



# A YEAR OF CHILDREN'S FOOD



A progress review of policy on children's food and nutrition across the four UK nations [2019-2020](#)



# INTRODUCTION



In April 2019, we published the final report from the Children's Future Food Inquiry – a year-long investigation into children's food across the UK. The process involved many children and young people who helped us to develop a Children's Right2Food Charter. This captured the key recommendations from the Inquiry on how government policies and programmes can better support children to eat well in pre-school settings, at school and at home. The Inquiry report was discussed extensively in parliament as well as in the media, and we presented it to policy makers in all four UK nations. Just over one year later, we return to our recommendations to ask what has changed.

In this report we take each element of the Children's Right2Food Charter and investigate what the governments of England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland have done to implement its recommendations. We capture our results in a traffic light rating that shines a light on each nation's progress (or lack thereof) in regard to children's food policy.

Overall, we have seen some important steps being taken, but progress is patchy. The findings reaffirm the need for an approach to children's food which comprehensively addresses policy gaps and implementation failures.

In March 2020, the UK went into lockdown as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. This unprecedented event has plunged millions of children, many of whom were already struggling to secure a decent diet, further into food insecurity. Given the scale of the challenge and the importance of children's health and diet, the provisions set out in the Children's Right2Food Charter – updated to reflect recent events – are now more important than ever.

## WHY DO WE NEED THE CHILDREN'S RIGHT2FOOD CHARTER?

Before the Covid-19 crisis hit, 4.2 million children were living in poverty in the UK (CPAG, 2019). Our data show that 3.7 million children were living in households that would have to spend more than 40% of their income (after housing) on food to afford the government's recommended Eatwell Guide (Food Foundation, 2018). Before the pandemic, childhood obesity rates were also worryingly high, with the poorest children disproportionately affected. Among children from disadvantaged backgrounds, obesity levels are rising, while they fall amongst the wealthiest children (NHS Digital, 2019). No devolved government to date has succeeded in tackling these health inequalities which have risen every single year of the past decade (UK Government, 2020b). Although food insecurity among children is not measured by the UK government, other estimates suggest between 2.5 and 4 million children pre-Covid were affected by moderate or severe food insecurity (Food Foundation, 2020b). Data gathered by the Food Foundation on food insecurity levels during the UK Covid-19 lockdown showed that, among households with children, the prevalence of food insecurity has doubled since the crisis hit (Food Foundation, 2020c).

The Inquiry reported on the many aspects of children's lives that are impacted by the experience of food insecurity, as told by young people. Lack of food can create stressful home environments for children, while at school children experiencing food insecurity have lower attainment and worse education outcomes than food secure children (Food Foundation, 2019). In addition to the negative impact of food insecurity on mental and social wellbeing, children in food insecure households are also more likely to have poor physical health (Marmot, 2020).



These problems can have lifelong consequences for these children, not to mention the long-term impacts on our health and social care system. The Covid-19 virus has highlighted the danger that obesity and poor nutrition pose for public health, with obese individuals showing increased risk of severe medical complications from the virus (Public Health England, 2020).

Implementing the Children's Right2Food Charter should be a critical priority for UK governments: young people's nutrition has never been more important.

## RECAP: CHILDREN'S FUTURE FOOD INQUIRY FINDINGS

In the 2019 Inquiry, we found that existing government policies were often patchy and insufficient, leaving large numbers of children unable to access the food provision they needed. Other policies, while seeming adequate on paper, were badly implemented in practice.

For example, less than 50% of children (in England, Wales and Northern Ireland) living in poverty were entitled to support from the Healthy Start scheme (see glossary), and only 33% actually received it due to implementation problems (Food Foundation, 2019). Of secondary school children living in poverty (in England, Wales and Scotland), less than 60% were eligible for free school meals (FSM). This is as low as 42% in England compared to 100% in Northern Ireland (Food Foundation, 2019). We found that 23% of secondary school children who did not qualify for FSM had gone without lunch because they couldn't afford it (Food Foundation, 2019).

Another critical policy failure identified was that, despite governments' major investment in school meals, there

is no monitoring of compliance with mandatory school food standards (other than in Scotland), and therefore no way of knowing if children have access to sufficiently nutritious food at school. The Soil Association's Food for Life programme estimated that at least 60% of secondary schools are non-compliant with the School Food Standards (Soil Association Food for Life, 2018).

The Inquiry report also drew attention to a lack of sufficient holiday provision for children dependent on FSM and an absence of mandatory policies on nursery food standards. Inconsistencies in policies to protect children from food insecurity across the four nations were also revealed, even though, of course, children's nutritional needs remain the same across the UK. Further details can be seen in the **Children's Future Food Inquiry report**.

## YOUNG FOOD AMBASSADORS

The Children's Right2Food Campaign is led by our dedicated team of Young Food Ambassadors. Over the past year, they've undertaken a huge range of impactful activity, including:

- Completing work experience with the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland
- Speaking on a panel with the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland in Westminster
- Winning community awards
- Giving interviews in the news and on the radio
- Making posters and giving school assemblies
- Speaking at a food insecurity summit at City Hall in London
- Meeting with local MPs, signing petitions and writing letters
- Joining youth boards for other food campaigns
- Creating short films and recording podcasts

# POLICY PROGRESS REVIEW SUMMARY

Following on from the Inquiry, we reviewed the progress made by each of the four nations in relation to the Charter recommendations from the Charter's launch (April 2019) to the current date (July 2020).

● NO POLICY IN PLACE ● PILOT OR A COMMITMENT ● SOME POLICY IN PLACE ● FULLY ACHIEVED

		WALES		NORTHERN IRELAND		SCOTLAND		ENGLAND		
		2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	2019	2020	
1 HEALTHY LUNCH GUARANTEE	Providing free nursery meals to children who are entitled to free childcare	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
	Increasing the offer of free school meals to a wider group of children throughout age bands	Breakfast	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
		Lunch	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	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		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●
	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.		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
2 HEALTHY FOOD MINIMUM	Expanding the Healthy Start voucher scheme by increasing the voucher value and increasing the number of children who benefit		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
	Introducing financial holiday allowances for school holiday periods for lower income families		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
	When considering changes to support or wages for families, make laws that account for food costs, and unlock the constraints of poverty on our diets.		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
3 CHILDREN'S FOOD WATCHDOG	Monitoring and inspection of school and nursery meals		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
	Development of guidance for schools 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	Stopping marketing aimed at children on packaging. Ending promotions of unhealthy foods and replacing these with health warnings		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	
	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	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.		●	●	●	●	●	●	●	

# POLICY PROGRESS REVIEW



FROM 2019  
CHARTER

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.

● NO POLICY  
IN PLACE

● PILOT OR A  
COMMITMENT

● SOME POLICY  
IN PLACE

● FULLY  
ACHIEVED

● NON-GOVERNMENT  
RESPONSE

### WALES TWO STEPS FORWARD, ONE STEP BACK

- Wales committed to fully embed government food and nutrition guidance in childcare settings such as nurseries (Welsh Government, 2019a).
- For school-aged children, Wales decided against mirroring Northern Ireland in their eligibility criteria for FSM. The parliamentary Equality, Local Government and Communities Committee recommended government undertake a feasibility study into increasing the income threshold for FSM from the current £7,400 to £14,000 (National Assembly for Wales: Equality Local Government and Communities Committee, 2019). The response from government was that this threshold had previously been considered and been decided against, so they would not be looking into it again until 2023 (Welsh Government, 2019b).
- Wales further expanded its commitments on holiday provision. Holiday provision was piloted for the summer and the October half-term break in 2019 and £1m was allocated for 2020. A further £2.7m was allocated to the School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP) (which provides two nutritious meals per day over the summer holidays) for 2020-21, which would potentially reach 7,600 children (Welsh Government, 2020c). Expanding holiday provision is also a commitment in the Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales (HWHW) strategy (Welsh Government, 2019a) (see page 12 for further information on this strategy).

### NORTHERN IRELAND NO DEVELOPMENTS

### SCOTLAND PLANS DELAYED BY COVID-19

- Scotland's plans to provide free nursery food to all children in funded early learning care, and to introduce the new Scottish Milk and Healthy Snack scheme, have been delayed due to Covid-19 (Scottish Government, 2019a).
- There has been a continuation of funding for holiday provision:
  - The Scottish government has part-funded charities and councils to provide nutritious food to children in the summer holidays, with the Fair Food Fund reaching 60,000 young people in 2019 (Scottish Government, 2019c).
  - The government also announced the new Access to Childcare Fund planned to run for two years beginning in April 2020 which would have partly contributed to holiday clubs and addressing food insecurity (Scottish Government, 2019b), but it is not clear how this is has been affected by the current pandemic.

**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.**

## ENGLAND SOME POLICY IN PLACE

- There has been a continuation of funding for breakfast clubs and an expansion of holiday provision programmes since 2018, but both remain at levels far below what's needed:
  - Government committed £11.8m towards the National School Breakfast Programme in 2019, supporting 650 new schools (UK Government, 2020a).
  - Backed by £9.1m funding, the Holiday Activities and Food scheme (HAF) was expanded, reaching around 50,000 children in 2019. The Government has committed to continuing the scheme in 2020 with a further £9m (UK Government, 2020a) but funding will only extend to 10 projects in 17 local authorities in certain regions of the country.
- Adding to the momentum in the Children's Right2Food Charter:
  - The Chief Medical Officer's report, Time to Solve Childhood Obesity, recommended that government should review FSM to identify ways to improve uptake and delivery of healthy affordable meals (Professor Dame Sally Davies, 2019).
  - The National Audit Office conducted an inquiry to trace where funding committed to FSM, but which is not spent by vulnerable children, ends up, following a request from Frank Field MP (Defeyter & Stretesky, 2019).

## COMMENTARY

**Nursery food:** Nutritious meals in childcare settings, driven by standards which are monitored and enforced, is a recommendation in the Children's Right2Food Charter. Making these meals free for children in poverty is also included. Northern Ireland leads the way, with both elements in place. Wales took an important step on standards in the past year and committed to fully embed them in early years settings. It's not clear if the standards will be mandatory. Scotland made commitments on free provision, but these have not yet materialised. England has made no progress.

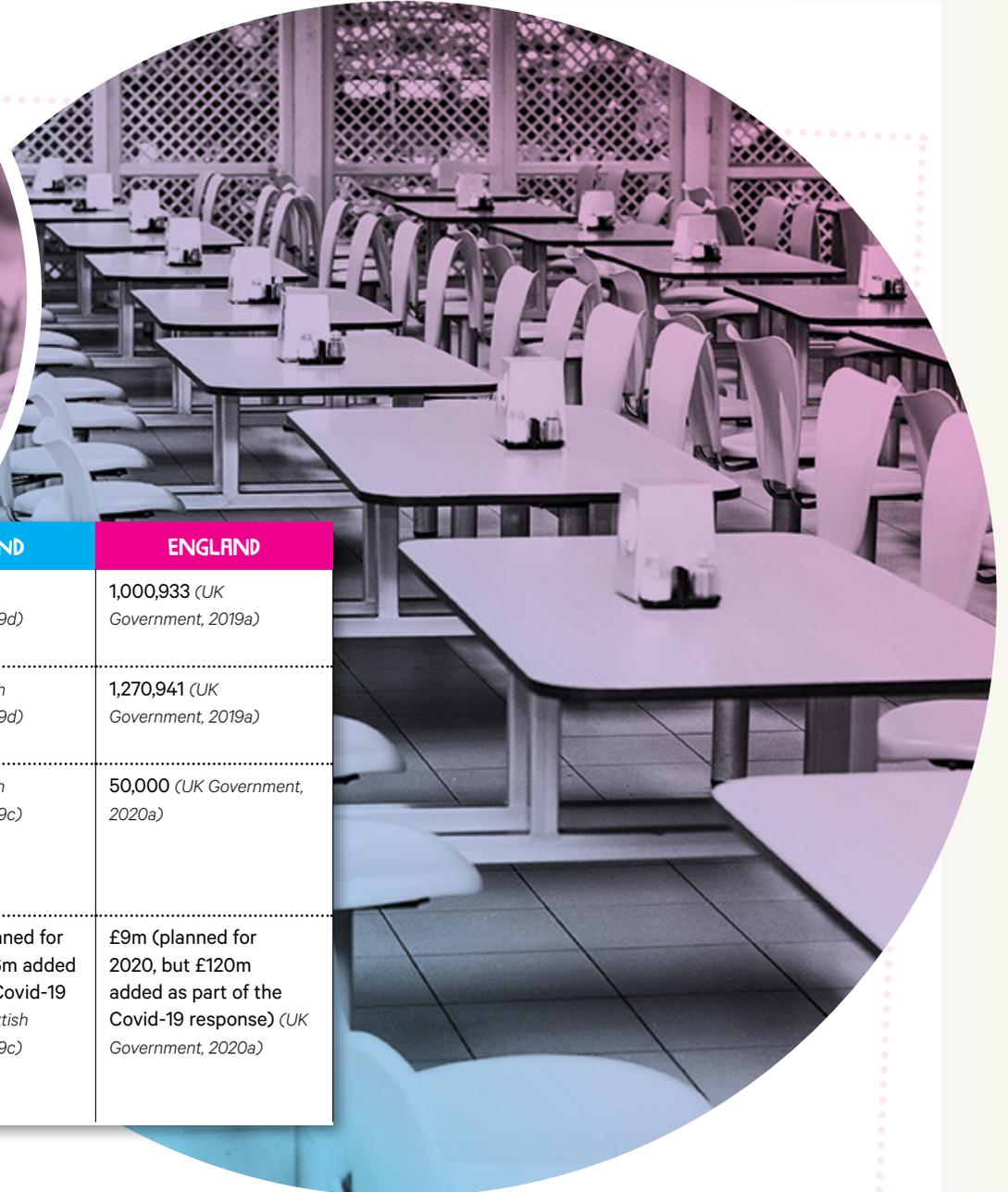
**School food:** Expanding the eligibility criteria for FSM to allow more children living in poverty to benefit as well as increasing the FSM allowance for secondary school children are both recommended in the Children's Right2Food Charter. Northern Ireland includes almost all children living in poverty on its FSM scheme. Wales almost took a step in this direction in the past year but this was delayed for a further three years.

Universal free school meal provision remains a critically important commitment for all infants in Scotland and England. As yet, there is no sign that Wales or Northern Ireland will follow suit.

School breakfast schemes have seen continued investment in Wales and England. Wales is the only country with a national, universal scheme for free breakfast, though in practice this only reached 60,000 children in 2019 (Welsh Government, 2019c), while 28% of children (approximately 148,000 school-aged children) in Wales are living in poverty (Food Foundation, 2019). In England, the government committed funding to support 650 new schools to start breakfast provision.

Children with no recourse to public funds (NRPF) continue to miss out on FSM unless they are universally provided to infants. When schools closed during the Covid-19 lockdown, FSM were temporarily extended to some children from NRPF households, following a legal challenge against their exclusion, although with much more stringent eligibility criteria. This inclusion is expected to be temporary and to last only the duration of the Covid-19 crisis.

**Holiday provision:** Ensuring all children entitled to FSM have access to a healthy lunch during school holidays is a provision in the Children's Right2Food Charter. Wales, Scotland and England all have some form of national holiday provision programme in place but they do not reach all children at risk of holiday food insecurity. In England, for example, the £9m committed by government for Holiday Activity and Food (HAF) provision in 2020 will reach just 50,000 children – a fraction of the country's vulnerable children – and only in pockets of the country. Northern Ireland has no national programme. All nations have committed temporary funding for holiday provision during the Covid-19 pandemic (see page 22 for details).



	WALES	NORTHERN IRELAND	SCOTLAND	ENGLAND
<b>Number of children known to be claiming FSM on census day</b>	66,012 (Welsh Government, 2020b)	75,889 (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2019)	84,491 (Scottish Government, 2019d)	1,000,933 (UK Government, 2019a)
<b>Number of pupils eligible for FSM</b>	90,662 (Welsh Government, 2020b)	94,703 (Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency, 2019)	123,637 (Scottish Government, 2019d)	1,270,941 (UK Government, 2019a)
<b>Children committed to reach through 2020 summer holiday provision (before the Covid-19 response)</b>	7,600 (Welsh Government, 2020c)	Unknown	60,000 (Scottish Government, 2019c)	50,000 (UK Government, 2020a)
<b>Funding committed to summer holiday provision 2020</b>	£1m (in existing playwork settings) £2.7m to SHEP An estimated £10m committed as part of Covid-19 response. (Welsh Government, 2020c)	£12m committed for the summer food scheme (as part of the Covid-19 response) (Department of Education, 2020b)	£350,000 (planned for 2020, but £27.6m added as part of the Covid-19 response) (Scottish Government, 2019c)	£9m (planned for 2020, but £120m added as part of the Covid-19 response) (UK Government, 2020a)



FROM 2019  
CHARTER

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.

● NO POLICY  
IN PLACE

● PILOT OR A  
COMMITMENT

● SOME POLICY  
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● FULLY  
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● NON-GOVERNMENT  
RESPONSE

### WALES TINY STEPS ON HEALTHY START

- The Welsh Government will review the Healthy Start scheme in the next two years to see how to strengthen delivery and increase uptake, including through digitisation as part of the HWHW Strategy (Welsh Government, 2020c).

### NORTHERN IRELAND NO DEVELOPMENTS

### SCOTLAND A NEW SCHEME SUPPORTING EARLY YEARS NUTRITION

- The Best Start Foods scheme (the replacement for Healthy Start) was fully rolled out in Scotland in August 2019 (Scottish Government, 2020a).

### ENGLAND TINY STEPS ON HEALTHY START

- England introduced some improvements to the Healthy Start scheme including no longer needing a healthcare professional's signature to apply (NHS, 2020a). Work is also underway to try and digitise the scheme. These improvements will also apply in Northern Ireland and Wales.
- In line with the Charter, the Chief Medical Officer's report recommended considering uptake and effectiveness, and accelerating progress of the digitisation of the scheme (Professor Dame Sally Davies, 2019).

THE BEST START FOODS SCHEME, A NEW SCHEME SUPPORTING EARLY YEARS NUTRITION, WAS FULLY ROLLED OUT IN SCOTLAND IN AUGUST 2019.

## COMMENTARY

Healthy Start is a statutory scheme providing healthy food vouchers for very low-income households with young children. It has been plagued by implementation difficulties, low uptake (currently 53% of those eligible are accessing the scheme in England (NHS, 2020b)) and a very low voucher value which has not increased since 2009 and is not index-linked. The government promised a consultation on the scheme in 2018 which has never materialised (Department of Health and Social Care, 2018). Instead, they have been working on the digitisation of the scheme and are planning to roll-out pre-paid cards in October 2020. Retailers will no longer be required to register for the scheme. These changes will be applied in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

In Wales, the HWHW strategy sets out plans to use Healthy Start to enhance financial support for parents on lower incomes to promote good nutrition choices for their children (Welsh Government, 2020c).

In Scotland, the scheme was recently devolved (although not in Wales and Northern Ireland), and the Scottish government has improved and renamed the scheme "Best Start Foods". The key elements of the scheme are:

- Mothers receive £4.25 per week (compared to just £3.10 in other nations).
- The allowable foods have been expanded to include not only fresh/frozen fruit and vegetables, cow's milk and first infant formula milk, but also tinned fruit and vegetables, fresh/frozen/dried/tinned pulses (including lentils, peas, barley and beans) and eggs to provide greater choice.
- It is preloaded on to a payment card rather than having to use paper vouchers to make it easier to use and to avoid stigma.
- Best Start Foods and the new Scottish Child Payment will all be available through a single application (Scottish Government, 2019a).

While 22,000 low-income families are now benefiting from the scheme (Scottish Government, 2020a) a third of applications are still being refused (Scottish Parliament, 2020a). We look forward to the evaluation report on the roll-out of the scheme as a useful resource for other nations to learn from.

The remaining two provisions of the Charter on providing financial assistance for food during school holidays for children living in poverty and incorporating the cost of a healthy diet into government laws on social security and wages have seen no progress.

**HEALTHY START IS A STATUTORY SCHEME PROVIDING HEALTHY FOOD VOUCHERS FOR VERY LOW-INCOME HOUSEHOLDS WITH YOUNG CHILDREN. IT HAS BEEN PLAGUED BY IMPLEMENTATION DIFFICULTIES, LOW UPTAKE, AND A VERY LOW VOUCHER VALUE.**



FROM 2019  
CHARTER

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.

● NO POLICY  
IN PLACE

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RESPONSE

### WALES COMMITMENTS MADE

- The Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales (HWHW) strategy commits to revising school food regulations (Welsh Government, 2019a). Work on revising the regulations and incorporating the latest government dietary recommendations into school food provisions is set to commence by 2022 (Welsh Government, 2020c).
- In the HWHW Strategy, improvements in school dining environments and efforts to involve pupils in decision-making about food and drink choices are planned by 2030 (Welsh Government, 2019a) but not made a priority in the 2020-2022 delivery plan.
- The HWHW delivery plan commits to monitor the impact of the Food and Nutrition for childcare settings - best practice guidance (Welsh Government, 2020c).

### NORTHERN IRELAND NEW PROPOSALS MADE

#### ON MONITORING

- The Department of Education is consulting on proposals to update nutritional standards for school food. As part of the consultation, there is a proposal to introduce independent monitoring and evaluation of school food to ensure updated nutritional standards are properly implemented in grant-aided schools (Department of Education, 2020a). The consultation proposes an increase to two portions of vegetables and one portion of fruit at all school lunch services (compared to one portion of each in the current standards).

### SCOTLAND NEW SCHOOL FOOD REGULATIONS DUE TO BE DELIVERED

- Following a 2018 consultation on food and drink in schools (Scottish Government, 2019c), the following changes in school food will be delivered in April 2021:
  - a minimum of two full portions of vegetables and a full portion of fruit offered at school lunch, with fruit and/or vegetables also available in other food settings such as tuck shops
  - a maximum limit for red and processed red meat (such as bacon, ham and pepperoni) in school lunches
  - removal of fruit juice and smoothies from primary and secondary schools.

### ENGLAND LITTLE MEANINGFUL PROGRESS

- A voluntary Healthy Schools Rating Scheme was introduced in July 2019 which includes five criteria on food education and school food standards (Department for Education, 2019a).
- In line with the Charter, a report by the Chief Medical Officer recommended a robust independent monitoring system to ensure current food standards are implemented in all nurseries and school settings (Professor Dame Sally Davies, 2019).

## COMMENTARY

The existence of Scotland's independent school food monitoring system has set an example of good practice for other UK nations to follow. In the last year, Scotland went further and introduced improvements to existing food standards demonstrating further commitment to protecting children's health. Given that monitoring already exists in Scotland, we expect such improvements to be implemented and upheld effectively. Meanwhile, Northern Ireland's consultation on monitoring and evaluation of school food shows progress but no meaningful policy change has yet taken place.

In England, the government is no closer to tracking whether the money spent on school food is delivering meals that fulfil its own set of school food standards. Although additions made in 2019 to the Ofsted Inspection Framework now require inspectors to consider whether schools are developing pupils' understanding of healthy eating (Department for Education, 2019b), they miss the mark on any truly comprehensive school food inspection. The long-delayed introduction of the Healthy School Rating Scheme (pledged in the Government's 2016 Childhood Obesity Plan and finally introduced in July 2019) again pays lip service to school food monitoring. The voluntary scheme rates primary and secondary schools on their compliance with school food standards based on self-assessed criteria – a far cry from the mandatory, externally monitored mechanism that was called for in the Charter.

Wales' HWHW strategy commits to inspectors being more informed and having a greater focus on the whole school approach to health and well-being but falls short of including the monitoring of school food standards as part of the strategy. It also commits to monitor the implementation of early years food guidance. We welcome Wales' commitment to involving children in decisions about their food environment as well as its plans to develop a new curriculum on cooking, food, nutrition and hydration in the next two years (Welsh Government, 2019a, 2020c). However, to align with provisions in the Charter, education on food poverty shouldn't be left off the national curriculum.



**EDUCATION ON FOOD POVERTY SHOULDN'T BE LEFT OFF THE NATIONAL CURRICULUM.**

FROM 2019  
CHARTER

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.

THE CHIEF MEDICAL OFFICER'S 2019 REPORT HIGHLIGHTED THAT CHILDREN SHOULD BE ALLOWED TO GROW UP FREE FROM MARKETING AND INCENTIVES TO CONSUME UNHEALTHY FOOD.

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RESPONSE

### WALES PLANS IN THE PIPELINE

- The HWHW 2020-2022 Delivery Plan commits to consult on a package of legislation to shift the balance in the food environment towards healthier options including:
  - A consultation on rebalancing price promotions and discounting practices by Summer 2020 (delayed due to Covid-19)
  - Working with key stakeholders to restrict advertising of HFSS and redressing the imbalance in advertising of healthier and less healthy foods (the strategy commits to a ban on advertising, sponsorship and promotion of foods high in saturated fat, sugar and salt in public spaces by 2030)
  - Working with the UK government to further restrict advertising in broadcast and online settings (non-devolved policy areas)
  - Considering limiting hot food takeaways and advertising in after-school street environments. Commitment is made to a consultation by summer 2021 on the role of planning and licensing in the creation of healthier environments (Welsh Government, 2020c).

### NORTHERN IRELAND NO DEVELOPMENTS

### SCOTLAND ONE STEP FORWARD, TWO STEPS BACK

- Government had committed to bringing forward a bill to restrict unhealthy food promotion – the Restricting Food Promotions Bill - in next year's Legislative Programme following a consultation published in September 2019 (Scottish Government, 2019b). An announcement made in June 2020 confirmed this is now paused due to Covid-19 (Scottish Parliament, 2020b).

### ENGLAND ACTION OVERDUE

- We await government responses to consultations held in 2019 on:
  - restricting promotions of high fat, salt and/or sugar (HFSS) foods (such as buy one get one free offers) and restricting the placement of HFSS foods and drinks at checkouts and store entrances (UK Government, 2019b)
  - introducing a 9pm watershed on TV advertising and restrictions to online advertising (including social media) of HFSS foods and drink (UK Government, 2019a).
- The Chief Medical Officer's 2019 report highlighted that children should be allowed to grow up free from marketing and incentives to consume unhealthy food (Professor Dame Sally Davies, 2019).

## COMMENTARY

As promised in Chapter Two of the Child Obesity Plan (Department of Health and Social Care, 2018), in 2019 the government in England consulted on restrictions around advertising and promotion of HFSS foods. Two years after announcing these consultations, and one year after the consultations closed, there has been no response from government.

The Scottish government initially seemed to be making progress with a promise to bring forward its Restricting Food Promotions Bill that would include measures to ban multi-buy offers and remove unhealthy food displays at supermarket checkouts. The bill was in step with both our Charter recommendations and the government's target to cut child obesity in Scotland by half by 2030 (Scottish Government, 2018). However, in June, ministers announced that the bill would be paused in light of the Covid-19 pandemic. At time of print, there was no firm timetable from the Scottish government on when this much-needed legislation would be resurrected.

Wales has recognised the merit in promoting healthy options, not merely limiting promotions of unhealthy options. However, we're yet to see any concrete government action to limit advertising and promotions of unhealthy foods (Welsh Government, 2019a, 2020c). The consultation on rebalancing price promotions and discounting practices due in Summer 2020 has been delayed due to Covid-19. We wait to see whether the rest of the commitments laid out in the HWHW 2020-2022 Delivery Plan will be fulfilled on time.



**“I AM DETERMINED ALONG WITH MY PEERS TO ACHIEVE OUR CHARTER GOALS, AND TO MAKE A POSITIVE CHANGE TO OUR COUNTRY. FOOD INEQUALITY IS A COMPLEX ISSUE WITH MANY CONTRIBUTING FACTORS BUT IT IS NOTHING WE CANNOT OVERCOME, WITH THE APPROPRIATE RESOURCES AND TIME. FOOD POVERTY IS AN ISSUE THAT A HIGHLY DEVELOPED COUNTRY LIKE THE UK SHOULD NOT HAVE TO FACE, BUT WE DO. I AM CERTAIN WE CAN MAKE A CHANGE.”**

BETH, YOUNG FOOD AMBASSADOR, WALES

FROM 2019  
CHARTER

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.

● NO POLICY  
IN PLACE

● PILOT OR A  
COMMITMENT

● SOME POLICY  
IN PLACE

● FULLY  
ACHIEVED

● NON-GOVERNMENT  
RESPONSE

### WALES COMMITMENT MADE

- Wales committed to increasing the allowance for pupils entitled to FSM in Year 7 from September 2020 (Welsh Government, 2020c).

### NORTHERN IRELAND NO DEVELOPMENTS

### SCOTLAND NO DEVELOPMENTS

### ENGLAND RECOMMENDATIONS MEET NO ACTION

- The Chief Medical Officer's 2019 report recommended:
  - Increasing the value of the FSM allowance so that it covers the cost of a healthy meal
  - Making free drinking water readily available in schools (Professor Dame Sally Davies, 2019).



## COMMENTARY

In our 2019 Inquiry, we heard how children experienced shame due to lack of poverty proofing in schools and the stigma inherent in the FSM system. Since then, across all four nations, there has been a worrying lack of attention given to tackling the deep-rooted stigma felt by children experiencing food insecurity.

Wales' HWHW Delivery Plan acknowledges that children have to spend their FSM allowance to buy breakfast and so aims to increase the allowance for children in Year 7.

In England, the Chief Medical Officer's recommendation (Professor Dame Sally Davies, 2019) to increase the FSM allowance has not been addressed by government, nor the issue she raised concerning a lack of freely available drinking water in schools. In our Inquiry, children reported having to spend part of their FSM allowance on bottled water due to drinking fountains not being available. Other provisions of the Charter, such as changing the name of FSM, have not been actioned.

The current Covid-19 pandemic could worsen stigma, as financial and health inequalities widen, and more families depend on food aid and government parcels. Months of school closure has meant vulnerable children are further cut off from equal learning and social opportunities. As more children become beneficiaries of the FSM scheme, it is paramount that the government reprioritise its efforts to protect these pupils from suffering from both hunger and the stigma attached to it.

**“MANY PARENTS ARE  
ASHAMED THAT THEY  
CAN'T ALWAYS FEED  
THEIR CHILDREN”**

SHANE, YOUNG FOOD AMBASSADOR,  
NORTHERN IRELAND



# CHILDREN'S RIGHTS

## A BROADER SCOPE: MAKING CHILDREN'S RIGHTS REALITY

While no UK nation has fully incorporated the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) into domestic law, the following steps have been taken:

### WALES PROMISED PROGRESS DELAYED

- The Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011 which places duties on Welsh ministers to have due regard for the UNCRC has been reviewed by the Children, Young People and Education Committee. Publication of this report has been delayed due to Covid-19 (Welsh government, no date).
- The Welsh government recently consulted on 'commencing the socio-economic duty' which requires public bodies to consider how their decisions might help to reduce inequalities (Welsh government, 2020a). The legislative process has been delayed due to Covid-19.

### NORTHERN IRELAND NO DEVELOPMENTS

### SCOTLAND PROMISED PROGRESS DELAYED

- A UNCRC Bill is due to be laid before parliament later in 2020 which will see Scotland incorporate the UNCRC into law (Scottish government, 2019a).
- A first draft of the Good Food Nation Bill was due to be published in early 2020 to underpin the work being

undertaken to deliver the Good Food Nation ambition in Scotland. Due to Covid-19, this Bill has been delayed and will not be introduced within the parliamentary session (Together Scotland, 2020).

### ENGLAND NO DEVELOPMENTS



## COMMENTARY

### CHILDREN'S RIGHTS ENshrined IN LAW

Children's rights are enshrined in Welsh law through the Rights of Children and Young Persons (Wales) Measure 2011. This requires ministers to take children's rights into account when making decisions on new or existing legislation or policies and supply evidence that they have complied with this duty in a report published every five years. However, the last report published in 2018 does not cover children's right to food – a key component of the UNCRC. The Scottish government has consulted on incorporating the UNCRC into domestic law, as exists in Wales, with a bill due to be introduced in 2021.

The introduction of Scotland's Good Food Nation Bill could also be a promising step. It aims to provide a statutory framework which places responsibilities on Scottish ministers and selected public bodies with regard to food. Due to Covid-19, the bill will no longer be introduced within the current parliamentary session (Together Scotland, 2020) but remains an important opportunity for the future.

One of the Scottish Food Coalition's key recommendations for the Good Food National Bill has been a new food commission. An alliance between the existing Scottish Children's Commissioner and Scottish Human Rights Commission presents a potentially strong foundation for a statutory body to protect children's right to food. In 2019, Scotland also established a Poverty and Inequality Commission, as a non-departmental advisory body providing independent advice and scrutiny to Scottish ministers on poverty and inequality.

Although not specific to children's rights, Northern Ireland's Children's Services Co-operation Act 2015 places a duty on government to have a strategy to improve well-being of children through cooperation between Departments and Agencies (Department of Education, no date).

### NEW SCOTTISH CHILD PAYMENT

The Scottish government's announcement of a child payment top-up worth £10 per week was planned to be rolled out by 2022 but faces delays in the wake of Covid-19. The increase was projected to lift 30,000 children out of poverty by 2023/24 and reduce the relative child poverty rate by an estimated three percentage points (Scottish Government, 2019e). In the context of the pandemic, the need to boost family income is more urgent than ever. The Scottish Government have made assurances that the policy remains a priority and is aiming to accept applications by the end of 2020 (Scottish Government, 2020b).

### PROTECTION FROM INEQUALITY

A priority for the Welsh government is the safeguarding of equality and human rights. A consultation closed earlier in 2020 on "commencing the socio-economic duty" as part of the Equality Act 2010 (Welsh Government, 2020a). This would require public bodies (such a local authorities, ministers, NHS trusts) to consider how their decisions might help to reduce inequalities. The recognition by government of its duty to protect citizens from inequalities is a positive step. Going forward, a demonstration of this commitment would be to ensure the cost of the government's dietary guidelines is considered in legislation and government programmes (e.g. when setting benefit levels, minimum wage levels).

### MINISTER LETTER TO SCHOOLS

In response to the release of the Inquiry, Nadhim Zahawi (Minister for DfE at the time) wrote a letter to all schools in England drawing attention to the Inquiry's findings and the need for affordable healthy options, avoiding stigma, and access to free drinking water for children at school. He also reiterated that school meal standards are mandatory (Nadhim Zahawi MP Parliamentary; Under-Secretary of State for Children and Families, 2019). While this response by a government minister demonstrates an understanding of the actions needed to improve children's food, no significant legislative action on the Charter recommendations in this area has been fulfilled.

### RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) is a Convention that covers all aspects of a child's life and sets out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that all children everywhere are entitled to. The UK ratified the UNCRC in 1991 and is obligated to uphold the Convention, which clearly states:

- that government must act in the best interests of the child and this should be a primary consideration in all decisions (Article 3)
- that children have the right to the best possible health and that governments must ensure provision of adequate nutritious food (Article 24).

# COVID-19



# GOVERNMENT RESPONSE TO CHILDREN'S FOOD INSECURITY DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Our 2019 Inquiry showed food insecurity among children was already a substantial problem before Covid-19, but the intensity of the problem has substantially escalated. More than twice as many people are food insecure now compared to before the crisis. Huge numbers of adults and children have had to go without food and reduce the quality of their diets. Many have been forced to turn to food banks for support. There was clear indication that government support was needed to protect children from food insecurity during the pandemic. This section provides an overview of how government responded to this challenge.

## FREE SCHOOL MEALS SUBSTITUTE

When schools closed across the UK on March 20th 2020 due to the Covid-19 pandemic, the four governments were faced with the issue of how to support the 1.6 million children who would usually receive FSM. Given the importance of this scheme in supporting so many vulnerable children, the need for a swift strategy to provide a substitute during the school closures was recognised. However, there have been many issues with the implementation of replacement provisions, initially, in part, due to the time pressures in setting these up.

At the outset, England's Department for Education delegated responsibility for organising the provision to headteachers and local authorities. This resulted in a postcode lottery whereby some children received a nutritious meal and others received a pitiful provision with no fruit or vegetables, and some did not receive anything at all. There was no central coordination, no apparent nutritional guidance on how the money should be used, and

no monitoring of how the money provided by government was being spent. Two weeks into lockdown only two thirds of children eligible for FSM were being offered a substitute (Food Foundation, 2020a).

Later, England attempted to implement a voucher scheme which was heavily criticised due to technological issues with the voucher supplier, meaning thousands of children went without for weeks while they attempted to resolve the problems.

Two months into the launch of the voucher scheme nearly one in four children were still not being offered a substitute (Food Foundation, 2020b).

Northern Ireland put in place direct payments to families on FSM (Department of Finance NI, 2020) which had the advantage of not having to coordinate the preparation of food, or the delivery or collection of food while maintaining social distancing, but struggled to reach families without a bank account.

Wales considered a voucher scheme but on learning from the mishaps in England, let local authorities continue to decide how they wanted to provide FSM. A month into lockdown, 60,000 of the 90,000 eligible children were receiving some provision (Welsh Government, 2020b). In Scotland, FSM were similarly also handled at local authority level with either direct payments, vouchers, food to collect or food deliveries (Scottish Government, 2020c). There have been mixed reports of some children receiving excellent provision and others missing out entirely.

A positive outcome of the FSM substitute programmes has been the extension, in England, to include some children in NRPF households (who were previously ineligible) – a decision made by the Department for Education following a threat of legal action (Matthew Gold & Co. Ltd. Solicitors, 2020). However, the government has made it clear that this is only a temporary measure during the crisis (UK Government, 2020c). Wales has permitted local authorities to “exercise their discretion” to allow children with NRPF to benefit from FSM during the school closures (Welsh Government, 2020d). These extensions must be made permanent to ensure every child in the UK has the right to food.

**“MILLIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE IN THE UK HAVE BEEN AFFECTED BY FOOD INSECURITY AND POOR FOOD QUALITY IN THE COVID-19 CRISIS AND WILL CONTINUE TO BE. THE GOVERNMENT NEEDS TO ENSURE YOUNG PEOPLE – ESPECIALLY THOSE WITH LIVED EXPERIENCE – ARE INVOLVED IN FINDING LONG-TERM SOLUTIONS TO THESE PROBLEMS.”**

DEV, YOUNG FOOD AMBASSADOR, ENGLAND



The value of FSM was increased to £3 per day in England during this period, as the existing value (£2.70) was recognised to be insufficient (UK Government, 2020d). When schools return, it should remain at least at this value, if not be raised further. The lack of consistency between the four nations has also been demonstrated with provision in Northern Ireland being worth £2.70 (Department of Finance NI, 2020), but £3.90 in Wales where the funding covers breakfast as well (Welsh Government, 2020d).

### HOLIDAY PROVISION

In June 2020, the government announced a £120 million Covid Summer Holiday Fund to support children on free school meals in England with a £90 voucher to cover the six-week summer holiday period (UK Government, 2020e). On the same day, the Scottish government confirmed an additional £27.6 million for children on FSM in Scotland (Scottish Government, 2020d). Later that week, Northern Ireland also announced it would be extending its direct payment scheme to children over the summer, and in early July committed £12 million to the summer food scheme. The Welsh government had previously committed to a children's holiday food scheme until September, worth £19.50 per week for food for eligible children (Welsh Government, 2020d).

The announcements came after a period of intense campaigning from a coalition of civil society campaigners, with support for the cause by the Conservative Chair of the Education Select Committee and the Shadow Education Secretary. A key catalyst for change was when 22-year-old England footballer Marcus Rashford joined the campaign. His open letter to MPs, and the ensuing media storm it provoked, secured a welcome U-turn from government who had previously argued against awarding funding for FSM over the summer period.

This policy change mirrored two previous U-turns from government on holiday provision since the start of the pandemic. A last-minute announcement was made on extending funding to cover the Easter holidays in England, after Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland had committed to do so. Even then, a third of eligible children did not receive a substitute through the Easter holidays (Food Foundation 2020a). Although Government had refused funding during May half-term, it backtracked halfway through half-term following mounting pressure from campaigners. The late notice and mixed messages of both announcements resulted in widespread confusion

among schools, parents and local authorities, leading many children to miss out on much-needed meals.

While the debate over holiday provision gave rise to a favourable short-term solution, government has warned this level of funding is temporary, as a response to the unique circumstances of the pandemic. This overlooks the fact that children's food insecurity has long been a serious problem in the UK, only exacerbated by Covid-19.

This mounting issue will not go away without an effective long-term response and a coherent strategy from government. Furthermore, FSM are only available to a fraction of children living in poverty. If we are to prevent millions of young people suffering in future, we must make every child's right to food an ongoing priority.

### EARLY YEARS

The Healthy Start scheme, that functioned inefficiently before Covid-19, has been even less effective during the pandemic, with reports of vouchers being refused at stores that would only accept contactless forms of payment, and people being unable to print application forms due to libraries being closed.



**FREE SCHOOL MEALS ARE ONLY AVAILABLE TO A FRACTION OF CHILDREN LIVING IN POVERTY. IF WE ARE TO PREVENT MILLIONS OF YOUNG PEOPLE SUFFERING IN FUTURE, WE MUST MAKE EVERY CHILD'S RIGHT TO FOOD AN ONGOING PRIORITY.**

# THE COVID-19 CRISIS HAS CREATED **SIX NEW IMPERATIVES** FOR THE CHILDREN'S RIGHT2FOOD CHARTER

**1** The chaos over FSM replacements has revealed the absence of national leadership and standard setting on children's food. This provides more grounds for a statutory watchdog for children's food.

**2** The nutritional deterioration for the millions of children who have missed out on a hot school lunch during school closures is likely to be significant. This has not been helped by the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme being suspended due to operational difficulties in delivering it during lockdown. The Department for Education is yet to announce plans to reinstate it for the autumn school term time (UK Parliament, 2020). One study showed that half of children receiving free school meal vouchers had been eating a lot less fruit and vegetables and consuming many more sugary drinks and snacks (Northumbria University, 2020). Getting school and nursery food to be top-notch nutritionally when children return to school and supporting children to get access to fruit and veg before then is more important than ever.

**3** Many more children have become eligible for FSM and Healthy Start as a result of the crisis, making demand for these schemes and their role in children's diets even greater. They need to be of the highest standard possible to offer these vulnerable children all the support they need. Many more children will find themselves in need of the schemes but will not quite meet the eligibility criteria. We need to establish a watchdog for children's food to review the evidence on need and eligibility and advise governments accordingly (see page 25 on the Children's Right to Food Commission for further detail).

**4** School closures have revealed the bogus logic of only providing a healthy lunch to vulnerable children during term time. Securing FSM provision for children over the summer holidays during the Covid-19 pandemic is a welcome step forward but a short-term measure. Holiday provision is now in urgent need of a long-term fix so that all vulnerable children across all nations have access to it all year round.

**5** Supermarket chains have substantially increased their market share during the crisis and have played an important role in securing delivery capability for the vulnerable. If the Healthy Start scheme could be modernised and expanded, retailers could also play an important role in supporting families to use their vouchers well, and help them go further through in-store promotions and deals. The government needs to grab this opportunity while it lasts.

**6** Covid-19 has shone a light on the severe inequalities that exist in our society, with people in deprived areas being twice as likely to die from the virus (National Records of Scotland, 2020; Office for National Statistics, 2020). Dietary inequalities are likely to be a contributing factor. Increasing evidence demonstrates that obesity, diet-related conditions and nutritional deficiencies make people more vulnerable to severe medical reactions to the virus. Given that obesity and diet-related disease have a higher prevalence in deprived groups, urgent action is needed to reduce these dietary inequalities so these groups are not disproportionately affected by health problems.

# WHAT NEEDS TO HAPPEN NEXT



# CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO FOOD COMMISSION

The Children's Right2Food Charter calls for an independent, statutory watchdog for children's food – co-led by children and young people – which we are now calling the 'Children's Right to Food Commission'.

## WHY DO WE NEED THE COMMISSION?

A Children's Right to Food Commission must provide energetic and committed leadership to deliver quick results on simultaneously tackling child food insecurity and inequalities in childhood obesity.

The Commission would address four major gaps:

1. There is currently no mechanism for young people to have a say on food policy which affects them, and yet we know that if the food culture operating among young people is to change, they must be at the forefront of leading the change.
2. There are critical policy failures such as major investment in school meals but no monitoring of compliance to school food standards (except in Scotland); a statutory Healthy Start scheme but dismal uptake due to implementation problems.
3. There are critical policy gaps such as on holiday provision for children dependent on FSM; or mandatory policy on nursery food standards.
4. There are no minimum standards on children's food and the protection of food during childhood – each of the four UK nations has different standards, but nutritional needs are the same wherever a child lives.

## HOW WOULD THE COMMISSION WORK?

The Children's Right to Food Commission would be appointed by government with a statutory role. It would include devolved elements in Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales, and an independent board reporting to parliaments across the four nations. The Commission would play a critical role in bringing young people directly into the policy development process by involving the Young Food Ambassadors who helped lead the Inquiry in its leadership, along with other children and young people.

It would hold relevant government departments accountable for delivery against the Charter, and empower them to do more to ensure that we have the right mix of policies and programmes in place which protect children from nutritional and social harm, promote their well-being and reflect their lived experience, especially those children who are most disadvantaged.

It would deliver improvements in the quality of policy implementation by joining up policy across departments and the devolved nations. It would not take any responsibilities away from departments, but rather it would hold them accountable for their responsibilities. The board would report issues, successes and annual progress on children's right to food to parliament, and keep the Children's Commissioners in all four nations informed of progress.

**“IT'S DIFFICULT TO SEE SOME FAMILIES STRUGGLE AND NOT GET THE FOOD THEY NEED, AND THE FOOD THEY DO GET ISN'T AS NUTRITIOUS AS IT IS NEEDED TO BE FOR THEIR CHILDREN”**

SHANE, YOUNG FOOD AMBASSADOR, NORTHERN IRELAND





# CHILDREN'S #Right2Food CHARTER

FOR TOO LONG, CHILDREN  
HAVE BEEN HELD BACK BY  
POOR DIETS AND HUNGER

OUR CHARTER SETS OUT A PLAN  
TO TACKLE CHILDREN'S FOOD  
INSECURITY AND INEQUALITIES  
IN OBESITY AND PROTECT  
EVERY CHILD'S RIGHT TO FOOD



1

## A NEW CHILDREN'S RIGHT TO FOOD COMMISSION

To achieve the changes set out in this Charter, we need a Children's Right to Food Commission to monitor and improve children's food. It must be established in law and operate across all four UK nations with young people at the heart of its leadership.

1. **Develop a plan to deliver this Charter:** secure evidence to support policy decisions, drive cross-departmental action and share best practice across the four UK nations, reporting progress to parliament
2. **Design and develop a monitoring system for school and nursery food** to prove that money spent on school food is truly delivering quality meals for children
3. **Design and test school food menus and better eating environments for secondary schools** with input from young people that align with school food standards
4. **Plan how to protect children's food security in future pandemics and emergencies:** so no child is ever subject to hunger or poor quality food in a crisis again.

2

## A NUTRITIOUS START IN LIFE FOR EVERY CHILD

We build foundations for long-term health in early childhood: missing out on healthy diets is leading to health and education inequalities for a whole generation. We must invest in children's nutrition and give our youngest the best chance to fulfil their potential.

1. **Introduce universal infant free school meals in Wales and Northern Ireland** to replicate existing schemes in Scotland and England
2. **Put in place mandatory nursery food standards in England and Scotland** to fix the current variable food standards in pre-school settings
3. **Expand the Healthy Start scheme:** increase its value and the number of children who benefit from it, encouraging support from retailers (in England, Wales and Northern Ireland).

3

## A HEALTHY LUNCH EVERY DAY

Covid-19 showed the importance of free school meals and the immediate threat of hunger when they are taken away. All children should have a healthy lunch so that they can grow and thrive, whether in term time or during the holidays, especially if times are tough at home.

1. **Extend the offer of free school meals to more children in need:** apply the income threshold of £14,000 per year used in Northern Ireland to the rest of the UK for more children to qualify
2. **Expand holiday provision permanently** to support all children who normally receive free school meals when schools are closed
3. **Ensure children with no recourse to public funds can access free school meals**, continuing the commitments made during Covid-19
4. **Provide free nursery meals to children** who are entitled to free childcare
5. **Increase the free school meal allowance for secondary school children:** raise the £2.70 currently allocated per meal per child to £4.00.

4

## STOP THE STIGMA

During the Covid-19 crisis, millions of households faced stress and shame as they were forced to turn to food banks, and many more children now qualify for free school meals. It's time to stop the stigma attached to hunger and make sure no child feels embarrassed or humiliated.

1. **Rename free school meals as the "school meal allowance"** to remove the negative associations felt by many children
2. **Poverty proof school food** including protecting the anonymity of children who receive free school meals and making sure no child misses out on school cooking classes due to lack of money
3. **Develop guidance for schools on food education** adding learning about food poverty and the right to food to the curriculum
4. **Increase funding for free breakfast clubs** so that no child starts school on an empty stomach
5. **Extend the School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme to all children** to support children to eat healthily even when budgets are tight at home
6. **Ensure all schools have facilities for children to drink tap water for free:** payment for bottled water should be banned on school premises
7. **Make laws that take food costs into account** when considering changes to support or wages for families.

5

## HEALTH BEFORE PROFITS

Covid-19 has shown that a strong immune system and healthy weight are critical for the nation's resilience. Children's health must come before the profits of big business, and the government must help make the healthiest options the easiest.

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

# #Right2Food



# CONCLUSION

Since the publication of our Inquiry report in 2019, there have been multiple obstacles to progress: cabinet reshuffles, a general election, threats of no-deal Brexit and a global pandemic. The minister in the Department for Education promised an official response to the Inquiry but there has been none. But we can't let these difficult circumstances be an excuse.

The pandemic has resulted in high levels of food insecurity, but the inequality and food insecurity issues faced by children and families are not new. They were highly prevalent before, have now got worse, and are likely to continue doing so given that economic recovery from Covid-19 will be slow.

Faced with increased financial and social insecurity, we can no longer delay urgently required policy changes. We need to act to ensure all children across the UK have access to healthy, affordable food and that no child living in poverty falls through the gaps.

The solutions to build a more resilient future for our children are set out in the Charter. It is an evidence-based roadmap for government on what needs to happen. Young people are ready to act. It's time for political leaders to step up and support them.



# GLOSSARY

- **Best Start Foods scheme (Scotland):** 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 fresh, frozen or tinned fruit and vegetables. There are two rates of payment, either £4.25 or £8.50 per week. The amount depends on whether it is received in pregnancy and/or how old your child is (Scottish Government, 2020b).
- **Chief Medical Officer's Obesity Report:** an important report by England's Chief Medical Officer Professor Dame Sally Davies titled "Time to Solve Childhood Obesity" published in 2019 that included a range of recommendations to help the government reach its target of halving childhood obesity by 2030 (Professor Dame Sally Davies, 2019). There is no formal requirement for government to respond to the recommendations.
- **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 Northern Ireland) (NHS, 2020a).
- **Free School Meals scheme (FSM):** 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) (UK Government, no date). The threshold is £14,000 in Northern Ireland. The amount which entitled children in secondary school receive on their cards varies between £1.90 and £2.30. Primary school children who pay for school meals typically pay £2.20, though amounts vary between schools (UK wide). In Northern Ireland the prices for school meals are £2.60 for primary and £2.80 for post-primary children.
- **School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme (SFVS):** a government programme that entitles every child aged four to six in state-funded schools to a piece of fruit or vegetable each school day in England (and some local authorities in Scotland).
- **School Holiday Enrichment Programme (SHEP):** a school-based programme supported by the Welsh government that provides healthy meals, food and nutrition, education, physical activity and enrichment sessions to children in areas of social deprivation during the summer holidays (Wales).
- **No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF):** 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.
- **Healthy Weight: Healthy Wales (HWHW):** a long-term strategy to prevent and reduce obesity in Wales legislated through the Public Health (Wales) Act 2017 (Welsh Government, 2019a). Goals are set until 2030 but the 2020-22 Delivery Plan sets out milestones for the initial phase of strategy (Welsh Government, 2020c).
- **Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM):** all children are entitled to a free lunch in the first three years of school. (England and Scotland) (Scotland, 2016; UK Government, 2019b).
- **United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC):** Convention that covers all aspects of a child's life and sets out the civil, political, economic, social and cultural rights that all children everywhere are entitled to. The UK ratified the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1991 and is obligated to uphold the Convention.

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## CONTRIBUTORS



The Children's Right2Food Campaign is a nationwide initiative to ensure every child in the UK can access and afford good food, and was shaped by the findings of the Children's Future Food Inquiry. Led by Young Food Ambassadors from across the UK and coordinated by the Food Foundation, the campaign calls for government action to tackle children's food insecurity and inequalities in childhood obesity, and puts forward its vision in the Children's #Right2Food Charter. The Children's Future Food Inquiry was launched in 2018 as the first attempt to speak directly and systematically to children, young people and those who live and work with them about children's experience of food and how it affects their lives. The Inquiry was spearheaded by a cross-party parliamentary committee and led by partners in each of the devolved nations: Food Sense Wales, Children in Wales, Children in Scotland and Children in Northern Ireland. The involvement of young people in the Inquiry was thanks to coordination from Fixers and the support from the Tudor Trust, Trust for London, the National Lottery Community Fund and the Children and Young People's Commissioner Scotland.



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