school meals service in Scotland
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Consumers benefit from efficient and effective services in the public and private sectors. Service-providers benefit from discriminating consumers. A balanced partnership between the two is essential and the SCC seeks to develop this partnership by:

- carrying out research into consumer issues and concerns;
- informing key policy and decision-makers about consumer concerns and issues;
- influencing key policy and decision-making processes;
- informing and raising awareness among consumers.

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The SCC assesses the consumer perspective in any situation by analysing the position of consumers against a set of consumer principles.

These are:

ACCESS

Can consumers actually get the goods or services they need or want?

CHOICE

Can consumers affect the way the goods and services are provided through their own choice?

INFORMATION

Do consumers have the information they need, presented in the way they want, to make informed choices?

REDRESS

If something goes wrong, can it be put right?

SAFETY

Are standards as high as they can reasonably be?

FAIRNESS

Are consumers subject to arbitrary discrimination for reasons unconnected with their characteristics as consumers?

REPRESENTATION

If consumers cannot affect what is provided through their own choices, are there other effective means for their views to be represented?

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Introduction

A range of views exist in relation to school meals services in Scotland. The Scottish Consumer Council (SCC) and the Health Education Board for Scotland (HEBS) have attempted to understand the diversity by commissioning research to explore the views of users of these services, particularly pupils, parents and teachers. This short report summarises the findings of the research and puts forward issues and questions to stimulate thinking.

The report is of relevance to professionals, parents and individuals with an interest in school meals in Scotland.

School meals services are rarely provided with a captive clientele. Pupils and parents at primary schools can choose the alternative of packed lunches or going home, while at secondary schools, pupils can choose packed lunches and can also buy food at local shops and take-aways.

In order to remain viable therefore, school meals services have to recognise that they are operating in a competitive market. Pupils and parents are consumers whose needs and wants have to be met in order to win and keep their custom.

However, unlike other consumers, pupils and their parents are being offered a service within an educational environment and they can be directed, indeed expect to be directed, towards particular choices.

The challenge for school meals services, for pupils, parents and teachers, is how to balance the need for pupil choice against the responsibility to educate children and young people into choosing and buying healthy foods.

In 2000, the Health Education Board for Scotland (HEBS) and the Scottish Consumer Council (SCC) commissioned qualitative research to gain a better understanding of the opinions of key groups who have an interest in the development, delivery and consumption of school meals. The key groups are those who are in charge of providing the service (the local authorities) and those who use the service (pupils, parents and teachers).

The SCC and HEBS have produced this short summary from a complex area of study to draw out the range of views that exist in relation to school meals services, particularly those of pupils, parents and teachers. It then puts forward issues arising from the research, to stimulate thinking and contribute to the wider public debate on school meals. The findings provide a first step in piecing together the consumer perspective.
METHODOLOGY

Interviews were conducted with 27 local authorities and with 18 teachers by Scottish Health Feedback for HEBS and the SCC. Fifty-three older pupils and 26 parents took part in discussions in small groups and 87 younger children showed what they did at lunchtime and what changes they would like to find in the dining rooms using a technique called "draw and write". In all, 140 pupils took part.

The research examined schools where the school meals service had been up-graded using commercial sponsorship (3 schools), schools where the service had been up-graded without commercial sponsorship (3 schools) and schools where the service had not been upgraded (2 schools). In total 8 schools within 5 Local Authority areas were represented.
Challenges facing school meals services

A range of pressures facing school meals services are examined in this section, including the alternatives available to pupils, fewer customers in rural areas, changing eating habits and the educational and social role of school meals. It concludes that a key challenge for providers is how to manage the competing demands while maintaining a financially sound business.

School meals services have been under pressure over the last few years, with a decline in the number of pupils choosing to buy food from the dining room in school, opting instead for an alternative food provider. These commonly include home dinners, packed lunches, local shops, vans, take-aways or tuck shops and vending machines. A major concern is the lack of uptake from pupils eligible for free school meals.

The majority of pupils now have more options at lunchtime. They can, with or without the consent of their parents, take their custom elsewhere than the school dining room. The result is that school meals services no longer have a captive audience and have to compete for pupils' custom and have to find ways of attracting more pupils to buy food in school.

Rural schools
In rural areas children generally travel longer distances to school than children in towns and cities. They often cannot go home for lunch and there are fewer shops and take-aways near their schools. They are, therefore, more likely to buy school meals. However, other pressures face some rural schools such as falling numbers of pupils, which has meant that school meals services are still faced with fewer customers.

Cultural change
School meals services also have to contend with wider cultural and social changes and recognise that the way people eat has changed. This includes more meals consumed outside the home from cafes and restaurants, or as take-aways from snack bars and food chains. Both inside and outside the home, more food is taken as a snack rather than as part of a sit-down meal.
Educational role
Children need to eat, and to eat well, in order to be able to learn. Pupils are young and may be impressionable, and they need to learn about diet in the context of a healthy lifestyle and how to make healthy choices in order to form good dietary habits to take into adulthood.

In order to sell more, school meals services have to respond to the changes and increased options available to pupils. Like other food outlets, they have to try to give their customers what they want in the way that they want it. However, unlike other food outlets, school meals services also have an important educational and social role.

Social exclusion
Free school meals are an important element in combating social exclusion and the continued existence of a thriving school meals service is essential to pupils eligible for free meals. The research found that approximately one in seven primary school pupils and one in eight secondary school pupils were eligible for a free school meal. Clearly, the continued existence of school meals services are important for this group of children.

However, the research found that take up of free school meals was low.

The key issue for schools is how to maintain this educational and social role while also responding to the changes in schools and in society. The challenge is how to sell enough food to enough customers in order to be financially sound while also promoting healthy choices to these customers. School meals services have to find a balance between financial management and healthy eating. As one respondent said, there is “no point in providing healthy food if no-one comes”.
Responsibilities for school meals services

The framework under which the provision of school meals services operate is summarised in this section. This includes a duty to consult users of school meals services. A range of views on the method and extent of consultation is outlined.

Since the 1990's local authorities have had to put school meals services out to tender. As a result, there is a split between the purchasers and the providers. Local authorities are the purchasers of the school meals services and set the conditions under which the providers operate. These include written standards on quality and requirements such as "low fat, low salt, low sugar and high fibre in meals". The providers of the meals are private operators in some areas, while in other areas in-house local authority services have been awarded the contract. In a few areas meals are provided by a combination of private and local authority staff. The providers work to the standards and rules set by local authorities but are solely responsible for attracting and keeping customers.

Best Value
Best Value, set out by central government, now requires all local authorities to assess the services they provide. This includes their own and those contracted out to the voluntary and private sectors. Under Best Value, local authorities have to consider existing practices and service provision, consult stakeholders, compare themselves with other similar services and establish critical success factors against which future provision can be judged. The intention is to promote a culture of continuous learning and improvement.

Consultation with Stakeholders
A key element of Best Value is consultation with stakeholders. Most, but not all, of the local authorities interviewed had consulted with parents, pupils and teachers either as part of Best Value or because they were putting into effect their plans to upgrade school meals services. However, the method and extent of consultation or whether it had influenced change was not clear.
The views of parents in the research project seemed to indicate that some felt they had not been consulted or that their views had been ignored. Some providers of school meals services were seen as having decided on changes with little or no consultation and then informed parents about the changes. Other service providers had consulted parents and then did not appear to have acted on the information received. In one school, the parents had actively lobbied for change, but believed that their concerns had not been taken into consideration.

I'm really annoyed, I mean the fact that particularly since we bothered to put a survey together we weren't just sort of making comments without consulting people. We actually had evidence to show that the majority of parents and children did not like the system and they still did not listen to us. I mean in fairness there were a few odd parents who did like it.

(Parent)
Meeting the needs of customers

Changes that have been made to school meals services are explored in this section, along with associated views of the users of the service. The key findings are highlighted throughout.

The research indicates that many changes have been made to school meals services, much of which are viewed in a positive light by the users of the services. However, some appear to be viewed less favourably by the users. The main changes to school meals services arising from the research, with views of users, are summarised below.

Upgrading the dining room

The research found that for the most part, schools have made changes to the layout and design of the dining room so that many resemble modern cafeterias or food courts.

*In high schools we've totally revamped dining rooms/kitchens in all but one… They now have food courts with a selection of three counters.* (School meals service)

Parents generally liked these changes to the physical environment. They also felt that the pupils were treated more like adults. Pupils also appeared positive about these changes, particularly in having increased space and a more relaxed atmosphere in which to eat.

*The tables are quite big so you can sit round with all your friends and get everyone round one table.* (Pupil)

The layout of the dining room appears to be an important factor for pupils. Suggestions for improvements made by some parents were having the room divided into small areas “not for any reason but just more private that they could sit and have a chat”.

Some pupils said that they did not like restrictions on where they could sit in the dining room, as they wanted to be able to sit with their friends. Some schools insisted that children eating packed lunches had to sit in a separate area of the dining room from those eating school dinners, or that those who had chosen cold dinners had to sit separately from those who had chosen hot dinners. This meant that pupils could not sit with their friends and that mixed years had to sit together, something that did not appear popular. However, some schools took a more relaxed view to where pupils eat, to the extent that some allowed pupils to eat their food outside the dining room.
An important factor for influencing where and what pupils eat is recognising that pupils are strongly influenced by what their friends are doing.

Sometimes if my friends are all having a packed lunch I would prefer to go up to the registration room to have it but sometimes maybe if it’s raining I’ll go into the canteen but sometimes I just go [out of school] because that’s where all my other friends go. (Pupil)

Well I go and get my lunch and I take it up to my common room and eat it there and after I finish it we just sit and talk in the common room. (Pupil)

• A key conclusion of the research is that school meals services which provide a more attractive eating environment and which try to promote social time among pupils are more likely to increase uptake by pupils.

Reducing delays
An important factor in encouraging pupils to buy school meals is to reduce the queuing and serving time for food. Eating food is just one activity that has to be fitted into the lunch break. For younger children, it is important they have time to play with friends. Older pupils want to be with their friends, but also to take part in extra-curricular activities like sport.

Many school meals services have recognised the importance of the time-factor to pupils by trying to cut down on the delays in buying food at the counters. For example, one school has introduced a system of pre-ordering food ahead of the lunch break which is then assembled at the counter. Others have increased the number of "outlets" at the counters.
Queue lanes have increased from one to six. A faster service has therefore increased the food uptake. (School meals service)

A frequent complaint among pupils was the amount of time spent queuing. Their frustration was compounded if their preferred food choice was sold out by the time they were served.

There was a view that it is no good attracting more pupils to buy school meals if the system for selling the meals cannot cope with the demand. A number of school meals services have attempted to alleviate this problem.

Some schools sought to reduce the time spent queuing to pay for food by introducing a swipe card system for payment. Local authorities felt that this had the added attraction of concealing those pupils who receive free school meals. The system appeared popular with pupils except in one school where the complaints about the system included the £2 charge for replacing lost cards. Also, the machine for recharging the cards was useable only for one hour at lunchtime, which meant that there were then long queues to recharge the cards.

- A key conclusion is that schools which find acceptable ways of reducing the time spent choosing and buying food will increase uptake - but only if they ensure that the means of saving time do not add to queues in other areas and do not reduce choice and quality or increase costs.

It's too difficult to get near the canteen 'cause lots of people go there and it just queues up and you have to leave your bags and stuff and you get squashed. (Pupil)
Providing choice and information
Pupils wanted to be able to choose what they liked or could eat and the perception of having choices appears to be important to some pupils. Vegetarians in particular wanted greater choice and also more information about whether the food was free of animal products.

Both pupils and teachers praised services where there was an increase in variety and freshness.

...high schools now have food courts with selection of three counters ‘Round the World’, ‘Hearty Bar’ and ‘Fast Choice’. In primaries we’ve run promotions for a year with food courts and colour zoning. (School meals service)

Pupils and parents in one school, which had a fixed tray system, had suggestions for improving choice within the system.

I think either they should, like if you don't eat all of it you can just say 'I'm not going to eat that' and they deduct it off the price or something, or take it off the tray. (Pupil)

This is just something that my children have told me that they’re not allowed to swap puddings and things between trays and if there's something they don't like they just have the tray as it is but the teachers can. (Parent)

- A key finding is that pupils want to be able to make a choice over the food they buy, and many need information to make this easier.

Comparing cost and providing value for money
Value for money appears to be a key factor in determining whether pupils and parents choose school meals over packed lunches and other options. The average cost of a school meal is £1.35. For some families this was too expensive, but all pupils and parents considered the cost to some extent.

There's a part called the Hearty Bar where you can just get healthy sandwiches, the other half is burgers and stuff like that so if you're having a "I'm going to be healthy today" you can just go there and if you're having a bad day you just go to the other side. They give you a choice. (Pupil)
I think before it [dining room] was quite popular before the prices changed but now it's like loads of folk don't eat there because of the prices. (Pupil)

Pupils compare prices in dining rooms with those in local shops.

And it's expensive here see because like a packet of grapes are like 40 pence and you can go down the street and get a big bag for like 60 pence. (Pupil)

Schools that offered food that was regarded as cheap, or which provided deals on a combination of foods that pupils liked, were popular.

I think it's good value for money because I always get the Vital Mix so that's a carton of soup, two sandwiches, a piece of fruit and a milk as well, so I think that is good value for money and it's quite nutritious as well. (Pupil)

• A key finding is that pupils and parents want value for money from school meals services and these should be competitively priced relative to other options outside school.

Age factors
The research found that in addition to the issues relevant to pupils in general, some were linked to specific age groups. The needs of primary and secondary pupils are examined.

Needs of primary pupils
In general, parents and pupils in primary schools liked the more relaxed atmosphere which resulted from the changes to the dining environment. However, parents also wanted the service to be organised so that children would find it easier to cope with.

Some parents felt that primary school children found the dining room situation stressful. This included problems with queuing, in that younger children did not like the crush of queuing and having to manage their school bags while carrying trays. Some parents were also concerned that their children would be served food that they did not like.
When my daughter was about six she from a distance saw what she thought was macaroni cheese and it was cauliflower cheese and she took it and she started to eat it and "no I don't like this" she couldn't change it and came home hungry that day and I was really really annoyed so the lunch that was stopped, back to packed lunch until I felt she was more able to cope with it. (Parent)

Some parents suggested that primary school children found dealing with money difficult.

H never went until she was nearly in Primary 3 because they did not understand money and they were too frightened to stand there and get their money purses. (Parent)

Some parents of primary school children wanted improvement to the delivery system for example, for each class to go in to the school dining room at a given time. This could be rotated so that the same class did not always go in last and find that the choice was limited because the most popular options had been finished.

I actually think the bell system was good because especially for the youngsters that are new, at least they were guaranteed of getting in one day out of five, they were getting more choice. (Parent)

For younger pupils it appears that while a more relaxed, less directed meals service is popular, there is clearly also a need to have an organised system for younger children so that they do not find the dining room stressful.

Needs of secondary school pupils
Some parents of younger secondary school children also wanted a more organised system and felt that it would encourage pupils to buy school meals.

However, there was a gap between this view by parents and the finding of the researchers, which indicated that the lower years at secondary school were difficult to attract to the dining room, possibly because the pupils wanted to express their independence by leaving school at lunch time. As they got older secondary school pupils appear to become more willing to buy school meals.
• A key finding of the research is that the needs of pupils vary with age. This underlines the importance of consulting with the users of the service to gain their views.
Some school meals services said that the changes they had implemented could not be achieved without sponsorship because they do not have the funds to do all the things that they want to do.

Modern, sexy style, fast and lots of ‘street-cred’ with children. Value for money, lowest price in Scotland, if not the UK. (Sponsored Service)

However, other local authorities, which had made changes to school meals services without seeking sponsorship, challenged the assumptions that changes could not be made without it. They were critical of authorities that had gone along this route. Two local authorities had refused sponsorship from major companies because there were “health reasons against it”, and another emphasised the need for “soft drink and sweets advertising to be treated like tobacco advertising”.

There appeared to be no clear and consistent definition of sponsorship used by local authorities. The clearest distinction made was between 'branded sponsorship' (which referred to the wholesale upgrading of the school meals service from brand name companies such as Coca Cola and McCains) and 'local partnerships' (which referred to suppliers who provided prizes for one-off events and promotions).

Four main types of commercial sponsorship used by school meals services were apparent:

- major upgrading of dining rooms;
- the supply of resources such as refrigerators, counters, bins and coolers;
- marketing and public relations, such as menu boards; and
- special promotions including prize donations for theme days, competitions or one off events.

The most explicit form of sponsorship was in the major upgrading of the dining room.

Role of commercial sponsorship

This section examines issues around sponsorship in school meals services and explores the views of pupils, parents and teachers in relation to sponsorship.

So I’m not saying... I’m not against it necessarily if it speeds it up, if it means the children getting their food quicker and have more time to do other things. But there’s still this question mark "does it have to be sponsored to do that?" (Parent)
Some schools which claimed they did not have sponsored school meals services had allowed local suppliers and branded companies to give them support on a one-off basis. This was not usually regarded as sponsorship by schools.

In the sponsored schools, the marketing used for the sale of branded foods was very apparent. Companies include Coca Cola and Irn Bru for soft drinks, and McCain's, Bernard Matthews, Muller and Sharwood food companies. However, the researchers pointed out that the same branded items, especially fizzy drinks and sweets, were on sale in schools that were not regarded as sponsored, although the marketing was generally not as explicit.

Users’ views on sponsorship
Two main observations can be made relating to the views of users. Firstly, that similar views existed about sponsorship in school meals services, regardless of the type of service the users had access to. Secondly, that the most significant contrast of views was between the three user groups (pupils, parents and teachers). These are outlined as follows.

Pupils' views
Pupils held mixed views on sponsorship. For example, some pupils felt that the refurbished dining rooms from sponsorship and food choices were "too McDonald's like" while others liked the changes and said everything was cleaner.

Some pupils liked having branded items on sale and saw them as a sign of good quality. They said that having branded items sold in the dining room encouraged them to have school meals.

Some pupils argued that advertisements would liven up the dining room, but they also wanted to see healthy products such as milk and fruit promoted more.
Many felt that they were being steered towards the less healthy food.

*It's irresponsible really, yeah and surely it's a waste of money as well. I mean there is an outstanding problem in Scotland with heart attacks. We've got one of the highest heart attack rates.* (Pupil)

Parents' views
Parents had mixed views on sponsorship. Some parents felt that commercialism was a fact of everyday life and could not be avoided. There appeared to be a pragmatic view that if pupils buy these items anyway, then the school might as well get the profits.

However, some parents were alarmed by the commercialisation on school premises. They felt that it sent out the wrong messages and encouraged children to think that unhealthy options were acceptable.

*Well you're on about healthy eating, if you're going to advertise the likes of Burger King and McDonald's, and have them come in and refurbish the place and all the rest of it, then the children are going to see it as*

education saying *well this is all right you should go for these easy meals rather than the healthy option*. I'm not in favour of it at all. (Parent)

However, when sponsorship had been used to encourage and promote healthy eating this was viewed positively by some parents.

Teachers' views
Overall, teachers do not appear to approve of commercial sponsorship. Many felt that it encouraged unhealthy eating. They disapproved of commercialism becoming a part of school life.

*a money making venture with no thought for children's health or teeth* (Teacher)
Healthy eating and school meals services

This section examines views from the users and providers of school meals services in relation to the role of the service in promoting healthy eating.

The research indicated clearly that teachers, parents and pupils all felt that school meals services should promote healthy eating.

Pupils’ views
The research found that girls generally showed more interest in healthy foods than boys, and some boys suggested they could be made fun of if they tried to eat healthily.

Older pupils were more attracted by healthy options than younger pupils, and felt that improving access to these options was likely to encourage greater use of the school meals service.

Some pupils pointed out that even schools which tried to promote healthy eating could give out contradictory messages, for example by putting up posters promoting healthy food and then having few healthy choices available to buy in dining rooms, at tuck shops or in vending machines.

Pupils criticised the fact that the vegetables were often finished by the time the last class came to buy their dinners, and they felt that the desserts were not healthy.

Aye 'cause the doughnuts has got millions and millions of sugar on it. I like them but there's millions of sugar and they're no very healthy when there's a huge poster saying 'pick the healthy option'. (Pupil)

Many who wanted to choose healthier options were deterred from doing so by the very fact that the promotion of healthy eating had been so successful and popular.

They go to the 'Hearty Bar' and then they see all the people in their year just floating past, and they're stuck in the 'Hearty Bar' queue, and there's no point in getting out because you've just spent quarter of an hour waiting for nothing...you've got to think carefully what you want to do. (Pupil)
You can wait 30 minutes sometimes, most of the people don't have the time to finish their lunch because the place...loads of people want to go, loads of people, loads of friends and they want to eat healthy and stuff but it's just that they can't wait that long. (Pupil)

It is clear that it is possible to persuade pupils to choose healthy options, indeed that many of them are very willing to do so. However, school meals services have to keep their customers and their systems under continuous review. Pupils will not choose healthy options if the other factors affecting their choice are not right too: time spent queuing, and also the atmosphere of the eating area, quality, price and value.

Parents' views
Parents suggested that one way to improve children's diets was to have more vegetables and pasta, and to present the children's favourite dishes, such as chicken and pizza, in a more healthy form.

If that's what they love they could make that as healthy as it possibly can and the kids will still eat it. (Parent)

Parents also drew attention to pricing and the disincentive to buying fruit and vegetables when a bag of crisps was 10p.

Teachers' views
Teachers were unanimous in disliking commercialisation in the dining room because they believed that it encourages unhealthy eating. They felt that efforts to educate pupils about healthy eating and to improve pupils' choice of foods were undermined by having meals services which were heavily marketed with branded foods.

There was support among teachers for linking healthy eating with the curriculum and for working with school meals services, something that was also supported by local authorities. However, many recognised that this required a number of elements that were in scarce
supply: concerted commitment on their part; support from some head teachers; and enough staff and classroom time.

Local authorities’ perspective
Local authorities set the rules and standards to which school meals services have to work. The researchers found that more than three quarters of the local authorities interviewed were aware of the nutritional guidelines for the public sector though their views on its usefulness were mixed. Some felt that they had gone further in promoting healthy foods than the guidelines recommended.

The research reported that local authorities did take responsibility for providing attractive, healthy options on the menu. However, local authorities were also concerned that school meals can only be part of the solution to improving the Scottish diet.

For many local authorities other issues took precedence over healthy eating. These included the need to manage tight financial constraints, the need to meet pupils' demands for fast food, and, most important of all, the need to sell more food especially in deprived areas. The social inclusion agenda was seen as at least as important as healthy eating with a view that the main objective was to ensure that children eat something.

Views and initiatives of school meals services
The research found that school meals services did not want to be seen as too prescriptive. On the whole there was a feeling that it was no good just banning certain foods as it was better to take positive actions to promote healthy alternatives. There were many positive initiatives such as putting healthy options on the "hot spot" on the counter, making the healthy option cheaper, offering incentives such as awarding points or scratch cards for healthy choices that entitled pupils to win prizes, such as free admission to sports facilities. Many had also applied for the Scottish Healthy Choices Award, based at the SCC.
One non-sponsored school meals service offered 'Meal Deals' which addressed the balance in the meal overall. For example, if a pupil ordered a “baked potato, you get home baking half price; if you order burger and chips, get the yoghurt half price”. Presentation was also important for example, cutting up fruit meant it “goes like hot cakes”.
Conclusion

Across the different school meals service types examined there were consistent factors which appear to influence the perceptions and take-up of school meals. These relate to issues of cost, choice and information, quality, the appearance and layout of the dining room, time constraints, age and access to alternatives.

The research found that differences between school meals service types (ie. sponsored/non-sponsored) were not the defining factor influencing whether a service was regarded as good and one that pupils wanted to use. While there was no single factor that appeared to increase take-up, it was apparent from the research that services which were bright, modern and which reflected aspects of the commercial sector in terms of appearance and choice were popular with pupils.

It was apparent from the research that there is a lack of clarity and commitment, in some cases, to the promotion of healthy eating within schools, which is characterised by the conflict between messages within the curriculum to eat healthily and the availability and promotion of unhealthy foods.
Wider issues relating to school meals services in Scotland

The research was conducted to highlight the broad range of issues and views that exist in relation to school meals services. However, in the course of the research many issues and questions were highlighted or implied. These are included below to stimulate thinking and contribute to the debate on school meals. Some of these will generate little debate or controversy and are widely regarded as acceptable. However, others involve polarised views where clear tensions are apparent.

Consultation with users
- Issues arose about the consultation of parents, pupils and teachers. It is necessary that proposed changes to school meals services are transparent and conducted through an open process. There is a need for those responsible for school meals services (at all levels) to review consultation processes to ensure they are meaningful and inclusive and take account of views of all of the users – pupils, parents and teachers. To what extent does this occur?
- After consultation, the changes implemented (and the suggestions that were rejected) should be reported back to those who were consulted and the wider community.
- There is a greater role for Departments of Education as well as Catering Services to consult with users, particularly as they are responsible for establishing the criteria for awarding contracts.

Lunch time
- Schools need to review the time available for lunch to consider the needs of the users and providers of school meals.

Commercial sponsorship
- A gap appears to exist in a common definition of sponsorship, since there appeared to be no consensus between local authorities on the meaning of sponsorship. A consistent definition, agreed between local authorities is necessary.
- Is commercial sponsorship acceptable at all in the school meals environment?
- Is promotion of 'healthy' foods (such as milk) more acceptable in schools than sponsorship of sweets and fizzy drinks? Debate is necessary on whether it is the products that cause controversy or the private sector involvement.
• What is the extent of commercial sponsorship in schools, and how can parents and pupils find out?

• A unified national policy on sponsorship of school meals services is necessary and desirable in Scotland.

• There appears to be little clear evaluation or ongoing monitoring of the impact of sponsorship on the promotion of healthy eating in schools. This information is necessary. Who should undertake any evaluation and monitoring? Should this be the responsibility of each school? The results should be made available to parents, teachers and pupils.

Healthy eating
• There appear to be double standards in some areas, undermining the efforts of the school meals services or committed teachers, through for example, tuck shops and vending machines giving access to 'unhealthy' food. A more co-ordinated approach to the provision of food in schools is necessary.

• Do schools go down the route of providing 'unhealthy' but populist food because it will improve the take up of school meals, particularly free meals, and therefore generate income for the school?

• Local authorities are the purchasers of school meals services and for caterers to be awarded the contract to provide school meals services they must satisfy the criteria set by the local authority. The promotion of healthy eating should be a criterion with more importance placed on it.

Social inclusion
• For many local authorities, the priority in school meals services is social inclusion, rather than the provision of healthy food. Does this mean that it is acceptable for school pupils who are eligible for free school meals to be nutritionally disadvantaged?
Long term health impact
• What will be the long term health implications and health costs to the nation of pursuing a policy of school meal provision based on factors other than nutritional quality?

Competitive market place
• In the climate of changing consumption patterns and increased choice available to pupils, including from global competitors in the high street, is it possible for school meals services to provide an attractive service that pupils, parents and teachers will welcome?

Future research
This research provides a useful range of views focusing on a relatively small qualitative research base and raises some issues for debate and some where action is necessary. However, further research would be useful to expand on this work to provide quantitative data, representative of the general population of Scotland.
References
