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Evaluation of the Free School Meals Trial for P1 to P3 Pupils



social
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EVALUATION OF THE FREE SCHOOL MEALS TRIAL FOR P1 TO P3 PUPILS

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Background

1. This report presents the outcomes of the evaluation of the free school meals trial for P1-P3 pupils, commissioned by the Scottish Government. The trial is part of the Government's drive to improve the nation's health and encourage good eating habits from a young age.

2. The trial ran from October 2007 to June 2008 in five local authorities in Scotland – East Ayrshire, Fife, Glasgow, Scottish Borders and West Dunbartonshire. These local authorities were selected to take part in the trial because they include recognised areas of deprivation and cover urban areas as well as small towns and rural areas across different parts of the country.

Aims and objectives of the evaluation

3. The overarching aim of the evaluation was to inform roll-out in other areas by exploring:

- the change in uptake of school meals by P1-P3 pupils
- process and practical issues for local authorities and schools in implementing free school meals for P1 to P3 pupils
- the range of potential health and other benefits of the trial
- the impact of the trial on the costs of providing school meals
- unexpected impacts and barriers to roll-out in other local authorities.

Methodology

4. The change in uptake was based on analysis of uptake data collected from each school in the five local authority areas before the trial started in October 2007, and again in late February 2008. In order to reduce the burden on schools, the February 2008 survey was carried out in conjunction with the annual School Meals Census undertaken by the Scottish Government. Both the pre-trial survey and the late February 2008 survey mirrored the methods employed by the School Census – a school level return being required from each school, giving figures for a “normal¹” day.

5. The other findings are based on case studies in ten schools (two in each of the five local authority areas) involving qualitative research among key stakeholders (pupils, parents, teachers, headteachers, school catering staff and local authority catering managers), and a postal survey of 926 parents of P1 to P3 pupils in schools across the five areas .

¹ In a similar manner to the School Meal Census, schools were asked to complete their returns for a specific date – unless this date was atypical, for example, if a year group were out of school for any reason or there was a special menu such as an “Italian theme”.

Main findings

6. Overall, the principal conclusion is that the implementation of the trial was relatively straightforward. There were no unexpected impacts and roll-out by other local authorities should not be problematic.

7. Parents, teachers, local authority staff and catering staff were overwhelmingly positive about the provision of universal free school meals for P1-P3 pupils.

8. Problems that emerged were generally minor teething problems that could be quite quickly remedied through planning, preparation, flexibility, and small adjustments to daily routines. Furthermore, the issues which did arise were not unexpected.

Change in uptake

9. The trial resulted in significantly increased uptake of school meals:

- Among the target group of P1-P3 pupils not FSM registered, uptake of school meals increased from 41% to 69% (an increase of 28 percentage points).
- Among P1-P3 pupils who were previously FSM registered, uptake increased from 89.2% to 93.6% (an increase of 4.4 percentage points).
- Overall, the uptake among all P1-P3 pupils increased from 53% to 75% (an increase of 22 percentage points).
- There was concern that the trial might negatively impact on P4-P7 uptake (for example, because queues might increase or food choices might reduce). However, there has been a small but positive impact this group – uptake increased from 47.3 % to 49.9% (an increase of 2.6 percentage points).
- Overall, the uptake among all primary pupils increased from 50% to 60% (an increase of 10 percentage points).
- Uptake increased in all five trial areas. Among the target group of P1-P3 pupils not FSM registered, the biggest increases were in Fife and Scottish Borders (both 32 percentage points) and East Ayrshire (31 percentage points). The increases were relatively lower in West Dunbartonshire (26 percentage points) and Glasgow (22 percentage points).
- Among those previously registered for FSM, the increases in uptake ranged from 8.5 percentage points in Scottish Borders to 3.4 percentage points in Glasgow.
- Among P1-P3 pupils who were not FSM registered and who did not take a school meal before the trial, those in the most deprived areas and those in the least deprived areas were equally likely to take up the offer of a free school meal.

- The increase in uptake was higher in smaller schools and in schools with on-site (as opposed to off-site) cooking facilities.
- In all five local authorities there was a substantial upward trend in P1-P3 uptake at the start of the trial. In three areas (West Dunbartonshire, East Ayrshire, and Glasgow) this decreased slightly and, to varying degrees, stabilised over the following months. In the remaining two areas, uptake was less stable, fluctuating between around 60% and around 70% in Scottish Borders and between around 66% and around 73% Fife.

10. Uptake increased more in schools with lower levels of FSM registration, where the pre-trial uptake tended to be lower. The five trial areas have a higher proportion of FSM registered pupils than Scotland as a whole, so should FSM for P1-P3 pupils be rolled out in the remaining local authority areas, the overall increase in uptake across the rest of Scotland is likely to be higher than that observed in the trial areas.

11. Parents indicated that if school meals were no longer free, their child would take a school meal more frequently than they did pre-trial – in particular, on days that they liked the food on offer. This suggests that if charges are reintroduced, overall uptake will decrease but remain higher than pre-trial levels. It also suggests that this cohort will have higher levels of uptake once they reach P4 and beyond.

12. While uptake among all P1-P3 pupils has increased to 75%, this still means that a quarter are not taking a school meal on a ‘normal’ day. It was clear from the research that the main reason for non-uptake is that some children are ‘fussy eaters’. It should be acknowledged that parents of these children generally wanted them to have school meals and would welcome help to encourage their children to sample a broader range of foods. There does, however, appear to be a ceiling effect – there are some pupils who, for whatever reason, will never take a school meal. Nevertheless, the research indicates that the greatest impact on uptake might be realised through initiatives to enhance parents’ skills in encouraging young children to eat a wider range of foods, as opposed to changes to the school meal experience itself (queuing systems, décor etc.).

13. While parents generally found it valuable to have menus sent home and many considered the invitation to sample the foods on offer useful, sometimes foods were given attractive ‘child-friendly’ names such as ‘*Nemo Pizza*’ and ‘*Shark Infested Mince*’. As a result, it was unclear what the individual ingredients in some dishes were, leaving parents feeling that they could not always help their child decide what they wanted, nor cook the same food at home if their child asked for it.

Practical issues: limited time and space

14. The main challenges schools faced were physical space and time pressures; the interrelated problems of the size of dining areas coupled with the time available for lunch.

15. However, these logistical issues were not unexpected and there was a strong view that small adjustments to daily routines would go a long way towards relieving them.

16. Interviewees outlined a range of successful strategies that would be useful to share with other schools should FSMs be rolled-out across other local authorities. In particular, strategies found useful in making effective use of limited time and space include:

- staggering the times pupils arrive at dining areas
- setting tables in advance
- operating different queuing systems or service areas
- allowing slightly lengthened lunchtimes (e.g. letting P1 pupils out five or ten minutes early)
- using alternative accommodation (especially for packed lunches)

17. With regard to pre-ordering systems, there were mixed views; in some cases they were viewed as unnecessarily time consuming for little benefit, while other schools found them successful.

Lead-in and start time of the trial

18. Although schools and local authorities managed very successfully to implement the trial without major difficulties, there was a commonly held view that a longer lead-in time would enable more preparations to be put in place. In particular, there was insufficient time for potential new staff to undergo Disclosure Scotland checks and, on occasion, additional equipment was not in place at the outset.

19. There was also a view that it would have been better for the start of the trial to coincide with the beginning of the school year in August, to avoid pupils getting into a routine which is then changed. These problems could be easily overcome for roll-out in other areas.

Impact on the quality and quantity of food

20. The quality and quantity of food provided was not seen to have changed as a result of the trial. Furthermore, waste was proportionate to pre-trial levels.

21. Popular options did sometimes run out for those at the end of the queue, but this was also an issue pre-trial and the problem was not exacerbated by the trial.

22. Provision for special dietary needs was not a problem – special dietary needs have a minor impact on uptake (only 4% of survey respondents cited dietary needs as

a factor influencing uptake) and there is no evidence of increased demand for special foods as a result of the trial.

Impact on workloads

23. Workloads of local authority and teaching staff remained relatively unchanged as a result of the trial. The greatest impact was on catering staff who tended to have slightly increased workloads as a result of the trial. However, once extra staff had been recruited, there were generally no major problems.

24. In general, staff viewed the implementation of the trial as simply an extension of what they were already doing. However, staff undertaking supervision in the dining room sometimes felt they might have less time to encourage healthy eating among individual children.

Potential health and other benefits

25. Universal healthy free school meals have the potential to impact on children's health, wellbeing, and educational performance in the medium to long term. However, there is unlikely to be a 'quick fix' in terms of changing children's eating preferences overnight, and given the short-term nature of the trial, this evaluation did not seek to examine such impacts in detail. Instead, the evaluation explored early perceptions of health and other benefits, from which the following conclusions can be drawn:

- The trial provided pupils with an opportunity to try new foods, resulting in pupils asking at home for foods they had tried at school. In some cases, these were healthier options.
- Although pupils appeared to have a good awareness of healthy foods, there is no evidence that the trial had impacted upon this. When deciding what to eat, children tend to pick what they like the taste of. Choosing healthier options is likely to come as a result of them trying and enjoying new foods. Therefore, evidence that the trial acted as a catalyst for pupils' willingness to try new foods is a positive finding.
- There was some evidence that the trial had impacted positively on the home environment of pupils. In particular, it had resulted in parents talking about food with their children more often and some parents noted that children were more confident in discussing their food preferences.
- In turn, some parents were keen to make meals for their children that they had enjoyed at school but did not always know how to make them. Providing recipe cards or books of school recipes was suggested as a solution.
- Teachers did not report any behavioural changes in pupils at lunchtime or in afternoon classes.

26. Although there was evidence that pupils were trying new foods and that some were asking for new foods at home, including healthier options, the evidence is

unclear on how many children were doing so and the extent to which children were eating more healthily at home. On other potential benefits such as whether parents felt they knew more about healthy foods and were buying healthier foods for the home, the evidence is also unclear.

Costs

27. One of the reasons for selecting the five particular authorities involved in the trial was that they were each operating in a different context – in terms of size of local authority, levels of deprivation, urban/rural mix, size of schools, previous levels of uptake and structure of school meals provision – and so faced different challenges. The costs reflected this and should not therefore be read as an assessment of the efficiency of different areas in implementing the trial, but as a guide to the range of costs incurred by local authorities in different circumstances.

28. The costs of the trial varied widely from £1.79 per additional meal in Fife to £4.65 in Scottish Borders. Costs tended to be higher in areas with a higher percentage increase in uptake, i.e. Where more fundamental changes needed to be made to staffing and equipment levels. Costs also tended to be lower in areas where the total number of additional meals served was higher – perhaps where there was more scope for economies of scale to reduce some of the costs (e.g. in relation to buying equipment in bulk or negotiating contracts with food supplier).

Future research

29. An important issue to consider, which is outwith the remit of this research, is what pupils are actually eating. There was evidence that many pupils picked at their school meals, eating only the bits they like. In particular, it was suggested that some of the healthier foods such as vegetables and soup were frequently left untouched by some pupils. Having got to a stage where more pupils are enjoying the school meal experience and are willing to try new foods, the next steps are to ensure that pupils are eating all or most of the school meals they choose, and that links with parents are improved in order to ensure that the free healthy school meal initiative reaches its full potential.

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

1.1 This report presents the outcomes of the evaluation of the free school meals trial for P1-P3 pupils, commissioned by the Scottish Government. The evaluation comprised qualitative research among key stakeholders, analysis of uptake data, and a quantitative survey of parents.

Background

1.2 Scotland has some of the worst health in Europe and has been dubbed the ‘sick man of Europe’. Life expectancy in the most deprived areas of Scotland can be as much as 10 years lower than in the most affluent. Life circumstances, as well as individual lifestyles, are recognised as having a powerful impact on health. Tackling poor health, among young people in particular, is therefore a priority for the Scottish Government. In recent years, a wide-ranging programme of action to improve health and reduce health inequalities has been introduced.

1.3 Poor diet is recognised as a significant contributor to Scotland’s poor health record. Improving children’s diets can have a major impact with beneficial outcomes for physical well-being, improved health in later life and the potential to impact on educational attainment. Influencing children’s eating habits from an early age is widely considered to be vital to ensuring that they grow up to be healthy adults.

1.4 The positive role schools can play in promoting healthy lifestyles is clearly recognised and is being addressed through a variety of initiatives, with recent policy in this area focusing on a number of key areas:

- the nutritional value and uptake of school meals
- the extent to which school pupils can take part in physical activity
- mental and emotional well-being
- the extent to which schools promote healthy lifestyles across the full range of activities.

1.5 As part of the Scottish Executive’s drive to improve the health and well-being of children in Scotland, nutrient-defined standards for school meals in Scotland were introduced in 2002 with the publication of *Hungry for Success – a Whole School Approach to School Meals in Scotland*. The report also introduced a strategy for delivering the standards, improving uptake of school meals and minimising stigma associated with receiving free school meals. Its prime focus was to improve both the quality and uptake of school meals across Scotland.

1.6 In 2005, HM Inspectorate of Education (HMIE) published an evaluation of the implementation of Hungry for Success.² The report was positive about progress but further action was recommended to:

² In January 2008, midway through the Evaluation of the Free School Meal Trial, HMIE published ‘Hungry for Success – Further Food for Thought’. The report found that notable improvements in the quality of school meals in Scotland had been made, particularly in primary schools. It also highlighted significant aspects where further improvements are required.

- extend good practice and establish consistently high quality provision of school lunches across all local authorities and schools
- further improve school meal uptake and ensure that pupils make healthy choices
- further develop partnerships with parents on matters relating to food in schools
- maximise anonymity for recipients of free school meals
- introduce rigorous self-evaluation of action to improve food in schools.

1.7 To add value to the implementation of Hungry for Success and to help educate and instil healthy eating habits at an early age, in 2003 the Scottish Executive funded the provision of free fruit in school to all children in Primary 1 and 2. Provision of milk in schools by local authorities is also subsidised by the EU and the Government through the School Milk Subsidy Scheme and pupils already benefit from fresh drinking water in schools.

1.8 Building on work already being undertaken and going beyond Hungry for Success, in 2007, the Schools (Health Promotion and Nutrition) (Scotland) Act was passed. The Act covers all food and drinks available in schools, and:

- places health promotion at the heart of schools' activities
- ensures that food and drink served in schools meets nutritional standards set out by Scottish Ministers
- ensures local authorities promote the uptake and benefits of school meals and, in particular, free school meals
- reduces the stigma associated with free school meals by requiring local authorities to protect the identity of those eligible for free school meals
- gives local authorities the power to provide pupils with healthy snacks and drinks, either at a cost or free of charge
- requires local authorities to consider sustainable development when they provide food or drink in schools.

1.9 The duties in the Act relating to health promotion came into effect in January 2008, with the nutritional regulations for food and drink in schools now due to be introduced in August 2009. However, schools and local authorities have already implemented Hungry for Success and are preparing for the changes that the Act will produce.

1.10 Many of the challenges relating to encouraging health promotion and healthy eating amongst children and their parents in Scotland are currently being addressed through a number of other policies and initiatives.

Health Promoting Schools – Scotland joined the European Network of Health Promoting Schools as part of the UK in 1993, and Scottish schools were set the target of being Health Promoting Schools by 2007. As defined in the Act, “a school is ‘health promoting’ if it provides (whether on its own or in conjunction with Health Boards, parents or any other person) activities, and an environment and facilities which promote the physical, social, mental and emotional health and wellbeing of pupils in attendance at the school.”

The Healthy Living Campaign – Run by NHS Health Scotland and the Scottish Government, the Healthy Living Campaign is a component of the implementation of the Scottish Diet Action Plan. It is a multi-media, multi-component approach, communicating information, positive messages and skills about physical activity and healthy eating.

The National Physical Activity Strategy/Active Schools – The National Physical Activity Strategy is the Government's programme of action to increase the nation's physical activity. In February 2003, Active Schools was identified as a key element of the drive to get more Scots more active – a commitment of the National Physical Activity Strategy. Active Schools is a term given to schools that provide pupils with sufficient opportunities to get active to the extent that it makes a positive contribution to their health. The primary aim of Active Schools is to give children of school age the motivation, opportunities, and tools to be more active throughout their school years and into adulthood. The initiative is not solely about getting young people to participate in formal sport and exercise, but also to introduce more physical activity into their daily lives through play, dance, and active travel.

1.11 It is against this background that the trial of universal school meal provision for Primary 1 to Primary 3 pupils was implemented. The trial ran from October 2007 to June 2008 in five local authorities in Scotland – East Ayrshire, Fife, Glasgow, Scottish Borders and West Dunbartonshire. These local authorities were selected to take part in the trial because they include recognised areas of deprivation and cover urban areas as well as small towns and rural areas across different parts of the country. Ipsos MORI Scotland was subsequently commissioned to undertake an evaluation of the trial.

Objectives of the evaluation

1.12 The evaluation of the trial was undertaken in order to assess process and practical issues relating to the implementation of free school meals, together with any early indications of benefits, across a variety of different locations, to inform roll-out. The trial was evaluated in the context of the overall aim of providing free nutritious school meals to children in P1-P3 with a view to improving pupils' health.

1.13 The specific objectives of the study are to:

- a) Assess process and practical issues for local authorities and schools in implementing free school meals for P1 to P3 pupils
- b) Measure the change in uptake of school meals by P1-P3 pupils
- c) Investigate the range of potential health and other benefits of the trial, including attitudes and behaviours in relation to school meals and healthy eating, by pupils, parents, teachers and schools
- d) Provide an assessment of the impact of the trial on the marginal and average costs of providing school meals
- e) Identify any unexpected impacts and barriers to roll-out in other local authorities

1.14 Based on the research objectives, we identified key research questions to be addressed in the evaluation (see Table 1.1 below).

Table 1.1: Key research questions

OBJECTIVE	SOME KEY RESEARCH QUESTIONS	SOURCES OF INFORMATION					
		Local authority catering dept./	School catering staff	Head teachers / teachers	Parents	School pupils	Census data (pre trial and trial)
ASSESS PROCESS & PRACTICAL ISSUES FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES & SCHOOLS IN IMPLEMENTING FSM FOR P1 - P3 PUPILS	WERE THERE ANY INITIAL TEETHING PROBLEMS?	✓	✓	✓			
	ARE THERE ANY CAPACITY, ACCOMMODATION, OR FACILITY ISSUES?			✓		✓	
	ARE THERE ANY PRACTICAL ISSUES RELATED TO QUEUING & SCHEDULING?	✓		✓		✓	
	IS THERE ANY EFFECT ON AVAILABILITY, QUALITY, OR QUANTITY OF FOOD?		✓	✓	✓	✓	
	WHAT IMPACT DOES FSM INITIATIVE HAVE ON STAFF WORKLOAD?			✓			
	WHAT LEVELS OF WASTAGE OF FOOD ARE THERE?	✓	✓	✓			
	ARE THERE ISSUES RELATED TO ADMINISTRATIVE IMPACT?			✓			
	WHAT ARE THE POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO SUCCESSFUL ROLL-OUT?	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	
MEASURE THE CHANGE IN UPTAKE OF SCHOOL MEALS BY P1-P3 PUPILS	WHAT LEVELS OF UPTAKE OF FSM ARE THERE?	✓		✓			✓
	WHAT TRENDS ARE THERE IN UPTAKE OVER THE TRIAL PERIOD?	✓	✓	✓			✓
	WHAT FACTORS ARE CORRELATED WITH UPTAKE?			✓	✓	✓	✓
	ARE THERE KNOCK ON EFFECTS ON P4-P7 PUPILS?			✓	✓	✓	✓
INVESTIGATE THE RANGE OF POTENTIAL HEALTH AND OTHER BENEFITS OF THE TRIAL	EXAMINE ATTITUDES TO FSM AND HEALTHY EATING		✓	✓	✓	✓	
	WHAT ARE THE PERCEIVED BENEFITS/PROBLEMS OF PROVIDING FSM?			✓	✓	✓	
PROVIDE AN ASSESSMENT OF THE IMPACT OF THE TRIAL ON THE COSTS OF	WHAT ARE THE COSTS INVOLVED IN IMPLEMENTING FSM?	✓	✓	✓			

		SOURCES OF INFORMATION					
PROVIDING SCHOOL MEALS							
IDENTIFY ANY UNEXPECTED IMPACTS AND BARRIERS TO ROLL-OUT	IDENTIFIED FROM ABOVE RESEARCH	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	

CHAPTER 2: METHODOLOGY

2.1 This chapter details the methods used to evaluate the free school meal trial for P1 to P3 pupils. A mixed methods approach was used. This comprised analysis of school meal uptake data, qualitative research with key stakeholders and a quantitative survey of parents of P1 to P3 pupils.

Analysis of school meal uptake data

2.2 A key objective of the study was to measure the change in uptake of school meals by P1 to P3 pupils as a result of the trial. In addition, it was recognised that increased uptake among P1 to P3 pupils may have knock-on effects for P4 to P7 pupils.

2.3 In order to analyse changes in the level of uptake, data was collected from each school in the 5 local authority areas before the trial started in October 2007, and again in late February 2008. In order to reduce the burden on schools, the February 2008 survey was carried out in conjunction with the annual School Meals Census that is undertaken by the Scottish Government. Both the pre-trial survey and the mid-trial February survey mirrored the methods employed by the School Census – a school level return being required from each school, giving figures for a “normal³” day, with the data collection co-ordinated by the five local authorities involved in the trial.

2.4 In both surveys, mainstream schools were asked to provide the following details for each year group and split by whether registered for FSM:

- number of pupils on the school roll
- number of pupils absent from school
- number of pupils taking a school meal on census day.

2.5 Unlike mainstream local authority primary schools, in special schools, pupils are not always organised into strict year groups. An adapted version of the survey form was sent to special schools, asking for the details listed above, but broken down by those aged equivalent to Primary 1 to Primary 3 pupils and all other pupils of primary school age.

2.6 In the pre-trial survey, schools were asked to respond to a number of additional questions:

- whether school meals are cooked onsite or offsite
- whether the school envisaged that the extension of Free School Meals to all Primary 1 to Primary 3 pupils would create any practical difficulties.

2.7 Overall, there was a very high response rate to the surveys. In the pre-trial survey, we received 469 returns from schools, via the five local authorities. Table 2.1 gives the breakdown of returns by local authority. Three returns were excluded from

³ In a similar manner to the School Meal Census, schools were asked to complete their returns for a specific date – unless this date was atypical, for example, if a year group were out of school for any reason or there was a special menu such as an “Italian theme”.

the analysis due to obvious data inaccuracies. In total, 446 useable returns were received from primary schools and 20 from special schools⁴. This represents a response rate of around 97% from mainstream primary schools. In the mid-trial survey, returns were made by the schools, via the local authorities and the Scottish Government. In total, 458 returns were received from primary schools and 19 for special schools.

2.8 In initial discussions before the fieldwork commenced, it was clear that some special schools already provided free meals for all of their pupils, whether or not they were formally entitled to receive FSM. Local Authorities and special schools decided whether they already provided FSM for all pupils in Primary 1 to Primary 3 before the trial commenced. Those that did were not asked to complete a questionnaire. This is the reason why the response rate was lower among special schools.

Table 2.1 Total number of school returns

	Pre-trial survey October '07			Mid-trial survey February '08		
	Primary	Special	Total	Primary	Special	Total
Glasgow	166	19	185	170	19	189
Fife	141	0	141	142	0	142
Scottish Borders	64	0	64	65	0	65
East Ayrshire	43	0	43	44	0	44
West Dunbartonshire	32	1	33	37	1	38
Total	446	20	466	458	19	478

2.9 Analysis of the two surveys of uptake is presented in Chapter 3. However, the change in uptake captured by the two surveys does not cover the changing pattern of uptake during the pilot period: was there a steep increase on the introduction of universal FSM, which then falls away slightly? Was there a steady increase over the pilot period? We therefore asked local authorities for some additional information throughout the pilot period on uptake. Analysis of this data is also presented in Chapter 3.

Qualitative research with key stakeholders

2.10 In each of the five local authorities participating in the trial, two case study schools were selected to take part in the qualitative research.

Sampling schools

2.11 Ipsos MORI selected the 10 case study schools.

2.12 The selection of schools was designed to ensure that a range of schools was covered in terms of population characteristics (e.g. levels of deprivation) and school type/facilities. The sampling approach meant that:

⁴ The School Census of September 2006 lists 460 local authority primary schools and 70 special schools in the five areas

- two schools were included from each local authority area
- the schools characteristics varied by:
 - FSM eligibility (high, medium and low: against the pre-trial average for the five local authority areas).
 - School size (above average, below average: against the pre-trial average for the five local authority areas).
 - School meal uptake (above average, below average: against the pre-trial average for the five local authority areas).
- one school had a high proportion of pupils from ethnic minorities.

2.13 The chosen schools had a mix of facilities, including: whether all the children ate in a canteen or whether other areas were also used; on site and off site catering; breakfast clubs/after school clubs or not; and, whether schools envisaged difficulties with the extension of school meals. Matched reserve schools were also selected by Ipsos MORI at the outset.

2.14 After checking that none of the selected schools were due to be inspected by HMIE during the fieldwork period, local authority Directors of Education were afforded the opportunity to alert us to any other reason that the selected schools should not be approached to take part in the research. As a result, two schools that were currently going through a rationalisation process were replaced by reserve schools. Following this, the research staff approached the headteachers of the selected case study schools to invite them to participate in the research. One headteacher refused to participate due to the fact he was in an acting headteacher position at the school and did not feel that the school was well placed to take part in the research at that time. This school was replaced by its reserve school.

Qualitative fieldwork

2.15 During March 2008, each case study school was visited by a member of the research team. Over the course of a day in the school, the researcher spoke to the headteacher, the head cook, canteen staff, P1, P2 or P3 pupils and parents of P1-P3 pupils. In nine schools the researcher also spoke to class teachers. Although not a planned part of the research, in some schools it was clear the evaluation would benefit from speaking to classroom assistants, school administrators and dining room supervisors. This was done on an ad-hoc basis at the discretion of the researcher and the relevant headteacher. The researchers also undertook observation in the dining areas at lunch time.

2.16 On a different day, in-depth interviews were undertaken with the five local authority catering managers involved in the implementation of the trial – one interview was face-to-face while four were conducted by telephone.

2.17 In three local authorities, where there was sufficient interest from parents, an evening discussion group was held in a local hotel.

2.18 Full details of the methods used with each stakeholder type are in Table 2.2 below.

2.19 Parents were recruited to the qualitative research by means of a quantitative survey (see page 10). At the end of the questionnaire, parents were asked whether they would be willing to discuss the issues surrounding the trial in more detail and, if so, to provide their contact details. They were then invited to take part in a discussion group at the school in the afternoon or at a hotel in the evening. Giving parents the option of attending either an afternoon group or an evening group maximised the chance that they would be able to attend, ensuring that a range of parents in different circumstances could participate (e.g. working full time, working part-time, non-working).

Table 2.2: Methods used with each stakeholder group

Stakeholder	Method
P1 pupils	Paired in-depth interviews (both pupils who have school meals and those who do not) plus observation/informal chat at lunchtime in 10 schools
P2 pupils	Paired in-depth interviews (both pupils who have school meals and those who do not) plus observation/informal chat at lunchtime in 10 schools
P3 pupils	Paired in-depth interviews (both pupils who have school meals and those who do not) plus observation/informal chat at lunchtime in 10 schools
P4-P7 pupils	Observation and informal chat at lunchtime
Parents	Mini focus groups (10 at schools and 3 in the evenings)
Head teachers	In-depth interviews
P1 to P7 class teachers	Mini focus groups
Head cooks	In-depth interviews
Canteen staff	Mini focus groups
Classroom assistants	Paired in-depth interviews/mini focus groups
Dining room supervisors	Paired in-depth interview
School administrator	In-depth interview
Local authority catering managers	In-depth interviews

Discussion guide design

2.20 Ipsos MORI, in collaboration with the Research Advisory Group, designed discussion guides to facilitate the qualitative research. There were 7 guides in total: one each for pupils, parents, headteachers, class teachers, head cooks, canteen staff and local authority catering managers (although the headteachers and class teachers guides were very similar, as were those for the head cooks and canteen staff). The guides were designed around the key research questions (see Table 1.1 above) to ensure that the relevant topics were covered with the appropriate stakeholders.

A note on the interpretation of qualitative research

2.21 Qualitative research is often compared and contrasted with quantitative research. Qualitative research is less concerned with measurement (“how many?”, “how often?” etc.) and more concerned with understanding motivations, attitudes and feelings (“why?”, “how?” etc).

2.22 The qualitative component of the evaluation, like most qualitative research, involved substantially fewer people than the quantitative research, but it explores attitudes and experiences of participants in much more depth. The aim of qualitative research is not to generalise to the wider population in terms of the *prevalence* of attitudes or behaviours (e.g. ‘one quarter of pupils at Scottish schools do not take school meals because their friends don’t have them’, or ‘girls are more likely than boys to be influenced by what their friends are doing for lunch’), but to identify and explore the different issues and themes relating to the subject being researched. The assumption is that issues and themes affecting the participants are a reflection of issues and themes in the wider population. Although the *extent* to which they apply to the wider population or specific sub-groups cannot be quantified, the value of qualitative research is in identifying the range of different issues involved and the way in which they can impact on people.

2.23 So, for example, one of the findings from this study was that some parents would like to have recipe cards for the school meals that their children enjoyed so that they could make them at home. Although we cannot extrapolate from this and say that X% of parents would like this, the implication is this suggestion should be considered if the provision of free school meals for P1 to P3 pupils is to be implemented across Scotland.

Quantitative research with parents of P1 to P3 pupils

2.24 A survey of parents of P1 to P3 pupils was also undertaken. This enabled us to collect some quantitative data on the trial whilst also allowing parents who did not wish/were unable to take part in a discussion group to provide some feedback on the trial.

Sampling schools for the parents' survey

2.25 The parents' survey was designed with the aim of achieving a broadly representative sample of 1,000 parents⁵. Based on the average number of pupils per school and an estimated response rate of 50%, it was calculated that a further 17 schools (in addition to the 10 case study schools) would be required for the survey.

2.26 In order to ensure that the sample was broadly representative of the population regarding rurality and deprivation, details from the baseline uptake survey were linked to information from the School census, and the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD).

2.27 The urban rural classification was collapsed into three bands (urban, small towns and rural) and the SIMD into 3 bands (most deprived 20%, next 40% and least deprived 40%) to give a 9-cell matrix. Table 2.3 shows the distribution across all schools in the trial areas.

Table 2.3: Number of schools in pilot areas

	Most deprived 20%	Next 40%	Least deprived 40%	Total
Urban	154	114	51	319
Small towns	9	24	15	48
Rural	5	40	66	111
Total	168	178	132	478

2.28 In order to achieve a broadly representative sample, the sample design was disproportionate. It over sampled schools in deprived small towns and rural areas and under sampled schools from the most deprived urban areas (mainly in Glasgow). An alternative wholly proportionate design would not have provided such a useful sample, as in each of the small town cells, only a single school would be chosen, and no schools in the "Rural - most deprived 20%" cell would be included in the sample.

Response to the survey

2.29 The survey fieldwork ran from 11 February – 15 April 2008. The 10 case study schools and the additional 17 schools agreed to help with the administration of the survey. Schools received batches of stamped envelopes each containing a letter providing the background to the research, a questionnaire and a reply-paid envelope for parents to return their completed questionnaire directly to Ipsos MORI. Schools addressed the envelopes to the parents of their P1 to P3 pupils and posted them. A total of 926 parents completed and returned the questionnaire – an estimated response rate of 41%⁶.

2.30 Midway through the fieldwork period, it was clear that the response rate from parents in deprived areas was significantly lower than in less deprived areas. In an

⁵ We did not aim for a purely random sample of parents across the trial areas as this would have greatly increased the number of schools involved and the administrative costs, and would have been disproportionate given the scale of the evaluation.

⁶ It is not possible to provide an exact response rate because schools distributed the questionnaires on behalf of the research team. All schools were given spare copies of the questionnaire so that they could distribute them to any parents who had lost them.

attempt to boost the response rate in the most deprived areas, the following steps were taken:

- all parents in the most deprived areas were sent a reminder letter and a spare copy of the questionnaire.⁷
- Ipsos MORI interviewers visited 9 of the 10 most deprived schools either in the morning when parents were dropping children off at the schools or in the afternoon when they were collecting them.

2.31 While this served to boost the response rate, differences by deprivation remained; the response rate was 46% in the least deprived areas, 42% in mid deprived areas and 37% in the most deprived areas.

Questionnaire design

2.32 The questionnaire for the survey of parents was designed by Ipsos MORI, in close consultation with the Research Advisory Group and was based on the key research questions (Table 1.1 above).

A note on measures of deprivation

2.33 Two measures of deprivation were used in the evaluation. For uptake data and other school level data, analysis by deprivation was based on the pre-trial level of registration for free school meals within each school. This is a commonly used proxy measure for the level of deprivation within the school population. For the data from the survey of parents, analysis was based on the Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation⁸ classification based on the parent's home postcode.

Structure of the report

2.34 Chapter 3 sets the research findings in context, exploring uptake of school meals, and associated trends, and identifies factors correlated with uptake. Chapter 4 discusses the process and practical challenges schools and local authorities faced in implementing the trial. Chapter 5 explores early perceptions of health and other benefits of the trial. Chapter 6 provides an analysis of the impact of the trial on the costs of providing school meals. Finally, Chapter 7 draws conclusions from the research, focusing on the implications for roll-out in other local authorities.

⁷ Parents of pupils at schools other than the most deprived 20% also received a reminder letter but did not receive a spare copy of the questionnaire.

⁸ For more details see: <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Topics/Statistics/SIMD/>

CHAPTER 3: UPTAKE OF FREE SCHOOL MEALS

Key points

The trial resulted in significantly increased uptake of school meals in mainstream schools.

Among the target group of P1-P3 pupils not FSM registered, uptake of school meals increased from 41% to 69% (an increase of 28 percentage points).

Among P1-P3 pupils who were previously FSM registered, uptake increased from 89.2% to 93.6% (an increase of 4.4 percentage points).

Overall, the uptake among all P1-P3 pupils increased from 53% to 75% (an increase of 22 percentage points).

There was concern that the trial might negatively impact on P4-P7 uptake (for example, because queues might increase or food choices might reduce). However, there has been a small but positive impact this group – uptake increased from 47.3 % to 49.9% (an increase of 2.6 percentage points).

Overall, the uptake among all primary pupils increased from 50% to 60% (an increase of 10 percentage points).

Uptake increased in all five trial areas. Among the target group of P1-P3 pupils not FSM registered, the biggest increases were in Fife and Scottish Borders (both 32 percentage points) and East Ayrshire (31 percentage points). The increases were relatively lower in West Dunbartonshire (26 percentage points) and Glasgow (22 percentage points).

Among those previously registered for FSM, the increases in uptake ranged from 8.5 percentage points in Scottish Borders to 3.4 percentage points in Glasgow.

Among P1-P3 pupils who were not FSM registered and who did not take a school meal before the trial, those in the most deprived areas and those in the least deprived areas were equally likely to take up the offer of a free school meal.

In the non-trial areas across Scotland, the level of uptake of schools meals remained relatively static. Changes in the trial areas are therefore almost certainly a result of the trial rather than wider trends in uptake.

Uptake increased most in schools where it was lowest previously. The increase in uptake was also higher in smaller schools and in schools with on-site (as opposed to off-site) cooking facilities.

In all five local authorities there was a substantial upward trend in uptake at the outset of the trial. In three areas (West Dunbartonshire, East Ayrshire, and Glasgow) this decreased slightly and, to varying degrees, stabilised. In the remaining two areas, P1-P3 uptake was less stable, fluctuating between around

60% and around 70% in Scottish Borders and between around 66% and around 73% in Fife.

A quarter of P1-P3 pupils were still not taking a school meal on a ‘normal day’ and it was clear from the research that the main reason for non-uptake is that some children are ‘fussy eaters’. The parents of these children generally wanted them to have school meals and would welcome help to encourage their children to sample a broader range of foods. The greatest impact on uptake might be realised through initiatives to enhance parents’ skills in encouraging young children to eat a wider range of foods, as opposed to changes to the school meal experience itself (queuing systems, décor etc.).

The trial does not appear to have had an impact on uptake levels in special schools.

3.1 This chapter presents analysis of the returns from schools in the two uptake surveys; the pre-trial baseline uptake survey in October 2007 and the late February 2008 uptake survey⁹. It focuses primarily on mainstream local authority schools, but also covers returns received from special schools, and on trend data throughout the trial period received from the five trial local authorities.

3.2 It should be noted that uptake figures measure the proportion of pupils taking a school meal *on a given day*. Many pupils take a school meal some days and a packed lunch on other days. Rather than conceptualising ‘pupils who take school meals’ and ‘pupils who do not take school meals’, it is more helpful to think about the proportion taking a school meal on a given day, and the number of times a week pupils take a school meal.

3.3 Before analysing uptake levels, we examine the baseline level of Free School Meal registration in the trial areas before the trial commenced. This provides important context to the uptake data: the lower the level of existing registration for FSM, the more that the extension of FSM to all Primary 1 to Primary 3 pupils may increase the overall level of uptake.

Level of registration for Free School Meals (FSM) in the five trial areas

3.4 Table 3.1 below shows the 2007 pre-trial level of registration for FSMs by local authority (in mainstream schools). Among the five trial local authorities, the highest level of registration for FSMs was in Glasgow, where over a third of pupils (35%) were registered. Scottish Borders had the lowest level of FSM registration, with fewer than 1 in 10 pupils registered for FSM.

⁹ The decision to undertake the survey measuring uptake during the trial, i.e. in late February 2008, was taken when the trial was due to end in late March 2008. It was designed to minimise burdens on schools by collecting this information as part of the annual school meal statistical return. The decision to extend the trial to June meant the survey was roughly halfway through the trial. However, as discussed below, uptake had generally stabilised by this point so the fact that the second survey took place relatively earlier in the trial period is not problematic.

Table 3.1: Level of FSM registration by local authority in primary schools. Pre-trial survey and School Meals Census

	February 07 School Meals Census¹⁰	October 07 Pre-trial survey	February 08 School Meals Census¹¹
Glasgow	37.3%	35.3%	34.5%
West Dunbartonshire	25.5%	22.8%	23.7%
East Ayrshire	19.7%	18.9%	18.8%
Fife	18.4%	17.3%	17.5%
Scottish Borders	9.6%	8.8%	8.8%
Total	(17.6% Scotland)	24.7%	(16.9% Scotland)

3.5 In all five local authorities, the level of FSM registration found in the pre-trial survey in October 2007 was slightly lower than the level of registration as reported in the February 2007 School Meals Census and similar to that reported in the February 2008 School Meal Census. It does appear that there may have been a small drop in the level of FSM registration in the trial areas between 2007 and 2008. In Glasgow, for example, the level of registration figure dropped from 37.3% to 34.5%, while in East Ayrshire, it dropped from 19.7% to 18.8%.

3.6 Overall, the level of FSM registration in the five trial areas was higher than for Scotland as a whole (24.7% compared with 16.9%). Therefore, should FSM be extended to all P1 to P3 pupils across all local authorities, the increase in eligibility will be slighter greater in the other 27 local authorities combined, than it was in the 5 trial areas (around 83%¹² of all P1 to P3 pupils compared to 75% in the trial areas).

3.7 Table 3.2 shows the level of FSM registration in the five trial areas by stage of schooling. Overall, there was very little difference between the level of FSM registration among the Primary 1 to Primary 3 pupils, and Primary 4 to Primary 7 pupils. In four of the five areas – Glasgow being the exception - a marginally higher proportion of P1 to P3 pupils than P4 to P7 pupils were registered for FSMs.

¹⁰ As published in “School Meals in Scotland 2007” Scottish Government - www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2007/06/04134749/0

¹¹ As published in “School Meals in Scotland 2008” Scottish Government - <http://www.scotland.gov.uk/Publications/2008/06/24125730/0>

¹² As the School Meal Census does not provide registration figures broken down by year group, this assumes that levels of registration do not significantly differ between P1-P3 and P4-P7 pupils.

Table 3.2: Level of FSM registration by local authority and stage of schooling in primary schools. Pre-trial survey

	Primary 1 to Primary 3	Primary 4 to Primary 7
Glasgow	34.9%	35.6%
West Dunbartonshire	23.9%	22.1%
East Ayrshire	19.7%	18.4%
Fife	17.9%	16.9%
Scottish Borders	9.6%	8.3%
Total	24.9%	24.5%

Uptake of school meals before the trial

3.8 Table 3.3 shows the level of uptake of school meals by whether registered for FSMs across the five local authorities *before* the trial commenced. Overall, around half (50%) of all primary pupils (registered and non-registered) in the five trial areas took a school meal before the trial.

Table 3.3: Uptake of school meals by whether registered for Free School Meals and local authority. Pre-trial survey, Oct 2007

	FSM registered	Non-FSM registered	All Pupils
Glasgow	89.2%	42.5%	58.7%
Fife	86.6%	38.0%	46.1%
West Dunbartonshire	84.5%	34.2%	45.4%
East Ayrshire	85.9%	28.6%	39.1%
Scottish Borders	78.9%	32.3%	36.3%
Total	87.7%	37.7%	49.7%

3.9 Among the FSM registered pupils, just under 9 in 10 (88%) took a school meal. The proportion of FSM registered pupils who took a school meal was highest in Glasgow (89%) and lowest in the Scottish Borders (79%).

3.10 In comparison, just under 4 in 10 (38%) of the non-FSM registered pupils took a school meal. Among this group, the proportion who took a school meal was again highest in Glasgow (43%). It was lowest in East Ayrshire (29%) and Scottish Borders (32%).

3.11 Table 3.4 shows the level of uptake of school meals in the pre-trial survey by year group. Overall, across the five trial areas, a higher proportion of P1 to P3 pupils than P4 to P7 pupils took a school meal (53% compared with 47% respectively). This gap is seen in all five of the trial areas, and was largest in West Dunbartonshire (10% difference) and smallest in the Scottish Borders (2%).

Table 3.4: Uptake of school meals by whether registered for FSM, local authority and year group. Pre-trial survey, Oct 2007

	Primary 1 to Primary 3			Primary 4 to Primary 7		
	FSM registered	Non-FSM registered	All P1 to P3 pupils	FSM registered	Non-FSM registered	All P4 to P7 pupils
Glasgow	91.0%	47.8%	62.8%	88.0%	38.7%	55.8%
Fife	87.4%	40.9%	49.1%	85.9%	36.0%	44.1%
West Dunbartonshire	87.2%	39.9%	51.0%	82.5%	30.3%	41.5%
East Ayrshire	87.6%	29.7%	40.8%	84.6%	27.9%	38.0%
Scottish Borders	77.6%	33.1%	37.3%	80.0%	31.7%	35.7%
Total	89.2%	41.3%	53.0%	86.7%	35.1%	47.3%

3.12 The difference in uptake levels between P1 to P3 pupils and P4 to P7 pupils was higher among non-FSM registered pupils than FSM registered pupils. Across the five areas, 89% of FSM registered pupils in P1 to P3 took a school meal, compared to 87% in P4 to P7. In comparison, among the non-FSM registered pupils, the level of uptake dropped from 41% among P1 to P3 pupils to 35% among P4-P7 pupils.

3.13 It should be noted that schools where there was a low level of FSM registration also tended to have lower levels of uptake. This is not only because pupils who are FSM registered are more likely to take a school meal than non-FSM pupils. It is also because both FSM registered and non-FSM registered pupils were more likely to take a school meal if they were in a school where there was a high level of FSM registration.

Table 3.5: Uptake of school meals by whether registered for FSM and level of FSM registration within schools (banded)¹³. Pre-trial survey, October 2007

	FSM registered	Non-FSM registered	All pupils
Least deprived schools (0%-9% FSM registered)	85%	35%	37%
9% - 19% FSM registered	83%	33%	40%
19% - 37% FSM registered	87%	38%	51%
Most deprived schools (37-100% FSM registered)	90%	50%	70%
Total	88%	38%	50%

3.14 Table 3.5 shows that both FSM and non-FSM pupils were more likely to take a school meal if they were in a school with a high level of FSM registration. This pattern is particularly strong among non-FSM registered pupils. In other words, the more pupils in a school that were registered for FSM, the more likely that non-FSM

¹³ The banding of FSM registration within schools produced four quartiles. Thus, schools with between 0-9% FSM registration comprise around 25% of all primary schools in the trial areas.

pupils would take a school meal.¹⁴ As FSM registration is generally accepted as a good indicator of deprivation at a school level, this shows that uptake pre-trial was higher in schools in the more deprived areas among all pupils (both FSM registered and non-FSM registered).

Change in uptake of school meals as a result of the trial

3.15 The trial led to a significant increase in uptake of school meals in all five trial local authorities. Overall, uptake of school meals increased from 50% of all primary pupils to 60%. Among the group that the trial targeted, namely P1 to P3 pupils who are not registered for FSM, the level of uptake increased from 41.3% to 68.9%, an increase of 27.6 percentage points. Overall, among P1 to P3 pupils, uptake of school meals increased 21.9 percentage points to 74.9%.

3.16 In the non-trial areas across Scotland, the level of uptake of schools meals remained relatively static between the 2007 and 2008 School Meals Censuses, marginally increasing from 45.6% in 2007 to 46.3% in 2008 among all primary school pupils. Changes in the trial areas are therefore almost certainly a result of the trial rather than wider trends in uptake.

3.17 Table 3.6 shows uptake of school meals by whether registered for FSM, local authority and year group in the late February 2008 survey. The figures in brackets show the percentage point (pp) change from the pre-trial survey.

¹⁴ This holds for both P1 to P3 pupils and P4 to P7 pupils.

Table 3.6: Uptake of school meals by whether registered for FSM, local authority and year group. Late February 2008 survey, percentage point change from pre-trial survey shown in brackets

	Primary 1 to Primary 3			Primary 4 to Primary 7		
	FSM registered	Non-FSM registered	All P1 to P3 pupils	FSM registered	Non-FSM registered	All P4 to P7 pupils
Glasgow	94.4% (+3.4 pp)	69.1% (+21.3 pp)	77.8% (+15.0pp)	88.5% (+0.5pp)	38.4% (-0.3pp)	55.6% (-0.2pp)
Fife	92.0% (+4.6pp)	73.3% (+32.4pp)	76.5% (+27.4pp)	89.4% (+3.5pp)	42.2% (+6.2pp)	49.9% (+5.8pp)
West Dunbartonshire	95.0% (+7.8pp)	65.7% (+25.8pp)	72.5% (+21.5pp)	85.3% (+2.8pp)	33.0% (+2.7pp)	44.1% (+2.6pp)
East Ayrshire	94.5% (+6.9pp)	60.7% (+31.0pp)	67.2% (+26.4pp)	88.3% (+3.7pp)	32.9% (+5.0pp)	43.2% (+5.2pp)
Scottish Borders	86.1% (+8.5pp)	65.1% (+32.0pp)	67.0% (+29.7pp)	78.9% (-1.1pp)	32.7% (+1.0pp)	36.8% (+1.1pp)
Total	93.6% (+4.4pp)	68.9% (+27.6pp)	74.9% (+21.9pp)	88.1% (+1.4pp)	38.0% (+2.9pp)	49.9% (+2.6pp)

3.18 In all five local authorities, there was a sizeable increase in school meal uptake among the target group of non-FSM registered P1 to P3 pupils. In Fife, uptake increased from 41% to 73%, while in the Scottish Borders uptake increase from 33% to 65%. The increase in uptake was lower, relatively, in Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire (up 21 percentage points to 69% and up 26 percentage points to 66% respectively).

3.19 In all five trial local authorities, the level of uptake also increased among P1 to P3 pupils who had been entitled to receive FSMs *before* the trial started. Overall, the increase in uptake among this group was 4.4 percentage points (from 89.2% to 93.6%) and ranged from a 3.4 percentage point increase in Glasgow, to an 8.5 percentage point increase in the Scottish Borders. Although the trial did not *directly* target this group, these increases appear to be a result of the trial. This could be due to a number of different factors, for example, pupils wanting to sit with friends who were now taking a school meal, increased publicity or a reduction in parental concern about stigma.

P1-P3 uptake compared to P4-P7 uptake

3.20 There was concern before the trial that the extension to P1 to P3 pupils may have a negative effect on uptake among P4 to P7 pupils (for example, because queues might be longer). However, uptake among P4 and P7 pupils also increased slightly, up 2.6 percentage points to 49.9% between the pre-trial and late February 2008 surveys. Among FSM registered P4 to P7 pupils, the increase was 1.4 percentage points (to 88.1%), while among non-FSM registered pupils, the increase was 2.9 percentage points (to 38.0%).

3.21 Pre-trial, while uptake levels were relatively consistent across the lower primary year groups (P1 to P3), uptake of schools meals decreased slightly between P4 and P7. Among non-FSM registered pupils, uptake was 38.5% among P4 pupils pre-trial, and 32.4% among P7 pupils. The size of the increase in uptake during the trial was relatively consistent across the different year groups, with uptake increasing to 40.4% among non-FSM pupils in P4 and to 35.7% among pupils in P7 in the late February 2008 survey.

Changes in uptake compared to pre-trial uptake levels

3.22 Uptake of school meals increased most in schools where it was lowest previously, both among pupils where FSM had been extended, and among pupils who were registered for FSM before the trial. This result is not surprising. Schools with the lowest levels of uptake previously had the most scope to increase levels of uptake. Table 3.6 shows the level of uptake of school meals by level of uptake pre-trial (among P1-P3 non-FSM pupils) banded into quartiles.

3.23 The quartile of schools with the lowest uptake in the pre-trial survey saw an average increase in uptake of 36.5 percentage points among the P1 to P3 pupils to whom FSM had been extended. In comparison, the quartile of schools with the highest uptake in the pre-trial survey saw the smallest increase in uptake in this group, an increase of 11.9 percentage points.

3.24 This pattern is also seen among P1-P3 pupils who were registered for FSM pre-trial. In the quartile of schools where uptake was lowest previously, uptake increased 3.5 percentage points among this group to 89.3%. In comparison, in the quartile of schools where uptake was highest previously, uptake increased by 1.1 percentage points to 94.3%.

Table 3.6: Uptake of schools meals in late February 2008 survey by banded uptake (among P1-P3 Non-FSM pupils in pre-trial survey), and percentage point changes since pre-trial survey

Banded uptake (among P1-P3 Non-FSM pupils in pre-trial survey)	P1-P3			P4-P7		
	FSM	Non-FSM	ALL	FSM	Non-FSM	ALL
Lowest uptake (<32.8%)	89.3% (+3.5pp)	61.2% (+36.5pp)	66.2% (+30.5pp)	86.0% (+1.8pp)	33.0% (+5.4pp)	41.9% (+4.9pp)
Next 25% (32.8% to 42%)	95.1% (+7.0pp)	68.5% (+31.8pp)	74.1% (+26.7pp)	87.0% (+5.1pp)	35.8% (+4.2pp)	46.1% (+4.2pp)
Next 25% (42% - 54.8%)	94.8% (+5.7pp)	72.2% (+24.0pp)	78.0% (+19.1pp)	88.0% (+1.3pp)	37.6% (+1.7pp)	50.4% (+1.9pp)
Highest uptake (>54.8%)	94.3% (+1.1pp)	78.8% (+11.9pp)	84.3% (+8.0pp)	90.2% (-1.7pp)	51.0% (-2.1pp)	65.1% (-2.0pp)
Total	93.6% (+4.4pp)	68.9% (+27.6pp)	74.9% (+21.9pp)	88.1% (+1.4pp)	38.0% (+2.9pp)	49.9% (+2.6pp)

Take-up among the key target group - non-FSM registered pupils not previously taking a meal

3.25 Clearly, the fewer pupils who took a school meal before the trial, the more scope there was to increase the level of uptake during the trial. An alternative measure of the increase in uptake is to examine the proportion of those to whom FSM was extended to, who did not previously take a meal but started taking a school meal during the trial.

3.26 The key findings from analysis of this measure are¹⁵:

- Pupils were less likely to take a school meal when offered one as part of the trial in schools where the level of uptake was highest previously among the target group.
- Among this target group, while the overall level of uptake remains lower in schools where it was lowest pre-trial, the gap narrowed between schools where uptake levels were high and low previously, because relatively more pupils in schools with previously low uptake took up the offer of a FSM under the trial. This is likely to at least partially reflect a ceiling effect - that there are some pupils who, for whatever reason, will never take a school meal. As the proportion of pupils who take a school meal nears 100% in a school, it is less likely that a high proportion of the remainder can be persuaded take a school meal.
- Uptake among the target group increased more in smaller schools.
- More target group pupils took up the offer of FSM in schools with onsite facilities than those who received meals from offsite.
- Small schools with onsite cooking facilities saw the highest level of increase in uptake among this target group. Large schools without onsite cooking facilities saw the lowest level of increase in uptake. These patterns were seen across the different local authorities.
- The likelihood of taking up the offer of a FSM among those who did not take one before, and who were offered them as part of the trial, did not differ substantially by whether the school was in a deprived area. It might have been expected that there would be a greater uptake among those in the most deprived areas (where there will be a higher proportion of less affluent families, including those just above the threshold for FSM eligibility). However, the pre-trial uptake among non-FSM registered pupils in the more deprived areas was higher and there was therefore less scope to increase it.

¹⁵ More detailed data and commentary are contained in Annex 1.

Special schools

3.26 The trial does not appear to have had an impact on uptake levels in special schools – although the results should be treated with caution as there were some problems with the data¹⁶. The pre-trial survey showed that the P1-P3 level of uptake was already extremely high (98% among FSM registered pupils¹⁷, 91% among non-FSM registered pupils, and 96% overall). There was therefore little scope to increase it further. The results from the late February survey actually show a slight decrease (to 95% among FSM registered pupils, 87% among non-FSM registered pupils, and 93% overall). It seems extremely unlikely that the trial had a *negative* impact, and this apparent decrease probably reflects the issues with the data rather than a real change.

Trends in uptake over the trial period

3.27 The change in uptake captured by the two surveys does not cover any change in patterns of uptake during the trial period and thus may obscure important trends. To complement the information obtained from the surveys, local authorities were asked to provide additional uptake data throughout the duration of the trial.

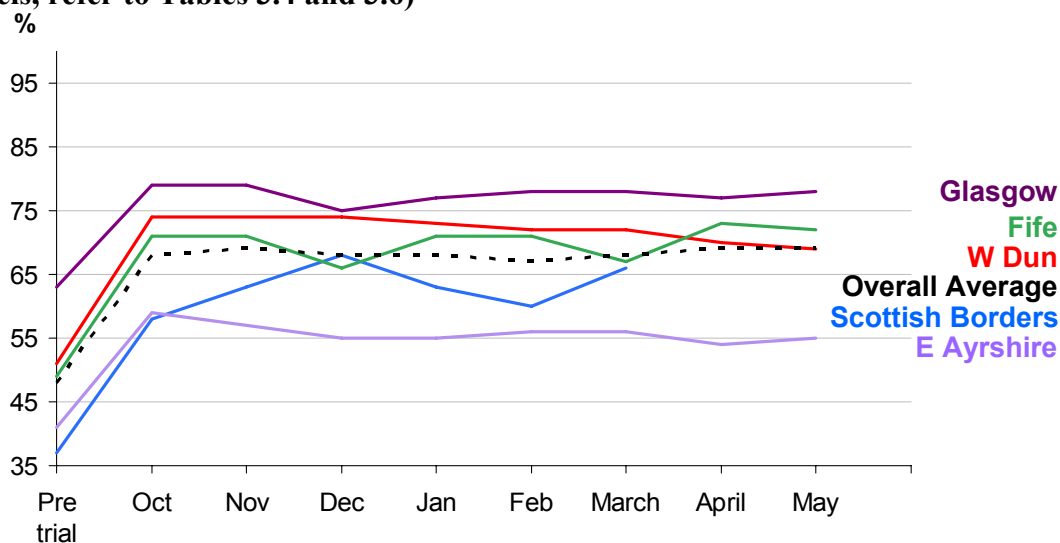
3.28 It should be noted that this data was not collected in the same way as the data in the pre-trial and late February 2008 surveys and is not directly comparable (e.g. some areas did not adjust for absences and some excluded FSM registered pupils). It is useful to illustrate general trends rather than absolute levels of uptake.

3.29 Figure 3.1, plotting P1 to P3 uptake by month, provides a concise picture of the trends in the five trial areas. In all five local authorities there is a large upward trend at the outset of the trial. In three areas (West Dunbartonshire, East Ayrshire, and Glasgow) this decreases slightly and, to varying degrees, stabilises. After the initial sharp increase, there is less stability in Scottish Borders and Fife; in the Scottish Borders, uptake fluctuates between around 60% and around 70% while in Fife it fluctuates between around 66% and around 73%.

¹⁶ In initial discussions before the fieldwork commenced, it was clear that some special schools already provided free meals for all of their pupils, whether or not they were formally entitled to receive FSM. Local Authorities and special schools decided whether they already provided FSM for all pupils in P1 to P3 before the trial commenced. Those that did were not asked to complete a proforma. This is one of the reasons why the response rate for special schools appears lower (there are 70 special schools in the five areas: 20 completed the pro-forma in the pre-trial survey and 19 in the late February 2008 survey). It should also be borne in mind that several special schools do not organise their classes strictly by age, but rather by the severity of their needs. It is possible that the age criterion of pupils was interpreted differently between the pre-trial and the late February 2008 survey. This, together with the low response, means that the results should be treated with caution.

¹⁷ Overall, 71% of pupils in special schools who made a return were registered for free school meals. There was little difference by age group, with 70% of P1 to P3 pupils registered and 72% of P4 to P7 pupils registered for FSM. The February 2007 School Meals Census does not report levels of registration for FSM for the special school sector.

Figure 3.1: P1-P3 Uptake trends across the 5 local authorities. (This chart illustrates general trends over the trial period. For absolute and relative uptake levels, refer to Tables 3.4 and 3.6)



Source: Ipsos MORI

3.30 The qualitative research in case study schools and the quantitative survey of parents of P1-P3 pupils also explored uptake – both levels of uptake and factors influencing uptake.

Initial uptake

3.31 Some schools suggested that uptake was higher in the initial few weeks of the trial than in following weeks. There was a view that this was due to the ‘novelty factor’. However, more commonly, it was seen to be because of ‘finicky eaters’, who reverted to packed lunches.

“I think [parents] were persuading their children, you are going to go and try it, and for some children, it wasn’t for them.”

Headteacher

“I think a couple of them have tried the school dinners but they’re just really fussy so they’ve gone back to packed lunches.”

Class Teacher

3.32 While ‘fussiness’ emerged as the most prominent factor affecting uptake, it was also suggested that the slight drop in uptake was a result of pupils not getting their preferred choice of food:

“I think she did two weeks and never got what she asked for, so that’s why we’re back to packed lunches.”

Parent

3.33 However, this problem of pupils not getting their preferred choice existed pre-trial and there was no evidence that the trial had exacerbated it.

3.34 In order to accommodate provision of *healthy* free school meals, one trial local authority felt it necessary to remove their school-provided packed lunch option. There were strong views on this, with some suggestion that this arrangement impacted upon uptake because a sandwich option was popular with children and felt to be adequate for their small stomachs. Where schools had stopped providing school packed lunches (i.e. snack based cold meals of rolls, sandwiches, packets of salad vegetables (e.g. cherry tomatoes), fruit, yoghurt etc.), it was suggested that an increased number of pupils opted to have a packed lunch from home as opposed to having a school meal.

3.35 Hardly any children go home for their lunch (among children of survey respondents, just 2% of P1 pupils, 1% of P2 pupils, and 1% of P3 pupils go home/to a relative or friend’s home for lunch 5 days a week). Figures 3.1 and 3.2 illustrate school meal and packed lunch uptake among children of parents’ survey respondents, both pre-trial and during the trial.¹⁸ As they show, there are some pupils who typically take school meals or packed lunches 5 days a week and some who normally take them 0 days a week. However, there is a considerable proportion who vary their lunches, having school meals/packed lunches 1-4 days a week. As figures 3.11 and 3.12 illustrate, the average number of days a week pupils have school meals has increased substantially as a result of the trial, while for packed lunches it has decreased significantly.

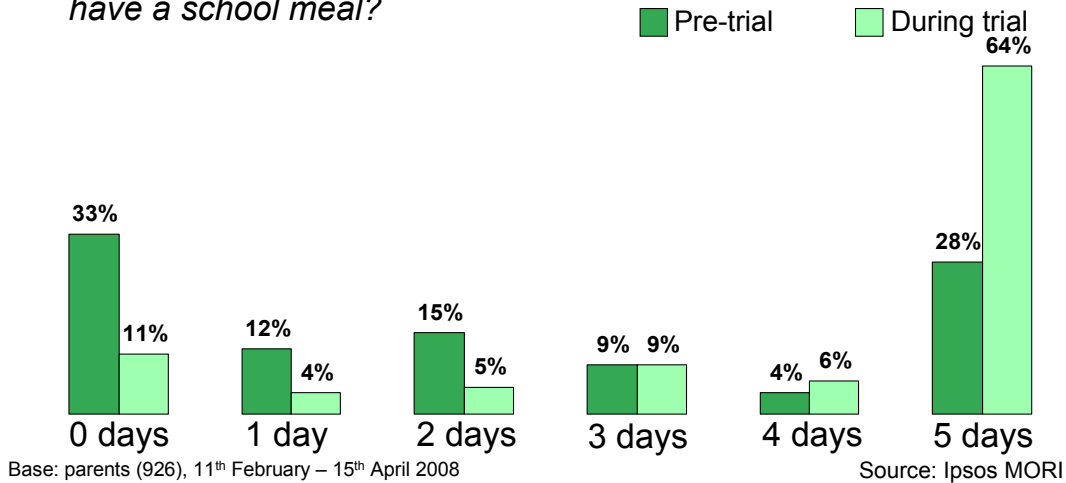
3.36 As illustrated in figure 3.1, before the introduction of the trial, among children of survey respondents, 28% took school meals 5 days a week. When they were surveyed during the trial, the corresponding figure was 64% – an increase of 36 percentage points. Conversely, 33% were having school meals on 0 days in a typical week pre-trial, compared with 11% during the trial. The proportions having school meals 3 or 4 days a week remained reasonably in line before and during the trial, while having school meals only 1 day and only 2 days a week both decreased over the timescale.

¹⁸ If these figures are translated into total uptake on any given day, they prove to be very consistent with the pre-trial and the late February 2008 uptake surveys, indicating that the parents survey was representative.

Figure 3.1: School meal uptake before & during trial

Q Before the introduction of FSMs, in a typical week, how often did your child have a school meal?

Q In a typical week nowadays, on how many days does your child have a school meal?

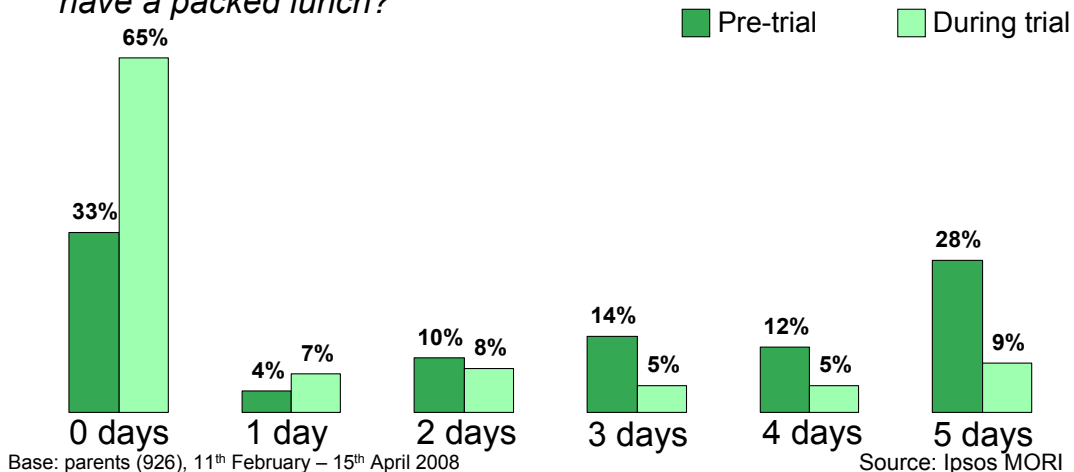


3.37 As illustrated in figure 3.2, the increase in school meal uptake was mirrored by similar decreases in the proportions of pupils having packed lunches; 65% of pupils were having packed lunches 0 days a week pre-trial compared to 33% of pupils 0 days a week during the trial, while those having packed lunches 5 days a week decreased considerably during the trial (from 28% to 9%).

Figure 3.2: Packed lunch uptake before & during trial

Q Before the introduction of FSMs, in a typical week, how often did your child have a packed lunch?

Q In a typical week nowadays, on how many days does your child have a packed lunch?



Reasons for having school meals

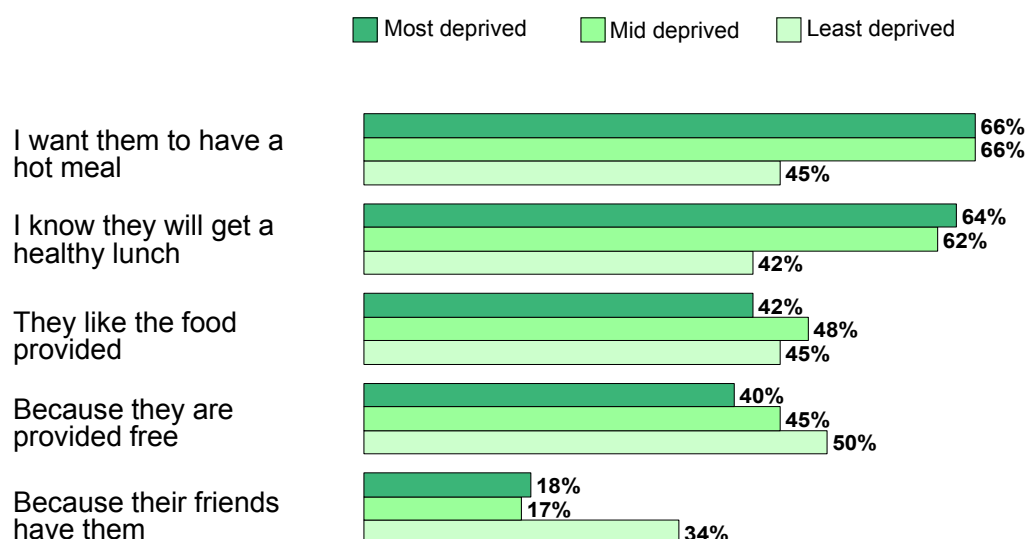
3.32 The two overriding reasons for parents opting to send their child for a school meal are that they ‘want them to have a hot meal’ and that they ‘know they will get a

healthy lunch’. As illustrated in figure 3.3, parents in the most deprived areas are more likely than those in the least deprived areas to suggest that these are key reasons influencing uptake. Parents in the least deprived areas are, on the other hand, more likely than those in the most deprived areas to say ‘because they are provided free’ and ‘because their friends have them’ are important reasons.

3.33 It is interesting to note that a greater proportion of parents in the least deprived areas say that ‘because they are provided free’ is a main reason. Looking only at those who were not previously entitled to FSMs, the difference is similar; 42% of those in the most deprived areas cite this as a reason, compared to 50% of those in the least deprived areas.

Figure 3.3: Reasons for child having school meals (all parents)

Q If your child ever takes a school meal nowadays, what are the main reasons?



Base: parents (926), 11th February – 15th April 2008

Source: Ipsos MORI

3.34 The reasons for having school meals given by parents of children who had school meals more often since the start of the trial were very similar to the reasons given by parents of children who had school meals the same amount. The exception was that parents of those children having school meals more often were more likely to give ‘because they are provided free’ as a main reason (59% of those taking school meals more often compared with 27% of those taking them the same amount).

Reasons for not having school meals every day

3.35 The main reasons for not having school meals every day were two sides of the same coin – that pupils do always like the food choices on offer, and that parents feel they can provide food their child will like and eat. The high incidence of parents reporting that ‘they don’t like the food choices on offer’ is likely to reflect the fact that children do not *always* like the food choices on offer and therefore do not always stay for school meals – otherwise there would be a much higher proportion of children who never or very rarely take school meals. As illustrated in figure 3.4, parents in the

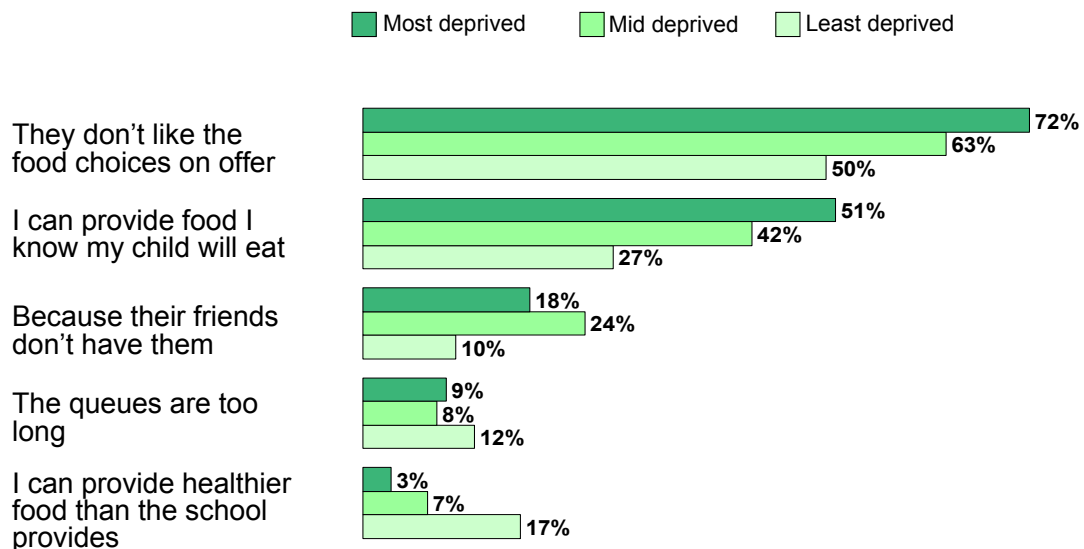
most deprived areas are more likely than those in the least deprived areas to suggest that these are key reasons influencing uptake.

3.36 Peer influence was again identified as having an impact, although, less so among the parents in the least deprived areas. In the qualitative research, there was a view, on occasion, that ‘sometimes it’s not even the meals it’s the queue’; pupils taking school meals have to queue whilst those having packed lunches sit and eat straight away. It was therefore suggested that pupils prefer the packed lunch option because it allows them to leave the dining room (to go out to play) quicker. However, queues were not generally identified as a major barrier to uptake: 8% of survey respondents considered it to be an influential factor. Only a small minority of parents suggested that their child has a packed lunch instead of a school meal because it is the healthier option. This view was more common among parents in the least deprived areas than those in the most deprived areas. The qualitative work supported these findings.

3.37 As with the reasons *for* taking school meals, the reasons for *not* having them every day were similar for those taking them more often and those taking them the same amount¹⁹.

Figure 3.4: Reasons for not having school meals

Q If your child does not always take a school meal, what are the main reasons?



Base: parents (926), 11th February – 15th April 2008

Source: Ipsos MORI

¹⁹ Only 25 parents indicated that their child had school meals *less* often since the start of the trial.

Menu options

3.38 The various stakeholders shared a perception that options on the menu on any given day exert a strong influence on uptake, with pupils ‘opting in and out’ on a daily basis; ‘On the days there isn’t anything they like, they don’t have them’. As one local authority catering manager observed:

“I monitored for the first two weeks ... and I could see a direct correlation between, on the individual days, the menu choices it was quite clear to me that, that was showing that there were certain menu days when the meal numbers dropped and I’m assuming it was because the children didn’t like the menu, so that was very clear.”

Local Authority Catering Manager

3.39 Indeed, parents and pupils also supported this view:

“... depending on the selections, my daughter will come two or three times a week.”

Parent

“On Wednesday, I didn’t like any of the menu, I just went to my mum and said ‘mum I don’t like anything on the menu, can I have home dinners?’ and she said aye.”

P3 Pupil

3.40 Although the less healthy options (such as pizza and sausages) seemed universally popular, pupils’ individual preferences would often include healthy options too, and it would be wrong to suggest it was as simple as ‘unhealthy = popular’ and ‘healthy = unpopular’.

3.41 On days that pupils do not like any of the available options, they tend to opt for a packed lunch:

“They will look at the menu and see if there is something on it, all right then, I will have school dinners that day, that day, and that day, and then have packed lunches other days.”

Dining Hall Supervisor

“Likes of today, there is fish and sausage and they like both, but there is days maybe they are not very

keen, so they go away and have packed lunch that day.”

Canteen Staff

3.42 As a result of these preferences, stakeholders reported a big increase in uptake on certain days, and substantially decreased uptake on other days. For example, on Fridays, which tends to be the day for less healthy ‘treat’ foods (such as fish and chips, pizza, hot dogs, burgers and sausages) uptake increases. Pupils themselves often expressed their preferences:

“I’m fussy about food – I just go to school dinners when it’s pizza.”

P2 Pupil

“I check on the menu and if it is smiley faces and chicken dippers I always go.”

P3 Pupil

3.43 However, stakeholders reported that this reflects the pre-trial trend; such options have historically been popular.

3.44 While it was frequently suggested that children are ‘picky eaters’, there was also a view that that inappropriate menu options sometimes impact upon levels of uptake. Concerns were expressed that some combinations were peculiar, while there was a view that some of the options are matured, acquired tastes that are inappropriate for young children, for example, because they are too spicy:

“Likes of gammon steak and lamb madras and things, I don’t think there is that many little Primary 1s and 2s and 3s that will go for that. Lisa, she likes lamb and she likes rice and she had the lamb madras once, but she said I didn’t like the sauce. Gammon steaks, I don’t think there will be that many kids that eat gammon steaks.”

Parent

3.45 Parents, education, and catering staff felt that themed menus – such as those for Burns Day, Christmas, and ‘foods from around the world’ days – contributed to increased levels of uptake while also offering pupils the opportunity to sample new foods. However, some schools felt the rigidity of local authority menus did not allow flexibility for such events.

Peer influence

3.46 It was commonly suggested that peers play a role in influencing whether or not a child will have a free school meal. There was a view among stakeholders that pupils like to do what their friends do, regardless of the food options:

“I remember when we were trying to get him to try it, we used to talk to the other parents, say, we’ll all send our children for a canteen lunch and that way they’ll be together, yes, it is a big influence.”

Parent

“Mine will say ‘could I have a packed lunch today? because my friends are packed lunch’.”

Parent

3.47 This may be exacerbated in schools where packed lunchers and school meal pupils eat in separate dining areas. However, schools tended to operate systems whereby the two sit at different tables. In such systems, the social aspect of lunch may not be accommodated:

“I think some of it is to do with the fact ‘well my child likes to sit with her friends and she doesn’t really want to have to go into a different room’. One of the things that’s happened in some of the schools, just a couple of them I have visited, they have actually rearranged their dining arrangements, so that the children with a packed lunch and a hot dinner can actually sit together. I do think there are some behaviours and ways of management in school that actually discourage the children.”

Local Authority Catering Manager

Likelihood of receiving preferred food choice

3.48 Another factor influencing uptake is likelihood of receiving preferred food choice:

“They will have something else obviously, but they probably won’t finish it, or won’t enjoy it. Then they come home, I didn’t get my pizza, or I didn’t get my fish today because it was finished by the time I got there. I don’t want to go back for school dinners I want to have a packed lunch.”

Parent

3.49 However, as noted above, this had been recognised previously and did not arise as a result of the trial.

Free school meals versus packed lunches

3.50 There was a widespread view among parents that the provision of free school meals relieved the burden on them to select and prepare a packed lunch that is both healthy and *will* be eaten:

“It takes the pressure off you, it allows me not to think about it and maybe that sounds lazy, but that’s how I feel about it. It takes the pressure off me having to think about with my weekly shop, with everything else, ‘what do I need to make her for lunch every day?’”

Parent

Researcher: “When you first heard about the free school meals for Primary 1 to Primary 3 pupils what was your initial reaction to that”?

M “One less packed lunch to make”.

F “Exactly, fantastic idea not having to think about what you would put in the packed lunch.”

Parents

3.51 However, parents explained that empty wrappers and/or food remaining in a lunch box at the end of the day provide useful evidence of what their child had eaten – or not eaten – each day. With school meals, parents were not able to determine what their child had eaten at lunchtime.

The financial aspect

3.52 The very fact the trial provided a meal for free had a significant impact on uptake. A common initial reaction among parents was that the trial would relieve the financial burden associated with paying for a lunchtime meal:

Researcher: “When you first heard about the free school meals trial, what was your initial reaction?”

F “That will save me £1.47”

M “I think the biggest benefit is financial isn’t it, costs a fortune to put kids to school with uniforms, trainers, outings, that is one less financial burden.”

F “I’m on my own and I find it a benefit no having to pay money for packed lunches and things like that.”

Parents

3.53 The trial was also viewed as alleviating the general ‘hassle’ of providing lunch money each day:

“Oh thank God, I’m not going to have to rummage about looking for change every day; that was the first reaction.”

Parent

3.54 The simple benefit of increasing disposable income was particularly evident among parents with more than one child – some parents mentioned that meeting the cost of school meals is prohibitive, with it frequently being suggested that packed lunches are more economical:

F “As you say, it is bad enough with one but if you’ve got two or three.”

F “I did have three, we were like that, it was just too much to pay every week - to pay for the three kids to come to school dinners.”

Parents

3.55 In particular, it was suggested that the trial would have a significant effect on those families just above the free school meal eligibility threshold. In some instances, the trial was seen to have freed up money for other items/activities. For example, one parent mentioned that they had been able to buy their child trainers.

3.56 Parents commonly perceived that school meals were not good value for money if they were paying for them. However, as a result of the trial providing meals for free, many parents said they had negotiated with their child to have a school meal, as they had nothing to lose and could save money:

“I must say it did make me sway towards school dinners when I knew it was free...I sat down and said to them right, if we have four school dinners, we get one home dinner and then they accepted that as well.”

Parent

“I would object to maybe paying the full cost if it is just going to go in the bin, it is just a waste of time for everybody, so I find it quite good.”

Parent

CHAPTER 4: PROCESS AND PRACTICAL ISSUES FOR LOCAL AUTHORITIES AND SCHOOLS

Key points

The implementation of the trial was relatively straightforward. There were no unexpected impacts and roll-out by other local authorities should not be problematic.

Problems that emerged were generally minor teething problems that could be relatively quickly remedied.

The main challenges schools faced were the size of dining areas coupled with the time available for lunch. Strategies found useful in overcoming this were:

- **staggering the times pupils arrive at dining areas**
- **setting tables in advance**
- **operating different queuing systems or service areas**
- **allowing slightly lengthened lunchtimes (e.g. letting P1 pupils out 5 or 10 minutes early)**
- **using alternative accommodation (especially for packed lunches)**

The quality and quantity of food provided was not seen to have changed as a result of the trial. Waste was proportionate to pre-trial levels.

Provision for special dietary needs was not a problem – special dietary needs have a minor impact on uptake and there is no evidence of increased demand for special foods as a result of the trial.

Workloads of local authority and teaching staff remained relatively unchanged. The greatest impact was on catering staff who tended to have slightly increased workloads as a result of the trial. However, once extra staff had been recruited, there were generally no major problems.

4.1 This chapter focuses on challenges that schools and local authorities faced in implementing the trial and the approaches they took to resolving them. It should be noted that the local authority catering managers, the stakeholders in the case study schools, and respondents to the parents' survey were generally very positive about the trial.

Expected issues and actual issues with trial

4.2 In the pre-trial uptake survey in October 2007, schools were asked if they anticipated any problems. Overall, 39% of schools expected problems. Encouragingly though, in the late February 2008 survey, only around half that number (21%) reported that the trial had actually created practical difficulties.

4.3 Table 4.1 shows the proportion of schools envisaging and actually encountering practical difficulties, by local authority and by whether the cooking facilities were onsite or offsite.

Table 4.1: Whether schools envisaged and encountered any practical difficulties as a result of the extension of FSM eligibility to all P1 to P3 pupils, by local authority and cooking facilities

	Schools envisaging practical difficulties (pre-trial survey)	Schools encountering practical difficulties (late February 2008 survey)
East Ayrshire	51%	36%
Fife	46%	31%
Scottish Borders	41%	15%
West Dunbartonshire	38%	29%
Glasgow	29%	9%
Onsite cooking facilities	39%	23%
Offsite cooking facilities	39%	16%
Total	39%	21%

4.4 Whilst schools' cooking facilities did not make any differences to whether they expected practical difficulties, a smaller percentage of schools with offsite cooking facilities experienced actual problems.

4.5 Smaller schools were less likely to experience practical difficulties (see table 4.2). Only 13% of small schools (schools with 111 pupils or less) experienced difficulties, compared to 33% of large schools (schools with at least 265 pupils).

Table 4.2: Whether schools envisaged and encountered any practical difficulties as a result of the extension of FSM eligibility to all P1 to P3 pupils, by school size

	Schools envisaging practical difficulties (pre-trial survey)	Schools encountering practical difficulties (late February 2008 survey)
Smallest 25% (6-111 pupils)	25%	13%
Next 25% (112-179 pupils)	28%	14%
Next 25% (180-264 pupils)	40%	24%
Largest 25% (265+ pupils)	63%	33%
Total	39%	21%

4.6 Unsurprisingly, schools who already had the highest levels of uptake pre-trial were the least likely to encounter practical difficulties (see table 4.3).

Table 4.3: Whether schools envisaged and encountered any practical difficulties as a result of the extension of FSM eligibility to all P1 to P3 pupils by pre-trial level of uptake (all P1 to P3)

	Schools envisaging practical difficulties (pre-trial survey)	Schools encountering practical difficulties (late February 2008 survey)
Lowest uptake 25% (< 40.8% uptake)	51%	32%
Next 25% (40.9% - 54.0% uptake)	53%	29%
Next 25% (54.3% to 70.5% uptake)	32%	13%
Highest 25% (>70.8% uptake)	12%	9%
Total	39%	21%

4.7 In the late February 2008 survey, schools were asked whether they had been required to take particular steps to accommodate the trial (shown in Table 4.4.). A third indicated that they had purchased additional equipment.

4.8 Only 16% had introduced staggered sittings although more of the largest schools had done this (26% of schools with 265+ pupils). The question on the school meal census form simply asked schools to indicate 'yes' or 'no' to 'Introduction of staggered sittings'²⁰ so it is not clear how many of these schools had actually staggered the lunch period or whether they had staggered the queues within the existing lunch period. Some of the case study schools tended to do the latter, also perhaps allowing P1s and P2s out five or ten minutes earlier, rather than formally staggering the lunch period for the whole school.

4.9 Few schools had increased the length of the lunch period (8%) or made changes to where pupils take meals (6%).

Table 4.4. Steps taken to accommodate the extension of FSM to all P1-P3 pupils

	Proportion of schools taking this step
Purchased equipment (tables, cutlery etc.)	32%
Introduced staggered sittings	16%
Increased the length of the lunch period	8%
Changes to where pupils take meals	6%

4.10 The qualitative research with schools and local authority catering managers confirmed that there were initial concerns about the increased volume and the logistical issues, but, in the event, the implementation of the trial appears to have been relatively straightforward.

²⁰ A small number of questions on the trial, for schools in trial areas, were added to the standard school meal census form. These were necessarily short and could not include detailed explanations or definitions.

4.11 It was commonly suggested that the initial challenges encountered were generally easily resolvable ‘teething problems’ and ‘minor glitches’, which, after a week or two, schools and local authority staff felt sufficiently geared up to meet.

4.12 The challenges identified by schools and local authorities can be classified as ‘non-food related’ and ‘food related’ and are discussed more in detail below.

Non-food related issues

4.13 The main non-food related issue raised by schools and local authorities was that some schools lack dining room capacity to provide dinners for all pupils at any one time. Related to this was the limited time for getting pupils fed. Other issues raised by schools and local authorities were the lead-in and start time of the trial, staff workloads, and recruitment of additional catering staff.

Physical limitations of space & time

4.14 The main challenges schools faced in implementing the trial were physical space and time pressures; the interrelated problems of the size of dining areas (compared to the size of schools) coupled with the time available for lunch:

“The biggest problem is not having enough time because we only have a 45 minutes lunch hour ... so talking about over 200 children to be served their meal in 45 minutes.”

Headteacher

“Problems? Space, and accommodating a large number of children within a specific timeframe, the lunch break is 45 minutes, so trying to feed maybe 300 children within that space of time, in a limited space can be quite difficult.”

Local Authority Catering Manager

4.15 Schools tended to have dining rooms that were too small to physically accommodate, in one sitting, the increased number of pupils taking a school meal. Nonetheless, throughout the discussions, there was a sense that this was not unexpected and so schools had, to varying degrees, been able to plan and adjust lunchtime organisation accordingly.

4.16 Indeed, most schools did not experience an increase in the number of children staying on the school premises at lunchtime, because, pre-trial, the large majority of P1-P3 pupils tended to stay for either a school meal or a packed lunch, with very few going home:

“All of our children stay for lunch, there is only one goes home, so over fifty children stay, they’ve

always stayed, they were either packed lunch or they were paying for their dinner, so they were in the dinner hall anyway.”

Headteacher

4.17 The greatest problems were encountered at schools using multipurpose areas (either for all pupils or for packed lunches) rather than a dedicated dining area.

“Overall we didn’t think there would be an increase in the amount of children staying at lunchtime, because a lot of them stayed and had packed lunches anyway. It was the issue of they needed to be near the kitchen to get a hot meal and our packed lunches were in a separate space So the solution that they gave us to that was that we still used the separate space which was quite near the main kitchen, but they provided a hot trolley and all the meals were loaded on to a hot trolley and taken through. It seems to be working fine.”

Headteacher

4.18 There was a shared perception among the stakeholders that problems related to limited dining room capacity and available lunch time were relatively easily and effectively resolved through introducing minor changes and flexible arrangements for lunch breaks and by being as prepared as possible at the outset.

Arrangements to optimise lunch ‘time’ and space

4.19 In order to overcome the constraints related to the time and space pressures, some schools operated staggered queuing systems with rota arrangements (which some had operated, often to a lesser degree, pre-trial). This was seen to have considerably lessened time and queue pressures and is discussed in more detail below.

4.20 Aside from staggering the times that pupils arrive at dining areas, schools commonly suggested that they had developed flexible routines designed to optimise lunch ‘time’ and that minor adjustments to routines had substantially helped to relieve the pressures.

4.21 Examples of specific actions undertaken to optimise time and space, which are discussed in more detail below, include:

- staggering times pupils arrive at dining areas
- pre-ordering systems
- setting tables in advance
- operating different queuing systems or service areas
- reducing food choice
- slightly lengthened lunchtimes
- using alternative accommodation

4.22 Menus had frequently been sent home in advance of the introduction of the trial. Many parents discuss the menu options for each day with their child in order to help them decide whether they will opt for a school meal that day, and, if so, what meal they will choose. As a result, many pupils had decided what they would like to eat before arriving at the counter. This arrangement was in place in many of the schools pre-trial anyway but staff felt it helped speed up the process.

Staggering Queues

4.23 Schools tended to operate systems whereby there is one lunchtime where all pupils are on break, but the times pupils arrive at the dining area are slightly staggered. Commonly, the queues were staggered by just 5 or 10 minutes. Some of the case study schools organised two or three sittings for lunch whilst others used classrooms for additional space for packed lunches, at the same time, reducing queues.

4.24 Some schools had adopted the practice of organising rotas whereby entry to dining areas was staggered by year group. Younger pupils were generally given priority in the queues, with pupils from P1 to P3 served lunch first, with P4 to P7 pupils taking turns to be next into the dining area thereafter.

4.25 There was a general consensus that younger pupils take longer to eat their lunch and therefore require maximum time in the dining area. Several schools introduced systems whereby some pupils went out to play before going to the dining area:

“Well we always had two sittings for lunch and first of all we kept the two sittings and tried it, but that didn’t work at all, so we had to make up a new rota system and have three sittings for lunch so that the primary 3s and 4s went out to play first, so they had their play time before their lunch, and the wee ones have their lunch and then go out to play.”

Headteacher

“It’s not a problem...three classes get sent out to play for ten minutes till we deal with the other three classes and then they get brought in.”

Canteen Staff

4.26 This arrangement was seen to have a significant impact on easing the pressures of limited time and space. However, there were some concerns that boys, in particular, may carry on playing and never come in for lunch.

“The play is important for them...especially the boys who just want to play football end of story, and sometimes I do know ones who have missed their lunch.”

Class Teacher

4.27 As a result, it was suggested that it is necessary to *'keep an eye on them'*. This was easier in the smaller schools than in some of the larger schools visited.

4.28 Overall, there was a general consensus that staggered queuing systems worked well. Indeed, queuing is recognised as a key factor in the school meal experience and reducing the queuing and serving time for food is cited as an important factor influencing decisions about whether or not to have school meals. As a consequence of most case study schools operating staggered systems to combat time and space issues, significant queue pressures were relatively rare. Among pupils, the amount of time spent queuing was an infrequent complaint, and during the observation at lunchtime in the case study schools, there was no evidence of excessive queuing.

4.29 Rota systems were generally perceived to be effective in reducing overcrowding and time spent queuing whilst usually ensuring that pupils had equal opportunities to be first served – which again is viewed as a factor influencing uptake. Parents generally accepted the systems and there was a perception that pupils quickly accepted it as a routine part of their school day. In the schools visited, the length of time allocated for lunch appeared sufficient; pupils were served and ate their lunch without being overly rushed, still having time for socialising whilst eating, and playing either before and/or after eating. Indeed, by and large, pupils were of the opinion they had sufficient time for lunch.

4.30 While it was felt that staggering queues generally works very efficiently, on occasions, a lack of choice for those at the end of queues was commented on. It was suggested that the rota systems can influence uptake; pupils often commented that they were more likely to have a school meal on days when they were early in the rota and so would have more choice of foods:

“My eldest, she wants to come on a Thursday, that’s pizza day and she’ll say, well I think our class is going to be last in today, into the dinner school, so I might not get it. So then she doesn’t want to go.”

Parent

4.31 However, the problem of running out of popular food choices was not perceived to be a direct result of the trial; it was present pre-trial.

Pre-ordering systems

4.32 To speed up service, one of the local authorities and some of the individual schools in other local authorities, had introduced systems whereby pupils would pre-order food ahead of the lunch break. Reasons for implementing pre-ordering systems include:

- ensuring a sufficient amount of food
- ensuring pupils receive their preferred choice
- speeding up lunchtime by ensuring pupils knew what they were having when they arrive at the service counter

- reducing waste

4.33 Within the case study schools, a variety of pre-ordering systems were in place based on daily or weekly ordering. In general, they were perceived to have been effective. The fact that children did not have to make choices at the counter was viewed as being particularly useful:

“Mine line up by choice and you have a token system, the colours, so it just depends how you want to work it, but definitely make sure they know before they get to the hall.”

Class Teacher

4.34 One school administrator described how pre-ordering forms were initially sent home with pupils, to be completed with their parents, but the system had to be adapted as a result of forms not being returned:

“Now, every week we put an envelope out with the next week’s dinner choice. Now that is a free school meals child, now what we found, if we let the free school meals child take them home, they don’t come back with them, so we sit with them in classes and get them to choose in classes.”

School Administrator

4.35 Some parents commented on this adapted arrangement, recognising the problem but also suggesting that it resulted in them being unaware of what their child is eating each day. Another teacher suggested that this arrangement was particularly time consuming and thus, did not work for her. She also highlighted a problem she had encountered with the system requiring forms to be sent home:

“I tried to do it in class once and it took half an hour and I thought no, I can’t afford the time to do that, so we sent them home, but then you do get the children saying ‘I don’t like that, my mum just ordered it for me’.”

Teacher

4.36 For one school relying on a production kitchen, the local authority catering manager described how the pre-ordering system they had implemented was useful in ensuring appropriate proportions of each menu option are sent to the school:

“One dining school, as a pilot, put in a pre-ordering system where the kids and the pupil councils would own a board, a very bright coloured board with our logo on it and the kids choose the day before by using tokens, of what they want for the next day. That then gives the production kitchen a better idea of what split to send the different foods; that then means that the kids who are maybe

new into the school meal service are not coming and then being disappointed.”

Local Authority Catering Manager

4.37 Schools operating pre-ordering systems generally thought that they had been helpful - by speeding up service at the counter and helping reduce waste. However, there was an alternative view that they are unnecessary because catering staff quickly learn pupil likes and dislikes and can produce accordingly.

Setting tables in advance

4.38 Stakeholders in schools described routines whereby they eased time and space pressures by undertaking as much preparation as possible ahead of pupils arriving for lunch. Specifically, by having tables laid in advance of pupils arriving at the dining area:

“I think we definitely find that having the tables set with the cutlery on the tables and the water already on the tables has made a huge difference and we also, we put out the soup, just as the wee ones are coming in to allow time to cool so the soup is not really hot when they get it, it is a temperature that they can take the soup and we also, we put out the sweets²¹, on the day they get sweets we put them out on the table as well and just go round with the custard for them. So that speeds things up. It also means there is less to-ing and fro-ing for them with their meals. So anything we can do like that to cut down on the amount of going back and forward for the children certainly has made a difference.”

Headteacher

4.39 Schools which operate ‘plate it up’ systems whereby cutlery, water, soup, and/or puddings are set on tables in advance of pupils arriving at the dining area, suggest that these relatively straightforward changes considerably relieved time pressures.

Operating different queuing systems or service areas

4.40 Some schools utilised different service areas to minimise the length of time pupils queued for meals, commonly having different queues and service areas for pupils depending on whether they wanted to eat hot or cold food or what year group they were in. This was seen to go some way in alleviating pressure.

²¹ i.e. puddings rather than confectionery

Reducing food choice

4.41 In order to provide a free *healthy* meal, one of the trial local authorities removed the option of a school-provided packed lunch. There was some criticism of this arrangement, in particular, from parents, who suggested that the cold option was popular with the children.

Slightly lengthened lunchtimes

4.42 In some schools where uptake has increased dramatically, in particular in the larger schools visited, headteachers had implemented systems whereby P1-P3 pupils have a slightly longer lunch break than they had pre-trial. While six of the ten case study schools allowed an extra five, or sometimes ten minutes for younger pupils, in one large school with a substantial increase in uptake as a result of the trial, an extra 15 minutes was required. However, this was exceptional. As noted above, only 8% of schools indicated in the late February 2008 survey that they had increased the length of the lunch period (although it may be that some schools did not include allowing the P1s out five minutes early).

”We also just could not physically fit all the children in, in the 45 minutes, it just wasn’t possible so now what we have to do is the Primary 1’s have to come along 15 minutes before the end of the school, which really is not ideal because it means they’re losing 15 minutes of school time every day, so that’s an hour and 15 minutes they’re losing every week, of time that really should be in the class spent on the education, but that is the only way we can fit everyone in, it would just be impossible otherwise.”

Headteacher

4.43 Although recognising this arrangement was not ideal, because it results in pupils missing out on curriculum time, such flexibility was viewed as being particularly useful in relieving pressures on the dining area, and, there was a view that it is perhaps balanced out by the fact pupils are ‘getting healthy meals’:

“The only problem we have is because we are sharing accommodation and the time’s a bit tight, but we tend to get all the children out before half past twelve. Thirty-five minutes we really have to get the children through the dinner hall and it is tight, but we tend to do that. That was the other thing, we tend to make sure the children are down in the hall for five to, so their dinner hour starts a wee bit earlier, so it’s maybe ten to. We are maybe losing classroom time, but it is just a necessary evil

– *Probably gain the fact that they are getting healthy meals and getting the whole free meal thing for P1 to 3.*”

Headteacher

Using alternative accommodation

4.44 As a direct result of the limited capacity of dining areas, some schools had to utilise other areas of the school to accommodate the increased number of pupils. In particular, arrangements for pupils having packed lunches were altered:

“I think it has been a bit of problem at the start. At the start we were wondering where to put the children who were having packed lunches because everybody was in the lunch hall. We don’t have another room. So we’ve had to use the GP (General Purpose) room for eating which is not great because there are problems – Straight after lunchtime, it’s not great. Some children eat in there, some children eat in the gym hall, some children eat in the corridor and some eat outside, which is okay if the weather is fine.”

Class Teacher

4.45 Apart from these minor changes to daily routines, the very fact the meals were provided free was also seen to help queues to move quickly as a result of removing the complication of money changing hands.

Workloads

4.46 There was a general consensus that the trial had no significant impact on workloads, with many considering the implementation of the trial to be ‘part of their job’, or an extension of what they were already doing.

Local Authority Staff

4.47 Local authority catering managers commonly subscribed to the view that workloads, and their own in particular, had changed relatively little as a result of the trial:

“It’s been pretty insignificant, apart from attending another meeting, allowing a bit of time for, apart from that it has not been too bad at all, just like an extension of what you are doing, we’re not doing anything different, it is just increasing the volume from my point of view.”

Local Authority Catering Manager

4.48 It is interesting to note that local authority catering managers commonly said that the trial local authorities had implemented the initiative independently of each other. Local authorities did not have close links with each other; they had not tended to communicate with each other, discuss common issues, or share best-practice in the course of the trial. This was largely seen to be due to a belief that local authorities all have different systems and structures in place and what works best in one area will not necessarily work in another area:

“It would help if each authority was a mirror, but it’s not, we do different things, different menus, different uptakes.”

Local Authority Catering Manager

4.49 As a result of these perceived differences, it was felt that increased communication and co-operation *between* authorities would not be particularly useful. On the other hand, *within* local authorities, partnership working, in particular between catering and education, was viewed as being key to successful implementation of the trial:

“It depends how the local authorities work, but we work quite well with education and that’s all that’s needed From day one, this has been let’s get information out, let’s do this, this is a joint approach, what can we do? So from those points I think that’s been beneficial it really has.”

Local Authority Catering Manager

4.50 Indeed, there was a view that as a result of the trial, there was closer collaboration than ever before, with ‘*catering service and education working more closely now than they ever have*’.

School Staff

4.51 A variety of school staff are involved in school meals. For head cooks, the bulk of work is in budgeting, ordering, and preparation. On the other hand, the bulk of the work for canteen staff is in preparing, cleaning, and serving. Teaching staff meanwhile frequently play a supervisory role in dining areas at lunchtimes.

Head Cooks

4.52 The qualitative interviews with head cooks revealed that they felt that the trial had not had any major impact on their work, for example, in ordering and preparing the increased quantities of food. It was viewed as perhaps being a little bit more work, but essentially, an extension of what they were already doing, which they quickly adapt to:

Researcher: “What impact has the trial had on your job?”

“Just the same, do what I have to do – a bit more work It’s just actually doing the same work but doing more of it.”

Head Cook

“You just up your quantities so it is not any problem.”

Head Cook

4.53 One theme to emerge was the feeling that the trial had impacted upon the time they spent encouraging children to develop healthy eating habits and varied diets:

“I used to go out and you would talk to them and that but I don’t get the chance to do that now. You did try to encourage them to eat.”

Head Cook

“I don’t feel I get out into the hall beside the kids as much as I did before because I’m not in the dining room with them now.”

Head Cook

Other catering staff

4.54 There was more of an impact on the workloads of catering staff who serve pupils and clean up afterwards, and staff undertaking lunchtime supervision.

4.55 It was suggested that the greatest impact on catering staff was on dining area preparation, the increased number of pupils to serve, and cleaning up after pupils. However, there was general consensus among canteen staff that, despite being ‘*a wee bit busier*’, their workloads similarly remained manageable and they quickly got their ‘*heads down*’ and adapted, soon forgetting routines of old:

“It’s all just kind of used to it now, seems as if we just always did this now, it doesn’t take you long to get used to it, although at the beginning you are like ‘oh no, I’m going to go and get another job, I’m sick of the dishes’.”

Canteen staff

4.56 Catering staff were inclined to agree that the trial was simply an extension of what they were already doing.

4.57 However, on one occasion, it was felt that that the increased work of the trial had impacted on cleaning routines:

“There is a bit more cleaning. Every day cleaning is getting done just the same, it is the bigger stuff that we are not getting time for, likes of, well, the

cookers and that are getting stripped but not as much as what, you know the big things are not getting cleaned as much as I would like.”

Head Cook

Supervision

4.58 Class teachers and learning assistants generally carried out dining area supervision, while in some schools, management staff such as headteachers and their deputies also undertook supervisory duties. As one learning assistant noted, they too felt that their workloads were relatively unaffected:

“Our routine in the dining room is exactly the same as it was before.”

Classroom Assistant

4.59 Similarly, as one headteacher noted:

“The biggest thing was really just a sudden increase in numbers and we thought that might put a bit of a strain on the kitchen staff and just our own supervision. It has turned out not to be not too bad.”

Headteacher

4.60 Regarding supervision, one theme that emerged was that the increased volume of pupils taking a school meal resulted in an increase in the number of spillages, and dropping trays of food. Inevitably, more pupils required help with cutting up food, and there was an increase in the amount of cleaning up required.

4.61 As a result, catering and education staff undertaking supervisory duties sometimes felt that they had less time to support individual pupils, for example, to develop good eating habits, choose healthy options, and monitor wastage. One headteacher also described the knock on impact on playground supervision:

“Then again of course, the longer my lunchtime supervisor is in helping in the dinner hall the less time she is out in the playground, so a kind of Catch 22. I mean there is always spillages, there is always kids needing things cut up for them.”

Headteacher

4.62 Some of the early problems experienced were related to the issue of extra catering staff not having been recruited in time for the start of the trial, but these problems were relatively quickly resolved.

Recruiting staff

4.63 Some of the most negative criticisms about the implementation of the trial concerned the recruitment of extra catering staff. It was suggested that, for some schools and local authorities, this had proved problematic, and it was commonly commented that this was a result of the limited hours required:

“We are trying to find somebody, it is difficult, it is something like an hour and half and to get somebody to commit to that time is really difficult.”

Headteacher

4.64 On occasion, it was suggested that the local authority had authorised the allocation of extra hours for current catering staff. However, a number of headteachers felt that, through their knowledge of local circumstances, they themselves could have allocated hours more effectively:

“Obviously there was an allocation of extra hours for two of the members of staff, but ... I actually felt that I could have allocated the hours better myself if I had been given my choice, rather than being told what they had to do.”

Headteacher

4.65 There was also a view that extending the hours of existing staff does not resolve the problem because it is the short period of serving time that proves problematic:

“I would rather have had an extra member of staff, just at the actual service time, so that, well you saw we have a busy counter.”

Headteacher

4.66 As the headteacher above notes, the problems around provision of catering staff were not wholly unexpected. Indeed, it was frequently commented that problems were exaggerated in the first weeks of the trial as a result of the short lead-in to implementing the trial.

Lead-in and start time of the trial

4.67 One other issue highlighted by school and local authority staff was the lead-in and start time of the trial. It was frequently noted that the lead-in timescale was particularly short and this may have exacerbated problems because of insufficient time to undertake adequate preparation. In particular, it was commented that the short lead-in time did not allow sufficient time for potential new staff to undergo Disclosure Scotland checks.

4.68 There was a view that the start of the trial not coinciding with the start of the school term was not ideal. It was felt that pupils, in particular those in P1, had just got used to their daily lunchtime routines when it was ‘all change’.

4.69 It was frequently suggested that these problems could be easily overcome for any roll-out in other local authorities.

Administration

4.70 There was a shared perception that any administrative impact related to the trial was minimal – and much of the administration related to the monitoring and evaluation of the trial rather than the extension of free school meal provision itself. Many administrative staff involved in school meals felt any additional administrative impact of the trial was balanced out by the fact it had become a cashless transaction.

Equipment

4.71 Schools generally encountered no problems with obtaining sufficient kitchen and dining room equipment from their local authority. Staff at the case study schools commonly felt that it was a case of ‘saying we will need more tables, chairs, cutlery, trays, whatever it was, and getting it’. Pre-trial audits of equipment requirements and the resultant careful planning was perceived to have eliminated any potential problems.

4.72 Although a small minority of schools had experienced some problems regarding dining room equipment at the outset of the trial, they suggested that these were teething problems that balanced out in the early days of the trial:

“They checked the tables, they checked the seating capacity before that happened. They also had to order in cutlery and trays and they did have a wee spell where we had to wash trays until more came in, but certainly the cutlery had to be ordered and occasionally they did have to wash stuff, but that has balanced itself out now and it’s not such a problem.”

Headteacher

4.73 Local authority catering managers concurred with the view that significant equipment-related problems had not been encountered:

“What we did initially, was speak to the catering manager and give them a very small amount, a set amount to say look use this for the free school meals and to buy things like knives, forks, cutlery, crockery and that type of thing and we then controlled the bigger items, if they needed more tables or anything else to accommodate that, we ordered that ourselves, but no problems at all.”

Local Authority Catering Manager

Food related issues

4.74 Food related issues the research explored include:

- availability of food
- quality and quantity of food
- predicting uptake
- food wastage
- provision for special diets and allergies
- encouraging children to eat healthily

4.75 As with non-food related issues, stakeholders tended to suggest that food-related problems that were encountered tended to be ‘snags’, rather than serious difficulties, which were largely resolved in the early days of the trial, sometimes by simple alterations to routines.

Availability of food

4.76 Some of the most negative criticism of the trial, in particular, from pupils and parents, related to schools running out of the preferred food options. However, on further investigation, it appeared the issue was no more of a problem since the introduction of the trial:

“We haven’t had any problems, I mean other than some of them not getting what they want, but that would be an issue before this even started and maybe the child would be upset because he didn’t get what he wanted, but we can’t cater for every single individual. There is going to be days next week when she will get what she wants and somebody else will be upset.”

Head Cook

Quality and quantity of food

4.77 There was strong agreement among teachers, catering staff and local authority catering managers that the quality of the food and the size of portions should not, and had not, changed as a result of the trial. Indeed many schools were using the same menus, staff, and suppliers as they had done pre-trial. However, in the quantitative survey with parents, responses concerning the quality and quantity of food since the introduction of the trial were generally much more positive (in particular, among parents in the most deprived areas). Despite a reminder on the front of the questionnaire that the research was not designed to help decide whether the trial would be continued in their child’s school, it is possible that parents may have felt that there was more likelihood of the trial being continued or being rolled-out if they provided positive responses. Indeed, in the qualitative work with parents, these perceptions were much less evident, with the various stakeholders commenting that they were not aware of any change in the quality or quantity of food.

Predicting uptake

4.78 Schools and local authorities agreed that an inability to accurately predict uptake levels exacerbated problems faced in the early days of the trial:

“What we didn’t know was how many would come along, that was the difficult bit. Pizza being more popular than perhaps chicken korma but we didn't know what our uptake would be – was it going to be 10%, or was it going to be 90%? – That was the difficulty.”

Local Authority Catering Manager

4.79 However, there was agreement that uptake soon stabilised and food selections quickly become predictable:

“Another problem was perhaps getting used to the additional numbers and what people were actually selecting. So in the early stages we were short of food, or over providing food, but again that takes a period of time, but that works itself out.”

Local Authority Catering Manager

4.80 As discussed below, schools felt that the inability to predict uptake may have resulted in increased wastage at the outset of the trial. However, a few schools mentioned that they had completely run out of food in the first week of the trial. Other schools suggested that the preparations they undertook at the outset of the trial were key to ensuring they did not find themselves in such a position. Specifically, some schools had sent out a leaflet to parents, asking them to indicate whether their child would be likely to take a school meal. While some found this a useful indication of potential uptake, allowing them to be better prepared, others felt the approach would not be of much assistance:

“I don’t know how much benefit you would gain from the exercise itself, because you can quickly adjust. In a kitchen environment you are not going to run out of food, you can always put something else on, until it pans out, so quite a big exercise to gauge and I think in some of the bigger primary schools that would be quite a huge undertaking. And how accurate would the data be?”

Local Authority Catering Manager

4.81 Indeed, as one parent commented:

“I think you were to put on it [the form] how often you would possibly come. Every day, once a week, a couple of times. I put down three times, but she was going five times a week for the first few months.”

Parent

4.82 It was also suggested that the findings of this evaluation should go some way in helping to alleviate problems with predicting uptake should the initiative be rolled-out across other local authorities.

Food wastage

4.83 Overall, there was a general perception that food wastage (either as a result of providers or pupils throwing it out) was proportionately the same amount as pre-trial. It was felt that the early days of the trial might have witnessed increased levels of food wastage, largely because of not knowing what uptake would be, and therefore, of overcompensating in order to avoid running out of food.

4.84 Some schools suggested that there was a trend of increased uptake at the start of the trial that decreased slightly after a short time (as discussed in Chapter 2 above, this was the overall pattern in East Ayrshire, Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire). It was commonly felt that ‘picky eaters’ who reverted to packed lunches caused the decrease and may perhaps have contributed to additional wastage in the early days of the trial:

“Once it has kind of settled down into a pattern, at least now she [head cook] knows roughly what she’s getting every day Certainly to begin with that was much more difficult, but now she seems to be running about 180 or something.”

Headteacher

4.85 A widespread view was that wastage was not directly related to the trial, but rather, by the options on menus. Some foods were commonly identified as being most likely to be wasted, specifically, vegetables and soup, which pupils were encouraged to try:

“It depends what the choice is – vegetables mainly because a lot of them don’t like their vegetables, but obviously we put a bit of each onto the plates and what the assistants do is try to get them to taste a bit.”

Head Cook

4.86 Sometimes peculiar combinations of food, or unrealistically large portions were cited as contributing to waste. Again, these are not a direct result of the trial:

“I think the biggest waste, like some days, it depends what you have, like a day they get pizza and they’re supposed to get a baked potato, they don’t eat the whole baked potato, but other days there is very little wastage.”

Head Cook

“I’ve got a few who don’t because they just don’t like the choices and to be honest, some of them are

quite bizarre choices, pizza and potatoes and the combinations of food, I can imagine why they wouldn't want to take it."

Class Teachers

Provision for special diets and allergies

4.87 There was consensus among providers of school meals, at both school and local authority level, that as a result of having previously developed policies to deliver appropriate provision for pupils with special diets, they encountered no real problems related to provision for such needs. Schools tended not to have had many requests for special diets in the course of the trial. However, there is a perception that pupils with special dietary requirements tend to have a packed lunch, or go home for lunch as a result of their dietary requirements:

"I think some of the children with allergies always bring their own packed lunches. The catering staff know that these children have allergies and I think things like peanuts aren't in the meals anyway, but the parents just being extra cautious, so some of these kids tend not have free meals, they tend to take packed lunches."

Headteacher

4.88 Indeed, the responses to the quantitative questionnaire support this view. Of the 332 parents who indicated that their child does not always have a school meal, very few (4%, n=14) cited dietary needs as an influencing factor. Of these 13, 6 pupils are vegetarian, 3 do not always have school meals because of religious needs they do not feel are always catered for, while 2 cited allergies. Providers suggested that they would be able to cater for them should this be required. However, although very few parents indicated that their child did not take school meals because they were vegetarian, some felt the vegetarian choice and variety was limited.

4.89 While most case study schools received very few requests for halal foods, one school had encountered considerable demand but had not experienced any serious complications as a result of the trial. Parents thought that the halal food provided was adequate but not necessarily the same kind of foods that the children would eat at home.

4.90 Teaching and catering staff encountered some problems with children not being aware of their requirements, for example, in knowing that only some of the food was halal and that they should only be eating that. Canteen staff talked of having to be 'on the ball' to ensure 'no-one slips past':

"We've got to watch some of the kids that are allergic to things as well. We've got a few of them ... they would just eat anything."

Canteen Staff

“Well some of them are and some of them aren’t [aware that it should be halal they are looking for]. We’ve got one wee lassie... she is halal, but the days the chicken burger is on she’ll ask for the chicken burger and we say, ‘you can’t have that, it’s not halal’ ... then it is the tears, ‘can I have that?’ and then it is the same when the ham is on, the sandwich with the ham, she will ask for that.”

Canteen Staff

4.91 Again however, stakeholders indicated that this was an issue pre-trial and, at worst, had slowed down service in the early days of the trial because of having to teach the ‘new’ uptake ‘how things worked’. As one headteacher noted:

“We had big signs saying ‘not halal’, but some of the children, you were really struggling to have this conversation with them. ‘Tell me...’ – this is all to get one child up to the hatch, ‘are you Muslim?... Okay do you go to Mosque?... Should you be eating halal food?’ This is just all to try and make sure – obviously when the children are a bit more older, they are bit more articulate, then that’s fine, they know that there is the big sign there, that says ‘not halal’, so it means that everything else is fine for me to eat, but that slows things down even more to begin with.”

Headteacher

4.92 Indeed, as one headteacher noted:

“The problem is, they didn’t have discussions about halal food in the house because obviously, in their own house everything that is prepared for them is appropriate for them to eat.”

Headteacher

CHAPTER 5: POTENTIAL HEALTH AND OTHER BENEFITS

Key points

The reaction to the introduction of the free school meal trial was overwhelmingly positive among all key stakeholder groups. The main reasons for this were that children were being offered a healthy lunch and the chance to try new foods; and parents saved money and did not have to try to make a varied and nutritionally balanced packed lunch on a daily basis.

The trial provided pupils with an opportunity to try new foods, resulting in pupils asking at home for foods they had tried at school. In some cases, these were healthier options.

Although pupils appeared to have a good awareness of healthy foods, there is no evidence that the trial had impacted upon this. When deciding what to eat, children tend to pick what they like the taste of. Choosing healthier options is likely to come as a result of them trying and enjoying new foods. Therefore, evidence that the trial acted as a catalyst for pupils' willingness to try new foods is a positive finding.

There was some evidence that the trial had impacted positively on the home environment of pupils. In particular, it had resulted in parents talking about food with their children more often and some parents noted that children were more confident in discussing their food preferences.

In turn, some parents were keen to make meals for their children that they had enjoyed at school but did not always know how to make them. Providing recipe cards or books of school recipes was suggested as a solution.

Teachers did not report any behavioural changes in pupils at lunchtime or in afternoon classes.

Although there was evidence that pupils were trying new foods and that some were asking for new foods at home, including healthier options, the evidence is unclear on how many children were doing so and the extent to which children were eating more healthily at home. On other potential benefits such as whether parents felt they knew more about healthy foods and were buying healthier foods for the home, the evidence is also unclear.

5.1 Given the short term nature of the trial, the evaluation was not intended to provide a robust evaluation of the impact on pupils' nutritional intake, health, behaviour or educational attainment. Instead the evaluation looked at **early perceptions of health and other benefits** such as:

- pupil and parent attitudes towards school meals and healthy eating

- parent and teacher perceptions of any social or behavioural changes in children
- eating behaviour among pupils
- the impact of the trial on the home and on food choices for the rest of the family.

Pupil and parent attitudes towards healthy eating and school meals

Attitudes to healthy eating

5.2 It was apparent that pupils had an awareness of healthy eating; most knew that fruit and vegetables were healthy foods, that some foods, such as pizza, were sometimes healthy and sometimes not, depending on the toppings, and that crisps and sweets were less healthy foods. The topic had already been included in the school curriculum as part of initiatives such as Hungry for Success and Health Promoting Schools. There was no indication that the free school meal trial had significantly enhanced pupils' levels of knowledge about healthy eating. However, the trial was seen by teaching staff as a welcome addition to the curriculum which fitted in with the ongoing work and kept the issues prominent in pupils' minds.

“We had been involved in the healthy lunch, the healthy diet and we have a healthy eating school issue going on and so it was ideal for us...In a way it has helped because we were looking at healthy diets and so on. More children now are sampling the healthy foods in the dining hall, so they know what they are talking about when we are looking at curriculum programmes.”

Headteacher

Attitudes towards school meals

5.3 It was clear from the qualitative research that school meals were viewed positively overall by pupils and parents: pupils generally enjoyed the meals and parents felt that they were healthy and of high quality. Many parents whose children did not take free school meals were, nonetheless, positive about them; their children did not take them because they were 'too fussy' rather than because parents did not want them to.

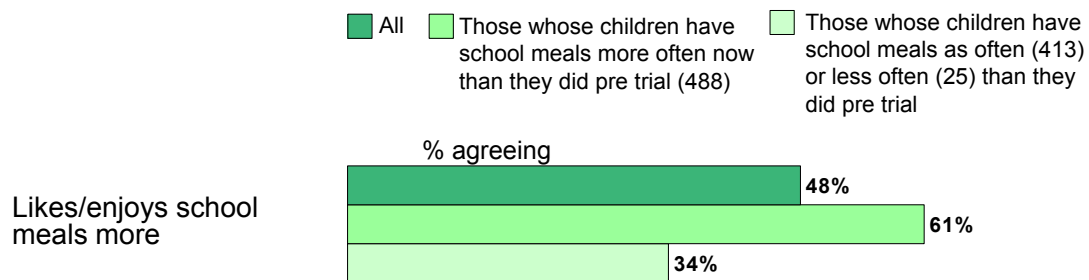
5.4 However, there was a view held by some, particularly among those in the least deprived areas, that the meals were not *actually* particularly healthy nor high quality; in fact, some felt that the packed lunches that they had given their child before the trial were healthier than the school lunches. Other criticisms of the meals included items on the menu, for example spicy foods, not being suitable for young children and kitchens running out of the most popular options on a particular day, meaning that

children might have to take something that they did not like. However, these issues had been present before the trial.

5.5 The generally positive views of school meals were reiterated in the quantitative survey, with parents listing *I know they will get a healthy lunch* and *they like the food provided* among their top reasons for their child taking school meals. Parents also felt that their children were enjoying school meals more than they had been before the introduction of the trial. As figure 5.1 shows, almost half (48%) of all parents agreed that their child now *likes/enjoys school meals more*. As might be expected, this figure is highest among those who took school meals more often during the trial than they did before its introduction (61%). However, a third of parents (34%) whose children had not increased the number of school meals they had felt that their child now *likes/enjoys school meals more*. As other parts of the evaluation did not suggest that the quality of school meals had changed since the introduction of the trial, it is possible that other factors, such as having more of their friends taking school meals, are influencing enjoyment.

Figure 5.1: Children’s enjoyment of school meals

Q *To what extent do you agree or disagree that the introduction of free school meals in October 2007, has meant your child...*



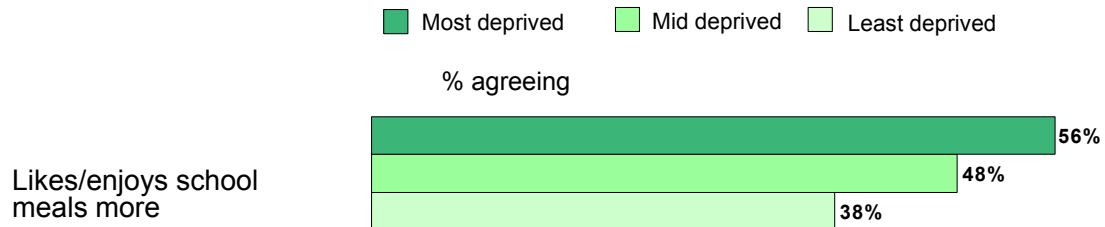
Base: parents (926), 11th February – 15th April 2008

Source: Ipsos MORI

5.6 Figure 5.2 shows that parents in the most deprived areas were more likely to say that their child *likes/enjoys school meals more* than they did before the introduction of the trial. There is no obvious reason for this difference. As discussed in more detail in the section on behavioural change below, it might be that those in deprived areas were over-reporting the benefits of the trial in the hope that it continues.

Figure 5.2 Children’s enjoyment of school meals by deprivation

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree that the introduction of free school meals in October 2007, has meant your child...



Base: parents (926), 11th February – 15th April 2008

Source: Ipsos MORI

Attitudes towards the free school meal trial

5.7 The reaction to the free school meal trial was overwhelmingly positive. Parents, along with headteachers, teachers and catering staff, commented on the wider benefits of the trial. These included the fact that all children were being offered a healthy lunch as well as being able to try new foods.

“Children getting a healthy lunch at lunch time, that would maybe have had a packed lunch that wouldn’t have been so healthy, a lot of snacks, a lot of chocolate, a lot of inappropriate food, so the majority of children are getting a healthy lunch. Some children are getting a healthy meal and it is their only healthy meal in a day. In an area like this, so that has been good. Some children also getting the opportunity to taste foods that they may not have had the chance to taste. They’re the three main benefits I would say.”

Parent

5.8 Pupils were enjoying the meals and parents encouraged their children to take them. Parents commented on the time and financial savings it had afforded them and said that it had eased some of the pressures of trying to make a varied and nutritionally balanced packed lunch on a daily basis. While pupils discussed the meals, they focused on the food and had little awareness or interest in the fact that they were being provided free.

“For me it has been a Godsend. I just feel as though I don’t need to worry about what I’m putting in, I don’t need to worry about whether or not it is balanced, I don’t need to spend time at night making up packed lunches for him to say, ‘I don’t really want that, can I have that?’”

Parent

5.9 Although the stigma attached to receiving free school meals was not seen as a particular issue in primary school, it was mentioned. The free school meal trial was viewed positively in light of the fact that it eliminated the possibility of stigmatisation.

“Although I would have said we have always tried to be sensitive to it, you don’t try to scream from the roof tops, “oh you’re a free meal”. There is something much nicer about everybody just being exactly the same in Primary 1 to 3 and I don’t know how much the children notice it, but I know, yes it does seem nicer that everybody is on a level playing field.”

Headteacher

5.10 The only negative point raised, on a small number of occasions, was the wider financial implications of the trial; there was a view that it is not the best use of public money as there are many people who can easily afford to pay for their child’s lunch and there was a concern that other parts of the budget may suffer as a result.

“Plus in this kind of area, I don’t know I’m not sure of the value of our children getting free meals, because they all come from fairly affluent homes. Quite frankly their parents could afford to pay for a meal.”

Parent

“I suppose my concerns would be the financial implications of it and some budget has to suffer for this.”

Headteacher

Parent and teacher perceptions of any social or behavioural changes in children

5.11 As mentioned above, due to the short time scale of the trial, the evaluation did not seek to directly measure changes in attainment or behaviour of pupils. However, parents, teachers, headteachers and canteen staff were asked in the qualitative discussions whether they had observed any behavioural changes in the children since the start of the trial. There were no reported changes in behaviour in the dining hall, the classroom or the home.

“I would say the behaviour and everything is just more or less the same as it always was.”

Headteacher

5.12 However, some parents had noticed some social changes in their children. This tended to be an increased level of confidence as a result of being able to choose what they would like to have for lunch:

“He chooses when we go through the menu through the week. He says “I’ll have café lunch then and

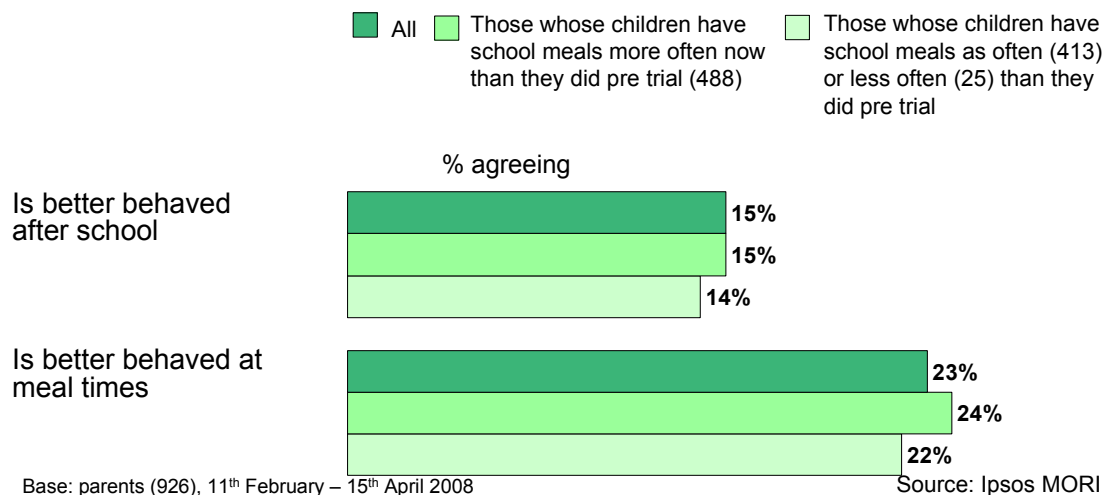
café lunch then, but I'll take packed lunch in when there is nothing on the menu that I want." That kind of sense of empowerment for him is really important rather than shoving it down in front of him saying, "You'll eat that"."

Parent

5.13 The quantitative survey of parents also asked for perceptions of any behavioural changes, both after school and at meal times, and a small proportion of parents *had* noticed improvements in behaviour. As figure 5.3 shows, 15% agreed that since the introduction of free school meals their child had been better behaved after school and 23% agreed that their child had been better behaved at meal times. There were no significant differences in terms of children's lunch arrangements before and during the trial.

Figure 5.3: Parents' perceptions of changes in their children's behaviour

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree that the introduction of free school meals in October 2007, has meant your child...



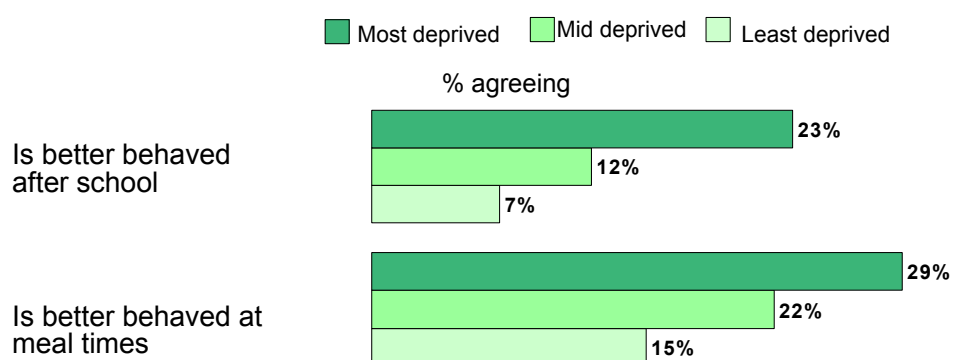
5.14 There are several possible reasons as to why perceived behavioural changes are reported irrespective of lunch arrangements before and during the trial. Firstly, changes in behaviour could simply be a result of the child maturing. Secondly, the perceived changes *could* be attributable to the trial; it might be that there has been a change in, for example, the atmosphere in the dining room or school might be placing more emphasis on behaviour at lunch time. However, the qualitative research among those present in the dining hall during lunch did not support this. Lastly, some parents may have (consciously or unconsciously) over-reported the benefits of the trial, under the impression that doing so would increase the likelihood of the continuation of free school meals for their child. While the letter accompanying the questionnaire clearly stated that their individual response would not be used to decide whether the trial was rolled out in their child's school, it is more difficult to reassure parents through a postal questionnaire than through face to face discussions. It is, therefore, possible that this could explain the discrepancy in the small but significant

number of parents responding to the questionnaire reporting behavioural changes and the lack of any supporting evidence from the qualitative research.

5.15 This is perhaps further supported by the differences in perceived behavioural changes across different levels of deprivation. As figure 5.4 shows, those in the most deprived areas were significantly more likely to have noticed changes in the behaviour of their children. It is likely that this group would be most worried about the trial not continuing due to the fact that they are less able to afford to pay for their children to have a school lunch or a healthy packed lunch.²²

Figure 5.4: Parents’ perceptions of changes in their children’s behaviour by deprivation

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree that the introduction of free school meals in October 2007, has meant your child...



Base: parents (926), 11th February – 15th April 2008

Source: Ipsos MORI

5.16 The possibility of over-reporting the benefits of the free school meal trial should be borne in mind when interpreting the results of the parents’ survey in the remainder of this chapter. Areas where the evidence is inconclusive (e.g. where the qualitative research with parents does not support the survey results or where the survey results are similar for those taking schools meals the same amount and those taking meals more), and where over-reporting the benefits is a plausible explanation, have been highlighted.

Eating behaviour among pupils

Willingness to try new foods

5.17 For many parents, the most noticeable change in their child as a result of the trial was a willingness to try new foods. In part this was simply attributed to the school lunch menu offering a wide range of choices, many of which were not dishes they currently made for their child. However, it was suggested that the different context of the school meals setting, as opposed to the home, exerted a positive

²² Although this group contains a large proportion already eligible for school meals, the introduction of the trial, and the knowledge that the trial would be stopping, might have made them worry that their child would no longer receive their free school meal.

influence on their willingness to try new foods. It was common for parents, and those teachers present in the dining room, to feel that children were trying things that they would not have tried at home, possibly as a result of seeing their friends eating certain foods and then wanting to try them too.

“I think the children, the majority, are enjoying their food and I think they talk to each other about it and actually, you get some positive peer pressure in a way, when they see their pal trying something and they say that was really good and then maybe next time they’ll try it.”

Headteacher

5.18 The fact that the meals have been provided free has been the catalyst for this willingness to try new foods; before the trial parents would not have been willing to pay for a meal that they were unsure their child would eat. The trial gave pupils the opportunity to try different options on the menu in order to see what they liked and to then choose which days that they would have a school meal.

“Before it was free she would go in on the day it was fish and chips, that was about it and it meant that she, for a while, went in every day to try everything, to see what she liked and didn’t like, and we wouldn’t have done that if we had to pay for it.”

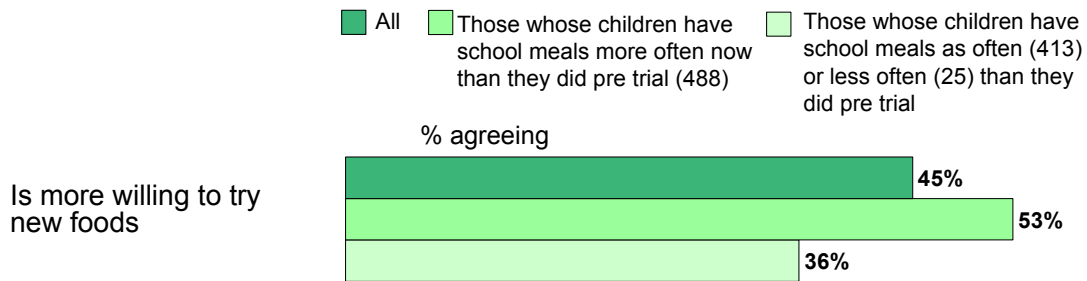
Parent

5.19 This evidence from the qualitative research was backed up by the results of the quantitative survey of parents. As figure 5.5 shows, almost half (45%) of all parents thought that their child has been more willing to try new foods since the introduction of the free school meals trial.

5.20 Analysing the results by lunch arrangements before and during the trial indicates that the trial, as opposed to normal developmental changes alone, has impacted on willingness to try new foods; those whose children took school meals more frequently than they did before the trial were more likely to have noticed this change in their child than those who had not changed their lunch arrangements or took school meals less often than they did pre trial (53% versus 36%).

Figure 5.5: Willingness to try new foods by change in lunch arrangements

Q *To what extent do you agree or disagree that the introduction of free school meals in October 2007, has meant your child...*



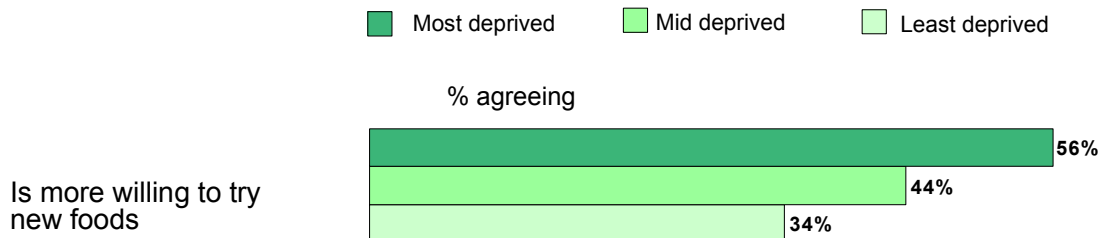
Base: parents (926), 11th February – 15th April 2008

Source: Ipsos MORI

5.21 The qualitative research indicated that not all parents had observed such changes in their child’s willingness to try new foods; some, who tended to be from the least deprived areas, said that their child had always eaten a varied and healthy diet at home. Again, this was echoed in the quantitative research among parents; there were significant differences in *willingness to try new foods* by deprivation with a significantly higher proportion of those in the most deprived areas having noticed this change in their child (56% versus 34% in the least deprived areas, figure 5.6).

Figure 5.6: Willingness to try new foods by deprivation

Q *To what extent do you agree or disagree that the introduction of free school meals in October 2007, has meant your child...*



Base: parents (926), 11th February – 15th April 2008

Source: Ipsos MORI

5.22 Although children had been trying a wider variety of foods and have an awareness of which foods are healthy and which are not so healthy, there was little evidence from the qualitative research that they use this knowledge when deciding which school meal option to choose. Instead, children would make their decision on the basis of which meal they liked best. There was also evidence of the healthiest parts of the meals, usually vegetables, not being eaten. This had happened before the trial and levels of food wastage were not reported to have changed proportionally since the trial was introduced.

“Anything green really, or like with the soup if it is vegetable soup, they’ll dip their roll in and dip their

roll in, until all is left is the vegetables in the bottom and then that goes in the bin.”

Dining room supervisor

5.23 The effects of trying new foods at school did transfer to the home with pupils telling their parents what they had eaten for their lunch and then being happy to eat it at home in future, and some going a step further and asking their parent for things that they have enjoyed at school. Parents tended to be pleased that their children were asking for new foods and would make an effort to cater for their requests.

“I would say so, fruits and that because she is eating different things in here and there is a few times she’s come home and said yes, I’ll have that because I’ve had that at school.”

Parent

“See if she said tomorrow “Can I have tattie soup?” I would make tattie soup because she has asked for it.”

Parent

5.24 While many parents were keen to try and build on the fact that their children were trying a range of foods by making them at home, it was noted that it is not necessarily easy to replicate what they have eaten at school. Even if parents did know how to make the meal, it was often ‘not the same’ as the way that they had enjoyed it at school. Providing recipe cards for parents was suggested as a solution to this: something one school had already successfully done.

“The only thing that springs to mind is that there are certain things on the menu that my wee boy just loves and I don’t know how to make them...I wouldn’t mind knowing how to cook it because he loves it. ... if they are going to bring out a new one, a completely different range of stuff on it, then give me the recipe for some...”

Parent

Eating healthier foods

5.25 While parents did not explicitly comment that it was healthier foods in particular that their children were asking for, this was implicit as they were talking about foods they had enjoyed as part of a nutritionally balanced school meal. Additionally, there was no evidence to suggest that children were asking for more junk food at home as a result of the trial: there was a concern that the trial might negatively impact upon this with pupils eating less healthily at home *because* they had eaten healthily at lunch time.

Researcher: “Do you find there is any difference where she is maybe asking for more junk food or less junk food?”

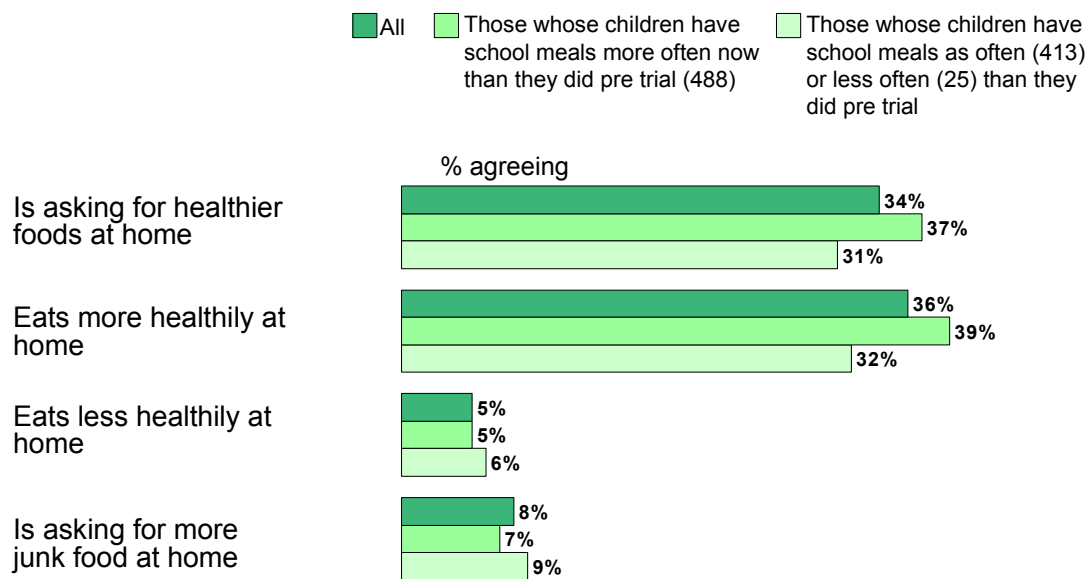
“Less, she’s eating a lot more fruit and stuff now before she was eating hardly anything.”

Parent

5.26 The findings from the quantitative survey are broadly consistent with those of the qualitative research; around a third (34%) of parents agreed that their child is asking for more healthy foods at home and a similar proportion (36%) agreed that their child was eating more healthily at home. Those whose children took school meals more often than they did before the trial started were slightly more likely than others to say that their child eats more healthily at home (figure 5.7) but there was no significant difference in terms of asking for healthier foods at home. Very small proportions reported their children eating less healthily at home (5%) and asking for more junk food since the introduction of the trial (8%). This was not affected by lunch arrangements before and during the trial.

Figure 5.7: Children’s eating behaviour at home by change in lunch arrangements

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree that the introduction of free school meals in October 2007, has meant your child...



Base: parents (926), 11th February – 15th April 2008

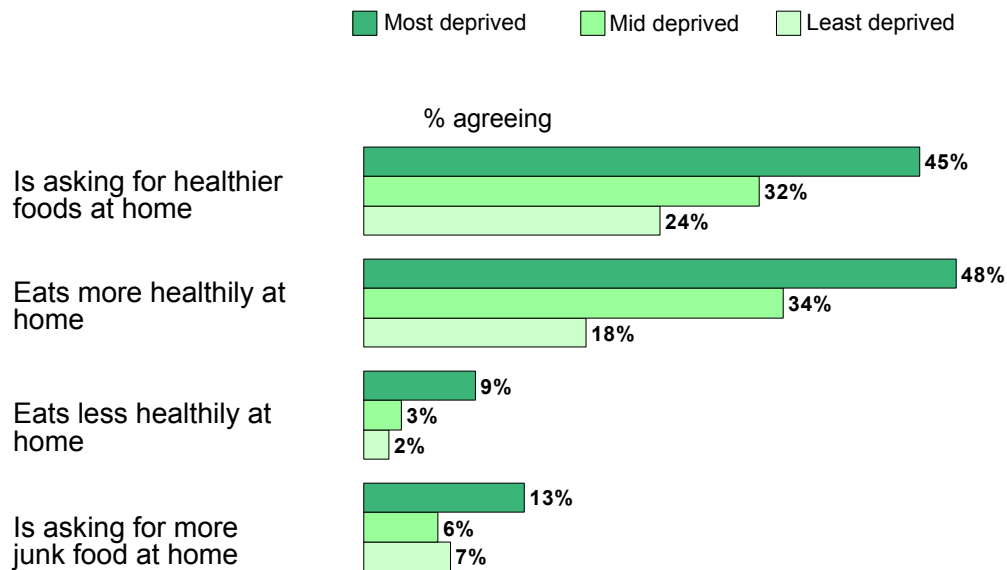
Source: Ipsos MORI

5.27 Once more there were significant differences by deprivation with those in the most deprived areas most likely to agree with all statements – both positive and negative (figure 5.8). The qualitative research with parents suggested that those in the least deprived areas were already eating more healthily and the trial therefore had less potential to improve their eating habits. This might explain the findings from the quantitative survey, that those in the most deprived areas were more likely to have

noticed a positive change in their child's eating habits. The reasons for the higher, but still very low, proportion of parents in deprived areas agreeing that their child has developed less healthy eating habits at home since the trial is unclear; one possibility is that this group were having a less healthy packed lunch pre trial so are asking for the types of foods that they have not been getting since changing to school lunches.

Figure 5.8: Children's eating behaviour at home by deprivation (all parents)

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree that the introduction of free school meals in October 2007, has meant your child...



Base: parents (926), 11th February – 15th April 2008

Source: Ipsos MORI

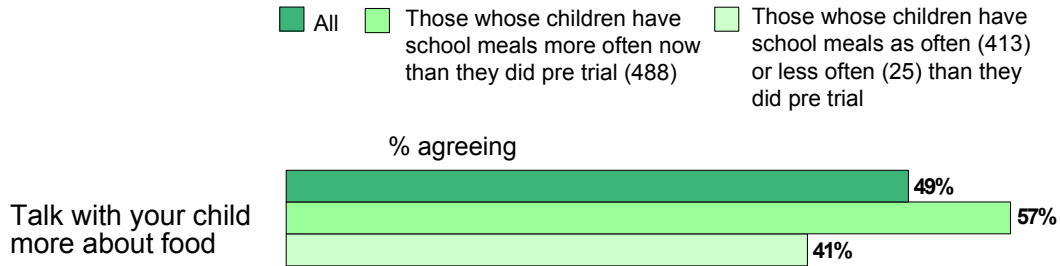
The impact of the trial on the home and on food choices for the rest of the family

Discussions about food

5.28 Both the qualitative research and the quantitative survey of parents revealed that the introduction of the trial has resulted in parents talking about food with their children more often. It was common for parents to report sitting down and going through the menus with their children to choose their meals for the week. Additionally, and as discussed above, children would often tell their parents about foods they have enjoyed at school. As shown in figure 5.9, almost half (49%) of all parents who completed the survey agreed that they talk more about food with their children since the introduction of the trial. This change is particularly prevalent among those whose children took more school meals during the trial than they did pre trial (57% versus 41% of those who took school meals as often or less often than they did pre trial).

Figure 5.9: Discussion about food by change in lunch arrangements

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree that the introduction of free school meals in October 2007, has meant you...



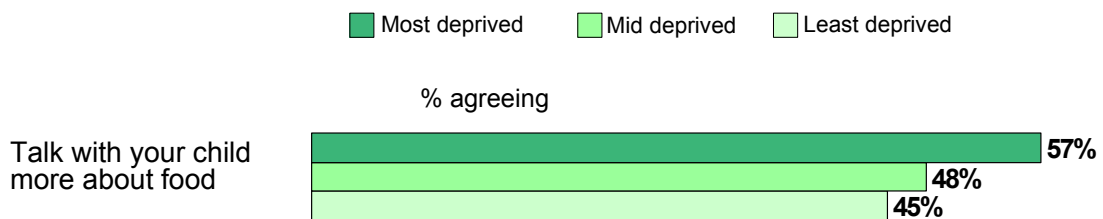
Base: parents (926), 11th February – 15th April 2008

Source: Ipsos MORI

5.29 As with other benefits, the trial has reportedly had the greatest effect on those in the most deprived areas. As shown in figure 5.10, 57% of parents in the most deprived areas reported talking to their child about food more since the introduction of the trial, compared to 48% in the mid deprived areas and 45% from the least deprived areas.

Figure 5.10: Discussion about food by deprivation

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree that the introduction of free school meals in October 2007, has meant you...



Base: parents (926), 11th February – 15 April 2008

Source: Ipsos MORI

Parents' knowledge and purchase of healthy foods

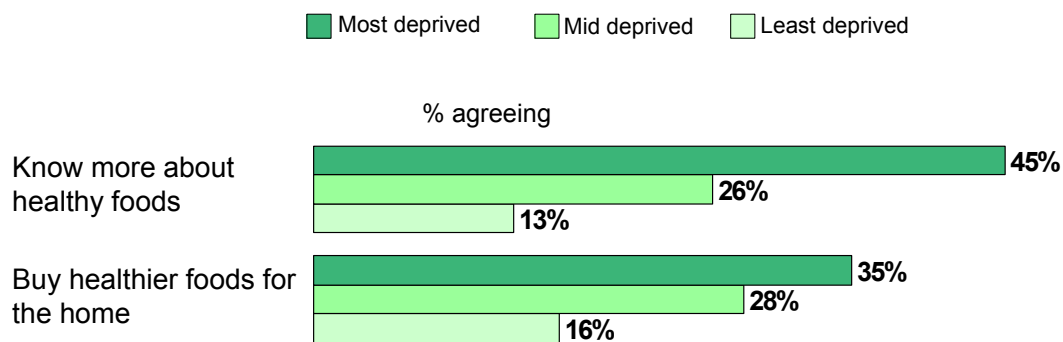
5.30 Overall, the qualitative research indicated that parents had not made many changes to the eating arrangements in the home, although, as reported earlier, they would try and make meals that their children had enjoyed at school. The quantitative survey of parents, on the other hand, did suggest that there may have been some impact on the home; 30% of parents said they felt that they knew more about healthy foods than they did before the trial and the same proportion reported that they had gone one step further and were buying healthier foods for the home. However, this was not affected by changes in lunch arrangements and the possibility of parents over-reporting the benefits should be borne in mind.

5.31 Deprivation impacted upon both of these aspects. As shown in figure 5.11, a significantly higher proportion of those in the most deprived areas reported a positive

change in their knowledge and purchase of healthier foods; 45% of those in the most deprived areas reported that their knowledge of healthy foods had increased, compared with just 13% of those in the least deprived areas, and 35% of those in the most deprived areas reported buying healthier foods for the home compared with 16% in the least deprived areas. The findings from the qualitative research would suggest that this might be explained by the differing baselines across the levels of deprivation; those in the least deprived areas tended to feel that they were already very knowledgeable about healthy eating and were already buying very healthy foods for the home. Again, however, there is the possibility that parents in deprived areas may have been more likely to over-report the benefits and therefore the evidence is unclear.

Figure 5.11: Knowledge and purchase of healthy foods by deprivation

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree that the introduction of free school meals in October 2007, has meant you...



Base: parents (926), 11th February – 15th April 2008

Source: Ipsos MORI

Eating less healthily at home?

5.33 A potential negative aspect of the trial would be that parents would feel less pressure to feed their children healthily at home. The qualitative phase of the evaluation did not provide any evidence of this. However, the results of the quantitative survey of parents did reveal that almost one in five parents (18%) feel less pressure to make their child eat healthy foods at home since the introduction of the trial. However, the proportion of parents agreeing was no higher among those whose children had taken school meals more often since the introduction of the trial, which is puzzling.

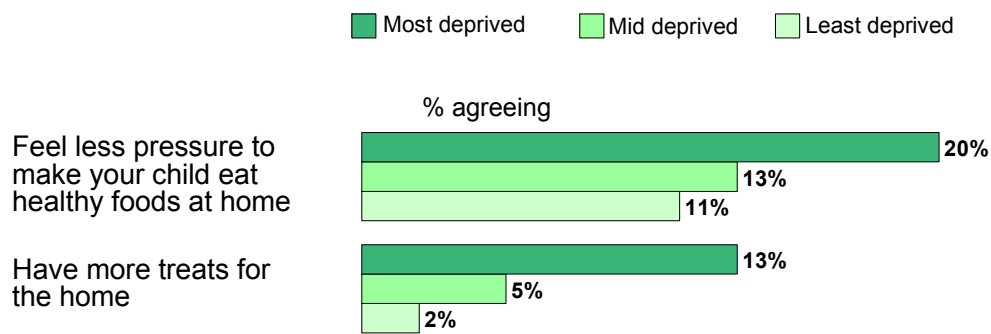
5.34 At first glance, it is concerning that 18% of parents (which increases to 20% among those in the most deprived areas, Figure 5.12), feel less pressure to feed their child less healthy foods at home. However, further exploration of the data shows that this group also report that their child is eating more healthily at home; in fact, just 1% of all parents said they felt less pressure and said that their child is not eating more healthy foods. Therefore, this could be a positive finding because children’s willingness to try more foods means that parents do not have to try to *make* them eat healthy foods and therefore parents feel less pressure.

5.35 Just a small proportion (7% overall and rising to 13% in the most deprived area) reported “buying more treats (less healthy foods)” for the home. Furthermore,

just 1% of all parents reported that they are “buying more treats (less healthy foods)” for the home and that their child is eating less healthy foods at home.

Figure 5.12: Relieving the pressures of making children eat healthily at home by deprivation

Q To what extent do you agree or disagree that the introduction of free school meals in October 2007, has meant you...



Base: parents (926), 11th February – 15th April 2008

Source: Ipsos MORI

Impact on P4-P7 children

5.36 The results of the quantitative survey of parents show that just a small proportion have changed arrangements for their P4-P7 children. Of those with other children in the household, 84% have not made changes to their lunch arrangements. This is consistent with the uptake data which showed a small increase in the number of P4-P7 children having school meals.

5.37 The qualitative research helps to explain why some parents have made changes to lunch arrangements for their P4-P7 children. Reasons provided include P4-P7 children seeing their younger siblings having school meals and wanting to try it too and parents feeling that they can afford for one child to go so now send the elder one as well.

“So what made him [p4 sibling] change?”

“I think because his sister was going he decided he was going to try them as well. But he just went on certain days. If it was pizza he would go then and maybe Spaghetti Bolognese he would go for that, but that was about it.”

Parent

CHAPTER 6: THE IMPACT OF THE FREE SCHOOL MEAL TRIAL ON THE COSTS OF PROVIDING SCHOOL MEALS

Key points

One of the reasons for selecting the five particular authorities involved was that they were each operating in a different context. The costs reflected this and should not therefore be read as an assessment of the efficiency of different areas in implementing the trial, but as a guide to the range of costs incurred by local authorities in different circumstances.

The estimated costs of the trial varied widely from £1.79 per additional meal in Fife to £4.65 in Scottish Borders.

Costs tended to be higher in areas with a higher percentage increase in uptake, i.e. where more fundamental changes needed to be made to staffing and equipment levels.

Costs also tended to be lower in areas where the total number of additional meals served was higher – perhaps where there was more scope for economies of scale to reduce some of the costs.

6.1 This chapter looks at the additional costs incurred by the local authorities in implementing the provision of free school meals for P1 to P3 pupils. One of the reasons for selecting the five particular authorities involved was that they were each operating in a different context – in terms of size of local authority, levels of deprivation, urban/rural mix, size of schools, previous levels of uptake and structure of school meals provision – and so faced different challenges. The cost estimates discussed below should not therefore be read as an assessment of the efficiency of different areas in implementing the trial, but as a guide to the range of costs incurred by local authorities in different circumstances.

6.2 Each area provided the research team with the *additional* costs (beyond what would normally be spent on school meals) incurred as a direct result of the trial and the associated increase in uptake. Costs were provided under the broad headings of food, staffing, equipment and marketing/publicity²³. There were no unexpected costs which did not fit under one of these headings. Both revenue and capital costs²⁴ are included.

²³ To minimise the research burden on local authorities, we did not provide a template or detailed instructions on how costs were to be recorded, but asked them to provide a summary of the financial information they were recording anyway. Different areas may therefore have attributed costs to different headings (e.g. time spent on promotional activities may be categorised as ‘marketing/publicity’ by some but as ‘staffing (administration)’ by others.) The costs should therefore be taken as a broad guide rather than a precise measure.

²⁴ Revenue costs would tend to include on-going costs such as salaries, food and light equipment (e.g. plates and cutlery). Capital costs would include larger items of equipment such as cookers. However, costs might be categorised differently in different areas.

6.3 Food costs are clearly on-going. However, as was pointed out by one local authority catering manager, the knowledge that free school meal provision was to continue (and therefore that uptake levels would remain at a higher level) might enable a renegotiation of contracts with food suppliers.

6.4 Roughly 90% of staffing costs are on-going costs for kitchen staff (around 62%) and for supervisory staff (around 28%). The remaining 10% or so of staffing costs are for management and administration. Some of these management/administration costs will be on-going but a proportion will have been one-off costs incurred in implementing the initiative.²⁵

6.5 The equipment costs are largely one-off (although there will, of course, be higher levels of replacement costs over time). Around 45% of the costs were for crockery, cutlery and other 'light equipment' and roughly 55% of the costs were spent on kitchen equipment and dining furniture.

6.6 It is perhaps harder to gauge the extent to which the marketing and publicity costs are on-going. *Hungry for Success* has generally led to increased publicity and information on school meals, and if universal free school meals for P1 to P3 pupils were to be rolled out, marketing and publicity on that aspect would presumably be incorporated into that. If any roll-out in other areas were to take place at the start of a school year in August, this would enable publicity about the fact the meals were free to be incorporated into other information given to parents on school meals and school life in general.

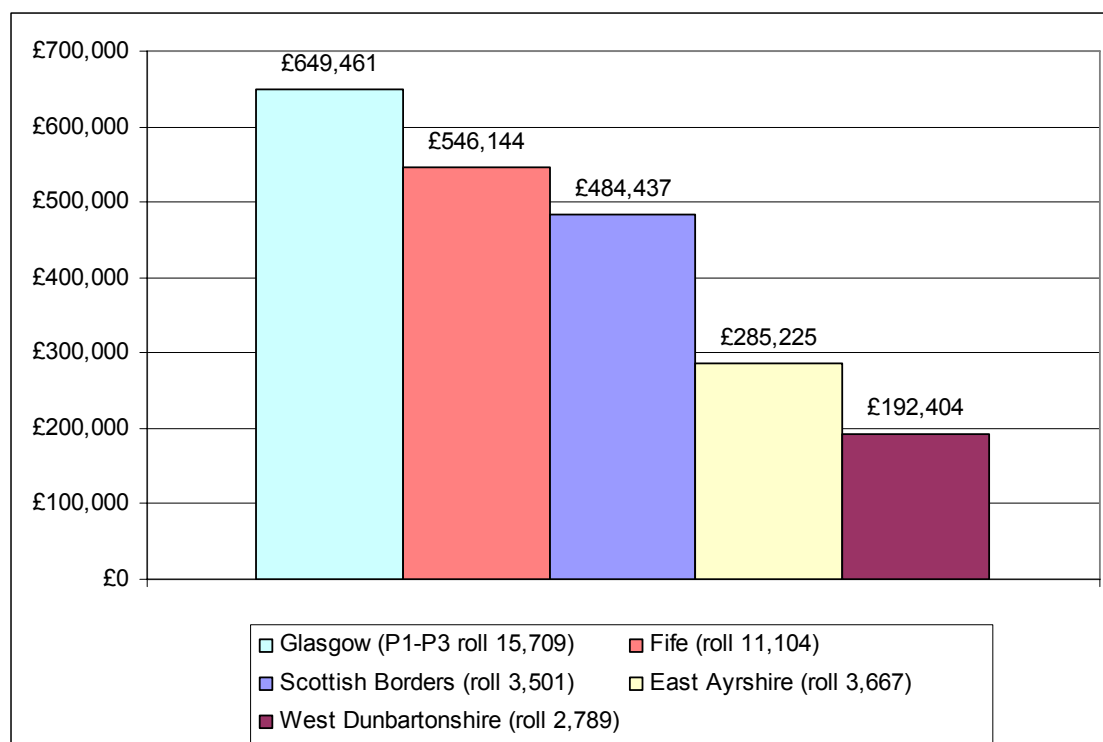
Total additional costs

6.7 The total additional costs, for the first 100 school days²⁶ of the trial in each area - i.e. from the start of the trial on 22 October 2007 (in East Ayrshire, Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire) and 29 October 2007 (in Fife and Scottish Borders) to around 31 March 2008 - are shown in figure 6.1 and generally reflect the size of the local authority. It should be noted that the first 100 days costs are likely to be significantly higher than subsequent periods because they will include many capital costs which will not be ongoing (investment in equipment etc.). Also, in three of the five areas, there was a slight decrease in uptake after the initial big increase, so slightly more additional meals will have been served in the first 100 days than in subsequent periods.

²⁵ Both the categorisation and the breakdown of staffing costs vary across local authorities. These figures are based on data from three local authorities that provided staffing costs at this level of detail. They should be taken as a very rough guide only.

²⁶ Local authorities supplied additional costs to the research team in terms of what was convenient for the way their financial information was recorded. In most cases this was from the start of the trial in their area to the 31 March 2008. For ease of comparison, costs for the first 100 school days have been calculated from this data.

Figure 6.1: Total additional (revenue and capital) costs incurred by each area over the first 100 school days of the trial (Late October 2007 – 31 March 2008)



6.8 On top of the additional costs incurred, there is also the loss of income from the pupils who previously paid for school meals. The estimate of the loss of income (based on pre-trial survey figures among non-FSM registered P1-P3 pupils extrapolated over 100 days) is shown in table 6.1.

Table 6.1: Estimate of loss of income from meals over first 100 days of the trial (Late October 2007 – 31 March 2008)

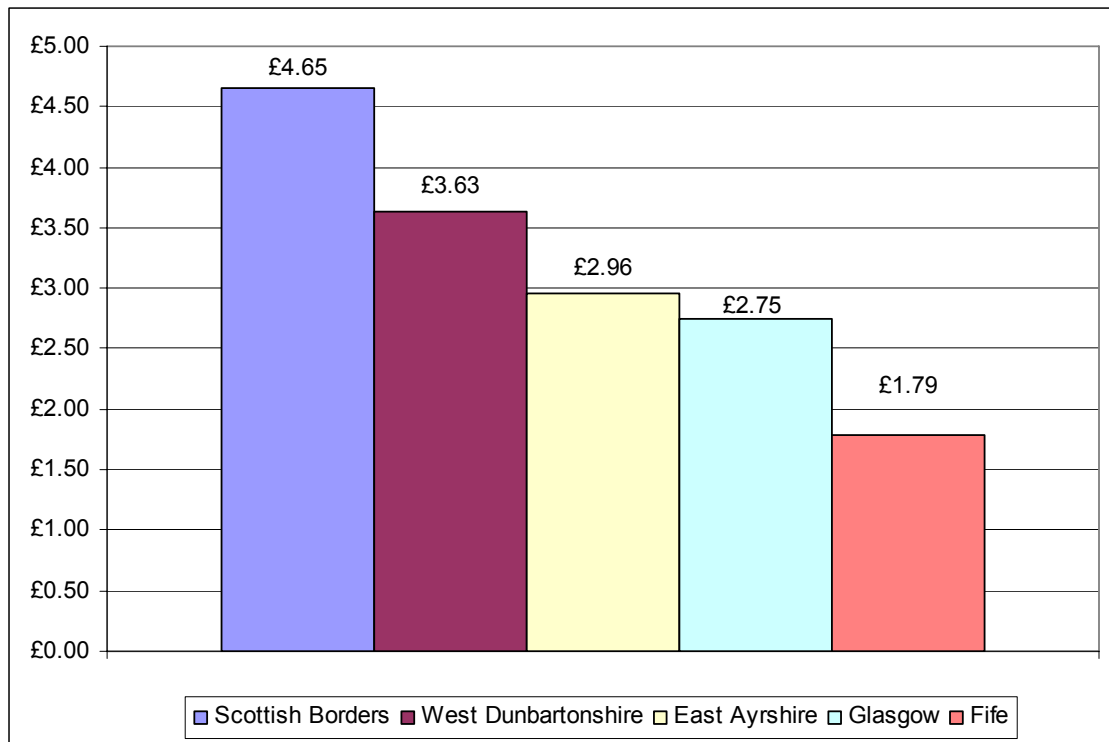
	Number of P1-P3 meals per day previously paid for (pre-trial survey uptake data)	Charge for a meal	Loss of income over first 100 days
Fife	3,729	£1.55	£577,995
Glasgow	4,888	£1.15	£562,120
Scottish Borders	1,048	£1.60	£167,680
East Ayrshire	875	£1.56	£136,500
West Dunbartonshire	847	£1.47	£124,509

Note: Ipsos MORI calculations based on uptake levels of non-FSM registered pupils in pre-trial survey and late February 2008 survey.

6.9 More informative, however, is the total additional cost per additional meal served²⁷ (illustrated in figure 6.2). This has been calculated by dividing the total additional costs in each area by the number of additional meals served (based on the pre-trial and late February 2008 survey uptake figures for all P1-P3 pupils). Again, because these costs relate to the first three months or so of FSM for all P1-P3 pupils, they are likely to be higher than subsequent periods because they will include many capital costs which will not be ongoing. Also, the number of additional meals served may be a slight underestimate because they are based on the late February 2008 survey, by which time the uptake in three areas (East Ayrshire, Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire) had decreased slightly from the initial big increase.

6.10 This varies hugely, from £1.79 in Fife up to £4.65 in the Scottish Borders.

Figure 6.2: Total additional cost (revenue and capital) per additional meal served

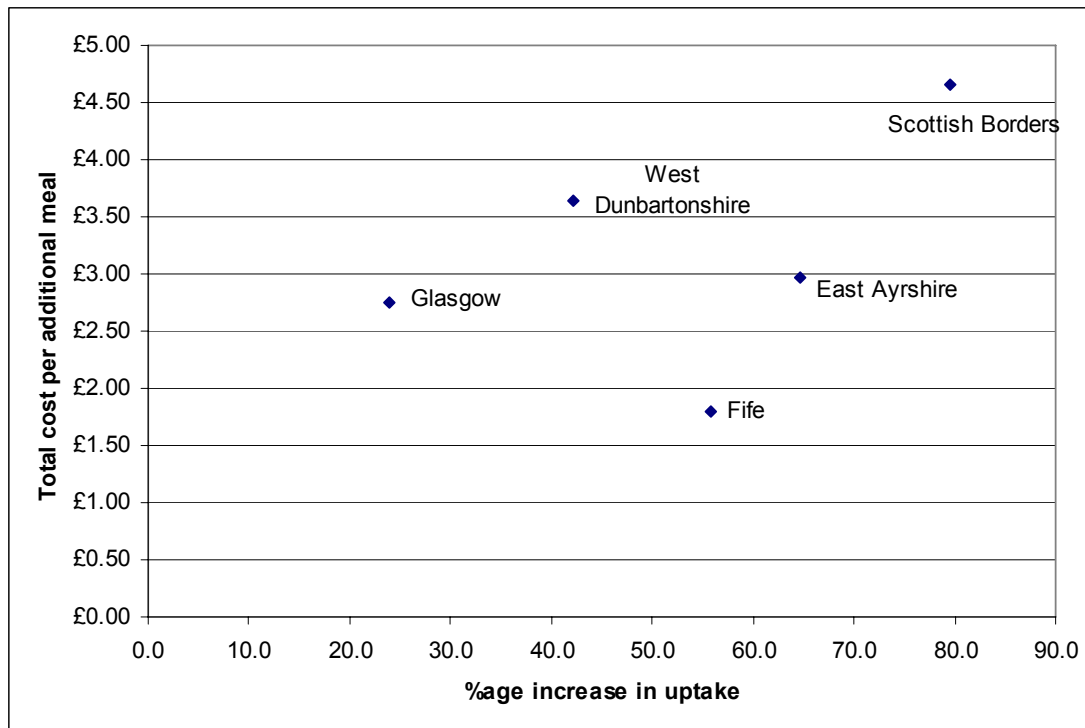


6.11 As noted above, each authority is operating in different circumstances and the increase in uptake, *as a proportion of the pre-trial percentage uptake*, appears to be linked to the costs. This is not surprising as areas where the relative increase in uptake is higher are likely to have to make more fundamental changes (to staffing and equipment in particular) and this will be reflected in the costs.

²⁷ This is based solely on the total additional costs incurred. It does not take account of any loss of income.

6.12 Figure 6.3 shows the relationship between costs and the relative increase in uptake. Scottish Borders had the highest costs but also the biggest increase in uptake, relative to pre-trial levels (uptake increased from 37.3% to 67.0% for all P1 to P3 pupils, which is a 79.6% increase). In contrast, Glasgow had lower costs and the smallest increase in uptake, relative to pre-trial levels (uptake increased from 62.8% to 77.8% for all P1 to P3 pupils, which is a 24% increase). Fife’s costs were relatively low compared with the percentage increase in uptake.

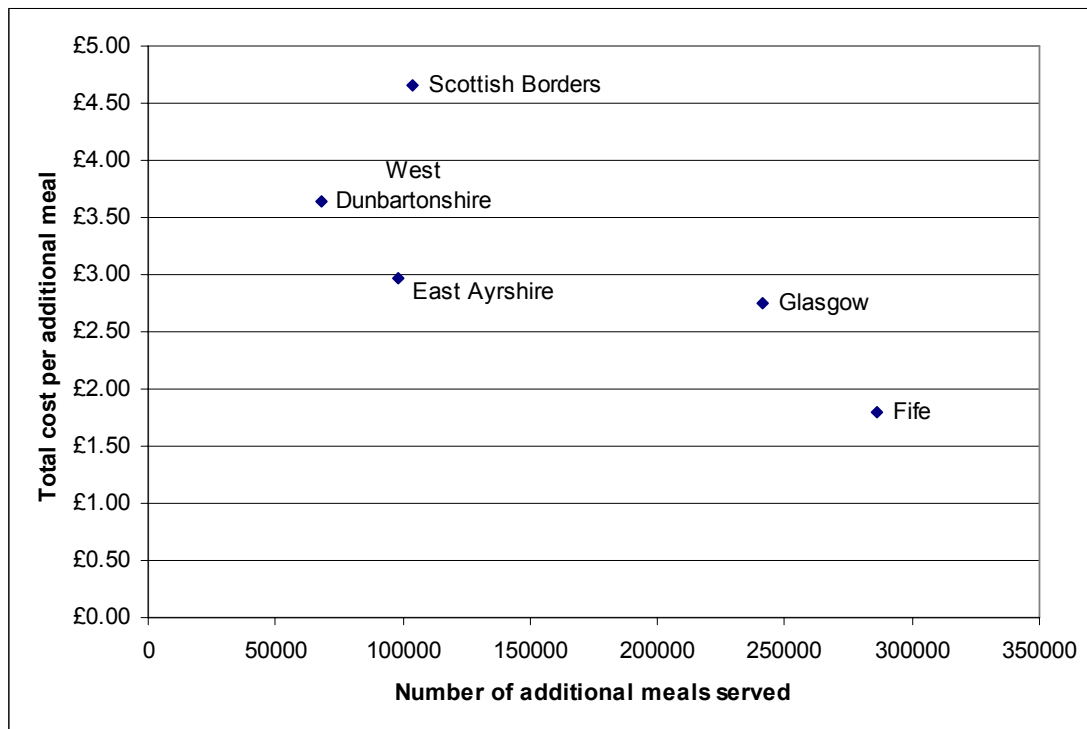
Figure 6.3: Total additional cost per additional meal served by percentage increase in uptake²⁸



6.13 Another factor is the scale of the operation: the larger the number of additional meals served, the more opportunity there is for economies of scale to reduce the costs (e.g. in relation to buying equipment in bulk or negotiating contracts with food suppliers). Figure 6.4 below illustrates the relationship between the total additional cost per additional meal served and the absolute number of additional meals served. In general, the areas with the highest number of additional meals have the lowest additional costs per additional meal.

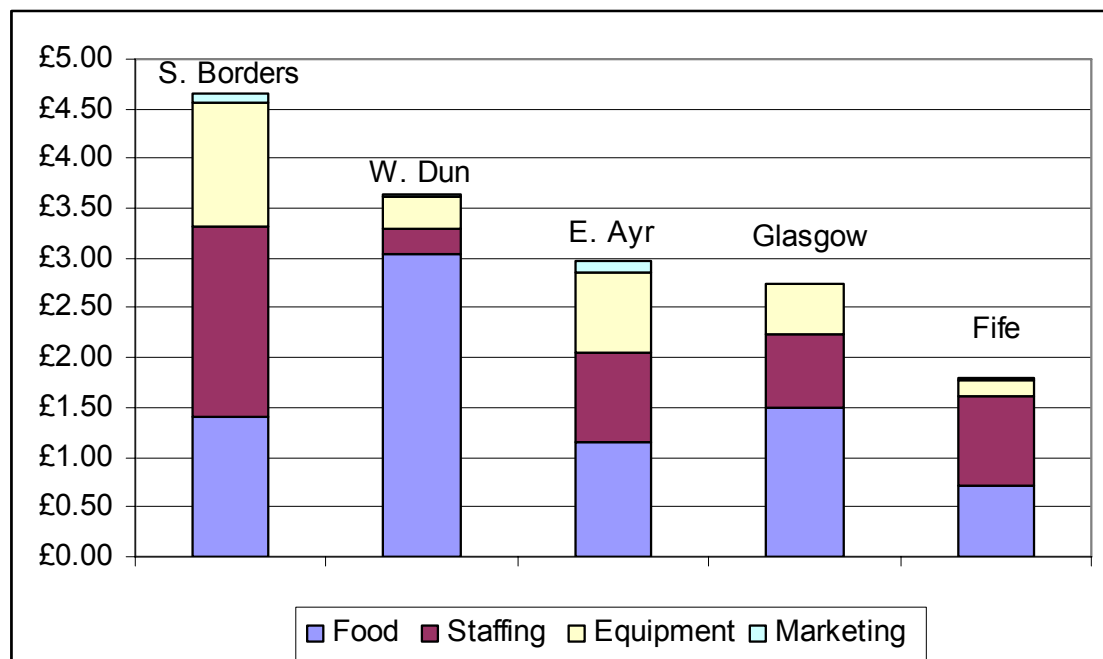
²⁸ i.e. the percentage increase on the baseline percentage uptake

Figure 6.4: Total additional cost per additional meal served by number of additional meals served



6.14 Figure 6.5 below shows the contribution of the different cost elements (food, staffing, equipment and marketing) to the total additional cost per additional meal. As noted above, each area will have categorised certain costs differently so this data should be treated as a rough guide only. Costs incurred under the different headings are discussed in more detail below.

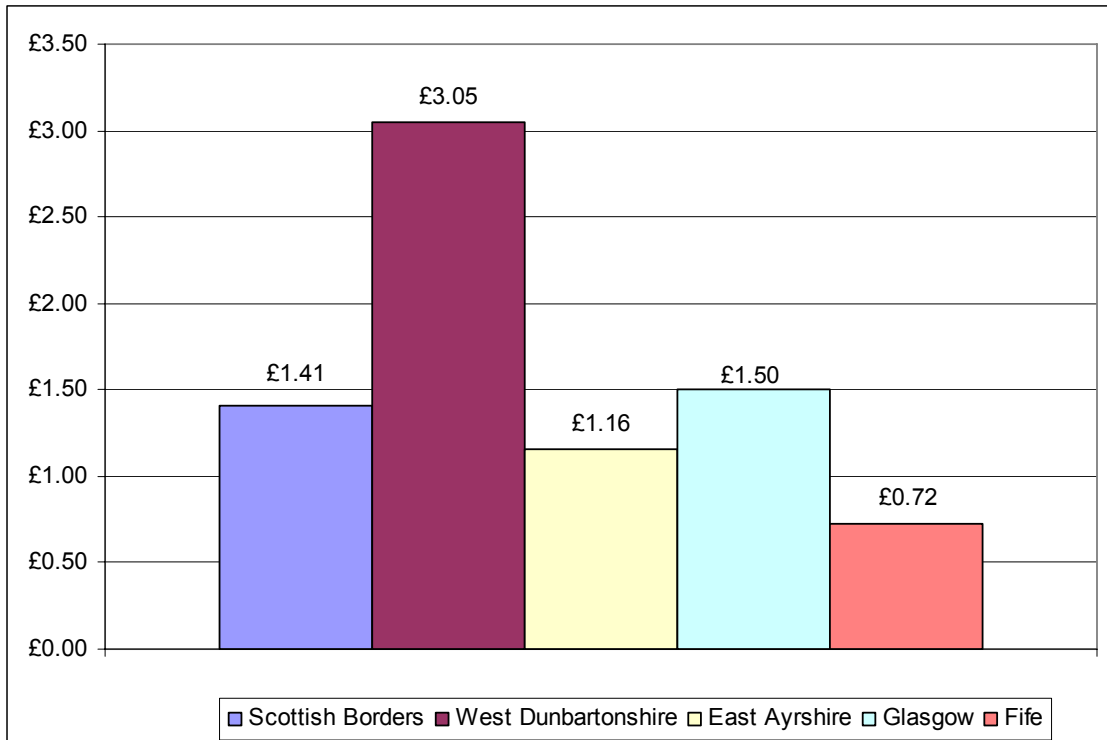
Figure 6.5: Contribution of food, staffing, equipment and marketing costs to total additional cost per additional meal served



Food costs

6.15 The food costs per additional meal vary considerably (shown in figure 6.5) and there appears to be no pattern in relation to the percentage increase in uptake or the number of additional meals served.

Figure 6.5: Food cost per additional meal served



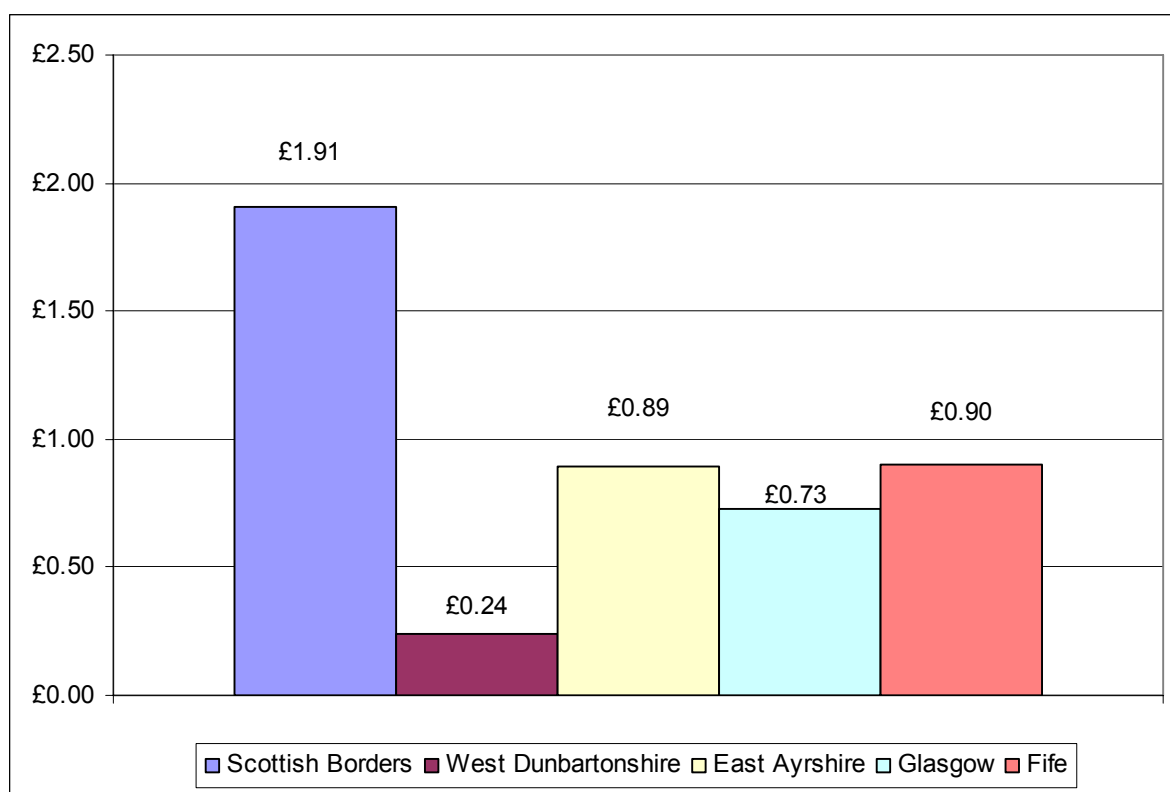
Staffing costs

6.16 The additional staffing costs per additional meal served also vary (shown in figure 6.6). They are broadly similar in three of the areas, ranging from 73p to 90p in East Ayrshire, Glasgow and Fife.

6.17 Scottish Borders had a particular issue with staffing levels, having had a low level of previous uptake and a large number of small schools (so one additional person in a school might double the staffing). This, in part, explains their relatively high additional staffing costs per additional meal. Scottish Borders also increased staffing (initially) on the assumption that P1 to P3 uptake might reach 85%. The uptake in the late February 2008 survey was actually 67% so there was some over-staffing in places until fixed-term contracts ended or hours could be reduced again.

6.18 West Dunbartonshire on the other hand, which had one of the lower increases in uptake and the lowest number of additional meals in total, was able to manage with their existing staffing with very few new posts.

Figure 6.6: Additional staffing cost per additional meal served



6.19 Examining the data, there does appear to be a link between the percentage increase in uptake and the additional staffing costs per meal (shown in Annex 2, figure A2.1).

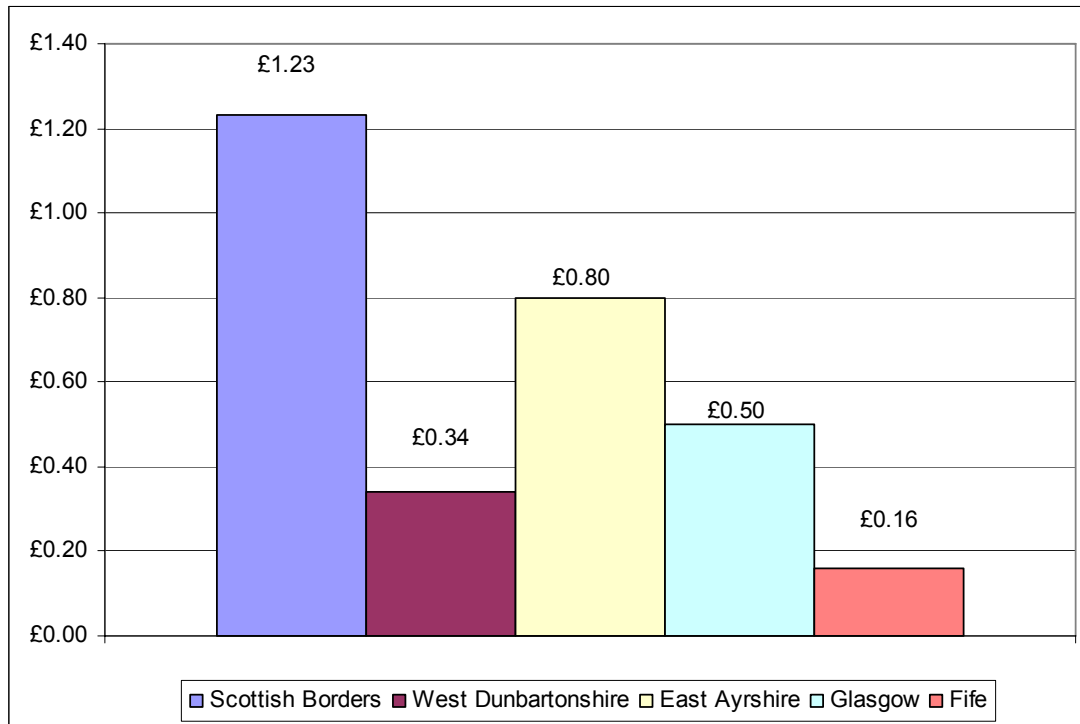
6.20 However, there does not appear to be a direct relationship between the additional staffing costs and the number of additional meals served. Unlike the costs of food and light equipment (crockery and cutlery), which might be expected to increase in direct proportion to the number of additional meals served, staffing costs will be more stepped: a certain number of additional pupils will make no difference to the staffing levels but when uptake reaches a certain point, one additional pupil might require a new member of staff. Since the numbers of kitchen and supervisory staff in any one school are low (typically three or four kitchen staff and one or two supervisory staff), one additional member of staff represents a significant increase. The requirements will also vary across schools. As one catering manager pointed out, some schools may have been running with some spare capacity and could cope with a considerable increase in uptake without requiring any more staff. Others may already have been stretched and even a very small increase might require additional staff.

Equipment costs

6.21 Equipment costs cover light equipment such as crockery and cutlery, dining furniture and kitchen equipment. They also vary widely, from 16p per additional meal in Fife to £1.23 in Scottish Borders (see Figure 6.7). Again, costs tend to be

higher in areas where the percentage increase in uptake was higher (see Annex 2, Figure A2.2) and lower in areas serving more additional meals. As with staffing, West Dunbartonshire (which had one of the lower percentage increases in uptake and the lowest number of additional meals in total) reported that they were generally able to manage with their existing equipment.

Figure 6.7: Additional equipment cost per additional meal served



Marketing and publicity costs

6.22 In three areas (Glasgow, Fife and West Dunbartonshire), the marketing and publicity costs were around 1p per additional meal. They were significantly higher in East Ayrshire (12p) and Scottish Borders (10p). East Ayrshire and Scottish Borders did see the biggest percentage increase in uptake and this may, in part, be a reflection of their investment in marketing: Scottish Borders sent ‘several’ letters to parents and East Ayrshire sent two ‘nicely produced’ leaflets to parents in advance of the trial (one around 6-8 weeks in advance and one just before it started). Staff in both Glasgow and West Dunbartonshire felt that they might have benefited from more publicity. However, Radio Clyde provided free promotion of the initiative in Glasgow so it would be simplistic to make too much of the relationship between marketing/publicity spend and uptake. Similarly, it would be simplistic to equate spend with levels of marketing/publicity activity. Fife, for example, kept costs to a minimum by using schools to publicise the trial and issuing press releases to local media.

CHAPTER 7: CONCLUSIONS AND IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The overarching aim of the evaluation was to inform roll-out in other areas by exploring:

- the change in uptake of school meals by P1-P3 pupils
- process and practical issues for local authorities and schools in implementing free school meals for P1 to P3 pupils
- the range of potential health and other benefits of the trial
- the impact of the trial on the costs of providing school meals
- unexpected impacts and barriers to roll-out in other local authorities.

7.2 Overall, the principal conclusion is that the implementation of the trial was relatively straightforward. There were no unexpected impacts and roll-out by other local authorities should not be problematic.

7.3 Parents, teachers, local authority staff and catering staff were overwhelmingly positive about the provision of universal free school meals for P1-P3 pupils.

7.4 Problems that emerged were generally minor teething problems that could be quite quickly remedied through planning, preparation, flexibility, and small adjustments to daily routines. Furthermore, the issues which did arise were not unexpected.

Uptake

7.5 The trial resulted in significantly increased uptake of school meals:

- Among the target group of P1-P3 pupils not FSM registered, uptake of school meals increased from 41% to 69% (an increase of 28 percentage points).
- Among P1-P3 pupils who were previously FSM registered, uptake increased from 89.2% to 93.6% (an increase of 4.4 percentage points).
- Overall, the uptake among all P1-P3 pupils increased from 53% to 75% (an increase of 22 percentage points).
- There was concern that the trial might negatively impact on P4-P7 uptake (for example, because queues might increase or food choices might reduce). However, there was been a small but positive impact on this group – uptake increased from 47.3 % to 49.9% (an increase of 2.6 percentage points).
- Overall, the uptake among all primary pupils increased from 50% to 60% (an increase of 10 percentage points).
- Uptake increased in all five trial areas. Among the target group of P1-P3 pupils not FSM registered, the biggest increases were in Fife and Scottish Borders (both 32 percentage points) and East Ayrshire (31 percentage points).

The increases were relatively lower in West Dunbartonshire (26 percentage points) and Glasgow (22 percentage points).

- Among those previously registered for FSM, the increases in uptake ranged from 8.5 percentage points in Scottish Borders to 3.4 percentage points in Glasgow.
- Among P1-P3 pupils who were not FSM registered and who did not take a school meal before the trial, those in the most deprived areas and those in the least deprived areas were equally likely to take up the offer of a free school meal. It might have been expected that there would be a greater uptake among those in the most deprived areas (where there will be a higher proportion of less affluent families, including those just above the threshold for FSM eligibility). However, the pre-trial uptake among non-FSM registered pupils in the more deprived areas was higher and there was therefore less scope to increase it.
- The increase in uptake was higher in smaller schools and in schools with on-site (as opposed to off-site) cooking facilities.
- In all five areas there was a substantial upward trend in P1-P3 uptake at the start of the trial. In three areas (West Dunbartonshire, East Ayrshire, and Glasgow) this decreased slightly and, to varying degrees, stabilised over the following months. In the remaining two areas, uptake was less stable, fluctuating between around 60% and around 70% in Scottish Borders and between around 66% and around 73% Fife.

7.6 It should be noted that uptake figures measure the proportion of pupils taking a school meal *on a given day*. Many pupils take a school meal some days and a packed lunch on other days. Rather than conceptualising ‘pupils who take school meals’ and ‘pupils who do not take school meals’, it is more helpful to think about the proportion taking a school meal on a given day, and the number of times a week pupils take a school meal. So it would be wrong to assume that 22% of P1-P3 pupils have changed from never taking school meals to taking them five days a week – it is more complex than that. For example, some pupils who took never took a school meal before are now taking them five days a week but some are now taking them on one or two days.

7.7 Uptake increased more in schools with lower levels of FSM registration, where the pre-trial uptake tended to be lower. The five trial areas have a higher proportion of FSM registered pupils than Scotland as a whole, so should FSM for P1-P3 pupils be rolled out in the remaining local authority areas, the overall increase in uptake across the rest of Scotland is likely to be higher than that observed in the trial areas.

Reasons for taking, or not taking, school meals

7.8 Parents indicated that the main reasons for their children taking school meals were that they want them to have a hot meal, that they know they will get a healthy lunch, that the children like the food provided, and because they are provided free.

7.9 Interestingly, the reasons given by those whose children took school meals more often since the trial started were very similar to the reasons given by those whose children took school meals the same amount. The exception was that those whose children took school meals more often were much more likely to say that the fact they were free was one of the main reasons.

7.10 The financial benefits were welcomed by parents – particularly those with more than one child. More specifically, there was a view that school meals were not good value for money, particularly if the child was ‘fussy’ and the parent was not sure how much of the meal they would eat. If it was free they were more willing to take the risk of some or all of it not being eaten. While this may raise concerns about wastage, catering staff indicated that levels of waste were the same as they were pre-trial, and this willingness to ‘risk’ a school meal (or a different menu option) has the potential to expand the range of foods pupils try - and find they enjoy.

7.11 The menu options on any given day exert a strong influence with many pupils taking a school meal on days they liked the choices on offer and taking a packed lunch on days that they did not (or thought their favourite choice would run out because their class was last on the rota that day). Although the less healthy options (such as pizza and sausages) seemed universally popular, pupils’ individual preferences would often include healthy options too, and it would be wrong to suggest it was as simple as ‘unhealthy = popular’ and ‘healthy = unpopular’. To maximise uptake, there is scope to make better use of uptake data and catering staff’s knowledge of which dishes are popular to plan menus (e.g. not having two ‘unpopular’ main courses on the same day) and to more accurately predict demand (so those at the end of the queue are likely to get their first choice).

7.12 While uptake among all P1-P3 pupils has increased to 75%, this still means that a quarter are not taking a school meal on a ‘normal’ day. It was clear from the research that the main reason for non-uptake is that some children are ‘fussy eaters’. It should be acknowledged that parents of these children generally wanted them to have school meals and would welcome help to encourage their children to sample a broader range of foods. There does, however, appear to be a ceiling effect – there are some pupils who, for whatever reason, will never take a school meal. Nevertheless, the research indicates that the greatest impact on uptake might be realised through initiatives to enhance parents’ skills in encouraging young children to eat a wider range of foods, as opposed to changes to the school meal experience itself (e.g. queuing systems, décor etc.).

7.13 Parents indicated that if school meals were no longer free, their child would take a school meal more frequently than they did pre-trial – in particular, on days that they liked the food on offer. This suggests that if charges are reintroduced, overall uptake will decrease but will remain higher than pre-trial levels. It also suggests that this cohort will have higher levels of uptake once they reach P4 and beyond.

7.14 While parents generally found it valuable to have menus sent home and many considered the invitation to sample the foods on offer useful, sometimes foods were given attractive ‘child-friendly’ names such as ‘*Nemo Pizza*’ and ‘*Shark Infested Mince*’. As a result, it was unclear what the individual ingredients in some dishes

were, leaving parents feeling that they could not always help their child decide what they wanted, nor cook the same food at home if their child asked for it.

Practical issues: limited time and space

7.15 The main challenges schools faced were physical space and time pressures; the interrelated problems of the size of dining areas coupled with the time available for lunch.

7.16 However, these logistical issues were not unexpected and there was a strong view that small adjustments to daily routines would go a long way towards relieving them.

7.17 Interviewees outlined a range of successful strategies that would be useful to share with other schools should FSMs be rolled-out across other local authorities. In particular, strategies found useful in making effective use of limited time and space include:

- staggering the times pupils arrive at dining areas
- setting tables in advance
- operating different queuing systems or service areas
- allowing slightly lengthened lunchtimes (e.g. letting P1 pupils out five or ten minutes early)
- using alternative accommodation (especially for packed lunches)

7.18 With regard to pre-ordering systems, there were mixed views; in some cases they were viewed as unnecessarily time consuming for little benefit, while other schools found them successful.

Lead-in and start time of the trial

7.19 Although schools and local authorities managed very successfully to implement the trial without major difficulties, there was a commonly held view that a longer lead-in time would enable more preparations to be put in place. In particular, there was insufficient time for potential new staff to undergo Disclosure Scotland checks and, on occasion, additional equipment was not in place at the outset.

7.20 There was also a view that it would have been better for the start of the trial to coincide with the beginning of the school year in August, to avoid pupils getting into a routine which is then changed. These problems could be easily overcome for roll-out in other areas.

Impact on the quality and quantity of food

7.21 The quality and quantity of food provided was not seen to have changed as a result of the trial. Furthermore, waste was proportionate to pre-trial levels.

7.22 Popular options did sometimes run out for those at the end of the queue, but this was also an issue pre-trial and the problem was not exacerbated by the trial.

7.23 Provision for special dietary needs was not a problem – special dietary needs have a minor impact on uptake (only 4% of survey respondents cited dietary needs as a factor influencing uptake) and there is no evidence of increased demand for special foods as a result of the trial.

Impact on workloads

7.24 Workloads of local authority and teaching staff remained relatively unchanged as a result of the trial. The greatest impact was on catering staff who tended to have slightly increased workloads. However, once extra staff had been recruited, there were generally no major problems.

7.25 In general, staff viewed the implementation of the trial as simply an extension of what they were already doing. However, staff undertaking supervision in the dining room sometimes felt they might have less time to encourage healthy eating among individual children.

Potential health and other benefits

7.26 Universal healthy free school meals have the potential to impact on children's health, wellbeing, and educational performance in the medium to long term. However, there is unlikely to be a 'quick fix' in terms of changing children's eating preferences overnight, and given the short-term nature of the trial, this evaluation did not seek to examine such impacts in detail. Instead, the evaluation explored early perceptions of health and other benefits, from which the following conclusions can be drawn:

- The trial provided pupils with an opportunity to try new foods, resulting in pupils asking at home for foods they had tried at school. In some cases, these were healthier options.
- Although pupils appeared to have a good awareness of healthy foods, there is no evidence that the trial had impacted upon this. When deciding what to eat, children tend to pick what they like the taste of. Choosing healthier options is likely to come as a result of them trying and enjoying new foods. Therefore, evidence that the trial acted as a catalyst for pupils' willingness to try new foods is a positive finding.
- There was some evidence that the trial had impacted positively on the home environment of pupils. In particular, it had resulted in parents talking about food with their children more often and some parents noted that children were more confident in discussing their food preferences.
- In turn, some parents were keen to make meals for their children that they had enjoyed at school but they did not always know how to make them. Providing recipe cards or books of school recipes was suggested as a solution.
- Teachers did not report any behavioural changes in pupils at lunchtime or in afternoon classes.

7.27 Although there was evidence that pupils were trying new foods and that some were asking for new foods at home, including healthier options, the evidence is unclear on how many children were doing so and the extent to which children were eating more healthily at home. On other potential benefits such as whether parents felt they knew more about healthy foods and were buying healthier foods for the home, the evidence is also unclear.

7.28 Around a third of parents in the survey reported these changes. However, there was little evidence from the qualitative research with parents that these things had changed as a result of the trial. Furthermore, in the survey, there was little difference between those whose children were taking school meals the same amount as before and those whose children were taking school meals more often. It is not clear why this is the case – it might be expected that if the trial is having an impact on these issues it would have a greater impact on those who are taking school meals more often. In some cases, it may simply be that the child is five months older and the changes would have occurred anyway. It is also possible that having more of their friends taking school meals has had a positive influence on those who were already taking them. Finally, some parents may have (consciously or unconsciously) over-reported the benefits of the trial, under the impression that doing so would increase the likelihood of the continuation of free school meals for their child. While the letter accompanying the questionnaire clearly stated that their individual response would not be used to decide whether the trial was rolled out in their child's school, it is more difficult to reassure parents through a postal questionnaire than through face to face discussions.

Costs

7.29 One of the reasons for selecting the five particular authorities involved in the trial was that they were each operating in a different context – in terms of size of local authority, levels of deprivation, urban/rural mix, size of schools, previous levels of uptake and structure of school meals provision – and so faced different challenges. The costs reflected this and should not therefore be read as an assessment of the efficiency of different areas in implementing the trial, but as a guide to the range of costs incurred by local authorities in different circumstances.

7.30 The costs of the trial varied widely from £1.79 per additional meal in Fife to £4.65 in Scottish Borders. Costs tended to be higher in areas with a higher percentage increase in uptake, i.e. where more fundamental changes needed to be made to staffing and equipment levels. Costs also tended to be lower in areas where the total number of additional meals served was higher – perhaps where there was more scope for economies of scale to reduce some of the costs (e.g. in relation to buying equipment in bulk or negotiating contracts with food supplier).

Future research

7.31 An important issue to consider, which was outwith the remit of this research given the short lead in time for the trial, is what pupils are actually eating. There was evidence that many pupils picked at their school meals, eating only the bits they like.

In particular, it was suggested that some of the healthier foods such as vegetables and soup were frequently left untouched by some pupils.

7.32 Comparisons with what pupils who take packed lunches are eating would also be useful. For example, research in Sheffield primary schools, commissioned by the School Food Trust,²⁹ found that school meals provide healthier food than packed lunches. However, research by Colquhoun et al in Hull primary schools suggests that pupils taking school meals may be consuming more afternoon snacks high in fat, sugar and salt than those taking packed lunches³⁰ – so nutritional intake at lunchtime should not be considered in isolation.

7.33 Having got to a stage where more pupils are enjoying the school meal experience and are willing to try new foods, the next steps are to ensure that pupils are eating all or most of the school meals they choose, and that links with parents are improved in order to ensure that the free healthy school meal initiative reaches its full potential.

²⁹ School Food Trust. *What are we eating? School lunch versus packed lunch following the introduction of food-based standards for school lunch.*
http://www.schoolfoodtrust.org.uk/UploadDocs/Library/Documents/sl&b_findings1.pdf

³⁰ Colquhoun D, Wright N, Pike J and Gatenby L. 2008. *Evaluation of Eat Well Do Well Kingston Upon Hull's School Meal Initiative.* p55. <http://www.hull.ac.uk/ifl-research/finalreport.pdf>

ANNEX 1: UPTAKE AMONG NON-FSM REGISTERED PUPILS NOT PREVIOUSLY TAKING A MEAL

This Annex provides data and more detailed commentary on the alternative measure of uptake (i.e. uptake among the key target group: those who were non-FSM registered and who did not previously take a school meal) summarised in Chapter 3.

1. Clearly, the fewer pupils who took a school meal before the trial, the more scope there was to increase the level of uptake during the trial. And as schools with high levels of FSM entitlement (schools in the more deprived areas) also tended to have higher levels of uptake, it follows that they had less scope to increase uptake in absolute terms.

2. An alternative measure of the increase in uptake is to examine the proportion of those to whom FSM was extended to, who did not previously take a meal but started taking a school meal during the trial. In other words, how likely were these pupils to take a FSM when offered one as part of the trial?

Uptake by pre-trial level of uptake

3. Table A1.1 shows the likelihood of uptake where FSM was extended, by uptake level within the target group (P1 to P3 Non-FSM pupils) prior to the trial. Overall, 47% of those to whom FSM was extended during the trial and who were not already taking a meal, did so during the trial.³¹

Table A1.1: Relative increase in uptake of schools meals among target group by pre-trial level of uptake

	P1 to P3 Pupils not entitled to FSM before trial		
	Pre-trial uptake	Late February 2008 uptake	% of pupils FSM extended to (who did not previously take a meal) who are now taking a school meal
Level of uptake pre-trial among target group³²			
Lowest uptake (<32.8%)	25%	61%	48%
Next 25% (32.8% to 42%)	37%	69%	50%
Next 25% (42% - 54.8%)	48%	72%	46%
Highest uptake (> 54.8%)	67%	79%	36%
Overall	41%	69%	47%

4. Using this measure, pupils were less likely to take a school meal when offered one as part of the trial in schools where the level of uptake was highest previously among the target group. Just over one in three (36%) pupils took up the offer of a FSM where they had not taken a school meal previously, in schools where there was the highest uptake pre-trial among the target group. In contrast, almost half (48%) of

³¹ This is calculated by dividing the increase in uptake by the proportion not taking a school meal pre-trial: (69%-41%) divided by (100%-41%) which equals 28%/59%. Calculations have been done on non-rounded figures.

³² P1 to P3 Non-FSM pupils

pupils took up the offer of a FSM under the trial in schools where there had been the lowest level of uptake among the target group pre-trial.

5. In other words, among the target group, while the overall level of uptake remains lower in schools where it was lowest pre-trial, the gap narrowed between schools where uptake levels were high and low previously, because relatively more pupils in schools with previously low uptake took up the offer of a FSM under the trial.

6. This is likely to at least partially reflect a ceiling effect - that there are some pupils who, for whatever reason, will never take a school meal. As the proportion of pupils who take a school meal nears 100% in a school, it is less likely that a high proportion of the remainder can be persuaded take a school meal.

Uptake by local authority

7. This effect is also seen, though only partially, in the breakdown by local authority. While Glasgow had the highest proportion of P1 to P3 non-FSM entitled pupils taking a school meal before the trial (48%), only around 4 in 10 (41%) of pupils who had not previously taken a school meal took up the offer of FSM during the trial. This was the lowest proportion of the five local authorities. In comparison, in the local authority with the lowest proportion of uptake among this group before the trial - East Ayrshire (30%) - 44% of pupils in the target group who had not previously taken a school meal, took up the offer of a FSM during the trial. The local authority with the largest proportionate increase in uptake was Fife: over half (55%) of pupils who had not taken a school meal before and were now entitled to a FSM took it, increasing uptake from 41% to 73% among this group. In terms of uptake of school meals before the trial, Fife was midway between Glasgow and East Ayrshire, i.e. it had neither the lowest or highest pre-trial levels of uptake.

Table A1.2: Relative increase in uptake of schools meals among target group by local authority

Local authority	P1 to P3 Pupils not entitled to FSM before trial		
	Pre-trial uptake	Late February 2008 uptake	% of pupils FSM extended to (who did not previously take a meal) who are now taking a school meal
Glasgow	48%	69%	41%
Fife	41%	73%	55%
West Dunbartonshire	40%	66%	43%
East Ayrshire	30%	61%	44%
Scottish Borders	33%	65%	48%

Uptake by size of school and location of cooking facilities

8. The size of the school, as defined by the school roll³³, and whether school meals were cooked onsite or offsite, were related to the likelihood of taking a FSM among those who FSM was extended to and who didn't take a school meal before (shown in table A1.3). In the smallest schools, uptake among the target group increased from 45% to 76%: thus 56% of those non-FSM registered pupils who had not taken a school meal before the trial took up the offer of a free school meal. In the largest schools, uptake among this group increased less, from 38% to 66%: 45% taking up the offer as part of the trial. In other words, as uptake increased more in smaller schools than larger schools during the trial, the pre-existing gap in uptake levels also widened.

9. With regard to the location of cooking facilities, more target group pupils took up the offer of FSM in schools with onsite facilities (50%) than those who received meals from offsite (41%). Therefore, while the gap in uptake among the target group between schools with on and off-site cooking facilities was small before the trial (42% compared to 40%) it had increased by the time of the late February 2008 survey (71% compared with 65%).

10. Indeed, as table A1.3 shows, small schools with onsite cooking facilities saw the highest level of increase in uptake among this target group of pupils, from 49% before the trial to 80% during the trial. In other words, 6 out of every 10 (60%) pupils in the target group in these schools, who previously had not taken a school meal, did so when offered a free school meal. In comparison, large schools without onsite cooking facilities saw the lowest level of increase in uptake, from 36% to 59%, or fewer than 4 out of every 10 non-FSM registered pupils (37%) taking a school meal when offered a free school meal. These patterns were seen across the different local authorities.

³³ School size was banded into the four quartile groups across the 5 different areas.

Table A1.3: Relative increase in uptake of schools meals among target group by size and location of cooking facilities.

	P1 to P3 Pupils not entitled to FSM before trial		
	Pre-trial uptake	Late February 2008 uptake	% of pupils FSM extended to (who did not previously take a meal) who are now taking a school meal
Size of school			
Smallest 25% (6-111 pupils)	45%	76%	56%
Next 25% (112-179 pupils)	46%	74%	51%
Next 25% - (180-264 pupils)	42%	68%	44%
Largest 25% - (265+ pupils)	38%	66%	45%
Location of cooking facilities			
On-site	42%	71%	50%
Off-site	40%	65%	41%
Location of cooking facilities and school size			
Onsite - Smallest 25% (6-111 pupils)	49%	80%	60%
Onsite - Next 25% (112-179 pupils)	46%	76%	55%
Onsite - Next 25% (180-264 pupils)	42%	70%	48%
Onsite - Largest 25% (265+ pupils)	39%	69%	49%
Offsite - Smallest 25% (6-111 pupils)	42%	73%	53%
Offsite - Next 25% (112-179 pupils)	46%	68%	41%
Offsite - Next 25% (180-264 pupils)	42%	64%	38%
Offsite - Largest 25% (265+ pupils)	36%	59%	37%
Overall	41%	69%	47%

Uptake by level of deprivation

11. Table A1.4 shows the change in uptake levels by FSM registration in schools. In the least deprived schools, where less than 9% of all pupils were FSM registered, uptake increased among the target group (P1 to P3 who were not registered for FSM before the trial) from 38% to 69%. In other words, 50% of pupils who had not taken a school meal before and were now entitled to a FSM took it in these schools. In comparison, uptake increased from 53% to 75% in schools in the most deprived areas – 47% who were offered FSMs under the trial and did not previously take a school meal, took them.

12. What does this tell us about changes in uptake in the more deprived areas? As noted previously, pupils not registered for FSMs were more likely to take a school meal before the trial if they were in a school with a high level of FSM registration, i.e. a school in a deprived area. During the trial, this gap between the least and most deprived areas narrowed. Importantly however, the likelihood of taking up the offer of a FSMs among those who did not take one before, and who were offered them as part of the trial, did not differ substantially by whether the school was in a deprived area – roughly half (50% and 47%) took up the offer of a school meal in schools in both the least and most deprived areas.

13. It might have been expected that there would be a greater uptake among those in the most deprived areas (where there will be a higher proportion of less affluent families, including those just above the threshold for FSM eligibility). However, the pre-trial uptake among non-FSM registered pupils in the more deprived areas was higher and there was therefore less scope to increase it.

Table A1.4: Relative increase in uptake of schools meals among target group by FSM registration within schools (banded)

	P1 to P3 Pupils not entitled to FSM before trial		
	Pre-trial uptake	Late February 2008 uptake	% of pupils FSM extended to (who did not previously take a meal) who are now taking a school meal
FSM registration pre-trial			
Least deprived schools (0%-9% FSM registered)	38%	69%	50%
9% - 19% FSM registered	38%	68%	49%
19% - 37% FSM registered	42%	67%	43%
Most deprived schools (37-100% FSM registered)	53%	75%	47%
	41%	69%	47%

ANNEX 2: ADDITIONAL COST CHARTS

Figure A2.1: Staffing cost per additional meal served by percentage increase in uptake

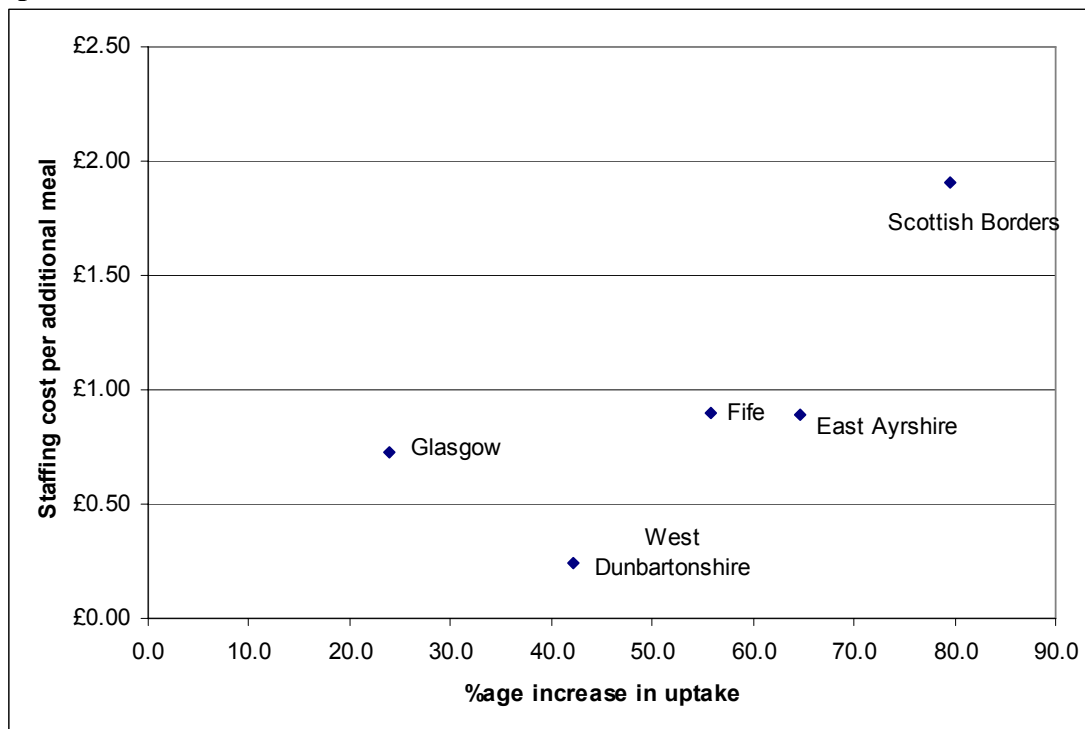
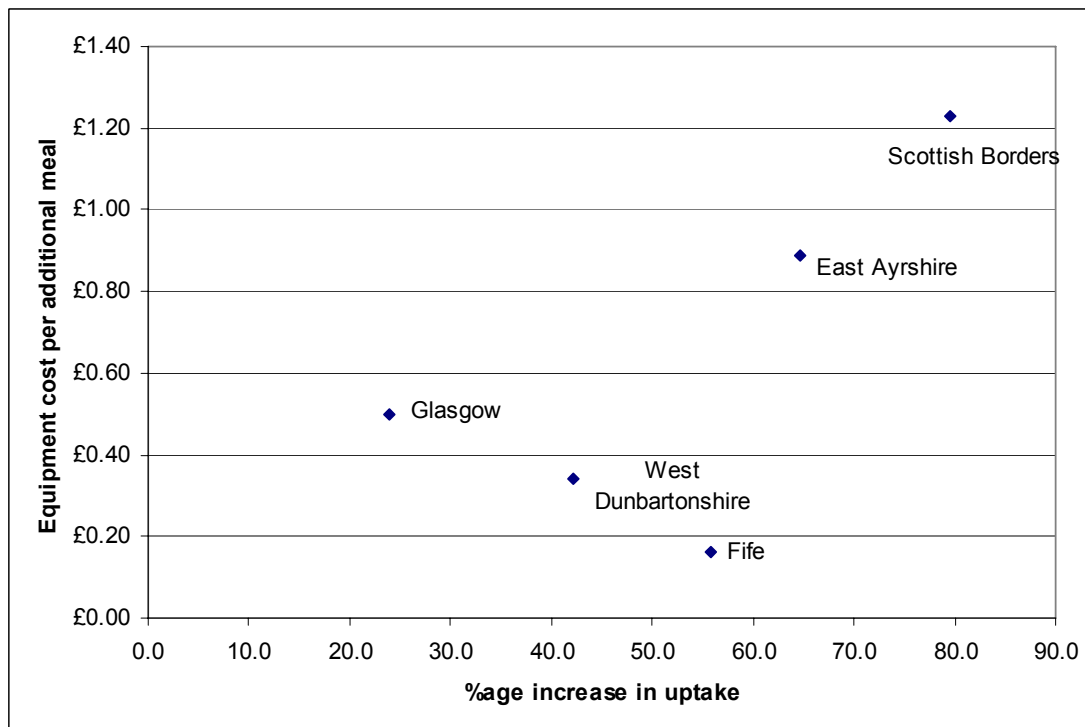


Figure A2.2: Additional equipment cost per additional meal served by percentage increase in uptake



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