

Food For Thought Campaign

Reasons to support universal free school meal expansion to all pupils.

The STUC Women's Committee are campaigning to expand universal free school meal entitlement to all young people attending publicly funded nursery, primary and secondary schools in Scotland. As part of the campaign, we are urging the Scottish Government to fully fund Local Government to implement this; and provide councils funding to ensure that holiday hunger provision can be offered in all 32 Local Authorities with dignity, nutrition, and young people's rights at its core. School meals are more than just food on a plate.

TACKLE HUNGER

Hunger knows no age boundaries. No young person irrespective of their school-age or stage should ever experience or risk going hungry in one of the richest nations in the world. Expanding universal school meals to all will guarantee every child and young person at least one hot and nutritious meal a day.

STINGA FREE

A universal school meal for all will eliminate the poverty-related stigma and shame that has long been associated with means-tested free school meals provision. Universal free school meals remain the best way to ensure that all young people have access to a healthy and nutritious meal at school, stigma-free. All young people will be able to enjoy and access their school lunch together without embarrassment, shame, or segregated down the lines of family income. All young people deserve to access food with dignity.

RIGHT TO FOOD

Article 27 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (UNCRC) states that all Children and Young People have the right to be able to live in a way that helps them reach their full physical, mental, spiritual, moral, and social potential. For this to happen, they should have access to adequate food and housing. The Scottish Government has committed to enshrining the UNCRC into Scots Law. Expanding UFM's to all will help meet all young people's right to food.

EDUCATIONAL ATTAINMENT

No hungry young person is ready to learn. The educational attainment gap in Scotland is rooted in poverty and inequality. The attainment gap is largest for children and young people eligible for free school meals. Expanding universal school meals to all will help contribute to measures that seek to address and reduce the poverty-related attainment gap in Scotland, and fuel young peoples' learning.

NUTRITION

All young people should have access to a nutritious meal. Children and young people in Scotland fall short of national dietary recommendations and many are consuming inadequate amounts of fruit and vegetables and eating too many foods high in fat, saturated fat, salt, and sugar. Expanding universal free school meal access to secondary school pupils will help aide measures to improve young people's daily nutrition and encourage a whole-school community approach to food nutrition.

SCHOOL STAGE/ AGE SHOULD NOT BE A BARRIER

The Scottish Government has already committed to offering the expansion of universal free school meal provision to all primary school pupils '*by the end of the 2021-2026 parliamentary session*'. The Scottish Government accept the beneficiaries of universal free school meals in principle, so why not expand this out to secondary school pupils too? It makes policy and political sense. All young people irrespective of their school stage and age should have access to a universal, nutritious, fulling and stigma-free meals.

REDUCE POVERTY

1 in 5 working-aged people (19%) in Scotland is living in poverty and 61% of working age adults in poverty and 68% of children in poverty live in a household where someone is in employment. Thousands of families living in poverty every day do not qualify for a free school meal. Universalism will support wider efforts to tackle child poverty in Scotland.