

# Feeding Our Future – State of the Nations SCOTLAND

## How much veg do Scottish children eat?

*Average number of vegetable portions eaten by region and age group for 2012-2019<sup>12</sup>*

	Scotland
Secondary school (11-16 years)	1.8
Primary school (5-10 years)	1.3

## School food in Scotland is ...

... provided primarily by the catering services of Scotland's **32 local authorities**

... **in 2,500 schools** across the nation

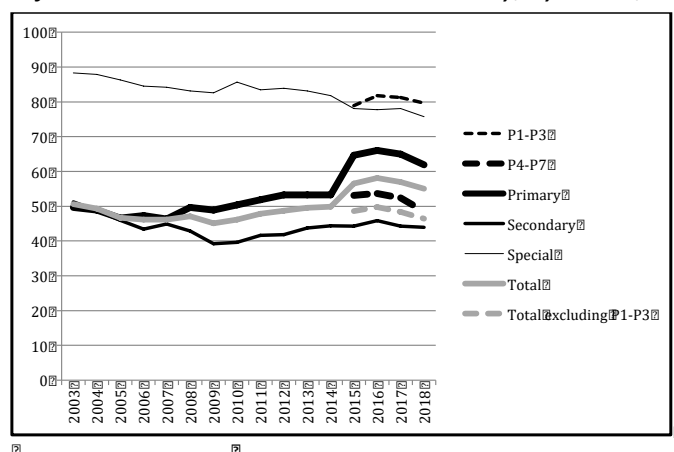
... served as **350,000 meals** daily, reaching around **51% of pupils<sup>34</sup>**.

## Provision of Free School Meals (FSM) in Scotland

Since January 2015, the Scottish Government has been providing **FSM to all children attending Primary 1 to Primary 3** at local council schools during school term time and based on eligibility criteria for older children or during the holidays<sup>5</sup>.

Almost 100,000 meals are served daily to pupils with free school meal entitlement on account of eligibility criteria which represents an **uptake of 76% of entitled primary pupils and 60% of entitled secondary pupils<sup>6</sup>**. In 2019, 54% of primary pupils were registered for free school meals including UFSM, which has been relatively consistent since 2015 (53-55%)<sup>7</sup>. Overall uptake of school meals – free or paid for - has been declining slightly in the last few years. It varies greatly by local authority from around 48% in East Renfrewshire and Shetland to above 75% in Glasgow City and Dundee<sup>8</sup>.

*Uptake of school meals in Scotland on census day, by sector, 2003 – 2018<sup>9</sup>*



The Scottish National Party (SNP) has committed to **provide free school breakfasts and lunches to every primary school pupil starting in 2022<sup>10</sup>**. As a first step, provision will be extended to pupils attending Primary 4 as of August 2021<sup>11</sup>. A Working Group of 15 different organisations from across the Scottish school food sector recently submitted a discussion paper, highlighting the importance of understanding this commitment as investment in school meals, student health, local economies and the environment with recommendations including a ‘whole school approach’ and the localisation of school food supply chains<sup>12</sup>.

### COVID-19 Impact: A ‘cash first’ approach to holiday provision

The Scottish Government provided £50million to local authorities for the delivery of FSM during periods of school closure and holidays up to the Easter break 2021. Local authorities largely adopted a ‘cash first approach’ and replaced school meal provision with direct payments to families, preserving their dignity to choose the food they need<sup>13</sup>.

### Vegetables served in Scottish schools

Based on [public consultation](#) the Scottish Government published the *Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2020*, aligning school food regulations with Scotland’s Dietary Goals of consuming a variety of fruit and vegetables, reaching at least 5 portions per day<sup>14</sup>. One key change from the 2008 Regulations in the specification of vegetable portion sizes rather than focus on ‘types’ of vegetables. As of April 2021, the *Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2020<sup>15</sup>* require pupils in Scotland to be served:

- **at least two portions of vegetables** (fresh, frozen, tinned) of at least 40g as part of a primary school meal and at least 80g as part of a nutritionally analysed secondary school meal or secondary hostel evening meal. Portions of vegetables can be offered as salad, cooked vegetable, or incorporated in a dish, e.g. stews, soups, or sandwiches.
- A portion of vegetables of at least 40g as part of food provision other than school meals in primary schools;
- One portion of salad or vegetables of at least 80g as part of a lunch which is not an analysed lunch at secondary schools<sup>16</sup>.

The implementation guidance for the Regulations<sup>17</sup> offers advice on how to increase the intake of fruit and vegetables among school children, including:

- Adding extra vegetables and pulses to stews, casseroles and other dishes
- Serving vegetable soups – which are popular with children - as at least one portion of vegetables
- Offering salad or crudites alongside low-fat dips and dressings
- Offering fruit and vegetables in a variety of colours and shapes
- Offering fruit and vegetables separately at times to allow children to choose the ones they like without being put off altogether by the ones they do not like.

The implementation of the nutritional requirements in schools are monitored by Education Scotland Health and Nutrition Inspectors.

### A snapshot of vegetable provision in Scottish schools

Vegetables are served in soups, salads, as part of main dishes or side dishes. As an indicator for the frequency of serving vegetables in primary schools, the number of local authorities serving soup and salads throughout the week was analysed by Obesity Action Scotland<sup>18</sup>:

Number of Local Authorities offering soup in 2017, 2019 and 2020

	2017	2019	2020	2019 vs 2020
EVERY SCHOOL DAY	12	10	10	-
4 DAYS A WEEK	3	4	4	-
3 DAYS A WEEK	1	3	6	↑
2 DAYS A WEEK	7	7	5	↓
1 DAY A WEEK	5	4	4	-
NO SOUP OFFERED	1	1	0	↓
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>30</b>	<b>29</b>	<b>29</b>	-

Salad was available on the menus of 27 local authorities in 2017, 25 local authorities in 2019 and 26 local authorities in 2020.

### Making healthy choices easier – a whole school approach in Scotland

Scotland's *Curriculum for Excellence* integrates learning about food and health across the school curriculum. It integrates experiences and outcomes as well as specific benchmarks relating to the food experience and development of healthy choices, an understanding of food hygiene, provenance and preparation<sup>19</sup>. The *Better Eating, Better Learning – A New Context For School Food (2014)* guidance highlights the strategic importance of food in schools for public health and sustainability outcomes, recognising the need to integrate food education across the curriculum with a school food experience which encourages healthy choices<sup>20</sup>.

Existing legislation around school food as well as the *Curriculum for Excellence* form the basis of the *Food in Schools across Scotland* online self-evaluation resource<sup>21</sup> which encourages education practitioners and catering staff to work together in their evaluation and understanding of what works well in Scottish school food and identify areas in need of improvement with regards to school food.

Education Scotland's *Food For Thought Education Fund* provides Early Learning and Childcare Centres and schools with up to £3,000 to support the provision of food education from production to consumption. Schools can apply to receive support for growing, harvesting or cooking activities. Funding has been extended for a wide variety of projects, including kitchen gardens and keeping hens, helping children learn about seasonality and the natural environment<sup>22</sup>.

### **COVID-19 Impact – Increasing space for dining, eating in groups and eating outdoors**

In light of COVID-19, meal provision in Scottish schools has changed to ensure a safe eating environment. Depending on the context, caterers were asked to consider<sup>23</sup>

- increasing the space for dining or implementing staggered dining arrangements, with children eating in their designated groups, sometimes in classrooms
- having set snack times for groups
- consider whether it would be beneficial for children to stay in play spaces to eat
- maximising the use of the outdoor environment for meals and snacks
- support children to wash hands before and after eating

In how far the change in meal provision has had an impact on the serving of vegetables is unknown.

### **Sustainability of Scottish school food**

With the guidance on “Better Eating, Better Learning – A New Context for School Food” issued in 2014, the Scottish Government has also been placing more emphasis on the sustainability dimension of school food, explicitly stressing the importance of healthy, locally sourced, seasonal and sustainably grown ingredients in school meals, as well as the opportunity to educate students about the health and environmental impact of their food choices<sup>24</sup>.

The Soil Association's *Food For Life Served Here (FFLSH) Award* in Scotland is currently extended to 17 of Scotland's 32 councils for their efforts to promote locally sourced and seasonal food in schools and to encourage children to make healthier choices in the dining hall<sup>25</sup>. Students in Food For Life accredited schools are twice as likely to eat five a day and a third less likely to eat no fruit and vegetables than students in comparison schools<sup>26</sup>. For more information see our *Feeding Our Future*<sup>27</sup> report.

### **Beyond the school gates**

As elsewhere in the UK, the food environment beyond the school gates is playing an important role in shaping young peoples' food choices and uptake of school meals. School meal uptake among secondary students has dropped from 50% in 2003 to 43% in 2018<sup>28</sup>. In Glasgow, uptake is even lower at around 30%<sup>29</sup>.

Instead of opting for a school meal, students frequent the food outlets in the school's vicinity. 70% of students in Scotland can access at least four food outlets in the school vicinity, just over 50% within 5 minutes' walk, 80% within 10 minutes' walk<sup>30</sup>. Beyond the school gates, students in Scotland opt for unhealthy, convenience food with very low nutritional quality, often including items that are not sold on the school premises, such as hot fast food, crisps, confectionary and sugary drinks<sup>31</sup>.

Scotland's *Healthy Living Programme* has been working with convenience stores to increase the availability and promotion of healthy food options to students. A pilot project in 6 convenience stores in deprived areas of Scotland showed that promoting healthy options, such as vegetable soup and sandwich meal deals, free salad with all freshly made sandwiches or "make your own salad" boxes, can increase the sale of healthier products at lunchtime. For more details see our *Feeding Our Future*<sup>32</sup> report.

Although Scotland's 'Beyond the School Gate' recommendations of 2014 encourage communities and individuals to engage with planning processes around schools, current planning policy in Scotland does not allow for the regulation of fast-food outlets around schools on health grounds<sup>33</sup>.

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth noting that the sample sizes for children in Scotland and Wales are smaller than for England and Northern Ireland.

<sup>2</sup> NDNS, years 5-11 combined, 2012-2019. Waves were combined to increase sample sizes.

<sup>3</sup> McKendrick *et al.* (2019) *Are pupils being served? A secondary review of the sector's evidence base on school meal provision at lunchtime in Scotland*. Glasgow. Available at <https://www.gcu.ac.uk/gsbs/media/gcu/gsbs/SPIRU%20Report%20for%20Assist%20FM%20190826.pdf>.

<sup>4</sup> Jones, J. (2020) Presentation for the Soil Association's "Local Routes to Market: Exploring the Opportunities in School Food for Scottish suppliers". Available at <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=5DrWPZiQXOM&t=38s>.

<sup>5</sup> The Scottish Government (2021) *School Meals*. Available at <https://www.mygov.scot/school-meals/#:~:text=Every%20child%20in%20Scotland%20at,free%20lunches%20at%20this%20age>.

<sup>6</sup> McKendrick *et al.* (2019) *Are pupils being served? A secondary review of the sector's evidence base on school meal provision at lunchtime in Scotland*. Glasgow. Available at <https://www.gcu.ac.uk/gsbs/media/gcu/gsbs/SPIRU%20Report%20for%20Assist%20FM%20190826.pdf>.

<sup>7</sup> Obesity Action Scotland (2020) *Primary School Meals in Scotland 2020 – A Snapshot and a Future Vision*. Available at <https://www.obesityactionsotland.org/campaigns/primary-school-meals-in-scotland-2020-a-snapshot-and-a-future-vision/>

<sup>8</sup> Obesity Action Scotland (2020) *Primary School Meals in Scotland 2020 – A Snapshot and a Future Vision*. Available at <https://www.obesityactionsotland.org/campaigns/primary-school-meals-in-scotland-2020-a-snapshot-and-a-future-vision/>

<sup>9</sup> McKendrick *et al.* (2019) *Are pupils being served? A secondary review of the sector's evidence base on school meal provision at lunchtime in Scotland*. Glasgow. Available at <https://www.gcu.ac.uk/gsbs/media/gcu/gsbs/SPIRU%20Report%20for%20Assist%20FM%20190826.pdf>.

<sup>10</sup> SNP (2021) *Scotland's Future – SNP Manifesto 2021*. Available at [https://issuu.com/hinksbrandwise/docs/04\\_15\\_snp\\_manifesto\\_2021\\_\\_\\_a4\\_document?mode=window](https://issuu.com/hinksbrandwise/docs/04_15_snp_manifesto_2021___a4_document?mode=window).

<sup>11</sup> <https://www.mygov.scot/school-meals>

<sup>12</sup> <https://www.nourishscotland.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/07/Good-School-Food-Discussion-Paper-FINAL.pdf>

<sup>13</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/children-young-peoples-voices-matter-progress-report-march-2021/documents/>

<sup>14</sup> The Scottish Government (2016) *Revised Dietary Goals for Scotland – March 2016*. Available at <https://www.webarchive.org.uk/wayback/archive/20161002010532/http://www.gov.scot/Topics/Health/Healthy-Living/Food-Health/DietaryGoalsScot>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2020/153/contents/made>

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- <sup>16</sup> The Scottish Government (2020) *The Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2020*. Available at <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/ssi/2020/153/contents>
- <sup>17</sup> The Scottish Government (2021) *Healthy Eating in Schools – A guide to implementing the Nutritional Requirements for Food and Drink in Schools (Scotland) Regulations 2020*. Available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/healthy-eating-schools-guidance-2020/>
- <sup>18</sup> Obesity Action Scotland (2020) *Primary School Meals in Scotland 2020 – A Snapshot and a Future Vision*. Available at <https://www.obesityactionsotland.org/campaigns/primary-school-meals-in-scotland-2020-a-snapshot-and-a-future-vision/>
- <sup>19</sup> <https://education.gov.scot/nih/Documents/HWBFoodHealthBenchmarksPDF.pdf>
- <sup>20</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/binaries/content/documents/govscot/publications/advice-and-guidance/2014/03/better-eating-better-learning-new-context-school-food/documents/00445740-pdf/00445740-pdf/govscot%3Adocument/00445740.pdf>
- <sup>21</sup> <https://blogs.glowscotland.org.uk/glowblogs/foodforschools/>
- <sup>22</sup> <https://education.gov.scot/education-scotland/what-we-do/food-for-thought-education-fund/>
- <sup>23</sup> <https://www.gov.scot/publications/coronavirus-covid-19-school-age-childcare-services/pages/meals-provision/>
- <sup>24</sup> The Scottish Government (2014) *Better Eating, Better Learning – A New Context for School Food*. Available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/better-eating-better-learning-new-context-school-food/>
- <sup>25</sup> <https://www.soilassociation.org/our-work-in-scotland/food-for-life-scotland/our-award-holders/>
- <sup>26</sup> <https://www.foodforlife.org.uk/about-us/~media/files/evaluation%20reports/2foodforlifelcspupilfvstudyfullreport.pdf>
- <sup>27</sup> The Food Foundation (2021) *Feeding Our Future*. Available at <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/publications/>
- <sup>28</sup> McKendrick *et al.* (2019) *Are pupils being served? A secondary review of the sector's evidence base on school meal provision at lunchtime in Scotland*. Glasgow. Available at <https://www.gcu.ac.uk/gsbs/media/gcu/gsbs/SPIRU%20Report%20for%20Assist%20FM%20190826.pdf>.
- <sup>29</sup> Crawford *et al.* (2017) 'Observation and assessment of the nutritional quality of "out of school" foods popular with secondary school pupils at lunchtime'. Available at <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/29149874/>
- <sup>30</sup> The Scottish Government (2014) *Beyond the School Gate*. Available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/beyond-school-gate-improving-food-choices-school-community/pages/7/>
- <sup>31</sup> Crawford *et al.* (2012) "Is Eating Out of School a Healthy Option for Secondary Pupils?" Available at [https://www.gcph.co.uk/assets/0000/3539/Out\\_of\\_school\\_foods\\_report\\_-\\_final.pdf](https://www.gcph.co.uk/assets/0000/3539/Out_of_school_foods_report_-_final.pdf)
- <sup>32</sup> The Food Foundation (2021) *Feeding Our Future*. Available at <https://foodfoundation.org.uk/publications/>
- <sup>33</sup> The Scottish Government (2018) *Relationship between Food Environment and Planning System: Research Summary*. Available at <https://www.gov.scot/publications/research-project-explore-relationship-between-food-environment-planning-system/pages/1/>