



Transforming UK Food Systems Conference, 23-24 March 2026



#TUKFS26

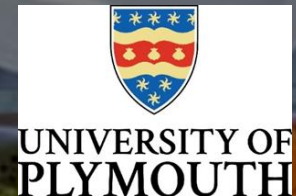




English School Food Provision as a public service at risk: exploring emerging economic and structural challenges and their implications for food system transformation

Clare Pettinger; Lucy
Michaels;

Gavin Fletcher; Brad Pearce



Workshop outline



Introduction & Framing (Clare & Lucy) 5mins

TUKFS project presentations – BeanMeals & FoodSEqual (20mins)

Gavin Fletcher (Good Food Leics) 10mins

Brad Pearce (CATERed/School Food People) 10mins

Facilitated table-top discussions (45mins)

Framing – how this workshop came about

- Economic & Structural challenges
- English School Food Provision as a Neoliberal experiment
- Financial instability & consequences for TUKFS projects
- School food – system change or system stalemate?
- **THE SUMS DON'T ADD UP!**

English School Food Provision as a Neoliberal experiment




- 1980 Education Act**
 - Removed obligation to provide school meals
 - Encouraged packed lunches
- 1988 Local Government Act**
 - Compulsory competitive tendering
 - Introduced private caterers, outside local authority influence
 - Not a level playing field in terms of competition.

England shifted to **market-oriented school food provision** – “Lowest cost masquerading as best value” (Kevin Morgan)


- 2000 Academisation**
 - Academies outside of local authority oversight
 - Rise of Multi-Academy Trust tenders

Financial instability & TUKFS project consequences...??

PFF CLD with caption




THE CATERED FEEDING AMBITIONS



School food – system change or system stalemate?

Prize	Problem
Public spend for public good	Not enough money in school food system
Support for local economies	AND lack of level playing field
Stimulate system change	AND lack of capacity/skills
Develop trusted system partnerships	Combination of stressed systems



Public Health in Leicestershire

Funding

Disparity across the country



THE SUMS DON'T ADD UP!

THE SCHOOL FOOD people



BeanMeals: What the beans taught us about English school food provision



BeanMeals

Thinking beyond the can

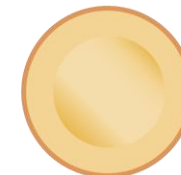


BeanMeals: Public Procurement & the Potential for Sustainable School Food in England

Lucy Michaels (University of Hertfordshire)

Lisa Didier (University of Liverpool)

24th March 2026 TUKFS Annual Conference, Birmingham



BeanMeals: Thinking Beyond the Can

TUKFS Project (2022- 2024)

Aim:

Develop & analyse systemic innovations to improve dietary health with lower environmental impact using UK-grown beans.

Premise:

Public procurement as lever for dietary & agricultural change.

Key question:

Can English school meals provide a reliable market for UK-grown pulses?



Potential for transformational change via public procurement

Local farmers → local authority procurement -> school caterers -> children's bellies

- Guaranteed markets for farmers
- Increase pulse consumption
- Shorten supply chains
- Create stronger relationships between growers, caterers and schools.



Introducing UK beans into English school meals

- Two local authority partners
 - Leicester
 - Leicestershire
- Local authority caterers
 - City Catering
 - Leicestershire Traded Services (LTS)
- Soil Association Food for Life Commissions
- Beans on school menus for 4 months
- Study included:
 - Acceptability of bean meals
 - Policy and procurement context

BeanMeals work with local authority caterers

Relationship-Based Approach

Training & Engagement with School Caterers

Menu Review & Practical Skills

Ongoing Support

Menu Adaptation

Scaling Potential



Barriers to scaling UK pulses via English school food procurement

- Stakeholder interviews (n=31)

Key finding:

- The English school food procurement system **is not well positioned** to scale UK-grown pulses through school meals

Why?

- Supply requirements favour large, established suppliers
- Broader structural constraints.



Immediate institutional and Governance Challenges for English School Food

English School Food Standards

- Only binding standards for school food (2015)
- No requirement to include pulses – 2026 update?
- Widely reported non-compliance – no provision for monitoring, enforcement

School food system under pressure post COVID

- Chronic **underinvestment** in school meals
- Inflation, food price volatility
- Supply chain disruption (Brexit, climate etc)
- Workforce wage increases (Leicester)
- Falling uptake post-COVID

Local authority capacity eroded

- Legacy of **austerity**
 - LAs have sustained school food service, but cash-strapped
 - Leicester City Council ended Food for Life Commission (2023) and closed City Catering (2024)

English School Food Provision as a Neoliberal experiment

1980 Education Act

- Removed obligation to provide school meals
- Encouraged packed lunches

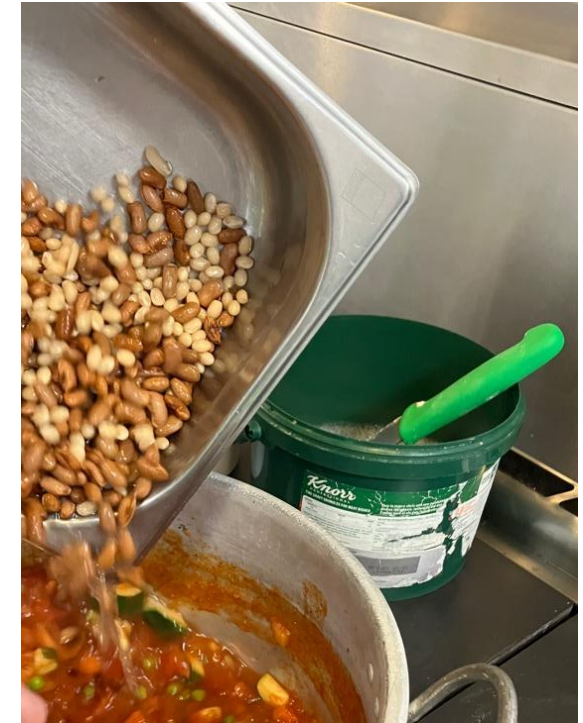
1988 Local Government Act

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2000 Academisation

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When Beans meets the Bean Counters

- Strong interest in UK grown beans
- But system incentives leading elsewhere

Result

School food is shifting from **public service**
(food valued for its multiple social benefits)

→ to **market service**
(food solely treated as a low-cost commodity)

Key question “If public sector caterers disappear, what **policies, institutions, oversight** is needed to ensure school food remains a public service?”





Michaels, L., & Barling, D. (2025). School meal nutrition and procurement policies in England: governance variability and innovation in implementation settings. *Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems*, 9, Article 10.3389/fsufs.2025.1643788.

Ingram, J., Barling, D., Bayes, N., Cottee, J., Dickinson, A., Hardman, C., Holub, E., Jones, K., Ledley, C., Maguire, R., **Michaels, L.**, Midgley, G., Rajagopalan, R., Zhang, J., & Zurek, M. (2025). Fork to farm: reverse engineering a food system. *Philosophical Transactions B: Biological Sciences*, 380(1935), Article 20240158. <https://doi.org/10.1098/rstb.2024.0158>



Environmental Change Institute



Leicester City Council



Leicestershire County Council

University of Hertfordshire UH

Joanne Craven
Serious gaming and research communication

What is the Plymouth Fish Finger?

Small-scale exploratory 'social innovation' case study

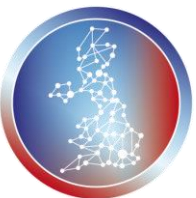
Product

- co-designed (with schools)
- healthy & sustainable
- makes use of under-utilised/under-valued fish species
- procured by small-boat fishers
- processed locally
- enters school food system

Process

- collaborative multi-stakeholder (transdisciplinary) team
- exploring creative participatory mixed methods (eg PAR; co-production)

forcing dynamic dialogue, change of mindset & supply chain disruption



**TRANSFORMING
UK FOOD
SYSTEMS**
Strategic Priorities Fund



Hunt et al (2026) <https://iopscience.iop.org/article/10.1088/2976-601X/ae1f1c>



Pre-innovation: Community (fish) workshops - intelligence

- **Our local (less affluent) community said they want:**
 - better access to affordable fresh locally procured fish
 - more education on different fish species and how to prepare/cook them
 - closer links with the people working on fish supply chains
 - their voices to be heard by fish policy makers to prioritise system change

The community wants these things because they have learnt (via FoodSEqual) that their ‘food system’ is not fit for purpose. They appreciate that imbalances contribute to **health inequalities**. The communities want

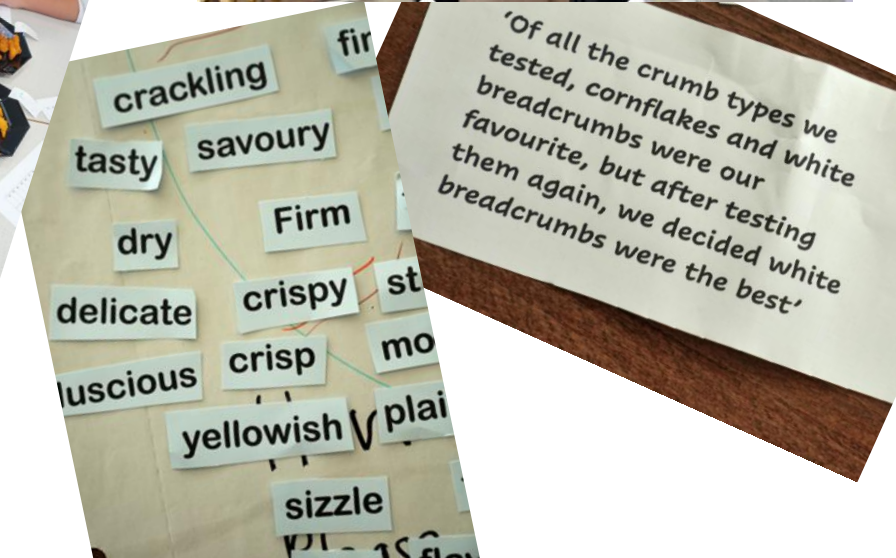


Our 'food systems vision' is to provide citizens of socio-culturally diverse disadvantaged communities with choice and agency over the food they consume, by co-developing:

- i. new products
- ii. new supply chains
- iii. new policy frameworks that deliver affordable, attractive, healthy & sustainable diets.

i. Product development (innovation)

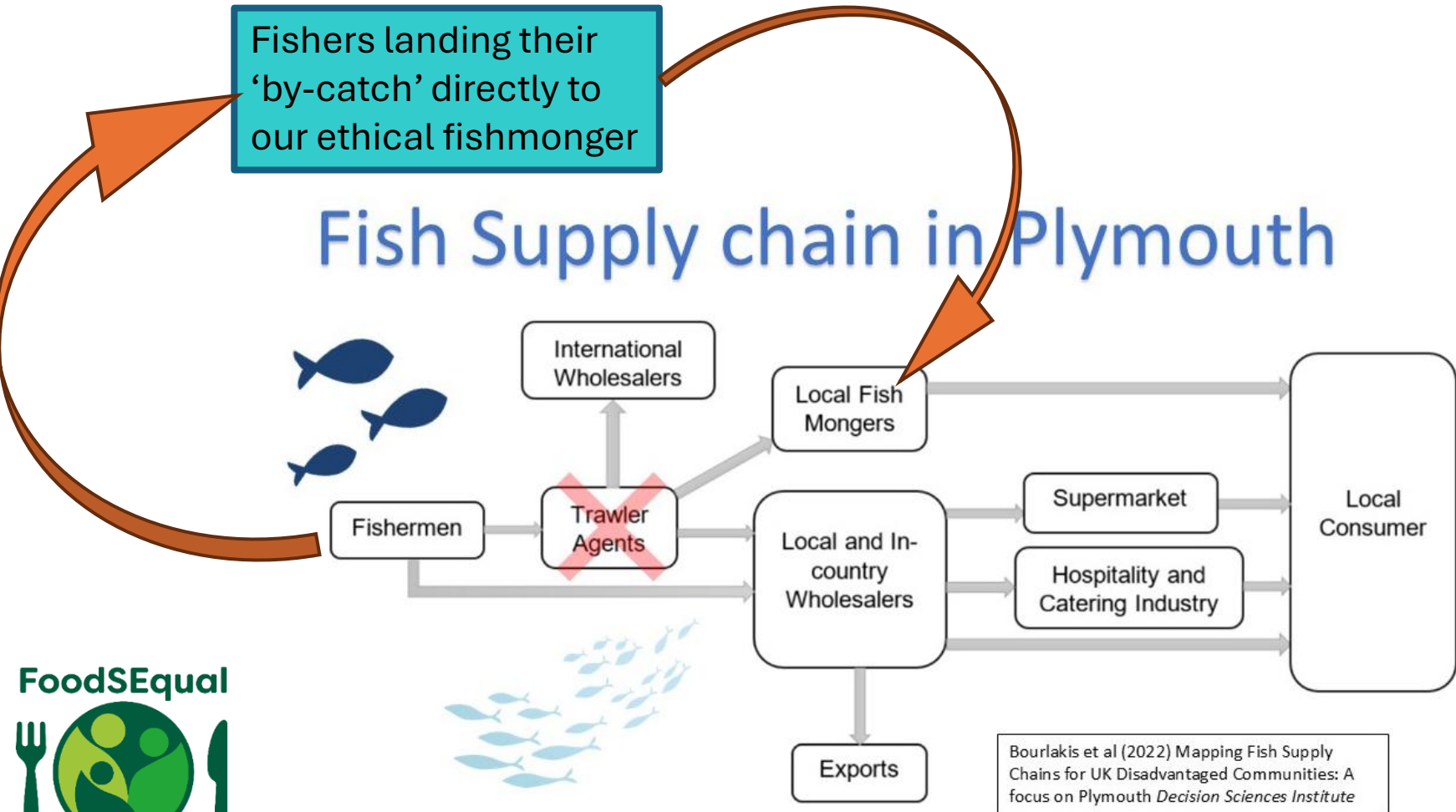
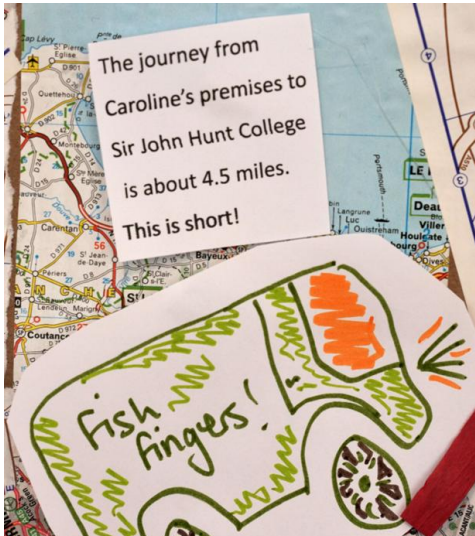
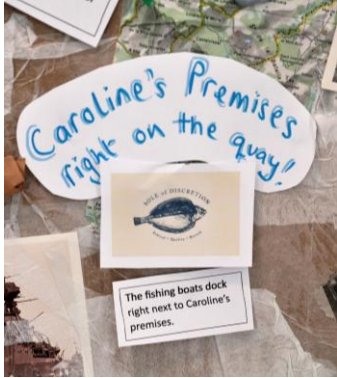
- Co-design (n=12 secondary school students)
- Community taste test event (n=25)
- Pop up educational sessions (n=5 primary schools; n=88 pupils)
- Lots of playing & experimenting!



ii. Supply chain innovation (disruption)

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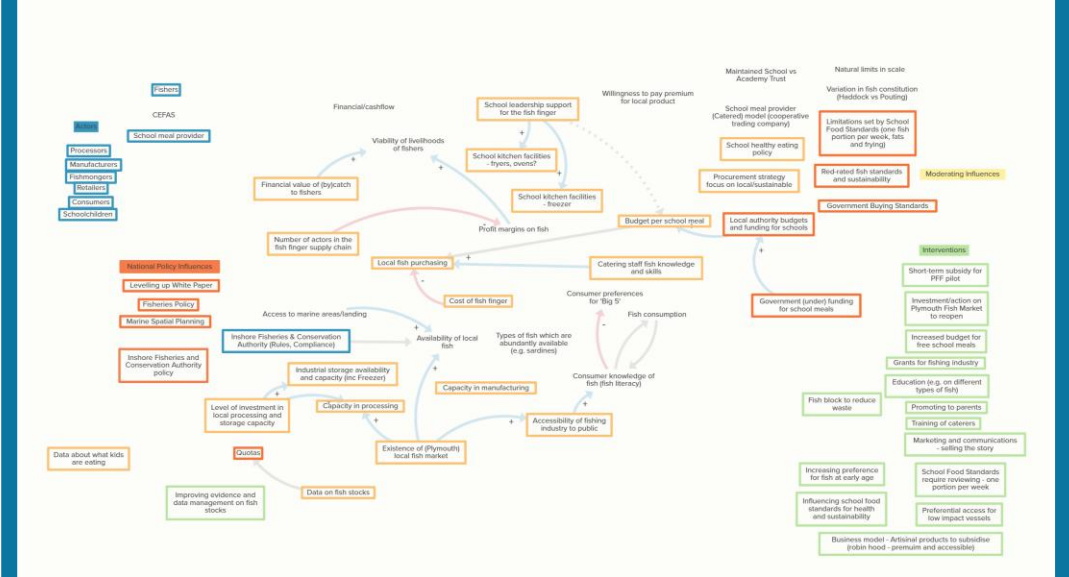
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- ii. **new supply chains**
- iii. **new policy frameworks** that deliver affordable, attractive, healthy & sustainable diets.

iii. Policy innovation

Fish finger Policy & Practice workshop(s) (n=15 participants) July 2024 & June 2025



- Pledges made by each participant
- Causal loop map co-created (& validated) to identify leverage points for system action/change (interventions)



Legend
 — Adds to / same direction
 — Subtracts from / opposite direction

Pettinger et al (2026 – in press)

PFF CLD with caption

T3. Economic Viability

T4. Social Innovation & Trust

T2. Supply Chain constraints

T1: Demand generation

T5. Nutritional Guidance

- Themes in CLD:**
- 1. Demand Generation
 - 2. Supply Chain Constraints
 - 3. Economic Viability
 - 4. Social Innovation & Trust
 - 5. Nutritional Guidance
 - 6. Unintended negative consequence

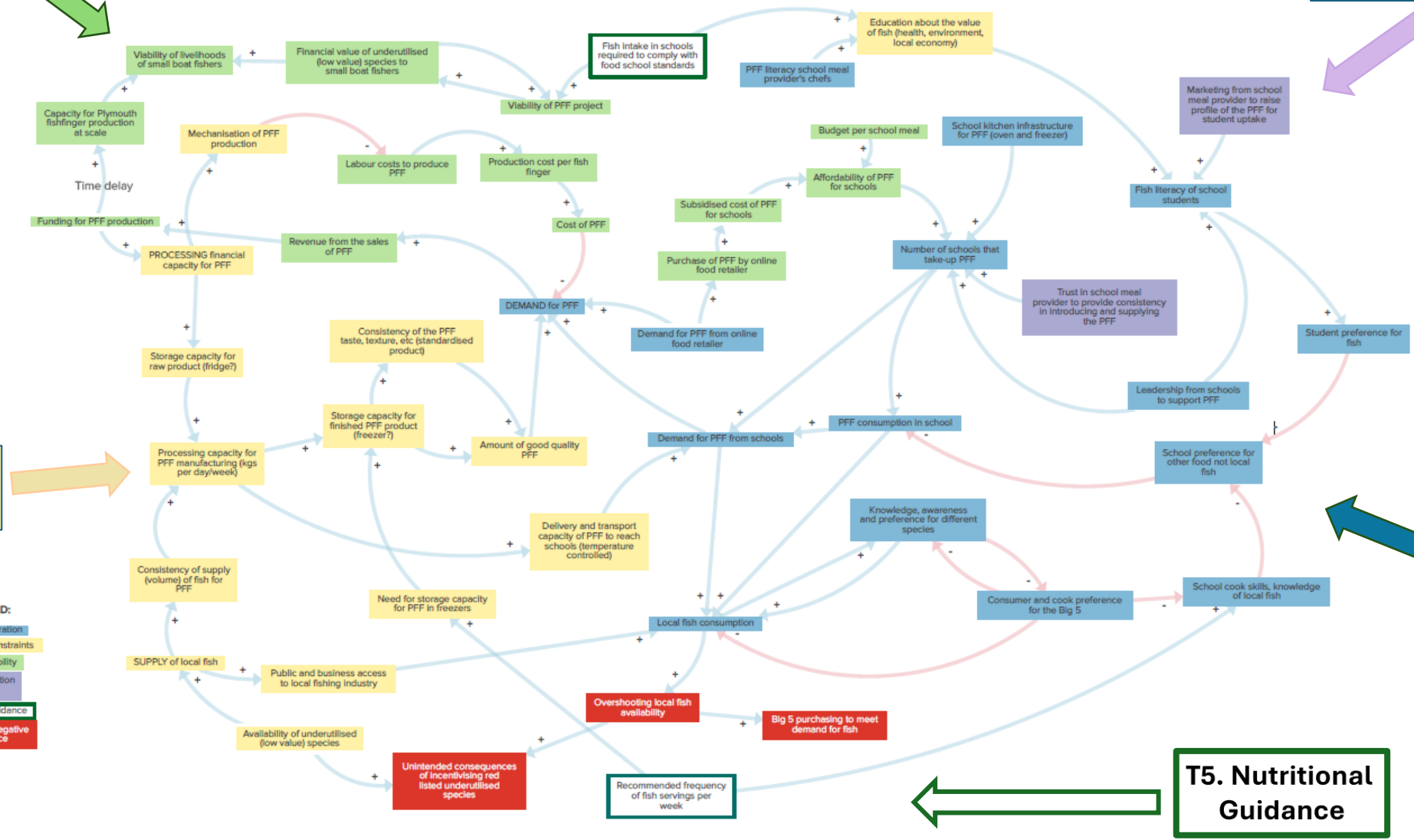


Figure 4. Overview of the System Map.

This diagram presents the stakeholder-generated causal loop diagram (CLD) illustrating the social, economic, environmental, and logistical factors influencing whether locally caught fish can be retained within the Plymouth supply chain and incorporated into school meals.

Variables are grouped into six colour-coded themes: Demand Generation, Supply Chain Constraints, Economic Viability, Social Innovation and Trust, Nutritional Guidance, and Unintended Negative Consequences.

Legend Arrows indicate causal influences, with "+" denoting same-direction change and "-" denoting opposite-direction change. The map reflects collective insights from policy, practice, and industry participants and provides an integrated representation of the system dynamics surrounding the PFF initiative.

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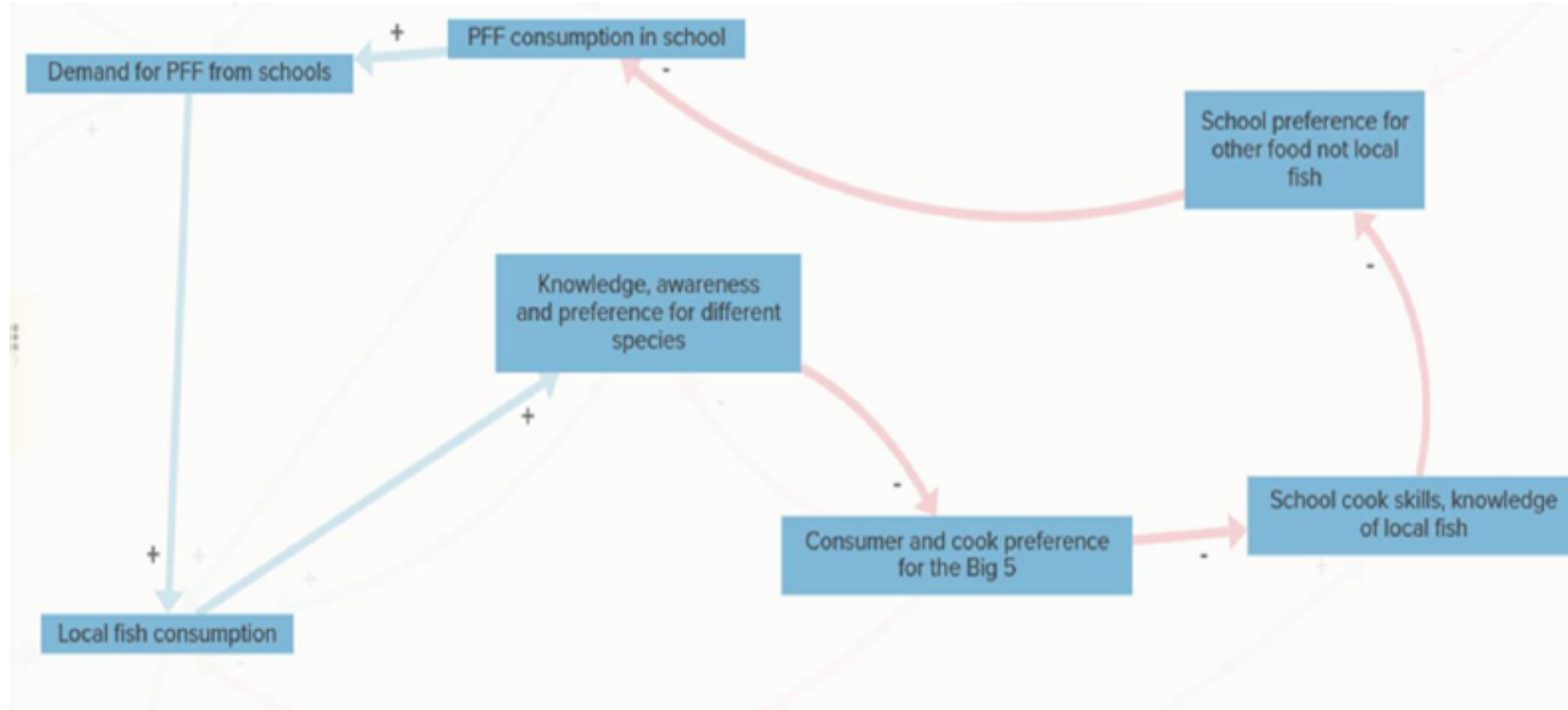
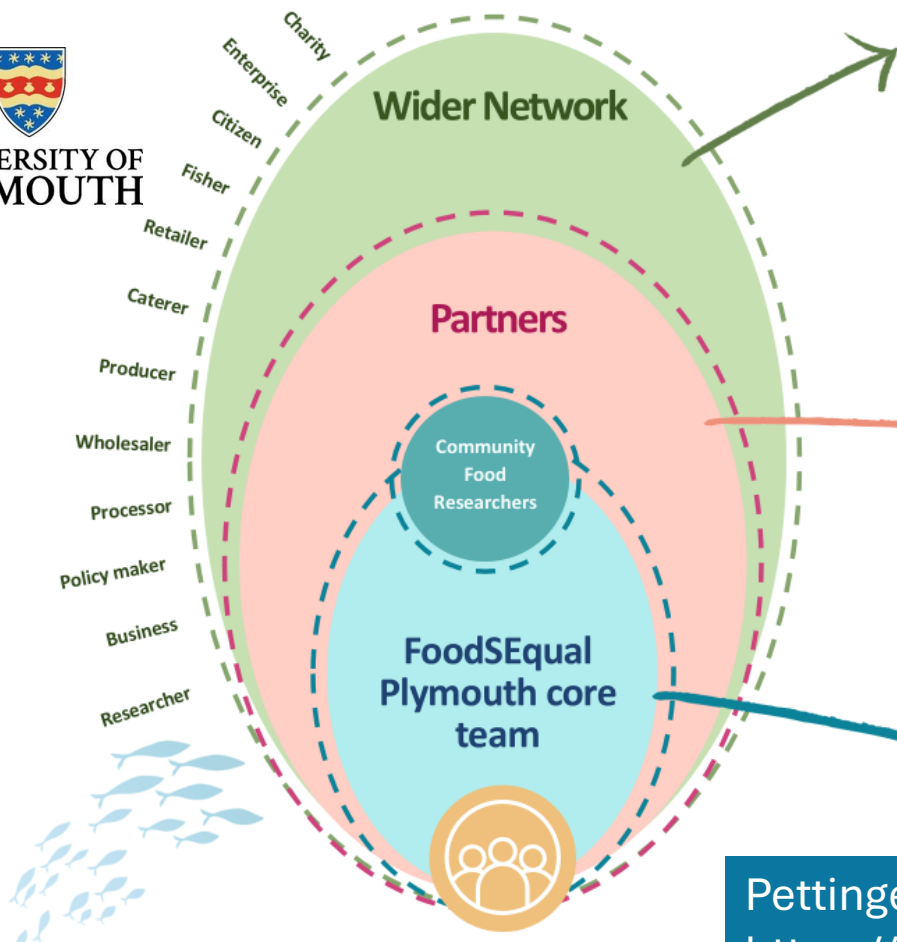


Figure 5. Demand-viability loop This feedback loop is heavily influenced by an increase in fish literacy, marketing, and school leadership which creates an awareness and enthusiasm for the PFF and is critical in maintaining the demand-viability feedback loop. As demand grows, PFF consumption rises, completing a cycle in which educational, cultural, and culinary readiness work together to support the viability of the PFF in school settings.

Collaborative processes



The Plymouth Fish Finger 'Community of Practice' (CoP)



- Marine Conservation Society (MCS)
- Marine Stewardship Council (MSC)
- Plymouth National Sound Marine Park
- Ocean Conservation Trust, Plymouth
- SeaFish
- Ocean Fish
- Prospect Brixham CIC
- Food Policy consultants
- The Fishmongers company
- OceanFish (Newlyn, Cornwall)
- Fishers
- DEFRA
- Fisheries APPG

- Partners:**
- Sole of Discretion CIC
 - Plymouth Fishing & Seafood Association CIC (PFSA)
 - CaterEd (Plymouth school meal provider)
 - Food Plymouth CIC
 - Local schools (1 secondary; 5 primary for pilot)

- PI: Dr Clare Pettinger (CP)
- RF: Dr Louise Hunt
- RA: Paridhi Garg



Pettinger et al (2026)
<https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/41496697/>

School meal provider



CATERed
FEEDING AMBITIONS

*“From the CATERed perspective it [social innovation] fits well... our co-operative ethos means that **collaborating** fits really nicely. Doing **MORE** for schools and school food, with buy-in from students and schools - **better all round**”*

*“Not driven purely by standardised menus and costs – it is smaller, more local, with license to be **innovative**”*



Critical reflections(s) – Learning/Challenges



1. Resource intensive (time & funding)



2. Communication & language



3. Collaborative leadership
(Pettinger et al 2023)



4. Ownership & governance
(Arthur, 2020)



5. Diverse priorities between collaborators
(UNEP, FAO 2023)



6. Systems thinking
(Bergquist et al 2025)



7. Complexity & messiness
(Shaw et al 2024)



8. Power, politics and commercial interests

“Time-lines aren’t matched! Everyone has different priorities in the day-to-day work, delivery objectives / timelines don’t match amongst each of the collaborating stakeholders” (Caroline SoD) .

“The project has had its challenges. For example, the need for ‘translating’ the language and concepts of disparate stakeholders so that everyone can understand each other’s work. This has been difficult at times” (Louise RF)

Financial instability & TUKFS project consequences...??



FEEDING AMBITIONS

PFF CLD with caption

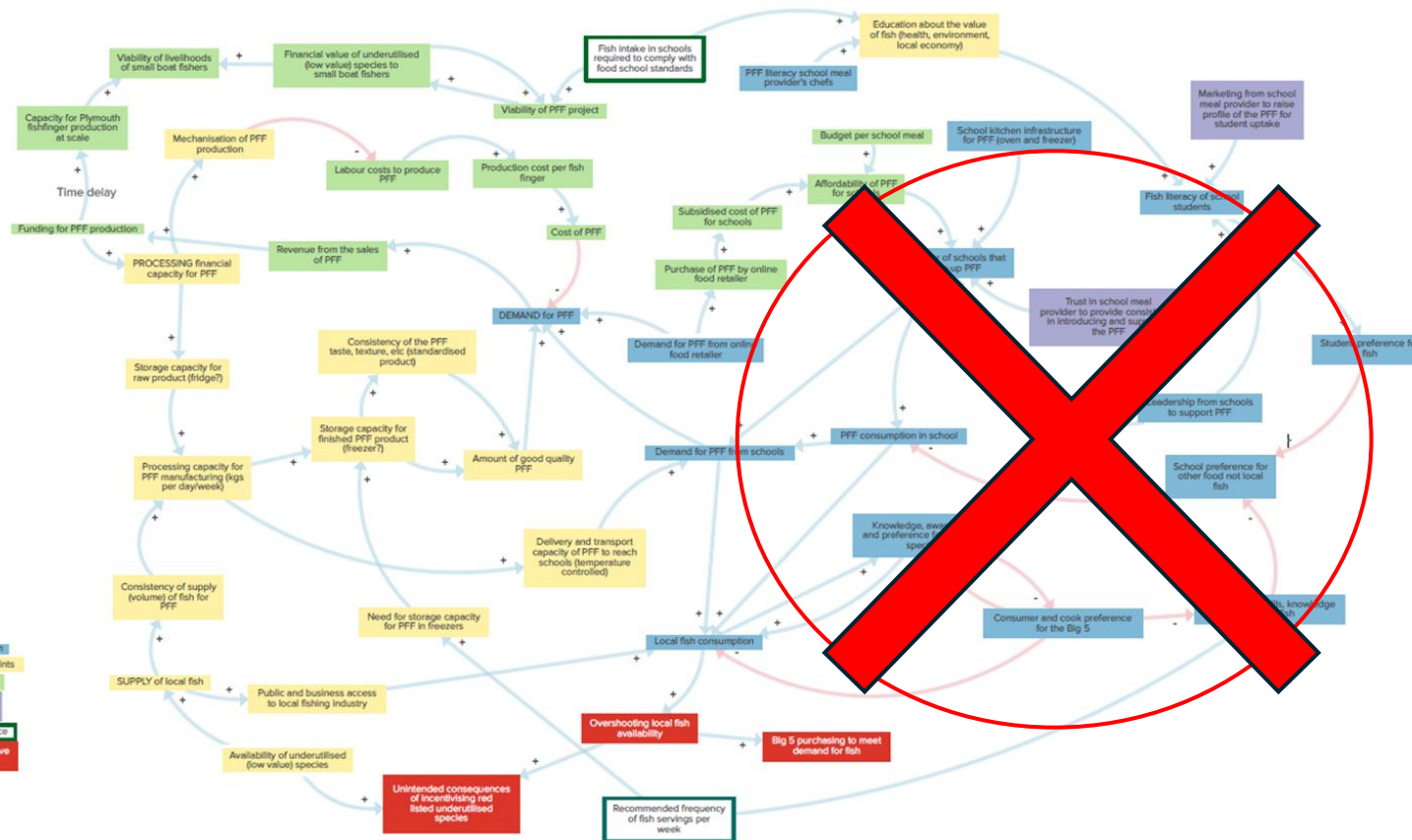


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Education caterer CATERed to cease trading in 2026

Foodservice 10 Dec 2025 11:50 by Jungmin Seo

The Plymouth City Council-backed caterer was named Education Caterer of the Year at the 2018 Foodservice Cateys



CATERed, a Foodservice Catey winner, has announced it will cease operations in 2026 as a result of the "increasingly challenging" financial climate.

The 2018 Education Caterer of the Year was founded in 2015 as a co-operative trading company jointly owned by local schools and Plymouth City Council.

Over the past decade, CATERed has been serving more than 10,000 meals a day in 59 schools.

Related content

Foodservice
Foodservice Cateys 2018: Education Caterer of the Year – CATERed

Foodservice
Foodservice Cateys 2019: CSER Award – CATERed

Foodservice
Government to expand free school meals to 500,000 more children

Foodservice
Leicestershire County Council to end school meals service



Feature
'Heartbroken': BrewDog co-founder apologises for 'many mistakes'

Most read Latest

Good Food Leicestershire



Gavin Fletcher – Sustainable Food Partnership
Coordinator, Public Health
gavin.fletcher@leics.gov.uk



PEOPLE



PROMOTE



PROTECT



PROVIDE



PARTNERSHIP



BEGINNING

Food for Life in
Schools and
Served Here



RECOGNITION

Food for Life Served
Here – Silver



PLANNING

- Food for Life Served Here – Gold (35,000 meals per day)
- Joined Sustainable Food Places
- Vegetable supply from local CSA



DISRUPTION

Covid



RESEARCH

BeanMeals
launched



COLLABORATION

Food Summit –
Procurement
focus



INNOVATION

Agreement to trial
Supply Chain+



**PLANNING
AND CHANGE**

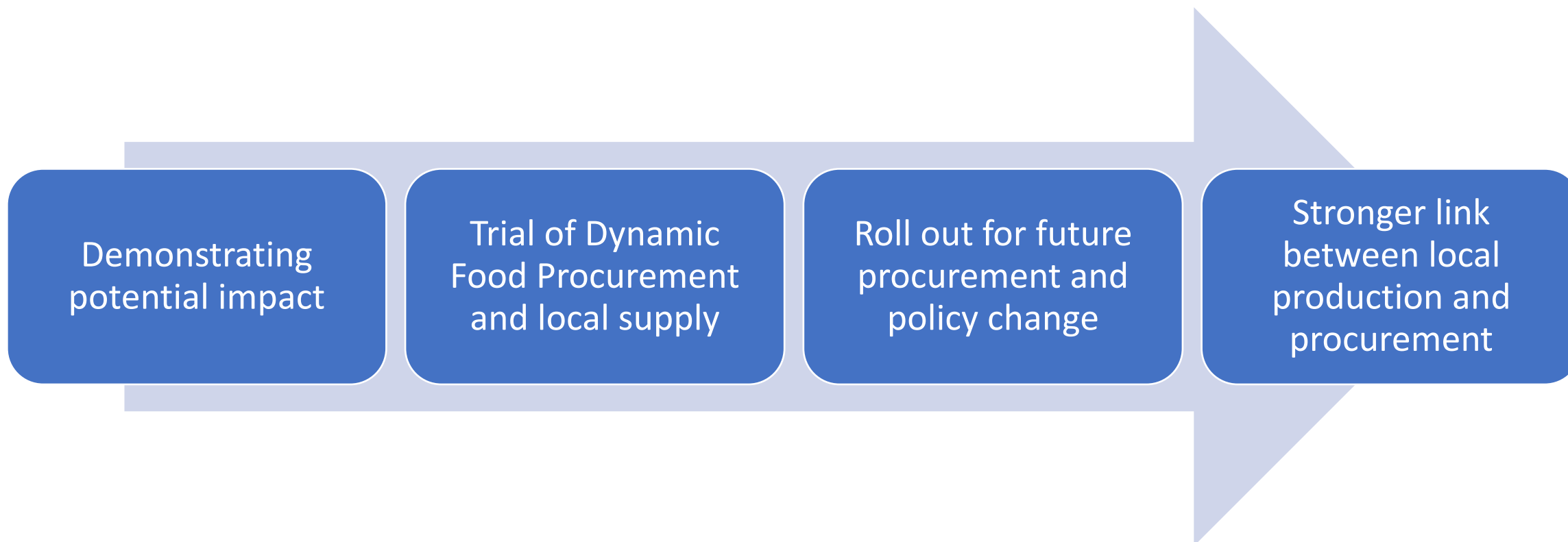
- Whole Systems Approach workshop
- Announcement of closure of School Meal service



Timeline



Sustainable Food Procurement





E.g. BeanMeals research project

Integrating UK grown pulses into school meals



One of our project aims was to test the acceptability of the beans as an unfamiliar food. Helping a range of staff who interact with pupils during the school day to better understand the benefits of the beans for both health and the environment had a positive impact on how enthusiastic the children were about trying the bean meals. Parents were also included in the research activities to help embed positive messages around healthy foods at home.

“For example, we found that ensuring good communication with the catering staff led to more creativity in how the beans were used in meals. We were really impressed at the variety of excellent meals that were served in all six schools.”



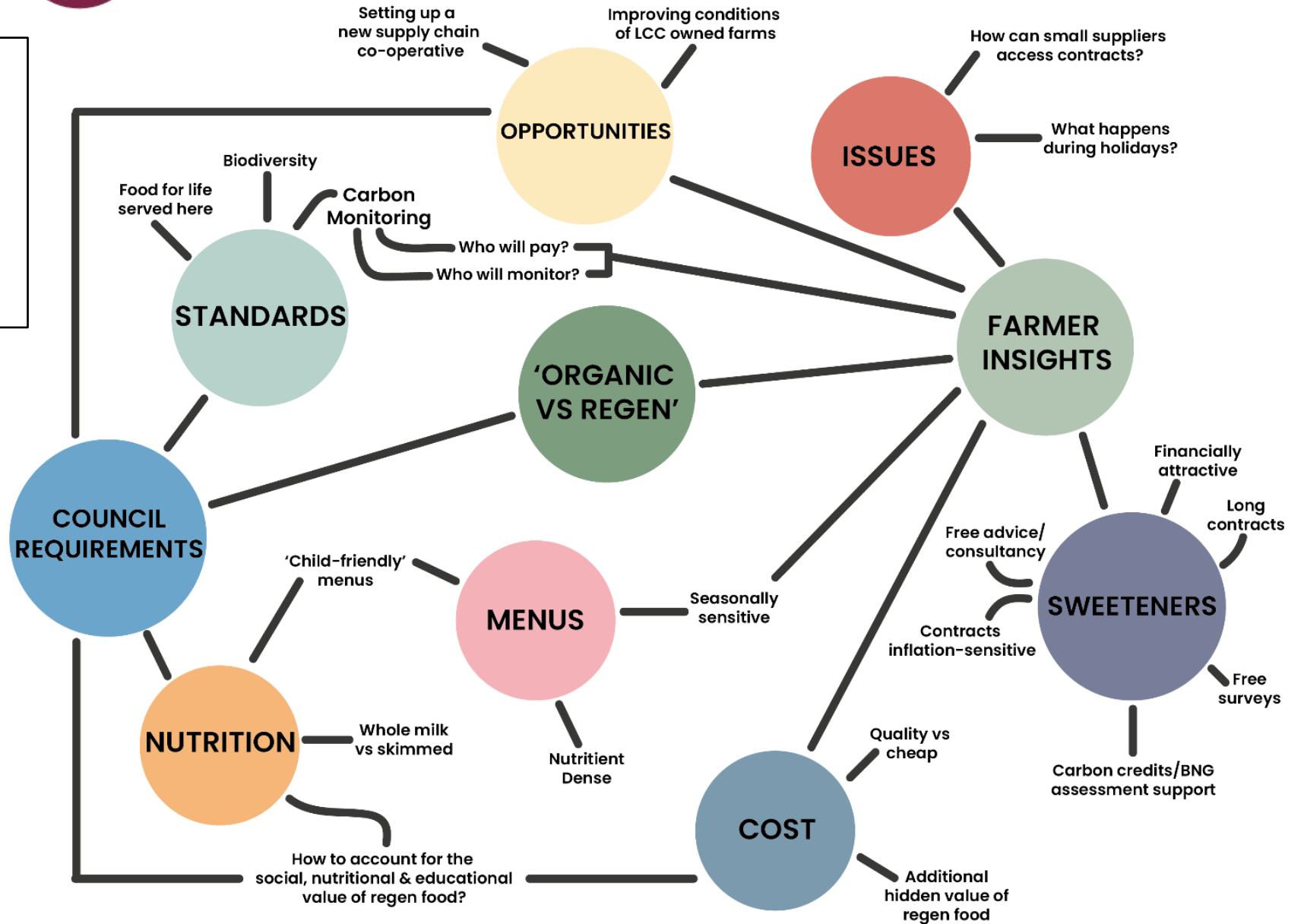


Farming and the Food Plan – understanding farming





Farming and the Food Plan – making the case for local procurement





Farming and the Food Plan – making the case for local procurement

Carbon emissions associated with ingredients

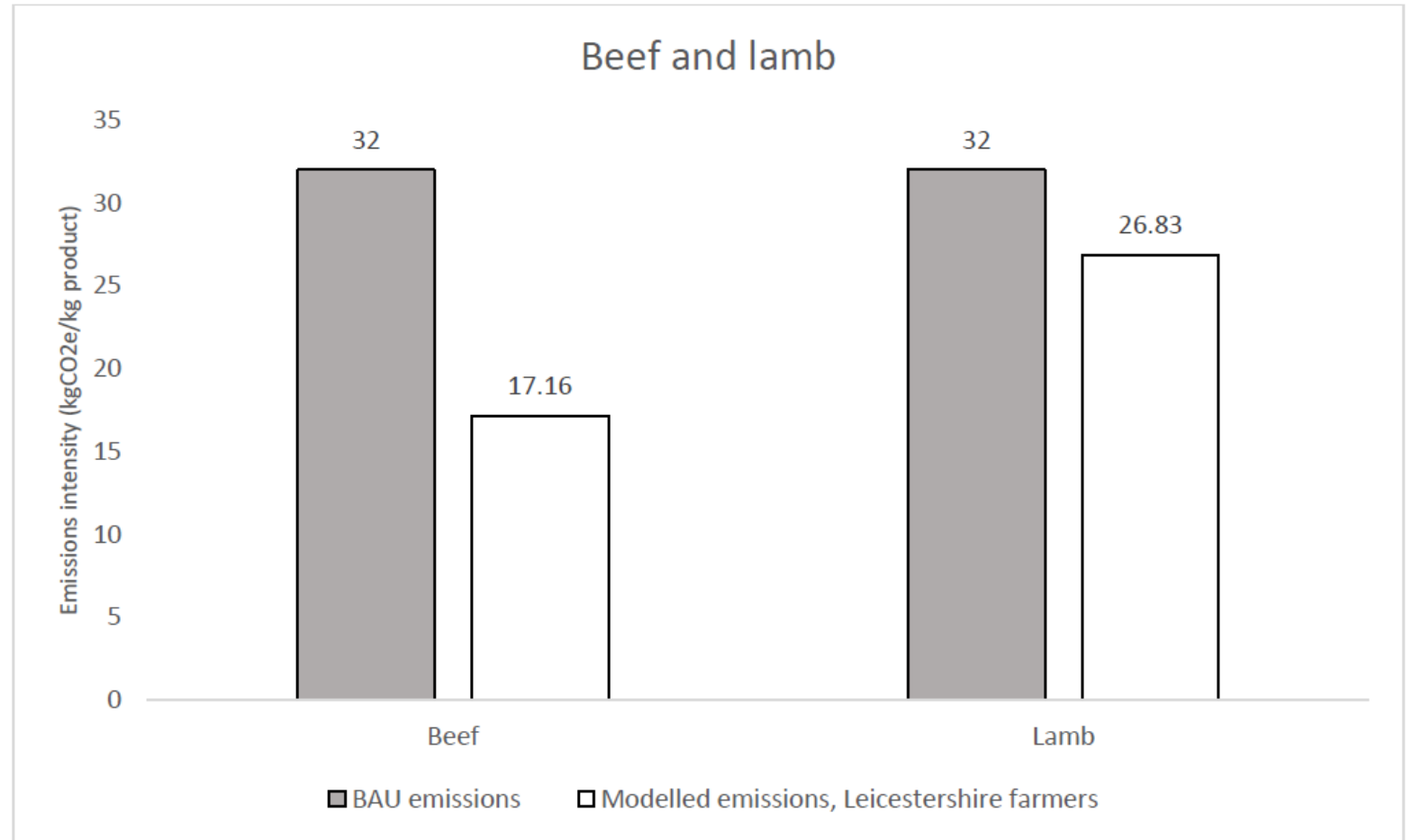


Figure 6. Comparison of emissions for BAU vs Leicestershire-produced meat



Farming and the Food Plan – links with partners -

Food and Land Use Summit

Event in partnership with University of Leicester and Leicester City Council – including DEFRA and local partners (Allerton Project)



Food and Land Use Summit

Cultivating Tomorrow: Unlocking Synergies between Land, Food, Biodiversity, and Net Zero



School food – system change or system stalemate?

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FoodSEqual, the Plymouth Fishfinger and CATERed



TUKFS
Edgbaston Park Hotel & Conference Centre
Tuesday 24 March 2026

Author: Brad Pearce



CATERed
FEEDING AMBITIONS

Who are CATERed?



Formed in 2014/15



School Food Co-operative owned by 67 schools and Plymouth City Council



Co-operative ethos – schools & academies commit budgets for school food to the business



Unique in the country



Schools wanted to do something different



Our collaboration with FoodSEqual



CATERed provides services across the majority of City infant, junior, primary and special schools providing 10,000 – 12,000 meals/day



Able to provide access to schools and Multi-academy Trusts



Worked directly with St Christopher's MAT – six primary schools



Importantly this allowed the programme to be run picking up on the MATs ethos but acknowledging the different demographics in each school



Our collaboration with FoodSEqual



Working with the senior leadership team in the MAT we identified year 5 / 6 pupils to engage with the Team



The Team produced an educational workshop session to engage pupils in the environment, food and fishing



Our staff prepared, cooked and served the fishfinger to pupils



Feedback was collected from pupils after taste-testing



Moving forward



The real benefit of the FoodSEqual Fishfinger Project was collaboration



Bringing the academic input with the food, produce, production and fishers together with frontline service and delivery direct to the customer – schools and pupils



Our intention had always been to include the fishfinger on our menus as either a “once per cycle choice” or intermittently as a theme day option





ENGLISH SCHOOL FOOD PROVISION AS A PUBLIC SERVICE AT RISK

Brad Pearce - National Chair – The School Food People



The School Food People



What we do

- Represent school food providers across England and Wales, soon to be joined by Northern Ireland. Close links to ASSIST in Scotland
- Local authority catering services
- Arms length organisations
- Commercial caterers
- Multi-academy Trusts
- In-house provision
- Single site schools
- Responsible for 3 million meals a day
- Partners and industry providers (food, ingredients, equipment etc.)



What's the requirement



Statutory duties

- Provision of free school meals is a STATUTORY DUTY which sits with a school or academy's Governing Body

In England that means: -

- Benefit-based Free School Meals
 - Where household income is less than £7,400 not including benefits
- Universal Infant Free School Meals (aged 4-7) (KS1)
- A Paid for Meal upon request

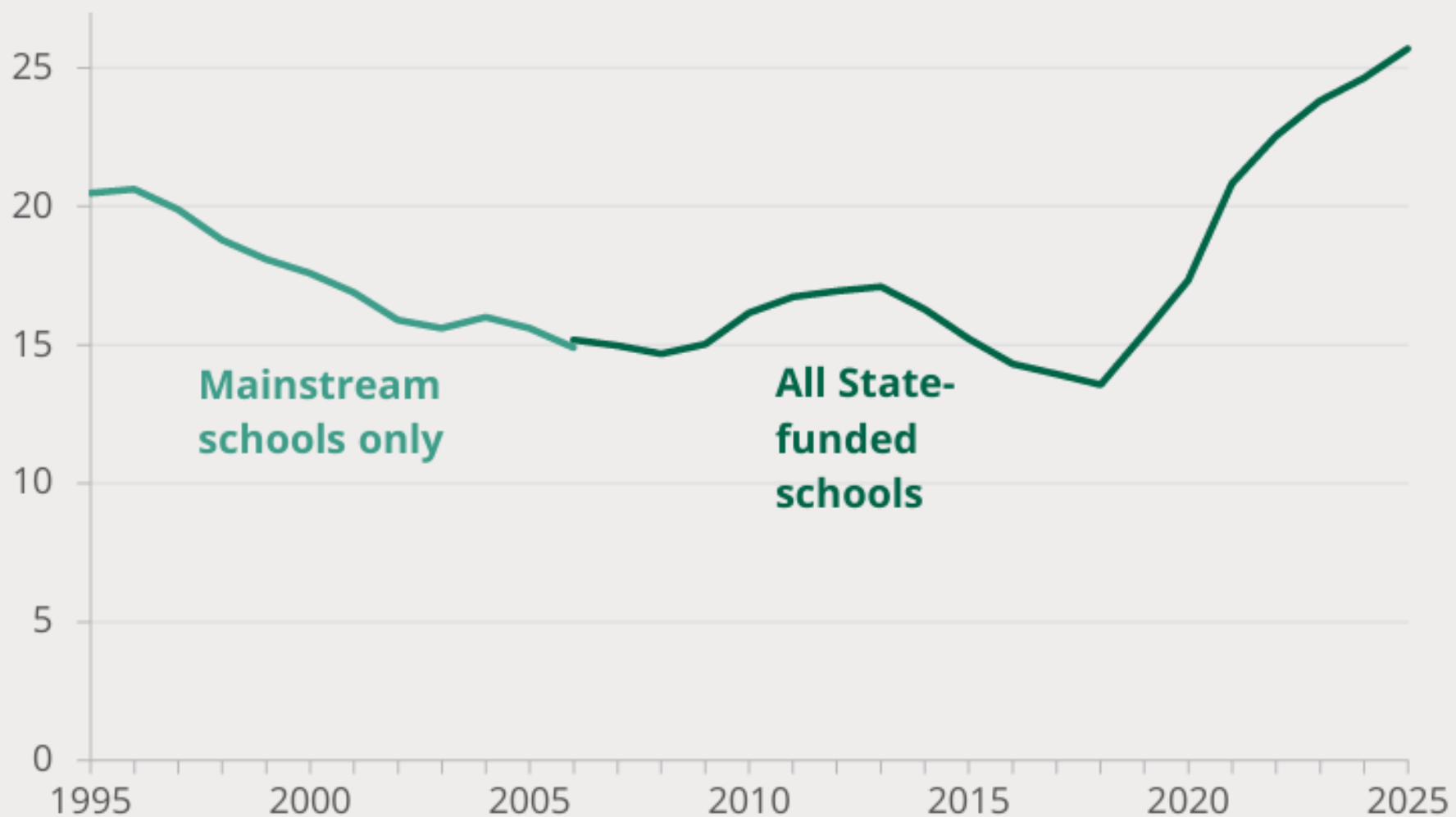
Coming up: -

- Extended-Free School Meals (September 2026) – all families in receipt of Universal Credit
 - Excludes Pupil Premium
 - Excludes Ever6



FSM eligibility rate increases to a new high in 2025

% of pupils known to be eligible, England



Note: Data includes non-maintained special schools from 2006



What's the requirement

Four Nations



What are the differences in the other nations of the UK?

- Wales – Universal Primary Provision
- Scotland – Universal Provision in Primary 1 – 5 (aged 4.5 – 9.5 years)
 - (not Primary 6 & 7)
- Northern Ireland – No universal provision
 - **BUT** Benefit-based Free School Meals eligibility threshold is a household income of £15,390 (some 52% higher than in England!)



Expectations

Mandatory School Food Standards

The standards for school lunches



Starchy foods

One or more portions of food from this group every day

Three or more different starchy foods each week

One or more wholegrain varieties of starchy food each week

Starchy food cooked in fat or oil no more than two days each week
(applies across the whole school day)

Bread - with no added fat or oil - must be available every day



Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein

A portion of food from this group every day

A portion of meat or poultry on three or more days each week

Only fish once or more every three weeks

For vegetarians, a portion of non-dairy protein on three or more days each week

A meat or poultry product (manufactured or homemade, a portion of non-dairy requirements) no more than once each week in primary schools and twice each week in secondary schools
(applies across the whole school day)

(applies across the whole school day)



Fruit and Vegetables

One or more portions of vegetables or salad as an accompaniment every day

One or more portions of fruit every day

A dessert containing at least 50% fruit two or more times each week

At least three different fruits and three different vegetables each week



Foods high in fat, sugar and salt

No more than two portions of food that have been deep-fried, batter-coated, or breadcrumb-coated, each week
(applies across the whole school day)

No more than two portions of food which include pastry each week
(applies across the whole school day)

No snacks, except nuts, seeds, vegetables and fruit with no added salt, sugar or fat
(applies across the whole school day)

Savoury crackers or breadsticks can be served at lunch with fruit or vegetables or dairy food

No confectionery, chocolate or chocolate-coated products
(applies across the whole school day)

Desserts, cakes and biscuits are allowed at lunchtime. They must not contain any confectionery

Salt must not be available to add to food after it has been cooked
(applies across the whole school day)

Any condiments must be limited to sachets or portions of no more than 10 grams or one teaspoonful
(applies across the whole school day)



Milk and dairy

A portion of food from this group every day

Lower fat milk must be available for drinking at least once a day during school hours



Healthier drinks *applies across the whole school day*

Free, fresh drinking water at all times

The only drinks permitted are:

- Plain water (still or carbonated)
- Lower fat milk or lactose reduced milk
- Fruit or vegetable juice (max 150mls)
- Plain soya, rice or oat drinks enriched with calcium; plain fermented milk (e.g. yoghurt) drinks
- Combinations of fruit or vegetable juice with plain water (still or carbonated), with no added sugars or honey
- Combinations of fruit juice and lower fat milk or plain yoghurt, plain soya, rice or oat drinks enriched with calcium; cocoa and lower fat milk; flavoured lower fat milk, all with less than 5% added sugars or honey
- Tea, coffee, hot chocolate

Combination drinks are limited to a portion size of 330mls. They may contain added vitamins or minerals, and no more than 150mls of fruit or vegetable juice. Fruit or vegetable juice combination drinks must be at least 45% fruit or vegetable juice

Standards for school food other than lunch



Fruit and Vegetables

Fruit and/or vegetables available in all school food outlets

SUGGESTIONS FOR WHAT YOU CAN SERVE

Pots of sliced/chopped fresh fruit. Fruit kebabs. Vegetable sticks with dips. Salad shaker pots.



Starchy foods

Starchy food cooked in fat or oil no more than two days each week
(applies across the whole school day)

SUGGESTIONS FOR WHAT YOU CAN SERVE

Potatoes, rice, pasta and bread (although these are restricted if cooked in fat or oil, malt loaf, or fruit bread.

Porridge is a great breakfast food. Use fruit to sweeten if necessary. Otherwise, choose fortified breakfast cereals with higher fibre and low or medium sugar content. Avoid cereals with lots of added sugar and salt.



Meat, fish, eggs, beans and other non-dairy sources of protein

A meat or poultry product (manufactured or homemade and meeting the legal requirements) no more than once each week in primary schools and twice each week in secondary schools
(applies across the whole school day)

SUGGESTIONS FOR WHAT YOU CAN SERVE

Offer a variety of sandwich/wraps/muffin fillings or toast toppings, such as eggs, ham, sliced meat, poultry, fish, canned fish, baked beans. Or serve tortillas, fajitas, burritos, quesadillas, enchiladas, omelette, Spanish omelette or fritata



Milk and dairy

Lower fat milk must be available for drinking at least once a day during school hours

SUGGESTIONS FOR WHAT YOU CAN SERVE

Choose lower fat natural (plain) yoghurt and plain lower fat fromage frais, and add fruit to sweeten



Healthier drinks *applies across the whole school day*

Free, fresh drinking water at all times

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- Plain soya, rice or oat drinks enriched with calcium; plain fermented milk (e.g. yoghurt) drinks
- Combinations of fruit or vegetable juice with plain water (still or carbonated), with no added sugars or honey
- Combinations of fruit juice and lower fat milk or plain yoghurt, plain soya, rice or oat drinks enriched with calcium; cocoa and lower fat milk; flavoured lower fat milk, all with less than 5% added sugars or honey
- Tea, coffee, hot chocolate

Combination drinks are limited to a portion size of 330mls. They may contain added vitamins or minerals, and no more than 150mls of fruit or vegetable juice. Fruit or vegetable juice combination drinks must be at least 45% fruit or vegetable juice

Many of the food-based standards apply to food served throughout the school day including breakfast, mid-morning break and after school clubs, as well as from vending machines and tuck shops. We have produced a checklist (see page 16) for schools to ensure the food and drink provision in each outlet operating in the school is compliant with the food-based standards for food other than lunch, available to download at www.schoolfoodplan.com/standards

As with the previous standards, these do not apply at parties, celebrations to mark religious or cultural occasions, or at fund-raising events.



Foods high in fat, sugar and salt

- No more than two portions of food that has been deep-fried, batter-coated, breadcrumb-coated, each week
(applies across the whole school day)
- No more than two portions of food which include pastry each week
(applies across the whole school day)
- No snacks, except nuts, seeds, vegetables and fruit with no added salt, sugar or fat
(applies across the whole school day)
- No savoury crackers or breadsticks
- No confectionery, chocolate and chocolate-coated products
(applies across the whole school day)
- No cakes, biscuits, pastries or desserts (except yoghurt or fruit-based desserts containing at least 50% fruit)
- Salt must not be available to add to food after it has been cooked
(applies across the whole school day)
- Any condiments limited to sachets or portions of no more than 10 grams or one teaspoonful
(applies across the whole school day)

SUGGESTIONS FOR WHAT YOU CAN SERVE

Remember: foods high in fat, sugar and salt are restricted or not permitted at times other than lunch



Expectations

Mandatory School Food Standards

CATERed WEEK 3

DATES: W/C: MONDAY 17TH NOV, 8TH DEC, 12TH JAN, 2ND FEB, 2ND MARCH, 23RD MARCH

MONDAY	TUESDAY	WEDNESDAY	THURSDAY	FRIDAY
<p>CHOICE 1 - H, W</p> <p>Sticky BBQ meatballs served with pasta and veg</p> <p>Allergens: Glu Wh</p>	<p>CHOICE 1 - H</p> <p>Cheese and tomato French bread pizza served with wedges and veg</p> <p>Allergens: Glu W Mi m/c So</p>	<p>All day breakfast choose from: meat or plant based served with a hash brown, beans and veg</p>	<p>CHOICE 1 - H</p> <p>Roast chicken served with roast potatoes Yorkshire pudding, veg and gravy</p> <p>Allergens: Glu Wh E Mi</p>	<p>CHOICE 1 - W</p> <p>Battered fish fillet with fresh chips or wholemeal pasta and veg</p> <p>Allergens: Glu Wh F</p>
<p>CHOICE 2 - H, W, V</p> <p>Cheesy courgette sausage with mash, veg and gravy</p> <p>Allergens: Glu Wh E Mi</p>	<p>CHOICE 2 - H, V</p> <p>Vegetable lasagne served with garlic bread and veg</p> <p>Allergens: Glu Wh Mu Mi m/c E, Bar</p>	<p>Meat option - H Allergens: Glu Wh E Mi</p> <p>Plant based option - V, VE Allergens: Glu Wh</p>	<p>CHOICE 2 - H, V, VE</p> <p>Katsu vegetable curry bake with roast potatoes and veg</p> <p>Allergens: Glu Wh</p>	<p>CHOICE 2 - W, V, VE</p> <p>Quorn dippers served with fresh chips or wholemeal pasta and veg</p> <p>Allergens: Glu Wh</p>
<p>SELECTION OF JACKET POTATOES ARE AVAILABLE EACH DAY: BEANS / CHEESE (MI) / TUNA MAYONNAISE (F E)</p> <p>HOT PANINI OR PASTA: CHOOSE FROM CHEESE & TOMATO OR HAM & TOMATO SERVED WITH TORTILLA CHIPS AND VEG, OR A HOMEMADE TOMATO SAUCE WITH PASTA</p> <p><small>(For the full allergy information, please refer to our webpage or check with your school)</small></p>				
<p>DESSERT - H, W, V, VE</p> <p>Date crispy crunch</p> <p>Allergens: Glu Wh Bar m/c Mi So</p>	<p>DESSERT - H, W, V</p> <p>Toffee and apple cake</p> <p>Allergens: Glu Wh E</p>	<p>DESSERT - H, V, VE</p> <p>Fruit platter</p>	<p>DESSERT - H, V</p> <p>Orange butter biscuits</p> <p>Allergens: Glu, Wh E</p>	<p>DESSERT - H, W, V</p> <p>Steamed jam sponge and custard</p> <p>Allergens: Glu Wh E Mi</p>
<p>AVAILABLE EVERY DAY: FRESH SALAD / FRESH FRUIT AND YOGHURT</p>				

Fresh fruit, local Westcountry yoghurt available daily. Fresh drinking water is available throughout the lunch time period. All meals served with seasonal vegetables. Chicken alternatives to beef and pork upon request. One meat free day. H = HOME-MADE IN THE KITCHEN, W = WHOLE WHEAT INGREDIENTS, VE = VEGAN DASH, V = VEGETARIAN.

Allergen Key: Gluten (Glu), Barley (Bar), Wheat (Wh), Oats (O), Rye (R), Soya (So), Sulphites (Su), Sesame (Se), Peanuts (P), Mustard (Mu), Molluscs (Mo), Milk (Mi), Nuts (N), Eggs (E), Crustaceans (C), Celery (Ce), Fish (F), Lupin (L), m/c: May Contain

= Climate Friendly

DID YOU KNOW
You can have mixed or brown rice instead of potatoes!
Tilda

Funding

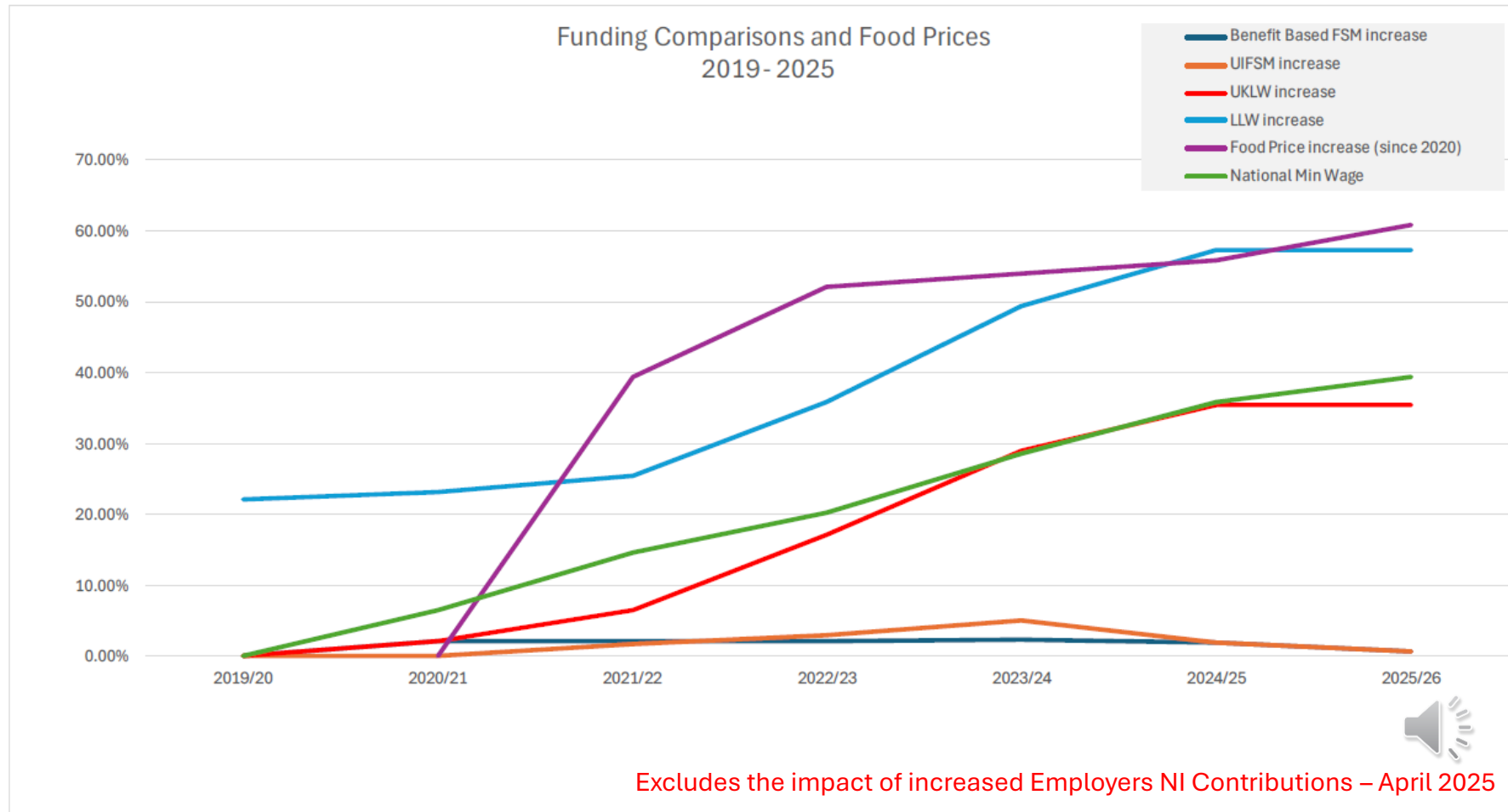
Disparity across the country



THE SUMS DON'T ADD UP!



Funding



Excludes the impact of increased Employers NI Contributions – April 2025

What our Members are saying



What emphasis do you place on supporting “buying British/local foods”?

While there is a **strong ethos and commitment** across respondents to support **British and local food sourcing**, particularly for meat and produce, the dominant limiting factor is cost. Many balance this aspiration against tight **budgetary and procurement constraints**, often resulting in a “where possible” approach rather than universal adoption.

High emphasis on buying British/local

- Many respondents describe it as a “high priority”, “central to what we do”, or “very important”.
- Frequent mention of sourcing British Red Tractor, farm-assured, or UK-reared meat.
- Several have accreditations or awards (e.g., Soil Association, Food for Life) promoting local sourcing.

Cost and budget constraints

- Respondents frequently note that while they **want to buy local/British, it is often more expensive and not always feasible within budget limits.**

Challenges

- Rising food costs and budget pressures are making it **“increasingly difficult” to maintain local sourcing.**
- Procurement restrictions sometimes prevent direct purchasing from local suppliers.
- Some admit they can **no longer afford to prioritise local on current menu costs.**

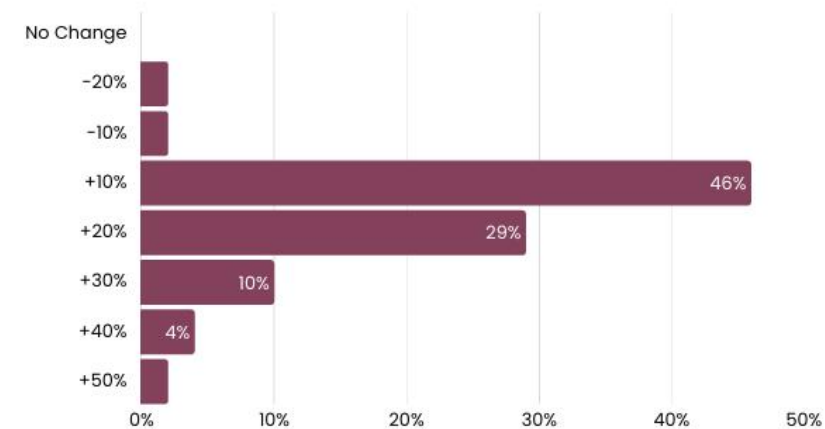
Regional and policy support

- Welsh respondents often reference Welsh Government initiatives encouraging local produce in school meals.
- There is a clear policy alignment with national/local government priorities, but **economic feasibility remains a challenge.**



Have you noted changes in food costs in the past six months?

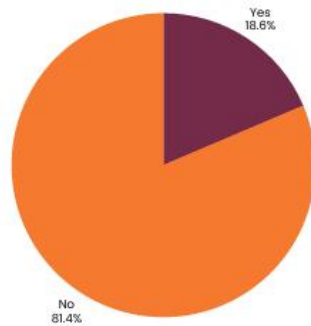
Are you able to provide an average percentage change?



What our Members are saying



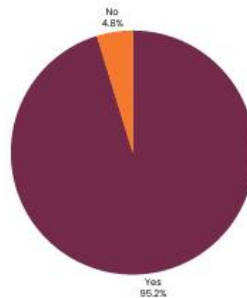
UFSM and benefit FSM are currently funded at £2.61 across England (£3.00 in London). Are you able to provide a SFS compliant, nutritionally balanced meal within this funding rate? (England only)



Only **2 in 10 respondents (19%)** reported that they are currently able to provide a **School Food Standards (SFS) compliant meal** within existing funding rates.

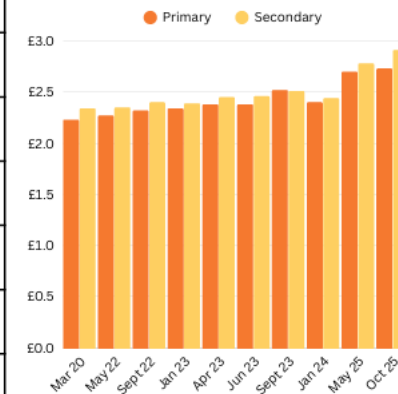
Among the **81%** who said they could not meet the standards at current rates, the average funding level required to do so was estimated at **£3.25 per meal**.

Do you agree that the funds for lunch should be ring fenced and not potentially "lost" or reduced to fund other school activities? (England only)



We asked our respondents to provide the selling price of the 'paid for meal / meal of the day since March 2020 in their primary schools and secondary schools.

Date	Primary	Secondary
Mar 20	£2.23	£2.32
Sept 22	£2.32	£2.40
Jan 23	£2.34	£2.39
Apr 23	£2.38	£2.45
Jun 23	£2.38	£2.46
Sept 23	£2.52	£2.51
Jan 24	£2.40	£2.44
May 25	£2.70	£2.78
Oct 25	£2.73	£2.91



On average, the price of a meal has **increased by 26.5%** since March 2020



Service closures

As a direct result of the financial pressures

- Leicestershire
 - Hampshire
 - Surrey
 - Stoke on Trent
- And....
- CATERed



The screenshot shows the website 'THE CATERER' with a navigation menu including News, InDepth, Products & Equipment, Events & Awards, Careers, and Technology. The main article is titled 'Education caterer CATERed to cease trading in 2026' and is dated 10 Dec 2025. The article text states: 'The Plymouth City Council-backed caterer was named Education Caterer of the Year at the 2018 Foodservice Cateys'. Below the text is a photo of children eating in a school cafeteria. A caption below the photo reads: 'CATERed, a Foodservice Catey winner, has announced it will cease operations in 2026 as a result of the "increasingly challenging" financial climate. The 2018 Education Caterer of the Year was founded in 2015 as a co-operative trading company jointly owned by local schools and Plymouth City Council. Over the past decade, CATERed has been serving more than 10,000 meals a day in 59 schools.' To the right of the article is a 'Related content' section with four items: 'Foodservice Cateys 2018: Education Caterer of the Year - CATERed', 'Foodservice Cateys 2019: CSER Award - CaterED', 'Foodservice Government to expand free school meals to 500,000 more children', and 'Foodservice Leicestershire County Council to end school meals service'. At the bottom right of the screenshot is a 'Most read Latest' section and a speaker icon.

Smaller providers

Local and regional context

But, why does this matter?

- School Food Providers – what will be left?
- Lack of choice, flexibility and diversity
- Market forces driving costs up?
- Market forces driving quality down?

And, what about procurement of food and ingredients:

- Procurement / DEFRA (50% British)

CATERed alone.....

- Butcher – Fishers – Fruit & Veg (potatoes) – Dairy
- £2.7m spend lost



What next?



- Revised School Food Standards
- Funding models – DfE and the wider school food landscape / campaign groups looking at potential alternatives
 - Need to take into account: - urban, deprivation, rural, small, large, SEND, primary, secondary
 - Two years to introduce a new formula for funding
- APPG – School Food: All Party Review – launched but on hold





Any questions?

English School Food Provision as a public service at risk: exploring emerging economic and structural challenges and their implications for food system transformation

Facilitated Table-Top Discussions (30mins)

- Each table has a themed question to appraise/critique
- Discuss & debate this topic in your group
- Come up with summarised ACTION(s)
- Feedback & discussion (plenary)

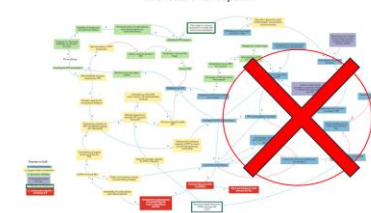
English School Food Provision as a Neoliberal experiment

- 1980 Education Act**
 - Removed obligation to provide school meals
 - Encouraged packed lunches
- 1988 Local Government Act**
 - Compulsory competitive tendering
 - Introduced private caterers, outside local authority influence
 - Not a level playing field in terms of competition.
- England shifted to **market-oriented school food provision** – “Lowest cost masquerading as best value” (Kevin Morgan)
- 2000 Academisation**
 - Academies outside of local authority oversight
 - Rise of Multi-Academy Trust tenders



Financial instability & ToKIP project consequences...??

PFF CLD with caption



School food – system change or system stalemate?

Prize	Problem
Public spend for public good	Not enough money in school food system
Support for local economies	AND lack of level playing field
Stimulate system change	AND lack of capacity/skills
Develop trusted system partnerships	Combination of stressed systems



Public Health in Leicestershire

Funding

Disparity across the country



THE SUMS DON'T ADD UP!

