

Blog Summary of the Webinar *Scotland's School Food Program* (from the School Food Around the World webinar series)

Description

On May 27, 2021, as part of the series [School Food Around the World](#), a webinar on Scotland's School Food Program was hosted by the [Coalition for Healthy School Food](#), George Brown College's School of Hospitality and Tourism Management, and Ryerson's Centre for Studies in Food Security. The purpose of the presentation was to:

- Understand the structure, systems, and policies of Scotland's School Food Program.
- Investigate its role in helping the country achieve the [United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals](#) (SDG'S).
- Learn how Scottish School Food Leaders manage local programs.

Participants

Hosts:

- **Debbie Field** - Coordinator of the Coalition for Healthy School Food.
- **Suvadra Datta Gupta** - Ph.D. Candidate of University of Saskatchewan.
- **Amberley Ruetz** - Ph.D. Candidate of University of Guelph.

Panellists:

- **Dr John McKendrick**- Professor of Social Justice and co-Director of the Scottish Poverty and Inequality Research Unit, Glasgow Caledonian University.
- **Jayne Jones**- Chair of ASSIST FM, the National organization responsible for all matters relating to catering and facilities management.
- **Sarah Duley**- Head of Food at Soil Association Scotland and Manager of Food for Life Scotland.

Summary of Presentations

John McKendrick

- One of the broader agendas of Scotland's school food program is to combat poverty. The program is part of the strategy to tackle child poverty by reducing the cost of living for the population and increase income from social security and benefits in kind-two of the main drivers of poverty.
- In 2021, the Scottish Government committed to extending the universal school meal provision to all children in primary schools, accessible to those who qualify based on the parents' eligibility to receive benefits and social security. Federal money is set aside and distributed to local authorities to fund school meals.¹

¹ Education Secretary Shirley-Anne Somerville said: "Free school meals are a vital support to thousands of children and young people across the country - ensuring that children have access to a free, healthy and

- Scotland assesses progress in the take-up of free school meals (FSM) for children who are entitled to that opportunity to gauge the extent to which these children avail themselves of FSM.
- Adding a breakfast cart/club into a set of schools in Scotland is discussed to increase participation.
- The data illustrates current challenges in Scotland: a significant number of students are not taking school meals, paid or free, across Scotland, although this number declines year by year.

Suggested steps for the Scottish Government to improve participation include:

- Innovations to improve school food provisions.
- Make food carts (especially breakfast carts) more prevalent.
- Offer multiple hours for lunch for different age groups to accommodate more students, especially for schools with small lunchroom capacity and in post-pandemic scenarios.
- Increase the uptake of free school meals by not letting children leave the school during lunchtime.
- Improve decision-making with more robust evidence; understand more thoroughly the school food provision across Scotland by collecting data from in-school environments and out-of-school environments, and analyse the impact of service delivery, etc.
- Make improvements to programs locally as well as nationally.

Jayne Jones

- The Scottish Government and other organizations, such as the [Food for Life Scotland](#), [Scotland Excel](#), [Scottish Local Authorities](#), [Scotland Food and Drink](#), and the [Convention of Scottish Local Authorities](#), formed a partnership to develop school food policy. The collaboration has also made school meal delivery possible during the pandemic.
- The federal government allocates funding directly to Scotland's 32 local councils, each responsible for providing catering services, procurement processes, and food education to 2,500 schools across the country.
- In collaboration with [ASSIST FM](#), local authorities and caterers deliver 350,000 school meals each day, and of those meals, 145,000 are for students who are entitled to free school meals.
- Scotland provides Universal Infant Free School Meals for Primary 1 (P1), Primary 2, and Primary 3 for children 5 to 7, an extension to a previous policy of offering free

nutritious meal every day they are in school and are ready to engage in learning." From: <https://www.gov.scot/news/free-school-meals-1/>

school meals to children and young people aged from five to 18 whose families are on low incomes and/or receiving in receipt of qualifying certain

benefits. <https://www.gov.scot/policies/maternal-and-child-health/free-school-meals/>

- The Scottish Government and Local authority leaders will implement Universal Free School Meals for P4 students in August 2021, Primary 5 in January 2022, and add P6 and P7 to the program by August 2022.
- Children who are not eligible for free school meals can also purchase them at a price determined by each local authority. The purchases are made in a way that protects the identity of Free School Meals entitled pupils.
- The Scottish local authorities' partnership for food procurement includes Scotland Excel and Scotland Food and Drink.
- Pre-pandemic, 75% of children were entitled to free school meals.

Sarah Duley

- The [Soil Association Scotland - Food For Life Scotland](#) (FFLS) is a non-profit organization funded by the Scottish Government to help local authorities source and serve more fresh, healthy, and environmentally sustainable products in their school meals. Soil Association Scotland works in close partnerships with the local authorities and suppliers across Scotland.
- The Soil Association's Food for Life Scotland campaign, a 2003 nationwide program, works with public and private sector caterers, growers and producers, cooks, and communities to transform food culture by serving local, sustainable food that is good for the planet. One-third of primary schools serve FFLS meals.
- Their programs include a step-by-step framework for change, for use by local authorities, public institutions, and other organizations. They provide annual independent inspections that guarantee food served meets significant standards across three main areas: championing local producers, sourcing environmentally friendly and ethical food, and making healthy eating easier for everyone. The programs work alongside federally legislated nutritional regulations to address healthy, sustainable food's environmental and economic benefits. They started to receive funding from the Government in 2012.
- Food for Life mainly measures and identifies trends in food sourcing, then maps the route to build relationships between local authorities, local food procurement departments, and local suppliers within Scotland to bring more Scottish local produce on the table. The [Food for Life Served Here Award](#) (FFLSH) Award recognizes and rewards caterers who are taking steps to increase their source of local produce.
- FFLSH also provides staff training, menu planning, data analysis, and sustainable, local supply chain alignment without adding pressure on budgets to achieve FFLSH awards.
- Working toward FFLSH awards, local authorities and organizations contribute to 6 of the Scottish Government's National Performance Framework's Outcomes and 11 of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals by investing in the local economy/supporting local businesses, sourcing sustainable food, and serving seasonal produce.

Questions and Answers

The attendees asked questions on funding, demand, student rights, governance, procurement and operational challenges, and the effect of the pandemic. The responses are summarized below:

- The UK government sends an amount of lump-sum funding to the Scottish Government who then distributes it to each local authority. The funding is part of a general grant allocation from the Federal Government to local authorities to pay for many things, including education and school costs, school meals, road and bridge repairs, and more. It is up to the local authorities to decide how they distribute the funds. Spending on school meals will vary for each local authority depending on how much budget they allocate to school meals.
- The local authority must subsidize any shortfall.
- The attractions of fast-food restaurants are powerful and present challenges to student participation in school meals. Outside food getting in the school gate is an issue too. To address this, some stakeholders are considering what lunchtime is. Is there an accurate value for kids to distance themselves from the school building at lunchtime? If there is an extended lunch, it is possible to consume school food and still have that distance.
- The simplification of meals is something that local authorities are implementing. Focusing on favourite dishes that our children and young people know, recognize, understand, and want to have, mainly coming back post-pandemic when they have not been in school for such a long time, will be critical.
 - Complying with the new Scottish nutrition guidance, however, does make some of that incredibly challenging because we must implement food and drink national nutritional standards. There are challenges with offering exciting combinations of ingredients and recipes that our children and young people would not ordinarily choose.
- The pandemic has not been kind to us because we had a whole year's worth of direct engagement planned with our children and young people. We had set up tasting sessions with our pupil councils, parent councils, and then from Christmas to Easter, which was when the implementation was to happen; schools were closed. We could not do any of that, which means we are paying the price for being in the middle of the pandemic, but that does not mean we will give up and do nothing about it. It means we now spend the next year when we're implementing more universal preschool meals working with our children and young people to taste and try the new dishes, update the menus, and make tweaks and changes.
- Scotland is a small country, and although we have 32 local authorities delivering the services, the governance around compliance and statutory compliance sits at a national level. There will be local policies around how we implement some of that. For instance, each local authority will have its approach to manage and support children with special diets. Some will have regional variations, so there are local ways of addressing that. Sustainable procurement will sit at a local level, so there is an element of both there.

- There is national legislation around nutritional requirements, their governance, and local control. We often see school meals and food policies written into local government policies. Some local government policies have created climate change plans that reference school meals. Local authorities take individual approaches in terms of considering the impact of procurement decisions on climate change.
- There is national legislation on procurement and a procurement reform act from 2014 not specific to school meals. However, it is a broader procurement regulation requiring all local authorities to develop a procurement strategy and consider various things within that. Ensuring specific standards for animal welfare are included. Every local authority will have a procurement strategy, but there is variation around how much they're connected to school meals. It is more a requirement that you must demonstrate that you've considered it and that you work from there.
- In terms of the broader procurement background, we have been bound by EU regulations, and there are challenges around how much you can specify local within that or how you would source or ensure local sourcing. There are lots of ways that can happen even within the EU guidance. We have been working under the Scottish Government's policy aligned with the EU. There have not been drastic changes since Brexit, and we are still aligned in terms of procurement approaches.
- Local procurement strategies in many local authorities in Scotland are becoming concerned about remuneration. School foodservice workers should receive a sufficient wage, a more significant *national living wage* than the federal minimum wage. If you are paying people a higher rate, there is no competitive advantage to seeking the lowest-cost supplier from afar. There are potential environmental and economic gains that might lend themselves to more local food purchasing because of our procurement strategies.
- Local authorities in Scotland are responsible for the caterers who provide food services in schools. The staff working in schools are employed by each Local Authority. ASSIST FM represents the 32 Local Authorities in many different areas.
- The local authorities pay for foodservice infrastructure.

For more resources and information on the webinar please follow the links below.

[Scotland's School Food Program Webinar Official Video](#)

[\[Webinar Slides from\] John McKendrick](#)

[\[Webinar Slides from\] Jayne Jones](#)

[\[Webinar Slides from\] Sarah Duley](#)
