

Food education: The missing ingredient in a healthier, more sustainable future

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Why now



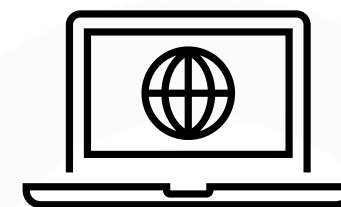
- It is currently **a pivotal moment** for food education across the UK - curriculum development, renewed attention to school food, growing concerns about children's health and food insecurity, and the climate and sustainability agenda.
- Food education is currently being **discussed in lots of different policy conversations**, but rarely as one connected agenda.
- Food education has the **potential to contribute to attainment and readiness to learn**, making the investment in it particularly relevant .
- The **decline in specialist food and D&T teachers** presents a **significant challenge** for the future of food education.
- Children are navigating an **increasingly complex food environment** - social media, influencers, marketing, misinformation and conflicting messages about health, sustainability and food choices, plus easy access to fast-food and takeaway outlets near schools, makes evidence-based education increasingly important.
- Food security and affordability make **practical food skills more important**, not less.
- There is an opportunity to connect food education with **future workforce policy decisions**.



Food – a fact of life

The whitepaper builds on the British Nutrition Foundation's long-standing commitment to food education through *Food – a fact of life*, its flagship UK education programme delivered in partnership with AHDB.

Established in 1991, the programme provides free healthy eating, cooking and where food comes from resources for children and young people aged 3-18 years, alongside professional development for teachers.



500,000
users each year

2 million



resources
downloaded
each year





Methodology

Primary research: in-depth interviews with seven senior contributors across all four UK nations; practising and former teachers, an awarding body, initial teacher education, academia and representatives BNF's Education Working Groups.

Evidence review: published UK sources only, including government statistics and curriculum policy from all four nations, Ofsted and Education Scotland frameworks, and large-scale teacher surveys.

Four-nation comparison: England, Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales examined separately on curriculum, funding, inspection and workforce, to identify where provision diverges and why.

Fully referenced: 49 cited sources, with all factual claims traced to a named primary source or a named interviewee.



Key takeaways

- Poor diet drives childhood obesity and long-term disease risk and can impact on attention and learning. The cost of living is widening dietary inequalities.
- Marketing, social media, and fast-food outlets clustered near schools all compete directly with what children are taught in the classroom.
- Home cooking and food skills are in decline, even though children and adults consistently rate them as essential life skills.
- Food education is also a pathway into the UK's 4.1-million strong agri-food workforce, an economic opportunity that is currently underutilised.

Key takeaways



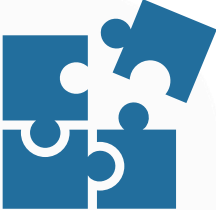
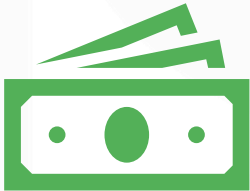
- Provision is inconsistent within and between the four nations, shaped by curriculum design, funding, inspection, and local priorities.
- Compulsory food education effectively ends at 14 across the UK, just as young people become more independent and more exposed to misinformation.
- Teacher recruitment, curriculum time, and ingredient costs are under pressure in every nation, though the specific barriers differ.
- Professional development must keep pace with newer pressures such as online misinformation.
- *Food - a fact of life* remains one of the few consistent, free, UK-wide resources teachers can rely on.



Recommendations



The following recommendations set out where non-profit organisations, governments, schools and industry across the UK can act.

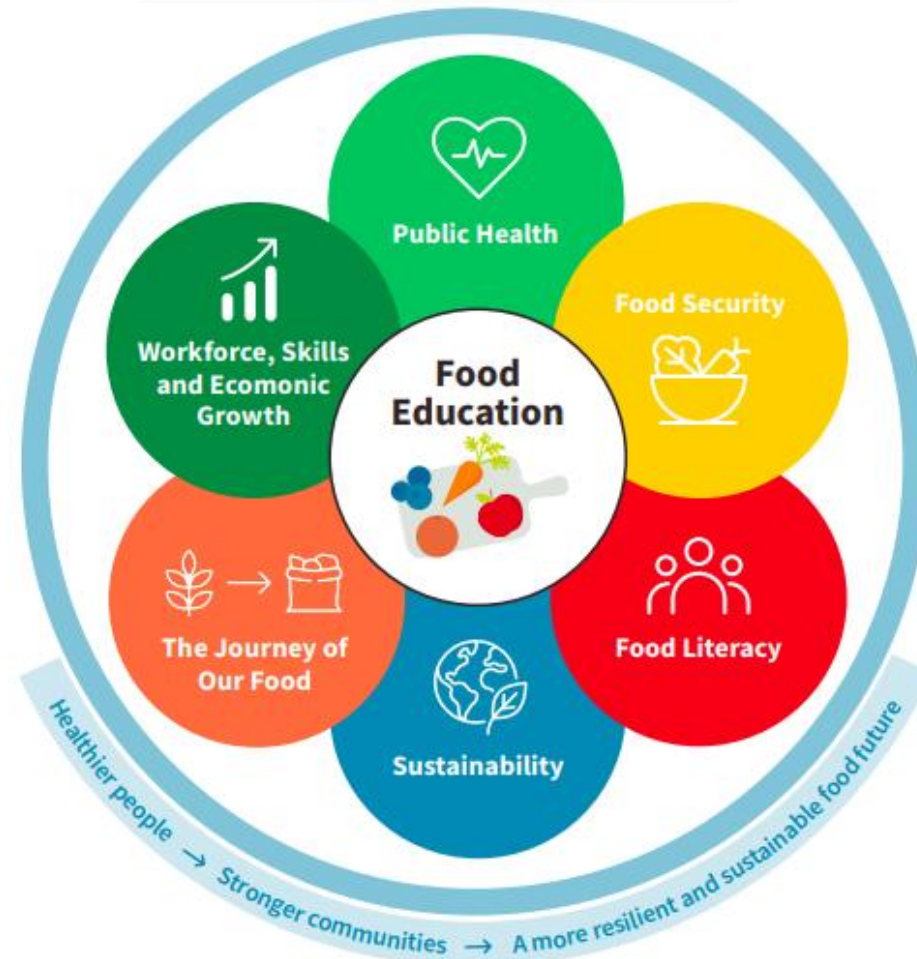
 Recognise and integrate food education within health prevention policy.	 Fund the ingredients and equipment schools need.	 Protect food education from further marginalisation.	 Strengthen monitoring, inspection and accountability for food education.
 Embed food education within school food and whole-school health policy.	 Treat food literacy with equal importance to digital, media and financial literacy.	 Link food education to sustainability and food systems policy.	 Connect food education with the workforce, skills, and economic growth.



Food education connects people, food and future opportunities



When food education is at the heart of our schools and communities, it helps build healthier people, stronger communities, a more resilient food system and a more sustainable future.





Thank you!

For more information contact education@nutrition.org.uk

