



# ACCESSIBLE, EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE EDUCATION

**Policy 4: Decision makers should provide universal free school meals for all young people in Scotland.**

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**Endorsed by:**



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## What's this all about?

Young people told us that they can't learn when they're hungry. To give them the best start and best opportunity to attain and attend school, many young people believe meals should be offered to all young people, including those not in school. Perceptions of poverty and the cost of the school day can be a barrier to some young people reaching their potential. Ensuring all children and young people have access to nutritious food which sustains them during school days should be more embedded in the curriculum, such as having young people grow food in school.

**"I very much agree with free school meals as I know how much they benefit many young people. However, I know that I would never use the privilege of a free school meal and would feel that it would go to waste, and the government could have used this money and time taken rolling it out on something that will benefit many more."**

– Young woman aged 14-17, Scottish Borders

**"How is it that prisoners can have free meals but I need to pay 2.50 for a panini?"**

– Young man aged 14-17, Glasgow

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## What are young people in Scotland calling for?

- Young people call for universal free school meals for all children and young people in Scotland.

**“This should genuinely be for ALL children and young people, including those who are not in school.”**

– Young woman aged 18-21, Orkney

- **Young people call for free school meals that meet the needs of all children and young people, including those with special diets and religious or cultural beliefs.**

**“This may be the only meal a day which is nutritious and adequate for a balanced diet for these young people. This should be open to all.”**

– Young woman aged 14-17, East Lothian

- **Decision makers must increase opportunities to learn about food, health and nutrition, and where our food comes from, in a way that is fun, engaging, and safe.**

**“It would be better if schools had gardens where children could grow their own food to eat as well as learn about nature and where food comes from. It is wrong to give someone something without making them work for it, it will cause them to undervalue food.”**

– Young man aged 18-21, East Dunbartonshire

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## Evidence and Support

- In mid 2024, Child Poverty Action Group in Scotland worked with 5,394 children and young people around Scotland who took part in the [Cost of the School Day Big Question](#), sharing their thoughts on school trips, food, what helps them feel ready to learn and their ideas about what should change. Please see more information [here](#).
- In terms of food and school meals, 97% of young people said food is very or quite important in feeling ready to learn. Hunger has a serious impact on learning and health, and leaves them feeling embarrassed and left out. Food support is provided in many schools but this varies. Young people identified opportunities for more consistent national support. 89% of primary children say the government commitment to P1-P7 universal free school meals is very or quite important, and secondary pupils are also strongly in favour of universal provision.



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## What has SYP done?

Previous [SYP consultations](#) include [SYP's response to the Good Food Nation Plan consultation \(2024\)](#) and [Cost of the School Day – SYP's #WhatsYourTake survey report \(2022\)](#). The [SYP Policy Log](#) includes upholding the right to food; a review of food provided in school meals; reduction or elimination of the cost of school meals; implementation of dietary options in educational institutions; the creation of a food voucher scheme for young people; eradication of poverty-induced hunger.