

Ingredients for Success? A Nation-Wide Survey of Teachers and Stakeholders on Food Education Across the UK

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Ingredients for Success?

A nation-wide survey of teachers and stakeholders on food education across the UK

A Summary Report - May 2023



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Executive Summary

About the Research

At the end of 2022, researchers from Glasgow Caledonian University shared an online survey to explore the opinions and experiences of food education teachers across the UK. The core focus of the research was to explore barriers to practical food education encountered by pupils in secondary/high schools across the UK. A secondary focus of the research was to explore the potential contribution of food education to tackling food insecurity and promoting well-being.

Thank you for carrying out this survey and for giving HE teachers across the UK a chance to voice our views. As a fairly small subject area, we are so often not heard.

I think the survey covered many of the frustrations, except perhaps time. We have recently had our lesson time reduced dramatically which inevitably bites into our time (break, lunch, PPA's, after school) as you end up 'mopping up' (literally) the unfinished jobs from rushed lessons. Reducing time adds to the feeling of being undervalued.

The Importance of Food Education for Schools and Society

Practitioners perceive that food education is undervalued and under resourced. Even those who might dispute this claim would agree that food education imparts lifelong skills and prepares young people for work in tourism and hospitality, both service industries that make important contributions to the UK economy. These industries have been impacted in recent years by Brexit, Covid and now a cost-of-living crisis, which has resulted in a shortage of skilled food service professionals. Public food provision in our schools, hospitals, universities, care homes, prisons and military services need a steady supply of skilled workers to promote our national health and well-being. Food education is also important *in and for* schools. Affording young people more opportunity to access a curriculum that reflects their interests and allows their talents to flourish will enrich the school experience of more young people.

With a national health crisis, food education for all children should be more important than ever before.

Happy to follow the guidelines but also think there is a need to cook for other reasons than qualifications. This needs to be recognised.

Key Findings

In favour of cost-free food education

- Two-thirds of practitioners opined that no pupil should contribute to the cost of food education, with most of the remainder believing that cost should be made on a family's ability to pay.
- Belief in cost-free food education was stronger in Scotland, compared to the rest of the UK (four-fifths of those from Scotland considered that no pupils should pay to access food education).

Schools should provide ingredients like other subjects do - Art provide the resources needed to complete the lessons, science also provide all the experimental resources, PE also, so why food not?

Parents appreciate not having to provide ingredients or containers.

Food education at a cost

- In all schools from Northern Ireland, and in around nine-in-every ten schools in Wales and England, pupils were required either to make a financial contribution to the cost of food education, or to supply ingredients. In sharp contrast, in Scotland – where the Scottish Government has provided funds to cover costs – 98% of respondents reported that pupils were not required to make a financial contribution or to provide ingredients.
- In England, it was reported that contributions were least likely to be asked – and punitive reactions to non-provision less likely to be enacted - in smaller schools, larger cities, and in schools with a higher proportion of pupils who were entitled to free school meals.
- In England, Wales and Northern Ireland, three-quarters of teachers reported that some pupils are asked to supply ingredients (and two-fifths of teachers reported that all pupils in their school are asked to supply ingredients). In the same, two-fifths of pupils are asked to make a financial contribution toward the cost of food education (although in most cases, this is a voluntary contribution). As noted above, in state schools in Scotland, the school provides ingredients and parents are not asked to make a financial contribution.
- In England and Wales, pupils are most likely to be asked to supply ingredients if they have elected for food education at GCSE level.
- In those schools where at least some pupils are required to supply ingredients or make a financial contribution, two-thirds of pupils who are entitled to free-school meals are required to do so.
- Most teachers reported that pupils were also asked to contribute to the cost of food education in other ways, for example, by providing containers to take home food, or supplying their own aprons.
- One-third of teachers reported that exemptions from contributing to the cost of food education were not promoted among parents/guardians and pupils.

(I'm Danish) I am used to all ingredients being provided for all students while at school and the variety of ingredients we used were much bigger, e.g., the teacher might bring trays of live fresh fish, we would be allowed to pick our own dishes in families (small groups) and we would have sufficient time to sit down and eat our food after cooking.

As we don't charge for the cost of ingredients, as required by the Scottish Government, I am concerned about future budget cuts and schools deciding not to offer food education due to the cost.

Hidden costs and awareness of circumstance in Scotland

- Although pupils in state schools are not asked to make a financial payment or to supply ingredients, most teachers in Scotland reported that pupils were asked to contribute in other ways to the cost of food education by supplying equipment or consumables. However, teachers in schools with a higher proportion of pupils from more disadvantaged situations were less likely to report asking pupils to make these contributions.

Implications of pupils not contributing to the cost of food education

- Although most schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland will facilitate participation if pupils do not supply ingredients (if required), in a significant minority of schools the consequence is a lesser educational experience (e.g., the pupil observes the lesson, but does not take part in practical work) or is punitive (e.g., pupils are not permitted to take the food home).

Ability of families to contribute to food education

- In those schools where at least some pupils are required to supply ingredients, fewer than one-half of teachers were confident that families would have ready access to most or all of the ingredients that they were asked to supply.
- Just over-one half of teachers reported that no advice was offered to families on how to source the ingredients that they were required to provide. Only one-in-five offered advice on where to source ingredients cheaply.
- One-third of teachers reported that their school had increased the amount of financial contribution required of families for 2022/23 school year.

Access to food education

- Most teachers perceived that cost was a barrier to accessing food education, although this was much more common outside of Scotland (thrice as many in the rest of the UK considered cost to be a barrier to participation).
- Access to food education varies across the four UK nations, options particularly limited in England and Wales. A much wider range of options being presented in Scotland, and more schools in Scotland reported to offer what is available to pupils. Respondents from Northern Ireland reported widespread access to advanced level qualifications.
- Interesting patterns of access to food education were reported in England, with less access to GCSE reported in schools with a higher proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds, and in smaller schools.
- Those schools in Scotland with a higher proportion of pupils from more disadvantaged backgrounds were more likely to report that pupils could access lower-level qualifications (National 3). However, small schools were less likely to offer access to the Higher (AS equivalent) in Health and Food Technology: there was also some evidence to suggest that schools with a high attendance and a high proportion of S5/S6 pupils among the school population were *less* likely to offer pupils the opportunity to present for this Higher.
- Teachers in Scotland were twice as likely as those from the rest of the UK to perceive that pupils who are entitled to free school meals were “more likely” to choose food education as one of their subject choices.

Need to bring back A level. Will not be taken seriously until then.

Home Economics is viewed as a "dumping" ground for pupils who can't take other subjects, just we are expected to get them Nat 5s. The exams are Practical Cookery are mental, it is becoming an English course rather than a practical subject.

It is frustrating when it comes to pupils' options as our subject is often up against other subjects like PE or some of the sciences so we either get pupils who would like to choose the subject but can't because they are told to pick a more 'academic' subject or the ones that don't want to do anything else in the column. In S3 last year we could have had x 4 Practical Cookery classes instead of the 2 we have and the 2 that we have a lot of the pupils did not pick it as their first choice and the ones that did pick it as the first choice (if they are deemed to be more academic) are advised not to take it so we end up with a class that don't really want to be there and a lot of pupils disappointed. It is the system that is unfair and the way the subject is viewed as a whole.

Highly variable asks

- There is much variation among those schools in England, Wales and Northern Ireland which ask families to make a financial contribution toward the cost of food education. Payments by class ranged from 50p to £4; payments by rotation ranged from £1 to £20; payments by term ranged from £2 to £30; and annual payments ranged from £2 to £60, with annual costs typically around £15.

The work of sourcing ingredients for school education

- No single approach to sourcing ingredients for food education prevailed across the UK.
- Teachers reported being able to exercise discretion on where to purchase ingredients, although for one-quarter of teachers this required them to expend their own money before claiming back what they have spent.
- Most teachers reported shopping for ingredients for food education, with two-fifths reporting that this was a frequent occurrence (either ‘all the time’ or ‘often’).
- Most teachers reported that neither were travel costs reimbursed, nor was time spent sourcing ingredients counted as hours worked.

Technician support

- Most schools had technician support, although only two-fifths of respondents reported that they had enough technician support.
- The lack of technician support was reported to have an adverse impact on food education. Almost all acknowledged that this increased teachers' workload, with a significant minority also noting that lessons had to be adapted, the quality of lessons decreased, and the workload for other technicians increased.
- Most respondents report that pressures on food education staff have intensified this school year, with more time spent sourcing ingredients, a shortage of teachers, and increased demands on technician's time. More respondents from Scotland perceived a shortage of teachers, particularly those from schools with a higher proportion of minority ethnic groups among the pupil population.
- In both England and Scotland, less technician support was available in smaller schools.
- In Scotland, teachers from schools serving more disadvantaged communities were much less likely to report that they had enough technician support.
- Schools in Scotland were more likely than those from the rest of the UK to report that the lack of technician support was diminishing the quality of lessons, with those from smaller schools and schools serving more disadvantaged populations being particularly likely to express concern over the impact on lesson quality.

The lacking technical support has a big impact on recruiting and retaining teachers.

After very long time campaigning, we finally got a technology technician for 16 hrs last week. He did 2 days....amounted to 2 hrs in food then complained that while He was OK with dt and art jobs he didn't like cleaning out equipment and wasn't prepared to work in food. So unbelievable! Head of faculty agreed to him working just art and DT so we are totally stuffed. Cross is an understatement .

Food education in times of rising living costs

- In most schools it was reported that the budget for sourcing ingredients had not increased in the current school year (2022-23). Furthermore, in the majority of cases where it had increased, the budget was reported to have increased below the rate of food inflation.
- Schools in Scotland were more likely than those in the rest of the UK to have increased the budget for ingredients in the current school year, although most were not increasing the budget to match food inflation.
- Most practitioners reported changes to classroom practice in the current school year. These changes accommodated the circumstances which schools and families are encountering (for example, adapting recipes to make them more affordable). However, some changes were reducing the quality of the educational experience (for example, one-quarter reported more cooking in pairs).
- Many practitioners noticed increases in indicators of need among children attending Food Education, with most observing that more children are eating the food prepared in class immediately after class.
- One-half of all teachers in Scotland observed that more children are now appearing hungry in class, with significantly higher rates in schools with a higher proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.
- Elsewhere in the UK, three-quarters of those in schools where pupils were required to bring ingredients to class, reported that problems related to this had increased in the current school year. Similar findings were reported by teachers in schools where pupils were required to make a financial contribution.
- Most practitioners also express concern that the current challenges are having hidden consequences with most expressing concern that equipment is not being replaced and that difficulties are being faced supporting wider education, such as extra-curricular clubs. Expressed concerns were slightly higher among teachers in Scotland, with some evidence that supporting extra-curricular clubs was more of a challenge in schools with a higher proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds.

It is becoming increasingly difficult if not impossible to get equipment repaired or serviced, the food budget is inadequate and is often supplemented by staff without reimbursement - again this is becoming more difficult as strain on personal budget increases

Food education and food insecurity

- Most agreed that food education should have closer links with social subjects to explore food insecurity as a cross-curricular issue.
- Interestingly, there was slightly less support for this in Scotland (albeit with a majority still in favour of it), despite there being a stronger rationale for cross-curricular education in Scotland with its Curriculum for Excellence. On the other hand, schools in Scotland which had a higher proportion of pupils from disadvantaged backgrounds were as likely to schools in the rest of the UK to support closer links.
- Most practitioners opined that food education should contribute to tackling food insecurity, with a clear majority strongly agreeing that it should.
- Most practitioners opined that food education actually contributes to tackling food insecurity, although more considered that it made 'a little' contribution rather than 'a lot'.
- A wide range of actions were reported to describe the ways in which food education could contribute to tackling food insecurity. Some of these had almost universal appeal (e.g., teaching how to cook on a budget), while others appealed to the majority (e.g., teaching about levels of food insecurity), and others only by a minority (e.g., teaching about community pantries).
- In Scotland, there was some evidence to suggest that support for specific actions to tackle food insecurity through food education (teaching about food insecurity and teaching about community pantries) was strongest in schools serving a higher proportion of pupils from disadvantaged areas.

Teaching about food banks can be a highly emotional topic when we know students families may rely on them. We have quite a high number of PP and even run a school based one. Ofsted also insist we are non-political and so guidance on how to explain why we need them, without creating a further sense of shame for those that do use them would be helpful.

A big shift in the focus for HE was the introduction of Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland where Health and well-being was given equal importance as numeracy and literacy in schools. We need to make sure as HE teachers that we continue to grasp the importance of the HWB aspects and ensure that as HE teachers we 'fight' to ensure we are not marginalised or pushed aside in favour of the more traditional curriculum subjects.

We struggle with time allocation as we are on a carousel system. We would love to be able to teach about food budgeting, food banks, etc but we are so squeezed for time.

How do we think others view food education?

- Most practitioners perceive that others think that food education is 'important, but less important than other subjects'.
- Practitioners believe that support for food education is strongest among pupils and senior management in their school, with parents/guardians valuing it more highly than those in wider society and other teachers in their school.
- There was a stronger belief in Scotland that senior management was supportive of food education, particularly in schools with a low proportion of S5/S6 pupils among the pupil population.

All pupils enjoy the subject, very little disruptive behaviour in lessons compared to other curriculum areas.

Comments have also been made by SLT members that nutrition teaching isn't important as we are in an affluent area, that food lesson structures should resemble a cooking show and that we aren't part of the National curriculum so not to worry. There is very little to no understanding of what food education is beyond those staff who have worked with the department

Next Steps to Consider

- 1. Campaign for cost free food education.** The research demonstrates strong support for cost free food education across the UK, with most practitioners opining it should be free, and that cost was a barrier to participation. Support is found throughout the UK but is strongest in Scotland where the Scottish Government has already committed funds to local government to enable core curriculum charges for food education to be waived.
- 2. Campaign for an extended period of compulsory food education.** The research demonstrates strong support for providing pupils with access to food education for more of their school education. There is a perception among teachers of food education that the subject is valued by other stakeholders.
- 3. The need for national conversations of food education.** Notwithstanding UK-wide support for cost free food education, there is significant variation across the UK, which suggests the need for national conversations to explore the UK-wide issues raised in this report, and those aspects of food education that are more pertinent to that nation. For example:
 - a. Northern Ireland.** It would be interesting to explore why there appears to be stronger support in Northern Ireland for parental contributions to food education, relative to other parts of the UK.
 - b. Scotland.** It would be interesting to explore why – with a Curriculum for Excellence that values inter-disciplinary learning – there is less support for food education to work more closely with social subjects to better understand food insecurity issues.
 - c. England.** It would be interesting to explore why smaller schools and schools with more disadvantaged pupils appear to offer more progressive approaches to some key aspects of access to food education.
 - d. Wales.** It would be interesting to explore the prospects for a wider range of options for food education being made available to pupils (also applies to England).
- 4. Hidden cost of food education.** Providing ingredients, equipment and accessories are hidden costs. It would be useful to better understand the total cost to families of food education across the UK, and to reflect on whether these asks are reasonable and just.
- 5. Promoting exemptions.** Although a range of exemptions are used to ensure that disadvantaged families have access to food education, there is evidence that these are not being promoted to parents: this could be rectified.
- 6. Share practice in response to non-provision.** A wide range of responses were reported when pupils did not provide ingredients, payments, equipment, and accessories, which were asked of them. Some of these were punitive, others were grounded in inclusive principles to access food education. It would be useful to raise awareness of the wide range of ways in which schools are responding to this issue, and to work toward some agreed principles to achieve equity.
- 7. Increasing hardships.** There was strong evidence from all four UK nations that the hardships experienced by families in the cost-of-living crisis of 2022-23 were impacting on pupils' experiences of food education. There is a need to reflect on how schools should respond, and the extent to which food education should adapt practices.
- 8. Technician support.** There is a need to reflect on the problems that were reported over a lack of technician support. There is a need to focus on the implications in smaller schools, where a lack of support was most evident.
- 9. Disinvestment.** It was reported that there was a lack of investment in equipment and facilities for food education in the current school year. There is a need to reflect on the longer-term consequences if there is under-investment in food education.
- 10. Connecting to wider issues.** There is support for promoting an understanding of the wider role of food in a healthy society, exploring how food education might be aligned to physical education to promote well-being, and to social subjects to promote a better understanding of food insecurity. The prospects for aligning food education to these wider issues – and other such as sustainability and community wealth-building – should be explored.