

Nourish Scotland response to: Welfare Foods Consultation



June 2018

Nourish Scotland is a charity campaigning on food justice issues in Scotland. We believe tasty and nutritious food should be accessible to everyone, be sustainable, and be produced, processed, sold and served in a way that values and respects workers. We campaign for solutions that work across the board: we take a systems approach toward food and health, poverty, fairness, workers' rights, rural economy, environment, climate change, land use, and waste.

We are a partner of the Menu for Change project, a member of the UK Food Poverty Alliance and contribute to the End Hunger UK campaign. The position in this consultation response is our own.

Summary

Nourish Scotland welcomes the proposed changes to Healthy Start in phase 1 of Welfare Foods; we commend the intention to simplify the scheme, remove the stigma associated with the use of paper vouchers, and to increase the value. Nourish is also supportive of the proposed measures in phase 2 of Welfare Foods.

We make the following key recommendations regarding the proposals for phase 1:

1. Collaboration between healthcare, early learning and childcare, and education professionals, as well as with the voluntary sector, is needed to raise awareness of the Best Start Foods scheme and support eligible families to make best use of it.
2. Best Start Foods would benefit from being explicitly linked with other Government-led campaigns and policies, such as Eat Better Feel Better, the Baby Box scheme, and the Scottish Attainment Challenge.
3. The Scottish Government should look into, and support, opportunities to link Best Start Foods with community or regional initiatives that can enhance the impact of the scheme and foster wider benefit to communities and the local economy.
4. Transparent monitoring and reporting on take up and usage of the scheme is very important for the success of Best Start Foods.

Full consultation response

1. How can we increase the uptake and awareness of the Best Start Grant and Best Start Foods?

Different avenues should be explored to increase uptake and awareness of Best Start Grant and Foods, in particular:

- 1) Collaboration across all front-line public sector staff in order to increase the number of contact points which provide opportunities to inform potentially eligible families about the

scheme, including professionals in healthcare, early learning and childcare, and primary education;

- 2) Ensuring that the schemes are integrated into the Universal Health Visiting Pathway;
- 3) Authorising non-healthcare professionals (eg. support workers or voluntary sector staff) to register families into the scheme, or to play an intermediary role between the recipient and the healthcare professional – to tackle the barrier posed by the requirement that the form is signed by a GP or midwife;
- 4) Ensuring good knowledge about the scheme among people responsible for promoting the schemes to families, so that they can answer questions about eligibility, value, and purpose;
- 5) Information about the scheme in plain English should be easily available, online and as paper leaflets in key points of contact, such as GP surgeries, Councils, and childcare settings;
- 6) Removing the requirement for mothers to register again after birth – a better system would be for the mid-wife, health visitor, or other health professional to opt out the recipient in case of miscarriage or stillbirth;
- 7) Utilising existing voluntary and community-based networks to promote the schemes. On this point, the following comments were made at an event with stakeholders, organised by Nourish Scotland and Voluntary Health Scotland in Edinburgh on 22nd May:
 - It was stressed that the voluntary sector is playing an important role in supporting many of the families that are eligible for Best Start Foods. The new scheme should do more to recognise and harness this support network. Continued Government funding for the third sector is also very important.
 - Grassroots organisations are also really important for reaching out to vulnerable or isolated communities and families. Community health or food growing initiatives, for example, can be a critical contact point to raise awareness of Best Start Foods, distribute a veg box, or promote wider health initiatives.

2. What can we do to make the smartcard system as easy to use as possible?

The system should allow for flexibility to meet users' diverse needs. We support the proposal to pre-load the smartcards on a 4-weekly basis, and recommend that credit on smartcards is not made to expire if unspent in that period. This will give people the opportunity to budget and save and would also help to avoid food waste by reducing the pressure to spend in weeks where consumption is expected to be lower.

To further answer this question we report comments made at the event on 22nd May.

There was a consensus that no one size fits all. Removing the need for retailers to register was seen as a great improvement. However, concerns were raised about excluding small independent and community-run shops who cannot afford the cost of electronic payment systems. There were various suggestions to address this issue:

- A mixed paper voucher and e-card system, leaving recipients to choose the option that suits them better.
- A smartcard-only system, where all cards have a unique identifier number or barcode which could be entered into an online system by the retailer to process the payment.

- The option to use smartphone technology, but lack of connectivity in parts of Scotland would be an issue.
- Encouraging the roll out of e-payment systems to all independent and community-run shops through cheaper IT packages, grants, or other financial incentives.

Further points about using smartphone technology:

- A Best Start Foods app could be helpful on various levels: to check the balance on the e-card, to pay (eg. apple pay, or to provide a unique number or barcode which would be scanned by the shopkeeper), and for marketing purposes (recipes, seasonal produce, special offers...)
- Developing a new, stand-alone app for Best Start Foods was discouraged by some, suggesting instead to link it with an existing popular app, eg pregnancy app.
- As some recipients may not have smartphones or data, the app should be an optional feature.

3. How do we gather feedback to make improvements as the system evolves?

Feedback could be gathered through an online platform as well as paper forms available in key points of contact. Feedback should be sought from Best Start Foods recipients, 'frontline staff' including healthcare, early learning and childcare, and education professionals, and voluntary organisations working with people who are eligible, and retailers.

Opportunities for members and representatives from all these groups to come together to discuss issues, successes, and solutions are also very beneficial, as demonstrated by the event organised by Nourish Scotland and Voluntary Health Scotland.

4. How can we work creatively with retailers and others to make it easier for families to use Best Start Foods to improve their diet and nutrition?

To answer this question we report the following comments from the event on 22nd May:

- Given the considerable differences in the cost of living across the country, it was considered whether the value of Best Start Foods 'vouchers' should be higher in areas where the cost of groceries is higher or where shops are beyond walking distance, eg. rural and remote areas.
- It is important to ensure that all families have the facilities to cook and store food (fridge and freezer).
- The lack of knowledge of retail staff about Healthy Start Vouchers was highlighted as an issue. More should be done to improve awareness and knowledge of Best Start Foods, in part with marketing materials. For the independent retailers, information could be shared through the Cash and Carry businesses. The Scottish Grocers Federation's Healthy Living Programme Team could facilitate this as they already work with those stakeholders.
- It was also suggested that retailers should have a duty to promote the scheme through in-shop marketing and staff training. Multiple retailers could be encouraged to add value to the scheme, eg. extra Nectar points or extra discounts for Best Start Foods card users.

- Tackling unhealthy clusters (high concentration of fast-food, alcohol, and tobacco outlets) was stressed as a key priority, as well as improving access to fresh produce in deprived neighbourhoods and rural areas.

5. What could be an innovative programme that will support families to establish healthy eating patterns look like?

Best Start Foods presents an important opportunity to link the health, social justice, community empowerment and local food agendas. Further consideration should be given to how this scheme could support communities and local producers to work together to provide local and seasonal produce to the families enrolled in the scheme.

Recipients could get good value for their money by accessing fresh produce, milk, and eggs direct from local producers through a veg box scheme, a cooperative of small producers or community growers, or from a subsidised farmers market. This could in turn benefit the local economy and have wider social benefits over the longer term as relationships develop among communities and with producers.

Improving Grow-Your-Own (GYO) opportunities is also an important strategy to improve access to fresh produce and improve nutrition: “by embracing all forms of community food-growing, improving access to land for food-growing purposes and giving more people the opportunity to grow their own food, we will help to improve food security.”¹

Promoting community-based action and short supply chains through initiatives such as the abovementioned is likely to have wider benefits on long-term healthy eating patterns. Many parents, community workers, or educators have witnessed that children and young people are more likely to enjoy vegetables when they have some emotional connection to those foods, e.g. through GYO or hearing the story behind the food from the producer, and this pattern is starting to be demonstrated by researchers too.^{2,3,4}

The infrastructure is currently lacking in many places for such initiatives especially in remote or deprived areas. However, veg boxes, cooperatives, and community growing have been tried and tested in some places, and could proliferate and thrive with public support.

6. What evidence could we gather about the impact?

Anonymised but geo-located data would be useful on 1) scheme take up and 2) patterns of purchasing with the Best Start Foods smartcard. Monitoring and reporting should be done in a

¹ Consultation on further guidance to local authorities on Part 9 of the Community Empowerment (Scotland) Act 2015

<https://consult.gov.scot/food-and-drink/part-9-allotments/>

² Growing Youth Growing Food: How Vegetable Gardening Influences Young People's Food Consciousness and Eating Habits

<https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/15330150701319388?src=recsys&journalCode=ueec20>

³ The Influence of Social Involvement, Neighborhood Aesthetics, and Community Garden Participation on Fruit and Vegetable Consumption

<https://ajph.aphapublications.org/doi/abs/10.2105/AJPH.2010.300111>

⁴ How storytelling can bias sensory perceptions among young students

<https://search.proquest.com/openview/2114a24d1c3d6bdc6278e02d8b0f069a/1?pq-origsite=gscholar&cbl=51940>

transparent way, with the data being publicly available and regular reports showing key trends and areas for improvement.

This data could enable targeted action in specific areas or retail outlets where the Best Start Foods vouchers are not used optimally, in collaboration with local stakeholders or specific retailers.

The need for such data was highlighted by Birmingham City Council at the event on 22th May, as they wanted to target hotspots of low take up or usage of Healthy Start Vouchers in their communications and stakeholder outreach activities.

7. Should the provision of children’s vitamins be linked to eligibility for the new Best Start Foods (ie. Up to age of 3)?

Yes. Registration for the free vitamins should be automatic when families register for Best Start Foods.

8. What do you think about the proposal to offer milk as part of the free meal offer for all children in ELC funded provision by 2020

n/a

9. What are your views on the proposal to include an offer of a healthy snack to complement the free milk and meal offer for all children in early learning and childcare funded provision by 2020?

We support this proposal, but encourage a clear definition of ‘healthy snack’, which should include a requirement for the snack to be unprocessed.

10. We are interested in your views on how we can best support childcare providers to provide milk to children outwith funded ELC entitlement. How could this work in practice without creating a costly administrative system?

n/a

11. What are your views on the proposal to include an offer of a healthy snack for children outwith funded ELC entitlement?

We support this proposal, with the same comment re. defining ‘healthy snack’ as above.

For more information, contact:

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