have been several studies examining children's relationship with food. However, there have been few studies that have focused on children's food from a low-income perspective, and none of them have included the thoughts and experiences of young people themselves. That is why the Children's Future Food Inquiry aimed to bridge that gap. We spoke and listened to young people who have experienced and witnessed food insecurity, whether it be themselves and their family, or their friends when they are at school.

If we are to tackle children's food insecurity, then we have to listen to what children and young people are telling us. Throughout the Inquiry, we heard worrying stories of limited access to free water in schools; pupils trying to stretch their free school meal money far enough so that they don't go hungry, and buying the cheapest and unhealthiest foods as a result; and young people rationing their own food at home, so that other family members have enough to eat. We found that young people were sacrificing their own needs for others, which whilst caring and admirable, I believe that no child should ever be put in that position.

We have a duty to encourage children and young people to eat a healthy diet, but the Inquiry found that this is unaffordable and unsustainable for many young people living in poverty. Children living in deprived areas are around twice as likely to be obese compared with their peers in less deprived areas. There are a number of reasons why this is; but they are not being focussed on in any of the government's Childhood Obesity Plans.

Children are falling through the safety net, and families are having to rely on charities and service providers for things such as breakfast clubs, holiday provision and foodbanks. We know that families use these services, but no one asks children their perception of them or why families are using them.

It is simply unacceptable that in the UK, children and their families are going hungry because they cannot afford food or do not have access to it. That such large numbers of children and young people are finding themselves struggling to get access to healthy food means that a whole generation will not grow up into healthy adults. We have a duty to younger generations to get this right.

The stories that young people told the committee members throughout this inquiry were both illuminating and heart-breaking, but it is important that adults, especially politicians, take them seriously so that we can truly tackle food insecurity, particularly amongst young people and their families.

**CO-CHAIR, SHARON HODGSON MP**

# SCOPE OF THE INQUIRY

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CHILDREN'S #Right2Food

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This Inquiry focuses on the food situation of children living in poverty across the UK. It draws on a wide variety of evidence but places a central focus on listening directly to school-age children about their experiences. While children's food has been the subject of investigation by others, this is the first attempt to systematically talk to children living in poverty and seek their views.

A proportion of children living in poverty experience food insecurity. This means that there are times when their household does not have enough money to acquire enough food, or they cannot buy the full variety of foods needed for a healthy diet, or their household members worry that this may happen in the future.

Adults in food insecure households may protect their children from the worst effects of food insecurity, but even when children's nutritional intake is not affected, they may be affected by the stress and other consequences of living in a food insecure household. It is quite possible for households to have periods of food insecurity which may be seasonably predictable (like school holidays), sudden (e.g. if someone becomes ill or loses their job) or chronic.

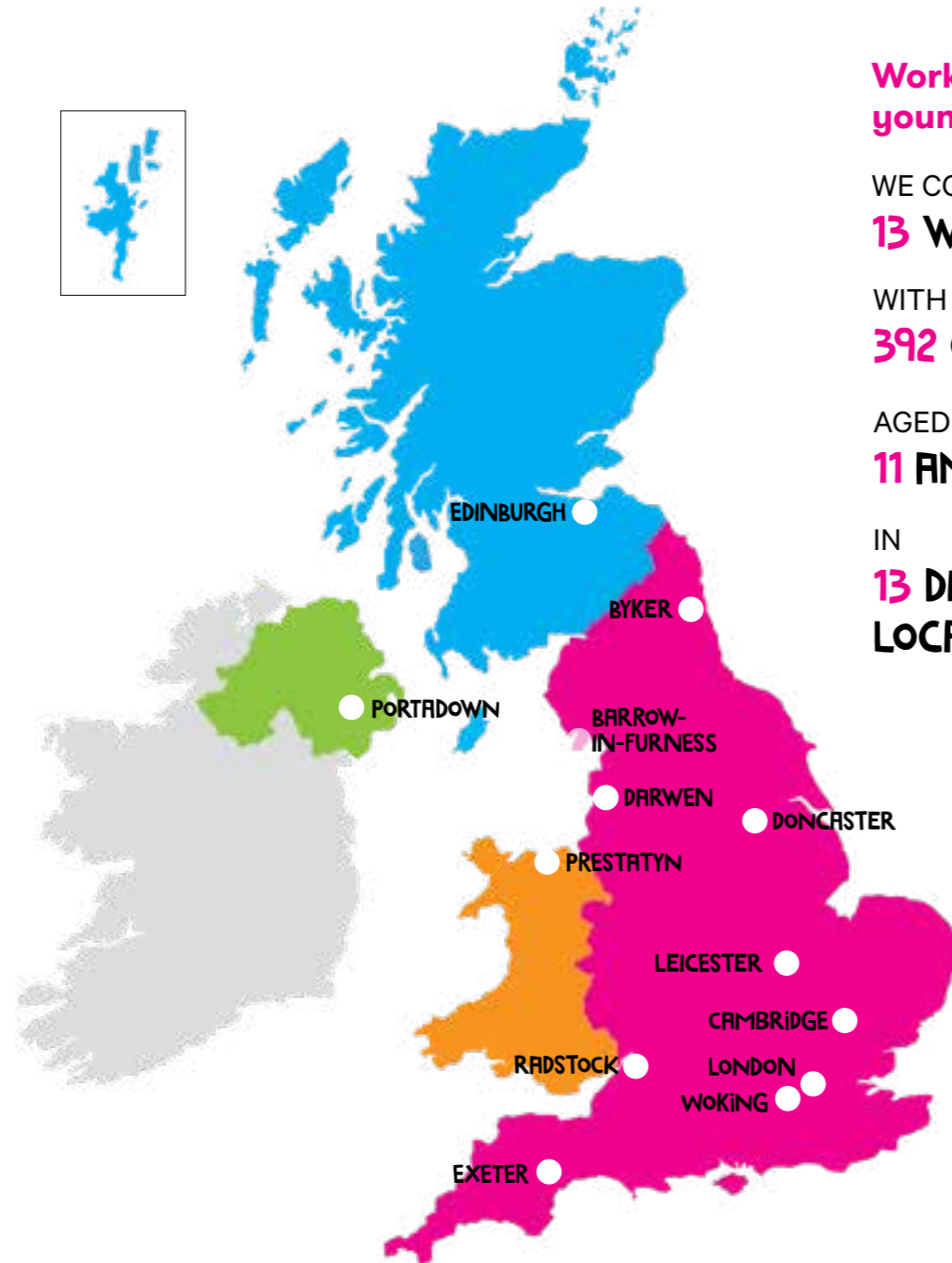
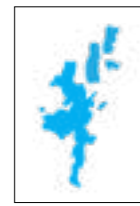
There are many factors which determine what children in poor households eat. Some of these factors are a direct consequence of insufficient financial resources but others are not and can be more readily attributed to the environment (homes, schools and neighbourhoods) around them. We consider all these factors in this Inquiry. The Inquiry was originally set up to focus on schoolage children but received a number of submissions of evidence focused on early years, so the report covers all ages 0-18 years.



CHILDREN'S #Right2Food

**WHILE CHILDREN'S  
FOOD HAS BEEN  
THE SUBJECT OF  
INVESTIGATION BY  
OTHERS, THIS IS THE  
FIRST ATTEMPT TO  
SYSTEMATICALLY TALK  
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THEIR VIEWS.**

# THE INQUIRY'S EVIDENCE BASE



## Workshops with young people

WE CONDUCTED **13 WORKSHOPS**

WITH **392 CHILDREN**

AGED BETWEEN **11 AND 16**

IN **13 DIFFERENT UK LOCATIONS**



## Workshops with young people

We conducted 13 workshops with **392 children** aged between 11 and 16 in **13 different locations** around the UK.

Many of the young people involved came from deprived backgrounds and were entitled to free school meals. The young people were asked about food at school and how food affects their home life and relationships as well as how it is portrayed in the media.

The organisation Fixers led this work, and have the highest standards in place for child safeguarding.

**"EVIDENCE SUGGESTS THAT CHILDREN HAVE **UNIQUE EXPERIENCES** OF FOOD INSECURITY WHICH ARE OFTEN **UNKNOWN TO ADULTS**" (1-3)**

## An academic 'Rapid Review' of child food insecurity

This was commissioned by the National Institute of Health Research (NIHR) and conducted by academics at the Health Services Research Unit at the University of Aberdeen. The objective of the review was to determine the nature, extent and consequences of food insecurity affecting children **aged 18-years-old and below** in the UK. This rapid review included **109 studies**.

## Polling of young people

A series of questions were included in the Childwise Monitor Omnibus survey in September and October 2018.

In total, **1,469** 11-18-year-olds from **46** schools responded to the survey. This included five schools in Wales, six schools in Scotland and three schools in Northern Ireland. The children and young people completed online surveys in school in lessons such as ICT, PSHE and form time.

## Expert witness evidence

Leeds Beckett University developed an online portal to receive evidence from adults and children for the Inquiry. The questions asked on the portal were aimed at adults with personal or professional experience of children's food. The questions aimed at children were about their

personal experience, and were piloted in two schools. The portal was disseminated through **411** organisations across all four UK nations. A total of **104** evidence submissions were received through the portal and were received on behalf of individuals (28) and organisations (76). Organisations included children's centres, food banks, schools, healthcare professionals, academics, faith organisations, housing associations, community advice centres, holiday kitchens and arm's-length bodies.

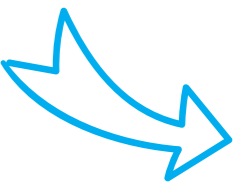
In addition, **23** witnesses attended an oral evidence session with the Committee. Six of these witnesses had submitted written evidence in advance. A full list of those who attended the oral evidence hearings are in Annex A.

## Policy review

We conducted a review identifying policy instruments in **England, Wales, Scotland** and **Northern Ireland** that were related in some way to children's food. Using the results from the workshops with young people, we identified key themes that children highlighted as areas of concern, and looked at how these issues might be linked to the policy levers for each nation in order to identify potential gaps, challenges to implementation or whether the issues could not be addressed by policy at all. The policy mapping for England and Scotland was conducted in March 2018, and in January 2019 for Wales and Northern Ireland. Whilst the review was as comprehensive as possible, emerging policy areas are not considered. Where data were available on coverage of a particular entitlement (e.g., number of KS1 children eligible for free school meals) we compared this to the number of children living in poverty for the target age group using data on children living in poverty from the Households Below Average Income survey (4) and age-specific population estimates for the UK (5).

## Secondary analysis of government data on the affordability of the diet

To better understand the affordability of healthy diets in the UK, we conducted a secondary analysis of the **Living Cost and Food Survey (LCFS)** and the **Family Resources Survey (FRS)** (6)(7), in which we considered the estimated cost of the government's recommended Eatwell Guide in relation to UK household expenditure on food and non-alcoholic drinks, and compared it to household disposable income.



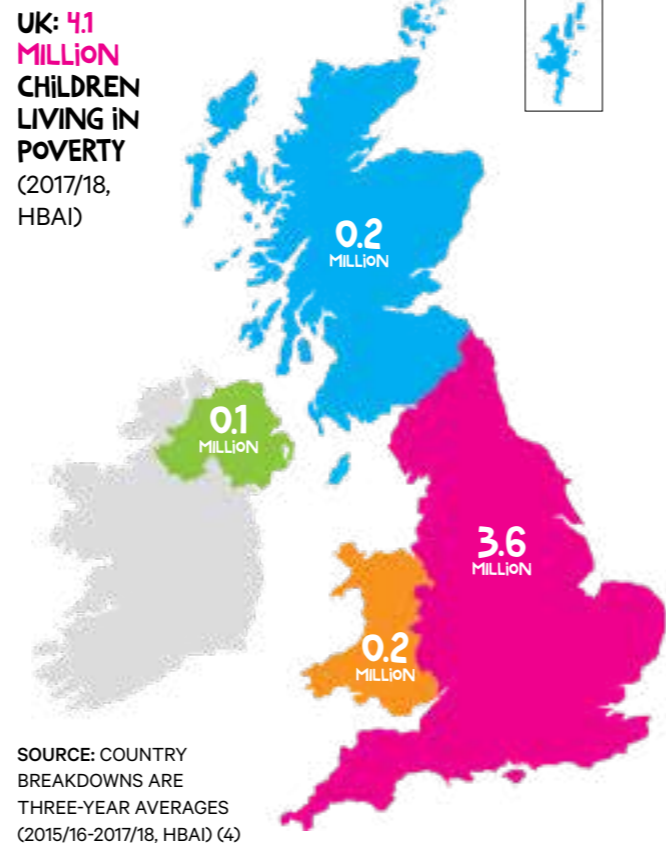
# THE SCALE AND IMPACT OF CHILD FOOD INSECURITY

## The scale of the problem

There is no government estimate of the number of children who are living with food insecurity in the UK (though the government has recently committed to measure food insecurity and annual data will start to be published in April 2021). There are a number of sources of data which can be used to build a sense of the scale of the problem, but these data tell us very little about which children are most at risk and where our efforts should be concentrated. They also tell us very little about what food insecurity really means for children's daily lives.

## Children living in poverty

The government reports on the number of households with below average income (8). It uses a relative measure of income and takes households earning below 60% of median equivalised income (after housing costs) as having below average income. For the most recent data from 2017/18, this threshold equates to an income of £367 per week (£19,074 per year) for a couple with two children. This is the measure which the Child Poverty Action Group uses to define children living in poverty. By this definition, 30% or 4.1 million children in the UK in 2017-18 were living in poverty. Children are defined as those 16-years-old or younger, or 16-19 years and not married or co-habiting, and in full-time non-advanced education.

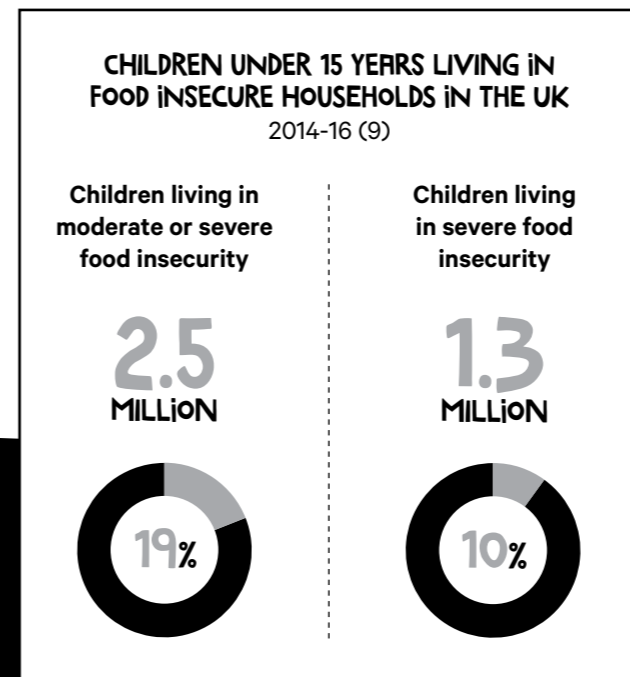


**“WE HAVE SPOKEN TO CHILDREN WHO HAVE SHOPLIFTED FOR FOOD, SCAVENGED FOR FOOD FROM BINS, EATEN TISSUE PAPER TO FEND OFF HUNGER, BARTERED FOR FOOD AT SCHOOL, SOLD DRUGS FOR FOOD, AND MUGGED OTHER CHILDREN FOR MONEY FOR FOOD.”**

LAURENCE GUINNESS, CHIEF EXECUTIVE, THE CHILDHOOD TRUST

## Experience of food insecurity

The United Nations recommends that the prevalence of food insecurity is best estimated using a set of questions which ask people directly about their experiences. These questions have been widely tested in many countries and proven to be robust when compared to income and nutritional data. These questions are yet not routinely asked in the UK, but the UN has done three consecutive surveys in 2014-2016 and UNICEF has further analysed the data to understand the proportion of children living in households where an adult reports food insecurity. The questions did not directly ask about children's experiences of food insecurity. It is estimated that 2.5 million children are living in moderate or severe food insecurity in the UK.

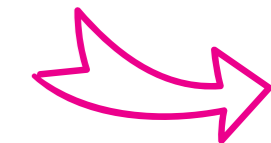
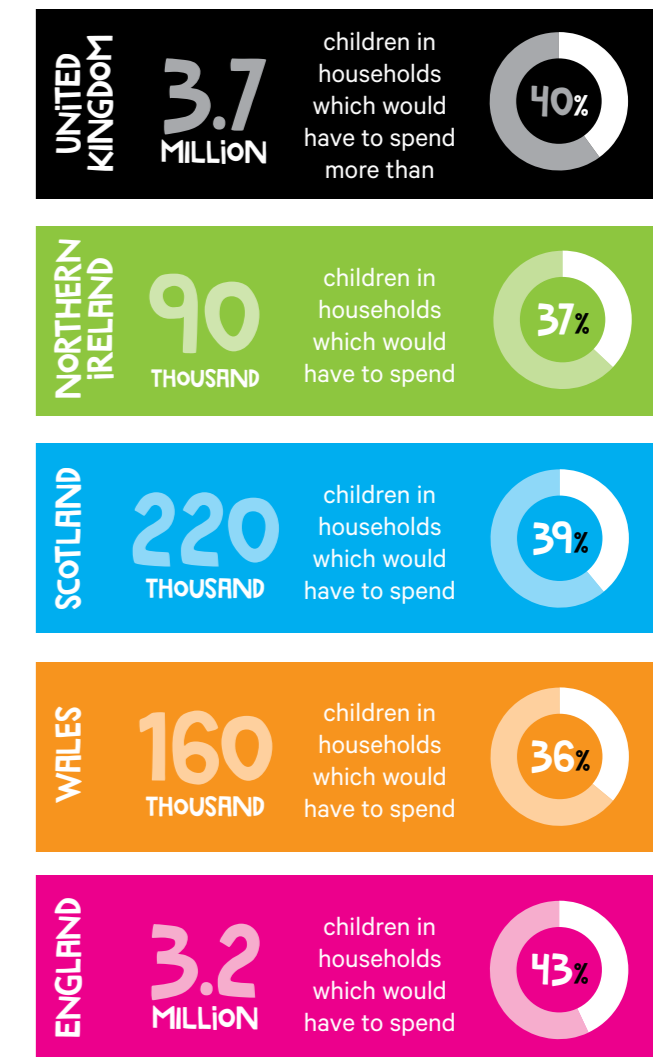


Using similar methods to those used by UNICEF, national survey data from 2017 showed that 8% of adults (3.9 million) living in England, Wales, and Northern Ireland are food insecure. These data were gathered from over 3,100 adults across England, Wales, and Northern Ireland as part of the 2016 Food and You Survey commissioned by the government's Food Standards Agency. Sixteen percent of those aged 16-24 and 11% of those aged 25-34 lived in food insecure households, compared with 1%-2% of those aged 65 and over. Those who were more likely to report having made a change to their buying and eating arrangements in the last 12 months for financial reasons were women (49% compared with 38% of men), younger respondents (58%-61% of those aged 16 to 34 compared with 13%-21% of those aged 65 and over) and respondents in households with children aged under 16 (58% compared with 37% in adult-only households) (10). The Scottish government has also measured food insecurity as part of the 2017 Scottish Health Survey which showed that 8% of adults in Scotland experienced food insecurity in the previous 12 months. Worrying about running out of food in Scotland was found to be more prevalent among: younger people aged 16-44 years (13%); single adult households (20%) and single parent households (21%)(11).

## Affordability of a healthy diet

As part of this Inquiry the Food Foundation compared the cost of a diet based on the government's Eatwell Guide with household income and expenditure (also using government data) (6,8). The estimated weekly cost of the Eatwell Guide for a family of two adults and two children is £103 (£42 for one adult). When comparing this cost to income, they estimated that 3.7 million children lived in households that earn less than £15,860 per year, and that these households would need to spend more than 40% of their income (after paying for their housing) on food in order to afford the Eatwell Guide diet. In contrast average households with children in Britain spend 18% of their expenditure on food (6).

## THE POOREST 20% OF CHILDREN AND % DISPOSABLE INCOME (AFTER HOUSING COSTS) NEEDED FOR A HEALTHY DIET:



# THE IMPACT ON CHILDREN'S LIVES

CHILDREN'S #Right2Food

## Households meeting the Minimum Income Standard

Loughborough University's work on the Minimum Income Standards has developed a minimum basket of goods required for an acceptable standard of living. This work also includes the cost of food.

Using this standard, analysis conducted as part of Families and Food in Hard Times found that between 2005 and 2013 the proportion of families spending less than the amount needed to obtain a socially acceptable, healthy diet rose to 52% in 2013 from 41% in 2003. Lone parents and large families are most likely to be spending below this level (12).

## A GENERATION OF CHILDREN WHO HAVE GROWN UP WITH FOOD BANKS

When we polled children aged 11-18 years, 73% said they knew what a food bank was. Of these children, 4% said their family had used one, and 59% said their family had donated to one.



## Food insecurity has devastating consequences on children's lives. It affects: Behaviour, mental and emotional wellbeing, and attainment

The majority of the relevant studies in the Rapid Review conducted for this Inquiry reported an association between food insecurity and children's emotional and mental health symptoms, such as externalising and internalising behaviours, aggressive behaviours, hyperactivity, impaired social skills, and atypical emotional symptoms. Food insecurity may also indirectly affect the security of attachment in children through depression and parenting processes. Behaviour is affected directly by prolonged periods between meals, and hunger, but also by the stress which food insecurity brings to families and parents, which in turn affects children's levels of anxiety (13).

*"Yes, I was very stressed and then panicking that- panic, like panic attacks, things like that. Because I'm thinking too much. I'm thinking 'what are my kids going to eat tomorrow and after tomorrow?'. I was thinking 'well, I don't know what I have to do.'"*  
(Quote provided from research by University of Liverpool).

Caregivers from food insecure households are more likely to suffer from depression or depressive symptoms than those who are food secure (14–20). Evidence was presented to the Inquiry from on-going work at the University of Liverpool on people attending food banks, which included reports that feelings of depression, stress and hopelessness were salient throughout the interviews.

*"If you're not eating it can really trash your confidence. Makes it hard to concentrate – instead of thinking about what you're learning, you're thinking about food."*  
(Young Food Ambassador)

In extreme situations, food insecurity can lead to socially unacceptable behaviour. An Executive Head Teacher told the Inquiry that in her school in Birmingham, they had a case of a family shoplifting in the supermarket, and of children stealing food from the bins.

*"These children are tired and they're lethargic and it takes effort to keep them going. The children who come to me talk openly about the physical experience of hunger. They can tell you about pains in their stomach. They can tell you about going to bed hungry. They can tell you about headaches and they can tell you about the tiredness and they can also tell you about the distorted relationship with food that that creates. Our children steal food from lunch boxes even though they've been fed just minutes before; they steal food from the classroom stocks of food that we keep to feed hungry children. And also, some of them steal food from the bins that other children have thrown away. As a result their health is poor, they're considerably smaller than other children. When they go to football tournament, they hide behind us because they can see these shiny, giant children around them that they know they just don't match up to. Their health isn't good, their teeth aren't in a good state of health and their life expectancy is between 15 and 20 years less than that of the children that they're on the football pitch with."*  
Siobhan Clifford, Headteacher

Behaviour is closely linked to attainment in school. What children eat during the day affects their concentration and performance in school (21–23). Hunger during term time, however, is further compounded by hunger in the holidays. The long summer holiday is thought to contribute to weeks' worth of learning loss for the most disadvantaged children, and many teachers report the effects of this when the school year begins again after the summer (24).

CHILDREN'S #Right2Food



## Dietary quality and body weight

Not surprisingly, poverty and deprivation are associated with poor nutritional outcomes. Across the UK there is a marked socio-economic gradient for childhood obesity (see Map). Typically, the most deprived areas have double the rates of childhood obesity compared to the least deprived. While this disparity is not as pronounced in Northern Ireland as it is in other regions at the start of school, these differences become greater in older age groups. Children in the most deprived parts of the country also don't grow as well, and are on average a centimetre shorter by the time they reach age 11 than children in the richest areas.

While levels of child underweight are low affecting about 1% of children overall, in England being underweight affects nearly 50% more children aged 5 who are living poorest tenth of areas compared to those living in the richest tenth (25).



### PREVALENCE OF OBESITY

#### ENGLAND

**Source:** National Child Measurement Programme 2017/18  
**Age group:** 4-5y (Reception)  
**Measure of deprivation:** Deciles (based on postcode of school)

#### SCOTLAND

**Source:** Child Health Surveillance Programme 2016/17  
**Age group:** 4.5-6.5y (Primary 1)  
**Measure of deprivation:** Quintiles

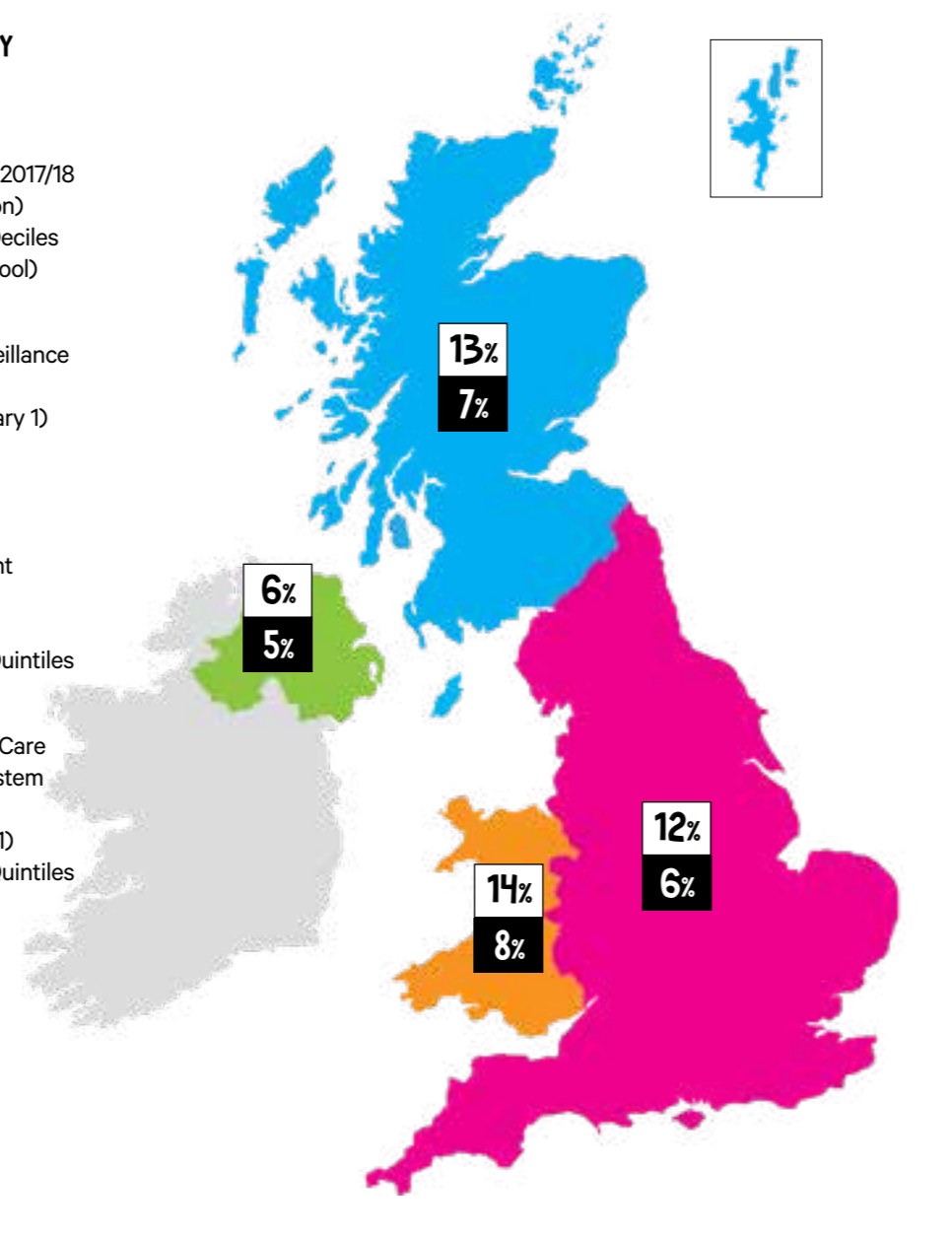
#### WALES

**Source:** Child Measurement Programme 2017/18  
**Age group:** 4-5y  
**Measure of deprivation:** Quintiles

#### NORTHERN IRELAND

**Source:** Health and Social Care Inequalities Monitoring System 2015/16  
**Age group:** 4-5y (Primary 1)  
**Measure of deprivation:** Quintiles  
 SOURCE: (26-29)

**MOST DEPRIVED %**  
**LEAST DEPRIVED %**



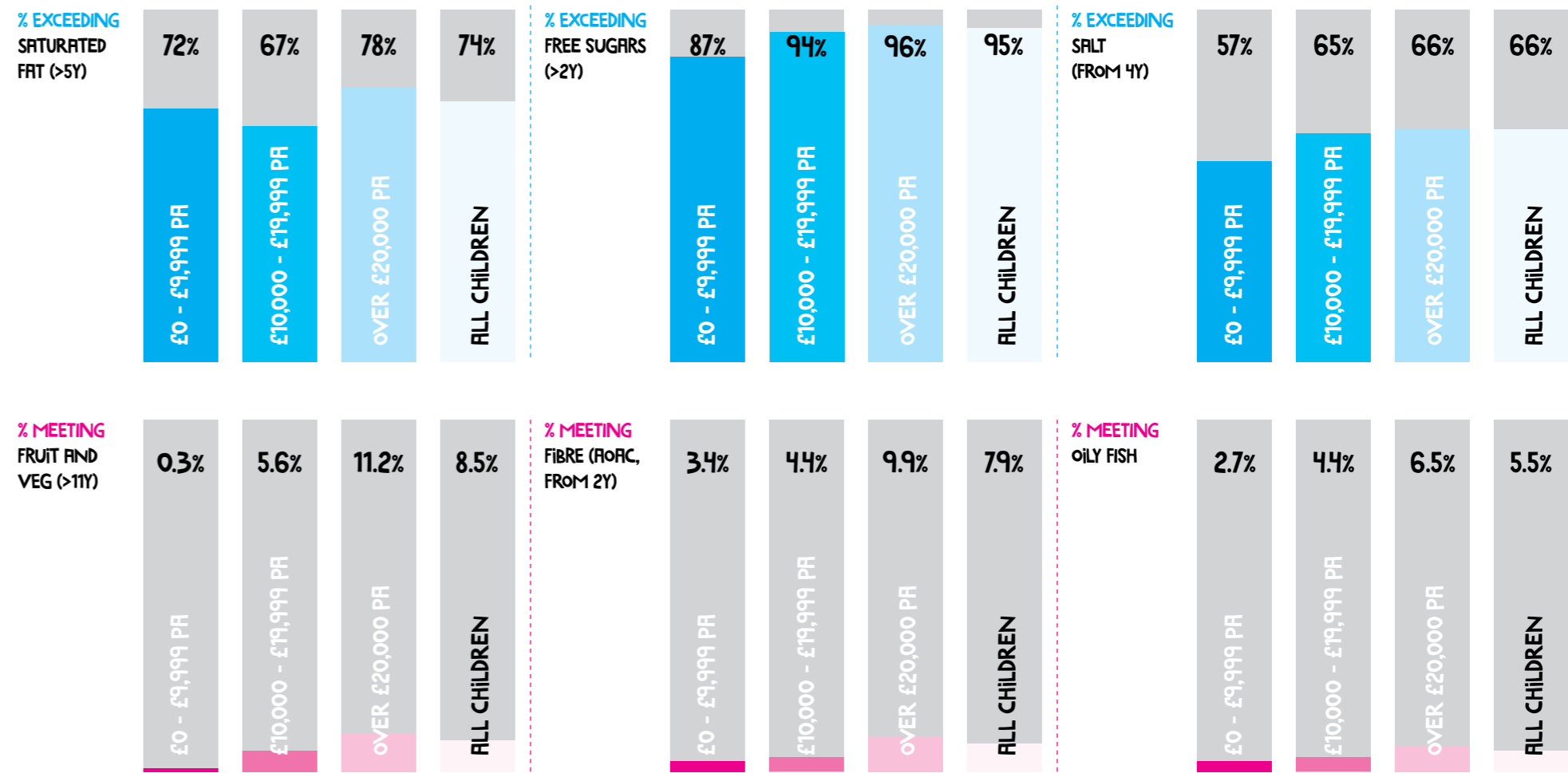
SOURCE: (25)

Data from the National Diet and Nutrition Survey show that the children in the poorest households do not eat more sugar, saturated fat and salt than other children, but they eat substantially less fruit and vegetables, fibre and

oily fish (30). Witnesses told the Inquiry that avoiding waste was a top priority for low income families and so this means parents frequently stick to a narrow range of food which they know their children will eat. Moreover,

they reported that parents often prioritised their children's food consumption over their own, and reported having a smaller portion or skipping meals altogether so their children could eat.

### PROPORTION OF CHILDREN <18YEARS EXCEEDING AND MEETING DIETARY RECOMMENDATIONS IN DIFFERENT INCOME GROUPS (30)





Due to the lack of national survey data on food insecurity there is little information on the links between food insecurity and dietary quality, but some of the available data is highlighted below.

A recent nationally representative survey in the UK of **2,551** adults found that food insecure adults ate less fruit and vegetables compared to food secure adults. Food insecure adults also had higher risk of unhealthy diets, overweight, poor general health, poor mental health, and extreme stress (Yao et al, 2019 in press). Similarly, a study in the north of England showed that although food insecurity was not associated with greater weight in children (though the sample was small) it was associated with parental weight status. Those parents in the most insecure group were **200%** more likely to be in a higher weight category than those in the most secure group (Boyland et al., unpublished data). Elsewhere, instances in which the situation for children has been researched show mixed results (13).

Data from an unpublished study conducted at the University of Liverpool looked at **17,000** children from the Millennium Cohort Study (personal communication, Praveetha Patalay and Charlotte Hardman). It examined how obesity and symptoms of depression and anxiety are associated from early childhood to mid-adolescence. It shows that children who are from lower income backgrounds are at greater risk of developing obesity and mental health problems and, as indicated above, these two health problems become inter-related and exacerbate each other from mid-childhood into adolescence. They show that the co-development of obesity and mental health problems in childhood and early adolescence is largely attributable to socio-economic factors. Eating behaviours of people experiencing food insecurity (overeating when food is available, for example) and the psychological aspects of being food insecure (such as stress, depression and anxiety) may also be contributing factors. It may be of particular relevance to children that lower income neighbourhoods lack opportunities for physical activity. This may present itself in terms of fewer facilities, such as parks and green spaces, unattractive or unsafe facilities, or inability to afford organised sports expenses or transport costs.

Where studies have been conducted in high income countries beyond the UK, children living in food poverty report physical symptoms more often (i.e., headaches, stomach aches, backaches) than those who did not suffer from food poverty (31,32).



## The Committee's conclusions

Examining the existing data on the scale of food insecurity in the UK shows that this is not a problem confined to a small minority of children living on the margins of society. The number of children experiencing symptoms of food insecurity, or whose income is evidently insufficient to afford a healthy diet amounts to between 2.5 and 4 million; between 20% and 30% of all children in the UK. Food insecurity carries a huge human cost which children are likely to bear for the rest of their lives, affecting their relationships, attainment, mental and physical health. This scale of problem requires systemic action, not sticking plaster projects.



*"Children seem to experience food poverty in a different way – adults often appear hungry (sometimes we've lied and put a mother down as breastfeeding so she gets a hospital meal too), while children only sometimes appear hungry BUT show impacts of malnutrition through having more unhealthy food. What is difficult to measure is how much this is influencing their underlying health until they present with signs of rickets or developmental stunting – we have had a couple of children more formally diagnosed with anaemia thought to be due to poor diet, and one with severe hypocalcaemia."*

Junior Doctor, London



*"I'll choose something that I know they're gonna like because I can't afford to do something and for them not to eat it. I just can't afford it, yeah."  
"And if the food's very low, I tend to go without food so that the kids can eat."*

(evidence submitted by Dr Charlotte Hardman, University of Liverpool)

# CHILDREN'S FOOD SETTINGS: POLICY, IMPLEMENTATION AND LIVED EXPERIENCE





## BIRTH AND THE EARLY MONTHS OF LIFE: The Committee's Conclusions

Approximately 750,000 babies are born every year in the UK (34–36). Of these about a third are born into poor households (fewer in Northern Ireland). What happens in the first 1,000 days from conception to a child's second birthday lays a critical and permanent foundation for their development.

There are a number of policies in place across the country to help support mothers to feed their babies well. These include grants for new mothers, support for breastfeeding in hospital, visits from health visitors and the Healthy Start/Best Start Foods scheme. Yet, the UK has one of the lowest rates of exclusive breastfeeding in the world (37) (see Key Facts). The package of support for mothers and babies is more comprehensive in Scotland, but across all nations the extent to which important breastfeeding support programmes reach mothers and babies living in poverty is often limited or unknown (see The Stats). No mother should be in a situation where she wants to breastfeed but does not have the support to do so, but many are. And this is even harder for those whose resources are scarce, as the cost of infant formula can present a substantial and sometimes unsustainable financial burden (see Key Facts & Case Study).

Maternal and infant nutrition determines our future health and yet the schemes we have in place to protect maternal and infant nutrition for those living in poverty (Healthy Start / Best Start Foods) are too small to make a difference. Less than half of children in poverty are eligible for Healthy Start, and of these a third are not actually registered for the scheme (38,39). Moreover, the voucher's value has dropped by half in real terms since the scheme began and cannot meet the costs it was designed to meet (though Scotland has recognised this and recently increased the value for its, soon to be introduced, Best Start Foods Scheme) (see Key Facts).

These gaps in provision represent a huge missed opportunity to provide the best nutrition at a time when it will deliver maximum, life-long returns.

# BIRTH AND THE EARLY MONTHS OF LIFE



## The nutrition costs for mother and baby

**THE COST OF FORMULA FEEDING:** the cost of first stage infant powdered and ready to feed formula for infants two to three months varies from £6.44 to £32.20 per week (Sainsbury's Little Ones First Infant Milk being the cheapest and Aptamil Profutura 1 First Infant Milk being the most expensive of the commonly available cow's milk based formulas). Specialist formulas are more expensive (47).

**THE COST OF FRUIT AND VEGETABLES:** the government has costed a diet based on the Eatwell Guide and estimated that the cost of enough fruit and vegetables to meet health guidelines for an adult is £5.88 per week (48).

## CASE STUDY

provided by Junior Doctor, Paediatric Senior House Office (SHO), London

*"I have come across a case where a mother came to A&E because she literally had no milk to feed her baby. Because of having very little money, she had tried to economise by bulk-buying a high calorie formula milk, but her baby wouldn't take it (a high calorie milk like this was inappropriate for an infant so young, but this wasn't clear on the packaging). She had no money left for an alternative milk, and no social support to help her. We were fortunately able to provide her with some milk and some charity cash until her next benefits, but without this, it seemed she had no recourse to any other support. This is a direct consequence of forcing people to live on knife-edge levels of money (not to mention the dire lack of breastfeeding support services which perhaps could have prevented this issue in the first place)."*



## THE UK'S DISMAL BREASTFEEDING RATES

By the time our babies are six to eight weeks old in England only 44% of them are still being breastfed (42% in Scotland, where rates seem to be improving a little) and by the time they are six months old only 1% are exclusively breastfed (41). Rates are lowest in Northern Ireland where only 27% of babies are receiving any breastmilk at six weeks and only 13% at six months (49).



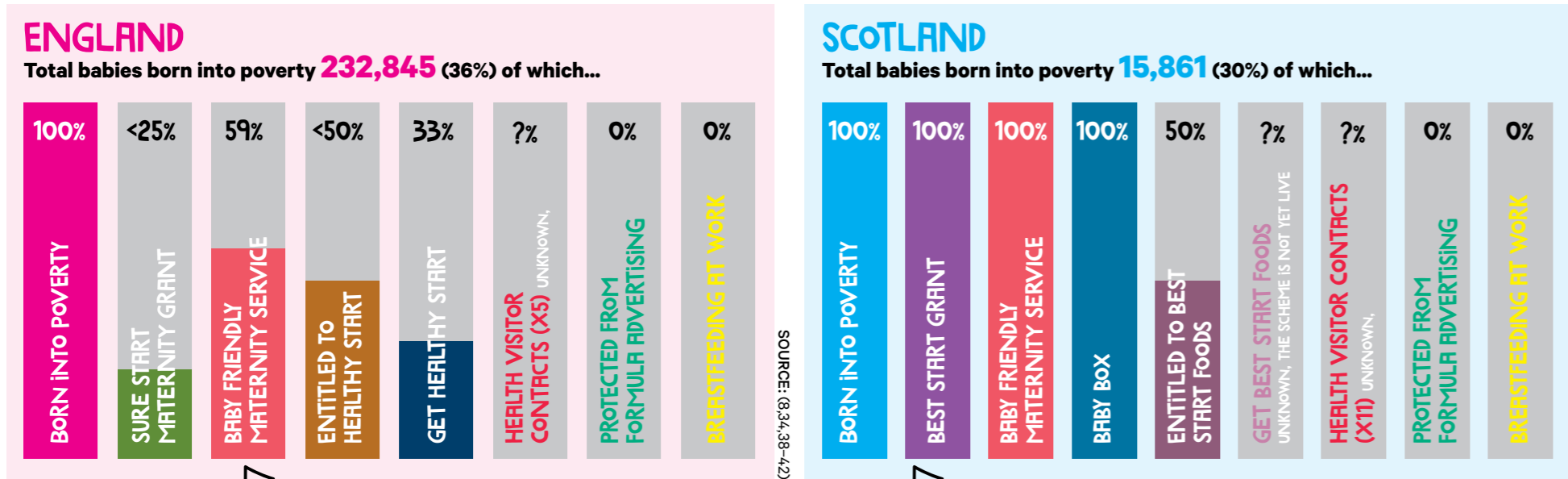
### WHAT THE PRACTITIONERS TOLD US:

*"If there was sufficient appropriate support available for women to breastfeed (and the majority of women do want to breastfeed), a safe, secure food supply for infants under six months of age, and important nutrition support in the second six months and beyond, would be assured. Parents of infants have told us that they have had to borrow money from relatives to buy infant formula, or that they have gone without food or feminine hygiene supplies themselves."*  
Dr Helen Crawley, First Steps Nutrition

THE STATS:

# BABIES BORN IN POVERTY IN 2017

Which policies and who benefits?



ONLY 59% OF BABIES BORN INTO BABY FRIENDLY HOSPITALS IN ENGLAND COMPARED TO 100% ELSEWHERE

ALL MOTHERS LIVING IN POVERTY IN SCOTLAND GET BEST START GRANT PREGNANCY AND BABY PAYMENT AND BABY BOX. ELSEWHERE LESS THAN 25% GET THE GRANT AND NONE GET THE BABY BOX

GLOSSARY FOR DATA VISUALISATIONS

**BABY BOX:** universal entitlement including a fitted mattress, sheet, bedding, towel, changing mat, nappies, baby clothes and other essentials including breastfeeding information (Scotland). Some local authorities in England offer baby box schemes but these can be externally funded and may have limited contents. Wales has plans to pilot a "baby bundle".

**BABY FRIENDLY MATERNITY SERVICES:** Baby Friendly UK is an accreditation scheme for maternity services in hospitals

which means that staff in those services are trained to support breastfeeding, to help all parents develop close and loving relationships with their baby and where all staff work within the WHO Code of Marketing of Breastmilk Substitutes. Baby Friendly UK also accredits neonatal and community services.

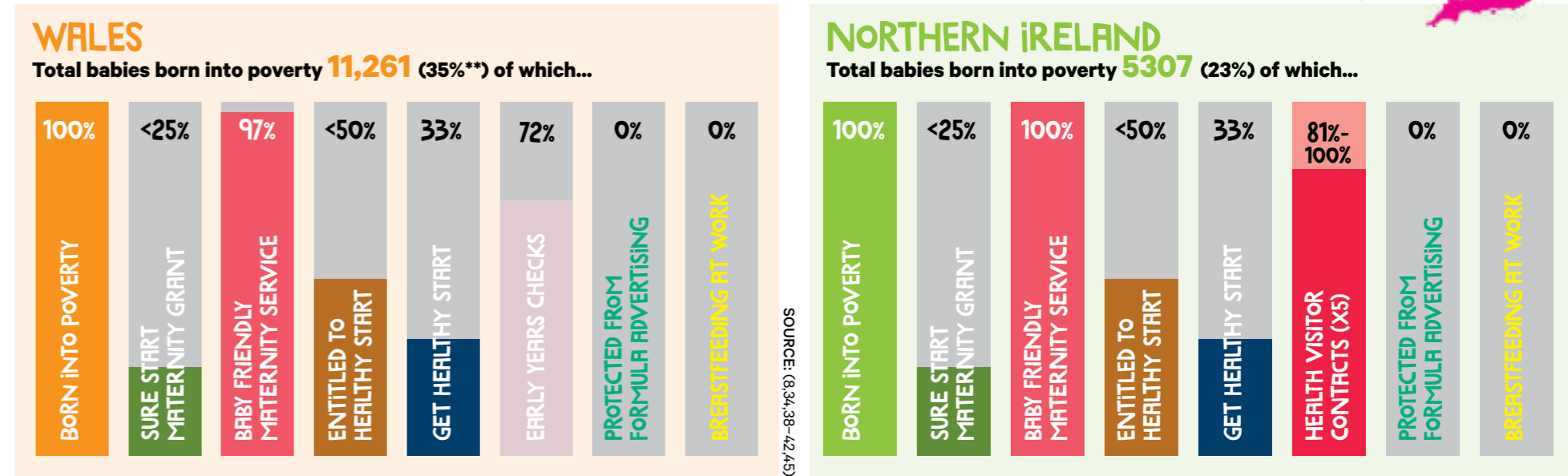
**BEST START GRANT:** means-tested entitlement to £600 for the first child and £300 for subsequent children (Scotland)

**BEST START FOODS SCHEME (ABOUT TO BE LAUNCHED):** means-tested entitlement for pregnant women and children under the age of three providing money via a smartcard which can be used to purchase formula milk, cow's milk, pulses, eggs or fruit and vegetables. Voucher will be worth £4.25 per week, but double that for babies under 12 months. (Scotland).

**BREASTFEEDING AT WORK:** employers in the UK must provide somewhere for a breastfeeding employee to rest and women can ask her employer for a safe and healthy place to

Please note:

We analysed all the policies and nationally funded programmes in place targeting mothers and their babies and found the best available evidence on their coverage. Where the coverage data was only available for the whole population we assumed that those living in poverty experienced the same coverage as the whole population. If, however, the policy was targeted at those living in poverty we assumed that all of those who benefited from the scheme were living in poverty.



\*\*No data on only 0-year-olds in Wales due to small sample size but 35% of <2-year-olds live in poverty in Wales.

breastfeed or express milk, but there is no legal requirement for breaks at work for breastfeeding or expressing milk.

**FAMILY NURSE PARTNERSHIP:** a special programme for first time teenage mothers to help them develop parenting. The coverage of this programme is unknown. (England, Scotland and some areas in Northern Ireland).

**FORMULA ADVERTISING:** Infant formula cannot be advertised to the general public but follow on formula

can be (even though it is not recommended by UK health departments).

**HEALTH VISITOR CONTACTS:** universal entitlement to a minimum of five contacts (in England), 11 home visits (in Scotland), 10 checks (in NI (Healthy Child Future Programme)), four screening, nine immunisation and 11 surveillance contacts (in Wales (Healthy Child Wales Programme)). (UK wide).

**HEALTHY START SCHEME:** means-tested scheme for low

income pregnant women and families with children under the age of four years, and universal entitlement for mothers under 18 years of age, providing coupons for vitamins and vouchers which can be used for foods such as formula milk, milk or fruit and vegetables. Voucher is worth £3.10 per week, and double that for babies under 12 months. (England, Wales and NI).

**SURE START MATERNITY GRANT:** means-tested entitlement to £500 when women have their first baby or have a multiple birth. (England, Wales and NI).

# GOING TO NURSERY



## GOING TO NURSERY: The Committee's Conclusions

Up until their second birthday children's brains and bodies are developing fast and laying down the foundation for the future. The food, energy and nutrients which children eat during this period determine how well they grow, how well they do at school and are also a good predictor of long-term health. During their early years the majority of children are exposed to some form of childcare setting which can and should create a relaxed atmosphere where children can develop healthy eating habits that last a lifetime and contribute to obesity prevention.

We have seen some very important actions made to support parents with childcare costs across the UK in recent years (especially in England) and these entitlements cover a high proportion of those children living in poverty, but there are some important gaps (see The Stats). It is noteworthy that childcare provision in Northern Ireland is more limited, and indeed a recent report on the costs of childcare in Northern Ireland were highlighted as a key contributor to food insecurity, posing an extreme financial burden on lone parents (50). For disabled children, we heard alarming examples of families going without (see What Practitioners Told Us) due to the additional unmet costs of caring.

However, we believe too little policy attention has been paid to the food which children receive when they are in childcare facilities. For the most part food is not included within free childcare or pre-school provision and there are no mandatory standards applied to the food provided. The exception is in Northern Ireland where food served during statutory pre-school must meet school food standards, and children attending full time, and falling below a family income of £14,000, are entitled to free meals. Scotland has also promised to make free food available to those entitled to free childcare. In the rest of the UK when a cooked lunch is unaffordable, it is likely to lead to much higher dependency on unhealthy packed lunches.



Dads House breakfast club, London



## CHILDCARE, NUTRITION AND CHILD DEVELOPMENT

Childcare providers have indicated that the cost of childcare provision exceeds the amount being provided by government, and that the costs charged for food can allow providers to recoup some of this shortfall. If the cost of meals is out of reach for low income families, they send their children with packed lunches and snacks, which are well known to be typically less healthy than a cooked lunch.

A survey of nurseries in England published in 2017 shows that nursery staff in deprived areas were eight times more likely to report concerns about both obesity and food insecurity among children in their care (62).

## WHAT PARENTS TOLD US

Many children are unaware of the foods they could be accessing and/or eating to fuel their bodies effectively. A child who never sees an aubergine in their home is unlikely to know what to do with one, if one was presented to them. They might be loathe to try it, and without the education of what food is and how it works, a child will have no chance of breaking a (possible) cycle of bad health forged in the home.

Often, a child facing food insecurity is unlikely to have a home food culture involving the trying and tasting of much fresh produce/vegetables. Aside from the cost, the risk of wasting money on a vegetable that may well be rejected is simply too great for many parents.

For a child to access healthy food, they must have an opportunity to be exposed to those foods. This is not always possible in the home and, as children are dependent on adults for all care and education, if they are not receiving food education, then they have no chance of accessing good food on their own. Kathleen Kerridge, mother of four

## BEST PRACTICE

In my own centres we provide recipe of the week, and a bag with a healthy vegetarian meal that will feed four and can be purchased for a pound. We also run play and eat sessions five days a week after school. These sessions are open to the whole family and we operate holiday breakfast/lunch sessions which are part-funded by local organisations. We also operate an informal foodbank for families. Over the last three months we have served over 1,500 hot meals. This is not our remit, but how do you address parenting needs or education within a family when basic human needs are not met?

Liz Parsons, Centre Coordinator, Picton and Kensington Children's Centre, Liverpool

## WHAT PRACTITIONERS TOLD US

### The additional costs of caring for a disabled child

Caring for a child with disabilities can bring a vast array of additional costs (heating, washing, transport, specialist food and toys, specialist equipment etc). Contact for Families with Disabled Children conducted a survey of families across the UK with disabled children in 2018 and found that of the 2,772 families surveyed, a third had taken out a payday loan to pay for food (compared to only 4% a decade ago). Twenty-six percent reported that their child's condition had worsened due to going without basics (up 4% since 2014) (63).

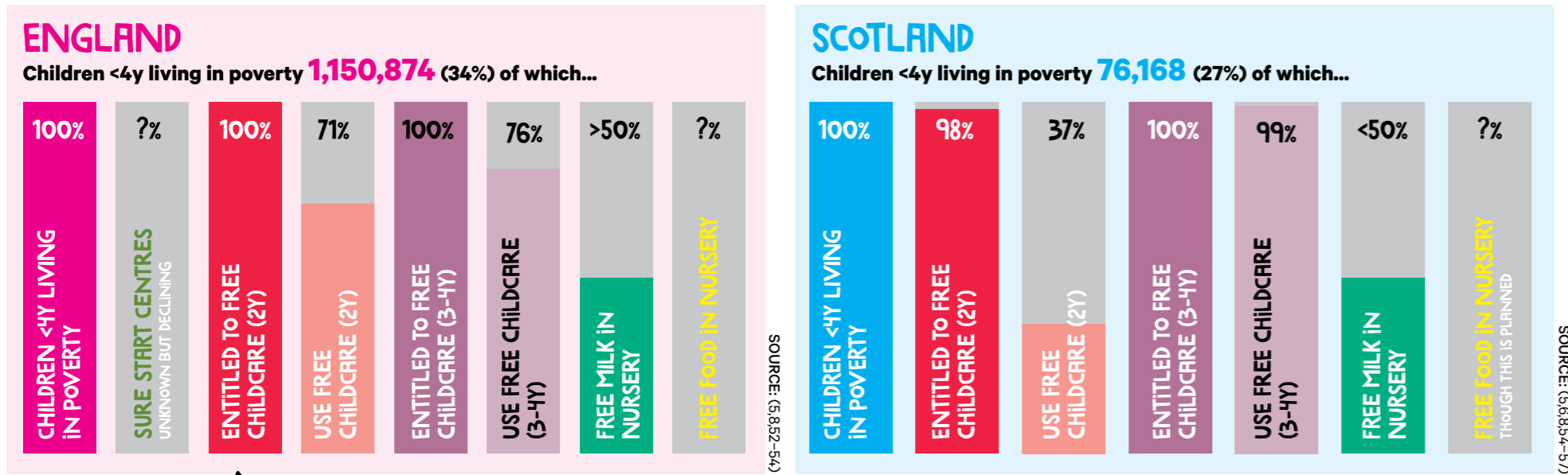
KEY FACTS

**PACKED LUNCHES ARE NUTRITIONALLY INFERIOR**  
Only **1.1%** of packed lunches meet the food-based school standards (64)

THE STATS:

# TODDLERS AND PRE-SCHOOLERS LIVING IN POVERTY

Which policies and who benefits?



CHILDREN IN POVERTY IN ENGLAND ARE ELIGIBLE TO FREE CHILDCARE FROM AGE TWO, INCREASING TO 30 HOURS AT AGES THREE TO FOUR FOR WORKING FAMILIES. ELSEWHERE, THERE IS LOWER ENTITLEMENT AT AGES 3-4Y

SCOTLAND WILL INTRODUCE FREE NURSERY MEALS FOR THOSE IN FUNDED EARLY LEARNING FROM 2020 (51)

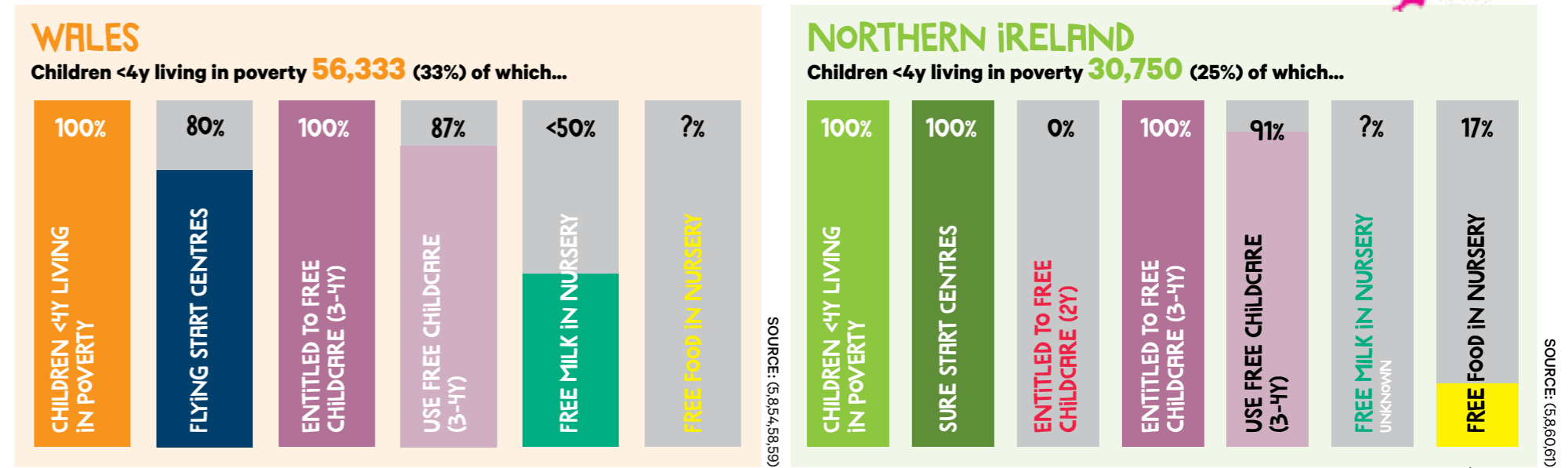
GLOSSARY FOR DATA VISUALISATIONS

- FLYING START CENTRES:** these centres provide an enhanced health visiting service, access to parenting programmes and support for speech, language and communication for children aged under four years as well free childcare for 2.5 hours per day during term time for two to three-year-olds in eligible disadvantaged areas. (Wales).
- FREE CHILDCARE FOR THREE TO FOUR-YEAR-OLDS:** England – 15 hours universal entitlement per week, 30 hours for working families; Scotland – 16 hours universal entitlement per week; Wales – 10 hours universal entitlement per week (Welsh Government are currently piloting 30 hours universal entitlement per week in specific local authorities with plans to roll out nationwide by April 2019); Northern Ireland – 12.5 hours universal entitlement to funded pre-school education provision per week. (UK wide).
- FREE CHILDCARE FOR TWO-YEAR-OLDS:** means-tested entitlement for 15 hours per week (England), 16 hours per week (Scotland), 10 hours (Wales).
- FREE MILK IN NURSERY:** all children under five in all four nations in day care facilities are entitled to a third of a pint of free milk per day.



Please note:

We analysed all the policies and nationally funded programmes in place targeting pre-school children and found the best available evidence on their coverage. Where the coverage data was only available for the whole population we assumed that those living in poverty experienced the same coverage as the whole population. If, however, the policy was targeted at those living in poverty we assumed that all of those who benefited from the scheme were living in poverty.



NORTHERN IRELAND IS THE ONLY NATION WHERE ANY CHILDCARE SETTING OFFERING STATUTORY PRE-SCHOOL MUST COMPLY WITH SCHOOL FOOD STANDARDS

- PRE-SCHOOL MEAL STANDARDS:** School meal standards: all four nations have food standards for preschool settings, but other than in Northern Ireland where any childcare setting offering statutory pre-school must comply with school food standards, they are not mandatory unless the pre-school is part of a primary school. In Wales, approximately 25% of pre-school providers (not including childminders) have joined The Healthy and Sustainable Pre School Scheme which drives delivery of a set of standards around health and well-being with an attached award scheme. Scotland is considering providing free meals to go alongside free universal childcare entitlement, and this is set to be introduced from 2020.
- SURE START CHILDREN'S CENTRES:** intended to bring children and family services under one roof and support positive child and family development, particularly in deprived areas. (England and Northern Ireland).

- FREE FOOD IN NURSERY:** In some local authorities in England, Scotland and Wales free meals are available to children attending state funded nurseries full time if they meet the means tested criteria for school meals (which are more stringent than those for free childcare). In Northern Ireland, all children attending for a full day in a maintained pre-school are eligible for free meals if they meet Northern Ireland's criteria for free school meals.

# FOOD AT SCHOOL

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## FOOD AT SCHOOL:

### The Committee's Conclusions

The food which children receive at school is especially important for children living in poverty because the food at home may be inadequate, and the school lunch maybe the only proper meal the child receives. What children eat during the day affects their concentration and performance in school.

Universal infant free school meals offer an excellent start for establishing a good food culture in school and uptake is very high, although in Northern Ireland and Wales this entitlement does not yet exist. In Wales, the government has invested in free school breakfast schemes.

Entitlement to free school meals for children (aged over seven) living in poverty varies greatly across the four nations. In Northern Ireland all children living in poverty are guaranteed a school lunch whereas for children in England less than half of those living in poverty are entitled (see The Stats). These represent gross disparities between parts of the United Kingdom and this means that many children go without a good lunch. Moreover, thousands of extremely vulnerable children are entirely excluded from accessing free school meals because they are undocumented or have No Recourse to Public Funds (see page 46). This violates the fundamental rights of the child.

Hearing directly from young people about food at school demonstrates just how big the gaps are between policy and its implementation (see page 43). Rather than being an environment where children learn to eat well together, meal times are often rushed, and the amount allocated for food for those on free school meals is insufficient to buy a healthy meal in secondary school. Unhealthy food is promoted particularly in secondary school, and children who are on a low income often go without. Their views suggest that school food, especially in secondary school, needs a root and branch review.

CHILDREN'S #Right2Food

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### WHAT THE CHILDREN WHO CONTRIBUTED TO THE INQUIRY TOLD US:

*"If you're put in isolation for a day or a week, you're not allowed in the canteen at all. You can take a packed lunch but there sometimes isn't any food at home to make one."*

*"People don't always even apply for free school meals even though they'd be entitled to them. It's about people's pride."*

*"Sometimes you don't have enough to buy much food. It can be embarrassing if you have to ask them (school staff) to take money out next time there's money on the card."*

*"A boy in our class sometimes comes to school with just two cold fish fingers."*

*"If you don't meet a certain criterion; you don't get any help at all – you don't get partial help, you just fall off a cliff."*

*"Fatty, unhealthy foods are way cheaper – burgers and paninis. People think that it's just the rich kids who go for salads."*

*"Often McDonald's and Subway are a much better option, so you go there instead."*

*"We have half an hour for lunch and by the time we've finished queueing only chips are left."*

*"Teachers should talk to parents and explain how important breakfast is."*

### What children told us about school food:

#### THE FREE SCHOOL MEAL ALLOCATION IS NOT ENOUGH

- Children come to school without having had breakfast and with no money for snacks which affects their concentration during the morning. If they buy a snack in the morning break then there is not enough for a full lunch.
- The £2.30 credit available to children on free school meals doesn't allow for breakfast or snacks to be purchased and is frequently insufficient for a hot meal. Children who are not on free school meals report spending £25-£30 on their food at school compared to the £11.50 which children on free school meals can spend.
- Many children are buying drinks at break and lunchtime, including water. This can make a significant dent into the £2.30 allowance. Many reported water/drinking fountains not being available in the dining halls.
- Electronic cards were good but inflexible. Any surplus left on the card each day is not rolled over, so unlike their non-free school meal peers they have no flexibility to spend their weekly allocation. If the card had not been topped up or the machine for topping up the card was not working, there was no cash option.

#### FREE SCHOOL MEALS CARRY A STIGMA

- There is a lot of stigma attached to free school meals especially in schools where the majority of children are not receiving them.
- The name "free school meals" was problematic in and of itself. The young people said it needed a new name. It should be presented as more of a privilege than something to be embarrassed about. They said we should remove the "free and cheap" connotations. Instead, free school meals need an image like the Education Maintenance Allowance which is seen very positively.

#### MEAL TIMES ARE NOT A VALUED PART OF THE SCHOOL DAY

- In some schools, lunchtimes are very short, and are made shorter for the students by long queuing times.
- For classes with a late lunchtime slot, choices can be very limited, and many options have run out. Children in detention often miss out entirely.
- They would like more involvement from teachers in food issues in schools, including having the teachers queue and eat the school food with them. They wanted someone in school with whom they knew they could discuss problems with food.
- They wanted lunchtime to be a valued part of the day which supports students' well-being and performance.
- They would like more in the curriculum about food insecurity in this country. Children knew about it, but mostly because of their own experiences and from interacting with their friends. Having the issue discussed in class would help to build understanding and tackle stigma.

#### YOUNG PEOPLE WANT TO HAVE A SAY ON THE FOOD THEY ARE OFFERED

- They recognised that in general school meals had improved, however they felt the healthier items on offer in the school dining halls are more expensive than the unhealthy items. In some schools the unhealthy food is much more prominent than the healthy food in the dining hall.
- They wanted a bigger say in the food which they are offered, and wanted much more sensitivity to cultural food preferences and dietary requirements in the menus.

CHILDREN'S #Right2Food



## MONITORING OF SCHOOL FOOD IS MOVING IN THE WRONG DIRECTION IN ENGLAND

In England, monitoring school food is the responsibility of school Governors. In August 2016, the first Chapter of the government's Childhood Obesity plan stated:

"From September 2017, we will introduce a new voluntary Healthy Rating Scheme for primary schools to recognise and encourage their contribution to preventing obesity by helping children to eat better and move more. This scheme will be taken into account during Ofsted inspections."

The Healthy Rating Scheme has not been introduced.

In June 2018, the second Chapter of the government's Childhood Obesity Plan stated:

"Ofsted is developing a new framework for September 2019. This will consider how schools build knowledge across the whole curriculum and how they support pupils' personal development more broadly, including in relation to healthy behaviours."

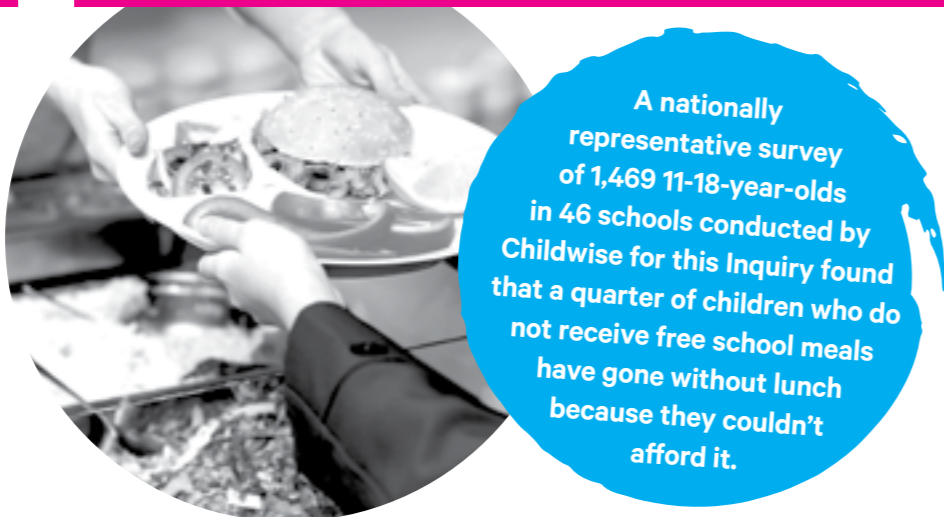
The draft 2019 Ofsted framework is currently under consultation and makes no reference to healthy eating (78). Moreover, this reference has been removed from the school handbook (79).

Food for Life estimates that up to 60% of secondary schools are non-compliant with the school food standards, largely because of an absence of government monitoring (81).

## BEST PRACTICE

### EXPANDING ENTITLEMENT TO FREE SCHOOL MEALS BEYOND INFANTS AT LOCAL AUTHORITY LEVEL

The London borough of Southwark is one of only three Local Authorities in England to offer every child in primary school a free school meal. Through this initiative, Southwark Council aim to ensure that children are well fed, do better at school and enjoy improved health and wellbeing. The initiative is part of a wider programme to tackle obesity and deprivation in Southwark. Each school provides a two course meal for a set price each day, in line with national nutritional standards ensuring children are provided with a healthy meal (80).



A nationally representative survey of 1,469 11-18-year-olds in 46 schools conducted by Childwise for this Inquiry found that a quarter of children who do not receive free school meals have gone without lunch because they couldn't afford it.

### THE UNIVERSITY OF HERTFORDSHIRE CONDUCTED RESEARCH WITH 600 SCHOOL STUDENTS AND REPORTED THAT:

**77%** purchase food outside school at least twice a week (this figure rose to **90%** in deprived areas) **89%** said going with friends was important

**74%** said the service and interaction they had with retailers etc was important The most popular places to buy food were: fast food outlets (**26%**), newsagents

(**25%**) and supermarkets (**23%**) Evidence submitted by Professor Wendy Wills, University of Hertfordshire.



### WHAT A YOUNG PERSON WHO SUBMITTED TO THE EVIDENCE PORTAL TOLD US:

"I have two friends at school who never have breakfast or lunch. Their parents work so they don't get free school meals. They never have money to buy lunch. They are both always hungry. I take extra food every day for them. We don't talk about it. They are too embarrassed. They would never tell teachers. There is lots of stealing at lunchtime from other kids. They get the food and leave the queue before they get to the till. They are hungry but have no money."



"Professionals working with families living in poverty shared with us that many families who struggle to feed their children include both those eligible for free school meals, and those who are not. Affordability of school food features on a number of occasions. Parents also mention that 'school dinners are so expensive'.

"Several children have felt able to openly talk about the fact that they receive free school meals, and that the price of items and amount of money allocated means they do not feel that they always have enough food. Children and parents have also talked about the need for extra food and/or drink across the school day – this was raised irrespective of whether free school meals were being accessed. The cost of buying these items, particularly in the case of one parent who had three children, was identified as an issue. This parent commented to me that her school would not be aware that she is struggling, because she and her partner are both working in low-paid jobs, but they find the cost of school meals impossible to afford for much of the school year. They prioritise paying for them in the coldest months so that their children have a hot meal instead of a packed lunch.

"During one workshop, there was a conversation between the children specifically around the price and availability of drinks in their school: "£1 for a bottle of water." They talked about being thirstier over the summer and how this affects how much money they have to spend on food and the amount of money they need. The group identified that a solution for one school would be to install free water fountains – something which is not currently available in their school." Professor Sally Holland, Children's Commissioner for Wales



"Because they feel ashamed the children whom I spoke to did everything they could to hide their experiences of food insecurity. Katie, who often missed meals so her younger siblings could eat more, spoke about not talking to her friends about these issues. She said "I don't really want to speak to people about it because they get really, really embarrassed about it. I get embarrassed. Other people get embarrassed." School meals were seen as an inferior choice over packed lunch. If you had money you brought in packed lunches and kids who didn't had school dinners. School dinners need to be something the children are proud of and want to eat." Annie Connolly, PhD Researcher, Leeds University



"Many of our children come from impoverished backgrounds. The only hot meal most of our children eat is what they eat in school." Jo Jones, Head Teacher from a West Midlands Primary School

## COOKING SKILLS

In our polling of 1,469 11-18-year-olds, **38%** said they would like to learn more cooking at school

"To pay £2 per person to attend a home economics class should be stopped – it is embarrassing to take the class because some cannot afford it. I had to cook for my little brothers and sister. So, it would be a case when I was young, I would go home and maybe have a £1 Iceland pizza. I was 10-years-old and never knew how to work the oven. So, I stick this £1 Iceland pizza in the oven and come back 40 minutes later and it's a slab, a black slab - charcoal. You could smash it off the table. We still ate it because we were starving. Nobody was teaching us the life skills of how to go home and cook a pizza or do the washing."

Chris Kilkenny, care-experienced father; poverty and equality campaigner

## CASE STUDY

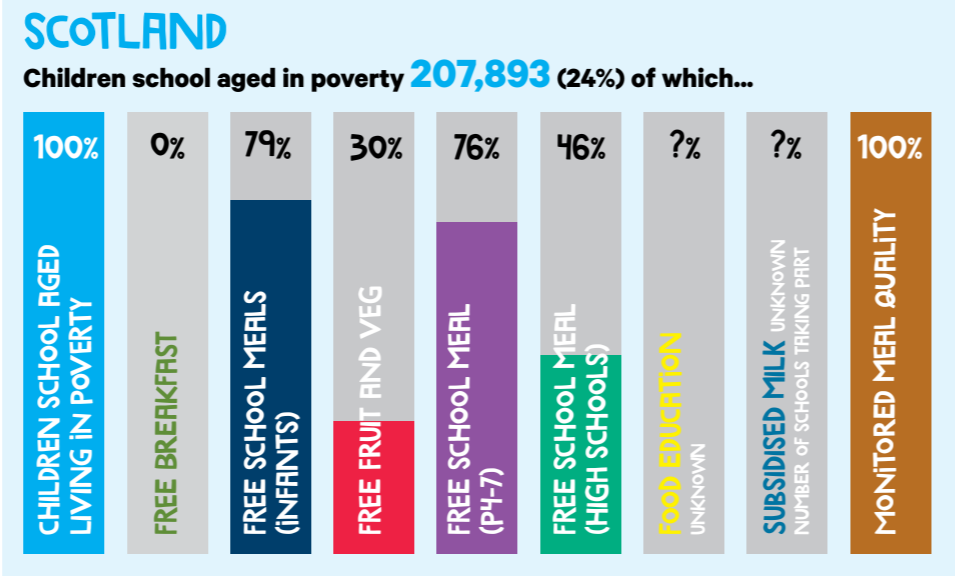
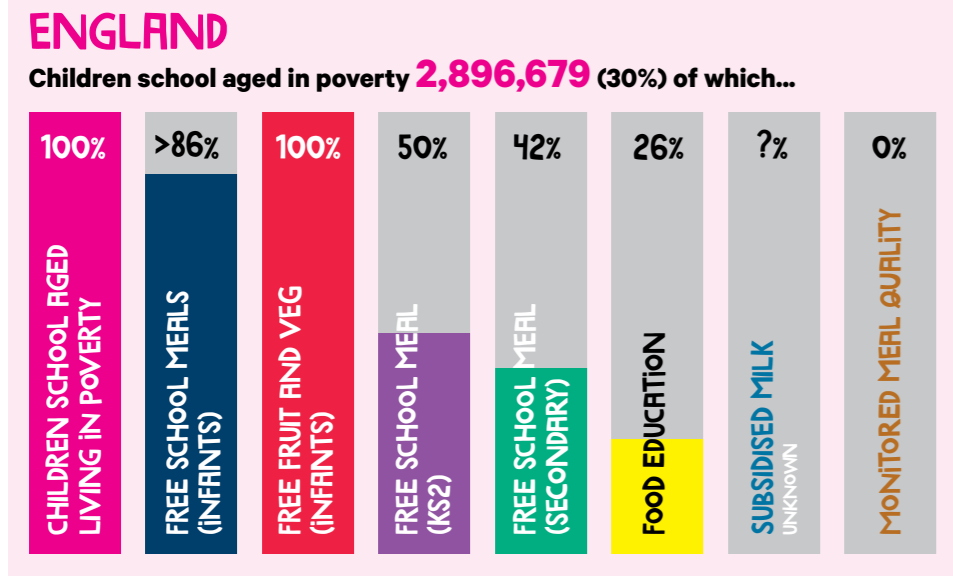
### Why teaching cooking at school may be of particular value to vulnerable students

From the age of five, Ryan was looking after his younger brother. He prepared food for them both. He told the Inquiry that he had been cooking in an overcrowded home. He had been worried about injuring himself, or causing a fire which could in turn mean that he and his brother were taken into care.

THE STATS:

# SCHOOL CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY

Which policies and who benefits?



ALL CHILDREN AGE FIVE TO SEVEN YEARS ARE ENTITLED TO FREE SCHOOL MEALS IN SCOTLAND AND ENGLAND BUT NOT IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND WALES

SCHOOL FOOD STANDARDS ARE FORMALLY MONITORED IN SCOTLAND BUT NOWHERE ELSE

GLOSSARY FOR DATA VISUALISATIONS

**FOOD EDUCATION IN THE CURRICULUM:** specifics vary across the four nations but there are elements across the UK

**FREE BREAKFAST:** universal entitlement (Wales). Voluntary provision elsewhere with some funding from government. (National School Breakfast Programme in England, Extended School Programme in Northern Ireland).

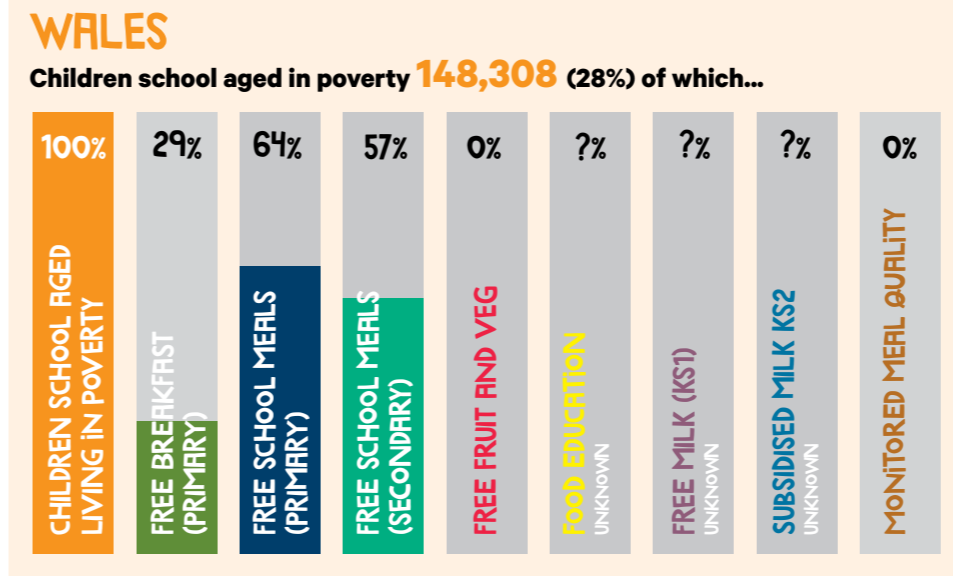
**FREE FRUIT AND VEGETABLE SCHEME:** universal for children in the first three years of school. (England and 30% of local authorities in Scotland).

**FREE HOLIDAY PROVISION:** voluntary provision with some funding from government. The Welsh Government plans to take its scheme nationwide (UK wide)

**FREE SCHOOL MEALS:** means-tested entitlement for school-age children in families are earning less than £7,400 per year (net income and before benefits are taken into account). The threshold is £14,000 in Northern Ireland. The amount which entitled children in secondary school receive on their cards seems to vary between £1.90 and £2.30. Primary school children who pay for school meals typically pay £2.20, though amounts vary between schools (76). (UK wide). In Northern Ireland the prices for school meals are £2.60 for primary and £2.80 for post-primary children.

Please note:

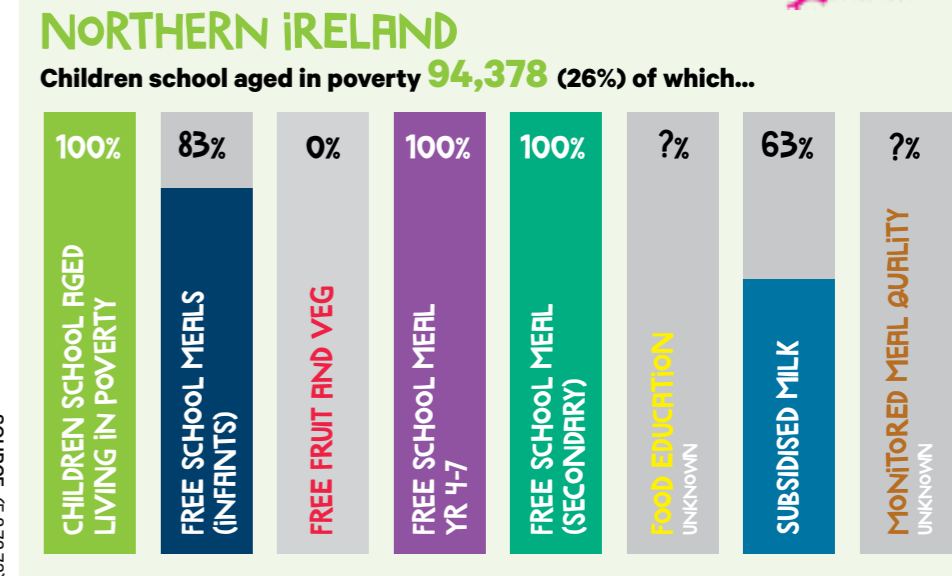
We analysed all the policies and nationally funded programmes in place targeting school-age and found the best available evidence on their coverage. Where the coverage data was only available for the whole population we assumed that those living in poverty experienced the same coverage as the whole population. If, however, the policy was targeted at those living in poverty we assumed that all of those who benefited from the scheme were living in poverty.



ALL SCHOOLS IN WALES CAN IMPLEMENT FREE BREAKFAST CLUBS BUT NOWHERE ELSE IS THIS PROVISION IN PLACE, BUT FREE BREAKFASTS CLUBS ARE NOT MANAGING TO REACH A LARGE PROPORTION OF CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY

**SCHOOL FOOD STANDARDS:** mandatory and specific to each nation, (UK wide). Academies and free schools set up in England between September 2010 and June 2014 are not bound to comply.

**SUBSIDISED SCHOOL MILK** (part of an EU scheme) is available for schools in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Pupils in Reception, Year One and Two in Wales are also eligible for free milk funded by the Welsh Government (77).



CHILDREN IN ENGLAND GET ACCESS TO THE FREE FRUIT AND VEGETABLE SCHEME BUT THIS SCHEME IS NOT IMPLEMENTED IN NORTHERN IRELAND AND WALES

no independent monitoring of school meal quality against standards.

**UNIVERSAL INFANT FREE SCHOOL MEALS:** all children are entitled to a free lunch in the first three years of school. (England and Scotland)



## Children excluded from free school meals

Children living within households who have migrated to the UK and been granted leave to remain with the condition that they have No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF) cannot claim free school meals. The Home Office does not have data on the number of children affected by this condition (82). Along with children who are undocumented (estimated in 2012 to be 120,000 children (83)), these are often the poorest families in the country with no source of income at all, reliant entirely on charity. Families in these circumstances can apply for emergency funding from their local authority. Section 17 of the Children Act 1989 imposes a duty on every local authority to safeguard and promote the welfare of children within their area who are in need. This means that homeless families should be able to receive housing and financial support from their local council for the sake of their children and to prevent destitution. In practice, access to this support is highly variable (see box). People are often afraid to ask for this help because they are scared their children will be taken away or they will be deported.

In 2017, 2,432 households with NRPF requested support from their local council in England and Wales because their children were in need (data supplied by NRPF Network through Freedom of Information). However, The Children's Society's report that six out of 10 families who have approached their local authority for Section 17 support were refused (83). Again, this number only represents those who have asked for help and does not reflect how many families need this help. In these circumstances, some schools step in and pay for the child's meals, but some, particularly those in areas of high immigration, cannot afford to do so.

### CASE STUDY

**Kathleen Kerridge, mother of four**

*"I honestly think the arbitrary level set for access to free school meals is far too low. Using myself as an example, on paper, my husband (he was earning £21,000 a year) is £5,000 a year above the cut-off point to be able to access free school meals, but:*

*"For the family as a whole, we receive no benefits at all. Our rent is £13,500 a year, our council tax a further £1,400. We are unable to apply for or access any grants free school meals or school bursaries for help for with school trips etc. We are left with only £6,100 from a yearly wage, without paying a single bill or buying a single potato.*

*"While our situation has improved, it would have been a massive help had we been able to rely on free school meals for our daughter, especially on the days we were only living on a few slices of bread.*

### EMERGING GOOD PRACTICE

In the last year Scotland has made efforts to support children and young people whose families have NRPF. In April 2018, the Deputy First Minister for Scotland wrote to all Local Authorities Directors of Education to inform them of 'flexibility to provide free school meals where pupils do not meet eligibility criteria' (covered by the Education (Scotland) Act 2016) 'such as a family having no income due to their immigration status.' This has been further supported by new guidance published in February 2019 by Confederation of Scottish Local Authorities on migrants' rights to services which includes providing financial support to meet essential living costs.

### WHAT THE EXPERTS TOLD THE INQUIRY:

*"I have met a parent who had accrued £1,000 of debt to her child's school because she was unable to pay for their school meals. That child was then punished by not being allowed to attend his end of secondary school prom. School should be a space where children can learn and play together as equals. If a child is from a family that is struggling financially, they must be able to eat the same meals as their friends at school. It is socially unacceptable for this to place a family further into destitution."* Nadia Chalabi, Hackney Migrant Centre.

*"We had a referral from a local school asking for assistance as one of their pupils had been caught stealing sachets of ketchup to take home because he was hungry."* Crookston Community Group, Glasgow



### EVIDENCE PROVIDED BY PROJECT 17

*Between April 2017 and March 2018, we assisted 134 families to seek Section 17 support from their local authority. Sixty percent of these families were unlawfully refused Section 17 support when they first approached their local authority. Twenty-two percent of families were wrongly refused support on the basis of their immigration status. The rationale in these cases was arbitrary and decisions were made before an assessment was conducted. Although some parents are excluded from accessing support under Schedule Three of the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002, local authorities must assess whether the family's situation is so serious that a failure to provide support would breach human rights, regardless of whether they have leave to remain. Thirty-one percent of clients were refused a Child in Need assessment, and 30% were refused urgently needed interim support. In 7% of cases, local authorities unlawfully threatened to take children away from their parents on the basis of destitution alone.*

### BEST PRACTICE

#### POVERTY PROOFING THE SCHOOL DAY

This is a project developed over the last six years by Children North East to address the barriers to learning that disadvantaged children face. The purpose is to ensure that "no activity or planned activity in school should identify, exclude, treat differently or make assumptions about children whose household income is lower than others".



#### WHAT HEAD TEACHERS SAY ABOUT POVERTY PROOFING:

*"It's not a judgement. It's a list of suggestions for how we can make our great schools even better."*  
*"It was scary hearing the words of our children."*  
*"It challenged our thinking on day-to-day things... we now provide everyone with the same kind of water bottle... our disadvantaged student attendance has improved by 4%."*  
*"To walk in someone else's shoes was very revealing."*  
*"The hardest part for us was hearing the student feedback: realising the impact some simple questions and behaviours can have on a child in disadvantage."*  
*"The impact has been a change in staff attitudes. Now they automatically think about things from the perspective of the poorest child in the school."*  
*"You think that you're doing things in the right way and you do things for a purpose but then when you're poverty proofed you realise that you're creating another barrier."*

### CASE STUDY

**Case study (provided by Project 17):**

*B is unable to access public funds or work because of her immigration status. B has an outstanding immigration application with the Home Office and is awaiting the outcome. When B requested support under Section 17 from her local authority, she was refused. When we provided advocacy support to B and her children, the local authority began an assessment but refused to provide interim support. One of B's children, C, developed Pica and was assessed by a Child and Adolescent Mental Health Service (CAMHS) practitioner. C was regularly eating plasterboard, foam-like materials from his pillow, stuffing from his coat and fibre from his socks and jumpers. C felt a lot of shame about this. The CAMHS practitioner concluded that it was difficult for C to be supported to reduce the amount of foam and plasterboard he was eating as he was extremely hungry. C told his mum the main reason he was eating the non-food items was because he was so hungry.*

**Case study (provided by Project 17):**

*A and her partner have four children under 10. A has an outstanding immigration application but is unable to work or access public funds because of her immigration status. A is unable to afford fresh fruit and vegetables and can only buy fruit and vegetables about once a month. A mainly cooks pasta for the family. A cannot afford breakfast so they children do not eat in the mornings, they simply drink milk. One of the children has developed a stomach problem because she does not have a sufficiently nutritious diet. A is forced to regularly skip meals and was unable to breastfeed her two youngest children as she was not eating enough to produce breastmilk. When A approached social services for support under Section 17, she was wrongly refused because the family were not homeless. After advocacy support from Project 17, the family were able to access Section 17 support from the local authority but were provided with just £61.80 a week.*



## FOOD AT HOME AND IN THE HOLIDAYS: The Committee's Conclusions

The food environment in which children are growing up affects children from the poorest families the worst. They are more exposed to fast food outlets and more affected by the relatively higher costs of healthy food (see The Stats). This is evident in their diets which have less healthy food compared to children from wealthier families. There are a number of policy measures in place to restrict the marketing of junk food to children, but children's exposure remains high because there are a number of policy gaps which need to be addressed including in advertising and packaging.

Children told us repeatedly how they felt healthy eating was very difficult to achieve both in and outside of school and that they were being encouraged to eat junk food. Children living in poverty are particularly vulnerable in the school holidays when free school meals are not available. While communities are stepping up to plug this gap and there is growing investment from governments, supply is still substantially less than demand.

**"WE SHOULD MAKE ALL HEALTHY FOOD CHEAPER AND MAKE SURE PEOPLE HAVE SOMEWHERE TO COOK FOOD PRIVATELY AND CALL HOME."**

FROM CHILD WHO SUBMITTED TO THE EVIDENCE PORTAL

# FOOD AT HOME AND IN THE HOLIDAYS

## THE STATS: FOOD AT HOME



### 1 COST

The cost of healthy and unhealthy food – unhealthy calories are three times cheaper than healthy calories

There are a multitude of policies which affect the relative costs of food including VAT, the sugary drinks tax and agricultural subsidies, but they are not currently effective. (25).



### 2 ADVERTISING TO CHILDREN

59% of food and drink adverts shown during family viewing time would be banned from children's TV, yet hundreds of thousands of children are exposed to these ads every week

Adverts for fast food and takeaways appear more than twice as often as any other type of food and drink adverts – often because they sponsor popular family shows (84).

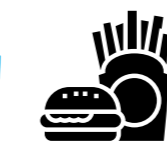
This is just TV: advertising also happens online, on social media, on apps, in-game, in cinemas and on digital outdoor advertising. There are a number of policy measures to restrict advertising of junk food to children, but they are not working well enough. The Broadcast Committee of Advertising Practice (BCAP) Code restricts TV advertising of junk food during children's viewing time, but doesn't cover family shows. Similarly, the CAP Code (the UK Code of Non-broadcast Advertising and Direct & Promotional Marketing) covers digital children's channels but only channels which are dedicated to children, and many children use other channels. The CAP code also covers outdoor advertising which has some restrictions but is still allows junk food advertising close to schools.



### 3 PACKAGING

Half of breakfast cereals with packaging which appeals to children are high in sugar and low in fibre (25).

There are no restrictions on marketing to children on packaging so it is possible to have packaging which appeals to children on very unhealthy products.



### 4 PROLIFERATION OF FAST FOOD OUTLETS

A third of all food outlets in England sell fast food and their concentration is linked to deprivation.

Planners in local authorities are increasingly implementing planning regulations that limit growth in the takeaway food sector, for example imposing exclusion zones around schools, and restrictions on the amount of retail frontage dedicated to takeaway food (Personal Communication, Matthew Keeble) (85), but more could be done. Mobile food vans frequently locate themselves near secondary schools to serve food to students who decide not to eat at the canteen. In Scotland 2014, 14 out of 32 local authorities had placed a condition/restriction on traders' licences to restrict their operation in the vicinity of schools.



### 5 HOUSING AND COOKING FACILITIES

Nearly 2% of households in England are living with children in private rented accommodation which failed to meet the decent homes standard (86).

Access to cooking facilities, cooking equipment and being able to afford gas or electricity to cook may also present barriers to eating well at home. Families supported under Section 17 are regularly housed in Bed and Breakfast accommodation for long periods of time (87). This type of accommodation has been found to be 'detrimental to child welfare' (88). Statutory guidance on homelessness states that Bed and Breakfast accommodation is unsuitable for people with dependent children or pregnant women. If a local authority is unable to source suitable accommodation, families should only be housed in Bed and Breakfasts for a maximum of six weeks (89). However, no such legislation or guidance exists for accommodation provided under Section 17.



**"SOME CHILDREN ARE TOO SCARED TO SPEAK UP"**

FROM YOUNG PERSON WHO SUBMITTED TO THE EVIDENCE PORTAL

## CASE STUDY

Sultan, age nine, and his mother have been living in a Bed and Breakfast for two years. They share one room. The room is too small for Sultan to do homework or play. They have no access to a kitchen, so they have been living on microwave food for the last two years. There is nowhere in the room for them to eat. There is a £20 charge to use the washing machine in the building, which Sultan and his mother can't afford. Sultan's mum is forced to clean his clothes with baby wipes (87).  
Evidence from Project 17's report **Not Seen Not Heard: Children's experiences of the hostile environment**

## BEST PRACTICE

## FOODCYCLE

FoodCycle is a national charity, based on the simple idea that food waste and food poverty should not co-exist, and that something powerful can be achieved through eating together. Every week, FoodCycle welcomes over 1,400 guests across England to enjoy a tasty and nutritious three-course meal in their local community. The organisation aims to relieve food poverty by providing nutritious meals for those in need, and to reduce social isolation by serving three-course, sit-down, communal meals in a friendly, supportive and safe environment. In addition, FoodCycle aims to reduce food waste by reclaiming as much as two tonnes of surplus food per week and transforming it into meals. The project builds strong, resilient communities by encouraging volunteers and guests to dine together and create strong support networks. Each project is powered by local volunteers. Last year, volunteers collected, peeled, chopped and cooked 120 tonnes of surplus food, turning it into the equivalent of 282,000 hot meals. Guests also take home unused surplus, such as bread or fruit and vegetables, so that they can continue to feed themselves throughout the week. Anecdotal evidence also suggests that this provision can be a lifeline for those who are struggling towards the end of the month: "she goes without so her two boys can eat but knowing there is a meal on a Thursday evening is really helpful."

## WHAT THE YOUNG PEOPLE TOLD US

- Healthy options at school are few and far between and more expensive. It's the same at home.
- Children are rarely involved in cooking or deciding what they will eat, but would like to be. The range of meals on offer at home is often narrow and the children would like more diversity.
- Time and erratic work patterns are a significant constraint to cooking from scratch and often leave children preparing their own meals. Parents can return tired and stressed from work and not want to cook. They enjoyed visiting grandparents because they ate a lot better there than they did at home, having more home-cooked and nutritious meals.
- Many children wanted to learn to cook more. Many were doing a lot of cooking for the rest of the family especially if they were designated carers.
- Eating together was recognised as an important part of family life but there were a number of reasons why this wasn't possible in some families.
- There was widespread concern that people were not taking care of each other when they were facing hardship, and that the stigma prevented people from talking to each other. There were also concerns that people needed help knowing what services were available.
- Rationing or taking smaller portions so that there was enough for everyone to eat happened in the home.
- They had mixed views on the media, though a survey of those involved in our workshops showed 72% believed the portrayal of food and meal times on TV is unrealistic.
- They felt that a disproportionate percentage of food adverts are for unhealthy junk food, which meant they are encouraged to choose that food even though the reality of the food on offer is never as good as the ad.

**"I FEEL SAD – CHILDREN SHOULD NOT BE HUNGRY. EVERY CHILD SHOULD GET A HOT MEAL EVERY DAY"**

A YOUNG PERSON WHO SUBMITTED TO THE EVIDENCE PORTAL

## THE SCHOOL HOLIDAYS

For families who rely on free school meals and other children living in poverty, the 13 weeks of the year when children are on holiday can create a profound financial pressure point which forces the family into greater food insecurity and in turn leads to cut backs on other important family expenditure. A shortage of funds for costs like entertainment and socialising which affect the quality of children's lives can leave them isolated and bored (90–92). The school holidays also bring a series of other social risks to children living in poverty (see Box). Andrew McCreery, a youth worker in Portadown, told the Committee that when they asked children to bring a packed lunch for the holiday programmes they were running, 10-15% of children had no lunch, and those who did were often bringing dry bread, cold microwave chips, biscuits or even empty lunchboxes.

The lost value of free school meals in the **13 WEEKS** of holidays is approximately **£150** per child

## What the holidays mean for children living in poverty

The Childhood Trust surveyed 22 charities in London that planned to support 12,337 children and young people, ranging from four to 18-years-old, during the 2018 summer holidays.

- **66%** of children and young people would go hungry if a charity did not provide meals during the holidays (up from **37%** in 2017)
- **90%** of children and young people will not go on holiday (i.e. will not experience a period away from home) during the summer holidays
- **50%** of children under the age of 11 are left without adult supervision during the summer holidays
- **65%** of children and young people are frightened of being attacked and/or exploited by gangs during the summer holidays
- **54%** of children and young people have witnessed violence during the holidays
- **73%** of beneficiaries responded that there is a high threat of violence to children and young people during the summer holidays (compared to term time)
- **50%** of beneficiaries reported that there is a high threat of sexual exploitation of children and young people during the summer holidays (compared to term time)
- **48%** children and young people have witnessed drug-taking during the holidays

*"I eat up in my room; my dad goes out to his caravan to eat."*

*"It would be helpful if someone showed us how to cook. I can't cook anything."*

*"It's a big problem if your parents work a lot; then you don't eat properly or at the right time,"*

*"I've heard my friends make up excuses about why they can't join in and invite friends round for their tea."*

*"My parents get depressed with food adverts; they can't afford it."*

*"You might be sat there with a Pot Noodle looking at pictures of food online and it makes people feel sad, like they're missing out because they can't have nice food."*

*"I don't always have the money to put a proper dinner down. I would get them pizza. It's not as healthy as I would want but it's cheap. I just don't have the money to go out and buy a proper dinner."* Parent of child attending holiday provision in Northern Ireland

**86% IN OUR POLLING OF 1,469 11-18-YEAR-OLDS HAD EVER PREPARED A MEAL AT HOME OR AT SCHOOL**  
**77% REPORTED HAVING A HOME-PREPARED MEAL IN THE EVENING IN THE PREVIOUS WEEK.**  
**13% SAID THEY HAD NOT.**

**ON AVERAGE, THE CHILDREN HAD HAD FOUR HOME PREPARED EVENING MEALS OVER THE PREVIOUS WEEK.**

As a result of a growing awareness of this need, there are now a multitude of community projects which seek to address this gap in provision. During both 2016 and 2017, Northumbria University undertook surveys of voluntary holiday provision (93). The surveys were based on a self-completed questionnaire, and were reliant on word of mouth and existing networks (i.e. this was not a nationally representative survey). They had an 82% increase in survey responses between 2016 and 2017, and half of the 500 holiday clubs that responses in 2017 were established that year. This suggests a sharp increase in the level of provision in recent years. Seventy-three percent were providing free sessions while the rest were charging (the majority less than £5 per child per session). The focus is on provision for primary school children and at least half involve parents and carers in the provision. Over half of the provision is delivered by voluntary or community groups and church or faith groups which use both paid staff and volunteers. The findings suggest the holiday clubs are more likely to be located within deprived areas where they are most economically needed, but there was some evidence of under-inclusion of ethnic minority neighbourhoods (94). Rural communities and children with disabilities may also face particular barriers (95).

During 2018, the Department for Education in England committed £2 million to pilot holiday provision, which they did in partnership with seven organisations already running holiday provision in deprived areas. In early 2019, a further £9 million was committed to this work. They report that 283 sites were supported which delivered a total of 3,649 days of operation and reached 18,000 children. They were provided with healthy meals and enrichment activities (96). In England alone 1.1 million children are eligible for free school meals.

In Wales, the WLGA and Welsh government support the School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP), which is a school-based programme that provides healthy meals, food and nutrition, education, physical activity and enrichment sessions to children in areas of social deprivation during the summer holidays. 'Food and Fun' is the brand identity used at a local level to promote the clubs to children and families. The programme has scaled up since 2016 and by 2018 a total of 56 schemes were running, offering more than 2,500 places to children across Wales. Further funding in 2019/20 is allocated within the Welsh government's budget.

Scotland has committed to spend £2 million in 2019/20 working with a range of partners across the public and third sectors to build momentum, trial new approaches and develop a clear plan of action for the future to tackle food insecurity during the school holidays.

**WHAT THE EXPERTS TOLD THE INQUIRY:**  
*"One parent commented that they felt that for some children, the initiative (holiday provision) would be something they could then talk about when they returned to school rather than just saying they stayed at home in the holidays. On two occasions, parents talked about how out of school and holiday initiatives help provide opportunities for their children to have healthy food, some of which they had not tried before, commenting that they "tried new food like kiwi and couscous"."* Professor Sally Holland, Children's Commissioner, Wales

## BEST PRACTICE

### YOUNG SCOT NATIONAL ENTITLEMENT CARD

Scotland is currently trialling a number of initiatives to support access to food for young people entitled to free school meals using the Young Scot National Entitlement Card (NEC). The Young Scot NEC is available free of charge to all young people aged 11-26 living in Scotland and can be used for a variety of services including discounts and rewards, transport, leisure and cashless catering. Young Scot is supporting three local authority areas – Highland, North Ayrshire and Renfrewshire – to provide young people with access to free and discounted food to tackle the poverty-related attainment gap using the Young Scot NEC. Target groups of young people are supported to access free school breakfasts and free and discounted meals in local cafes, and a leisure centre during out of school hours and holidays. The Attainment Challenge Partnership Project – a National Strategic Partnership with the Scottish government – focuses on improving health and wellbeing, challenging rural poverty, and tackling inequalities in a non-stigmatising way.

*"It's absolutely brilliant that I can get free food [at my local leisure centre], but sometimes the choice isn't the best there"* Girl, age 14

## HOLIDAY PROVISION ON A LOW BUDGET

"Over the past four years I have been involved in setting up holiday hunger projects in the diocese of St Asaph to tackle this issue using a simple but effective format. We work with local, open access play provisions to deliver packed lunches to children who might otherwise go hungry. This format seems to work well as it allows churches and communities to come together and, for a small cost, provide a simple meal for children and young people in their local area. It allows local play provision to continue their excellent work, while enhancing the children's experience of the school holidays by providing a much-needed meal. Families and friends can come and eat together, offering them the opportunity of a meal and a chance to socialise, that would otherwise for many be out of their price range. Many of our projects run during Easter, summer and Christmas school holidays, and some run during the half term holidays too." Sarah Wheat, St Asaph Diocese Engagement Officer, Wrexham

*"We became aware of the struggles that some families had in providing packed lunches for their kids. This became so evident that we now have a team that checks every child has a lunch box with them, and that checks inside to ensure there is enough food. We came across a child that consistently came with an empty lunch box. When we spoke to their mother, she said she simply did not have any food, was embarrassed to tell anyone so or let the community see that, so she sent him with an empty box in the hope that someone would step in and provide. We regularly add food to kids' lunches at our programmes, because often what is provided simply isn't substantial enough to sustain a child through the day. We do this without the kids' knowledge where possible so as to maintain their dignity and avoid any embarrassment for them. We have come across what can only be described as abject food poverty: parents phoning our staff early in the morning asking for milk and bread for breakfast, clients taking out of date food from our bins."*  
 Community Intercultural Programme Northern Ireland – Oasis Youth

*"I didn't have any breakfast 'cos there was nothing in the fridge. I don't eat breakfast much anyway. When we don't have any food for dinner my Dad will go out to borrow money from our neighbour. Sometimes he doesn't come back and I have to go to sleep"* Girl, 11

*"I eat crisps for breakfast. I don't like baked beans on toast 'cos we eat them too much but they fill you up nice. Sometimes we get chicken and chips which is my favourite!"* Boy, 10

*"These are my favourite biscuits. I've had them for six years, since 2012. No-one else likes them. I have 19 for lunch."* Quotes provided by the Childhood Trust from children attending summer holiday provision



# THE FINAL WORD & RECOMMENDATIONS



## THE FINAL WORD

We face a grave situation with children's food which is in urgent need of systematic leadership and action from all four governments across the United Kingdom.

Children living in poverty across the UK experience very different levels of entitlement depending on where they live. This is a postcode lottery with devastating consequences. Our young Food Ambassadors have developed a #Right2Food Charter which captures many of these recommendations in their own words, and we commend this charter to the government. Our own recommendations, with suggested scope, are below.

What we feed our children is a defining factor of our nation's values. There is incredible leadership being shown in all corners of the British Isles demonstrating that food can build communities and underpin health and wellbeing. But millions of children are missing out on this opportunity to lay the foundations of a better future. This must change.

## COMMITTEE RECOMMENDATIONS

The urgency and scale of the challenge we face with children's food requires systemic action, led by government.

**An independent watchdog for children's food should be established immediately** to provide energetic and committed leadership to deliver quick results. Children and young people need to be involved in its leadership. It could be housed by the Food Standards Agency in all four nations, staffed by secondees from relevant Departments, networked across nations and include an independent Board reporting to parliaments and informing the Children's Commissioners in all four nations.

The Watchdog must consider conducting a full economic costing of the following actions so they can report to parliaments on priorities by 2020 for immediate implementation. 2020 will mark a turning point for children's food in the UK.



## THE WATCHDOG SHOULD CONSIDER COSTING:

- 1 Putting in place a comprehensive action plan to support women who want to breastfeed in all four UK nations.**  
This could include:
  - Scaling up the Baby Friendly hospital initiative (England)
  - Increasing investment in breastfeeding peer support services (UK)
  - Creative campaigns to normalise breastfeeding (UK)
  - Tightening legislation to support breastfeeding in the workplace (UK)
  - Reducing the inappropriate promotion of breastmilk substitutes to families in the UK by bringing the World Health Organisation's Code of Marketing of Breastmilk substitutes into law (UK).
- 2 The further development of food voucher schemes for pregnant women and mothers of young children.**  
This could include:
  - Expanding the schemes to include a larger group of pregnant women and mothers, starting with all those on Universal Credit (all nations)
  - Expanding the food voucher value to at least £6 per week (to match the weekly cost of fruit and vegetables) and ensure it is index linked (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)
  - Learning from experiences in the US and leverage investment from retailers and the private sector in the provision of fruit and vegetables (all nations)
  - Considering how breastfeeding can be better supported and promoted (all nations).
- 3 The implementation of mandatory and monitored quality standards for food served in childcare settings.**  
In the meantime, childcare providers should follow the voluntary standards provided and work to ensure that wherever possible they assist lower income families with food costs to ensure their children have the same access as the others to the best development opportunities.
- 4 The extension of free meals and milk to those eligible for free childcare and early years provision following Scotland's lead (England, Wales and Northern Ireland).**
- 5 The extension of free school meals for those age seven upwards including:**
  - Expanding to include all children living in poverty, following Northern Ireland's lead
  - Re-branding for popular appeal. Combined with expanded eligibility, this will help to tackle stigma (all nations)
  - Increasing the value for secondary school children so they can afford a meal (all nations)
  - Expanding to include children from families without recourse to public funds and undocumented children (all nations).

- 6 The introduction of Free School Meals for all infants in Wales and Northern Ireland** in line with the rest of the United Kingdom.
- 7 The full monitoring of school food standards,** building on Scotland's existing monitoring (England, Wales and Northern Ireland).
- 8 Extending the Free Fruit and Vegetable Scheme to be universal for all school children,** not just young children in England (Wales, Northern Ireland and the rest of Scotland).
- 9 Including sufficient food education including on food insecurity in the curriculum.**
- 10 Poverty proofing the school day for all schools where more than 20% of children are on free school meals.**  
This could be supported by their local authority, following the model provided by Children North East.
- 11 Measures to rebalance the cost of healthy and unhealthy foods by examining the benefits of:**
  - further expanding the sugar tax to other high sugar categories
  - re-designing VAT on food to favour healthier and more sustainable choices
  - stopping price and location promotions on unhealthy food.
- 12 Advising Local Authorities on how to implement much stronger measures against takeaways being opened around schools.**
- 13 Examining the benefits of enshrining the cost of living and cost of a healthy diet in legislation as a mandatory guide for setting wage and benefit minimums in order to close the affordability gap (all nations).**
- 14 How best to support retailers and out of home providers to make healthier products cheaper than unhealthy products within specific food and drink categories (UK wide).**
- 15 All four governments building on the pilot holiday provision programmes and establishing a UK framework for holiday provision of establishing a UK framework for holiday provision.** Good holiday provision provides more than just good food, so should be fun and educational too (All nations).
- 16 Additional cash benefits during the school holidays to at least match the cost of free school meals.**  
Specific guidance should be provided to schools encouraging the use of their cooking facilities and space in the holidays as a community asset (all nations).





# YOUNG PEOPLE ARE LEADING THE WAY



Several of the young ambassadors have been supported by this Inquiry and Fixers to work with their friends to try to tackle food poverty problems in their own schools and communities. They are leading the way and tacking action now. We hope you will too.

## IN GLASGOW, SCOTLAND

Three young people at YOMO in Glasgow worked on a project about the availability of junk food in their local area.

In the early stages of this project they talked about people's attitudes and relationships with food, both positive and negative. These discussions moved on to look at the challenges young people face when they want to eat a healthy diet and this quickly focused on the subject of junk food.

Aaron, Savannah and Jacob noticed the high number of takeaways and junk food outlets in their deprived community limited the food choices available for young people. They discovered a lot of this food was cheaper than the meals they were offered at school, and advertised to encourage pupils to buy them instead of school dinners. They recognised the impact eating a poor diet has on their health and wanted to change this.

Their powerful film aims to address these issues and was shown at the Inquiry evidence hearing in Edinburgh, where Aaron, Savannah and Jacob also joined the panel to answer questions.

## IN PRESTATYN, WALES

Prestatyn High School worked in partnership with Fixers, who undertook workshops to discuss how branding and food awareness in the media impacts young people's decisions. This allowed Fixers to understand the students' perspective and opinions on how food in the media shapes their decisions and choices in relation to food. This activity fed into another workshop with Fixers which encouraged more detailed discussion of the issues students face each day with regard to food insecurity. Fixers and the students produced a film about the stigma surrounding free school meals and how the students would like to reduce this with a series of recommendations.

The main ideas on which all students agreed were to increase the amount allocated for free school meals, and to change the name to reduce stigma. This Inquiry has now progressed to students looking at all aspects of food insecurity, and Prestatyn High School has set up a global sustainability project which will examine the key points that students feel must be addressed. The students are also looking at setting up a food bank within the school so we can help families in the local community who are struggling with day-to-day finances. Beth Rhodes and Fayeth Jones who worked on the project became young Food Ambassadors for Wales because they both had personal experiences of food insecurity and special dietary needs. They delivered compelling evidence at the Fixers report launch at the House of Lords in Westminster.

## IN LONDON

Fixers undertook a series of workshops, talks and assemblies at Rockmount Primary School in Croydon, London, which five students in Year Six found particularly inspiring. Niedjeni, Nazeeha, Isaac, Alisson and Janan (who has acted as one of the Inquiry's Food Ambassadors) have talked about the fact that they were interested, shocked and saddened to learn about food poverty in the UK, recognising it as a name for an experience with which their classmates, friends and they themselves were all too familiar. The students went on to research the subject in their own time, producing a series of educational resources in the form of films, websites, posters, data visualisations and lesson plans. All five pupils sat on a panel with the Food Foundation at a House of Lords report launch, and planned and delivered an assembly to their peers which showcased their efforts and aimed to dispel the stigma around food poverty.



Tia Clarke, 16 and Corey McPartland, 15

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## ANNEX A: PEOPLE WHO GAVE ORAL EVIDENCE TO THE INQUIRY

Name	Organisation
Jo Jones	Executive Head Teacher, Storywood school Birmingham
Nadia Chalabi	Hackney Migrant Centre
Annie Connolly	Researcher, Leeds University
Vaneeza	National Children's Bureau
Rachel Thomas	Head of Policy and Public Affairs, Office for Children's Commissioner for Wales
James Williams	Teacher, Prestatyn High School
Gordon Thomson	Lanarkshire Community Food and Health Partnership
Nicola Joiner	East Renfrewshire School Meals service
Chris Kilkenny	Care-experienced father, poverty and equality campaigner
Janette Douglas	Youth Worker, Highlands
Dr Flora Douglas	Robert Gordon University, Aberdeen
Sinead Fury	Ulster University
Caroline Bloomfield	Public Health Agency
Ellen Finlay	Children in Northern Ireland
Aoife Hamilton	Employers for Childcare
Lindsay Wallace	For Families with Disabled Children
Mary McManus	East Belfast Independent Advice Centre
Andrew McCreary	Oasis Youth
Helen Dunn	Carrickfergus YMCA
Karen Graham	Carrickfergus YMCA
Isobel Loughran	Footprints Women's Centre
Eileen Wilson	Footprints Women's Centre
Chris Cupples	Christians Against Poverty

