



Young People's Right to Food

Young people's experiences of accessing food, and recommendations for improvements within Scotland's food system

March 2023

Contents

03

Recommendations

04

Introduction

05

Our Approach

06

Research Findings

06

Theme: Access to food

10

Theme: Perceptions of asking for help

12

Theme: School meals

18

Actions young people would like decision-makers to take

19

Respondent profiles



Recommendations

This report makes five recommendations which young people think will help to improve young people's access to food in Scotland and to ensure young people's right to food is upheld.



The Scottish Government and local authorities should extend the provision of free school meals to all pupils in secondary schools across Scotland

86% of the young people who participated in this research said this was a key way to uphold their right to food, and over 75% said this would make them more likely to eat lunch at school.



Schools and local authorities should meaningfully involve young people in decision-making about the content and quality of school meals, and in making improvements to the eating environment

This will improve uptake in eating school meals and uphold young people's rights under Article 12 of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). Including young people in decision-making will help accommodate their needs, such as dietary and accessibility requirements, and could be achieved by involving them in local Food Action Plans. Education authorities should make specific efforts to engage with young people who are home-educated to ensure their right to food is being upheld.



Greater efforts must be made to ensure any stigma associated with asking for help to access food is eliminated, and young people must be involved in making these discussions

Young people who took part in this research identified stigma as a barrier to free school meals and suggested a range of solutions to normalise free school meals and raise awareness (see page 11 for more suggestions).



Local government must raise awareness among young people about local programmes and initiatives supporting food access to increase equitable access to healthy food

Only two-fifths of respondents knew about the help and support they could receive to access food in their local communities. All young people should be able to realise their right to food and must know how they can access services that support this.



The Scottish Government must bring the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) Incorporation Bill back to Parliament and commit to immediate commencement when it has passed

This will ensure all of these rights are upheld and are legally enforceable.

Introduction

The Scottish Youth Parliament (SYP) is the democratically elected voice of Scotland's young people. We work to make sure young people's views are listened to by decision makers.

One of SYP's 2021-23 campaign priorities is to ensure young people in Scotland can access their right to food. Every person has the right to have food that is accessible, readily available, and adequately meets their dietary needs.

As part of SYP's campaign on the Right to Food, the 2021-23 membership carried out research to find out about young people's experience in accessing food, and to gather their opinions on different solutions to problems within Scotland's food system.

This report outlines the findings from our research, and makes five recommendations for changes to improve young people's access to food in Scotland.



Right to food

SYP's Campaign Priorities 2022-23

Our Approach

The research for this report was carried out in October and November 2022. Young people's views were collected through an online survey using the SmartSurvey website. The consultation questions were developed by SYP's Conveners Group, in collaboration with SYP staff and the Campaign Delivery Group, following discussions with representatives of external organisations who campaign on issues relating to the right to food.

In total, 846 young people aged 12-26 took part in this consultation. Responses were received from young people in twenty-six local authorities, and from the eleven national voluntary organisations represented within SYP.

Our approach focused on a research process that would produce robust findings, but also ensure the voices and experiences of young people remained at the heart of the research. The responsibility for consulting with young people across Scotland lay with Members of the Scottish Youth Parliament (MSYPs), who were trained and provided with resources to support their consultations.

SYP also shared the online survey link with other organisations who work with children and young people to promote the survey more widely. Young Scot points were available to any young people who completed the survey online, through the Young Scot Rewards programme.



Although answering each question was optional, and respondents were not compelled to complete the whole survey, every question was completed by a substantial number of respondents.

Given the demographics of respondents, this research cannot claim to be fully representative of Scotland's young people. However, this research identifies some important issues which are relevant to young people as a whole, and also highlights issues that could benefit further research. A profile of research participants is available on page 19.

Research Findings

Access to food

Meeting basic needs

The majority of young people who responded to this survey agreed or strongly agreed that they and their family can afford food without having to sacrifice other basic needs such as heating or housing. However, between 7-9% disagreed or strongly disagreed with these statements.



Young people's comments

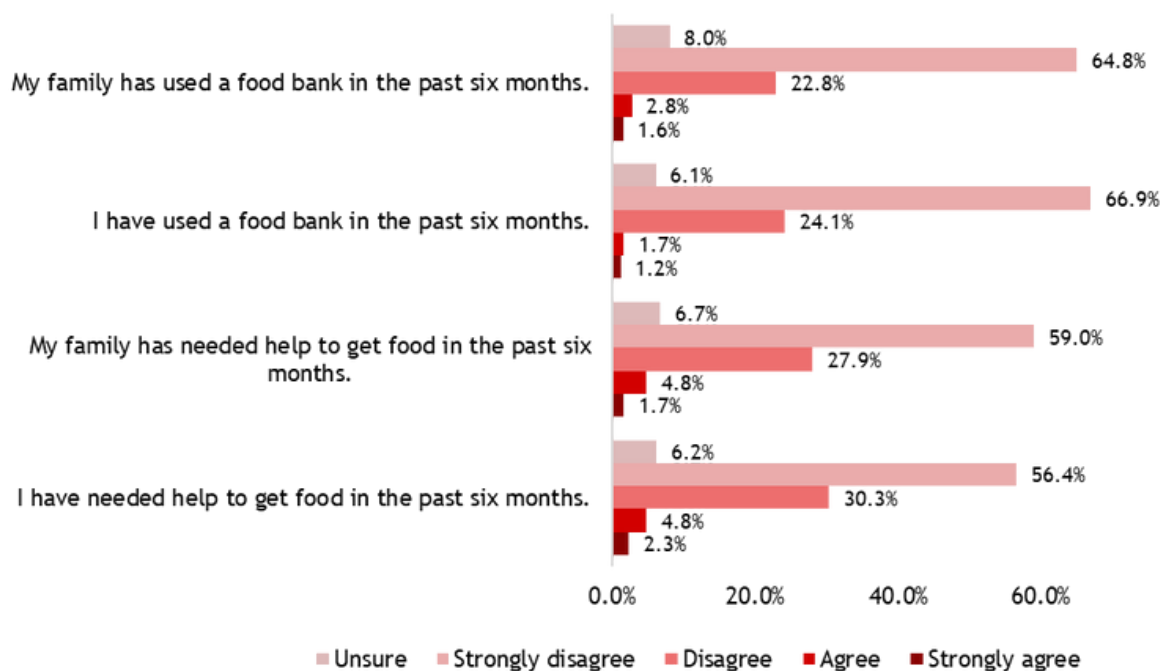


“I know that my mum can afford to feed me the food that I want but I see my friends who are struggling to eat. My little cousin’s mum also needs help with buying food from family members. My mum has had to go shopping for my grandad to make sure he has enough to eat.”

“Every child should be given free meals at school at university. Do not distinguish between lower and higher income at the end of the month everyone is struggling to make ends meet.”

Help accessing food

The majority of young people who responded to this survey have not needed help to access food or to use a food bank in the past six months. However, 7.1% of young people agreed or strongly agreed that they have needed help to get food in the past six months, and 6.5% agreed or strongly agreed that their family has needed help to get food in the past six months. Slightly fewer agreed or strongly agreed that they or their family have used a food bank in the past six months.

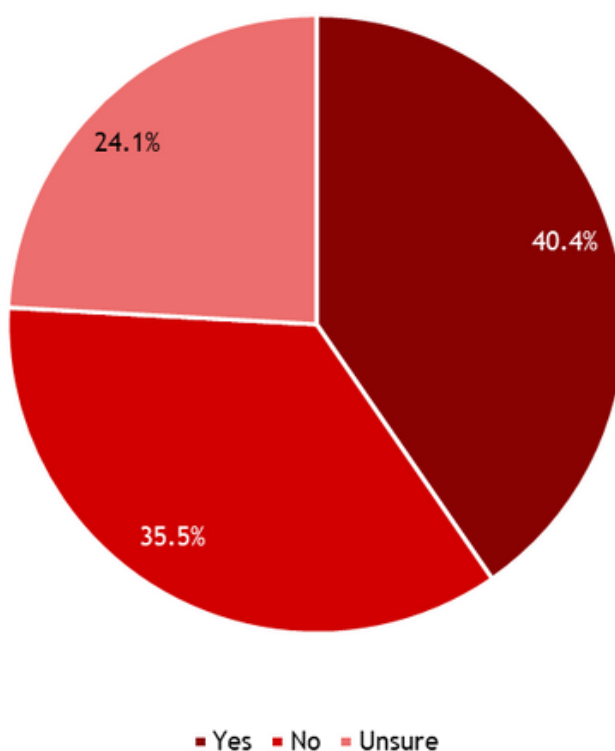


Do you know what help and support is available in your local community if you need help in accessing food?

Only two fifths (40.4%) of the young people who responded to this survey indicated they do know what help and support is available in their local community if they need help in accessing food.

Of those who commented on this question, the majority of comments focused on:

- Some young people are aware of foodbanks or other local support.
- Information is hard to find, and there isn't a lot of awareness of different types of support available.
- Support doesn't always help with specific issues.



Young people's comments



“Personally [I’ve] never had to search for help to access food, however I hope that if I looked for it I could find it easily”

“I know there will be help and support in getting food but its not advertised at all and is hard to find”

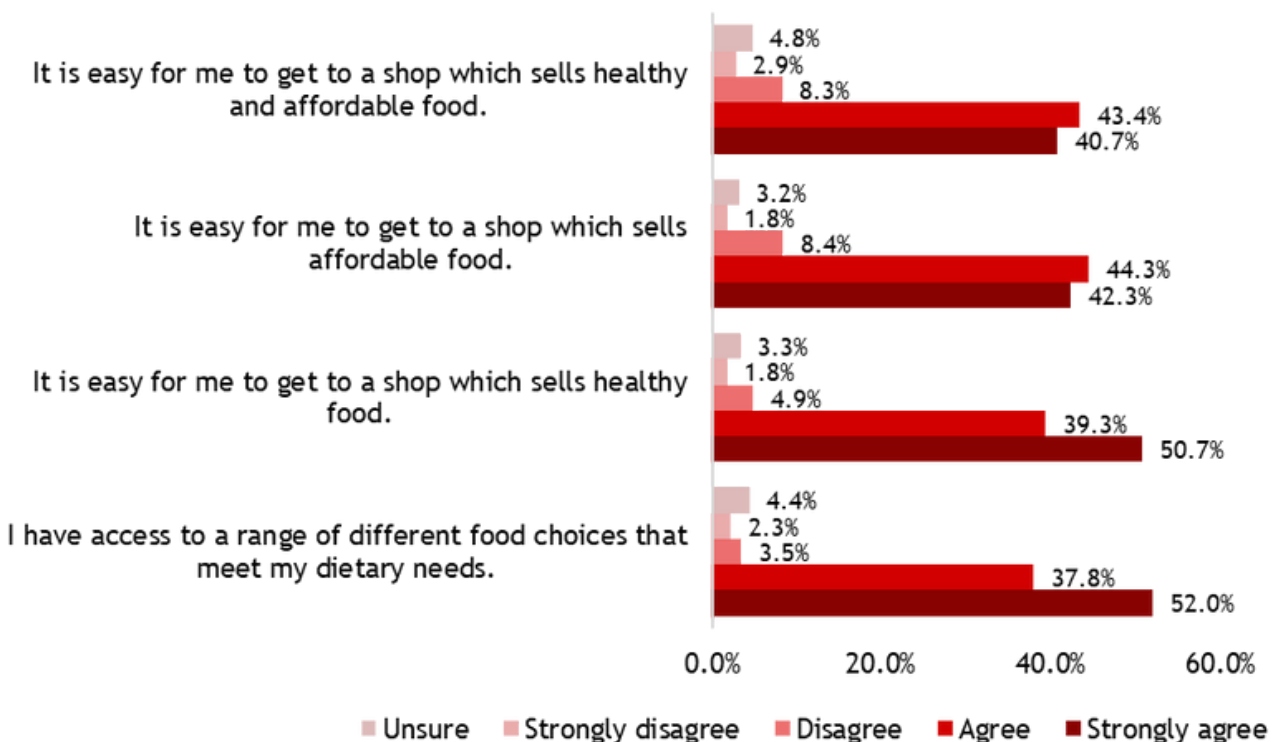
“I haven't look it up and my family don't speak much English”

“I currently would be unsure where to go to find my local foodbank, or any other food related help.”

“I am aware of some support although it doesn't help with my issues.”

Food choices

The majority of young people who responded to this survey indicated they have access to healthy and/or affordable food, and/or to a range of different food choices that meet their dietary requirements. However, just over one in ten young people (11.1%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement ‘It is easy for me to get to a shop which sells healthy and affordable food’, and a similar number (10.2%) disagreed or strongly disagreed with the statement ‘It is easy for me to get to a shop which sells affordable food’.



Comments from young people who responded to this question suggested that lack of or poor access to public transport may act as a barrier for young people to access healthy and affordable food. This is particularly relevant for young people living in rural and island communities, where public transport options are limited, although may also be a barrier for young people who have low incomes and cannot afford to travel to shops, or for young people who have a disability.

Existing Policy

'Transport Scotland and the Scottish Government should provide funding to support initiatives which make it easier, cheaper, and safer for young people to use active and sustainable travel options.'

89% agree

SYP's 2021-26 Manifesto
'From Scotland's Young People'

Young people's comments



"When I say I don't have access to a place to buy food I mean my nearest food store is islands away and the bus to get there doesn't come within a mile of my house."

"To get affordable food I would have to travel 10 miles to another town as my town has 1 supermarket and it is not very affordable"

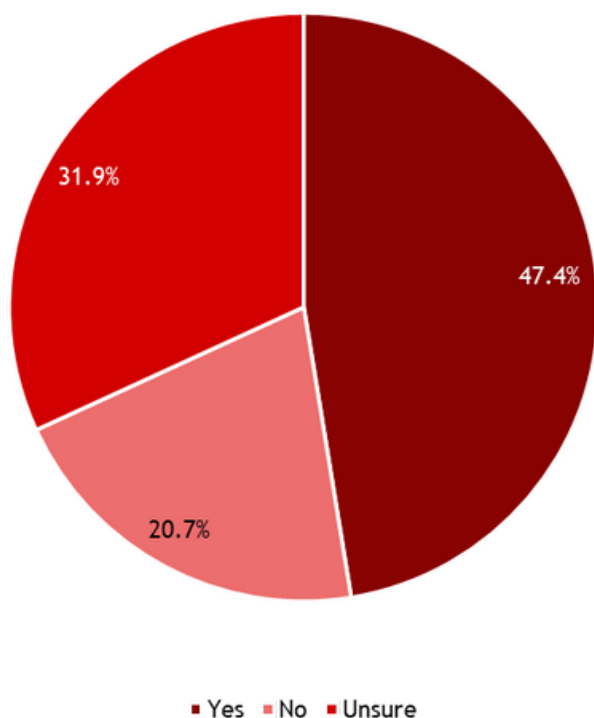
"I can't access shops that sell affordable or healthy food easily because I can't access any shops easily. Most aren't disability friendly and my health restricts my travel."

"I eat healthy, but it costs me a lot more than it would to eat unhealthy."



Perceptions of asking for help

Do you feel there is a stigma in asking for help to access food?



Nearly half (47.4%) of the young people who responded to this question feel there is stigma associated with asking for help to access food.

Many of the young people who commented on this question thought some people might feel embarrassed or ashamed asking for help, and some shared examples of their own experiences or the experiences of people they know.

Some young people commented that they know there is nothing to be embarrassed about, but they recognised the stigma associated with asking for help may stop people from feeling they can ask for help when they need it.

Young people's comments



“There is an unfortunate stigma around accessing food banks, community food pantries, food larders, or other forms of community food support- however, I know there are active efforts to keep this stigma to a minimum.”

“Somewhat, but I feel like with rising food insecurity and the cost of living crisis it is almost more normalised and understood that many people need to access emergency food provision.”

“People find it embarrassing to ask for food as it is something they feel they should easily be able to afford/access for both them and their family of which they may also feel they are letting down.”

“If you're well-off, which I am (relative to where I live anyways), when I think about foodbanks I think about helping out, volunteering. I don't think about what it's like to actually be someone requiring that help, or someone that needs to think about asking for it because they're struggling - that's what this survey has made me realise, and I think that a lot of people like me won't realise.”

What would help to reduce stigma in asking for help to access food?

Young people who commented on this question suggested the following actions to reduce stigma in asking for help to access food:

- Normalising talking about struggles and asking for help.
- Using more inclusive language which isn't targeted at 'poor people'.
- Ensuring people know help is available, and raising awareness of this help.
- Challenging structural barriers by, for example, providing a minimum standard of living.
- Offering an online order system with home delivery so people don't have to go to a venue which is known to be a food bank.

Young people's comments



“Using inclusive language so it's not directed at poorer people and families”

“To ensure that people know that help is available, and to normalise speaking about it so that people feel more comfortable talking about their stuff...”

“Sharing stories about how food assistance has benefited people and letting them know that a lack of food could be holding them back from things like paying attention in school and studying for exams”

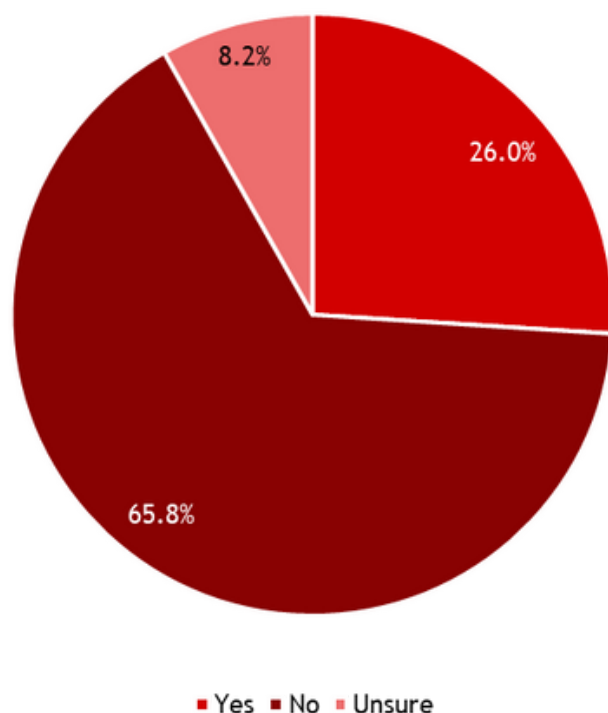
“More public education about and more help for people with dietary needs/ intolerances ... more education/ efforts to subsidise dietary needs for health reasons could help reduce stigma around people who maybe don't first present as needing help to access food because people assume we are "picky", "ungrateful" etc when dietary needs are very real for most people”

“Having more open conversations about food access especially in schools and subjects like home economics”

“Having a place where food is available but isn't the sole purpose”

School meals

Do you/did you receive a free school meal whilst at school?



One quarter of young people (26.0%) who responded to this survey said they do or did receive a free school meal whilst at school.

Of those who commented on this question, the majority indicated that they received a free school meal until they were in Primary 3 or 4. Universal free school meal provision was extended in Scotland to include all children in Primary 1 - 5 in January 2022. Prior to this, there was universal provision for all children in Primary 1 - 3. Due to the ages of respondents to this survey, none of the young people who responded to this survey will have been eligible for these universal free school meals when they reached Primary 4.

Some young people shared their experiences of free school meals, and there were mixed views on these, as shown in the selection of comments below.

Young people's comments



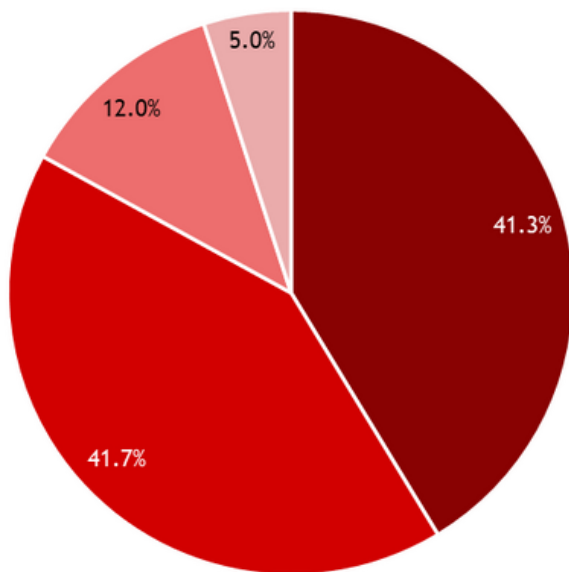
“Was mostly too embarrassed to take them and would use money to buy not enough food and then not eat enough”

“There's a selection of hot and cold foods and drinks but I'd like a few more vegetarian options/the choice to remove a non-vegetarian part of a hot meal”

“No one knew and it was fine. We didn't get free meals for a long time because the threshold included my mum's disability benefits, which is money spent on additional support because of her health...”

“It's not a great choice as school have cut back available options. Having food sensory issues makes this even harder to work round”

If every secondary school pupil in Scotland was given a free school meal at lunchtime in school, would you use it? If you have left school, think back to what you would have done.



The majority of young people who responded to this survey said they would make use of a free school meal if it was available to every secondary school pupil in Scotland, on a regular basis (41.3%) or sometimes (41.7%).

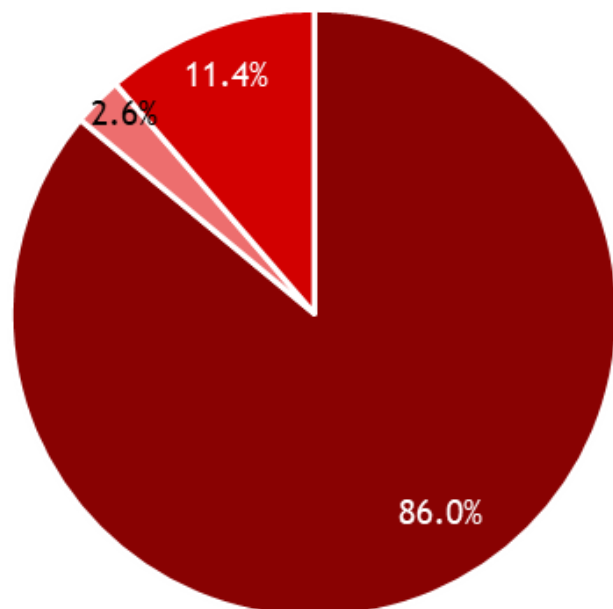
■ Yes, on a regular basis ■ Yes, sometimes ■ No ■ Unsure

Do you think that providing all secondary school pupils with a free school meal at lunch is a good way to uphold young people's right to food?

Over four fifths (86.0%) of young people who responded to this question agreed that providing all secondary school pupils with a free school meal at lunch is a good way to uphold young people's right to food.

Of those who commented on this question, comments focused on:

- Variety and quality of the food available for school meals.
- The potential to reduce stigma associated with free school meals and with asking for help.
- The atmosphere in school canteens, long queues, and time available to eat lunch at school.
- Health benefits of making sure everyone has access to food.



■ Yes ■ No ■ Unsure



“Yes because so many secondary school students do not eat lunch because of how expensive a days lunch can be most pupils end up going to the shops for a packet of crisps and a drink or going without because they don't have enough and don't qualify for free school meals.”

“Some people can't afford to buy food at lunch or bring in their own food so they just starve during school hours which make students unfocused and angry”

“If every secondary school pupil received a free school meal, people who were already entitled to it would feel less ashamed as they would be equal to everyone else”

“I work in a school and definitely feel every child should be entitled to free school meals should they choose to use it. All families regardless of work status are struggling especially with the living crisis and poverty so having free meals ensures that they are full and not distracted by hunger.”

“I couldn't afford to get school lunches, faced neglect at home before going into care and because my mum worked, I wasn't entitled to free meals. I'd often go hungry until dinner so if I had access to free school meals this would have made all the difference in my life. I had been declined food previously in school as I couldn't afford it or wasn't given money for lunches.”

“A lot of the school food is inedible and so some would be stubborn and not eat. If we want to get young people to eat, we should give them some money so they can go out to buy something. It will make them feel like they have more control over everything, it will help their mental health... they can get something they will actually enjoy so they will actually eat it, it will teach them more about money and how to save and how to spend it... They are treated like children but are expected to act like adults when they should be living and so this would be very important and good for they when there is so little control and so much change right now.”

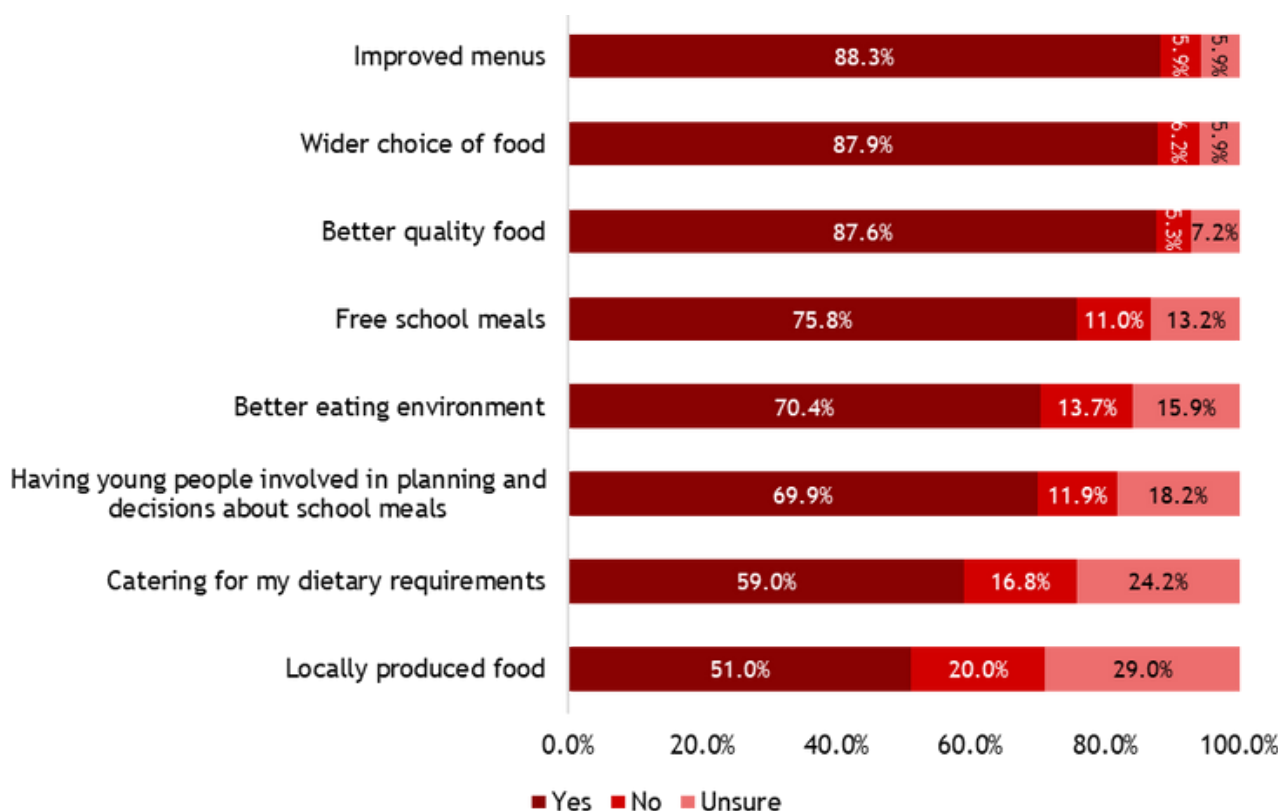
Would the following changes make you more likely to eat lunch at school?

Young people were given a list of eight options and were asked to indicate whether or not each option would make them more likely to eat lunch at school. Overall, the most popular responses focused on the variety and quality of food available.

Around three quarters (75.8%) of young people who responded said free school meals would make them more likely to eat lunch at school.

Just over two thirds of young people said a better eating environment (70.4%) and/or having young people involved in planning and making decisions about school meals (69.9%) would make them more likely to eat lunch at school.

Although fewer young people said catering for their dietary requirements (59.0%) or provision of locally produced food (51.0%) would make them more likely to eat lunch at school, both of these options still received agreement from over half of the respondents.



Are there any other changes that would make you more likely to eat lunch at school?

Similar to comments on earlier questions, young people's responses to this question focused on:

- Variety and quality of the food available for school meals.
- The atmosphere in school canteens, long queues, and time available to eat lunch at school.
- Being able to spend time with friends.
- The cost of food, and different types of payment methods.
- Health benefits of making sure everyone has access to food.

Young people's comments



“Would be pretty nice if the school did surveys in what types of food students feel would be best served.”

“The environment would also need to be socially inviting, a way for people to comfortably meet and socialise. The largest part of break and lunch is being able to spend time with your friends uninterrupted.”

“Price is the biggest factor for me. My parents made me make my own sandwiches 4 days a week because it's cheaper, and on Friday I could get a school meal as a treat.”

“My schools lunch isn't till 1:05 which means by the time you get to lunch your not hungry anymore and its only one period after until you go home compared to other schools that have lunch at 12ish i think it should be mandatory for schools to have lunch around 12ish because personally i find 1o'clock is far to late”

“It is more to do with the queues at lunch, you spend half of your time waiting in a queue to get food which is what is off putting on using the cafe. I had no issue with the food available or environment in my school but I did have an issue with waiting in a long queue.”

“I have autism and struggle to access the lunch hall as it's busy and loud, more work should be done to help kids that can't access these facilities”

“better quality salads and you can choose, like in primary we had a salad bar type of thing and you could pick by yourself”

Actions young people would like decision-makers to take

What other actions would you like to see decision-makers take to ensure that you/other young people can access your right to food at all times, both in and out of school?

Young people who commented on this question gave a range of responses, which fit into three broad themes. These responses provide additional ideas and suggestions to accompany the SYP's five key policy recommendations. A summary of responses is shown below.

Actions with and for young people and families	Actions in education settings	Actions at local and national levels
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Involving young people in decision-making. • Young Scot discounts. • Vouchers for those who struggle to access food. • Food deliveries to home instead of needing to get support in person. • Support for young people who don't live with family (up to the age of 25). 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Healthier food options should cost less and be available for all in schools. • Improved eating areas in schools. • Better variety and quality of school food. • Increased budget for school food provision. • Fun cooking and budgeting and finance lessons at school. • Support for home-educated young people. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • More information about how and where to access food and support. • Awareness of climate impacts of food waste. • Wider range of food options. • Lower food prices. • Challenging homelessness and in-work poverty • Improved public transport so young people can access food shops with greater variety and support.



“To provide with food voucher to youth since sometimes they are the ones choosing the healthier diets instead of the parents.”

“The budget in our local primary has been cut. As food costs increase, this doesn't make sense.”

“Secondary schools having free breakfast options before school, free meals, foodbank styled cupboards/ take one bring one access in schools for children to discretely take food if needed, ensuring families have access to information if they need help, access to water coolers.”

“Provide more information on where young people can access food. I don't think a lot of young people know where they can access food in and out of school and they might find it harder to come forward and ask.”

“Care experienced receive [free school meals] irrespective of where living, and irrespective of household income. My complex food problems mean insecurity and obsession and I need to know food is always available. My foster carer had to provide a supper stash so I didn't panic about not knowing food times or waiting until breakfast. Breakfast clubs free of charge. Breakfast club open whatever time u get to school, my primary closed breakfast club at 840 which meant kids having a hard time attending or food issues about what to eat wouldn't get breakfast if they were late. When a child has been neglected and is hungry years later it is the trauma brain that shapes behaviour panic about food and often children can't choose what or indeed understand they must eat”

“Children from low income families that have been awarded bursary places at private schools should be allowed free school meals if their parents income falls within the threshold for support!”

“have food available in schools at all times i.e a fruit bowl which you can take from at whatever time of school.”

“For example you have the Young Scot card which gives you free travel what about partnering with shopping centres or local shops so that possibly a system like the Young Scot card is implemented and you can get lunch for free on a card”

“empowerment and education of young people so they have the skills and knowledge to cook healthy/sustainable food for themselves, so they can uphold their right to food. And making such food affordable.”

Respondent profiles

In total, 846 young people took part in this consultation. Responses were received from young people in twenty-six local authorities, and from the eleven national voluntary organisations represented within SYP.

Age		Gender		Current education status	
12-14	45.0%	Female	45.0%	School	91.5%
15-17	47.9%	Male	47.9%	College	1.2%
18-20	3.7%	Non-binary identity	3.7%	University	3.9%
21-23	2.5%	Prefer to use my own term	2.5%	Apprenticeship	0.0%
24-26	1.0%	Prefer not to say	1.0%	Other training	0.2%
				None of these	3.1%

Current employment status		Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation (SIMD) ¹	
Yes (less than 10 hours a week)	14.8%	Quintile 1	12.0%
Yes (between 10-20 hours a week)	10.5%	Quintile 2	19.2%
Yes (between 20-30 hours a week)	0.8%	Quintile 3	16.3%
Yes (more than 30 hours a week)	1.6%	Quintile 4	28.0%
No	70.0%	Quintile 5	24.5%
Prefer not to say	2.3%		

Where do you normally live?		Who normally pays for the food you eat?	
On my own	1.0%	Myself	4.9%
With family	93.0%	Parent / Carer	91.4%
With a partner	1.8%	Other Family Member	1.1%
With friends	1.0%	Partner	0.6%
Student Accommodation (Catered)	1.7%	Friend/Housemate	0.0%
Student Accommodation (Self Catered)	1.1%	Included in Student Accommodation	1.3%
Somewhere Else - if so, where?	0.6%	Someone else - if so, who?	0.7%

¹ The Scottish Index of Multiple Deprivation is a relative measure of deprivation across Scotland. Read more about this on the [Scottish Government website](#).

Acknowledgements

This research was developed by SYP's Conveners, Deputy Conveners, and Right to Food Campaign Delivery Group.

The research process was managed by Kirsty Morrison, Policy and Public Affairs Manager.

Data analysis was carried out by Rosy Burgess, Governance and Events Manager.

The report was written by Rosy Burgess, Governance and Events Manager, Holly Owens, Policy and Public Affairs Officer, and Ben McKendrick, Chief Executive.

The report was designed by Ryan Coelho, Communications Officer.



Contact

Scottish Youth Parliament
1 Mansfield Place, Edinburgh, EH3 6NB

syp.org.uk · hello@syp.org.uk



@OfficialSYP

The Scottish Youth Parliament is a company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in Scotland No: SC227548 Scottish Youth Parliament is a charity registered in Scotland No: SC032662