

## Informing and supporting the UK Government's national roll out and implementation of the new school breakfast club programme in England



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On behalf of Sharon Hodgson MP - Chair of the All-Party Parliamentary Group on School Food<sup>3</sup>; Bremner & Co<sup>4</sup>; Feeding Britain<sup>5</sup>, Fair Education Alliance<sup>6</sup>, Family Action<sup>7</sup>, Magic Breakfast<sup>2</sup>, School Food Matters<sup>8</sup>, Chartwells<sup>9</sup>

## Introduction

The Department for Education (DfE) has provided full details of the new national breakfast club programme and the Early Adopters scheme at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/breakfast-clubs-early-adopter-guidance-for-schools-and-trusts-in-england/breakfast-clubs-early-adopter-guidance-for-schools-and-trusts-in-england#designingbreakfastclubs>. This guidance provides information and support to the 750 early adopter schools. The DfE has adopted a 'test and learn' approach to collecting evidence on what works and have sought input from existing providers of school breakfasts. The aim is for the new national breakfast club programme to build on existing school provision and contribute to the full wraparound childcare offer, with a guarantee of 30 minutes free childcare immediately preceding the start of the school day. To integrate with existing provision, schools and pre-school club providers, and breakfast clubs need to consider their current operating models. For example, if a private, voluntary and independent provider (PVI) currently provides before school childcare for a school from 8am to 9am, then this should continue, and schools are asked to work with the PVI about how to incorporate this new free and universal minimum expectation within or alongside such provision. A similar approach should be considered to existing school breakfast clubs where historically the focus may have been solely on provision of a breakfast and not the childcare element of the new programme. As the DfE has adopted a test and learn approach to learn from the Early Adopters scheme and existing provision, Prof Greta Defeyter and Dr Lindsey MacDonald decided to convene a co-production workshop with the aim of bringing together expertise from across government, businesses, charities, schools, school caterers and academia to develop a collaborative response to the DfE's introduction of the new school breakfast club programme for all primary aged pupils attending state funded schools in England. The main objective of the event was to bring together key stakeholders who lead school food programmes that deliver food to children through breakfast, lunch or after school provision to develop a more coherent and effective framework of school food across the school day, with the main aim of improving the opportunities offered to parents and pupils to drive engagement, uptake and positive health, educational, social and economic outcomes; whilst supporting the DfE and schools in terms of implementation and delivery.

We believe the UK Government's commitment to providing all primary aged children in state funded schools with 30 minutes of free childcare alongside a nutritious breakfast presents an exciting opportunity to bring key stakeholders together to develop a more coherent, and better funded, school food provision to state funded schools across England, and to improve multiple individual, household, local and national outcomes.

In this workshop we brought together our collective expertise in this field, with the aim of informing and supporting the DfE in their forthcoming roll out of the programme - ensuring it delivers on its objectives and aims. This report presents the co-produced outcomes of our collective thinking and working that will add value to the new school breakfast club programme. As with all our work, this workshop was underpinned by both practice and policy, and research expertise. Bringing this expertise together in a single workshop has proven, as in the case of developing the Holiday Activities and Food framework, to be an effective way of engaging in co-design and co-production processes. This is the first workshop of two workshops, that will provide the DfE with both research, policy and practice informed, co-produced frameworks. The findings of the second workshop will be published shortly and will include the collective thinking and co-produced outcomes of school leaders, PVI, parents and pupils, and academics.

## **The Project Team**

### **The Healthy Living Lab, and the School of Design at Northumbria University**

Since 2014, the **Healthy Living Lab** [www.northumbria.ac.uk/holidayprogrammes](http://www.northumbria.ac.uk/holidayprogrammes), at Northumbria University, has been a leader in researching childhood food insecurity, school breakfast clubs, HAF, and the interrelated problems associated with poverty. The interdisciplinary team within the Lab conduct pioneering, interdisciplinary research into the prevalence of holiday programmes across the UK and worldwide, as well as the important role that expanded, centrally coordinated programmes, such as school breakfast clubs, can play in combatting childhood food insecurity and increasing children's participation in physical activity and other social, enriching activities. The Healthy Living Lab is led by Professor Greta Defeyter and includes Dr Emily Round whose expertise is on nutritional interventions with the Holiday Activities and Food programme, and Mrs Rossana King (PhD student), who is a qualified primary school teacher and has expertise in nutritional education programmes within primary schools in England. Full details of over two decades of research on school breakfast clubs can be found at [School Food and Breakfast Clubs; A-Literature-Review-on-the-Effects-of-Breakfast-Consumption-and-School-Breakfast-Clubs-2-1.pdf](#). The Healthy Living Lab is collaborating with researchers from Northumbria University's **School of Design, Arts and Creative Industries** to incorporate co-design methods within its approach to working with children and young people. Professor Joyce Yee is a Professor of Design and Social Innovation, and her work uses co-design to explore more equitable, respectful, and sustainable approaches to community challenges. Dr Nicholas Spencer is Associate Professor of Design Innovation. His research focusses on the application of design to navigate contested futures within complex social and organisational situations contributing to our understanding of Design for Social Innovation. All illustration work was

undertaken by Ben Nightingale, Creative Director of Babatat Studio.

### **Magic Breakfast**

Magic Breakfast is a registered charity that was established in 2003 and exists to make sure no child or young person is too hungry to learn. Magic Breakfast provides nutritious breakfasts and expert support to primary, secondary, ASN/SEND schools and pupil referral units in disadvantaged areas of England and Scotland. Providing a daily school breakfast ensures that every child and young person feels included, equal and set up for success. Magic Breakfast works to be part of the solution to end child morning hunger for good through our campaigning, research and advocacy work with politicians and decision-makers.

Research undertaken and published by Magic Breakfast or evaluations of its programme can be found on their website: [www.magicbreakfast.com](http://www.magicbreakfast.com).

### **Project Aims and Objectives**

The aim of this project was to co-produce a national framework that incorporates the DfE's current criteria and guidance for the new school breakfast club programme (e.g. School Food Standards, 30 minutes before school childcare) and importantly includes empirical research findings, and the views of policy and practice experts to explore new opportunities, delivery and implementation mechanisms and processes. To achieve this aim, the current project involved key adult stakeholders in a number of co-production methods and processes to develop a visual illustration of a national school breakfast club programme framework to support continuity between existing services (e.g. school food and childcare) whilst enabling flexibility based on need and assets at the local school level. The targeted outcome of this project was to co-produce a programme framework that:

- Informs planning, implementation, and delivery of the new school breakfast programme to meet the needs of schools, parents, and pupils at both a national and local level.
- Ensures that the proposed framework adheres to the DfE's criteria and minimum expectations (e.g., safeguarding, school food standards etc.).
- Provides added value for money through exploring other key factors (e.g., supply chain).
- Utilises adult stakeholders' knowledge and expertise from across multiple sectors to scaffold learning.
- Consolidates different models of school breakfast and childcare delivery into a high level, overarching national framework.
- Is informed by prior research, policy, and practice.

### **The Workshop Method:**

The full day workshop took place in person on Friday, 21 March 2025 at Fora London Wall, London, UK and was attended by 21 adults from across the UK Government, NGOs, Charities, Businesses, School Caterers, Charities and Academia. As the project is part of a wider research project on the national school breakfast club programme, ethical approval was obtained from The Faculty of Health and Life Sciences at Northumbria University (Ethics number 7433) HLS, and each attendee was provided information about the research project prior to attending the workshop. All delegates consented to participate in the research and to have photographs taken for future dissemination.

The workshop approach focused on the front end of a design process. It sought to recognise and explore the complexity of delivery across a diversity of UK school settings and providers. To develop a visual illustration of a potential school breakfast club framework the workshop engaged participants to work collaboratively to define challenges, explore solutions and consider impacts. This collaborative work was captured by the illustrator in a single illustration, refined through a final collective discussion and review.

Following a brief introduction to the workshop by Professor Defeyter and Dr MacDonald in which participants were reminded about the objectives and aims of the project, and their right to withdraw, participants immediately began work on the first of four workshop activities. In order to continually consider who (i.e., parents and children) we are co-designing the programme for, a revolving display of parents and children with different needs was displayed on a large screen at the front of the room.



*Figure 1. Introduction to the workshop activities.*

### **Workshop Activities**

Workshop Activity 1: As a form of introduction, participants located the position(s) of their organisation and their role within various parts of the primary school food system map.



Figure 2. Participant mapping on the primary school food system.

Following activity 1, participants spent the major proportion of workshop time undertaking Activity 2 and 3 with participants carefully selected to form five groups ensuring each group contained a range of expertise from different sectors, concerns and expertise. One member of the academic team joined each table to act as a facilitator.

**Workshop Activity 2:** allowed participants to prioritise challenges related to implementing nationally the new school breakfast club programme and, working together, consider creative mechanisms and actions that would potentially meet the challenges. The activity had three simple steps:

- 1) Produce 3-5 core challenges. To do this, individuals produced a large set of challenges which were then collectively discussed, reviewed, organised into themes and finally synthesised into 3-5 challenge statements.
- 2) Respond to each core challenge with several creative propositions, framed as 'what if..' or 'how might we..', that could offer a route or mechanism to addressing the challenge.
- 3) Define practical steps, initiatives and actions based on their 'what if..' or 'how might we..' propositions.



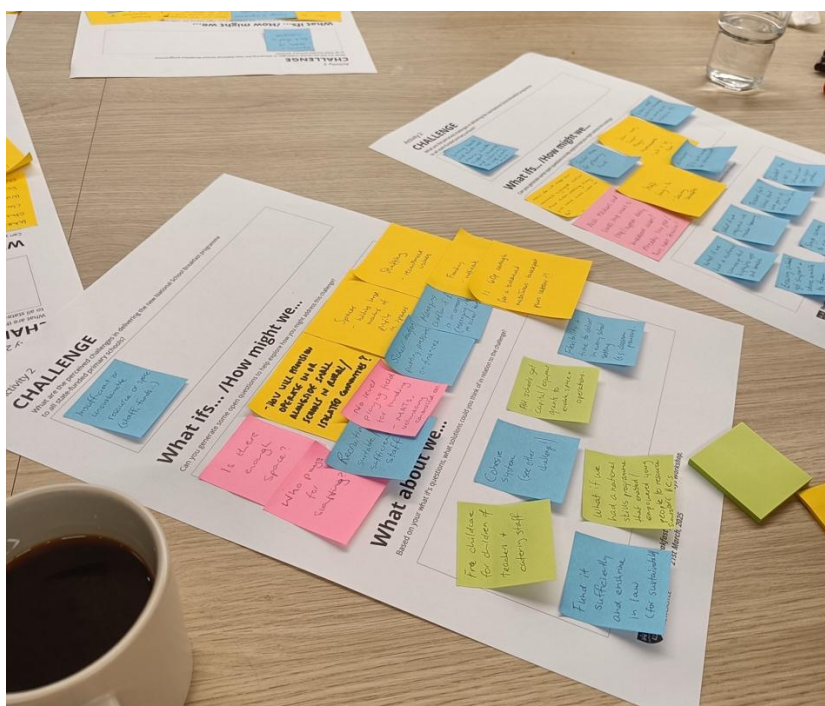


Figure 3. Participant mapping on the primary school food system.

**Workshop Activity 3:** further explored the core challenges identified in Activity 2 seeking to consider how addressing this challenge might affect different people (pupils, parents, school staff and catering staff). Groups were introduced to 14 different research-informed user stories (see Fig. 5 & 6). These stories, told from the perspectives of parents, pupils, teachers and caterers, were intended as stimulation for the groups' thinking. Groups were asked to consider if the user stories represented different issues to those, they had focused upon, and to consider how they would address them.





Figure 4. Participants engaged in the workshop activities.



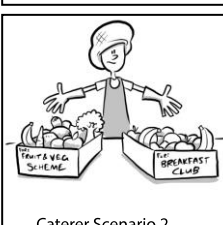
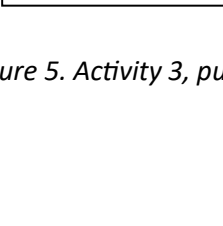


 <p>Pupil Scenario 1.</p>	<p>"I attend a pupil referral unit (PRU), which is not in my local area. It takes a long time to travel to school. I want to know that when I arrive at school, I won't have missed all the breakfast food provision available so that I am not hungry throughout the rest of the day."</p>
 <p>Pupil Scenario 3.</p>	<p>"I like having a fixed routine and seeing familiar faces at my breakfast club. As someone with autism and sensory processing disorder, these are important for me to feel comfortable. Now that my breakfast club is open to more children, would my routine be disrupted and the environment be too noisy for me to attend?"</p>
 <p>Caterer Scenario 2.</p>	<p>"I haven't attended breakfast club before, and my parents want me to go to enable mom to get to work earlier. I am worried that I won't like the food on offer. I want to know that there will be something I like so that I am not hungry later in the day."</p>
 <p>Caterer Scenario 1.</p>	<p>"My company provides school meals into multiple primary schools. Can arrangements about food provision be made separately to staffing arrangements?"</p>
 <p>Caterer Scenario 3.</p>	<p>"I provide fruit and vegetables to school through the Fruit and Vegetable Scheme. I want to provide a different fruit and vegetable offer to breakfast and lunch. Is the DfE considering offering guidance regarding a more coherent approach to school food?"</p>
 <p>Caterer Scenario 2.</p>	<p>"I am a young mum who works shifts in a local factory. My school currently asks me to register my child for breakfast club on a termly basis, but this is difficult as I work shifts. How will I register for the new programme that is free to all primary school children?"</p>

Figure 5. Activity 3, pupil and caterer user stories.



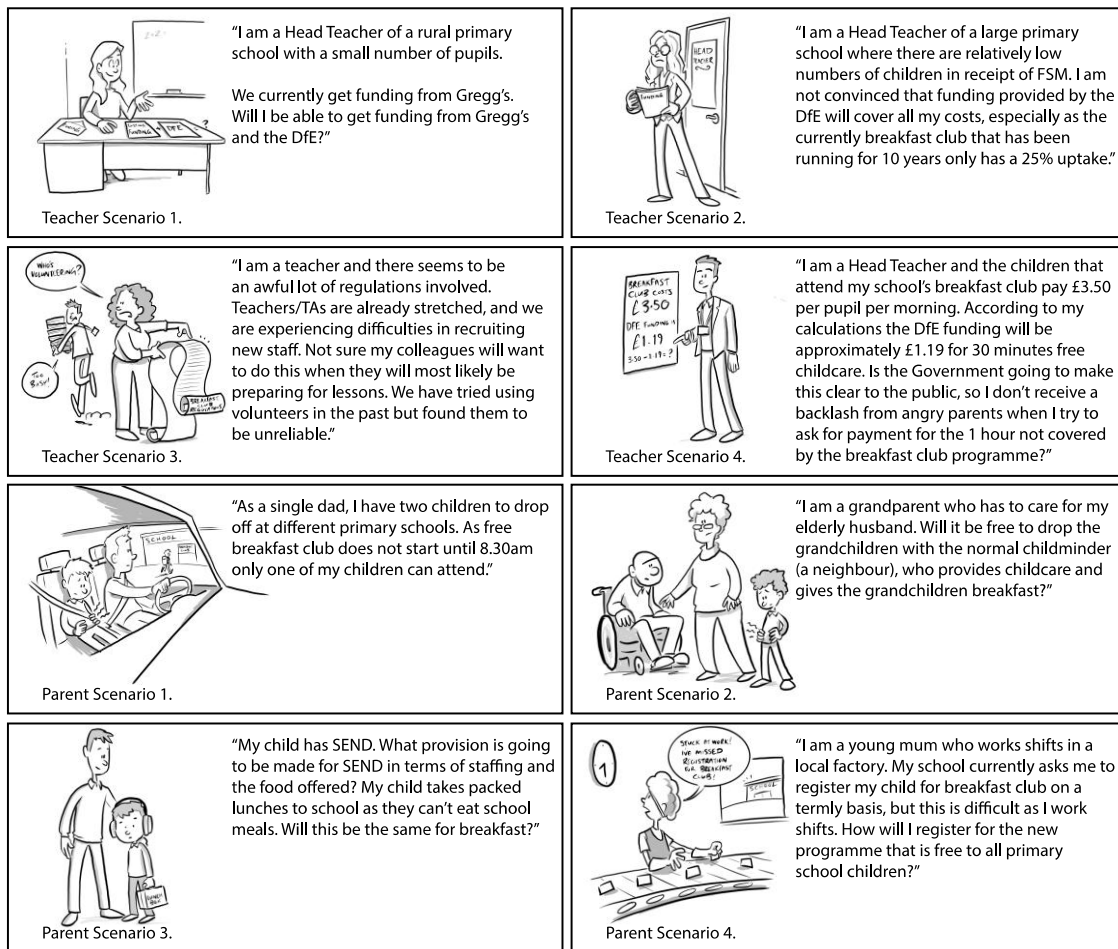


Figure 6. Activity 3, teacher and parent user stories.

Workshop Activity 4: focused on the illustration that had been developed to synthesise the issues and opportunities identified across all the groups in Activity 2 and 3. Gathered around the large illustration, its content was presented by the illustrator, which was discussed by the group. During this review, adjustments and additions were suggested and debated. If consensus was reached the illustrator made changes in real-time.



Figure 7. Collectively discussing and adjusting the workshop's illustration.

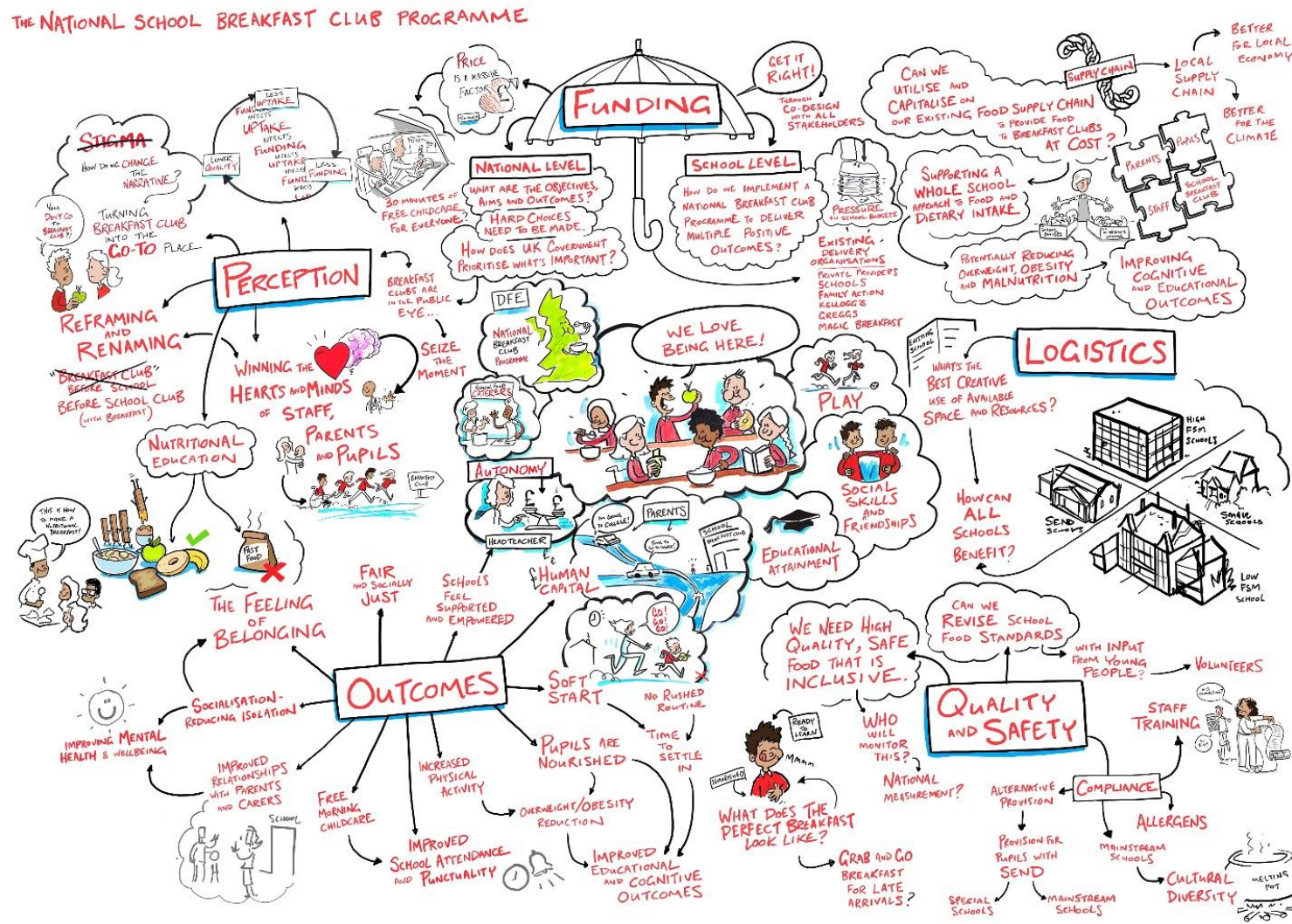


Figure 8. Illustration of a potential school breakfast club programme framework.

## **Conclusion**

This co-produced report generated innovative solutions on how to maximise the potential impact of the new national school breakfast programme. Mapping the positive outcomes of existing school breakfast provision alongside some of the potential barriers to the new school breakfast club programme provided a gestalt view of the national school food system in schools and enabled participants to innovate. The workshop also provided insights in how existing provision could flex to accommodate and assimilate the new school breakfast programme, thereby adding value to the provision offered to parents and pupils. For example, the workshop explored how school caterers could provide food at cost to maximise school food budgets, reduce school administrative burden, whilst ensuring compliance to School Food Standards and Natasha's Law. Other key discussions considered how the catering provision works in partnership or collaboration with food education providers within schools, so they are not seen by pupils as two distinct topics. Rather how providers could collaborate to ensure that food provision and food education offers a coherent, scaffolded learning experience as part of a normative school day. Similarly, consideration about how the breakfast provision supports positive pupil outcomes such as socialisation, wellbeing, and improved cognition and behaviours, whilst enabling parents to get to work or attend education or training provision etc., and how this could be best accommodated and assimilated into existing provision. Although the potential for pupils arriving 'just in time for the start of school' and being hungry through not consuming a breakfast at home or at school was a concern. Whilst the 30-minute free childcare is excellent, we strongly recommend that the DfE incorporates a range of options (e.g. soft-start classroom based; longer time period for childcare to enable parents to travel to work etc.). Importantly, the workshop highlighted some of the risks associated with siloed school food programmes (e.g. school breakfast, fruit and vegetable scheme, school meals, after school dining), rather than adopting a coherent whole school food approach to food that has the pupil at its very centre. Indeed, we propose that the DfE should consider how to use the findings of this workshop to co-develop a coherent approach to funding that includes wrap around care, all food served at school, food related projects, and food education, rather than funding siloed programmes. We believe that adopting a co-designed approach with teachers, parents and staff voice will increase efficiencies, maximise outcomes, and align policy and practice to the UN Sustainable Development Goals (e.g. Zero Hunger, Good Health and Wellbeing, Quality Education, Climate Action, Reduced Inequalities).

## **Post Workshop Actions**

Following the workshop the research team from Northumbria University has led a workshop involving school staff, parents and pupils. The findings from this second workshop will be published in a separate report.

For further information or details on this report, or the report involving school staff, parents and children please contact the corresponding author: Professor Greta Defeyter at [greta.defeyter@northumbria.ac.uk](mailto:greta.defeyter@northumbria.ac.uk)