

Free School Meals in Secondary Schools in Wales; a
Socio Ecological Examination of Policy Implementation
and the Take up of Entitlement.

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This thesis is submitted in fulfilment of the degree

Doctor of Philosophy

DECLARATION

This work has not been submitted in substance for any other degree or award at this or any other university or place of learning, nor is being submitted concurrently in candidature for any degree or other award

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Summary

Free school meal provision in the UK has a long history, representing an important mechanism to tackle child poverty, address inadequate diets and tackle childhood obesity. However, concern revolves around levels of non-take up, since a significant proportion of those entitled don't register, or once registered, don't consume the meal.

The take up of entitlement varies by Local Authority, indicating the impact of the local context. Existing research has identified a range of influential factors but by seeking to isolate factors, such an approach overlooks why these factors exist, how they are interrelated and why they affect the people they do. This study uses a collective lifestyles approach to explore the social context of free school meal provision to understand the interaction between policy, context and the individual and the influence of these interactions on uptake of entitlement.

Using a case study methodology, four schools within one Local Authority in Wales were examined; data were collected by a review of policy documents, focus groups with pupils and interviews with policy makers, stakeholders, local authority and school staff and parents and pupils.

Underpinned by a socio ecological framework, factors at a range of analytical levels were examined. Free school meal policy has been shaped by historical and structural factors, including devolution and this influences implementation at the local level. For pupils, issues associated with the school food environment, food availability, the built environment and the social processes of school dining influence the likelihood of having school meals and for pupils on free school meals, the ability to conform to peer norms is shaped by marginalisation, influencing the uptake of entitlement.

Recommendations focus on minimising marginalisation by ensuring confidentiality throughout school processes and ensuring that free school meal pupils can participate in the same school food practices as the wider pupil population.

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1. Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Background; the Introduction and Development of School Food Provision

The shifting focus of school meal policy over time reflects a highly political and often controversial history, and an examination of policy development reveals school meals to be emblematic of broader Government preoccupations (Gustafsson 2002; Davies 2005). This history has been characterised by debates over the role of the state and the family in child rearing, welfare and education, industrialisation and military preparedness, the role of schools, sustainability, and public procurement as an instrument of public policy (Davies 2005).

A precursor to school food provision was the Poor Law of 1834, which allowed children defined as malnourished to be given free meals, establishing the principle of addressing large scale malnutrition by feeding the poor. Subsequently, the 1906 Education (Provision of Meals) Act permitted, but did not compel, Local Education Authorities to provide free or reduced charge meals for those children who would not otherwise benefit from education. The system of differentiating between pupils who pay for the meal and those who do not continues today.

Originally developed because of charitable concerns about poor children's capacity to benefit from education, the emphasis of school food provision was originally on poverty (Colquhoun et al. 2001). Midday meals supplemented the diets of young and vulnerable members of poor families, partly for humanitarian reasons but also as a preventative measure to maintain social stability (Atkins 2007).

Moving away from the macro historical perspective, other studies have focused on the meaning and values of food eaten in school. The school meal system can be seen as a means of civilising children and there are

numerous discourses of civility which have driven the school meals system at different points in history. Nutrition choice, responsibility, proper food and manners, have all featured in the ethos of school food provision as school meals were intended to model healthy, productive and socially well adapted citizens (Elias 1982; Vernon 2005; Metcalfe et al. 2011).

However at the turn of the 20th Century, the discursive framing of school food provision shifted and the nutrition debate acquired a new dimension. In addition to concerns about the quantity of food availability, there was a growing realisation of the importance of quality. The discovery of the role of vitamins in deficiency diseases demonstrated the relationship between food intake and health and focussed attention on the content of food (Atkins 2007).

Consequently, the link between nutrition and health is well recognised in school meal policies and the dual role of supplementing inadequate diets and ensuring the quality of food provided is one which has characterised school food provision over the years, reflecting the shift in focus from merely providing children with enough food, to trying to ensure the best composition (Gustafsson 2002).

Reflecting new understandings of the contribution of diet to health and development, the remit of school food provision has expanded. Consequently, any review of school meals needs to acknowledge the role that school meals play in the link between diet and health, but also the role they play in the link between health and learning, between junk food and behaviour problems and the fact that it is in childhood and adolescence that eating habits are established (Davies 2005).

It is accepted that the school meal service continues to play a fundamental role in supporting children's education and development, and a number of studies point at the significant and immediate effect of diet on behaviour, concentration and cognitive ability as well as on the immune system and therefore the ability to attend school. As a result it is acknowledged that,

especially in light of improved nutritional standards, free school meals could provide a direct way for policy makers to reduce disparities in diet between children from more and less privileged socio economic backgrounds which in turn could contribute to reduce difference in educational outcomes (Belot and James 2011).

In recent decades, concern has also focussed on rising obesity levels in the UK and this has proven to be an effective driver for school meal policy. Reflecting global trends, increasing rates of obesity result in part from changing nutritional environments within which there has been a movement away from a dietary pattern essential for protecting health and maintaining a healthy weight, and towards a higher energy dense diet in which fat and added sugars play a greater role (Newby et al. 2003; World Health Organisation 2003; Guo et al. 2004).

These dietary changes are underpinned by changing global food production driven by decades of falling prices in commodities such as meat, fat and sugar. This has resulted in the development of an array of new products which are high in sugar, salt, fat and oils (Philip et al. 1997; French et al. 2001; Chopra 2002). Simultaneously, increasing opportunity to purchase food from fast food outlets and restaurants has resulted in these foods making an increasingly significant contribution to diet (Cummins and Macintyre 2006). In addition, portion sizes have increased, both in terms of 'ready to eat' products but also food consumed 'away from home', with the option to 'super-size' meals encouraging the consumption of larger portions (French et al. 2001).

Increased marketing supports the sale of these products, with the food industry in the USA spending US\$30 billion each year on advertising (Nestle and Jacobson 2000). Television plays a significant part, and food advertising remains largely for unhealthy foods (Boyland et al. 2011a, b; World Health Organisation 2013). The impact of advertising is particularly potent for children and research demonstrates links between the exposure of children to marketing messages and consequential changes in their dietary

behaviour, recognised as an important element in the aetiology of child obesity (Forman et al. 2009a; Zimmerman and Bell 2010; World Health Organisation 2013).

These changing nutritional environments are widely believed to make a significant contribution to the increasing epidemics of childhood and adult obesity by providing an obesogenic environment in which excessive food intake is encouraged (Glantz et al. 2005). In the UK, 'Healthy Weight Healthy Lives' (H M Government 2008) proposed a programme of initiatives which aimed to reverse the increasing rates of overweight and obesity in which much attention focused on the role of schools (National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence 2006; Nuffield Council on Bioethics 2013).

The role of the school in providing an environment which can promote healthful food reflects a wider acceptance of the concept of healthy settings (Department of Health 1992). This has resulted in a significant policy response with the implementation of school based initiatives including standards for school meals, a response aimed both to curb the obesity epidemic and to provide a nutritional safety net for children on free school meals and to protect nutritionally vulnerable groups (Evans and Harper 2009).

It is acknowledged that in light of improved nutritional standards, free school meals could provide a direct way for policy makers to reduce disparities in diet between children from more and less privileged socio economic backgrounds and as such, free school meals have a role in protecting the poorest children (Riley 2004a). Free school meals play a pivotal role in addressing the inability of low income families to purchase healthy food and while food poverty is often associated with poorer countries, the increasing use of food banks in the UK has led for calls for food poverty to be considered a public health issue (Hurley and Riley 2004; Peachey et al. 2013; BBC News 2014).

While the provision of meals in school, particularly free meals are acknowledged to address a number of areas of concern, including differential educational achievement, obesity levels and the impact of food poverty on children's diets, this thesis focuses on the role free school meals have in supplementing inadequate diets and tackling related issues associated with health and welfare.

Even though free school meals are available to children defined as in need, there are concerns about the uptake of these. One problem is the stigmatisation of children by the bureaucratic arrangements used to distinguish between those paying for meals and those receiving them without charge because of family poverty. Another is families who are poor but technically ineligible for free school meals and this remains a significant barrier (McMahon and Marsh 1999).

The nutritional and financial implications of non-take up of entitlement has resulted in concern and policy documents support the need to understand issues of non-take up of entitlement (Welsh Assembly Government 2008). The evidence indicates that both levels of free school meal registration and take up of the meal will vary by local authority, indicating that take up is influenced by local and contextual factors, including area deprivation, the school level of entitlement and family circumstances (Iniesta-Martinez and Evans 2012). Acknowledging the influence of context on the outcomes of health related interventions such as free school meals, results in a recognition that variations in the setting in which such interventions are implemented will have an impact on outcomes (Green et al. 2000; Poland et al. 2009).

The aim of this study is to understand the take up of free school meal entitlement¹ exploring the context of provision in terms of the policy framework, policy implementation and the school food environment. By

¹ Throughout the literature and this thesis, the terms entitlement and eligibility in reference to free school meals are used interchangeably.

undertaking an in-depth qualitative investigation, this thesis will explore the interaction of structure and agency across a range of socio ecological levels to understand how these interactions will influence the take up of entitlement.

Using a case study methodology, this thesis will explore free school meal provision in four secondary schools within one Local Authority in Wales. Semi structured interviews with policy makers and stakeholders from across the devolved territories in the UK will be used to explore the free school meal policy framework. Variation in policy implementation at the local level will be examined through interviews with local authority and school staff and focus groups with pupils across the schools will explore the relationship between pupils and the school food environment. Finally, the experience of free school meal entitlement will be explored through semi structured interviews with parents and pupils.

1.2. Thesis Structure

Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 provide a review of the literature which provides the basis of this study and Chapter 4 outlines the research design and methodology utilised. The following four chapters (Chapter 5, 6, 7 & 8) outline the empirical results and the final Chapter, Chapter 9 provides the discussion together with implications for policy and practice.

The aim of **Chapter Two** is to explore the policy framework which underpins free school meal provision within the UK. The chapter begins by considering school food provision as a response to the problems associated with inadequate nutrition in childhood. Within this context, the development of school food policy within the UK is considered, exploring how shifting economic, cultural and political contexts have influenced policy development and how this background has shaped current free school meal policy. This chapter also considers the nutritional and financial implications of non-take up of entitlement and how concern at the policy level supports the need to understand issues of non-take up.

The aim of **Chapter Three** is to explore the free school meal context in recognition of the importance of context in influencing the outcomes of health related interventions such as free school meal provision. Using a socio ecological model as a framework, the analytical levels that make up the context of free school meals provision are identified and this chapter considers each level, together with the theoretical and conceptual frameworks which underpin them. This chapter also considers the existing evidence base, highlighting the limitations of existing studies and outlining how these limitations will be addressed within this thesis. This chapter concludes by outlining the research aims and objectives.

Chapter Four outlines the research design and methodological approach utilised. This chapter discusses case study selection and the methods used, semi structured interviews and focus groups. This chapter also outlines the challenges associated with research within the school setting and outlines strategies implemented to overcome these challenges. The process of sampling and recruitment are outlined as well as details of data analysis. Finally, a guide to the empirical chapters is provided.

Chapter Five, the first of the empirical chapters, explores findings at the first level of analysis, the policy level, outlining the way that free school meal policy is viewed by policy makers and stakeholders, the contested nature of free school meal policy and the scope for policy change. This chapter then considers the impact of devolution within the free school meal policy context, exploring the shift towards principles of universality and identifies the political and structural factors which act to constrain or facilitate policy development. Finally, this chapter explores the variability of the policy context across the UK territories and identifies the way that policy will structure implementation at the local level.

Chapter Six considers issues of policy implementation at the national, local and school level, taking into account the wide range of factors which will influence the implementation of free school meal policy. This chapter begins by outlining the free school meal policy framework in Wales and explores

how staff at the Local Authority level will respond to policy level concerns. This chapter then considers the way that free school meal policy is implemented at the school level, identifying and exploring factors from across a range of levels which will influence implementation and the variable nature of the free school meal context which results.

Chapter Seven explores how pupils within the secondary school setting experience and negotiate the school food environment and the school food practices that result. This chapter begins by exploring pupils' perceptions of the school food environment, highlighting key issues and themes. Underpinned by a socio ecological framework, these factors encompass issues at the level of national and local policy as well as the school environment. This chapter then assesses the impact of consumption and social identity in defining pupils' school food choices, taking into account the increasing autonomy associated with adolescence and the importance of consumption to issues of identity. Finally, using concepts of agency and resistance, this chapter examines the interaction of structure and agency within the school food environment and the school food practices which result.

Chapter Eight, the final empirical chapter, focuses on the experience of free school meals. Drawing on previous chapters, this chapter explores how the take up of free school meal entitlement is influenced by factors across the socio ecological levels which converge, combining to create conditions within the local context. Drawing on interviews with parents and pupils, this chapter focuses on the way that free school meals are experienced assessing how variation in the school context will influence decisions made in terms of the uptake of free school meal entitlement. Finally this chapter considers how free school meal pupils exert agency within the school food environment and the degree to which their free school meal status affects the ability to conform to the school food practices of the wider pupil population.

The final chapter, **Chapter Nine** provides discussion and conclusions, drawing together key themes. The chapter begins by reflecting on the study

design, and discussing the strengths and limitations of the study. The chapter considers the take up of free school meal entitlement within the context of a socio ecological framework and concludes by considering the current and changing free school meal policy framework across the UK territories and providing recommendations for practice.

2. Chapter 2: Childhood Nutrition and the Development of School Food Provision

Understanding the implementation of free school meal policy requires an exploration of the policy framework which underpins provision since, by starting with the policy framework, it is possible to identify the range of processes which may lead to implementation success or failure. Such an approach recognises that to understand implementation it is necessary to understand the macro and political variables which structure the process. This chapter explores the free school meal policy framework, locating policy within the socio, historical and political context in which it has developed.

This chapter begins by outlining the importance of adequate nutrition in childhood and the significance of school food provision in addressing inadequate nutrition. The development of UK school food provision is then explored, in terms of the way that it has been shaped by economic, cultural and political influences, including devolution. This chapter then outlines current UK free school meal policy, considering the limitations attached to the means tested nature of entitlement and the nutritional and financial implications of non-take up of entitlement. Finally, this chapter explores how policy level concerns over the take up of entitlement support the need to understand issues associated with non-take up and concludes by introducing the general aims of the study.

2.1. The Importance of Childhood Nutrition

It is acknowledged that throughout the life course, nutrition plays a vital role in protecting physical and mental health and overall wellbeing (Sorhaindo and Feinsein 2006; Shepherd 2008; British Nutrition Foundation 2009a).

“Nutrition is a fundamental pillar of human life, health and development across the entire life span. From the earliest stages of fetal development, at birth, through infancy, childhood, adolescence, and on into adulthood and old age, proper food and good nutrition are essential for survival, physical growth, mental development, performance and productivity, health and well-being. It is an essential foundation of human and national development”
(World Health Organisation 2000:3)

A life course approach acknowledges childhood as a period which has enduring effects on health and longevity because it is when physical, emotional and cognitive development patterns are established. For children and young people, nutrition is a key contributor to both immediate and future health since diet in childhood will establish behaviours which will endure into adulthood (Lake et al. 2006). As such, ‘childhood origins shape adult destinations’ and inequalities in the resources and opportunities available in childhood will track into adulthood (Graham and Power 2004:11).

As such, diet in childhood will have an impact on long term health outcomes and evidence indicates a higher childhood intake of vegetables is associated with a lower risk of stroke and cardiovascular mortality in adulthood (Ness et al. 2005). Also that increased fruit consumption in childhood is inversely associated with cancer incidence in adulthood (Maynard et al. 2003). Conversely, evidence indicates that poor diet quality in childhood is associated with dental caries (Dugmore and Rock 2004; Cameron et al. 2006) and also with the early onset of chronic and degenerative disease (Mishra et al. 2003; Ames 2006).

As a period of sustained growth, childhood is a time in which adequate nutrition is essential, since rapid growth demands high energy requirements and adequate intakes of Protein, Calcium, Iron and Vitamins A and D (British Medical Association 2005; British Nutrition Foundation 2009a). These requirements continue into adolescence, when increased amounts of energy and nutrients are required to support the physical changes associated with puberty. For boys, the increased requirement for protein during puberty is

approximately 50% in addition to increased requirements for all vitamins and minerals; while for girls, requirements are for extra Thiamine, Niacin, Vitamin B6 and Iron (Pheasant 2008; Shepherd 2008; British Nutrition Foundation 2009b).

A failure to access adequate nutrition during these demanding years will result in a negative impact in terms of physical, cognitive and behavioural development. An inadequate level of Vitamin D will have implications for bone health, including rickets (Bates et al. 2012) and in adolescence, adequate Vitamin D and Calcium are essential to ensure the development of peak bone mass since bone density in youth can determine vulnerability to osteoporosis later in life (Sorhaindo and Feinstein 2006; Shepherd 2008; Whitton et al. 2011). Iron levels are especially important, and in children under 5, inadequate iron can cause impaired motor function and psychomotor development (Shepherd 2008) while for girls and women of childbearing age, iron deficiency can particularly affect women in the early stages of pregnancy (Whitton et al. 2011).

Diet also has an impact on children's cognitive abilities, in both the short and long term and research into the effects of deficiencies in Zinc, Iodine, Iron and Folate on the cognitive development in school aged children highlights the significance of nutrition in the post infancy period (Sorhaindo and Feinstein 2006). A lack of Vitamin B appears to have a causal relationship with behavioural problems in adolescents such as irritability, aggressive behaviour and behavioural changes, potentially affecting school performance and interaction with peers (Bellisle 2004; Sorhaindo and Feinstein 2006). Conversely, improvements in diet were found to improve educational outcomes significantly (Belot and James 2011).

Given the importance of diet and nutrition as a contributory factor to children's health and development, it is of concern that the evidence indicates that globally, a significant proportion of children experience either undernutrition (indicated by a low body mass index) or overnutrition, and as such do not consume diets optimal to health (UNICEF-WHO-The World Bank

2012). Both undernutrition and overnutrition fit within the construct of malnutrition, a term which encompasses all deviations from adequate and optimal nutritional status.

2.2. Malnutrition; Trends and Consequences

Historically, malnutrition has been associated with a state of undernutrition but recent decades have seen the emerging paradox of malnutrition linked with overnutrition and obesity (Tanumihardjo et al. 2007). For many people living in poverty, diets have adequate kilocalories to meet or exceed requirements but may lack the dietary quality needed to promote optimal health and prevent chronic disease. This compromised diet quality may lead both to undernutrition and recurring hunger but also overnutrition, overweight and obesity and as a result, the construct of malnutrition has been expanded to include both undernutrition and overnutrition in order to recognise that both conditions can result from living in poverty and having an inadequate food supply (Tanumihardjo et al. 2007; Black et al. 2008).

Undernutrition has a particularly devastating impact on children and globally it is estimated that undernutrition in all its forms is the cause of 3.1 million child deaths annually or 45% of all child deaths in 2011 (Black et al. 2013). Because undernutrition will increase susceptibility to disease, there exists a spectrum of risk associated with all degrees of undernutrition, with much of the burden of death attributable to moderate, rather than severe undernutrition (Caulfield et al. 2004a; Caulfield et al. 2004b). In the longer term, undernutrition is associated with lower human capital, since damage suffered in early life can lead to irreversible damage including shorter adult height, lower attained schooling, reduced adult income and decreased offspring birth weight (Victora et al. 2008).

Globally, 99 million children under five were underweight in 2012 (UNICEF-WHO-The World Bank 2012). While the causes of undernutrition encompass environmental, economic and socio political contexts, poverty maintains a

central role and the distribution of undernutrition reveals that 80% of the world's undernourished children live in just 20 countries (Black et al. 2008; Bryce et al. 2008; E Van de Poel et al. 2008). However, recent trends indicate that even in countries where undernutrition has traditionally been the concern, there has been a significant increase in overweight and obese individuals (Stevens et al. 2012; World Health Organisation 2014). As a result, due to the steady increase in maternal overweight in the past two decades, overweight now exceeds that of underweight in all regions (Black et al. 2013).

Reflecting these trends, the global rate of obesity has nearly doubled since 1980 (World Health Organisation 2014) with developing countries following the trend set by developed countries of increasing rates. In the US, around one third of the population are obese, a figure predicted to reach around half the population by 2030 (Harvard School of Public Health 2014). In the UK, the Foresight Report (Butland et al. 2007) estimated that by 2050, almost half the UK population would be obese and that the related costs could reach £50 billion a year (National Obesity Forum 2014). The rise in obesity is also evident in children and globally, an estimated 43 million children under five or 7% were overweight in 2011, a 54% increase since 1990 (UNICEF-WHO-The World Bank 2012).

While undernutrition has severe consequences for health, overweight and obesity represent a leading risk for global deaths and is linked to more deaths worldwide than underweight (World Health Organisation 2014). For children and adolescents, overweight and obesity will have a profound impact on health and development in both the short and long term. Obesity is an important risk factor associated with type 2 diabetes (British Medical Association 2005) and other health implications of childhood overweight and obesity include the development of gallstones, sleep apnoea and increased intracranial pressure as well as increased blood pressure (Sorhaindo and Feinstein 2006).

In the longer term, youths with obesity are more likely to suffer from hypertension, cardiovascular disease, gallbladder disease, osteoporosis, menstrual irregularities, female infertility and multiple health conditions later in life (Kiess et al. 2001; Pyle and Poston 2006; Sorhaindo and Feinstein 2006; Owen et al. 2009). Additionally, obesity in childhood will also have psychosocial repercussions since young people tend to become more body conscious and body satisfaction generally decreases as age increases (Currie et al. 2012). Obese individuals at all ages are at higher risk for depression, eating disorders, distorted body image and low self-esteem and body weight dissatisfaction has been related to increased substance use and poor mental health (Pyle and Poston 2006; Currie et al. 2012).

It is estimated that 44% of the diabetes burden, 23% of the ischemic heart disease burden and between 7 - 41% of certain cancer burdens are attributable to overweight and obesity and the role of changing dietary patterns in this epidemic of chronic disease is acknowledged (World Health Organisation 2014). While originally labelled 'diseases of affluence', these chronic diseases have now been recognised as emerging both in poorer populations in richer countries but also in poorer countries, where undernutrition persists alongside the increasing emergence of chronic disease associated with overweight and obesity (World Health Organisation 2003). As a result, like undernutrition, overnutrition, overweight and obesity have become markers of poverty, with the highest prevalence of obesity evident in households characterised as food insecure (Chopra 2002; Tanumihardjo et al. 2007).

2.2.1. Food Insecurity

Food insecurity occurs when people do not have the physical, social and economic access to sufficient, safe and nutritious food that meets their dietary needs and food preferences (Tanumihardjo et al. 2007). Food insecurity will result in both undernutrition and overnutrition and often both forms of malnutrition will coexist, within the same country, the same

communities, and the same households, causing a double burden of disease (World Health Organisation 2014). Food insecurity is defined as;

“The inability to acquire or consume an adequate quality or sufficient quantity of food in socially acceptable ways or the uncertainty that one will be able to do so” (Radimer et al 1992 cited in Riches 1997:65)

For people living in poverty, diets may have adequate kilocalories to meet or exceed requirements but may lack the dietary quality needed to promote optimal health and prevent chronic disease (Tanumihardjo et al. 2007). The evidence indicates that diets comprising low energy density, nutrient rich foods are more expensive than diets composed of refined grains and added sugars and fats. Consequently, low income groups may select foods that are both energy rich and shelf stable, prioritising maximum calories and minimum waste and spoilage (Darmon and Drewnowski 2008). These lower cost diets contain energy dense foods which provide the most dietary energy per unit weight, in which a lower proportion of energy is derived from fruits, vegetables, meat and dairy products and a higher proportion of energy derived from cereals, sweets and added fats (Drewnowski and Specter 2004).

Consequently, the association between low income, the consumption of a poor diet and overweight and obesity has been reported in many countries, including the UK, Netherlands, Sweden, Australia, US and Canada (Cummins and Macintyre 2006). Further evidence indicates that higher rates of obesity are likely to be found in those with the lowest incomes and the least education, particularly among women and certain ethnic minority groups (Drewnowski and Specter 2004).

2.3. Malnutrition in the UK

Historically, studies conducted early in the twentieth century revealed significant levels of undernutrition in the UK population (Orr 1936) but decades of growing affluence, the advance of the modern welfare state and

reductions in income inequalities resulted in a more equitable distribution of food. As a result, between the 1930s and the 1970s, issues of food security gained little attention in terms of policy and research (Leather 1996; Dowler 2002).

However, the perception of the UK as food secure and with well-developed social safety nets has been undermined (Riches 1997) as recent increases in living costs coupled with a decrease in benefits have resulted in rising levels of hunger and food insecurity in the UK (Gordon et al. 2013; Griffith et al. 2013; Peachey et al. 2013). As a result, it is estimated that around 4 million children and adults are not fed properly by today's standards (Gordon et al. 2013).

In terms of undernutrition (a BMI of less than 20kg/m²) it is estimated that in 2007, over 3 million people in the UK were affected (Elia et al. 2010) and between 2008 and 2012/3, malnutrition related hospital admissions in England increased from 3000 to 5,500 (Taylor-Robinson et al. 2013). While research on undernutrition will often focus on the institutional setting, it is estimated that 98% of cases of undernutrition occur in the community and that 70% goes unrecognised and untreated (Schenker 2003). As well as implications for health, undernutrition has financial implications, and it is estimated that public health expenditure on disease related malnutrition corresponded to about 10% of the expenditure on health and social care in the UK (Elia et al. 2010).

There are no official estimates regarding levels of food insecurity in the UK however one study found that 9.7% of families were found to be food insecure (Melchior et al. 2009). While a family may experience food insecurity, the extent to which children are protected by their parents is unclear. Evidence indicates that parents will often go without food to ensure that their children are fed (Bhattacharya et al. 2004) and in one study, 46% said they had gone without food to meet the needs of someone else in their family (National Children's Home 2004). However, in the face of significant hardship, such as the school holidays when free school meals are not

available, the impact of food insecurity can be significant (Gill and Sharma) and one study indicates that in London, hunger is a feature of life for an estimated 9% of children, despite parents skipping meals so their children could eat (Hall et al. 2013).

2.3.1. Dietary Quality in the UK

In terms of the quality of food consumed, evidence indicates that since the financial crisis of 2008, UK households have cut real expenditure on food with the largest decline in expenditure and nutritional quality was most marked in single parent households and households with young children (Griffith et al. 2013). The reduction in expenditure has been achieved by moving away from fruit and vegetables and substituting cheaper processed foods; this is a cause for concern since current guidelines recommend at least five portions of fruit and vegetables daily (NHS Choices 2014).

Fruit consumption when young is linked to many positive health outcomes, it promotes optimal health in childhood, growth and intellectual development, lower levels of body fat and in combination with vegetables, better bone density for boys (Currie et al. 2012). Further, consumption of fruit in childhood is an important predictor of adult consumption, since eating fruit at younger ages appears to translate to adult patterns, with adult outcomes including decreased risks for coronary heart disease, stroke and cancers (Marriott and Buttriss 2004; Currie et al. 2012). It is estimated that approximately 33,000 deaths per year would be avoided if UK dietary recommendations were met, 15,000 of these as a result of increased consumption of fruit and vegetables (Scarborough et al. 2010).

In the absence of official estimates, data regarding the adequacy of the diets of the UK population is drawn mainly from the National Diet and Nutrition Survey (NDNS)² (Gregory et al. 1995; Finch et al. 1998; Gregory et al. 2000; Henderson et al. 2002). The first NDNS indicated that diets of UK children were dominated by chips, cakes, biscuits and salty snacks at the expense of fruit and vegetables (Giles et al. 2002). More recent surveys indicate a significant improvement in population diet over the last 15 years and a comparison of NDNS data collected in 2008-9 with 1997 and 2001 indicates a significant change in the direction of UK dietary recommendations (Shepherd 2008).

However, for UK children, intakes of several key nutrients remain below dietary recommendations with Iron, Calcium, Magnesium, Potassium and Zinc especially low in some groups while the intake of saturated fat and sugar exceed current targets (Ruxton and Derbyshire 2011). For children under 5, intakes of Iron and Vitamin D are below recommended levels (Shepherd 2008). In comparison, children within the 4-10 age range showed the most marked changes in diet, with higher intakes of fruit and lower intakes of crisps, savoury snacks, chocolate and soft drinks; this group met recommendations at the population level in terms of micronutrient intakes (Whitton et al. 2011).

Within the 11-18 age group, intakes generally remained below recommendations. Of particular concern are inadequate levels of Iron for girls and Calcium, with 6% of boys and 12% of girls below recommended guidelines (Whitton et al. 2011; Bates et al. 2012). Vitamin A and Vitamin D

²The NDNS collects data to indicate levels of nutrients within the UK population. Beginning in 1992, data is collected across the four UK territories. There are four different age groups, 1.5 - 4.5 years; 4 -18 years; 19-64 years and 65 plus. Since 2008 the NDNS has been a rolling programme with data collected on a yearly basis (Ruxton and Derbyshire 2011).

levels were also below recommendations and 19% of this age group were below the lower threshold for Vitamin D adequacy (Bates et al. 2012).

In terms of consumption of fruit and vegetables, the NDNS indicates that for children aged 11-18 years, mean consumption was 3.0 portions per day for boys and 2.8 portions per day for girls, with only 11% of boys and 8% of girls meeting the '5-a-day' recommendation (Bates et al. 2012). Further, 20% of 4-18 year olds surveyed consumed no fruit during the survey week and 4% no vegetables, with younger children, those living in benefit households and those from manual social class groups more likely to have intakes of fruit and vegetables below recommended guidelines with the result that intake of vitamins and minerals tended to fall below guidelines in these groups (Ruxton and Derbyshire 2011).

For adults, the consequences of poor diets include micronutrient deficiencies and a link between food insecurity and overweight (Townsend et al. 2001; Anderson 2007; Nelson et al. 2007a). For children, UK figures indicate that boys and girls from the bottom 40% of the household income distribution are more likely to be obese than boys and girls from higher income households with those from managerial or professional households less likely to be obese than from other socio economic groups (Stamatakis 2005).

Recent figures indicate that more than one in four children (attending reception class) in Wales has a body mass index classified as overweight or obese, compared to one in five in England. Also that there is a strong relationship between levels of obesity and deprivation, with 28.5% of children living in the most deprived areas of Wales overweight or obese compared to 22.2% in the least deprived areas (Public Health Wales 2015)

2.4. Addressing Malnutrition

Two global conferences in the 1990s recognised the need for action to address undernutrition by reducing micronutrient deficiencies and improving child nutrition (Dalmiya and Schultink 2003) and the majority of the

Millennium Development Goals, drawn up in 2000, were directly or indirectly related to nutrition (Tanumihardjo et al. 2007). As a result, programmatic health and nutrition interventions targeting maternal and child undernutrition have resulted in major reductions in undernutrition (Bhutta et al. 2008; Black et al. 2008).

The results of these interventions are significant, with an estimated 1 million child deaths prevented as a result of Vitamin A supplementation between 1998-2000 (Dalmiya and Schultink 2003). Stunting was reduced between 1990-2010 (M de Onis et al. 2011) and it is further estimated that existing interventions could reduce stunting at 36 months by 36%, mortality between birth and 36 months by about 25%, and disability-adjusted life years associated with stunting, severe wasting, intrauterine growth restriction and micronutrient deficiencies by about 25% (Bhutta et al. 2008).

Alongside micronutrient interventions, a significant intervention for addressing nutritional inadequacies in children is the provision of food in school. With an annual investment of between \$US 47-75 billion, school food represents a major social programme and it is estimated that worldwide, 368 million school children are fed daily (World Food Programme 2013a). While the aims of school food programmes will differ by country and circumstances, generally, in both higher and lower income countries, the aims include improving nutritional status, growth, cognitive and academic performance and relieving short term hunger (Kristjansson et al. 2009).

In low income countries, school food programmes support families in securing education for their children, especially girls who are often differentially excluded from education (Victora et al. 2008). Such programmes commonly provide a safety net to support the most vulnerable families and children, facilitating the transfer of resources to households to the value of the food distributed and more in the case of take home rations. Additionally, such programmes benefit local agricultural production and market development (Bundy et al. 2012; World Food Programme 2013b).

Analysis of outcomes of school food provision has found positive significant effects on weight in lower income countries and mixed but generally positive effects in higher income countries. For height, results from lower income countries were mixed but in higher income countries, results were moderate and positive (Kristjansson et al. 2009). School food programmes have also been found to result in an increase in school attendance and enrolment (Bundy et al. 2012; World Food Programme 2013b) as well as having a significant positive effect on growth and cognitive performance (Greenhalgh et al. 2007; Kristjansson et al. 2009).

School food programmes are usually funded from government budgets and as a result, the scale of the school food programme will be associated with the income level of a country. Evidence indicates that countries with well-established government funding have more developed meal systems which are consolidated in national policy frameworks (Harper et al. 2008). While the aim of school food provision may be similar across countries, the form that provision takes will vary and in higher income countries, there is evidence of diversity in terms of the cost of the meal, the food provided, catering services, the dining environment and the level of take up of school food (Harper et al. 2008).

In terms of charging for a meal, generally, in low income countries there is no element of the cost recovery that is common in higher income countries (World Food Programme 2013b). Here the cost of a meal can vary, from 98p (USA) to £4.50 (France). Of the developed countries, only Sweden and Finland provide free meals to all pupils in compulsory education regardless of ability to pay, while in Brazil and Chile, deprived regions are targeted for free provision. In all other countries, with the exception of Australia, meals are provided free or at a reduced price for families who qualify (Harper et al. 2008).

In many countries such as the UK, Sweden and Finland, a full canteen service is provided but elsewhere, for example Ireland and Germany, provision is limited to sandwiches and soup. In Italy, France, Japan and

Hong Kong the emphasis is on organic and locally sourced produce and meals cooked onsite (Harper et al. 2008).

In many countries such as Italy, Finland and Japan, the dining environment is considered important for the transmission of cultural and social lessons. In Japan, there is a philosophy in which the school lunch environment contributes to the formation of proper eating habits and promotes good social relationships and in Finland, teachers and pupils eat at the same time and the school lunch supports the learning of manners and Finnish customs. Similarly in Italy, teachers and pupils eat their lunch together and meal times are considered to be part of the children's cultural education and the use of tablecloths, crockery and cutlery is encouraged (Harper et al. 2008).

Variation in the rate of uptake of the school food programme is also evident by country, for example in Canada and Australia uptake is very low (9% and 14% respectively) as the vast majority of children bring packed lunches. In Spain, where the majority of pupils go home for lunch, uptake is 14% and in England, Ireland and Chile (where secondary education is not compulsory) take up is around 40% with Scotland and Wales slightly over 40%. In comparison, take up is high in countries where the meal is free, Finland (95%), Sweden (85%) (Harper and Wells 2007).

The worldwide provision of food in schools reflects an acknowledgement that inadequacies in children's diets occur in both developing and developed countries including the UK, where issues of food insecurity have been of increasing concern over recent years.

2.5. UK School Food Provision

It has been noted that estimating current levels of undernutrition within the UK population is difficult since data is limited and reports on global hunger do not include data from industrialised nations (Riches 1997). In the UK there is no official poverty line, and as a result, there is no attempt to define basic needs in terms of food, or to cost a minimum diet. The prevailing political

view is that income maintenance grants are sufficient to provide recipients with enough money for a proper diet and in this way responsibility for diet is placed firmly at the individual level (Dowler 1998).

Consequently, it is argued that hunger in countries such as the UK has become depoliticised, since despite spending billions of pounds on social policies, with the exception of free school meals, food is not provided as a welfare benefit. The exception is the food stamps programme in operation in the US, but not emulated elsewhere (Rose and Falconer 1992; Riches 1997).

In the UK, Government initiatives focus on food labelling; the provision of information to enable informed choice and maintenance of the food supply (Dowler and Dobson 1997; Dowler 1998). As a result, those suffering from hunger and food insecurity are reliant on charity based food banks. Many of these food banks are operated by the Trussell Trust and reflecting the financial crisis of recent years, the use of food banks has been increasing year on year. In 2012-2013, UK food banks fed 346,992 people nationwide, of which 126,889 were children (Trussell Trust 2013).

While food poverty is largely depoliticised, the acknowledgement of the importance of diet in childhood has resulted in recognition of the need to tackle inadequate diets in childhood. The policy options open to politicians are summarised Nelson (2000) who identifies three possible options by which politicians may address nutritional inadequacies in childhood. These include, give money to parents, feed the children or improve access to healthy and affordable diets. Overwhelmingly the policy response has been to 'feed the children' and policies which aim to address childhood nutritional inadequacies are characterised predominantly by direct provision of food to children in an appropriate setting, such as school.

The current provision of food in UK schools reflects a long history of policy development which has been shaped by key political, economic and social milestones (Appendix 1). School food provision began in the 19th century

with an acknowledgment of the need to tackle widespread hunger in the UK population, tempered by prevailing views on poverty and the 'deserving poor'. This was followed by a shift towards an ethos of universal welfare provision in the aftermath of the Second World War which saw school food provision become standardised. The 1980s saw a political ideology which championed reduced public expenditure and increased consumer choice and it was not until 2001 that school food provision re-emerged as a means to tackling poor nutrition in childhood. Finally, the introduction of devolved powers across the UK territories has resulted in policy innovation which has seen the reintroduction of minimum nutritional standards across the UK territories as well as the introduction of universal free provision within certain age groups in both Scotland and England.

2.5.1. The Need to Address Widespread Malnutrition

A precursor of school food provision was the Poor Law of 1834 which allowed children, defined as malnourished by medical experts to be given free meals, establishing the principle of addressing large scale malnutrition by feeding the poor. Each local area had responsibility to look after the poor and as a result, patchy provision developed, with cities such as Manchester and Bradford instigating free meals for poor children. No advice was given on the amount or type of food to be provided and local responses varied according to micro political contexts (Atkins 2007). Provision was minimal in accordance with the principle of 'less eligibility' which underpinned the Poor Law; this dictated that as a deterrent, standards of living in the workhouse should never reach those of the lowest paid labourer outside it (Vernon 2005).

However, during the last quarter of the nineteenth century a growing empathy for the hungry was emerging. Hunger, especially the hunger of children was increasingly seen to dramatize the systematic failures of the market, as well as to threaten the political stability, racial health and imperial strength of the nation (Vernon 2005). The 1904 report by the inter

departmental committee on physical deterioration raised wider public health concerns when it stated that in 1900, 28.9% of army recruit applicants were rejected as being unfit for service (Colquhoun et al. 2001). As a result, improved nutrition was recognised as a necessity to address the needs of industrialisation as well as the military demands of the empire (Gustafsson 2004).

In addition to public health concerns, the extension of elementary education to larger numbers of children in 1880 brought many children to school for the first time and led to concern that underfed children would not be able to benefit from the education provided (Vernon 2005). The extension to education also had the unintentional effect of making more children hungry since they were no longer able to contribute to the family income (Thane 1984). The 1906 Education (Provision of Meals) Act permitted (but did not compel) Local Education Authorities (LEAs) in England and Wales to provide free or reduced charge meals for those children who would otherwise be unable to benefit from education; similar provision was introduced in Scotland in 1908.

The introduction of the 1906 Act was not without opposition, it was believed that the introduction of free meals would relieve parents of the proper responsibility to feed their children and would erode the function that meals had in strengthening family values (Booth 1970 cited in Welshman 1997; Colquhoun et al. 2001:230). In order to overcome this opposition, the 1906 Act made two significant concessions, first, it was emphasised that meals were provided for educational reasons rather than as a form of poor relief and second, that only those in greatest need would benefit from free meals.

These factors shaped early school food provision; characterised as 'medical treatment' it was the job of the school medical service to decide if a child was underfed, a decision underpinned by precise measurement by medical inspection (Gustafsson 2004; Vernon 2005). This method emphasised the fact that meals were provided for educational reasons and was supported by

the fact that funding came from the Board of Education budget (Welshman 1997; Passmore and Harris 2004).

The second factor enabling the 1906 Act was the fact that the free meals would benefit only the neediest, crucial in this was the distinction between those in need of free meals and those who had to pay some of the cost. This helped mollify those critics who argued that free meals abrogated parental responsibility in favour of the state maintenance of children. The limited nature of the free provision assured its acceptability across Edwardian society since it was feared by many that “that too general provision of meals would also undermine parental responsibility” (Colquhoun et al. 2001:123).

It soon became apparent that the provision resulting from the 1906 Act was insufficient. While some Local Authorities quickly made progress others did not adopt school meals (Welshman 1997) and in terms of quality, it became apparent that the meal provided was nutritionally inadequate (Gustafsson 2002). However, arguments relating to parental responsibility were deeply entrenched and the belief that poor housekeeping, rather than poverty, was responsible for poor childhood nutrition persisted. Despite this view being challenged by campaigners such as Maud Pember Reeves (Reeves 1913) this view remained influential, shaping school meal provision throughout the 1920s and 1930s.

2.5.2. The Interwar Years – Restricting Provision

Increased levels of need associated with the miners’ strike of 1921 led to a threefold increase in the cost of providing meals and in this year, over 60 million meals were served at a cost of almost £1 million. The Board of Education felt that this expenditure was on a scale greater than had been anticipated by the 1906 Act and responded by adopting a rationing system. Although the estimated expenditure for 1922/3 was £3.75 million, it was agreed to limit expenditure on meals to just £300,000. This was justified by the Board of Education President who argued ‘the financial and

administrative burden which has been thrown on the system of education is much greater than it can or ought to carry" (Welshman 1997:12).

As a result, an arbitrary limit was placed on the number of children who could have free meals, this hit poor areas disproportionately hard (Gillard 2003). LEAs were forced to select fewer children for meals by means test and consequently, only half as many meals were served in 1926 as 1921. Despite this, the Chief Medical Officer, Newman claimed there was less malnutrition and that the 1926 coal strike had not affected the health of schoolchildren; indeed the country should congratulate itself that "the duty was discharged so effectively and economically" (Welshman 1997:14).

The interwar period was one of slow progress with the Board of Education interpreting legislation narrowly, refusing to accept any wider responsibility for child poverty and rarely putting pressure on LEAs which provided an inadequate meals service (Welshman 1997). Newman maintained the health of school children had been unaffected by the depression and the belief prevailed that "more often it is careless mothering, ignorance of upbringing and lack of nature than actual shortage of food which results in a malnourished child" (Welshman 1997:14).

However, this view began to be challenged as the interwar period was characterised by debates about poverty, health and welfare. A shift in attitudes relating to nutrition was signalled by the introduction of free milk in depressed areas in recognition that poor families drank little milk because it was expensive (Welshman 1997). The question of nutrition became more and more political and 1935 can be seen as a turning point with the credibility of the Board beginning to crumble as it increasingly avoided the issue of nutrition. In 1936, the argument that malnutrition was caused by inefficiency rather than poverty was dismissed as evidence increasingly supported the idea that poverty was the cause of malnutrition (Orr 1936).

During this period, provision of free meals remained very limited, by 1938/39, 26 million meals and 114 million milk meals were served, these aggregate

figures disguise the fact that only 11.2 % got free milk and 1.2 % free meals (Welshman 1997). Increasing pressure was aimed at the inadequacies of the system, in particular methods for assessing malnutrition were especially criticised as unreliable. By the early 1940s the Board of Education came to accept criticism of its outdated methods and provide school meals and milk on a more generous level.

2.5.3. The Welfare State and Universal Provision

By 1941, Board of Education officials were beginning to envisage universal school meals as a permanent feature for the education system and in October 1941 the government increased grants and abandoned proof of necessitous and malnutrition (Welshman 1997). School meals were now intended to benefit all children (Passmore and Harris 2004) and the 1944 (Education) Act used a welfare state approach to school meals, introducing a universal national system which made school meals an integral part of the school day for all children (Davies 2005). School meal policy represented a standard meal for every child, based on scientific evidence of nutritional requirements reflecting welfare provision which was universal, standardised and coordinated and directed by a strong central state (Gustafsson 2002).

In line with the ethos of universal provision, it was the government vision that school meals would eventually be provided free of charge, however the Labour Government of 1945-51 decided this would be unrealistic on grounds of expenditure (Gillard 2003). In 1954, the earliest year for which detailed statistics are available, only 3.7% of pupils received meals free of charge however following the introduction of a national scale for means testing in 1964, the take up of free school meals more than trebled (Rose and Falconer 1992).

The move to universal standardised provision brought with it changing perceptions of the meaning of school food. While the introduction of the school meal acknowledged children's new social right not to be hungry, it did

so in return for educating them in a new set of social responsibilities and obligations. These lessons were engineered into the fabric of school life, the design of kitchens, canteens and dining halls, the arrangement of tables, chairs and utensils and the order and discipline of the meal, not to mention the food itself. School meals were to provide 'practical lessons in unselfishness, cleanliness and self-help' encouraging the acquisition of 'gentle manners, courtesy and respect' (Vernon 2005:711).

If children rarely sat down to meals at home, much less meals with tablecloths, cutlery and the art of polite conversation, they would learn the art of civility through the school meal (Elias 1982; Vernon 2005). As well as conversation, it was necessary to teach children how to use of the physical tools of civility. Tables, chairs, plates and cutlery were often absent from the poorest homes where food went from hand to mouth (Vernon 2005). The 1944 Act promised that every school would have its own dining hall; tables would be covered with a lino or cloth and decorated with flowers. Teachers were expected to supervise meals, sitting at the head of small tables of a dozen students where they could demonstrate how to behave and it was envisaged that these skills would pass from generation to generation (Vernon 2005).

As well as modelling healthy, productive and socially well adapted citizens, a further aim of school meals was to teach good dietary habits and the school canteen offered an ideal forum for 'training in food values'. However, children struggled to adapt to new tastes and foods since they were unused to the foods that were given to them and there is little evidence that children learned to enjoy or tolerate these foods (Vernon 2005).

In the decades following the 1944 Act, the philosophy of school meals was to provide an adequate lunch but a 1974 report which drew a link childhood diet and health marked the start of a debate on the quality of food provision and the need to promote healthy eating through school meals (Department of Health and Social Security 1974). However, the changing political ideology of the 1980's resulted in a shift away from the idea of school meals to

promote healthy eating, as the universal ethos of school food provision was challenged.

2.5.4. Reducing Public Expenditure, Increasing Consumer Choice

Although changes to the welfare system in the mid-1970s initially sought to further the impact of universal provision, the rising cost of mass unemployment and welfare provision saw a rapid reversal of the Universalist approach and in 1978 the supplementary benefits review explicitly linked the continued provision of welfare to the extension of means testing (Morelli and Seaman 2005). Within the context of increased wealth for many and a rise in consumerism, children had begun to reject the lunches being provided. Arguments for a decrease in public spending and an increase in consumer choice chimed with the ideology of the Conservative Government which came to power in 1979 and led to the introduction of three key pieces of legislation which were to have a significant impact on school meal policy (Gustafsson 2002; Morgan 2006).

The first, the 1980 (Education) Act removed the obligation of LEAs to provide meals (except free meals) and abolished the nutritional standards and national pricing structure in place since 1944. As a result, school meals were relegated to a non-essential service and the national and comprehensive nature of school meal provision was eroded. In some cases, councils ceased to provide a hot meal service completely and by 1992, 11% of local authorities had ceased to provide school meals beyond their statutory requirements (McMahon and Marsh 1999).

Secondly, the 1988 (Local Government) Act resulted in the introduction of compulsory competitive tendering in all public sector catering and as a result local authorities put their school meal service out to tender with the aim of reducing costs (Morgan 2006). Characterised as the 'second legislative vehicle for the neoliberal era' (Morgan 2006:380) the 1988 Act consolidated

the view of school meals as a commercial service rather than one provided on the grounds of welfare, health or education. For primary schools change was relatively minor, with meal provision remaining a two choice, two course meal for a fixed price. In secondary schools however, change was more significant with most introducing a cash cafeteria system in which pupils had free choice from individually priced items.

Until 1980, school meals were intended to provide at least a third of the daily requirement for energy and between a third and a half of the daily requirement of protein (Somerville et al. 1996). However, the Acts of 1980 and 1988 meant that the school lunch service in secondary schools became consumer led as items that sold well continued to be provided while less popular items were phased out. Thus, school meals were increasingly seen as a revenue generator and pupils as consumers, capable of selecting from a range of alternatives and this resulted in a shift of responsibility for health, away from the education system and towards the child (Gustafsson 2002, 2004).

The impact of these two pieces of legislation on school meal provision was manifold, resulting in the deskilling of the workforce, the loss of kitchens in schools, a fall in the quality of the food provided and the rising cost of the school meal (Morgan 2006). The third Act, the 1986 (Social Security) Act represented a shift towards increased targeting of free school meal provision. This was in line with a broader retreat from universal provision and an increased targeting of welfare which reflected debates on the reputed failure of welfare provision and the creation of a 'dependency culture' (Morelli and Seaman 2005).

As a result of the 1986 Act, parents in receipt of family credit lost entitlement to free school meals, receiving instead nominal compensation of 65 pence per day, per child. Analysis of the impact of this change found that the proportion of children who were eligible for free school meals dropped from 18% in 1987 to 12% in 1988 (when the Act came into operation) with an estimated half a million children affected (McMahon and Marsh 1999). Many

schools charged more for meals than the 65 pence allocated and as a result, many families ceased to buy school meals. One study indicates a reduction in the number of children taking free school meals of around 40% while for those children who continued to be eligible for free school meals, uptake was unchanged at 90% (Somerville et al. 1996). While those on income support remained eligible, the tightening of eligibility rules in 1992 reduced working hours allowed from 24 to fewer than 16 per week (Riley 2004a).

The legislation outlined had a devastating impact on UK school food provision and it was not until the election of New Labour in 1997 that school food was once again on the policy agenda. New nutritional guidelines introduced across the UK in 2001 reinstated both nutritional guidelines based on food groups and the duty of Local Authorities to provide a paid school meal service. However, in terms of school food policy, the period since 2001 has been one of significant change, resulting from the introduction of devolved powers across the UK territories.

2.5.5. The Impact of Devolution

Scotland took the initiative with 'Hungry for Success' (Scottish Executive 2002) which introduced the first nutrient based standards in the UK since 1980, adhering to the stringent guidelines outlined by the Caroline Walker Trust (Sharp 1992). The aspiration was to revitalise school meals, using a whole child, whole school approach as well as connecting school meals with the curriculum as a key aspect of health education and promotion. Detailed mechanisms for monitoring these standards were set out, as was a timetable for implementation.

This bold policy innovation was to prove a catalyst in terms of school meal policy, leading to the re-emergence of school food as a political issue (Morgan 2006). It was followed in England by 'Turning the Tables' (School Meals Review Panel 2005) which was underpinned by sustainable development principles in food procurement and supported the introduction

of an even more holistic approach than Scotland (Morgan 2006). 'Turning the Tables' challenged the ideological concept of choice and led to the introduction of stringent nutrient based standards in 2008/9. Key was the recognition of the importance of consistent messages in terms of health issues, focussed around the national healthy schools programme (Harper and Wells 2007).

Similarly, in Wales³, strict nutritional guidelines were proposed under the Appetite for Life Action Plan (Welsh Assembly Government 2008). In 2013 these guidelines were underpinned by legislation in the form of the 'Healthy Eating in Schools' (Wales) Measure. In Northern Ireland, the compulsory standards outlined in 'Catering for Healthier Lifestyles (Department of Education 2001) were updated in 2007 and in 2008 were extended to include all food and drink provided in school (Harper and Wood 2009; Adamson et al. 2013).

Across the devolved territories of the UK, these changes have resulted in the introduction of choice control and nutritional standards that are considered among the most comprehensive in the world (Harper and Wells 2007). As of 2013, all primary and secondary schools in the UK (with the exception of academies in England) were subject to food based standards with more stringent nutrient based standards in place in Wales, England and Scotland (Adamson et al. 2013). In England, new guidance was introduced from January 2015 (School Food Standards 2014; Department for Education 2015).

Devolution has also resulted in policy innovation in terms of entitlement to free meals. Kingston upon Hull led the way with its 'Eat Well, Do Well' initiative launched in 2004 which introduced free meals for all school children in primary schools (Colquhoun et al. 2008). In Scotland, a trial of universal free school meals for all pupils in the first three years in primary school in five

³ The Welsh Assembly Government became the Welsh Government in May 2011, for ease, the term Welsh Government is used throughout this thesis.

pilot areas was conducted in 2007-2008. The results of this trial indicated an overwhelmingly positive response from parents, teachers and catering staff and a significant increase in the uptake of school meals in the five trial areas (MacLardie et al. 2008).

In England, a pilot for universal free school meals introduced for primary school children in three selected Local Authorities in 2008 indicated a similar increase in the number of children opting to eat a school lunch; there was also significant increase in the take up of school meals among primary school children who were eligible for free school meals under the previous criteria (Kitchen et al. 2012). Subsequently, universal free meals have been introduced for all infant school pupils in England with effect from September 2014 (Laws 2014) and in Scotland from January 2015 (The Scottish Government 2014).

School food provision in the UK reveals a policy which, rather than being underpinned by a grand theory is the result of trial and error, reflecting the rise and fall of political ideologies, welfare states and standards of living (Vernon 2005). Analysing the development of school food policy reveals three key themes. First, the way that the role of Government has changed in line with changing meanings of hunger and ideas about the responsibility of government (Vernon 2005). Secondly, the changing vision of the child who moved from a collective recipient of standardised provision to an individual consumer capable of selecting from a range of alternatives (Gustafsson 2002, 2004). Finally, the changes to free school meal entitlement in Scotland and England reflect a shift towards universality in these territories, indicating that this is an area of school food provision which remains under review (Morelli and Seaman 2005).

2.6. Free School Meal Entitlement

The importance of free school meals and the contribution that they make to childhood nutrition has been recognised within two Government

commissioned reviews. In the first, free school meals were recognised as contributing to the welfare of a significant number of children and essential in tackling the continued association between social class and health in its broadest sense (Black 1980). A later review recognised the importance of the school lunch as a component of the diet of children from disadvantaged families as well as the potential to redress inequalities in diet such as fruit and vegetable consumption. This report also noted the contributions that free school meals made to the family food budget, resulting in the improvement in the nutrition of other family members (Acheson 1998).

More recently, evidence suggests that in terms of the contribution of school meals to dietary intake, school meals contribute between one quarter and one third of the daily intake of energy, Fat, Dietary Fibre, Iron, Calcium, Vitamin C and Folate for 11-18 year olds. For children in receipt of free school meals, this contribution is greater (Nelson et al. 2007b). Over the last decade, the reintroduction of strict nutritional standards has resulted in considerable improvements in school food. Comparisons of lunchtime provision between 2004 and 2011 found more main dishes, vegetables, salads, water and fruit juice on offer and less availability of items that were not permitted, with the consequence that meals eaten by pupils were well balanced (Nicholas et al. 2013).

In addition to a nutritional contribution, free school meal entitlement represents a significant financial contribution, estimated to be worth £370.00 per year, per child (The Children's Society 2012a:4). However, the additional benefits associated with receipt of free school meals such as clothing grants and travel subsidies have the potential to increase the value of entitlement to an estimated £625 per year (Goodwin 2008). In addition to the financial benefit, evidence indicates that families appreciated the contribution free school meals made to their child's wellbeing, parents noted that a free meal "ensures the children get healthy balanced meals when the budget at home is so tight" and "It's peace of mind that he's had a decent meal at school" (The Children's Society 2012b:12).

Additionally, a number of studies point at the significant and immediate effect of diet on behaviour, concentration and cognitive ability as well as on the immune system and therefore the ability to attend school (Bellisle 2004; Sorhaindo and Feinstein 2006; Belot and James 2011). As a result it is acknowledged that, especially in light of improved nutritional standards, free school meals could provide a direct way for policy makers to reduce disparities in diet between children from more and less privileged socio economic backgrounds which in turn could contribute to reduce difference in educational outcomes (Belot and James 2011).

In order to make a claim for free meals, parents must be in receipt of specified benefits, and children who receive a qualifying benefit in their own right are also entitled. The benefits are listed as:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseekers Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- the guaranteed element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided you are not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
- Working Tax Credit run-on - paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit ⁴

(UK Government 2013)

⁴ The proposed introduction of Universal Credit will replace all means tested benefits and tax credit for working people, replacing income support, income based jobseekers allowance, housing benefit, child tax credit and working tax credit.

2.6.1. The Contentious Nature of Entitlement

However the eligibility criteria for free school meals are contentious and a key criticism is that they are too restricted with the result that many families and children in need will be excluded from provision (Riley 2004b; Curtis 2008). In particular, the link between free school meal entitlement and 'out of work' benefits will exclude those classified as the 'working poor', estimated to constitute half of the 13 million people living in poverty in the UK in 2011/12 (MacInnes et al. 2013).

The link between free school meal entitlement and out of work benefits has other implications. For children, access to welfare provision is through a parent or carer intermediary and is dependent on parents or carers qualifying for one of the benefits specified. The 'passport' nature of free school meal entitlement is perceived as problematic because while the criteria for free school meal entitlement may remain the same, the ability of claimants to claim the original benefits may change. This issue is illustrated by data collected for Scottish schools which indicate that the proportion of school children entitled to free school meals was in continual decline between 1998 and 2004, falling from 21.9% to 19% of the school roll (Morelli and Seaman 2010).

These trends were reflected across the UK and data from the British Household Panel Survey (BHPS) indicates that free school meal eligibility for children in the bottom two deciles (based on household income) of the UK population fell significantly. For households in the second decile, eligibility fell from 77% in 1991-93 down to 54% in 2001-3. These trends, rather than reflecting a fall in the rate of children poverty, reflect a reduction in the number of families eligible to claim the necessary benefits (Morelli and Seaman 2010).

While a general fall in the number of children entitled to receive free school meals was observed, these trends did not impact equally on all groups. By 2001-3 the eligibility rate in the lowest decile was less than in the third decile,

indicating that entitlement had diminished for the very poorest households. This is explained by the fact that households in decile 1 fail to gain entitlement to the welfare system benefits available to other poor families; as a result, they are in desperate poverty because they have fallen through the welfare safety net, and do not qualify for, or claim the additional trigger benefits. While explanations as to why families fall through the welfare net entirely are complex, a number of key issues have been highlighted, including limited access to benefits for disadvantaged groups, the non-take up of benefits due to the complexity of the benefits system and a lack of knowledge of eligibility as welfare changes take place (Morelli and Seaman 2010).

This demonstrates the difficulty of using entitlement to one benefit to trigger entitlement to a second benefit. Steps taken to overcome the declining proportion of children entitled to free school meals include widening entitlement to include families in receipt of child tax credit with an annual income below a specified threshold in 2004. However, this did not extend to working families tax credit and data suggests that these changes were insufficient to stem the decline in the proportion of children entitled to receive free school meals. In 2005 the level of eligibility reached its lowest level ever, with only 18.5% of children gaining entitlement (Morelli and Seaman 2010).

In addition to criticism that the entitlement criteria are too restricted, it is acknowledged that of those who meet the entitlement criteria, a significant proportion either do not register for free school meals or do not take up the meal once registered. Analysis of data from England estimates that 3% of all eligible pupils in England (approximately 200,000 pupils) are not registered for free meals and a further one in four of those who are registered, do not consume the meal (Iniesta-Martinez and Evans 2012).

2.6.2. The Implications of Non-Take up of Entitlement

The financial and nutritional benefits of free school meal entitlement for both families and pupils have been noted. For those pupils who do not take up the meal, alternative provision in the form of a packed lunch or, for secondary school pupils, offsite provision will often represent a poorer nutritional option.

Alarm over the quality of packed lunches has led to suggestions of a ban (Dimbleby and Vincent 2013; Stevens et al. 2013) and evidence has consistently demonstrated that the contents of packed lunches fail to achieve the minimum standards set for school meals (Evans et al. 2010). Of concern is the high frequency of sugary and fatty foods in the form of sweetened soft drinks, cakes, biscuits, chocolate bars and crisps and the low inclusion of fruit and vegetables (Douglas 1999; Jefferson and Cowbrough 2003; Armstrong and Clapham 2007; Rees et al. 2008).

A comparison of packed lunches with school meals indicates that school meals generally have a healthier nutrient profile and since the introduction of compulsory food standards, school lunches contain significantly more energy, carbohydrate, Protein, Fibre, Vitamin A, Folate, Iron and Zinc than packed lunches and 8% less Salt (Stevens et al. 2013). Evidence indicates that in primary schools in England, only 1.1% of packed lunches met the standards in place for school meals, with low inclusion of vegetables and salads (Evans et al. 2010).

The other alternative to free meals common in secondary schools is for pupils to access food from offsite sources. One small study noted that, of the three sources of food available during the school day, home, school or shops surrounding secondary schools (labelled as the fringe), the shops on the fringe were most widely used, with 80% of pupils purchasing something from them at least once a week. For pupils allowed out at lunch, usage rose to 97%, this compared to 68% pupils bringing food from home and 59% consuming school food (Sinclair and Walker 2008).

There is general concern that food outlets selling unhealthy products will cluster around schools, especially in poor areas. However, while the evidence notes that the food environment around secondary schools may influence adolescent diet (Simon et al. 2008; Day and Pearce 2010; Kestens and Daniel 2010; Smith et al. 2013) the influence of such outlets is not clear cut. In the US, research found little evidence for a relationship between the food environment and consumption (Van der Horst et al. 2008; An and Sturm 2012) while another study found the close proximity of outlets was positively associated with adolescents intake of sugar sweetened beverages and percentage body fat (Laska et al. 2010). Other evidence found that students near fast food restaurants were more likely to be overweight or obese than were youths whose schools were not near fast food restaurants (Davis and Carpenter 2009).

In the UK, while research found evidence of clustering of food outlets around schools, the link with deprivation was more complex and across all schools there were numerous opportunities for pupils to purchase energy dense foods locally. In Glasgow, the most common type of food outlet was a takeaway (Ellaway et al. 2012). Analysis of food purchased from shops at the fringe indicated that purchases contained on average 38% of calories from fat, compared with the guideline of 35%. While total carbohydrate intake was roughly on target at 52%, much of that was sugar, with total sugars providing almost a quarter of energy (15%), more than a third above the recommended maximum (11%). The salt content was low but many pupils added salt to products in takeaways while proportions of protein were adequate (Sinclair and Walker 2008).

Given the significant improvement of school food provision which has resulted from the reintroduction of minimum nutritional standards across the UK territories, it is recognised that the best nutritional option for pupils is the consumption of school meals. This is especially true for pupils who are entitled to free school meals because their nutritional profile is often poorer and there may be less opportunity for deficiencies in the lunchtime meal to

be addressed in meals provided at home (Colquhoun et al. 2008). In addition to improving the nutritional profile of pupils from low income families, the other benefits associated with free school meals, such as the contribution that they make to family income and the nutritional profile of other family members means that the non-registration and non-take up of the meal is highlighted within policy documents as a cause for concern.

In Northern Ireland the 'Food in Schools Policy' acknowledges the requirement that the catering service and schools ensure that children from disadvantaged backgrounds entitled to free meals avail of this entitlement (Department of Education 2009). In England, 'Turning the Tables' acknowledges free school meals as a 'safety net' and recommends that schools and local authorities should aim for complete take up of free school meal entitlement (School Meals Review Panel 2005). Finally, the focus of 'Hungry for Success' was the introduction of a system which ensures anonymity and therefore minimises or eliminates stigma for free school meal pupils (Scottish Executive 2002).

Within Wales, the issue of non-take up of free school meals by those who are entitled arises within a number of documents (Welsh Assembly Government 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009; National Assembly for Wales 2011) and it is made clear that there is a duty for Local Authorities and schools to encourage maximum take up (Welsh Assembly Government 2009; National Assembly for Wales 2011). Finally, a need for further research to identify reasons for non-take up has been outlined (Welsh Assembly Government 2008).

2.7. The Need to Understand Non-Take Up of Entitlement

This chapter has outlined the importance of adequate nutrition within childhood and its contribution to healthy growth and development as well as exploring the most significant threat to childhood nutrition, that of malnutrition. The provision of food in schools has been placed at the centre of attempts to address both undernutrition and overnutrition and significant improvements in nutritional standards in UK schools have been implemented in response to concerns regarding inadequate diets among UK children.

The provision of free meals to those defined as 'in need' has a long history in the UK and while free school meal policy has been subject to change, underpinned by shifting political and economic contexts, the principle of providing a free meal to children from low income families remains in place. However, the evidence notes that a significant proportion of families and pupils do not use their free school meal entitlement and this will have nutritional and financial implications for both pupils and their families. As a result, the non-take up of entitlement is acknowledged within policy documents as a cause for concern and across the UK territories, policy documents acknowledge the need to ensure full take up of entitlement.

The evidence indicates that both levels of registration for free school meals and take up of the meal will vary by Local Authority, indicating that take up is influenced by local and contextual factors, including area deprivation, the school level of entitlement and family circumstances (Iniesta-Martinez and Evans 2012). Acknowledging the influence of context represents a shift in the understanding of the outcomes of health related interventions towards the recognition that variations in the setting in which such interventions are implemented will have an impact on outcomes (Green et al. 2000; Poland et al. 2009; Bonnell et al. 2013).

3. Chapter 3: Understanding the Context of Free School Meals

Recent years have seen a shift to acknowledge the influence of contextual factors on health and health behaviours, reflecting a broader shift in the conception of health from a model that was health care disease orientated towards a social one. Within this there is a move to reconsider the role of the environment, in recognition that social context may be the key to understanding health related behaviours and policy outcomes.

A socio ecological model acknowledges that behaviour has multiple levels of influence and this has resulted in a move towards theoretical and empirical work which investigates the role of contextual factors in the production and maintenance of health variation. The aim of this chapter is to explore the context of free school meals, in recognition of the importance of context in influencing the outcomes of health related interventions such as free school meals.

This chapter begins by examining the school as a setting within which to implement health related interventions. Using a socio ecological model as a framework, this chapter then outlines the analytical levels that make up the context of free school meal provision; these include the policy framework, policy implementation and the school food environment and these are considered together with the theoretical and conceptual frameworks which underpin each level.

By focusing on the cultural context of behaviours, an ecological model acknowledges the dynamic interplay between situational and personal factors and this chapter then considers the interaction between context and the individual. The school food environment is explored using a collective lifestyle approach to consider the dimensions of social context; power relations, patterns of consumption and the construction and maintenance of

social identity. Finally, this chapter considers the existing evidence base in terms of free school meal uptake, highlighting the limitations of existing studies and outlining how these limitations will be addressed within this thesis. The final section outlines the research aims and objectives of the study.

3.1. Interventions within the School Setting

In the UK as elsewhere, tackling both undernutrition and overnutrition in childhood focuses on the school environment in recognition that this is an appropriate setting within which to tackle a range of childhood health issues. This acknowledgement has resulted in a host of school based interventions which target the primary risk behaviours which typically emerge during childhood and adolescence; these include tobacco use, unhealthy dietary behaviours, inadequate physical activity, alcohol and other drug use and sexual behaviour (Warwick et al. 2005; Pyle and Poston 2006).

The use of the school environment to promote the health of children has been a goal of the World Health Organisation, UNESCO and UNICEF since the 1950s. Underpinned by the concept of healthy settings and rooted within the Ottawa Charter (World Health Organisation 1986), a vision emerged of a comprehensive approach to promoting health across the entire school community (Rowe et al. 2010). Key within this is the concept of supportive environments which acknowledges the links between people and their environment and that these environments should be a source of health for people (World Health Organisation 1986).

Settings represent 'major social structures that provide channels and mechanisms of influence for reaching defined populations' (Mullen 1995 cited in Green et al. 2000:12) and are recognised to consist of multiple physical, social and cultural dimensions that can influence a variety of health outcomes or health status (Stokols 1996). Settings are defined as;

“The place or social context in which people engage in daily activities in which environmental, organisational and personal factors interact to affect health and wellbeing...Settings can normally be identified as having physical boundaries, a range of people with defined roles, and an organisational structure.”

(World Health Organisation 1998:19)

Settings such as workplaces and schools are seen to provide a convenient route for health education interventions. Composing a setting, population group and the identification of particular health issue, they make up the traditional three dimensional matrix used to organise health education programmes (Dooris 2004). Such an approach acknowledges the influence of context on health behaviours and the outcomes of health related interventions, leading to health promotion becoming more ecological and context sensitive (Green et al. 2000; Poland et al. 2009).

In the UK the concept of ‘healthy settings’ received some legitimisation in the early 1990’s through ‘The Health of the Nation’ (Department of Health 1992) which encouraged action in an eclectic range of settings. This was picked up in the 1997 white paper ‘Excellence in Schools’ which set out the Government’s intention to help all schools become healthy schools. ‘Saving Lives, Our Healthier Nation’ (Department of Health 1999) noted the importance of education in the promotion of health and wellbeing of children, particularly those who are socially and economically disadvantaged and highlighted the potential role of healthy schools and workplaces in improving health and reducing inequalities (Dooris 2004).

It can be argued that in the UK ‘healthy schools’, underpinned by national standards is the only government led programme that has explicitly embraced and promoted the settings approach as a whole (Dooris 2004). The focus on schools acknowledges that education and health are inextricably linked to school organisation, community and individual factors which all work to influence physical and emotional wellbeing and intellectual

achievement; particularly because relationships formed at school are frequently central in children's social networks (Parcel et al. 2000; Warwick et al. 2005; Saab et al. 2009).

As a result, in recent years, a host of school based health initiatives have effectively shifted responsibility for children's health away from families and individuals and towards the school (Hemming 2007). Most children attend school regularly and for long periods of time, which means that school based interventions are capable of providing treatment to a large population of children in an economically efficient manner (Parcel et al. 2000; Pyle and Poston 2006). In addition to administering health related interventions, time spent within the school environment is viewed as an opportunity for dissemination of information (Pyle and Poston 2006) and schools are expected to promote pupils' health through school organisation, curriculum development and pedagogic practice (Markham and Aveyard 2003).

In terms of nutrition, the whole school approach has increasingly been endorsed as an effective way to promote nutrition in the school setting (Wang and Stewart 2012). This results from the widely accepted view of the school as having the potential to make substantial contributions to promoting healthy eating habits in children and adolescents by promoting nutritious food and creating supportive environments (Rowe et al. 2010). In this way the whole school approach encourages healthy choices, providing children with the opportunity to learn about food and nutrition and help them to gain social and practical skills (Harper and Wells 2007).

These approaches have met with success and the most compelling evidence for the effectiveness of the health promoting school model is based on nutrition related outcomes (Rowe et al. 2010). An investigation into the establishment of School Nutrition Action Groups (SNAGs) indicates that pupils' food selection can be altered at school by giving them more control over school food provision (Passmore and Harris 2005). Additionally, evidence indicates that the number of actions that secondary schools have in place to promote healthy eating is significantly associated with healthy food

choices made by students (Townsend et al. 2010), also that such actions can improve dietary intake, help to develop hygienic habits and improve food safety behaviours (Wang and Stewart 2012).

However it is recognised that variations within the school setting or a 'school effect' may have an impact on the outcomes of health related programmes or interventions (Bonnell et al. 2013). These 'school effects' include school policy, school climate, socio economic status and school location and have been found to have an impact on pupil behaviours such as smoking, drinking, diet and drug use as well as pupil's wellbeing, attainment and behaviour (West et al. 2004; Sellstrom and Bremberg 2006; Fletcher et al. 2008; Bonnell et al. 2013). Understanding the mechanisms by which the school context influences the outcomes of interventions and pupil behaviours requires an approach which understands the variability of health promotion practices within the setting as well as the experience of participants (Poland et al. 2009).

3.2. The Nature of Context; a Socio Ecological Model

The shift to acknowledge the influence of contextual factors on health and health behaviours reflects a broader shift in the conception of health from a model that was health care and disease orientated towards a social one. This social model encompasses a broader understanding of the determinants of health to include all major non-genetic and non-biological influences (Young 2005). Consequently, within a social model, health is understood to be determined by a complex interplay of environmental, organisational and personal factors, largely determined outside the health services (Dooris 2004, 2005; Young 2005).

This has resulted in a move away from traditional models of health which focussed on specific behaviours studied independently of social context, and towards theoretical and empirical work which investigates the role of contextual factors in the production and maintenance of health variation

(Frohlich et al. 2001; Cummins et al. 2007). This is in recognition that social context may be the key to understanding health related behaviours and policy outcomes since to understand human actions, it is necessary to be aware of its socially contingent nature (Popay et al. 1998; Green et al. 2000; Sayer 2000; Popay et al. 2003; Williams 2003).

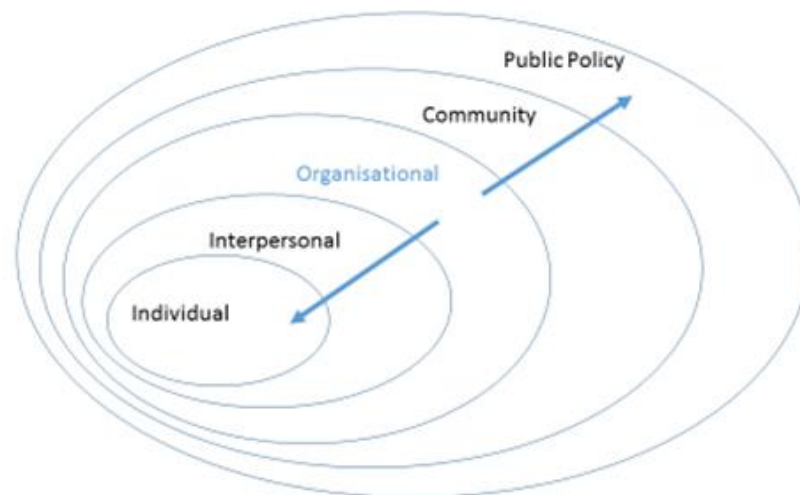
By focussing on the cultural context of behaviours, an ecological model acknowledges the dynamic interplay between situational and personal factors and in doing so attempts to understand how the same environmental conditions may affect people's health differently (Stokols 1996; McLaren and Hawe 2005). Within an ecological model, health and health behaviours are seen as a product of interdependence between the individual and the environment, as the environment is recognised as a factor that predisposes, enables and reinforces individual and collective behaviour (Green et al. 2000).

By conceptualising the environment amid other influences on behaviour, an ecological model stratifies the environment into various levels of influence (Sayer 2000; Richard et al. 2011). These levels will often include intrapersonal (biological, psychological), interpersonal (social and cultural), organisational, community, physical, environmental and policy (Sallis et al. 2008). The potential of the levels to interact is key within an ecological model, and using this model as a framework allows analysis of these interactions in order to determine which are of most importance (Sayer 2000; Richard et al. 2011). A further key feature of this model is that it has the capacity to incorporate constructs from models that focus on different levels of influence, thus allowing for the integration of multiple theories within a comprehensive framework (Sallis et al. 2008).

An ecological model has been utilised by McLeroy (1988)(Figure 1) to provide a framework to understand the impact of interventions designed to improve health. Within this model, behaviour is viewed as being affected by and affecting multiple levels of influence, and the attention is focussed on both individual and social environmental factors as targets for health

promotion interventions. Underpinning this model is the acknowledgment that most public health challenges are too complex to be understood adequately from a single level of analysis and an ecological model allows the development of appropriate interventions that systematically target mechanisms of change at each level of influence (McLeroy et al. 1988).

Figure 1: The Socio Ecological Model (Adapted from McLeroy et al. 1988)



Examining the free school meal policy context using McLeroy’s socio ecological model as a framework, the following analytical levels can be identified; the policy framework, policy implementation at the local level and the school food environment. Considering the policy framework includes consideration of the place of free school meal policy within the wider welfare policy framework, the implications of the means tested nature of policy and the impact of devolution on policy processes. Considering policy implementation within the local context necessitates examination of the theoretical framework for understanding the potential for variation in terms of policy implementation. Finally, focussing on structure agency interactions within the school food environment underpinned by a collective lifestyle approach highlights the dimensions of social context; power relations, consumption patterns and the construction and maintenance of social identity in determining school food practices.

3.3. The Policy Level

Like any social policy, free school meal policy promotes the norms and values of the wider societal context and as a result, policy evaluation needs to assess the values that policy promotes and whether it is well designed for the problem it is intended to address (Hanberger 2001). The development of free school meal policy outlined in Chapter 2 revealed that in the UK, school food provision has a long history, shaped by changing social, political and economic contexts (Gustafsson 2002; Morgan 2006; Evans and Harper 2009). As a result, the free school meal policy currently in place in the UK is the culmination of many years of policy development which under devolution, continues to evolve (Morelli and Seaman 2010).

3.3.1. UK Welfare Policy

Placing free school meal policy within a wider societal framework necessitates a brief outline of wider UK welfare policy. The recognition of the impact of social circumstances upon health status has long been documented in the UK; in 1842 Chadwick recognised the differences in life expectancy that different social classes could anticipate and subsequent writers, Rowntree 1901; Booth 1902-3; Pember Reeves 1913 also highlighted the link between 'health and wealth' (G Davey Smith 2001). The acknowledgment of a social model of health led to the idea that the state had a role in promoting health and the Public Health Act of 1848 set out the principle of state responsibility for public health (Acheson 1990).

Economic and political processes are fundamental determinants of health and disease and these can be analysed in terms of who benefits from specific government policies and practices (Chandola and Marmot 2004). In this way, welfare policy is designed to address issues of inequality and since social, class and income inequalities will determine inequalities in health, welfare provision will have a direct bearing on health outcomes (Townsend et al. 1992; Acheson 1998; Bambra 2005; Mackenbach 2006).

Originally, the study of welfare policy focussed on the creation of a typology of welfare regimes, allowing links to be made between welfare regimes and population health (Epsing-Andersen 1990; Korpi and Palme 1998; Navarro and Shi 2001). Subsequently, research has concentrated on examining the differences in health outcomes between countries by comparing welfare regimes and their respective politics and policies (Bambra et al. 2005; Bambra 2007).

Analysis of infant mortality rates found that Social Democratic regimes (characterised by generous benefits, a commitment to full employment and a strongly interventionist state) were found to have smaller household income inequalities, lower poverty rates and lower infant mortality rates, trends which were explained by a set of related interventions that generate and reproduce a culture of solidarity and opportunity. In comparison, Liberal countries such as the UK (characterised by minimal state provision in which benefits are modest and often attract strict entitlement criteria) were found to have the largest income differentials and lowest rates of improvement in infant mortality rates over the period studied (1945-1980). These trends were explained in terms that Liberal countries have the lowest public expenditure on health care, inequalities are largest in these countries and wage disparities most accentuated (Navarro and Shi 2001).

The marked differences in infant mortality rates between Neo Liberal and Social Democratic nations reflect wider trends, with those countries that follow more redistributive policies have more success at improving the health of their population than Neo Liberal countries, where welfare is weakest (Navarro and Shi 2001). The UK, together with the US, has higher rates of poverty among children than other industrialised European nations (Moore et al. 2002). In the UK, in 2011/12, evidence indicates that rates of child poverty varied between regions, ranging from the lowest levels in the East of England (21%) and Scotland (22%) to the highest Wales (33%) and London (36%) (Joseph Rowntree Foundation 2013).

Indeed, in all dimensions of child wellbeing, marked differences between Neo Liberal and Social Democratic nations exist, since accelerated loss of work and income for less qualified workers and declining government spending on health, education and welfare will impact on child development by reducing income as well as affecting the psychosocial and social capital of families (Li 2008). A key aspect of the Neo Liberal welfare regime is the nature of welfare benefits which are neither fully universal or comprehensive, instead they are concentrated on those defined as being 'in need' by political and administrative criteria. As a result, programmes are means tested rather than being based on citizenship, as in Social Democratic countries or on workers' rights as in Christian Democracies (Navarro and Shi 2001).

However, the categorisation of a country in terms of welfare regimes to an 'ideal type' obscures the fact that, in reality, most countries practice a disjointed set of welfare policies, reflecting the complex nature of welfare programmes and the incremental nature of policy formation. Due to the complexity of the welfare system, policies tend to be modified in a piecemeal fashion, as they are adapted to changing circumstances; in addition, individual states can and do embrace contradictory policies and within country and within region differences will occur in pursuit of policy (Kasza 2002). This is particularly true in the case of the UK where the introduction of devolved powers across UK territories has introduced the potential for policy divergence.

3.3.2. The Impact of Devolution

As a result of devolution, the UK is often seen as a paradox of four territories in one country, each territory with its own configuration of institutions and cultural practices which will define policy diversity and uniformity (Exworthy 2001). Prior to devolution, each country was subject to a common policy that applied throughout the United Kingdom, with latitude for minor variations and many observers expected that shared histories, legacies and labour markets would ensure that policy making in devolved areas would remain similar;

however the extent of policy divergence since devolution in some areas has surprised many (Connolly et al. 2010).

Devolution in the UK has been understood in terms of the degree to which unique or more responsive policy development may emerge, and thus policy divergence is understood to be a measure of the degree of effectiveness of devolution (Drakeford 2005; Morelli and Seaman 2010). Policy making reflects the fact that each governance regime will comprise multiple influences, from statutory and non-statutory sectors, public and private, professional bodies, pressure groups, central government and international bodies. This combination of influences will reflect the social, political, cultural and economic cultures and traditions within each territory and result in outcomes which are territorially specific, reflecting the interaction between existing territorial structures and processes and newly devolved competencies (Exworthy 2001).

Analysis of the impact of devolution on health related policy has focussed on health care and evidence indicates that the devolved territories have pursued differing policies and each of the four systems has their own distinct trajectory (Greer 2004). However, while initial analysis indicates significant differences, other analysis suggests the possibility that those divergences have been overestimated and in many cases, approaches across the territories were remarkably similar and it is suggested that it is the similarities rather than the differences that invite explanation (Blackman et al. 2006; Blackman et al. 2009; Harrington et al. 2009; Smith et al. 2009).

These similarities are explained as a result of the limited nature of devolution arrangements in the UK and the dominance of one political party for much of the period under study. Also, while individual policies such as free social care in Scotland and the removal of prescription charges in Wales indicate that policy divergence is possible, often such innovation will lead to policy transfer between territories (Smith et al. 2009).

In terms of school food provision, it has been noted that devolution has had an impact on two key policy areas. In terms of nutritional standards, analysis indicates that policy convergence flowed from divergence as the devolved territories introduced similar nutritional standards (Morelli and Seaman 2010). Similarly, in terms of the shift to universality, policy convergence flowed from policy divergence as trials, originally introduced in Scotland were replicated in England and subsequently introduced in both England and Scotland.

However, the introduction of universal free school meal entitlement in England and Scotland is limited to pupils in the first three years of primary school and such a policy has not been implemented in Wales or Northern Ireland. As a result, for the majority of pupils across the UK, free school meal entitlement remains a means tested benefit, and this will have implications for those in receipt.

3.3.3. The Implications of Means Tested Benefits

For Moffitt (1983) stigma arising from the act of welfare reciprocity per se, is the main cost of participation in welfare programmes. Welfare stigma is the negative attribution related to the perception that individuals who participate in such programs lack independence and autonomy, views which result from broadly shared cultural perceptions about deservingness and individual responsibility for poverty (Stuber and Schlesinger 2006).

While stigma is seen as cross culturally ubiquitous, cultural and historical forces shape norms and the national context provides an overarching ideology by categorising stigmatised groups and providing clues to appropriate responses toward them (Pescosolido et al. 2008). Such views are rationalised by the ideology of consumerism and underpinned by neo liberal reforms which emphasise the significance of personal rather than state responsibility (Scambler 2006).

Power is essential to the social production of stigma and stigmatisation is entirely contingent on access to social, economic and political power that allows the identification of differentness, the construction of stereotypes, the separation of labelled persons and the full execution of disapproval, rejection, exclusion and discrimination (Link and Phelan 2001). Consequently, the amount of stigma that people experience will be shaped by the relative power of the stigmatised and the stigmatiser, however these power differences are often overlooked and the focus of analysis has remained on the attributes that caused the stigma rather than the power differences between people who have those attributes and those who do not (Link and Phelan 2001).

This approach is reflected in traditional analysis which focuses on micro level interactions in which the attitudes held by individuals were viewed as central to understanding and reducing stigma (Link and Phelan 2001; Pescosolido et al. 2008). However, the theoretical model of the stigma construct has progressed from an individualistic focus towards an emphasis on stigma's social aspects (Yang et al. 2007), as analysis has gravitated away from the 'structure of interaction' and towards an appreciation of the causal potential of social structures (Scambler 2006).

In this way, analysis at the macro level views stigma as embedded in a larger cultural context that shapes the extent to which stereotyping exists and defines the way that different groups accept, reject or modify dominant cultural beliefs (Pescosolido et al. 2008). As such, a key aspect of analysis is to determine how culturally created categories arise and are sustained, since the essence of stigma lies in the rules that guide behaviour, and, as such the foundations for differentness are normative (Link and Phelan 2001; Pescosolido et al. 2008).

Within these culturally created categories, exceptions occur and factors associated with the social context may mediate stigma; for example if jobs are scarce then a person cannot be faulted for being unemployed and so stigma may be linked to local economic conditions which de-emphasises

failure on the part of the individual. Additionally, these views are not levelled at all those in receipt of welfare and children are often seen as deserving recipients of aid, even though parents may experience stigma (Stuber and Schlesinger 2006).

In the UK, as in other countries, many means tested welfare programmes exhibit less than full take up and factors which have been shown to contribute to low take up include confusion about requirements and welfare stigma (Currie 2004; Stuber and Schlesinger 2006). It is theorised that the probability of participating in a welfare program will vary with the size of the benefit and, if the costs outweigh the benefit, people will not participate. As such, non-participation in social programmes has been modelled as a utility maximising decision, as individuals weigh the disutility of participation against the potential benefit in their decision to participate (Moffitt 1983).

This cost benefit framework provides the basis for empirical investigation of non-participation in social programs but there is limited insight into what types of costs matter and what measures are most likely to reduce them (Currie 2004). For Moffitt (1983) stigma is the main cost of participation in welfare programmes with the result that households who would participate in the absence of stigma, choose not to (Currie 2004). Stigma can be fostered in the ways in which means tested programs are implemented and factors identified include negative interactions with workers and long waiting times. Additionally, those administering benefits could make the process of applying negative and recipients describe experiences as unpleasant and the need to disclose personal information unduly intrusive (Stuber and Schlesinger 2006).

While negative experiences associated with applying for benefits will lead to increased stigma, it has been found that take up is enhanced by automatic or default enrolment, and lowered administrative barriers. However, stigma is not the only cost facing participants and other costs such as learning about and applying for the programme may be sufficient in deterring some individuals (Currie 2004). Evidence suggests that there is a great deal of

variation in the way that similar types of programs are implemented at the institutional level and this variation could be exploited to identify the most important barriers to participation (Currie 2004).

3.4. The Institutional Level

Key within McLeroy's framework is the concept of the organisation as a vehicle for the implementation of health promoting interventions, in recognition that few community health promotion programmes are free standing (McLeroy et al. 1988). No two settings are alike and so policy implementation analysis will often focus on interaction between the policy and the setting which has resulted in attempts to systematize evidence regarding the effectiveness of interventions in different types of settings (Matland 1995; Green et al. 2000; Poland et al. 2009).

3.4.1. Implementation Theory

Implementation is defined as a 'specified set of activities designed to put into practice an activity or program of known dimensions' (Fixsen 2005 cited in Forman et al. 2009b:27). It is within the process of implementation that policy will take shape, in a relationship that is reciprocal, 'policy is made as it is being administered and administered as it is being made' (Anderson 1975 cited in Hill and Hupe 2002:7). It is acknowledged that within the process of implementation, the policy, its content and the impact on those affected may be substantially modified, elaborated or even negated (Hill and Hupe 2002).

The study of policy implementation has a long history in the UK and elsewhere and attempts to understand who, how and why policy is put into effect as well as the contribution of implementation to policy effectiveness (Schofield 2001; Hill 2003; Barrett 2004). Resultant studies, most famously, Pressman and Wildavsky's classic (Pressman and Wildavsky 1973) highlighted the problematic of implementation in order to identify key factors

deemed to contribute to what was perceived as 'implementation failure' (Barrett 2004).

Initially, the focus of analysis assessed compliance with government policy objectives in the assumption that implementation would follow in a linear fashion (Sanderson 2000; Barrett 2004). However, this 'top down' approach was criticised for failing to consider that barriers to implementation may be found earlier in the policy making process and also that such an approach neglects other actors who may divert policy for their own purposes (Matland 1995).

In contrast, the 'bottom up' approach seeks to describe both the networks of actors involved in implementation as well as focussing on the policy problem (Schofield 2001). However this approach is limited in that it fails to start from an explicit theory within which to frame the social, economic and legal factors which structure the perceptions, resources and participation of those actors (Sabatier 1986).

A third generation of implementation models synthesises these two approaches, attempting to understand the perspectives and strategies of all major categories of actors while taking account of the socio economic conditions and legal instruments which may constrain behaviour (Lester et al. 1987; O'Toole 2000; Hill 2009). This synthesised approach acknowledges that policy implementation occurs on two levels, the macro implementation level where the program is devised and the micro implementation level where local organisations develop their own programs and implement them (Matland 1995).

Often, policy will contain only shadowy guidance for implementation and as such, implementation of policy is an interpretive process and pre-existing social relationships will influence how health promotion initiatives are framed, perceived and supported (Matland 1995; Green et al. 2000). Key is understanding the array of actors and agencies involved, and how actor goals and priorities impact on implementation outcomes (Ryan 1995; O'Toole

2000; Schofield 2001). In response, a growing literature has explored the use of discretionary power by front line operatives (Barrett 2004) and the concept of the street level bureaucrat (Lipsky 1980) emphasises the autonomy of the professional and the level of discretion allowed within policy implementation (Hupe and Hill 2007).

In undertaking implementation, it is proposed that the priorities of street level bureaucrats may be achieved by various means including communication, bargaining, negotiation or conflict and these actions will be influenced by a number of factors, including their knowledge, beliefs, attitudes, history and culture (Spillane et al. 2002). As a result, policies that fit the implementers' own interests and agendas are more likely to be implemented than those that do not, which are more likely to be opposed or modified (Spillane et al. 2002; Hill 2003).

Consequently, implementation analysis needs to focus on the concept of micro networks which reveal interaction between groups of actors rather than the traditional concepts of top to bottom vertical relationships (Barrett and Hill 1984; Walt et al. 2008). This approach reflects the multi-dimensional character of the policy system and the horizontal and vertical nature of relationships (Hupe and Hill 2007). However, this analysis does not have to be one in which the formal structure is absent since the context influencing the scope for negotiation provides constraints and will set the framework for the relative autonomies between one party and another (Barrett and Hill 1984).

3.4.2. Implementation within a School Setting

In the course of developing implementation literature, scholars have identified more than three hundred variables that might affect implementation (O'Toole 1986). These fall into four general classes of influence; policy and the policy process; organisational characteristics; agent's preferences and leadership abilities and the implementation environment (Hill 2003).

In terms of the outcomes obtained in promotion and prevention programmes, empirical evidence has identified at least 23 contextual factors which will influence outcomes. These include the characteristics, attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of the implementers, factors relating to the organisational context of the interventions including the attitudes, beliefs and behaviours of managers and other stakeholders, organisational policies, structure and procedure and finally the external environment of the implementing organisation (Durlak and DuPre 2008; Forman et al. 2009b).

For programs implemented in schools, local factors will dominate the policy process since schools have different physical attributes, head teachers different leadership styles, staff members different skills, and parents different levels of effectiveness and influence (Spillane 1998; Poland et al. 2009). As a result, within the school environment there will be a diversity of practice that reflects different models of health promotion, different analysis of the problem and solution as well as varying organisational context within which there exists different degrees of opportunity and constraint (McLeroy et al. 1988).

Schools do not exist in a vacuum, but serve as mediating structures between individuals and the larger social environment (McLeroy et al. 1988; Green et al. 2000). So while schools are nested within Local Authorities, they also operate in areas which will have different ethnic and class mixes of students and teachers and as such, each school will have evolved from a different local history. The result will be a school which is inseparable from the families it serves and the community in which it is located (Flay 2002 cited in Poland et al. 2009:509).

As a result, the ability to bring about change may be hampered by a range of restrictions, as school staff will at any one time be likely to be responding to a wide variety of policy initiatives (Whitelaw et al. 2001; Barrett 2004). Although there is a belief, reflected by policy and practice that a school is a setting which will be amenable to being shaped into one which is more conducive to health, this may underestimate the extent to which the setting is

shaped by historical, economic, political and cultural contexts (Green et al. 2000; Dooris 2005).

Given the nature of the school environment, analysis of the interaction between the policy and the setting needs to encompass how policy may be redefined to fit local conditions or local conditions adapted to fit policy (Spillane 1998). As well as considering the school environment, it is necessary to consider the actors within that environment, all of whom will have different roles and different status levels (Pike 2010).

This discussion has considered the policy and institutional levels identified within a socio ecological model in relation to free school meal policy. The other levels of influence outlined within this model encompass interpersonal and intrapersonal processes which refer to social and cultural aspects and biological processes at the individual level. In order to understand the individual experience of school food provision and the interaction of structure and agency within the school food environment, the following section will draw on a collective lifestyles approach.

3.5. Dimensions of the School Food Context

The concept of collective lifestyles has been used as a theoretical basis with which to explain what context is, and how it affects individual outcomes. By conceptualising the link between context and behaviour, a collective lifestyles approach recognises the role that structure plays in constructing choices for people as well as imposing constraint on their practices (Frohlich et al. 2002). In this way, behaviour is understood as social practice, routinized and socialised behaviour common to groups (such as patterns of consumption) which are generated at the intersection of social structure (norms, resources, policy and institution practices) and agency (individual actions, volition and a sense of identity) and manifest concretely in specific places (Poland et al. 2006).

The notion of collective lifestyles recognises that behaviour occurs in settings that differ, but by bringing together three concepts from practice theory, social structure, social practices and agency, a collective lifestyle model includes a contextualisation of behaviours. In this way, the meaning that people ascribe to the contexts in which they function is considered and as a result, lifestyles can be understood as generated practice, reinforcing and emerging from the context (Frohlich et al. 2001; Frohlich et al. 2002). Within a collective lifestyle approach, the dimensions of the social context are identified as power relations, patterns of consumption and the construction and maintenance of identity (Poland et al. 2006).

Power has a central role in shaping the geography of place, in recognition that 'places' are not socially and politically neutral, but result from the outcome of dynamic social relations and power struggles. Power is the capacity to act so that one's own interests prevail over those of others and access to goods and services may be partly dependent on networks and social power. Such a focus on power relations draws attention to the way in which the social and geographic patterning of behaviours parallels the effects of other processes of marginalisation and disadvantage (Poland et al. 2006; Cummins et al. 2007).

Secondly, a collective lifestyles approach maintains that lifestyle practices are embedded in collective patterns of consumption, in turn selected from what is economically and socially feasible and appropriate (Frohlich et al. 2010). These patterns of consumption will establish and express differences among groups since different patterns of expression will exist among people of similar contexts (Frohlich et al. 2001; Frohlich et al. 2010). By establishing and expressing difference among and between social groups, consumption patterns will contribute to the construction and maintenance of a social identity, as distinctive cultures emerge in specific places, governing how people behave and the meanings that are derived from experience (Poland et al. 2006; Frohlich et al. 2010).

Applying the dimensions of context identified by a collective lifestyles approach to the school food environment involves exploring power relations and issues of consumption and identity.

3.5.1. Power Relations in the School Food Environment

Power plays a significant role in defining relationships around food practices, particularly in the school environment where rules on where to sit and how to eat indicate that food processes are highly regimented. A major factor influencing children's lunchtime experience is the presence and role of adults within the space and the contested nature of power relations between teachers, lunchtime staff and pupils (Pike and Colquhoun 2009; Pike 2010).

Two worlds make up the school, the world of the institution, an adult controlled world of formal structures and the world of the children themselves, in which social networks and peer group cultures dominate. The lunch break represents a time and space where the institutional organisation contrasts most strongly with the informal world of children's peer group culture and the way that they organise themselves around eating and relaxing (Valentine 2000).

Key within these relations is the dining room, itself an ambiguous space, because although physically situated in the school its function is nutritional rather than educational and so the rules which govern the educational space in the rest of the school day are different. For pupils, the dining environment is more associated with home than school and lunchtime is a space where they can relax, be with their friends and have a break from the normal routine (Daniel and Gustafsson 2010).

However, in recent years, school meal provision has been situated at the forefront of the drive to tackle poor nutrition and rising obesity rates, resulting in an increased focus on prescribed nutritional standards, predetermined menus and a drive towards consistent rules and routines (Metcalf et al. 2011). Implementing a healthy eating policy in a limited time and space falls

more readily to the assertion of control, and lunchtime as a 'children's space' has been relegated below that of the need to meet institutional criteria and the policy agenda (Daniel and Gustafsson 2010; Metcalfe et al. 2011). As a result of these constraints, lunchtime does not always fulfil its promise as a children's space and it is suggested that lunchtime is 'a territory of contested desires' (Burke and Grosvenor 2003 cited in Daniel and Gustafsson 2010:265).

Using the concept of structure and agency is essential to consider where children stand as actors, negotiators and acted upon, since lunchtime is a more negotiated time and space than the rest of the school day and power relations within the dining hall are continually renegotiated, redefined and contested (Valentine 2000; Pike 2008; Pike and Colquhoun 2009; Pike 2010; Metcalfe et al. 2011). Despite the regimented nature of the school meal environment there is potential for pupils to negotiate in order to exert agency and the contextual and fluid nature of power relations means that pupils are capable of resistance in a myriad of creative ways (Gallagher 2008; Pike 2010).

3.5.2. Consumption Patterns

For young people, patterns of consumption are vital in establishing and managing identities, particularly at the onset of adolescence when self-concept is fragile and heavily influenced by the reflected appraisal of others (Piacentini and Mailer 2004; Wooten 2006). The transition from childhood to adulthood is a major rite of passage, invoking a significant change in status. At this time of identity crisis, consumption is a way of establishing identity and gaining prestige, as consumption habits take on a greater role in distinguishing the pre-adult from the adult (Piacentini and Mailer 2004).

During this time, normative influences become increasingly important and adolescents are painfully aware of the tendency for psychological impressions to be formed on the basis of consumption preferences and

choices (Piacentini and Mailer 2004; Roper and La Niece 2009). In response, young people use goods to create, foster and develop their identity. In this way, material goods acquire social meaning and are used in instances of symbolic consumption, where consumers use products that are socially visible to others to communicate their identity (Piacentini and Mailer 2004; Roper and La Niece 2009).

As a consequence, young people learn how to identify brands and attach meaning and as a result, possessions are viewed as material symbols of identity. Inferences are made about peers based on their consumption choices and even simple products change from functional to symbolic items (Roper and La Niece 2009). For a product to function as a symbol, it must have commonality of meaning and while social symbolism and social identity associated with goods is largely provided by advertising, children learn much about the symbolic meaning of goods from their peers (Elliott and Leonard 2004; Roper and La Niece 2009).

As peer approval replaces family as the main influence in consumption behaviour, peers become more influential to consumption decisions (Roper and La Niece 2009). Being accepted by the peer group is the 'halfway house between the family and the adult world' and is one of the most powerful and potent forces effecting change in adolescents (Gay 1992 cited in Warrington and Younger 2010:207). However, inclusion and exclusion are complex processes, constantly reviewed, policed and renegotiated. Social comparisons are made, evaluated and constantly reassessed and comparison of self-image against the stereotypical values, customs and behaviours of the desired and undesired group is an essential part of the process (Warrington and Younger 2010).

For young people who make the wrong choices, there are critical social consequences in the form of teasing and bullying, stigma and exclusion (Valentine 2000; Stead et al. 2011). Evidence indicates that ridicule is used by adolescents to discourage the violation of norms and when adolescents ridicule peers about possessions; they threaten their fragile self-concept and

perpetuate a pattern of seeking material solutions for identity problems (Wooten 2006). As a consequence, adolescents may reject certain products on the basis of their symbolic meaning if they prove to be incongruent of the consumption choices of significant referents (Piacentini and Mailer 2004).

It is suggested that adolescents from low socio economic classes were most likely to compare themselves to others in terms of what they conspicuously consume while adolescents from high socio economic classes were more likely to compare themselves in terms of school performance (Belk 1984 cited in Roper and La Niece 2009:87). As a consequence, the consumption of socially recognised and acceptable goods is particularly potent for pupils from poor families and there is evidence of children using branding to disguise their poverty and as a way of elevating themselves up the social hierarchy (Roper and Shah 2007).

In one study branded trainers were used as a disguise. Branded trainers are acknowledged as symbolic, since those who owned them were seen as having referent power, inspiring admiration among peers. Poor pupils were aware that only close friends would see their home while everyone saw trainers and in this way branded trainers were used in an attempt to hide the children's poverty, since children felt that it was not possible to be poor and own branded trainers. As a result, a poor family may be more likely to buy branded goods because they are aware of an absence of money and use the symbolic meaning of branded goods to fill that gap (Elliott and Leonard 2004).

In terms of consumption, for children and young people, food practices are a vital aspect of managing identities, expressing individualism and expressing and conveying strong messages about autonomy (Kell 2008; Daniel and Gustafsson 2010; Metcalfe et al. 2011). In this way, food serves as a medium through which social groups are produced and maintained, marking out the culture and identity of an adolescent peer group as distinct from, and sometimes opposed to, the world of adults, family and home. In this way,

food conveys meaning, marking social relationships of exclusion and inclusion (Sylow and Holm 2009).

3.5.3. Food as a Consumption Practice

Adolescence is a period which coincides with increasing control over food practices. As adolescents increasingly purchase and consume food away from home, the influence of home diminishes while peer pressure, acceptance and conformity increases (Bassett et al. 2008; Warren et al. 2008). However, the evidence indicates that where adolescents have more control, food choices tend to be less healthy and although the literature indicates that adolescents are knowledgeable about what constitutes a healthy diet, choices are influenced more by likes and dislikes and social influences than health or physiological requirements (Neumark-Sztainer et al. 1999; Bassett et al. 2008; Kell 2008).

Studies note children's greater preference for fruit over vegetables (Edwards and Hartwell 2002) with girls liking fruit and vegetables more than boys (Cooke and Wardle 2005; Evans et al. 2010). Research also indicates that generally, children's preference tends to be for unhealthy snacks (Kortzinger et al. 1994; Warren et al. 2008), this is especially true for boys who have a preference for fatty and sugary food, eggs and meat and processed meat products (Cooke and Wardle 2005).

In terms of specific factors which act as barriers to healthy eating, these have been found to include poor school meal provision and ease of access to and relative cheapness of and personal preference for fast food (Shepherd et al. 2006). Facilitators of a healthier diet include support from family, the wider availability of healthy foods, a desire to look after appearance and will power (Shepherd et al. 2006). Lack of availability of healthy food at home or school was identified as an important barrier for change and less desirable eating habits may be more likely to be a result of too easy access to undesirable

items rather than poor access to more desirable items (Gracey et al. 1996; Hackett et al. 2008).

However, much research neglects the emotional and symbolic dimensions of food consumption and it is necessary to understand that food is a social cultural product with meaning and importance far beyond its nutritional and calorific content (Sylow and Holm 2009; Stead et al. 2011). For adolescents, different meals have different meanings and while 'healthy' is related to family meals, home and weight loss, junk food consumption is associated with friends, peers and convenience (Kell 2008). Additionally, research indicates that food habits among adolescents are characterised by irregular meal patterns in which snacking and light meals are common, contributing to 25-35% of energy intake (Samuelson 2000) so while a family evening meal signified health, food eaten at lunch and for snacks is predominantly chosen for taste (Contento et al. 2006).

A collective lifestyle approach recognises that patterns of consumption will establish and express differences among groups, since not everyone within a context will have the same manner of expressing collective lifestyles. As a result, different patterns of expression will exist among people of similar contexts, in order to construct and maintain a social identity that both establishes and expresses difference among and between social groups; as a result, distinctive cultures will emerge within specific places (Frohlich et al. 2001; Poland et al. 2006; Frohlich et al. 2010).

3.5.4. The Construction and Maintenance of Social Identity

Young people are often made to choose between competing definitions of their identity and there are different expectations, norms and rules across the contexts of home and school. It is the peer group in particular where young people learn to mark themselves out as the same or different from others, managing tension between conformity and individuality. In this way the

identities of young people are embedded in complex circuits and networks of relations in which the power to permit or withdraw friendship is central to relationships (Valentine 2000).

While teenagers in the school setting are thought to be subject to fewer spatial and social restrictions, they may still be constrained by organisational structures and social expectations and there is evidence that teenagers' behaviours are considerably influenced by peer group identities in the school setting (Valentine 2003; Wills et al. 2005). Dietary habits and food preferences are the most obvious symbols of social and cultural affiliation through which group identity is expressed, since what we eat and the context in which we use food are part of the shared routines through which personal and cultural identity is shaped (SyLOW and Holm 2009). In this way, food can be seen as a socio cultural product, an important marker of social relations and an important medium of communication (SyLOW and Holm 2009).

As a result it is acknowledged that, in terms of networks at school, school friends may be crucial in shaping young people's eating behaviours and bodyweight and vice versa (Fletcher et al. 2011). However, research evidence indicates that interaction with peers is complex and the fact that adolescents eat similar meals to their friends can be interpreted as demonstrating the influence of friends on adolescent food choice, or that adolescents tend to eat with those with similar eating preferences as themselves (Contento et al. 2006).

Similarly, connectedness to friends was found to be associated with health compromising behaviours, especially substance use and sexual activity however while such findings are often interpreted as peer pressure, they may well be interpreted as reflecting the way likeminded adolescents become involved in friendship groups (Carter et al. 2007).

Using a socio ecological model as a framework, this section has identified the analytical levels pertaining to the context of free school meals, outlining the concepts and frameworks relevant to each level of analysis; the policy

context, the institutional context and the school food environment. The aim of this thesis is to understand how influences from across these levels will combine to influence the uptake of free school meal entitlement and the existing evidence base will be considered.

3.6. The Uptake of Free School Meals; the Evidence Base

A search of the literature reveals a number of studies which explore the uptake of free school meal entitlement in primary and secondary schools across the UK (Appendix 2). These studies identify a number of factors which impact on the uptake of free school meal entitlement and the findings are presented, framed within the analytical levels identified by a socio ecological model.

3.6.1. The Policy Level

Analysis of the free school meal policy framework reveals that free school meal policy is characterised by two key issues; the restricted nature of entitlement and the means tested nature of entitlement. This will have implications for families, both in terms of the need to register for entitlement and also in terms of welfare stigma.

3.6.1.1. Registering for Entitlement

The first stage of the process is to register for free school meals however evidence indicates that of those who do not register for free school meals, levels of non-registration will vary according to specific factors. A study of free school meal registration at the local authority level found that the three regions with the highest proportion of non-registration are among those with the lowest proportion of all pupils being entitled to free school meals (Iniesta-Martinez and Evans 2012).

This could suggest that families living in areas with low overall entitlement rates are less likely to claim, however this is a broad pattern and does not apply to all regions. Inner London for example had the highest proportion of all pupils entitled to free school meals but has a lower proportion of those with entitlement, claiming. Also, the South West is shown to have one of the lowest entitlement rates, similar to South East and East of England but its registration rate is considerably higher (Iniesta-Martinez and Evans 2012).

Household income has a strong relationship with claiming free school meals as the odds of claiming falls with rising income. Other factors which will lower the likelihood of registering include being in the least deprived quartile; the lower the school level of entitlement, being from families with a high socio economic status and living in a family with high parental qualifications. Those more likely to claim include pupils with special educational needs, pupils in larger families and those with younger siblings (Iniesta-Martinez and Evans 2012).

It is noted that the literature indicates that non take up of welfare benefits is often attributed to confusion about requirements or how to apply (Stuber and Kronebusch 2004). In terms of the research on free school meals, parents in some instances were found not to know their entitlement or how to apply and even when parents knew they were entitled, lack of knowledge of how school meals were administered and concern as to what they would be 'signing the children up for' was expressed (Storey and Chamberlain 2001).

This is echoed by other research which found parents needed reassurance that free school meals were organised to ensure anonymity and flexibility (Morrison and Clarke 2006; Sahota 2009). Concerns about bullying were expressed and preference for a cashless system in secondary schools in order that children would not be identifiable was important to parents. Other concerns raised by parents were related to the organisation of free school meal, such as, if the child was bound to have a free meal every day, would they be able to sit with friends and if unused credit could be carried forward to another day (Sahota 2009).

In other research, reasons given for non-registration included not realising they were entitled, not knowing how to register or not getting round to it. For ease, parents wanted to be able to apply online or be registered automatically (Children's Food Trust 2013) and in other research, a lack of internet access was identified as a factor (Goodwin 2008). Parents generally reported that they were happy to claim and described the claiming process as easy and automatic, however head teachers felt that the bureaucracy involved in claiming may deter parents from applying (Sahota et al. 2013).

Additionally, working practices within the school and effective home-school relationships were regarded as crucial in promoting free school meal uptake (Sahota et al. 2013). Some parents felt that schools did not actively encourage free school meal uptake and this was confirmed by head teachers who said they feared appearing patronising or insulting. In contrast, in primary schools a closer relationship allowed more proactive promotion of entitlement (Sahota et al. 2013).

3.6.1.2. Stigma

The literature notes that a consequence of the means tested nature of UK welfare benefits such as free school meal entitlement is the potential for stigma for those in receipt (Moffitt 1983). While the issue of stigma was explored extensively in the studies outlined, they provide a mixed picture. In some studies, stigma was found to be significant (Storey and Chamberlain 2001; The Children's Society 2001) but less so in other research (Goodwin 2008; Farthing 2012; Sahota et al. 2013).

In an older study issues related to stigma were of key importance with a third of pupils and over two fifths of parents identifying embarrassment or fear of being teased as a factor which put people off taking their free meal. Of importance was the payment system in place which resulted in the identification of free school meal pupils and resulted in embarrassment (Storey and Chamberlain 2001).

Later studies present a far more complex picture of the prevalence of stigma for free school meal pupils. In an online survey, one in four students noted that stigma affected them however over half expressed no concern about confidentiality and actively noted that stigma was not a concern for them. This research identified a range of mitigating factors, from personal resilience, and not feeling ashamed of family backgrounds as well as a sense of solidarity if a large proportion of the school were in receipt of free school meals. Further, for some young people, there was the genuine belief that stigma associated with free school meals was an adult concept with no relevance to young people's lives (Farthing 2012).

Some evidence indicates that it is often parental concerns, frequently based on personal experience is where the issue of stigma may be strongly felt (Children's Food Trust 2013). However, for many parents, claiming free school meals was not seen as a source of stigma or shame and many parents considered free school meals as a temporary stop gap or in the majority of cases, a normal part of life. However, concern was expressed for secondary school pupils and a cashless system was regarded as crucial to ensure confidentiality and minimise the risk of stigma (Sahota et al. 2013).

For head teachers, stigma was not an issue because of cashless systems, but also as a result of the homogeneity of the student population in terms of socio economic status (Sahota et al. 2013). This echoes older research which included schools with both high and low levels of registered eligibility and found that in schools with a higher number of pupils registered and taking their meal, embarrassment and stigma was not identified by pupils as a reason for non-take up, while in some of the schools with lower levels of entitlement, stigma was more of an issue (Storey and Chamberlain 2001).

3.6.2. The Institutional Level

It has been noted that during the process of implementation, policy will take shape and that the policy, its content and the impact on those affected may be substantially modified (Hill and Hupe 2002). The implementation of free school meal policy occurs within the broader context of school food provision and key factors identified within previous research include issues associated with the free school meal allowance, payment and cost, the quality and choice of food provided and the school meal environment.

3.6.2.1. Free School Meal Allowance

The free school meal allowance, set at the Local Authority level was found to be more of an issue within the secondary school sector than primary because in most secondary schools a cafeteria system is in operation in which items are individually priced. Evidence found that the amount allowed for free meals did not always meet the cost of a meal (Storey and Chamberlain 2001; The Children's Society 2001; Farthing 2012), also that both parents and pupils felt that the amount allowed was often inadequate and failed to provide a well-balanced two course meal (Storey and Chamberlain 2001; Sahota 2009). Pupils also felt that the allowance should be greater (Sahota et al. 2013) and due to the fact that the amount of money available to spend was restricted, pupils were anxious that they would inadvertently overspend (Farthing 2012).

3.6.2.2. Payment and Cost

Methods of payment represent the demarcation between primary and secondary school meal provision and the cash system in operation in some secondary schools has the potential to make free school meal pupils identifiable. As a result, the research indicates that payment systems were highlighted as a cause for concern by parents and pupils.

Research by Farthing (Farthing 2012) found that young people were concerned about confidentiality and while stigma was reduced with electronic cards and fingerprint systems, these were not in place in a large number of schools. Also, these systems did not guarantee confidentiality completely due to the fact that the amount of money was inadequate and the amount on the card was the same every day (Farthing 2012). In other research (Welsh Government 2013) there was little evidence that pupils had concerns about payment systems however, initial research indicated that cashless systems did not always result in higher levels of uptake of free school meals.

Cost is a key issue and in one survey, 20% of free school meal pupils listed cost as within their top three concerns (Welsh Government 2013). Generally, the cost of the school meal was found to be prohibitive for many parents and pupils (The Children's Society 2001; Goodwin 2008; Sahota 2009). Prices of the food were not always clearly displayed and pupils were unable to calculate if they had enough money, leading to embarrassment at the till. It was also found that unhealthy options cost less than the healthy options, choice was limited and portion sizes too small (Sahota 2009; Sahota et al. 2013).

3.6.2.3. Quality and Choice of Food Provided

The provision of school meals has undergone significant change over the last decade however findings from all the research found that the issue of quality and choice of food on offer to be of significant importance in the take up of all school meals, both paid for and free. In older research (The Children's Society 2001), the quality of school meals was considered poor, portions were too small and choice was limited, especially around healthy options. In other research, the quality and choice of food on offer was given as a reason for non-take up with choices described as unappealing (Storey and Chamberlain 2001). Even the more recent research cites food choice (Morrison and Clarke 2006) and lack of choice and portion sizes (Sahota 2009) as issues putting children off taking their meals.

More recently, research has found that the options available continue to be of key importance and issues of availability were raised as popular choices run out (Morrison and Clarke 2006; Welsh Government 2013). Important to pupils was choice, familiarity and the taste of food on offer; additionally, pupils wanted culturally safe choices, for example, sufficient halal options for Muslim pupils and clear signage (Sahota et al. 2013). The quality of food and level of choice was key in decisions to take free meals, with many parents saying that their child did not like the food on offer and would not take the meal (Children's Food Trust 2013; Sahota et al. 2013).

Secondary school pupils complained of small portions sizes and going home hungry (Sahota et al. 2013) and parents were unhappy that juice was not available at lunch and if children did not like water, they would go without a drink. Parent's priority was to ensure that children would not be hungry (Sahota et al. 2013) and as a result, packed lunches remain popular because they cater for fussy eaters and parents could be confident that food was liked and would be eaten. In schools where a packed lunch was provided as a free meal, pupils expressed concern over the fact that they had no choice over the contents, unlike the ones brought from home (Storey and Chamberlain 2001).

3.6.2.4. The School Meal Environment

The dining room emerged as a significant factor in shaping pupil's experiences and attitudes towards school dining and pupil's accounts suggest that the organisation of lunchtime negatively impacted on their dining experience. For primary school pupils, lunch was frequently rushed in order to have sufficient time to play with friends (Sahota et al. 2013) and lunchtime queues were found to be a key issue and rated as one of the most important issues pertaining to school meals (Storey and Chamberlain 2001; Morrison and Clarke 2006; Farthing 2012; Welsh Government 2013). To avoid queues, pupils opted out of having lunch in school, choosing instead a

packed lunch or going off site (Storey and Chamberlain 2001; Morrison and Clarke 2006; Sahota 2009).

Limited space for dining is an issue which resulted in packed lunch children and free school meal children often having to sit separately, a factor which was found to deter the free school meal children from taking up entitlement (Storey and Chamberlain 2001). In another study, the separation of pupils taking school meals and packed lunches was the most frequently mentioned issue outside food choice (Sahota 2009) and not being able to eat with friends was identified as a key factor in decision making at lunchtime (Farthing 2012).

Friends' lunchtime decisions were rated in the top three concerns of pupils (Welsh Government 2013), reflecting the fact that socialising with friends was found to be the most important aspect of lunchtime (Morrison and Clarke 2006). However, pupils were reluctant to spend time socialising within the school, due to noise, light and the institutional feel and pupils in both primary and secondary schools suggested that ambience would be improved by a more restaurant like design and better decoration including displays, posters, music, better signage, tablecloths and flowers (Sahota et al. 2013).

3.6.3. The Limitations of Existing Studies

Eleven studies were identified which aimed to identify and explore various factors which may contribute to understanding of the likelihood of parents and pupils to register for and use, free school meal entitlement. Six studies used quantitative methods, of these, three used secondary data and three used a survey to collect primary data. The remaining five studies used mixed or exclusively qualitative methods. Only one of the studies identified was a peer reviewed academic research document (Sahota et al. 2013), the other studies were reports commissioned by charities, or local or national Government.

Three of the studies used secondary data; James used secondary data to investigate peer effects on the take up of free school meals (James 2011). Using data from the HMRC, Iniesta-Martinez estimated the number of pupils who were entitled to receive free school meal but are not currently claiming them (Iniesta-Martinez and Evans 2012). Finally, Holford used secondary data to explore the determinants of school meal participation in primary schools in Scotland (Holford 2012).

Three of the studies used survey data; the Children's Food Trust used a questionnaire to explore why some parents don't register for free school meals (Children's Food Trust 2013) while Farthing used an online survey to capture young people's experience of free school meals (Farthing 2012). Finally the Welsh Government conducted a survey in respect of payment systems in operation in secondary school in Wales (Welsh Government 2013).

Five studies used mixed or a qualitative approach to generate insight into influences on the uptake of free school meal entitlement. Research undertaken by Storey used mixed methods to gather data to find examples of good practice within schools (Storey and Chamberlain 2001). In Somerset, young people conducted a mixed method study aimed to improve take up of free school meals by looking at children and young peoples' experiences of the service (The Children's Society 2001). In Tameside, a mixed method study focused on the take up of free school meals in primary schools using a survey and interviews (Goodwin 2008). In the Highlands an assessment of free school meals was carried out to assess barriers to registration and uptake (Morrison and Clarke 2006) and a study in Leeds used data to explore factors that influenced registration for free school meals and take up of the meals (Sahota 2009; Sahota et al. 2013).

The use of survey data to gather information about factors which influence the take up of free school meals reflects a traditional epidemiology that attempts to identify causation and yield a predictive model. However, because the objective is to isolate risk factors and assess the influence of

that risk, these studies tend to overlook why these risk factors exist, how they are interrelated and why they affect the people they do (Frohlich et al. 2001). In order to understand the interrelationship between individuals and context, researchers have adopted qualitative techniques which generate insights into understanding the processes by which context 'gets into the body' (Cummins et al. 2007:1829).

The qualitative research reviewed focuses on explaining uptake of free school meal entitlement by seeking to isolate predisposing and constraining factors at a variety of scales and settings. However, within such an approach, multiple contexts are broken down into a series of factors or variables which are generalisable across settings and populations. As a result, the emphasis is on the allocation of variables to categories rather than preserving the integrity of context and in doing so, factors are abstracted from their context (Poland et al. 2006).

Thus, while such studies look at the effect of context, they don't look at the mechanisms by which outcomes are generated, so although this approach generates insight by the identification of influential factors, it tells us little about how or why such factors are important, and as a result, the explanatory power of such studies is limited (Frohlich et al. 2001; Poland et al. 2006).

What is needed is multi-dimensional research that combines multiple ways of characterising and understanding place and as a result will give insight into how people relate to places and the resources available to them locally (Cummins et al. 2007). To understand context, it is recognised that there is a need for the development of a definition which brings together the notion of space (a three dimensional physical environment) and place (a space invested with human meaning and significance) (Hargreaves et al. 2010). The concept of place is important in the consideration of behaviours, as both a container and a consequence of human activity (Poland et al. 2006) since individuals, through their actions will shape and reproduce the organisational structures of the setting as surely as the setting, with all its cultural and

institutional baggage, frames the expected parameters of individual action (Green et al. 2000).

This thesis is underpinned by a critical realist perspective, the objective of which is to explain outcomes and propose how the interplay between structure and agency has constituted the outcome; also how the workings of such mechanisms are contingent and conditional in respect of particular local, historical or institutional contexts. As such, realistic evaluation is a means of linking together mechanisms and their outcomes in relation to the context in which they occur (Pawson and Tilley 1997).

3.6.4. A Critical Realist Perspective

Critical realism has grown in prominence in policy evaluation research because it provides a philosophically grounded theoretical framework to enable the search for the underlying processes that account for natural and social phenomena (McEvoy and Richards 2003). A realist approach will not only track outcomes, but also the contexts in which these mechanisms are triggered and the content of the intervention. This is achieved by addressing not only the effects, but the inner workings and operation of the components of a programme and how they are connected (Pawson and Tilley 1997; Kazi 2003).

Within critical realism, social programmes are viewed as social systems, and key to understanding such programmes is understanding the interplay between individual and institution, agency and structure and micro and macro processes (Pawson and Tilley 1997). The unearthing and inspecting of vital programme mechanisms is key within a realist evaluation, these mechanisms exist in the social relations and organisational structures and refer to the structure, power and relations that explain how things work; while not directly observable, mechanisms can be identified through their effects (Connelly 2000; Sayer 2000; Kazi 2003; McEvoy and Richards 2003; Kivinen and Piironen 2004).

It is recognised that the same mechanism can produce different outcomes according to context and key within the process of identifying generative mechanisms is discovering if they have been activated and under what conditions (Pawson and Tilley 1997; McEvoy and Richards 2003). Because generative mechanisms are context dependent, the task is to distinguish which aspects of the context are responsible for the generation of diverse effects and as a result, an evaluation of social programmes must include an investigation of the extent to which pre-existing structures enable or disable the intended mechanisms of change (Pawson and Tilley 1997; Pawson 2003).

Essential to the discovery of generative mechanisms is the study of social relationships, conceived as relationships between agent and structure and agent and agent. In critical realism, both structure and agency are encompassed and accorded equal weight (Williams 1999; Connelly 2000; McEvoy and Richards 2003). Such an approach results from the recognition that all behaviours are embedded within a social context and in this way it is recognised that social structures provide resources that enable individuals to act, as well as placing limits on behaviour (Popay et al. 1998; McEvoy and Richards 2003).

A critical realist perspective recognises the multi layered or stratified character of the natural and social world and the appreciation that generative mechanisms will operate at different strata or levels of reality (McEvoy and Richards 2003). A socio ecological perspective offers the potential to stratify the free school meal environment and allow the identification of influences across analytical levels. This division of the social environment into analytical levels allows models such as these to direct attention to behaviour as well as its individual and environmental determinants and so acknowledges both environmental and policy contexts and social and psychological influences (Sayer 2000).

Finally, a collective lifestyle approach reflects a way of understanding behaviour as social practices, that is, routine and socialised behaviour

common to groups such as patterns of consumption which are generated at the intersection of social structure and agency and manifest concretely in specific places (Poland et al. 2006). By focussing on the cultural context of behaviours, this approach acknowledges the dynamic interplay between situational and personal factors and in doing so attempts to understand how the same environmental conditions may affect people's health differently (Stokols 1996; McLaren and Hawe 2005).

4. Chapter 4: Research Aims

The aim of this study is to understand the take up of free school meal entitlement exploring the context of provision in terms of the policy framework, policy implementation and the school food environment. By undertaking an in-depth qualitative investigation, this thesis will explore the interaction of structure and agency across a range of socio ecological levels to understand how these interactions will influence the uptake of free school meal entitlement.

Research Aim One

To explore the free school meal policy framework; to understand how political, cultural and economic factors influence policy development and policy implementation.

Objectives

- To understand the purpose of free school meal policy as outlined within policy documents and by policy makers and stakeholders.
- To explore policy maker and stakeholder perceptions of the efficacy of free school meal policy
- To identify and understand factors which have influenced the recent development of free school meal policy, including devolution.
- To understand how the policy framework will determine the way that policy is implemented at the local level

Research Aim Two

To identify factors which will influence the way that free school meal policy is implemented at the local level and to understand how variation in policy implementation may result in variation in context.

Objectives

- To identify how school staff respond to the local and national policy context
- To understand the factors which influence school policy in relation to the school food environment and the implementation of free school meal policy
- To explore the role of school staff and the influence that they have in terms of food provision and implementing free school meal policy.

Research Aim Three

To explore the school food environment and to understand the interaction between pupils and the school food environment and the school food practices that result.

Objectives

- To explore pupils' views of the school food environment
- To assess the extent to which school food provision meets pupils preferences
- To understand how pupils negotiate the school food environment, exert agency within the school food setting and the school food practices that result.

Research Aim Four

To understand the impact of contextual factors on parents and pupils on free school meals, and to identify the way that structure agency interactions will influence the uptake of entitlement.

Objectives

- To understand the implications that the nature of free school meal policy has for parents and pupils.

- To explore how school practice and the implementation of free school meal policy within the school environment will impact on parents and pupils
- To understand how the school food context will influence the decision to use free school meal entitlement

5. Chapter 5 – Research Design and Methodology

This chapter will outline the research design and methodological approach utilised in this thesis in order to address the research aims and objectives outlined. A socio ecological model provides a framework to guide the research design, aligned with the analytical levels of context identified within the previous chapter; the policy framework, policy implementation and the school food environment.

This chapter begins by outlining the methodological approach adopted. A qualitative approach will allow this study to capture interrelationships between individuals and contexts and a case study methodology will facilitate an in-depth examination of the peculiarities of context. This chapter then outlines the process of data collection, beginning with the selection of the case study schools using key criteria identified as influential in previous research. This chapter then considers the challenges for data collection associated with the project; the potential difficulties of research with children and young people, research in the school setting and researching potentially sensitive issues together with the strategies implemented to overcome them. Finally, the process of data collection and data analysis is outlined.

5.1. Methodological Approach

It has been noted that the interrelationships between individuals and contexts are not easy to capture in quantitative studies so addressing the aims of this study demands an interpretive and qualitative approach, necessary to discover actors reasoning according to specific circumstances (Sayer 2000). The use of qualitative research acknowledges an interpretive naturalistic approach to the world which attempts to interpret phenomena in terms of the meaning that people bring to them (Denzin and Lincoln 2005).

Qualitative research is undertaken “in a natural setting where the researcher is an instrument of data collection who gathers words or pictures, analyses them inductively, focuses on the meaning of participants, and describes a process that is expressive and persuasive in language” (Creswell 1998:14). Inherently multi-method in focus, qualitative research accommodates the need to examine the multiple dimensions of a problem or issue in order to provide a ‘complex holistic picture’ (Creswell 1998:15). As a result, qualitative researchers deploy a wide range of interconnected interpretive practices since each practice will make the world visible in a different way (Denzin and Lincoln 2005).

Understanding the social contextuality of meaning is achieved by tapping into the subjective experience of individuals, and as such, narrative material is crucial for integrating meaning into context studies (Frohlich et al. 2002). Interviews yield rich insights into people’s ‘biographies, experiences, opinions, values, aspiration, attitudes and feelings’ (May 2001:120). Built on a naturalistic interpretive philosophy, they are extensions of ordinary conversations in which interviewees are partners in the research enterprise; as a result, each conversation is unique, as researchers match their questions to what each interviewee knows and is willing to share (Rubin and Rubin 2005).

Due to the open ended nature of interviews, the interviewee is able to answer questions within their own frame of reference, allowing the meaning that the individual attributes to events and relationships to be understood in their own terms (May 2001; Bryman 2004). Here, the emphasis is on how the interviewee frames and understands issues and events, allowing the researcher to understand experiences and reconstruct events in which they did not participate (Bryman 2004; Rubin and Rubin 2005).

Adopting this approach will allow understanding of the way that structure is practiced, lived in, enacted and challenged, since embedded within narratives are explanations for what people do and why, which in turn shape social action. As such, they are valuable insights into the dynamic

relationship between human agency and wider social structures (Popay et al. 1998; Frohlich et al. 2002; Popay et al. 2003). An in-depth examination of the peculiarities of context is facilitated by a case study methodology which allows the researcher to understand the dynamics present in each setting (Eisenhardt 2002).

5.1.1. A Case Study Methodology

A case study methodology allows a focus on the peculiarities of context, situation and actors, allowing the researcher to look at a case in depth in order to understand ‘the dynamics present within single settings’ (Eisenhardt 2002:8). A particular strength of a case study methodology is the recognition that any case or phenomenon under study will be embedded in a number of contexts, ranging from historical, cultural, physical, social, economic, political and ethical (Stake 2005).

By definition, a case study is “an empirical inquiry that investigates a contemporary phenomenon in depth and within its real world context” (Yin 2014:16). It is these peculiarities of context, situation and actors that are the important features of case studies and this methodology will allow the researcher to determine what is common and what is particular (J Clyde Mitchell 1983; Stake 2005). Taking this concept further, an extended case methodology acknowledges the multi-level nature of context and in doing so situates the case in the broadest field of action, allowing underlying structural conditions to be included in analysis and thus allowing a move from localised interventions (Sullivan 2002; Tavory and Timmermans 2009). Within an extended case methodology, analysis attempts to understand the interaction across levels and to analyse how this interaction will impact at the level of the individual case (Burawoy 1998).

Using this method in an analysis of school violence, Sullivan (2002) placed individual behaviour within levels of hierarchically nested ecological context

and the influences and interrelationships of the individual, the school and the community were compared.

5.1.2. Researching the Policy Context

A review of the development of free school meal policy in Chapter 2 revealed the influence of changing political priorities and as a result, policy makers' perceptions of the problem are crucial in shaping policy development (Gustafsson 2002, 2004). Additionally, the introduction of devolved powers across the UK, creating a 'natural experiment' has led to an increasingly complex policy context (Davey et al. 2008:1442).

Research which has examined the impact of devolution has tended to use a compare/contrast approach to assess how policy outcomes differ between territories (Davey et al. 2008; Blackman et al. 2009; Harrington et al. 2009; Musingarimi 2009; Connolly et al. 2010). To understand this variation, policy documents have been reviewed and interviews conducted with key informants in terms of policy and practice (Harrington et al. 2009; Musingarimi 2009). This dual approach facilitates understanding of how policy makers and stakeholders, in a variety of local contexts, interpret policy guidance and put it into practice (Harrington et al. 2009).

A review of policy documents often forms a key part of policy variation analysis, providing insight into important political and social aspects of policy (Freeman 2006). Government is a text based medium and as such, policy documents constitute the tools of politics with public policy often turning on the production of a key text. Such public policy statements often frame the nature of public policy problems, shaping the boundaries of possible responses and thus acting as a point of reference for a wide variety of actors to justify subsequent actions (May 2001; Dew 2005; Freeman 2006; Smith et al. 2009).

Analysis of these texts provides a key method of understanding the policy process since they allow insight into what assumptions are, and how they are

likely to shape the way in which actors conceive of, and respond to particular policy problems (Smith et al. 2009). In addition, different stakeholders' perceptions of the policy problem need to be scrutinised and evaluation unfolds in the way in which they define the problem situation and the strategies they pursue (Hanberger 2001; Hill 2009).

This research will draw on these strategies; a review of policy documents produced by each of the devolved territories will provide the context for semi structured interviews with policy makers and stakeholders within each territory. The focus of interviews is to explore perceptions of the purpose of free school meal policy as well as the efficacy of current policy, and to identify and understand factors, including devolution which has influenced recent policy development.

5.1.3. Understanding Implementation Variation

It has been noted that it is within the process of implementation that public policy will take shape (Hill and Hupe 2002). Research which has attempted to understand variation in terms of implementation has highlighted a diverse range of influential factors including; actors, social norms, hierarchies of power, accountability mechanisms, local organisational culture and the physical and psychosocial environments (Poland et al. 2009).

The school sits between macro social structures and processes on one hand and the micro level of social agents on the other, serving as mediating structures between individuals and the larger social environment (Sanderson 2000). As a result, to understand implementation within the school setting, the broader socio political and economic context must be considered (McLeroy et al. 1988; Green et al. 2000; Poland et al. 2009). Additionally, key to understanding the implementation of interventions within the school is to understand the role and array of actors and agencies involved in the process (Ryan 1995; O'Toole 2000).

As a result, previous analysis has focussed on the actors who interact at the operational level (Sabatier 1986) highlighting the key importance of 'networks of implementation' (Schofield 2001:251). To understand the influence of key actors, research has undertaken interviews with key informants within the school setting to uncover factors which have impeded or facilitated the implementation of policy within the school setting (Abbott et al. 2011; Masse et al. 2013).

Drawing on these methods, this research will use interviews with local authority and school staff to focus on the way that implementation is shaped by the local and national policy context. Also to understand the influence of local factors on the implementation of policy in relation to the school food environment and the implementation of free school meal policy, also the influence of individuals within these processes.

5.1.4. The School Meal Environment

The literature review notes that for children and young people, dietary practices are a key aspect of consumption, contributing to social identity and a number of studies attempt to understand food practices within the school environment (Neumark-Sztainer et al. 1999; Warren et al. 2008; Fitzgerald et al. 2010).

It is acknowledged that qualitative methods can be useful in making sense of children and young people's food and eating practices, in particular where an individual's narrative is likely to involve complexity, contradiction and ambiguity (Wills 2012). In particular, speaking and writing about food and eating can offer participants of all ages and most abilities the opportunity to delve into their own world of practice (Share 2008). Such innovative methods offer the researcher the opportunity to build rapport with children and young people and spoken and written methods offer the researcher a way of deriving what social practices mean, since the texts produced can

reveal narratives which incorporate experiences, feelings, interactions and stories about food (Wills 2012).

The use of focus groups allow the opportunity to examine adolescent group norms and practices in terms of food and such an approach acknowledges that, in the school setting, food and eating takes place in social groups and school lunch represents an inherently social occasion (Share 2008). Drawing on these methods, this study will use focus groups to explore how pupils perceive and negotiate the school food environment and the school food practices which result.

5.1.5. The Free School Meal Experience

The concept of collective lifestyles has been used as a theoretical basis with which to explain what context is and how it affects individual outcomes and this approach has been used to understand the impact of context on behavioural outcomes, such as smoking (Poland et al. 2006; Frohlich et al. 2010) and dietary behaviours (Delormier et al. 2009).

Research by Frohlich (2010) used a collective lifestyles approach to focus on the way in which social context may structure smokers' views and reactions to tobacco control. This research stems from an understanding that social context may be key to understanding diverse sources of resistance to tobacco control and as a result is an approach which moves away from the concept of smoking as a lifestyle behaviour and towards the significance of the social as a domain of inquiry. In this research, interactions between tobacco control and the smoker's social context were examined as smoking was considered a social activity, rooted in place (Poland et al. 2006).

A collective lifestyle approach has also been utilised for the examination of eating patterns as social phenomena. Using the concept of social practice, understood as the interplay of structure and agency, it is acknowledged that while eating does involve isolated choice, that choice is conditioned by the context in which it occurs (Delormier et al. 2009).

Drawing on these concepts, this research explores how the interaction of the policy framework, policy implementation at the local level and the school food environment combine to influence parents and pupils in terms of the uptake of free school meals in secondary schools in one local authority in Wales.

5.2. Selecting the Local Authority

The goal of a case study is to generate theory by identifying factors and processes that are poorly understood and as such, a case study methodology is an inductive process in which foreshadowed problems are refined as the study proceeds (Creswell 1998; Sullivan 2002). In case studies, the richness of the phenomenon and the extensiveness of the real life context require case study investigators to deal with a technically distinctive situation; an essential tactic is to use multiple sources of evidence so that data will converge in a triangulating fashion (Yin 2009).

The need for in-depth investigation within case study methodology means that the sample size will be much too small to warrant random selection. As a result, the case from which the most can be learnt will be chosen, an atypical case, chosen for its explanatory power rather than its typicality (J Clyde Mitchell 1983; Stake 2005). In order to select an atypical case, *a priori* theoretical framing is used to justify sampling choice (Tavory and Timmermans 2009).

It is noted that the introduction of devolved powers across the UK has had an impact on the development of free school meal policy and as a result, the free school meal policy background varies across the UK territories. This study will compare the policy context within Wales to other UK territories. In terms of free school meal take up, the evidence indicates that in England there is variation at the local authority level (Iniesta-Martinez and Evans 2012) and analysis of local authorities in Wales reflects these trends as variation in levels of take up is evident across Welsh local authorities.

Figure 2: Percentage Average Free School Meal uptake in Secondary Schools by Welsh Local Authority



(Murtagh 2011).

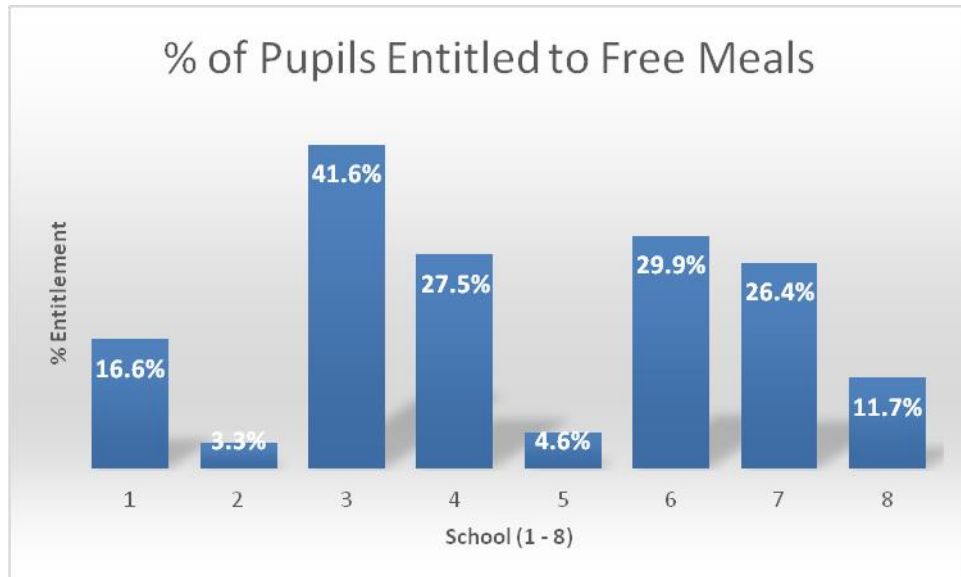
Research outlined in Chapter 3 highlights a number of factors in place at the local authority level proven to be influential to registration and uptake of free school meals. These factors include the overall level of entitlement, ease of registration, free school meal allowance, food on offer and the payment methods in operation. Based on these criteria, information on local authorities in Wales was gathered including the range of the level of free school meal entitlement and uptake, catering and school food provision and payment methods.

Contact was made with each Local Authority in Wales and a follow up email, requesting information was sent, additional information was gathered from websites and statistics provided by Welsh Government and using this information, one local authority was selected which reflected the range of criteria sought.

Within the selected Local Authority, secondary schools demonstrated a range in terms of levels of free school meal uptake and entitlement. In the schools within the Local Authority (1-8), school meal entitlement ranged

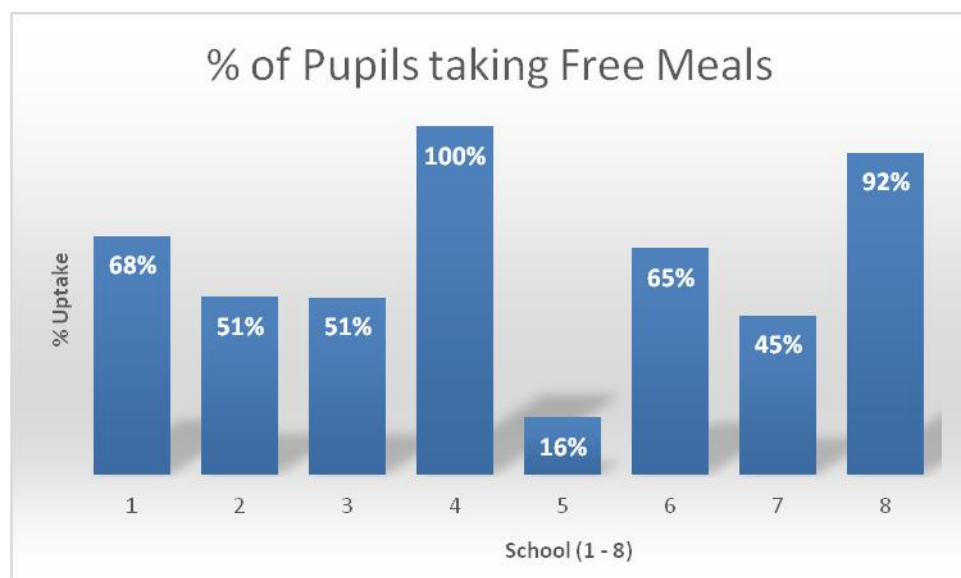
between 3%-42% (average 20%) of the school population and uptake 16%-100% (average 61%) of those entitled (Murtagh 2011).

Figure 3 - Percentage of Pupils Entitled to Free Meals in Secondary Schools within the selected Local Authority.



(Murtagh 2011).

Figure 4 - Percentage of Pupils taking Free Meals within Secondary Schools within the selected Local Authority on Census day 2010.



(Murtagh 2011).

In terms of the catering contract, the selected Local Authority was undergoing significant change since the catering contract was moving from local authority control to the private sector during the period of study. All catering provision was expected to follow the Appetite for Life guidelines outlined by the Welsh Government however this was common across all local authorities in Wales (Welsh Assembly Government 2006). In terms of payment methods, it was evident from the responses from schools that a mixture of payment methods, both cards and cash was in place across the Local Authority. In this way this Local Authority fulfilled all of the selection criteria outlined. A letter was sent to the Education Officer requesting cooperation and permission to contact schools within the Local Authority.

5.2.1. Selecting Four Secondary Schools

In terms of a focus on the primary or secondary school sector, the decision to focus on secondary schools was underpinned by the literature which indicates that secondary school pupils will be more likely to be exposed to a wider range of influential factors than primary school pupils. These factors include changes to school food provision, the ability to access food from offsite sources and the increasing desire for independence and autonomy which accompanies adolescence (Valentine 2003).

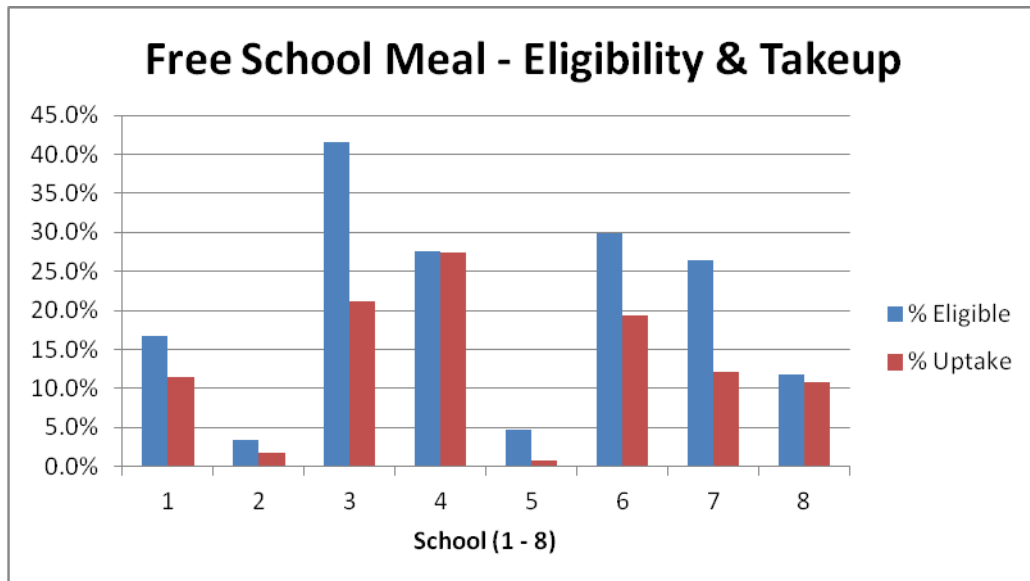
Changing school meal policy in the 1980s resulted in the introduction of a cafeteria system in the majority of secondary schools; this system was characterised by free choice and the pupil, as the consumer, was able to influence the food provided. Despite the recent reintroduction of minimum nutritional standards and a degree of choice control, a canteen style provision persists in secondary schools where pupils are able to select from a range of items, individually priced. This is compared to a set meal, set price system in operation in primary schools (Gustafsson 2002, 2004; Morgan 2006).

A second key factor distinguishing secondary from primary school food provision is the ability of secondary school pupils to access food offsite at lunchtime from shops and other outlets. Evidence indicates that such outlets provide pupils with a much wider range of foods than school provision (Sinclair and Walker 2008; Ellaway et al. 2012) and as a consequence the evidence indicates that the ability of pupils to access these offsite outlets has significant implications for the take up of school food (Welsh Assembly Government 2010).

Finally, evidence indicates that, as children become adolescents they increasingly purchase and consume food away from home and as a result, the influence of home diminishes, replaced by peer pressure and the desire for conformity and acceptance (Bassett et al. 2008). Focussing on the secondary school environment allows this research to explore the increasingly complex influences which occur within this age range.

The criteria for selection of the secondary school sample included the overall percentage levels of entitlement and uptake of free school meals, catering provision, payment methods and off site policy. The range of free school meal eligibility and uptake was a factor in the selection at the local authority level and these statistics were also used to select the individual schools.

Figure 5: Range of Free School Meal Entitlement and Take up by Secondary Schools within the Selected Local Authority



(Murtagh 2011).

Statistics regarding levels of entitlement and uptake of free school meals at the school level are collected by the Welsh Government annually. In the selected Local Authority, the average level of entitlement was 20% and the average level of uptake 61%. In order to generate a sample which represented all possible combinations in terms of levels of entitlement and uptake, the criteria for selection was to achieve a combination of entitlement and uptake which were higher and lower than the local authority average, with each represented.

Table 1: Free School Meal Entitlement and Uptake Levels

School	% FSM Entitlement	% FSM Take Up
1	Lower than LA average	Higher than LA average
2	Lower than LA average	Lower than LA average
3	Higher than LA average	Lower than LA average
4	Higher than LA average	Higher than LA average

Each secondary school within the local authority was contacted so that the additional selection criteria (payment methods, catering provision and offsite policy) could be assessed and diversity could be achieved. Schools which met the selection criteria in terms of free school meal entitlement and uptake, as well as demonstrated diversity in terms of payment methods, catering provision and offsite policy were selected. Four schools were contacted, two schools declined to participate so two replacement schools were contacted and agreed to participate in the research. Each school was given a pseudonym.

5.3. Challenges for Data Collection

In terms of the research design, a number of challenges were envisaged. In particular, the challenges associated with undertaking research with children and young people; undertaking research in the school environment and researching potentially sensitive issues. These issues are considered, together with strategies to address the challenges they represent.

5.3.1. Research with Children and Young People

In general, research with children and young people raises the same methodological and ethical questions that is faced by all research; issues of appropriate and honest ways of collecting, analysing and interpreting data and disseminating findings (Morrow 2008). However, research with children and young people often means that methodological issues are refracted in unique ways, in part because of the particular social context of adult/child relations but most significantly because of the unequal power dynamics that constitute these relationships (Barker and Weller 2003).

In the context of adult/child relations, the issues are largely a result of the way that childhood is constructed and understood, not least by a researcher since the way that they perceive childhood will have implications for the whole research process (Punch 2002; Morrow 2008). In particular, epistemological assumptions about childhood will determine the role that researchers take in research with children. Ideally, researchers should conceptualise children as active social agents, and researchers should invite children to help them to understand childhood while acknowledging the power differentials between adults and children (Harden et al. 2000; Cree et al. 2002).

Research involving children and young people within the school environment adds a further layer of complexity since while schools are highly significant in the geography of children's lives as places in which they spend a great deal of time, they are spaces over which children have little or no control (Barker and Weller 2003). In the school environment, adults control children's use of time, occupation of space, choice of clothing, times of eating and even their mode of social interaction. As such, the organisation of the school goes against the concept of children as social actors with the right to a voice (Robinson and Kellet 2004).

The fact that in school, adult authority is more salient and less challengeable than at home will have implications for the research process (Mayall 1994; Curtis et al. 2004). Some writers have questioned the ethics of research where children are captive subjects in school and the balance of power is heavily skewed towards the adults (Robinson and Kellet 2004). However, it is acknowledged that, rather than passively reproducing social structures, children contribute to and influence their own lives and the spaces they inhabit and this acknowledgement results in recognition of the need for a more child centred research process (Barker and Weller 2003).

Addressing these potential issues required an approach which took into account the potential for power differentials between researcher and participant. The decision was made to use a focus group methodology for exploring pupils' perceptions of the school food environment and within the focus groups, to use participatory methods to generate discussion.

5.3.1.1. Focus Groups

Focus groups are recognised as a way of potentially equalising the power dynamic in research with children and young people, since group discussion can help shift the balance of power from researcher to participant; this is particularly attractive in circumstances where the power dynamics of a one to one interview are of concern (Green and Hart 1999). A particular strength of the focus group method is the ability to include an established cohort (Bloor et al. 2001) and the group interaction inherent within a focus group makes them an attractive method for research with children and young people. This will not only allow the development of discussion which enables participants to follow their own agenda and develop themes most important to them, but also reduces the researcher's control over the interaction, thus making focus groups a relatively egalitarian method (Wilkinson 2006).

In terms of data collection within the school environment, focus groups have a number of advantages over one to one interviews; most obviously they provide a way of collecting data relatively quickly from a large number of research participants but also focus groups are more naturalistic than interviews and it is argued that a group context may make it easier for younger people to talk (Wilkinson 2006).

However, additional consideration needs to be taken when conducting focus groups with children and young people, there is a danger of leading participants, also that strong personalities will dominate discussion. To address these concerns, the questions and topics to be discussed should be carefully designed to minimise bias, avoiding the use of leading yes/no questions and encouraging a balance of contributions from all participants (Litosseliti 2003).

Another concern is that for some children, the peer group setting may be potentially threatening and this could lead to teasing if young people are at risk of being singled out or perceived differently by their peers. As a result, considerable thought must be paid to the issue of the possibility of pupils revealing sensitive information (Green and Hart 1999).

In view of these considerations, in this research focus group discussion was limited to general perceptions of the school food environment and no reference was made to free school meals. The decision was taken that it would be more appropriate to undertake one to one interviews with free school meal pupils, in order to protect their identity and ensure confidentiality. While the literature acknowledges that children can find an individual interview a daunting prospect it is also acknowledged that they may make children feel special because they are not used to adults outside the family being interested and so this can facilitate the generation of rich data (Cree et al. 2002).

5.3.1.2. Participatory Methods

In addition to the use of focus groups, in response to the challenge of how best to enable children to express their views to an adult researcher, there has been an increase in the use of participatory methods which are seen as a way of shifting the balance of power from researcher to participant (Punch 2002). This is a result of concern that inequalities in power may be replicated in the research process and a growing interest in childhood which has generated a series of methodological innovations (Harden et al. 2000; Barker and Weller 2003).

Participatory techniques are a diverse set of techniques which entail a collaborative and non-hierarchical approach. The concern is to actively involve research subjects in the construction of data so the ownership of the research is shared with the participant, in this way children are treated as experts in their own lives (Gallagher 2008). Research using these methods has found that visual or written methods have the potential to reduce the pressure a child may feel to respond quickly and in the correct manner, since in such methods the interaction is between the child and the paper (Punch 2002).

It is argued that participatory methods offer epistemological advantages over traditional methods, they are seen as producing more authentic knowledge and, due to shifting the balance of power from researcher to participant, are considered more ethically acceptable (Gallagher 2008). Using such methods will allow many children to complete tasks simultaneously as well providing interesting alternatives for children. Additionally, drawings have been used as an appropriate warm up to more difficult activities, enabling children to become more familiar with the adult researcher (Punch 2002).

However, the belief that participatory techniques necessarily produces better research, equalises power relations or enhances ethical integrity is treated with caution (Holland et al. 2010). Even using participatory techniques, there is still the possibility that the researcher may reproduce the regulation of

children by insisting on certain forms of participation in the belief that it constitutes empowerment (Gallagher 2008).

Additionally, it is important for a researcher to acknowledge that, as with adults, children's competencies, perceptions and frameworks of reference may vary according to a range of social differences, including culture, age, gender, ethnic background and personal characteristics (Morrow 2008). Also, while adults may associate drawing with fun, we cannot assume the same for children (Harden et al. 2000) and the success of these methods will depend on children's actual or perceived ability to draw, with some children inhibited by a perceived lack of artistic competence. In addition, care needs to be taken at the analysis stage, not to misinterpret drawings and impose adult interpretation upon them (Punch 2002).

5.3.2. Research in the School Setting

Ethical considerations relating to research in the school setting tend to focus on issues of informed consent and confidentiality, both of which can be more complex in research with children (Punch 2002). These concerns stem, in part, from perceptions of childhood in which children are perceived as vulnerable on the one hand and incompetent on the other. As such, gaining consent is often problematic, not primarily because of children's lack of understanding but because their participation in any research project within the school setting is dependent on adult gatekeepers (Harden et al. 2000).

The status of children within an organisation such as a school means that access to such an environment is often tightly controlled and this may result in difficulties in terms of access and consent (Punch 2002; Morrow 2008). Originally, the research design included a week long observation of the dining hall setting in each school, however ethical approval required consent from all of the pupils within the school who may potentially use the hall during the observation. Data collection was staggered and information and opt out consent forms were sent by post to all families with pupils in the first two

schools recruited (Ashgrove and Briarwood). However, the high level of opt out forms returned made the proposed observation unworkable.

Another issue associated with research undertaken within the school setting is the fact that the school is an environment where a hierarchy of gate keepers may influence the sampling process and this may have unpredictable effects on the group composition if teachers select participants on the basis of good behaviour or perceived eloquence (Veale 2005). Additionally, the reliance of researchers on school staff as gatekeepers as well as for the process of invitation often means that the responsibility for young people's fully informed consent is often out of the researchers hands (Curtis et al. 2004).

5.3.3. Researching Sensitive Issues

The evidence indicates that receipt of free school meal entitlement can be stigmatising for families (Moffitt 1983; Currie 2004) and undertaking research with a stigmatised population can have implications for recruitment. Such populations are often defined as 'hard to reach' however this is a contested and ambiguous term, often synonymised with other terms such as vulnerable, marginalised, hidden and disadvantaged (Flanagan and Hancock 2010). Additionally, it is recognised that 'hard to reach' or socially excluded groups are not homogenous and individuals come from diverse communities, cultures and language groups (Milbourne 2002).

Research which has focused on groups classified as 'hard to reach' has included those marginalised from education and other mainstream institutions (Milbourne 2002) and those with health issues such as HIV infection (Yates et al. 1997) or dementia (Bond and Corner 2001). A method of recruitment which addresses potential issues of recruiting participants defined as 'hard to reach' is snowball sampling which can be used as an informal method of reaching the target population (Atkinson and Flint 2001). Using snowballing as a method of recruitment, existing respondents recruit

future participants from among their social networks, recommending friends and acquaintances suitable for research.

This sampling technique is particularly useful when there is no population list or to research those who are not easily accessible. This strategy can be used to overcome the problems associated with sampling concealed populations since it takes advantage of social networks to identify respondents and offers benefits for studies which seek to access difficult to reach or hidden populations who are often obscured from researchers (Atkinson and Flint 2001).

5.4. Data Collection

5.4.1. The Policy Maker and Stakeholders Sample

Within this level, data collection focuses on documents produced by government bodies and stakeholders since devolution (Table 8). Documents which include references to the provision of school meals and free school meals in the broadest sense were identified and reviewed. Given the potential for divergence as a result of devolution, documents produced by the devolved territories were reviewed separately.

Documents were identified by a number of methods

- Internet searching
- Search of devolved government websites
- References in published and grey literature.

The inclusion criteria for the documents were that they have been published since devolution in the devolved territories of the UK and include reference to;

- School meals and /or free school meals.

- Entitlement criteria for free school meals
- Registration and receipt of free school meals
- Issues of poverty and exclusion in relation to free school meals

Within each document, reference to free school meal policy was noted and a summary of policy collated to provide a background to the interviews of policy makers and stakeholders. The individual with responsibility for policy in terms of school meals was identified within the Welsh Government and contact was made. From this, contacts were provided in Northern Ireland, Scotland and England and from these, other participants were identified through snowballing. Stakeholders were identified either from suggestions from policy makers that were interviewed, or from reading the grey literature.

Table 2 : Policymaker/Stakeholders: Completed Interviews (n = 9)

Wales	Policy Officer
Scotland	Policy Officer
Scotland	Stakeholder - Child Poverty Action Group
Northern Ireland	Policy Officer
Northern Ireland	Food in School Coordinator
England	Policy Officer
England	Policy Officer – Child Poverty Unit
England	Policy Manager
England	Stakeholder School Food Trust

Participants were invited to take part in interviews for the project, receiving a letter of invitation, an information sheet and a consent form, and semi structured interviews were conducted according to an interview schedule (Appendix 4a). Interviews were conducted via telephone or face to face and where permission was obtained, recorded. Interviews were then transcribed and each participant was given the opportunity to review the transcript.

5.4.2. The Local Authority and School Staff Sample

Data collection within this level was intended to investigate how free school meal policy is interpreted and operationalised at the local authority level as a context for investigation at the school level. Within the Local Authority that had been selected as a case study, staff with responsibility for school meal and free school meal policy were identified and invited for interview, snowballing was used to identify further participants.

Table 3: Local Authority Sample ($n = 4$)

Staff Member	Area of Responsibility
School Meals Contract Manager	Managing the catering contract with each school
Curriculum Improvement Advisor	Development of the Healthy schools scheme in Local Authority
School Organisation Manager	Overseeing school organisation including catering
Business Support Officer	Free school meal administration

Semi structured interviews were conducted with participants according to an interview schedule (Appendix 4a). Interviews were carried out within Local Authority offices and by telephone, these were recorded with permission and

transcribed and participants were given the opportunity to review the interview transcript.

Information about the project and consent forms were sent out to selected schools. Data collection within the schools was staggered. In Ashgrove and Briarwood, data collection was carried out between May and July 2011 and in Castlebridge and Daleview, November and December 2011.

In order to investigate the impact of decision making and networks at the school level, the sample was intended to reflect a range of staff with differing responsibilities. The focus was on three areas of responsibility and relevant staff members were identified within each school; these were senior members of teaching staff with responsibility for school food policy and catering, a member of the administrative or support staff who provided the link between families and the school and a member of catering staff.

Table 4 : School Staff: Completed Interviews (n = 11)

School	School Food Policy Responsibility	School and Parent Liaison	Catering staff
Ashgrove High School	Assistant Head	Administrative Officer	Site Manager
Briarwood High School	Support Staff Manager	Nurse Receptionist	Site Supervisor
Castlebridge High School	Deputy Head	Student Support Officer	Unit Manager
Daleview High School	Senior Assistant Head Teacher	N/A (A house system was operated in which teaching staff liaised with pupils)	Catering Site Manager

Each staff member received a letter of invitation, information sheet and consent form. The interviews were conducted according to an interview schedule (Appendix 4b & 4c) and took place within the school environment.

Interviews were recorded and transcribed where permission was received and participants were offered the opportunity to review the transcript.

5.4.3. The Focus Group Sample

The intention was to conduct two focus groups in each school, drawn from different year groups in order to maximise knowledge of pupils' experience and to explore possible variation by age. Year 8 and year 10 pupils were selected, this allowed a slight age range but avoided pupils that were new to the school (Year 7) and also those with forthcoming exams (Year 11). Where possible, one focus group was made up of School Council members or the School Nutrition Action Group (SNAG) since it was felt that these pupils would have a good knowledge of the concerns of other pupils in terms of school food provision.

Table 5 : Focus Groups (n = 7)

	Focus Group 1	Focus Group 2
Ashgrove High School	Year 8 (mixed gender)	SNAG (all girls, Year 10)
Briarwood High School	Year 8 (mixed gender)	Year 10 (mixed gender)
Castlebridge High School	Year 8 & Year 10 (mixed gender & age)	N/A
Daleview High School	Year 10 (mixed gender)	School Council (mixed age and gender)

In Castlebridge, it was only possible to timetable in one focus group before the end of term. While the intention was that the focus groups would contain pupils of a single year group (to prevent older pupils dominating discussion), this was not possible in Castlebridge and the focus group conducted contained pupils from both year 8 and year 10. In terms of gender, all focus

groups had mixed gender, except where the focus group was made up of an established cohort such as the SNAG group in Ashgrove.

The process of recruitment was slightly different between the two sets of schools. In the first two schools, Ashgrove and Briarwood, only pupils who had not been opted out of the proposed observation by parents were selected. They also had to complete opt in consent form. In Castlebridge and Daleview, since the opt-out consent operated in the first two schools was missing, both parents and pupils had to complete opt in consent.

Leaflets (Appendix 3a) were developed with the assistance of a young person's advisory group, ALPHA⁵ and these were distributed by class teachers together with consent forms to all pupils in the selected class in advance of the focus group. Participants were selected by teachers on the day of the focus group from those who had completed and returned the consent forms. The focus groups were facilitated by the researcher and, with the consent of all participants, recorded and transcribed. They took place within the school, usually in the library or a vacant classroom.

The focus groups were organised using participatory techniques. Drawing on the work of Jessica Mills (Mills 2002), three main tasks were used in order to structure the focus group (Appendix 4d). Initially, pupils were asked for a visual representation of their perceptions of school food provision. Pupils were given the option to create an ideal plate of food, an ideal menu or to list likes and dislikes of school food provision and the school food environment. Pupils were also given the choice of methods, some choose to draw and some write, a mix of drawings and written work resulted (Figures 6-13 & 22-28).

Further participatory techniques were undertaken later in the focus group, and pupils were tasked with creating a map of likes and dislikes of school food provision using post it notes and a large piece of paper. Stickers were

⁵ ALPHA is a young person's advisory group, based within DECIPHer at Cardiff University

then used to rank factors in order of importance. As well as creating a visual representation of pupils' views which were useful to support analysis of the focus group discussion, these tasks encouraged discussion as pupils explained their decision making processes.

5.4.4. The Pupil Sample

Pupils on free school meals were invited for individual interview via a leaflet distributed by the school (Appendix 3c), follow up letters of invitation were sent out by post from the school office. In addition, snowballing techniques were used on both parent and pupil participants on completion of the interviews. On receipt of completed consent forms, interviews were arranged. It was made clear that interviews could be undertaken in the setting of the participants' choosing but for the pupil interviews, most took place in school with a few on the phone or at home. The interviews were recorded and transcribed with permission and a voucher was given to participants on completion.

Table 6 : Pupil Interviews (n = 19)

School	Gender	School Year	In Receipt of Free Meals	Has Free Meals
Ashgrove High School	Male	8	Yes	Every day
	Male	8	Yes	Every day
	Male	7	Yes	Some days
	Male	8	Yes	Every day
	Male	7	Yes	Every day
Briarwood High School	Female	10	Yes	Most days
	Male	10	Yes	Most days
	Female	7	Yes	No
	Male	10	Yes	Every day
	Female	8	Yes	Every day
Castlebridge High School	Male	10	No	No
	Female	10	Yes	Every day
	Female	7	Yes	Every day
	Male	7	Yes	Every day
	Male	7	Yes	Every day
Daleview High School	Female	8	Yes	Every day
	Female	7	No (previously entitled)	No
	Female	8	Yes	Every day
	Female	8	Yes	Every day

Interviews were conducted in accordance with an interview schedule (Appendix 4f). In two schools, participants were the same gender, possibly as a result of friendship groups taking part together.

5.4.5. The Parent Sample

While the focus was on parents who were in receipt of free school meals, the invitation to participate went to all parents since it was felt that conducting interviews with a range of participants would broaden the scope of the interview in terms of understanding parents' perception of free school meal policy.

A flyer (Appendix 3b) was circulated through the school email system to all parents and paper copies were left at school reception. In addition, parents were recruited through snowballing, via both pupil and parent interviews. Due to a poor initial response, additional letters were sent out via the school administrator. It has been noted that recruitment of participants can be challenging and in this case the discussion of a potentially sensitive issue was recognised as potentially exacerbating the issue. Recruitment of parents for interview was particularly problematic in Castlebridge and Daleview, despite a number of additional strategies that were put in place. These included attending parent's evening and approaching parents individually with information.

Table 7 : Parent Interviews (n = 13)

School	Gender	In Receipt of Free Meals	Child Has Free Meals
Ashgrove High School	Female	No	No
	Male	Yes	Yes
	Female	No	No
	Female	Yes	Yes
	Female	Yes	Yes
Briarwood High School	Female	Yes	Yes
	Female	Yes	Yes
	Female	Yes	Yes
	Female	Yes	Yes
Castlebridge High School	Male	Yes	Yes
	Female	No	No
	Male	No	No
Daleview High School	Female	Yes	Yes

On receipt of completed consent forms, interviews were arranged, many were telephone interviews but some took place in the home. An interview schedule was used (Appendix 4e) and interviews were recorded and transcribed where permission was given. A voucher was given to parents on completion of the interview.

5.5. Reflections on Methods

The potential issues associated with data collection within this project have been highlighted together with steps taken to address these issues. This section evaluates the methods used and assesses the impact of challenges on the research project.

5.5.1. Research in the School Setting

It is noted that within the school setting, researchers need to be careful of the potential for a power imbalance in group; obtaining naturalistic data involves balancing the need to allow confrontation to accounts, but not bullying (Green and Hart 1999). As a result, the focus groups conducted were mainly mixed gender but as far as possible consisted of pupils from a single age range in order to prevent domination of discussion by older pupils. Only one focus group was mixed age and while the younger pupils initially expressed some trepidation at the thought of being joined by older pupils, they seemed confident to make a contribution to the discussion.

As a researcher undertaking data collection in the school setting, a space usually organised and controlled by adult teachers my first task as facilitator was to reassure pupils that there were no correct answers. However, the focus groups were quite structured and this was felt to be appropriate in light of pupils' familiarity of responding to given tasks. Additionally, the structured nature of the focus group ensured that each pupil had the opportunity to give their thoughts in turn and without interruption.

Using participatory techniques as the initial task was successful; it enabled pupils to settle into the group. Additionally, the visual data produced provided a resource which they could draw on when they outlined their thoughts, as well as providing additional data for analysis. Initially, participants were asked to outline their opinions about school meals in turn, this allowed them to speak without interruption. Other tasks included a group exercise to create a map of likes and dislikes of school food provision using

post it notes and ranking these factors in order of importance. The aim of the focus group was to generate discussion and was successful, often in response to the task in hand.

When participatory techniques are used, researchers note that care needs to be taken in analysis so that the adult researcher does not impose their views on the data produced. However, given the age of the participants this was not deemed an issue and also participants were given the opportunity to talk through the work that they had produced.

The focus groups were drawn from one class, or established cohort, with no attempt to distinguish those pupils entitled to free meals. The focus of discussion remained generally about school food provision, this was a deliberate decision and there was no discussion of free school meals. This was to ensure that there was no possibility of deductive disclosure during the discussion so that the confidentiality of any pupils within the focus group who were entitled to free school meal would be protected.

It is noted that in research with children, ethical considerations can be more complex (Punch 2002), with issues of informed consent a particular concern. Debates regarding the need to obtain informed consent to undertake observation is discussed further (Section 10.1.4). In this research, a failure to gain informed consent from all pupils potentially using the dining hall made a proposed observation unworkable since it would have been impractical to identify the pupils who had opted out.

The intention of the observation was to observe the lunchtime service of the dining hall and to provide a context for data collection within the focus groups and interviews. However, because the observation did not take place, as a facilitator, I had no preconceived ideas about what would be important to the pupils and through focus group discussions, a picture of the priorities and concerns from the pupils' perspective emerged.

5.5.2. Recruitment

The potential difficulty of recruiting participants for a project focussed on a topic which may be the cause of stigma have been noted and recruiting parents for this project was challenging. However, the difference in recruiting parents was noticeable between the two periods of recruitment. The planned observation in Ashgrove and Briarwood meant that letters went out by post to every family; this appeared to raise the profile of the research.

In contrast, in Castlebridge and Daleview, recruitment was initially by email and flyers left in the school reception. Parents rarely visit secondary school and the level of access to email was unknown and this may explain the poor initial response. To address this, additional recruitment strategies were put in place, such as attending parents' evenings to give out information and sending letters directly to families registered for free school meals via the school however, recruitment in the second two schools remained challenging.

It appeared that sending letters to all parents in the first two schools raised the profile of the research, resulting in more participants coming forward. It may have been beneficial to ensure that each family from the second two schools also received information about the research project, possibly using 'pupil post' to reduce the cost.

In addition, a difficulty was the identification of families who met the entitlement criteria for free school meals but had not completed the registration since these families would be unknown to the school. Previous research has estimated the number of families by comparing HMRC data to free school meal data (Iniesta-Martinez and Evans 2012). Within this research, while the invitation to interview was open to all parents and pupils within the school, no participants from this category came forward for interview and as a result it is not possible to represent their views within this research.

Due to the potentially sensitive nature of free school meal receipt, pupils were interviewed on an individual basis. This was considered more appropriate for protecting the identity of pupils and allowing them to discuss their feelings about free school meals in a confidential way, which could not have been achieved within a group setting. However, there were potential problems to consider, and the need to protect the identity of free school meal pupils began with the process of recruitment when letters were sent out by post from the school rather than given out in class and returned directly to the researcher rather than given back to the teacher. Pupils could choose the venue for the interview, however, while some interviews were undertaken over the phone or at home, the majority took place in the school setting.

Of the pupils who were interviewed, although some did not use their free school meal entitlement, all were happy to discuss it in an open manner, often in the school setting. It is probable that the pupils who came forward for interview were the ones who, to some extent were accepting of their free school meal status and it must be acknowledged that it is likely that those pupils who did not register for or use their free school meal entitlement may not have come forward for interview and so their views would not be represented within the interviews conducted.

5.6. Data Analysis

This research has used a case study approach within which *a priori* theoretical framing, used for case construction produces a theoretically driven ethnography (Tavory and Timmermans 2009). As such, a case study approach is an inductive method in which general questions are refined as the study proceeds with the goal of generating theory by identifying factors and processes which are poorly understood (Creswell 1998; Sullivan 2002).

Data were analysed using a framework method, an analytical approach which involves a systematic process of shifting, charting and sorting material according to key issues and themes (Richie and Spencer 1994). The

interview and focus group schedules were used as a starting point for the development of the thematic framework or index and added to this, emergent issues, raised by the respondents themselves formed analytical themes. These themes developed from the recurrence or patterning of particular views or experiences.

Once established, the thematic framework was systematically applied to the data in its textual form. Using NVivo, all data were annotated according to the thematic framework with consideration of the meaning of each passage both alone and within the context of the interview as a whole. In this way, each passage was indexed; single passages often contained a number of different themes, each of which were referenced and, as a result of this multiple indexing, patterns of association within the data were highlighted.

A value of indexing is that it allows the researcher to find that different major topics are connected and interwoven since once labelled, the researcher is able to see patterns and the context in which they arise. The next process was to consider the range of attitudes and experience for each theme or issue, this was achieved by lifting the data from their original context and arranging them in the appropriate thematic reference. Using a thematic approach, charts were drawn up for each key subject area and entries made for several respondents on each chart. Following the shifting and charting of the data into core themes, it was possible to map and interpret the data set as a whole.

A review of the literature indicates that the policy context in respect of school meals and free school meals has changed significantly over the last decade with the reintroduction of minimum nutritional standards and trials of universal provision in Scotland and England⁶. The interview schedules for policy makers and stakeholders focussed on policy development in terms of

⁶ Subsequent to this research project, universal free school meal provision for infant school pupils has been introduced in England with effect from September 2014 and Scotland from January 2015. However these developments, introduced after data collection, are not reflected in the data presented.

school food policy generally and free school meal policy specifically. Themes that emerged from the data encompassed broad areas related to the purpose and efficacy of free school meal policy and the potential for policy change. A key theme was the impact of devolution and the potential for policy divergence, also the way in which the nature of current policy will have implications for implementation at the local level.

The literature indicates that numerous factors at the local level will influence the implementation of policy interventions and data collected from local authority and school staff revealed a number of local influences which affected school food provision generally and free school meal policy implementation particularly. The broad themes that emerged reflected issues relating to the policy context as well as the challenges of operationalising policy. At the local level, the school environment and the school community were highlighted as factors which influence policy implementation resulting in implementation variation at the school level.

Understanding how pupils perceive and negotiate the school food environment and the school food practices that result was assessed by focus groups with pupils. The data produced was mix of visual and narrative data and within the focus group discussion broad themes relating to the school food environment included the built environment, the temporal and social processes of school dining and the availability of food and drink. Also how pupils exert agency within this setting and the school food practices which result.

How the levels identified within a socio ecological framework interact to impact on the target population was explored in interviews with parents and pupils. The interviews focussed on perceptions of free school meal policy, policy implementation at the local authority and school level and the school food environment. The broad themes that emerged included issues of entitlement, school processes including payment methods and issues related to the school food environment, together with the way that these issues will influence the decision to take up the free meal.

6. Chapter 6 – Free School Meals; the Policy Context

Macro and political variables will structure policy implementation and so understanding the policy framework is necessary in order to identify the range of processes which may lead to implementation success or failure. The aim of this chapter is to explore the free school meal policy framework in place across the UK territories, considering the potential for policy divergence and to identify the way that the free school meal policy framework will structure implementation at the local level.

Understanding these processes requires locating policy within the socio historical and political context in which it has developed and Chapter 2 highlights the economic, political and social influences that have framed policy development. Drawing on interview data from policy makers and stakeholders and analysis of policy documents from the four UK territories (Table 8), this chapter explores stakeholders' perceptions of the current policy problem and the potential for policy change.

This chapter begins by examining the perceptions of policy makers and stakeholders in terms of the purpose of free school meals in addressing inadequate diets. Additionally policy limitations, relating to the means tested nature of entitlement are examined, together with the potential for policy change in light of these limitations, within the current welfare system.

This chapter then considers the impact of devolution within the free school meal policy context, exploring the shift towards principles of universality and identifies the political and structural factors which act to constrain or facilitate policy development. Finally, this chapter explores the variability of the policy context across the UK territories and identifies the way that the policy will structure implementation at the local level in terms of key aspects of policy implementation, including ensuring the promotion and registration of free school meal entitlement and ensuring anonymity for free school meal pupils.

Table 8 : Policy Documents from the Devolved Territories

Wales	England	Scotland	Northern Ireland
'The Education (Nutritional Standards for School Lunches) (Wales) Regulations 2001' National Assembly for Wales	'Education (Nutritional Standards for School Lunches) Regulations 2001'	'Hungry for Success, A Whole School Approach to School Meals in Scotland' Scottish Executive (2002)	'Catering for Healthier Lifestyles: Compulsory Nutritional Standards for School Meals' Department of Education (2001)
'Appetite for Life Action Plan' Welsh Assembly Government (2008)	'Turning the Tables; Transforming School Food' School Meals Review Panel (2005)	'School Meals (Scotland) Bill' The Scottish Parliament (2002)	'Evaluating the Pilot of the 'Catering for Healthier Lifestyles Standards' in Northern Ireland' Department of Education (2005)
'Proposed Healthy Eating in Schools (Wales) Measure' National Assembly for Wales (2009)	'Education (Nutritional Standards for School Lunches) (England) Regulations 2006'	'Eating for Health, Meeting the Challenge' Scottish Executive (2004)	'Consultation on New Nutritional Standards for School Meals and other food in Schools' Department of Education (2007)
'Appetite for Life Action Research Project 2008-2010' Welsh Assembly Government (2010)		'Baseline Research of Implementation of Recommendation of Expert Panel on School Meals – Hungry for Success' Scottish Executive Social Research (2006)	'Nutritional Standards for School Lunches – A Guide for Implementation' Department of Education (2008)
		'Evaluation of the Free School Meals Trial for P1 to P3 Pupils' Scottish Government (2008)	'Food in Schools Policy – Draft for Consultation' Department of Education (2009)

6.1. The Purpose of Free School Meal Policy

Addressing inadequate nutrition in childhood by the use of provision of food in school is evident in many countries, in recognition of the importance of nutrition to childhood health and development (World Health Organisation 2000). In the UK, the provision of food in school has a long history, originally introduced as a result of a growing public empathy for hungry children; free school meals are viewed as a means of supplementing the diets of children from low-income families in order to ensure adequate nutritional status for healthy growth and development.

Understanding free school meal policy requires understanding of what is described as the 'problem situation', and this is achieved by exploring different stakeholders perceptions of the policy problem and locating the policy in relation to the socio historical and political context in which it has been developed (Hanberger 2001). There is agreement between both policy makers and stakeholders from across the UK as to the purpose of free school meal policy, which is to ensure that children from low income families were guaranteed to receive at least one meal a day.

“To ensure that most vulnerable families in terms of income are given the opportunity to have a healthy balanced meal at school each day” (Policy Maker, Wales)

The need to address inadequate nutrition for some UK children acknowledges wider issues related to food poverty and food insecurity in the UK. Recent studies estimate that around 4 million children and adults in the UK are not properly fed by today's standards (Gordon et al. 2013) and policy initiatives acknowledge children as a particularly vulnerable group (Dowler 2002). Policy documents acknowledge the contribution of free school meals to alleviating the worst aspects of food poverty by providing a 'safety net'.

“The benefits of free school meals are substantial, within low income families children cannot always rely on healthy, nutritious meals at home...The importance of free school meals in contributing to the nutritional quality of the diets of these children...for many of them the school meal is a safety net, the one meal of the day that they can rely on” (School Meals Review Panel 2005)

The UK policy response to tackling undernutrition in the UK population is to maintain an approach which presupposes individual rather than state responsibility for diet (Riches 1997; Dowler 1998). As a result, rather than increasing income levels to low income families, addressing issues of childhood undernutrition has resulted in a policy response of ‘feed the children’ (Nelson 2000) and the provision of a meal, rather than money is noted as a positive by stakeholders.

“Budgets are flexible, if there’s cash there’s many pressures on a household budget for low income families, it may be used elsewhere. You don’t receive cash, you actually receive the meal, so it’s kind of certain that those children will receive at least one hot meal a day” (Stakeholder, School Food Trust)

In addition to tackling undernutrition, the school has been acknowledged as a setting with the potential to make substantial contributions to promoting healthy eating habits in children and adolescents (Rowe et al. 2010). Consequently, school food provision has been seen as a means of tackling rising levels of childhood obesity and widely publicised campaigns such as the one fronted by celebrity chef Jamie Oliver have exerted pressure for an improvement in the food provided within the school environment.

These campaigns coincided with a drive across the UK territories to reintroduce minimum nutritional standards in school food provision (Department of Education 2001; Scottish Executive 2002; School Meals Review Panel 2005; Welsh Assembly Government 2008). In Scotland, the reintroduction of minimum nutritional standards is underpinned by an

acknowledgment within policy circles of the need to improve the eating habits of pupils.

“To try and instil better eating habits in children from a young age” (Policy Maker, Scotland)

In addition to contributing to nutritional adequacy and promoting healthier food choices, free school meals are acknowledged to have a wider role in addressing the impact of inequality by tackling the association between social class and health in its broadest sense (Black 1980; Acheson 1998). In addition, free school meals are noted as having a role in tackling differential educational achievement (Belot and James 2011) and within the data, the role of free school meals in tackling inequality, in terms of learning and achievement is noted.

“The purpose of free meals is to ensure that a nutritionally balanced main meal is available to those pupils who are most in need of it. It is one of a range of antipoverty measures targeting non-working and low income families to help reduce barriers to learning and address inequalities” (Policy Maker, Northern Ireland)

In addition to benefitting the individual child, it is acknowledged that free school meals also contribute to the family food budget, resulting in an improvement in the nutritional status of other family members (Acheson 1998). Stakeholders acknowledge the contribution that free school meals make to the family budget.

“It’s an effective way of reducing the pressure on those family budgets” (Stakeholder, CPAG)

Generally, there is consensus among policy makers and stakeholders as to the purpose that free school meal policy has in tackling inadequate nutrition among pupils from low-income families, addressing overnutrition by the promotion of healthy lunches and tackling differential achievement that results from inequality. However, while there is consensus in terms of the

purpose of policy, there is dissensus in terms of the degree to which free school meal policy was effective at addressing the concerns identified.

6.2. The Limitations of Free School Meal Policy

The mapping of the development of free school meal policy in Chapter 2 revealed that the provision of free meals has always been contentious, tapping into wider concerns about the family and parental responsibility for children (Welshman 1997). In order to mollify critics, the provision of free meals has always been limited to those defined as ‘in need’ and while measures defining need have fluctuated, the basic premise of restricted entitlement has remained, providing a defining feature of free school meal policy since inception (Colquhoun et al. 2001; Gillard 2003).

In the UK, welfare benefits such as free school meals are predominantly allocated via a means test, an approach which fits within a neo liberal welfare regime. Such an approach is characterised by minimal state provision in which benefits are modest and concentrated on those defined as ‘in need’ by strict political and administrative criteria (Bambra 2005, 2007). However, there was evidence that policy makers and stakeholders hold different views as to the efficacy of free school meal policy in meeting the needs of low income families.

As a result of the restricted nature of free school meal entitlement, the literature estimates that 1 million poor children miss out on free school meals because they do not meet the criteria of receipt of qualifying benefits (Curtis 2008; BBC News 2013). Within the data, stakeholders echo this view.

“They’re a really important form of support to the lowest income families, the problem is the means test is still so tight that there are families who are on lower sub poverty incomes...officially recognised as living in poverty who still aren’t entitled to a free school meal” (Stakeholder, CPAG)

Specifically, criticism revolves around the fact that entitlement to free school meals is based on receipt of one of a number of 'out of work' benefits (outlined in section 2.6). Critics maintain that to measure need by focussing on worklessness excludes children living in 'working poor' households, estimated to constitute half of the 13 million people living in poverty in 2011/12 (MacInnes et al. 2013). However, policy makers defend the association of need with the receipt of 'out of work' benefits.

“We believe our research shows in terms of our policy on children and young people in poverty that there are around 20% of children and young people living in poverty at the moment and around 20% are receiving free school meals...Welfare sometimes is a crude indicator of how in need a family is, but it's probably one of the best we've got, I can't really think of one other one that is any better” (Policy Maker, Scotland).

While free school meal entitlement based on out of work benefits is criticised by stakeholders for excluding large numbers of children living in poverty, the association of free school meal entitlement and out of work benefits has another implication, welfare stigma. Welfare stigma will result in a negative attribution towards individuals who participate in means tested programmes and may result in deterring families from signing up for means tested benefits (Moffitt 1983; Currie 2004; Stuber and Schlesinger 2006). For stakeholders, the stigma associated with means testing of free school meal entitlement is a key reason for non-take up.

“We're still means testing access to that healthy meal in the middle of the day, which means that some children, too many children are missing out on that opportunity altogether. There is a problem about means testing, cos it reduces take up and means that children who are entitled are not getting the free school meal that they are entitled to. We know that when you remove that means test, take up goes up significantly across the board”
(Stakeholder, CPAG)

However, for policy makers, welfare stigma is not considered the only reason for non-take up of entitlement and other factors are cited.

“It could be they don’t like the way the meals are served, it could be that the children are very fussy eaters” (Senior Policy Officer, England)

The evidence indicates that a significant number of families do not register for free school meal entitlement and of those that register, approximately one in four do not eat the meal (Iniesta-Martinez and Evans 2012). Non take up of entitlement has implications for the nutritional profile of low income children (Colquhoun et al. 2008) and within the data, concern is expressed in terms of the impact on attainment.

“I think we have still got this group of people who are just not accessing their free school meal and that causes significant impact on attainment and achievement in school” (Stakeholder, School Food Trust)

Among policy makers and stakeholders, there is a consensus in terms of the purpose of free school meal policy, however, there is a dissensus as to how effective current policy is at addressing the problem. Two key areas of contention were identified, the first focusses on the nature of free school meal policy as it defines and measures need as stakeholders are critical of the way that the restricted nature of entitlement excludes children of poor working families. Secondly the association of means testing with stigma is considered by stakeholders as a key reason for non-take up, while for policy makers, other factors are considered as important. These varying perspectives have resulted in a pressure for policy change however the processes underpinning policy change are complex.

6.3. Addressing Policy Limitations; the Potential for Change

It is noted that the most significant area of contention is the restricted nature of entitlement and while policy makers maintain that receipt of welfare is an adequate measure of need, stakeholders argue that such an approach

results in excluding many children in poverty from provision. This has resulted in pressure to address the restricted nature of entitlement, particularly the association with out of work benefits. However; it is acknowledged by policy makers that the potential to address the issue of entitlement within the current system is limited.

“We do know that there are people out there that are working on a very low income who are maybe receiving less than the people who are on benefits but they are not eligible to claim a free school meal because they are not receiving the right benefit and we do know that there is a disparity there. It’s not something we have had the budget or the ability to do anything about it at the moment and it is difficult to know the right way to do it, to make sure you are targeting the right people without then cutting out a lot of people who had previously been eligible too. It’s not an easy situation to resolve” (Senior Policy Officer, England)

The acknowledgement of the difficulty of making significant change to an existing policy is reflected in the literature which notes that, due to the complexity of the welfare system, policies tend to be modified in a piecemeal fashion, as they are adapted to changing circumstances (Kasza 2002). One such catalyst for change is the introduction of a new policy (Hill 2009) and the proposed introduction of Universal Credit is noted to provide an opportunity to address the limitations of the existing entitlement criteria since, under Universal Credit, the benefits currently defining entitlement will be replaced.

“(Universal Credit) does give us an opportunity to try and make sure that we target cos I guess when you think about it, if you think about free school meals you would automatically assume that those out of work would be the ones who would need it where as anybody working, surely they have to be better off, but unfortunately it isn’t always the case. I guess universal credit will give us an option, it will give us a chance to make sure that we do try and catch everybody that we think needs to be caught” (Senior Policy Officer, England)

Despite an acknowledgment by both stakeholders and policy makers that the existing system of means tested entitlement will exclude some children living in poverty, the policy focus is to maintain the status quo and adhere to a neo liberal welfare approach in which welfare entitlement remains strictly limited. As a result, despite the potential for change to free school meal entitlement that Universal Credit would allow, it was evident that while under the new system there may be a change in the cohort of people who met the entitlement criteria, the overall level of entitlement will remain the same.

“Is your aim to maintain levels of eligibility as they are now?” (SA)

“Yes, roughly...it will be a slightly different group of people...there will be some winners and loser because there will be, the people who gain will be working families on very low, on low incomes, but there will probably be some families, if there are winners and we have a fixed pot of money and we’re trying to have the same number of people entitled overall then there will have to be some losers, and that will probably be people with an income over whatever the income threshold is” (Policy Manager, England)

Understanding the potential for change requires understanding the extent to which change would challenge the norms and values that underpin the policy making process (Hanberger 2001). Consequently, the policy focus is to maintain the status quo and this is illustrated in respect of change to another policy, the level at which child tax credit is assessed which would potentially have had an impact on entitlement levels for free school meal. In response, policy makers took steps to ensure that changes to child tax credit did not result in changes to the levels of entitlement to free school meals.

“So then we broke the link with the child tax credit income threshold and defined a specific income threshold which was £16,190, so that we were maintaining the same income threshold. So basically, we did lots of changes to keep everything the same” (Policy Manager, England)

Within the current welfare system, there is little opportunity for significant change to existing policy and efforts focus on maintaining the status quo. As

a result, the criteria for entitlement to free school meals has been largely unchanged throughout its history. However the introduction of devolved powers across the UK territories has added a further layer of complexity to policy making, providing the opportunity for policy entrepreneurship (Musingarimi 2009; Morelli and Seaman 2010) and this is reflected in recent development relating to free school meal policy.

6.4. The Impact of Devolution; Convergence and Divergence

The introduction of devolved powers across the UK territories has signalled the potential for policy divergence within policy areas such as health and education (Greer 2004; Rees 2007; Davey et al. 2008; Hill 2009). In order to understand policy variation, it is necessary to acknowledge that each governance regime will comprise of multiple influences; statutory and non-statutory sectors, public and private, professional bodies, pressure groups, central government and international bodies. The combination of these influences will reflect the social, political, cultural and economic cultures and traditions within each territory and as a result, policy outcomes will be territorially specific, reflecting the interaction between existing territorial structures and processes and newly devolved competencies (Exworthy 2001).

In terms of free school meal policy, devolution has resulted in the opportunity for UK territories to move away from restricted entitlement and towards the principle of universal entitlement. Such moves, evident in Scotland (2007-2008) and England (2008) have been in the form of trials of universal free meals to infant school pupils (reception to year 2).

In Scotland, the impetus for such policy innovation came initially from within the Scottish Executive (The Scottish Parliament 2002), supported by influential organisations such as Child Poverty Action Group (Brown and Phillips no date given). However, the initial campaign for universal entitlement was explicitly rejected by the Scottish Executive of the time, as

they adhered to a policy approach which was characterised by a commitment to means testing and targeting of welfare that closely mirrored the Westminster Government (Morelli and Seaman 2010). As a result, over the next years, little progress was made on the issue in Scotland.

“It has become highly politicised here, quite early on Labour, Scottish Labour, set themselves against the universal approach to free school meals which then has always made it very difficult to make progress on the issue”
(Stakeholder, CPAG)

However, in May 2007, the replacement of Scottish Labour with a minority Scottish National Party (SNP) Government signalled a shift in direction in free school meal policy towards universality. This began with a pilot of universal free school meals to pupils in the first three years of primary school (P1-P3) in five Scottish Local Authorities between October 2007 and June 2008 (MacLardie et al. 2008). Following the success of these trials, it was planned that universal free meals for P1-P3 pupils would be rolled out from August 2010; however, this initiative was met with resistance at the local authority level.

“Local Governments signed up to delivering on certain key commitments...one of them that was very explicit was to deliver free school meals for all primary one to primary three pupils from August 2010...from the very beginning individual local authorities were making all sorts of unhappy noises, about where was the money going to come from?” (Stakeholder, CPAG)

Compounding the lack of commitment at the local authority level, the perception is that changing priorities within the Scottish Government led to a reduction in pressure to implement the policy; key was a new Education Secretary.

“He was less committed to the free school meals policy anyway and that led very quickly to an agreement with local authorities that there could be flexibility, the local authorities could have flexibility in terms of how they

moved towards the universal free school meals for primary one to primary three” (Stakeholder, CPAG)

Because of pressure from the local authorities, the Scottish Government withdrew from the intended introduction of universal provision within this age range, the result was that local authorities were left to decide the level of implementation at a local level.

“What we did to scale it back was, the agreement was to provide free school meals to primary one, two and three children in the most 20% deprived, with 20% deprived primary one-three, but how they did that, the arrangement and how they did that was completely up to local authorities” (Policy Maker, Scotland)

The consequences of the shift in policy was a limited and patchwork provision of universal entitlement across local authorities in Scotland, endorsed by the fact that the policy has not become legislation

“Local authorities are doing different things, so some have introduced free school meals for all primary one’s, some have introduced free school, universal free school meals but just in certain schools...which kind of undermines the idea of it being universal. The problem with that universal, the roll out of that universal free school meals, primary one to primary three was that it was never put in regulation or legislation that children were entitled to it” (Stakeholder, CPAG)

In Scotland, while the impetus for changing entitlement originated at the level of national government, strongly supported by stakeholders, a lack of support at the local authority level was sufficient to ensure that the policy did not become embedded on a widespread scale. In contrast, the experience in England was one where policy innovation has been initiated at the local level. One of the first initiatives was in Hull, which introduced both universal breakfast clubs and universal free school meals in all primary schools in 2004; this was followed by other initiatives.

“Hull, and then there’s other initiatives that local authorities have decided to run so Islington have run a free school meal pilot and Southwark have also been running a pilot as well. Other local authorities have done some innovative work, Bolton have looked at introducing a pound a meal project”
(Stakeholder, School Food Trust)

Subsequently, growing interest in extending the principle of universality in England at a national level resulted in a trial of universal free meals in three local authorities in 2008. In two Local Authorities (Durham and Newham), universal free school meals were provided to all primary school pupils for two years and the third Local Authority (Wolverhampton) extended eligibility was trialled (Kitchen et al. 2012). However, changing economic circumstances and a change in Government in 2010 resulted in a shift away from the universal approach, a withdrawal of funding and a commitment, once again to means testing.

Comparison of trials of universal provision in England and Scotland reveal that the impetus for change stemmed from different sources. In England, initiatives at the local level were precursors for policy innovation while in Scotland, calls for change originated at the national level. However, neither Scotland nor England was able to coordinate the introduction of universal provision since the policy was not supported across both the policy making and implementing structures⁷.

In terms of entitlement criteria, while England and Scotland have been characterised by policy innovation, entitlement in Wales and Northern Ireland continues to adhere to the pre-devolutionary criteria set by the Westminster Government. In Northern Ireland, while some changes have been implemented in terms of entitlement criteria, these have been minimal.

⁷ Universal free school meals for pupils in the first three years of primary school have subsequently been introduced in England with effect from September 2014 and in Scotland with effect from January 2015.

“Free school meals in Northern Ireland operate in a similar way to the systems used in Great Britain and the eligibility criteria are broadly similar. However, in 2010/11 the Department extended the eligibility criteria to include full-time nursery and primary school children whose parents are in receipt of working tax credit and have an annual taxable income which does not exceed £16,190 (in 2010/11). The new criterion is being introduced on a phased basis with Nursery, Foundation Stage and Key Stage 1 pupils eligible from September 2010 and Key Stage 2 pupils becoming eligible from September 2011 - the latter is subject to the necessary funding being available” (Policy Maker, Northern Ireland)

In Wales, similarly, in terms of entitlement criteria, the focus is adherence to the wider UK policy.

“Each claim for free school meals is assessed by the Local Authority, guidance is provided by Welsh Assembly Government, there are no plans to change the eligibility criteria” (Policy Maker, Wales)

Instead, the focus in Wales is on increasing the uptake of school food provision, driven by the reintroduction of minimum nutritional standards in the expectation that improving school food provision will result in an increase in uptake.

“The current focus is to improve the food and drink for those already choosing a meal – then to increase the numbers taking it rather than attempting to do it the other way round” (Policy Maker, Wales)

The introduction of devolved powers across the UK territories provided the opportunity for policy divergence, yet, despite policy innovation in both Scotland and England, the policy context remains broadly similar. This is explained by the fact that that policymaking will reflect the social, political and economic history of a country and the UK territories share many of these key aspects. Additionally, the UK territories have more similarities than differences in terms of the underlying structures that facilitate and constrain policy change and a commitment to pre devolutionary practice will result in a

pressure for convergence (Exworthy 2001; Maslin-Prothero et al. 2008; Smith et al. 2009).

The adherence to a restricted and means tested free school meal policy throughout the UK will have implications for policy implementation, since it is acknowledged that policy implementation occurs on two levels; the macro implementation level where actors devise a government program and the micro implementation level where local organisations react to the program, develop their own programmes and implement them (Matland 1995).

6.5. The Free School Meal Policy Context; Implications for Implementation

It has been noted that it is within the process of implementation that policy takes shape since, within the implementation chain, running through policy makers, practitioners and subjects, there is always much negotiation about the precise delivery of an intervention. As a result, during the process of implementation, the context of the policy and the impact on those affected may be substantially modified, elaborated or even negated (Hill and Hupe 2002; Pawson 2003). In terms of free school meal policy, the defining characteristics, shaping the way that policy is implemented, are the restricted nature of entitlement and the association of entitlement with means tested benefits.

6.5.1. Restricted Entitlement; National Policy and Local Implementation

It has been noted that restricted entitlement is a key feature of free school meal policy and this is an area which remains contentious however there has been minimal change to the policy context. Across the four UK territories, the focus on improving take up has been delegated to the local level (Morelli and Seaman 2010), resonating with a wider policy approach which has seen a shift towards localism.

“The localism agenda is a really big one across government and there’s a real desire, in the context of wanting to reduce the public deficit...but also the desire to devolve decision making and kind of drive more local partnerships, they’re kind of nearer to the people actually accessing services so they’ll be better at addressing them” (Policy Maker, Child Poverty Unit)

In Scotland, initiatives to introduce universal free meals for infant school pupils were resisted at the local authority level preventing a broad roll out of the policy; however the initiative, delegated to the local level, is still in place. Consequently, the provision of universal free meals to infant school pupils is variable.

“Given funding pressure and the lack of any kind of national pressure to continue delivery on this policy...local authorities are doing different things, so some have introduced free school meals for all primary ones, some have introduced universal free school meals but just in certain schools, they’ve identified those schools in the most disadvantaged areas, which kind of undermines the idea of it being universal. So we essentially have a bit of patchwork provision at the moment depending where you live” (Stakeholder, CPAG)

In England, the withdrawal of support for universal free meals at a national level in 2010 resulted in the focus once again being at the local level and this had implications for the local authorities which were part of the universal trial.

“Durham has announced recently that they’ll be introducing a charge of £1.50, so they’re trying to reduce the price of a school meal to try and cushion that blow a bit. It’s obviously on the back of a changed economic environment...Durham have faced a number of budget cuts” (Stakeholder, School Food Trust)

In Wales, entitlement criteria remain consistent with those set by Westminster however provision had been made for change at the local level, with the introduction of legislation to allow local authorities to introduce free meals.

“All Local Authorities have the power to provide meals free of charge if they choose, previously it was that they must charge and now that they may”
(Policy Maker, Wales)

Across the UK territories, free school meal policy remains largely a means tested benefit, and this will have implications for implementation at the local level. Despite the similarity in terms of the policy context, the evidence indicates that levels of both registration for free school meal entitlement and take up of free school meals will vary by Local Authority, indicating that take up is influenced by local and contextual factors (Iniesta-Martinez and Evans 2012). This suggests that there will be variation in the way that the free school meal programme is implemented at the local level (Currie 2004).

The literature identifies key areas in which implementation at the local level may differ in terms of influential factors for uptake. First, it is noted that issues associated with lack of knowledge may deter families from claiming; secondly the association with welfare stigma and the way that means tested programmes are implemented can foster stigma (Currie 2004; Stuber and Schlesinger 2006). Finally school food provision has been revolutionised in recent years with the reintroduction of minimum nutritional standards across the UK. These factors will be considered in terms of the influence of implementation at the local level.

6.5.2. Encouraging Registration

It is estimated that approximately 3% of all pupils in England (age 4-15) appear to be entitled but not claiming free school meals (Iniesta-Martinez and Evans 2012) and research highlights a lack of awareness of entitlement. In recognition of these issues in relation to free school meal policy, policy makers have the expectation that free school meal entitlement will be promoted at the local level. In Northern Ireland, there was an expectation that action to increase the uptake would be taken at the local level.

“As part of the funding arrangements for the ELBs (Education Library Boards) the Department has set an annual target which requires Boards to maintain or increase the uptake of free school meals versus entitlement. Encouraging uptake is an issue for The ELBs and they are addressing this by taking various steps to streamline the application process and publicise the scheme” (Policy Maker, Northern Ireland)

In England, the lack of national guidance is acknowledged, as is the variability of practice which resulted.

“They are responsible, the regulations say that where a pupil is eligible and makes a claim that a meal has to be provided, it doesn’t say that local authorities have to promote it or try and encourage people but they do. We can’t force them to do anything and I guess each local authority will put different priority on their free school meals...It varies from school to school, depending on the staff and the priority, what time they’ve got and on the parents, the catchment areas. If they live in a fairly deprived area they may do more work on free school meals than schools in a more affluent area...So I guess it depends entirely on the school, the staff, the location, that kind of thing” (Senior Policy Officer, England)

In England, the introduction of the pupil premium (worth approximately £800 per pupil) is based on the number of pupils within the school in receipt of free school meals. This initiative is acknowledged to be an incentive for local authorities and schools to take steps to encourage registration.

“With the introduction of the pupil premium...we’ve had some indication that that has led to a push in schools to get parents to apply for free school meals so that then the local authority and the school know that those pupils are eligible and that then they can receive the pupil premium for those pupils” (Policy Manager, England)

In Wales, a similar scheme, the pupil deprivation grant was considered an incentive for local authorities and schools to promote the registration and uptake of free school meals. Additionally, the introduction of a school

banding system (Welsh Government 2011) which weights schools according to the level of free school meal pupils attending is perceived by policy makers to be an incentive for local authorities to increase registration.

“It is in the interests of the Local Authority to increase registration for free school meals because it affects their budget. Also, schools results are measured against levels of free school meal uptake within the school” (Policy Maker, Wales)

Policy makers note that the promotion of free school meal entitlement was key to addressing issues associated with non-take up as a result of lack of knowledge and that different approaches at the local level will result in variability of practice. The second key issue associated with policy implementation, addressed at the local level is to ensure anonymity for free school meal pupils.

6.5.3. Ensuring Anonymity

Welfare stigma has been shown to contribute to low take up of means tested benefits (Currie 2004; Stuber and Schlesinger 2006) and within policy documents from across the UK territories, the need to protect the identity of free school meal pupils is noted (Scottish Executive 2002; School Meals Review Panel 2005; Welsh Assembly Government 2008). This is reflected in the narratives of both policy makers and stakeholders who associate tackling the non-take up of free school meal entitlement with tackling issues of confidentiality and protecting the identity of free school meal pupils.

“We have to focus on the stigma aspect of free school meals and making sure that there is absolutely no way of identifying whether a child is a free school meal child or not” (Stakeholder, School Food Trust)

Key within this is the need for anonymity for free school meal pupils within the school setting. The strategies that are suggested to ensure anonymity

are usually related to payment methods, which are seen by policy makers as essential to ensuring that free school meal pupils cannot be identified.

“Being able to be identified in the queue that you are a free school meal pupil...schools combat that because they have cashless catering, nobody can be identified as being a paying pupil or a free school meal pupil” (Senior Policy Officer, England)

Policy makers and stakeholders recommend the use of cashless systems as a way to ensure that pupils in receipt of free school meals could not be identified.

“There is a duty in the Health Promotion Act...Education Authorities to protect the identity of those receiving free school lunches, and we know that more and more schools and local authorities are doing that via the use of cashless systems” (Policy Maker, Scotland)

In addition to the promotion of free school meal entitlement and ensuring anonymity for free school meal pupils, research indicates that a key aspect of free school meal policy is the environment in which free school meals are provided. Specifically the popularity of the food that is served within school and the evidence indicates that the nutritional standards which have been introduced across the devolved territories over the last decade have had a significant impact on school food provision.

6.5.4. The School Food Environment

A critical development in terms of school food provision in recent years is the reintroduction of minimum nutritional standards in recognition that the school food environment is a key setting in which to promote healthy eating habits and provide healthy choices. In terms of nutritional standards, each of the UK territories has developed and implemented its own version of nutritional guidelines and as a result, the school food environment is similar across the UK territories as policy converged. While Scotland led the way with ‘Hungry

for Success' (Scottish Executive 2002), each of the devolved territories have moved to increasingly stringent guidance and as a result, the nutritional standards which govern food provision across the UK are considered the most comprehensive in the world (Harper and Wells 2007).

The reintroduction of minimum nutritional standards is acknowledged as a significant change in school food provision, replacing the consumer led system which characterised the 1980s and 1990s. For policy makers, there is the perception that the reintroduction of nutritional guidelines had led to an improvement in the food served within schools.

“Meals are healthier and children choices, they’re getting steered towards better choices, so yes I think it is working” (Senior Policy Officer, England)

The improvement in school food is important because the school has been recognised in various policy documents as a setting within which to promote healthy choices. The aim of the new guidelines is to ensure that the message given to pupils was consistent in terms of the foods that were provided.

“Consistency of message is important...to consider the educational environment; making the school lunch part of the school day rather than representing high street provision” (Policy Maker, Wales)

However, it was acknowledged that the new standards were not universally welcomed and that many stakeholders involved with implementing the new nutritional standards felt that they were too far reaching, in particular where they were met with resistance at the school level.

“It took quite a while and there was quite a lot of backlash when we decided to introduce the nutrient standards, people thought that was a little bit of a step too far” (Senior Policy Officer, England)

Additionally, it is noted that the introduction of the new nutritional guidelines may be less popular with pupils, as their favourite foods were discontinued and that this may result in a fall in take up of school food.

“We knew that it was going to be a massive impact on schools and local authorities and lots of caterers out there and that there was initially...a dip because we banned lots of products and schools sometimes relied on things like vending machines that sold coke and crisps and chocolate and things that weren’t allowed anymore” (Senior Policy Officer, England)

Policy makers acknowledge that the reintroduction of minimum nutritional standards, while they may be unpopular with pupils, may also be unpopular with school staff. It was noted that the priorities of different staff may vary and that catering staff may not share the commitment to the provision of healthier, but less popular food.

“I think in this particular economic climate, the caterers are up against increasing food costs and fuel costs” (Stakeholder, Northern Ireland)

While the nutritional guidelines are determined at a national level, responsibility for the implementation of the guidelines is at the local authority level. Policy makers acknowledge that there would be local variation as a result.

“All schools should be complying with the standards because they are law, but how well they comply and how much they encourage take up ...varies greatly from school to school and region to region within England” (Senior Policy Officer, England)

While the free school meal policy framework is similar at the national level across the UK territories, policy makers acknowledge that there will be variability at the local level in terms of the implementation of key aspects of policy. Key to understanding variation in policy implementation is to understand the interaction of a policy with setting and to appreciate that, as a result of varying contextual factors within the implementing environment; there will be variation in how the same national policy is implemented at the local level.

6.6. Chapter Summary; the Free School Meal Policy Framework

Sabatier (1979) argues that the case studies which form the bulk of the implementation literature often become so immersed in the details of the program implementation that they underestimate the ability of the policy framework to structure the implementation process. This chapter addresses these shortcomings by exploring the policy framework underpinning free school meal policy in recognition that understanding implementation requires understanding of the macro and political variables which structure the process (Sabatier 1979; Hill 2003).

Understanding the policy framework requires locating policy both within the socio historical and political context in which it has developed, as well as exploring stakeholders' perceptions of the current policy problem (Hanberger 2001). The narratives of policy makers and stakeholders reveal that in terms of the policy purpose, free school meal policy continues its historic role of addressing issues of undernutrition and inequality together with the more recent re-invention of school food provision which is concerned with addressing issues associated with overnutrition by tackling rising levels of obesity by the provision of healthy foods within the school setting.

An acknowledgement by policy makers and stakeholders of the limitations of free school meal policy in terms of the means tested nature of entitlement provide the impetus for policy change and this chapter explores the potential for change, both within the current UK welfare system and as a result of the introduction of devolved powers. Within the current system, despite potential for the devolved territories to introduce change to the free school meal system, the parameters of wider welfare policy structures constrain the degree to which significant change can be achieved and as a result, the policy focus is on maintaining the status quo.

However, the introduction of devolved powers has in other policy areas provided a significant agent for change (Greer 2004; Rees 2007; Davey et al.

2008; Hill 2009). In terms of free school meal policy, innovation has been in terms of a shift in the direction of universality in both Scotland and England. However, key in determining policy outcomes under devolution is the interaction between newly devolved competencies and existing territorial structures and processes (Exworthy 2001) and despite indications of a policy shift towards universality, underlying structures have acted to constrain significant change. As a result, the free school meal policy context is mainly consistent across the UK territories, predominantly adhering to a pre-devolutionary approach to means tested entitlement.

As well as providing the opportunity for policy entrepreneurship, devolution also represents a more direct means of policy implementation (Musingarimi 2009; Morelli and Seaman 2010) and this chapter explores the way that issues of policy implementation at the local level are conceptualised at the policy level. It is evident that through a variety of methods, policy makers attempt to influence policy implementation according to policy priorities and concerns while acknowledging autonomy at the local level.

This chapter has established the way that the policy context will potentially define and shape the implementation of free school meal policy by identifying aspects of policy which will determine implementation at the local level. The means tested nature of free school meal entitlement will determine key aspects of policy implementation including promoting free school meal entitlement, encouraging registration and tackling the potential for stigma by ensuring the anonymity of free school meal pupils within the school environment. However, as policy and setting interact, there is the potential for implementation variability and the next chapter will consider the implementation process, at a national, local and school level in order to identify the range of factors which may cause variation in terms of implementation across different contexts.

7. Chapter 6 – Policy Implementation; the National, Local and School Context

Implementation is the carrying out of a policy decision and this decision will in variety of ways structure the implementation process. Chapter 5 has explored the way that the free school meal policy framework will determine key aspects of implementation however, throughout the implementation chain, running through policy makers, practitioners and subjects, there is always negotiation about the precise delivery of an intervention. The aim of this chapter is to consider the delivery of free school meal policy at the national, local and school level, to identify factors that influence implementation and investigate the effect of the political, institutional and organisational contexts on implementation processes.

Drawing on interview data from staff and stakeholders at the national, local and school level, this chapter investigates the implementation of free school meal policy in four secondary schools within one Local Authority in Wales. The implementation literature highlights that factors from a range of levels; policy, organisational, staff and the environment may affect implementation and for programs in schools, local factors will dominate the policy process.

This chapter begins by outlining the free school meal policy framework in Wales and explores how staff at the Local Authority level will respond to policy level concerns. This chapter then considers the way that free school meal policy is implemented at the school level, identifying and exploring factors from across a range of levels which will influence implementation. These factors include the wider policy context, including changes to the school food environment as well as the built environment, the school community and the priorities of school staff. This chapter explores the way that key aspects of free school meal policy, the promotion of free school meals entitlement, payment methods and the school food environment are

determined by these influences and the variable nature of the free school meal context which results.

7.1. The Welsh Policy Context

In Wales as across the UK, public health documents and policy documents make explicit the link between diet, health and health inequalities (Food Standards Agency Wales 2003; Welsh Assembly Government 2006). In tackling issues of poor diet, schools are highlighted as a key setting within which to tackle the impact of poverty (National Assembly for Wales 2011) and the school is acknowledged as a key setting within which to address the impact of poor diet on health and tooth decay, to tackle rising obesity levels and promote understanding about good nutrition (Welsh Assembly Government 2006, 2008, 2009).

In addition to addressing health inequalities, policy documents link healthy eating and hydration to improved school performance, concentration and attention (Welsh Assembly Government 2006, 2009). Reflecting the concerns of the other UK territories, the non-take up of free school meal entitlement is noted within a number of Welsh policy documents (Welsh Assembly Government 2005, 2007, 2008, 2009; National Assembly for Wales 2011).

Strategies to encourage registration for free school meals include the provision of an electronic scheme for determining eligibility (Welsh Assembly Government 2007). Documents also outline the need for further research to identify reasons for non-take up (Welsh Assembly Government 2008) and the need to encourage the full take up of entitlement (Welsh Assembly Government 2009). This position is reiterated at the policy level.

“The goal is 100% take up of free school meal entitlement” (Policy Maker, Wales)

A key aspect of the Welsh policy approach to increasing the uptake of free school meal entitlement in Wales is the introduction of minimum nutritional standards, considered a key part of the drive to encourage the uptake of school meals, both paid for and free (Welsh Assembly Government 2008). It is noted that the ability of pupils to access food offsite is a major factor in the non-take up of school food and a barrier to the success of Appetite for Life (Welsh Assembly Government 2010). Additionally, the increasingly complex nature of provision of food in secondary schools is noted.

“Free school meal take up is better in primary than in secondary, take up in primary is more straightforward, in terms of payment and the fact that there is no off-site policy. In secondary school take up drops, possible reasons, stigma, choice, off site/friendship groups” (Policy Maker, Wales)

In terms of implementation, policy documents outline the duty that local authorities and schools have to encourage maximum take up of free school meal entitlement (Welsh Assembly Government 2009; National Assembly for Wales 2011). In part, this is by tackling stigma, and the importance of protecting the identity of free school meals is noted (Welsh Assembly Government 2009). In order to achieve this, the focus is on the use of cashless systems within schools (Welsh Assembly Government 2005) and more recently, the recommendation that a stigma free school meals system should be introduced in all schools (National Assembly for Wales 2011).

7.2. Operationalising Policy; the Local Authority Context

The policy decision will, in a variety of ways, structure the implementation process and the crucial role of implementation analysis is to identify factors which affect the achievement of objectives (Sabatier 1979). Analysis of data at the policy level reveals that key within the implementation of free school meal policy is the need to promote free school meals since a lack of knowledge has been found to impact on levels of registration.

7.2.1. Maximising Registration and Uptake

Data from policy makers and policy documents note the role that local authorities have in maximising the registration and uptake of free school meal entitlement. The need to promote free school meal entitlement and encourage registration is noted by local authority staff.

“We try and promote free school meals as well...to encourage parents on low income or on certain benefits to apply for free school meals cos obviously it’s an entitlement there for them” (Contract Manager, Local Authority)

It is noted by policy makers that, because free school meal entitlement is used as a proxy for deprivation, it is associated with payment of additional funding for schools. This is noted by local authority staff as a key incentive for attempting to increase the level of registration, in recognition that it would affect school funding.

“It’s important that we can increase the uptake; we can make sure that everybody who is entitled to them is processed as receiving them cos it does affect schools funding as well, because their social deprivation funding is triggered on the number of pupils that are entitled to free school meals” (School Organisation Manager, Local Authority)

Local authorities have responsibility for the processing of application for free school meal entitlement and previous research notes that not realising that they were entitled and not knowing how to register were issues that deterred parents from registering (Goodwin 2008; Children's Food Trust 2013). However, local authority staff consider the process of application straightforward, especially since the introduction of an electronic system by the Welsh Government.

“Schools maintain that parents have difficulty in filling in the application form but literally all they’re asking for is name, address, national insurance number and tick which benefit you’re on...school based staff should be able

to assist parents if necessary” (School Organisation Manager, Local Authority)

Policy documents note that a key aspect of increasing the take up of entitlement is to ensure the anonymity of free school meal pupils within the school environment to minimise stigma. In previous research, a cashless system was regarded as crucial to ensure confidentiality and minimise the risk of stigma (Sahota 2009). The value of a cashless system, in operation by most of the secondary schools, is noted by Local Authority staff.

“We’ve got quite a few cashless systems in our secondary schools which has taken some of the stigma away from free school meals...which I think has helped things quite a lot” (Contract Manager, Local Authority)

In addition to responsibility for administering registration for free school meals, local authority staff have responsibility for setting the allowance that free school meal pupils receive daily. In other research, a key factor in deterring the uptake of free school meals is the level at which the allowance is set, and research findings indicate that, in many cases, the amount allocated to free school meal pupils was inadequate and failed to provide a well-balanced two course meal (Storey and Chamberlain 2001; Sahota 2009; Farthing 2012). Local authority staff note that the allowance is set according to a number of criteria.

“It goes through a political process so there’s an annual review...we compare costs with other authorities...so they would get whatever the meal of the day and either a pudding or a drink” (School Organisation Manager, Local Authority)

However, other staff suggest that the amount provided is insufficient for pupils to buy what they want and that an increase in the daily allowance may result in an increase in free school meal uptake.

“How do you think the take up of free school meals could be improved?” (SA)

“Raise the price of free school meals maybe, so that there is more choice?”

(Curriculum Improvement Advisor, Local Authority)

“Is that set by the Welsh Assembly or Local Authorities?” (SA)

“By Local Government, the Welsh Assembly Government could set a minimum couldn’t they though?” (Curriculum Improvement Advisor, Local Authority)

Operationalising free school meal policy at the local authority level reflects concern regarding key aspects of the policy; encouraging registration and ensuring anonymity to minimise stigma. At the national level, the policy focus in terms of increasing uptake of free meals revolves, in part, around improving the quality of the food served in school with the introduction of minimum nutritional guidelines, a policy which is operationalised at the local authority level.

7.2.2. Nutritional Standards; Implementing the Appetite for Life Guidelines

A key issue defining the school food environment and recent school food provision across the UK is the reintroduction of minimum nutritional standards in an attempt to improve the quality of food served within the school environment. In terms of the Appetite for Life guidance introduced by the Welsh Government, local authority staff welcome the guidance, feeling that the improved food will have a positive impact on pupils.

“The purpose is to ensure that there is consistency across all schools in Wales with what is provided for children, young people and it is to ensure that there is only healthy foods...on offer” (Curriculum Improvement Advisor, Local Authority)

It was noted at the policy level that the changing nutritional standards may have an impact on the take up of school food. At the local authority level,

while the new menus were broadly welcomed, local authority staff indicated they had some reservations about the implementation of the guidelines, specifically whether food provided in accordance with the specifications of Appetite for Life would suit the pupils' tastes.

“The problem is that obviously, culture need to change, the children’s eating culture needs to change and they need to be able to embrace the new foods that are being offered to them. That can be difficult sometimes cos whilst something may be Appetite for Life compliant it is very difficult to encourage children to eat foods that they just don’t want to eat. There’s a particular issue I feel with something like oily fish, which they recommend should be twice a week” (School Organisation Manager, Local Authority)

Local authority staff had been proactive in terms of making changes to catering provision throughout the Local Authority. Traditionally, school food provision has been provided ‘in house’ but from April 2011, the provision of school food was contracted to private providers. The majority of secondary schools remained under the contract negotiated by the Local Authority while two secondary schools had negotiated their own contract with a different private provider. The decision to move to a private provider was explained in terms of cost.

“Cost, savings, looking for a more cost effective service provision and unfortunately that could be provided at a lower cost from an outside contractor than our own in-house provider. And that was the reason” (School Organisation Manager, Local Authority)

The new contracts were seen as an opportunity to ensure that the menus provided within schools were compliant with the Appetite for Life guidance.

“In (Local Authority) we have gone through a new contact with a caterer and in order for them to be successful as part of our tendering process they have to meet Appetite for Life guidelines, even though it’s not legislation yet” (Curriculum Improvement Advisor, Local Authority)

In addition to cost savings it was envisaged by local authority staff that the new company would offer improvement in quality of food and service.

“It was really just an improvement in service and the quality really, was really required and I think where (catering company) have already improved is the quality of food because they’ve got so much more buying power they can purchase so much a higher quality of ingredient than (local authority) catering were able to do with the budget that they had...they’ve just got that purchasing power really” (Contract Manager, Local Authority)

However, a potential constraint in the implementation of Appetite for Life noted by staff was the perceived level of skill within the catering staff. Local authority staff questioned the skill level of these employees, noting that provision of the Appetite for Life menu required a higher level of skill than had previously been expected.

“It was a lot of sort of packet mixes and things like that we used...they’re going back to basics, getting back to the raw ingredients...real joints of meat rather than something that’s been shrink wrapped and cooked previously. The skills of the staff on site are being tested...now it’s all sort of prepared on site” (Contract Manager, Local Authority)

Local authority staff note that while catering was organised by a new provider, the catering staff remained the same. There was evidence that there were some doubts that the catering staff would be able to keep up with the demands of the new menus.

“A new menu doesn’t make the person able to cook any better unfortunately, does it?” (School Organisation Manager, Local Authority)

In addition to reservations about how well the pupils may adapt to the new menus, local authority staff acknowledge that a number of constraints are in place at the school level which may affect the uptake of the new menus. Key in their concerns was the school dining environment. In previous research, the dining room emerged as a significant factor in shaping pupils

experiences and attitudes towards school dining (Storey and Chamberlain 2001; Morrison and Clarke 2006; Farthing 2012; Welsh Government 2013). The dining environment is acknowledged by local authority staff to be poor in some schools.

“I would say the environment is poor, I think there needs to be further investment into the environment, I think that really matters to young people. I think young people want to buy into an atmosphere...as if they were going to Starbucks or somewhere else they would choose to go”. (Curriculum Improvement Advisor, Local Authority)

However, while local authority staff acknowledge that there is a need for the school food environment to be improved; lack of funding was a constraint.

“It does cause difficulties for authorities with budgets and things like that, especially at the moment, they’re being cut back and cut back and to try and improve the dining experience while the budgets are being cut back so much is a difficult measure” (Contract Manager, Local Authority)

A key finding in the evaluation of Appetite for Life was the impact of the availability of offsite sources of food to the take up of school food provision. Within the Local Authority, a number of schools had offsite policies in place and local authority staff acknowledge that this presented a barrier to enforcing the new guidelines.

“School meals are compliant with Appetite for Life but the culture is still bad, they are still allowing children to visit the shops, the chip vans outside and I don’t think young people have bought into buying healthy products because there is too much in competition with the Appetite for Life menu. So it is the schools system and the management and leadership that have spoilt the policy” (Curriculum Improvement Advisor, Local Authority)

Local authority staff consider the answer to this is to enforce an onsite policy in all schools.

“I think there has to be some policy to say that somebody has to stay in school because I don’t think school meals can compete with local businesses” (School Organisation Manager, Local Authority)

Staff within the Local Authority operationalise policy within a context determined by the Welsh Government. In terms of the free school meal policy framework, this policy context shares significant similarities with the other UK territories, in which free school meal entitlement is predominantly a means tested benefit, with some exceptions in Scotland. As a result, the Welsh policy context has significant similarities as other UK territories in terms of the means tested nature of entitlement. However, in respect of some aspects of free school meal policy implementation; registration, setting the free school meal allowance and the introduction and overseeing of Appetite for Life compliant menus is determined by the Local Authority.

However, for the most part, policy implementation is undertaken at the school level and analysis needs to focus on the interaction between policy and the school setting in order to identify those aspects of the context which are responsible for the generation of diverse effects.

7.3. Putting Policy into Practice; Implementation at the School Level

In order to understand the variability of policy implementation within the school setting, it is necessary to identify those aspects which have the most influence (Poland et al. 2009). For programs implemented in schools, local factors will dominate the policy process since schools will have different physical attributes, head teachers’ different leadership styles and staff members’ different skills (Spillane 1998; Poland et al. 2009). As well as this, consideration needs to be given to the community in which the school is located since this will define the ethnic and class mix of the pupil and teacher population (McLeroy et al. 1988; Green et al. 2000).

Within this project, four schools were selected using *a priori* theoretical framing. It was intended that the sample would reflect variation, both in terms of the level of free school meal entitlement and the level of free school meal uptake. In order to generate a sample which represented various combinations, schools with a combination of levels of entitlement and uptake which were higher and lower than the local authority average were selected, with each represented.

In addition, schools were selected based on variation of school food policy which could be assessed prior to data collection, these included policies implemented at the local level that have been noted to influence the take up of free school meals. Factors considered included payment methods in place in the school canteen, noted to be important in ensuring confidentiality for free school meal pupils. Also, whether an offsite policy was in place, since this has been noted to be influential in the take up of school food. Finally, catering provision and adherence to nutritional guidelines were considered.

The characteristics of the selected schools are outlined in Table 9. Interviews with school staff explored the variability of school practice in relation to these key aspects of policy implementation.

Table 9 : Characteristics of Selected Schools

School	Number of Pupils on roll	% Pupils entitled to free school meals	% Pupils Taking Free Meals	Catering Provision	Nutritional Guidelines in Place	Number of sittings	Payment Method in Place	Offsite Policy	Home-School Contact
School 1 Ashgrove High School	1600	Lower than the average (17%) <i>(n = 266)</i>	Higher than the LA average (68%) <i>(n = 182)</i>	Private Company managed by the Local Authority	Appetite for Life	1	Cashless	Year 9 and above	Low Level
School 2 Briarwood High School	1665	Lower than the LA average (3%) <i>(n = 55)</i>	Lower than the LA average (51%) <i>(n = 28)</i>	Private Company managed by the School	Appetite for Life	1	Cash	Year 9 and above	Low Level
School 3 Castlebridge High School	1245	Higher than the LA average (42%) <i>(n = 518)</i>	Lower than the LA average (51%) <i>(n = 263)</i>	Private Company managed by the Local Authority	Appetite for Life	1	Cashless	None (except sixth form)	High Level
School 4 Daleview High School	960	Higher than the LA average (28%) <i>(n = 265)</i>	Higher than the LA average (100%) <i>(n = 264)</i>	Private Company managed by the School	Appetite for Life	2	Cashless	None (except sixth form)	High Level
LA Average		20%	61%						

(Murtagh 2011)

7.3.1. Promoting Free School Meal Entitlement

The requirement for schools to promote free school meal entitlement to parents and encourage registration was outlined at both the national and local policy level; additionally, previous research notes that schools have an active role in the promotion of free school meals and a responsibility to encourage families to apply where appropriate (Sahota 2009; Sahota et al. 2013). Across the school sample, staff indicate a range of approaches in the way that each school promotes free school meal entitlement with some of the schools within the sample demonstrating a more proactive approach.

The school level of free school meal entitlement reflects the local community and in the schools in the sample, the level of entitlement ranged from 3% to 42% of the pupil population. It was apparent across the four schools, action taken by staff to promote free school meal entitlement varies, and that this variation is linked to staff perceptions of the accuracy of the entitlement figures.

In Castlebridge and Daleview, staff express a much greater level of concern about the accuracy of entitlement figures than staff in Ashgrove and Briarwood. In both Castlebridge and Daleview, staff express the view that they felt that figures were not an accurate reflection of the socio economic status of pupils attending the school, and this is a matter of concern.

“The current uptake of free school meals is in the mid-thirties, previously it has been in the forties, we are investigating that as a school as we speak because we’ve got no idea, particularly with the economic downturn, we don’t understand, all we can fathom is that there are many families out there that are not claiming, even though we use a card system” (Deputy Head, Castlebridge)

A similar level of concern was expressed by staff in Daleview; however the falling level of entitlement was attributed to a changing catchment.

“Last year we were in the thirty to forty bracket, this year so far, evidence would indicate that we’re gonna be closer to twenty six so probably a five percent drop this year which might well tie in to the fact that we’re getting a number of students back from the areas that are better off within the catchment...I think that’s gonna make a significant difference to us, as the years progress” (Senior Assistant Head, Daleview)

Staff concerns regarding the accuracy of the number of free school meal pupils registered is linked to the use of free school meal entitlement as a proxy for deprivation. This affected the school in two ways, first the pupil deprivation grant was allocated on the basis of the number of free school meal pupils within the school; secondly, a new banding system introduced by the Welsh Government in September 2011 (Welsh Government 2011) used the level of free school meal entitlement as part of the weighting system to allocate schools to bands.

The degree to which schools promoted free school meal entitlement varied by school and this in turn reflected the level of concern expressed by staff in terms of the accuracy of entitlement levels. School staff acknowledge that the introduction of the new banding system may have the impact of encouraging schools to promote registration of free school meal entitlement.

“I would guess that you’d find lots of secondary schools extremely proactive, particularly now that the Minister has put us into bands...we’re sat in a good band however if our free school meals dropped, chances are that our band, we might move down the bands” (Deputy Head, Castlebridge)

In Ashgrove, data collection occurred prior to the introduction of the new banding system and the narratives of school staff indicated unconcern as to the level of entitlement of pupils within the school. However, staff did note that the introduction of a banding system later that year may encourage schools to be more proactive in terms of promoting free school meals.

“We vary at around eighteen or nineteen percent free school meals...I wonder...because so much of our school performance now is related to our

percentage of free school meals, it's interesting that lots of schools do take far more interest in their free school meals, and I guess it's not for the right reasons, not for looking at the welfare of the pupils but seeing how they're gonna compare in a league table" (Assistant Head, Ashgrove)

In Castlebridge and Daleview, the concern over the implications of decreasing levels of free school meal entitlement was linked with a proactive approach to ensuring all pupils who were eligible for free school meals, were registered.

"If there was any way that I could get the free school meals from 26ish (%) where it is at the moment, back above 30 (%) I would do it. But in the last couple of months we've got to the stage where we've almost exhausted the fact that we can't go anywhere with it unless there's a massive change in circumstances because we've investigated every avenue. The Head teacher has asked me to ensure that there's no one out there on our roll that's entitled, that isn't taking it up" (Senior Assistant Head, Daleview)

As a result, both Castlebridge and Daleview have implemented a number of systems intended to encourage registration and the take up of free school meal entitlement.

"Through intervention, what we're doing, basically questionnaires, having progress coordinators and form tutors basically having those conversations with some students" (Deputy Head, Castlebridge)

Previous research found that active home-school relations are important in the promotion of free school meal entitlement and uptake (Sahota et al. 2013). The liaison between school and home often falls to administrative staff and the data indicates that the level of promotion of free school meal entitlement reflects the level of concern displayed by teaching staff. In Ashgrove and Briarwood, there was a low level of liaison and promotion of free school meals while in Castlebridge and Daleview, more effort to promote the uptake of free school meals had resulted in higher levels of home-school liaison and support for families.

“What I’m doing at the moment is looking at last year’s list, looking at the current list by the Local Authority and just ringing home to those parents and saying....should your child be free school meals this year?” (Student Support Officer, Castlebridge)

As well as contacting every parent of pupils in year seven individually to check if they were entitled to free school meals, staff at Castlebridge also undertook regular mailings of information.

“When we do our whole school mailings there’s quite a few bits and pieces go, we automatically enclose a free meal application, just before the summer holidays begin and also when we come back in September” (Student Support Officer, Castlebridge)

In Daleview a house system meant that each pupil had a tutor, and using this system, close contact between pupils and the school was maintained.

“The heads of house have got a really good relationship with their tutors who then would go to the student and say, has circumstances changed? For a number of reasons it’s in our interest to identify and made sure there’s a take up for every student that has entitlement. We have contacted parents and asked them, to be sure if their circumstances have changed” (Senior Assistant Head, Daleview)

In comparison, in Ashgrove and Briarwood, the evidence indicates that there was little attempt to promote free school meal entitlement by administrative staff and home-school contact was limited.

“If there were children who didn’t use their free school meal entitlement would you have any idea why? (SA)

“I don’t know, it doesn’t really affect me as such, as long as I know in September who’s on and who not that’s all I really, you know is my remit...Each year you get a new form which is a new criteria, I mean to be honest, I don’t ever read it because I would just read it out to a parent” (Admin Officer, Ashgrove)

Similarly, in Briarwood there was no indication the school encouraged or promoted registration for free school meals.

“So, the school doesn’t say in a newsletter, do you think you might be entitled to school meals?” (SA)

“Not that I’m aware of, no” (Nurse Receptionist, Briarwood)

While in Ashgrove and Briarwood there were less initiatives to promote free school meals, staff in Castlebridge and Daleview noted the importance of the promotion of free school meals and had put in place several strategies to encourage parents to register. In addition to noting the importance of encouraging parents to register, staff in Castlebridge had also noted the use of a card system within the dining hall as important to encouraging uptake.

7.3.2. Ensuring Anonymity; Payment Systems

The importance of payment methods in protecting the identity of free school meal pupils, highlighted within policy documents and by policy makers, was noted in the previous chapter. In Wales, policy documents recommend that a stigma free school meal system should be introduced in all schools and strategies to tackle the issue of stigma have focussed on the use of cashless systems (Welsh Assembly Government 2005, 2009; National Assembly for Wales 2011).

Previous research indicates that stigma is reduced with the use of electronic cards and fingerprint systems (Farthing 2012). Of the schools in the sample, three (Ashgrove, Castlebridge & Daleview) had a card system in place, in these schools staff note that the card system protected free school meal pupils from identification.

“It works quite well...no student is easily identifiable as a free school meal student” (Senior Assistant Head, Daleview)

However, staff note other positives in the shift from cash to a card system.

“When I first started here it was manual tickets and at the end of the day with a manual ticket that the child can put in their pocket, it can be lost, it can be given to another child or it can be taken from a child, so without a doubt the card system is excellent really” (Student Support Officer, Castlebridge)

A card system was acknowledged to prevent bullying since they could only be used by the pupil.

“How well do you feel that the cashless system works?” (SA)

“Good, because you know then if they’re using anybody else’s card and it can stop bullying as well” (Student Support Officer, Castlebridge)

Briarwood was the only school in the sample to operate a cash system and pupils receiving free school meals had to collect tickets from the school nurse on a daily or weekly basis. A number of contextual factors explained the use of tickets; first that, within the school population, only a tiny proportion of pupils (3%) were entitled to free school meals. This meant that a ticket system operated by a member of staff was manageable, whereas in a school with more significant numbers, the school nurse would have been unable to process the administration involved.

“If there were more children I don’t think I would be able to keep such a close eye on it, but as there are only a few I think, yes, we can monitor it” (Nurse Receptionist, Briarwood)

The use of tickets did allow the School Nurse to monitor the use of free school meals and highlight any concerns about pupils who consistently did not eat meals.

“I tend to keep an eye on the younger children in particular. If for some reason they’re not picking up their meals I would initially let the Head of Year know. Sometimes their parents will say to me” (Nurse Receptionist, Briarwood)

Secondly, school staff did acknowledge that the ticket system made free school meal pupils identifiable which may lead to reluctance to use the ticket. However, because of the close nature of the support provided by the member of staff, she felt she was able to overcome this.

“We’ve had one or two who were a little bit nervous about handing their tickets over so what we arranged for those is that I would show the canteen staff a photograph of the children or take the child in and I would just give them the tickets for the week to the canteen staff and then the child would go in and say I’ve already paid...It helped out for one little boy in particular in year seven, he did it for about a fortnight then he was quite happy” (Nurse Receptionist, Briarwood)

However, there were plans to introduce a card system in response to pressure from a number of areas which acknowledged the need for the identity of free school meal pupils to be protected.

“That has come up a few times as a reason...the governors have mentioned it, staff have mentioned it, the school nurse has mentioned it. So it’s come from that area that it does protect our free school meal children and they’re not stigmatised as having the ticket and handing it in.” (Support Staff Manager, Briarwood)

School staff note that there is flexibility in terms of the way that schools operationalise two key aspects of policy implementation, the promotion of free school meals and payment methods and as a result the schools exhibit variation in these two aspects of implementation. However, there is less flexibility in terms of the food provided in school since all schools must provide menus which are compliant with the Appetite for Life guidance and for catering staff, the lack of flexibility in terms of school food provision is challenging.

7.3.3. Appetite for Life; the Introduction of Minimum Nutritional Guidelines

The Introduction of the Appetite for Life guidance by the Welsh Government represents a significant shift in school food provision and a commitment to the new guidelines by the Local Authority has resulted in a similar provision across the four schools. The introduction of the new guidance was broadly welcomed by teaching staff and they expressed the opinion that there had been a significant improvement in school food provision and this was to be applauded. It was noted that there had been recognition of a need to improve school food provision for some time.

“I’ve had quite a lot of experience in England working with healthy schools initiatives, since I’ve arrived at this specific school... we’ve been very unhappy about the level of catering and the quality of the food” (Deputy Head, Castlebridge)

Additionally, teaching staff note that the new guidance had resulted in an improvement to the quality and type of food provided.

“I think the food’s better now, I honestly do...I’ve thought, that tasted really, really good” (Assistant Head, Ashgrove)

Catering staff shared the perception that food quality had improved, and they noted the variation in produce that was now being provided.

“We’re using a lot more fresh produce. I’ve never had fresh pineapple in my fridge, and melons and grapes, it’s wonderful” (Catering Staff, Briarwood)

“The meat they have is lovely...they used to have processed meat with the council, this is all fresh, like yesterday it was pork and you get chicken breast, turkey crown, it’s not cheap” (Catering Staff, Castlebridge)

While catering staff welcome the introduction of improved quality and range of foods, they had concerns about the new menus, echoing concerns of local

authority staff that pupils would not adapt to the new foods. For catering staff, there is concern that the stringent guidelines had resulted in much of the food that had been popular with pupils, being removed from the menu.

“There’s no chocolate, there’s no crisps, there’s no cereal bars, there’s just water, flavoured water and home bakes, they call it” (Catering Staff, Castlebridge)

In addition, to the removal of high fat and high sugar foods, dishes had to be produced to stringent new guidelines, and these new meals were proving less popular than those previously served.

“Pies, they loved the homemade pies, loved the curries, loved the fish and chips, pasta, bolognaise, spaghetti bolognaise, anything like that” (Catering Staff, Ashgrove)

“Since the new guidelines, are you still making those things?” (SA)

“We’re making them but to a different recipe...a lot of comments about how the old meals tasted better” (Catering Staff, Ashgrove)

In noting the declining popularity of school food provision, catering staff across the schools had seen an impact on the number of pupils using the canteen. They acknowledged that the unpopularity of the new foods would have implications for job security.

“It’s quite sad really because the numbers have dropped so much...I’d say, excluding the exams about 30%. Girls have already lost working hours because of the drop in numbers, and it will be happening again soon” (Catering Staff, Ashgrove)

While catering staff acknowledge that changing menus had led to a reduction in the number of pupils using the canteen and that this in turn threatened job security, it was apparent that they felt they had limited influence. Not least in terms of their relationships with other staff members, where there was

flexibility in terms of menu decisions, these tended to be made by teaching staff.

“(Catering company) also do a healthy pizza but (Head teacher) won’t have that...in all the other schools...it flies out, and it would here, but I’ve given (Head teacher) a couple of samples but he still hasn’t come forward with saying that we can do them... He wants a proper meal...he is a stickler, anything take away, he won’t have” (Catering Staff, Castlebridge)

Despite their knowledge of pupil preferences, catering staff note that there was very little opportunity for them to influence the food served, instead, strict adherence to the menus specified was expected and there was little opportunity for catering staff to introduce any variation.

“So you know what they like and what they don’t like, and you go to meetings and put your voice forward but...it’s what the nutritionist...and she’ll come round without telling you and check and she knows there’s an ingredient in there that shouldn’t be she’ll come back and tell you, so you can’t get away with anything” (Catering Staff, Castlebridge)

The narratives of local authority staff implied that the new guidance provided a challenge for the skill levels of catering staff within the schools; this view was reiterated by teaching staff with the schools.

“I think one of the problems, one of the limitations, is that your caterer might change but your catering staff doesn’t change, and of course they’ve been used to providing food a certain way for an awful long time so they have to go through a retraining exercise with the current caterer because they’re producing food in a different way now. They were very much open packets and put things in to warm up, whereas this caterer is expecting them to cook things from scratch” (Support Staff Manager, Briarwood)

It was apparent that having little opportunity to influence menus was frustrating for catering staff, especially when they knew that certain foods were unpopular.

“The menus could be changed; they’re not popular at all...I mean like today, goats cheese tart, even the adults don’t like it...” (Catering Staff, Castlebridge)

Catering staff felt they knew what pupils liked and that they should be able to provide these foods.

“They like their curries, they like their lasagnes and they like their pies, they don’t like halibut this and halibut that” (Catering Staff, Castlebridge)

However, despite the constraints of the Appetite for Life guidance and having little influence to change menus, catering staff were able to find ways to adapt or change menus in accordance with what they knew pupils would like in an attempt to improve sales. Of particular concern was the restriction that chips could only be served once a week, a move which had significant implications for the take up of meals and catering staff note a decline in the popularity of the main meals when chips were not on offer.

“What sells best?” (SA)

“Mostly baguettes and Panini’s, except today cos its fish and chip day, it’s the only day we can serve chips, so they like their chips” (Catering Staff, Daleview)

“How many will you sell?” (SA)

“Well over 100 I would say” (Catering Staff, Daleview)

“And on another day, when it’s not chips?” (SA)

“Ten!” (Catering Staff, Daleview)

Reducing the chips to once a week represented a real difficulty in Briarwood and the Catering Manager admitted that she has not yet been able to reduce the number of days in which chips were served to one. This was because on days when chips were not served, catering staff noted a significant drop in the number of pupils using the canteen.

“We have chips on a Monday and a Wednesday and a Friday, we have jacket potato um wedges for two days, now last Wednesday, we had a chip free day, I put on more food thinking the children would, instead of taking chips and pizza would take two pizza, they didn’t, so the money was right down...they came in, just seen there was no chips and didn’t like it” (Catering Staff, Briarwood)

The situation in Briarwood was exacerbated by the offsite policy which was in operation. While the school was not allowed to sell chips and other unhealthy food, it was easy for pupils to leave the school site and access these foods offsite. This situation was noted by catering staff.

“Yes, our numbers are gradually getting worse and worse...where would you rather be for lunchtime, in here having something healthy or down the road at the chip shop?” (Catering Staff, Briarwood)

In the other school with an offsite policy in place (Ashgrove), staff also noted the limitation of what they were able to sell, in comparison to the foods that the pupils could access offsite.

“I used to sell ten boxes of crisps a week, I’m not allowed to sell one now...we’ve just given our custom away to the vans outside...that’s the way it is” (Catering Staff, Ashgrove)

In general, the consensus among catering staff was that the Appetite for Life menus were too stringent and did not allow catering staff to provide foods that they knew pupils would like and wanted to eat. They felt that if they were given more opportunity to make decisions, they would be able to increase the uptake of meals in the canteen since they knew the likes and dislikes of the pupils that they catered for.

“Ideally, what would you serve?” (SA)

“The things the children are not supposed to have, your burgers, your pizzas, your chips. I think me personally; I’d take Jamie Oliver out and shoot him” (Catering Staff, Briarwood)

A significant consequence of the declining popularity of the food provided was a reduction in the level of uptake of school meals. Catering staff acknowledged that this was an issue and that there was pressure on them to increase the numbers of pupils having meals but they felt that, because they had to adhere strictly to the new menus, they were unable to create an increase in demand.

“We try, they desperately put things on you, that we should be having more children in here, but if I’ve got no say with what I sell I can’t see how I can do any more to get them in here” (Catering Staff, Daleview)

Concerns of catering staff relating to the ability of pupils to purchase unhealthy foods offsite highlights the inherent contradiction which exists in terms of school food provision; while the school is seen as a setting in which to promote healthy choices, the school meals service also functions as a business. This contradiction also extends to the provision of free meals, essentially a welfare initiative within a business model. Catering staff noted that for some of the pupils, the school lunch was important.

“You know the kids that need the meals...It’s their main meal really with some of them isn’t it? (Catering Staff, Castlebridge)

This proved difficult for catering staff, if they were aware of a pupil who didn’t have the money to purchase a meal, or receive free school meal entitlement.

“If they haven’t filled the form in, you can’t give them a meal?” (SA)

“I do, I’m not supposed to, I can’t see them go without food, I’ve even paid myself sometimes...you can’t see children go without food, especially the girls” (Catering Staff, Castlebridge)

For catering staff across the four schools, the introduction of the Appetite for Life guidance had had a significant impact on the food that they were allowed to serve and this had implications for the uptake of school meals. Pupils’ decisions to access food from other sources was dependent on school policy in terms of offsite provision and two of the schools in the sample allowed

pupils to leave the school site at lunchtime. The operation of an offsite policy in two of the schools is acknowledged at the policy level as critical in the uptake of free school meals and of interest are the school level factors which underpin offsite policy.

7.3.4. Offsite Policy

The literature indicates that the ability of pupils to access foods offsite has implications for dietary health and concern revolves around food outlets which provide opportunities for pupils to purchase energy dense foods (Sinclair and Walker 2008; Ellaway et al. 2012; Smith et al. 2013). Within the school sample, underpinning the offsite policy in Ashgrove and Briarwood were constraints associated with the built environment. In Ashgrove, there were 1600 pupils on the school roll and the school had two dining halls which held approximately 100 pupils each. As a result of the lack of capacity, teaching staff felt that they had no alternative but to let the pupils leave the school at lunchtime.

“Why have you got that policy in place?” (SA)

“Accommodation, simple as that, accommodation, we would like to have much more on site...our canteens, they’re just not big enough” (Assistant Head, Ashgrove)

A similar situation in terms of lack of space was evident in Briarwood but here, school staff seemed to view the local shops as having a role in lunchtime provision for pupils and of supplementing the school facilities.

“We don’t have huge facilities for catering so in a way we’ve worked, we’ve allowed children to go outside, almost sharing that role of having food at lunchtime with our local suppliers, because they are feeding children quickly and we’re getting them back in to school as well” (Support Staff Manager, Briarwood)

In Castlebridge and Daleview, all children were expected to stay in school, reflecting the fact that in both schools, facilities were large enough to contain all of the pupils.

“All students use the facilities; no student is allowed off site with the exception of sixth form” (Deputy Head, Castlebridge)

The same policy was in place in Daleview, but this was a policy that had been recently implemented as a result of a move to a new building and new dining facilities. At the same time as the move, school staff had decided to implement a staggered lunch time which reduced the lunchtime and divided it into two sittings. This move was felt to be important by school staff.

“In the old school...students would go out, the break would naturally be extended and it caused disruption for them coming back in. They were quite often evidently eating and drinking the wrong food, of which we had no part to play in what was provided...it was seen as the way forward, trying to get the school into a position where we were in control of the situation” (Senior Assistant Head, Daleview)

In both Ashgrove and Briarwood, staff acknowledge problems associated with the offsite policy, both on the grounds of behavioural problems being introduced into the community and also the availability of unhealthy foods out of school.

“We have problems policing, the lunchtime in the community...and there’s also the healthy eating agenda as well, we know that they go outside and they can have, a burger just outside the school gates, or a tray of chips. We would like to keep more on site, we really looked at what it would be like to bring year nine back on site but our canteens, they’re just not big enough” (Assistant Head, Ashgrove)

Given the lack of any significant resources for changing the school environment, staff in both schools which had an offsite policy in place express the desire to have more capacity at lunchtime and as a result staff

had considered the introduction of a number of strategies that would increase lunchtime capacity of the school. In the case of Ashgrove, this included adding additional outlets around the school.

“What we’re looking to do in the short term and (Catering Company) has been good about this, we’ve thought about our canteen size...we’re gonna look for little portable sites we can move around the school” (Assistant Head, Ashgrove)

In Briarwood, staff had more ambitious plans, both to change the layout of the dining hall but also to introduce a staggered lunch.

“It’s very early days with the (catering) contractor but we would like to see that dining hall redesigned...to have it more, when you go to a motorway service station and you have your salad bar in the middle and then you have hot food over there and you have baguettes there and you have jacket potatoes there and soup there. We can see that sort of arrangement where children flow through and then flow out through the till area” (Support Staff Manager, Briarwood)

However, in Briarwood the plan to introduce a staggered lunchtime had met with opposition from teaching staff but there was determination that the plan would be pushed through, despite opposition.

“Well, right from day one we wanted a staggered lunch...our teaching staff, we had absolute outcry that we were doing a split lunch...but staff were told, this isn’t going to go away” (Support Staff Manager, Briarwood)

Underpinning the offsite policy in both Ashgrove and Briarwood were limitations associated with physical aspects of the built environment; the offsite policy in place was as a result of the school buildings being inadequate to accommodate pupils. In Castlebridge two large dining halls were sufficient to accommodate all of the pupils at lunchtime and in Daleview, the move to a new, purpose built school and the introduction of a staggered lunch hour had allowed the reversal of a previous offsite policy.

7.3.5. Policy Implementation; Context Variability

It has been noted that schools were selected to represent a range of levels of pupils registered for free school meals as well as a range in the level of uptake. Within these contexts, school policy, noted to have an impact on the uptake of free school meal was explored, this included the degree to which schools promote free school meal entitlement to parents and pupils, the payment method in place, noted to influence take up due to the protection of anonymity, catering systems and staff perceptions of the food served and offsite policy.

The four schools within the sample demonstrated different approaches to the promotion of free school meal entitlement within two of the schools in the sample (Castlebridge and Daleview) demonstrating an active role in the promotion of free school meal entitlement to families. Staff at Ashgrove and Briarwood demonstrated less commitment to the promotion of free school meal entitlement and this was reflected in the approach of the administrative staff within these schools.

In terms of payment methods, three of the schools within the sample use the card system recommended in policy documents; in these schools staff note the value of the card system in terms of protecting the identity of free school meal pupils as well as preventing bullying. Briarwood maintained a payment system which was cash for paying pupils and tickets for free school meal pupils. The cash system in place seemed to be linked the low level of free school meal entitlement within the pupil population, at only 3%, however pressure from a number of sources had resulted in plans to change to a card system.

Also considered was catering provision within the schools, in all of the schools catering was provided by a private catering company although in two schools, Ashgrove and Castlebridge the contract was managed by the Local Authority while in Briarwood and Daleview the school had a direct contract with the catering company. Despite these differences, the menus across the

schools adhered to the Appetite for Life guidance enforced by the Local Authority and as a result, the food served within the schools was very similar.

Finally to be considered was offsite policy, both Ashgrove and Briarwood had an offsite policy in which all pupils in year 9 and above were allowed to leave the school site at lunchtime compared with Castlebridge and Daleview where all pupils (except sixth form) were expected to remain on site at lunchtime.

7.4. Chapter Summary

Implementation is defined as a 'specified set of activities designed to put into practice an activity or program of known dimensions' (Fixsen 2005 cited in Forman et al. 2009b:27) and it is within the process of implementation that policy will take shape, in a relationship that is reciprocal, 'policy is made as it is being administered and administered as it is being made' (Anderson 1975 cited in Hill and Hupe 2002:7). Key within a socio ecological framework is the concept of the organisation as a vehicle for the implementation of health promoting interventions. Since few health promotion programmes are free standing, policy implementation analysis will often focus on interaction between the policy and the setting.

This chapter begins with a focus on the national policy context in Wales which is one in which free school meal policy remains means tested. This will have implications for implementation in terms of the promotion of free school meal entitlement, and ensuring the anonymity of free school meal pupils. Other factors at the policy level noted to influence free school meal uptake are broader issues associated with the school food environment and the food that is served.

Schools are nested within a Local Authority and it is at the local authority level that policies are operationalised. Decisions made at the local authority level encompass broader issues associated with the implementation of the Appetite for Life guidance as well as catering provision across the schools. In terms of operationalising free school meal policy, Local Authority staff

have responsibility for registering families for free school meals and notifying schools of pupils with entitlement, also setting the free school meal allowance.

While these macro level policies and processes have significant similarities, it is in the school setting that variation in policy implementation is most apparent. This chapter has explored the process by which free school meal policy is implemented at the school level. The implementation of four key aspects of policy, noted to influence the uptake of free school meal entitlement were considered; the promotion of free school meal entitlement, ensuring anonymity of free school meal pupils, implementing the minimum nutritional standards and offsite policy.

In terms of the promotion of free school meal policy, the evidence indicates that this is driven by school staff responding to the wider political context, representing an unintended consequence of pupil deprivation grant payments and the introduction of a new school banding system. A difference in attitudes between school staff in the first two schools where data was collected (Ashgrove and Briarwood) compared to the second two schools (Castlebridge and Daleview) was apparent; possibly as a result of the fact that the introduction of the new banding system between two periods of data collection.

It was apparent that the degree to which free school meal entitlement was promoted at the school level was driven by the attitudes of senior school staff and these attitudes were reflected in the actions of administrative staff in terms of the level of home school contact with parents in respect of free school meal entitlement. While levels of contact were noted to be good in Castlebridge and Daleview, in Ashgrove and Briarwood, staff noted that there was little attempt to promote free school meals within these schools.

A second key policy noted to impact on the uptake of free school meal entitlement are payment systems, essential to protect the anonymity of free school meals pupils. Where a cash system remained in Briarwood, the

overall school level of free school meal entitlement was very low and it appeared that as a result, anonymity was not considered a priority compared to other schools where the larger proportion of free school meal pupils would have made administering the ticket system unworkable.

Understanding the broader policy environment in which free school meal policy operates requires consideration of policies which will impact on the school environment in which free school meals are served. Specifically, this chapter explores two related policy areas which have been shown to impact on the uptake of free school meals. First, the Appetite for Life guidelines, introduced by the Welsh Government and operationalised by the Local Authority and consequently in place in each of the schools. Secondly, offsite policy, determined at the school level but which is acknowledged to have significant implications for the uptake of school meals, both paid for and free (Welsh Assembly Government 2010).

In terms of the consideration of the impact of the Appetite for Life guidance, differing staff priorities were apparent. While teaching staff felt that the improved menus were overwhelmingly positive, for catering staff, concerns over falling levels of popularity of school food and the impact that this had on the uptake of meals dominated their narratives. Despite concerns over the new menus, the evidence indicates that catering staff felt that they had little autonomy in relation to making changes to the food served, a lack of autonomy which possibly reflected the level of status held by catering staff .

The introduction of the Appetite for Life menus also reveals an inherent contradiction in the role of the school food service, for many years run as a business which was consumer led. It is only recently that school food provision has once again been conceptualised as a means to encourage and promote healthy dietary choice and the changing school food provision associated with this shift has had a direct impact on the uptake of school food and consequently, the viability of school meal provision.

Another locally determined policy which has been proven to impact on the uptake of school food is the ability of pupils to leave the school site at lunchtime and access food from other providers. The evidence indicates that physical aspects of the school determine this policy although the data revealed that there was some potential for school staff to adapt local conditions in an attempt to overcome these physical constraints.

This chapter has identified the range of factors which influence the way that free school meal policy is implemented within the school setting. Understanding of the variability of context is essential to the understanding of the variability of policy outcomes, since the execution and delivery of policy has been found to be a central determinant (Ryan 1995). To understand the variability of policy outcomes, it is necessary to understand the socially contingent nature of human action and the particular confluences of factors that characterise different categories of settings (Green et al. 2000). The next chapter will explore the link between context and behaviour, emphasising the role that structure plays in constructing choices for people as well as imposing constraint upon their practices (Frohlich et al. 2001; Frohlich et al. 2002).

8. Chapter 8: The School Food Environment; the Influence of Context

Research on adolescent eating practices has shown that they are deeply embedded in the contexts of home and school as well as relationships with parents and peers (Delormier et al. 2009). This aim of this chapter is to provide a broader understanding of the environment in which decisions about free school meal entitlement are made. By exploring the school food environment, this chapter places pupils' school food practices within the social and cultural context within which they occur.

Underpinned by a collective lifestyle approach, the link between context and behaviour is acknowledged, in recognition of the role that structure plays in constructing choices for people as well as imposing constraint on their practices (Frohlich et al. 2002). Within this, dimensions of the social context; power, consumption and social identity are considered as they contribute to the school food practices of secondary school pupils.

Drawing on visual and narrative data from focus groups made up of pupils from the four secondary schools, this chapter explores the way that pupils perceive and negotiate the school food environment with the aim of identifying the policy and environmental factors which influence these relations and assessing how influences and outcomes will differ according to context.

This chapter begins by exploring pupils' perceptions of the school food environment, highlighting key issues and themes which emerge from the visual data. Underpinned by a socio ecological framework, these factors encompass issues at the level of national and local policy as well as the school environment. Further analysis explores the context of the built environment, school meal processes and food and drink availability, taking into account recent changes in provision at the national and local level. This

chapter then assesses the impact of consumption and social identity in defining pupils' school food choices, taking into account the increasing autonomy associated with adolescence and the importance of consumption to issues of identity. Finally, using concepts of agency and resistance, this chapter examines the interaction of structure and agency within the school food environment and the school food practices which result.

8.1. The School Food Environment

This research uses a case study methodology which facilitates an in-depth analysis of data from pupils in four secondary schools in Wales. The schools were selected using *a priori* theoretical framing to represent a range of factors which may influence the school food environment; these include catering provision, organisation of the school lunchtime and offsite policy (Table 9).

In previous research, the dining room emerged as a significant factor in shaping pupils' experiences and attitudes towards school dining and pupils' accounts suggest that lunchtime organisation, frequently rushed, had a negative impact on the dining experience (Sahota et al. 2013). Queues were found to be a key issue and rated as one of the most important pertaining to school meals (Storey and Chamberlain 2001; Morrison and Clarke 2006; Farthing 2012; Welsh Government 2013). Additionally, pupils were found to be reluctant to spend time socialising within the school, due to noise, light and the institutional feel (Sahota et al. 2013).

Through the generation of participatory and visual data, this research aims to explore the way that pupils perceive the school food environment across the four schools, identifying influential factors which may impact on school food practices. The value of using participatory techniques in research with children and young people has been noted and such techniques provide an appropriate lens through which to investigate such issues, since they require

an investigation into the meanings that individuals attribute to everyday objects and routines (Packard 2008).

Drawings are increasingly being used as a means of researching children's experiences and such visual methods provide a new way to tap into sources which may otherwise be unexplored. Further, ceding power to research participants in this way, will generate new forms of knowledge (Veale 2005; Packard 2008). Additionally, using more than one method to look at an object provides a more comprehensive knowledge of the object since all methods have specificity in terms of the type of data that they yield and triangulation extends understanding and adds breadth to analysis by revealing multiple aspects of a single empirical reality (Miller 1997; Richie and Lewis 2003; Bryman 2004).

Pupils were asked to provide either a list of likes or dislikes of the school food environment or a list or picture representation of 'perfect school meals' or menus. Using a thematic analysis (Richie and Spencer 1994), emergent themes identified within the visual data formed the basis of focus group discussion. These themes developed from recurrence or patterning of particular views or experiences and included food provision, in terms of price, quality and availability; the canteen, specifically decor, cleanliness and seating; queues and time allowed and the importance of using the lunchtime as an opportunity to socialise.

The introduction of Appetite for Life guidance across the Local Authority meant that issues associated with food availability were similar across the focus groups. Other factors which were general to the focus groups were issues associated with the institutional nature of school dining, and encompassed queues, mess and the noisy and busy nature of the school food environment. Factors which were more localised included the dining hall itself, in terms of the size and capacity and school policy relating to the lunchtime environment, including the number of lunch sittings and whether pupils were allowed offsite at lunchtime.

8.1.1. Ashgrove High School

In Ashgrove, school staff had noted the limited capacity of the dining halls and these concerns were reflected within the focus groups, particularly in relation to lack of seating. The fact that the canteen was newly decorated and 'brightly coloured' was also noted as were issues such as queues and mess. Ashgrove had an offsite policy in place; however this was restricted to pupils in Year 9 and above.



Figure 6: Perceptions of the School Food Environment (Pupil, Ashgrove) (01)

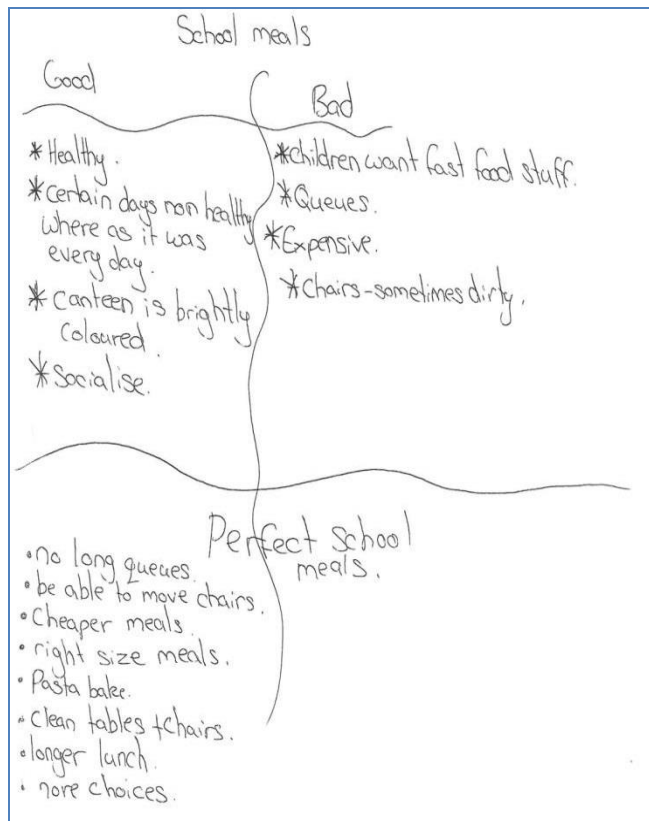


Figure 7: Perceptions of the School Food Environment (Pupil, Ashgrove) (02)

8.1.2. Briarwood High School

In Briarwood, issues associated with capacity in the dining hall, again noted by school staff as insufficient were raised within the visual data in terms of lack of seating. Other issues raised were the cost of food and food quality. However a salad bar provision was noted positively and the decor in the canteen was also commented on positively.

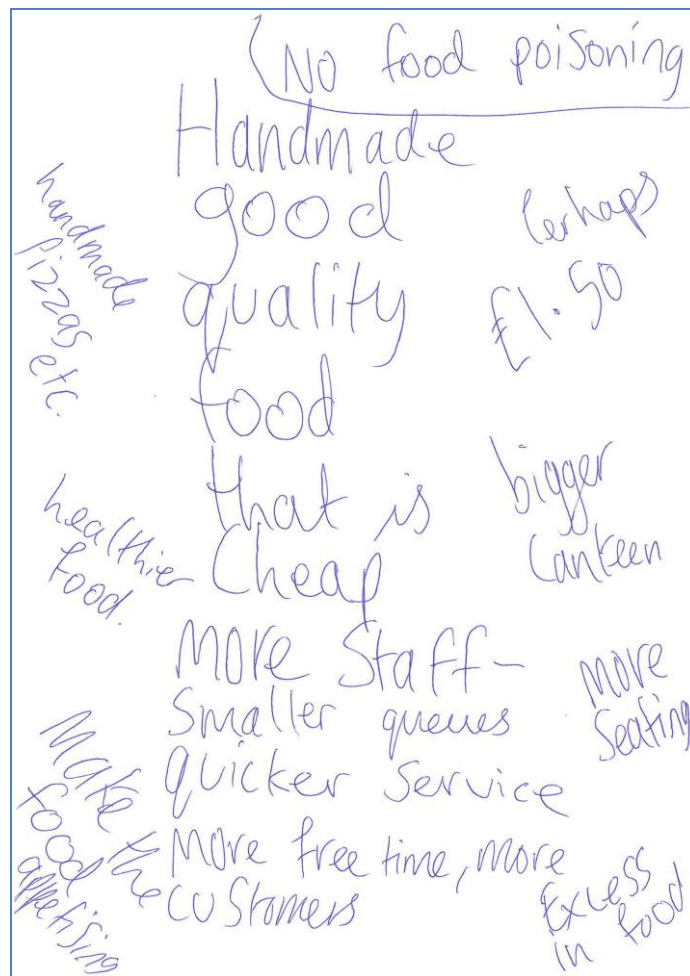


Figure 8: Perceptions of the School Food Environment (Pupil, Briarwood) (01)

Like about school meals:

- There's quite a lot to choose from.
- The salad bar.
- The canteen looks nice.

Dislikes about school food:

- Small portions
- Not much to choose if your a vegetarian
- No where to sit
- Really long queues
- meals are quite boring.
- Un-tidy.
- Very greasy.

Figure 9: Perceptions of the School Food Environment (Pupil, Briarwood) (02)

8.1.3. Castlebridge High School

In Castlebridge, school staff noted that two large dining halls mean that there is sufficient room for all pupils to stay onsite at lunchtime. This is reflected in the visual data in which pupils note the potential to socialise at lunchtime but also that they are constrained in terms of where they can eat their food since they are not allowed to take food outside.

Like	Dislike
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• we get to sit where we want inside the canteen.• We get to be with our friends.• we are aloud to sit in the hall but not outside.• they do a variety of foods.• we have two food halls.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• we are not aloud to leave the canteen or hall with our food.• The @ues are too long we usually have to @ wait ages and by the time we get there everything good is gone.• they don't sell anything we like e.g. Burger, fries, pizza or Junk.• Price too high.

Figure 10: Perceptions of the School Food Environment (Pupil, Castlebridge) (01)

Like	Don't Like
<p>the food that is served we do get food we like. The quality of certain food menus.</p>	<p>the long queues people pushing into the queues lack of food most of us like lack of seating area not enough food let on in the sitting ^{area} too much food that more seats did not facilitate area how crowded the halls get the way they waiting for the queues not enough drinks not enough places to sit up after bell bells being old</p>

Figure 11: Perceptions of the School Food Environment (Pupil, Castlebridge) (02)

8.1.4. Daleview High School

In Daleview, the visual data related mainly to the food that was served in the canteen and issues associated with the dining hall were represented less. Daleview was newly built and this meant that pupils had less issues associated with the dining hall environment. Also the lunch time was staggered and this may have resulted in a lunchtime which was less busy.

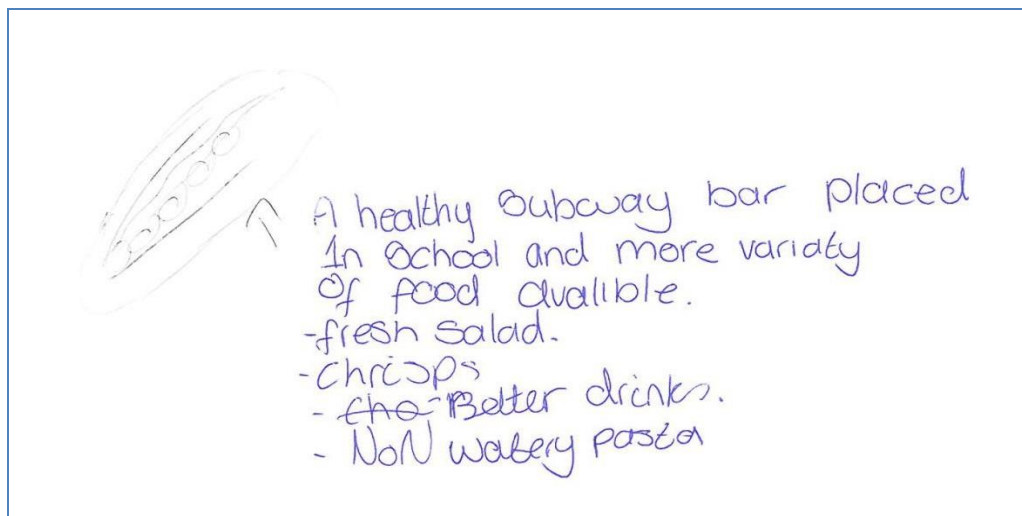


Figure 12: Perceptions of the School Food Environment (Pupil, Daleview) (01)

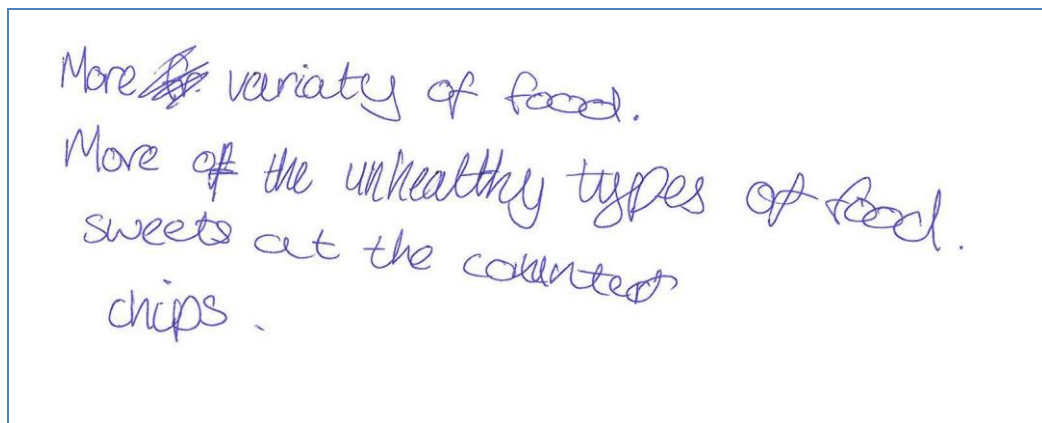


Figure 13: Perceptions of the School Food Environment (Pupil, Daleview) (02)

In terms of the school food environment, initiatives at the national and local level will result in a similar context, however it is also necessary to consider the way that local, contextual and spatial factors contribute to the way that these policy initiatives are experienced at the school level (Pike and Colquhoun 2009; Metcalfe et al. 2011). Within the focus groups, the factors which were highlighted within the visual and narrative data include, the built environment; the temporal and social processes of school dining and food and drink availability and these will be explored in the following sections.

8.2. The Built Environment

The narratives of school staff outlined in Chapter 6 reveal concerns associated with the built environment in some of the schools, specifically, the limited capacity of dining halls, noted in both Ashgrove and Briarwood. The inability to accommodate all of the pupils in the school within one lunchtime sitting results in the implementation of an offsite policy in these schools. The two large dining halls in Castlebridge allowed all pupils to have lunch onsite and in Daleview, a new school building and a staggered lunch hour ensured that all pupils could be accommodated on site. The built environment featured significantly in both the picture data and in the narratives of pupils; key were issues of capacity and seating.



Figure 14: Dining Hall - Ashgrove High School (01)



Figure 15: Dining Hall - Ashgrove High School (02)



Figure 16: Dining Hall - Briarwood High School (01)



Figure 17: Dining Hall - Briarwood High School (02)



Figure 18: Dining Hall - Castlebridge High School (01)



Figure 19: Dining Hall - Castlebridge High School (02)



Figure 20: Dining Hall - Daleview High School (01)

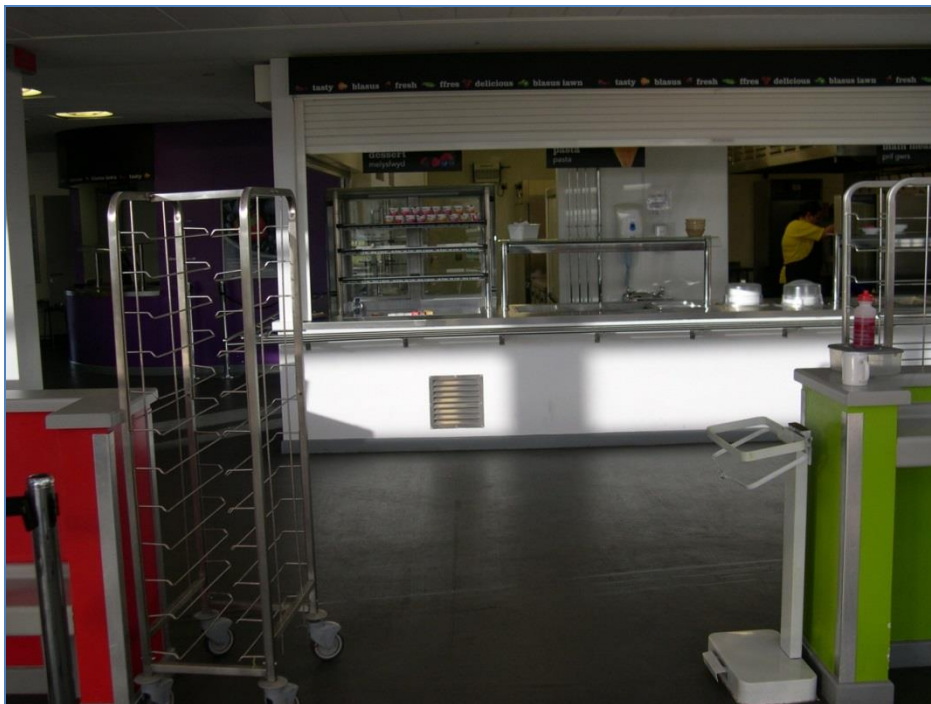


Figure 21: Dining Hall - Daleview High School (02)

Research indicates that for pupils, eating is a process which is associated more with the home environment rather than a school environment and as a result, the institutional nature of school dining is unpopular (Daniel and Gustafsson 2010; Sahota et al. 2013). In each of the four schools in the sample, the dining halls reflected the institutional nature of school dining and the narrative data reflects the dissatisfaction that pupils feel in terms of the environment. In Castlebridge, pupils note that the dining hall could be improved (Figure 18 &19).

“The painting of the hall, it needs to be redone, Hall 1 has got this food painting on the back, it’s really old and really dirty” (Y8/10 Pupil, Castlebridge)

“What would you have if you could choose anything you liked in your canteen?”(SA)

“Colourful” (Y8/10 Pupil, Castlebridge)

“Multi colourful” (Y8/10 Pupil, Castlebridge)

“Colourful like pop art” (Y8/10 Pupil, Castlebridge)

“Anything else?” (SA)

“New lights” (Y8/10 Pupil, Castlebridge)

“Yeah, the old ones are really old” (Y8/10 Pupil, Castlebridge)

In Ashgrove, the dining hall had been redecorated with the input of the SNAG Group (made up of a group of girls in year 10). This group had responsibility for working with school staff to promote healthy eating within the school and had recently been responsible for decision making in terms of changing the décor in the school canteen following surveys of the wider school population. However, despite the input of the student population, the décor of the dining hall in Ashgrove remained unpopular with pupils (Figure 14 &15).

“They’ve just painted the canteens as well” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

“Have they, is that good or bad?” (SA)

“Bad” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

“They’ve just got different colours, it used to be nice blues and greens but now it’s like red and black” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

Even the SNAG group, responsible for the new colour scheme, acknowledge that the colour that they had chosen is unpopular.

“And the colours in the canteen, we picked red and it’s turned out pink and we’ve had so many complaints” (SNAG Pupil, Ashgrove)

“It’s horrible, but it’s better than it was before” (SNAG Pupil, Ashgrove)

“It’s a minging colour but we picked it, how can we dis it? (SNAG Pupil, Ashgrove)

In Briarwood, pupils’ views on the dining hall decor (Figures 16 &17) were mixed.

“I said the canteen looks nice” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

“Oh, you like the canteen?”(SA)

“I do” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

“I don’t” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

“It’s too dull” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

“It needs painting, cos it’s just yellow” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

“It’s too dull, it’s really dark inside” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

Daleview was the only school where the comments about the dining hall were overwhelmingly positive (Figure 20 & 21), the school was newly built and the light surroundings of the dining hall were appreciated by the pupils, especially in comparison to the old school.

“What about the canteen itself?”(SA)

“It’s nice, it’s spacious” (School Council Pupil, Daleview)

“What about compared to your old school?” (SA)

“Much better” (School Council Pupil, Daleview)

A key factor colouring the perceptions of pupils and their feelings towards the dining hall was the extent to which the dining hall allowed them to sit together in friendship groups, reflecting the importance that lunchtime provides for socialising. The ability to sit with friends is a key aspect of the narratives of focus group pupils, reflecting literature which notes that for pupils, lunchtime represents a space where they can relax, be with their friends and have a break from the normal routine (Daniel and Gustafsson 2010).

“You can at least meet up with your friends and have a nice chat and socialise” (SNAG Group Pupil, Ashgrove)

Key within this was seating, and pupils dislike it when seating does not allow for friendship groups to sit together, such as in Briarwood where seating had recently been changed from square tables to long tables (Figure 16 & 17).

“What do you think about the seating?” (SA)

“It’s cool” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

“It looks nice” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

“There’s not enough seats” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

“I prefer it when there are tables, you can sit with your friends instead of sitting by people on the long table” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

The dislike of seating was echoed in Ashgrove where seating was fixed (Figure 14 & 15) and pupils were not able to move seats to accommodate friendship groups.

“The seats, why can’t we move the seats?” (SNAG Pupil, Ashgrove)

“They’re all stuck together” (SNAG Pupil, Ashgrove)

“How could the chairs be improved?” (SA)

“If you could move them, if there’s five of us and there’s only a four-seater table, if you could move the chairs you could just pull one over” (SNAG Pupil, Ashgrove)

“Sometimes there’s like six of us and we’re sat on a four seater” (SNAG Pupil, Ashgrove)

In both Ashgrove and Briarwood, school staff note that capacity in the canteen was insufficient to accommodate all pupils, this is reflected in the data and pupils expressed a dislike of having to sit next to people they didn’t know.

“The canteen is packed; you don’t have nowhere to sit” (SNAG Pupil, Ashgrove)

“Yeah, sometimes you just go and sit with some randomer” (SNAG Pupil, Ashgrove)

“Whenever I used to have lunch in the canteen I wouldn’t be able to get a seat, I’d have to go and wait until someone else had moved or sit with someone I didn’t know” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

Where the dining hall was sufficient to accommodate all pupils, as in Castlebridge, pupils note the ability to sit with friends as a positive and it was mentioned repeatedly in the focus group.

“The thing I like (about the dining hall) is that we get to sit where we want inside it and we get to be with our friends” (Year 8/10 Pupil, Castlebridge)

“The seating, cos you can sit by your friends” (Year 8/10 Pupil, Castlebridge)

“We get to sit with our friends” (Year 8/10 Pupil, Castlebridge)

Daleview was a newly built school, opened only a couple of years previously, school staff made the decision on the reopening of the school to implement an onsite policy and this was made possible by splitting the lunchtime into two sittings, however, seating was still an issue.

“Can you sit with your friends?”(SA)

“You can, but there’s people standing up” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

“Because there’s not enough seats?” (SA)

“And then they moan when we stand up then” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

“So, often it’s full and you can’t sit down?” (SA)

“Yeah” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

In terms of the built environment, similar issues were raised across the four schools and these related to pupils’ perceptions of the lunchtime as an opportunity to socialise. The processes within the dining hall, in terms of the operation of the school lunch service were also mentioned in both the visual and narrative data as pupils expressed a dislike of the way that the school meal service was run.

8.3. The Temporal and Social Processes of School Dining

School staff noted the difficulty of feeding a large number of pupils in a short space of time and in previous research, the busy and noisy nature of the school food environment was found to be unpopular with pupils (Sahota 2009; Sahota et al. 2013). These findings are confirmed within the focus groups in which the issue of cleanliness and queues are highlighted as key issues in terms of school food provision.

“There are crumbs everywhere” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

“There always seems to be a mess on the floor” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

Similar issues were found in other schools

“People leave like minging food, there’s crumbs” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

“There should be more bins” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

In Daleview, the staggered lunch meant that older pupils followed the younger pupils’ lunchtime and this caused issues.

“Sometimes the younger ones leave mess” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

“What do you mean by that? Is there rubbish or food?” (SA)

“Yeah, food rubbish” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

“All the tables are messy” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

Briarwood only had one sitting for lunch and the noise and busy nature of school food provision was noted within the focus group.

“It’s too loud” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

“There’s loads of pushing” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

*“There’s always someone drops their plate and everyone goes wooahh!”
(Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)*

In Briarwood, pupils in the focus group agree that due to the need to queue for lunch, the time allowed is not sufficient.

“Are you given enough time do you think, for your dinner?” (SA)

“No” (All; Year 8, Briarwood)

“Cos with the queues” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

“The queues are like, all the way out the door” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

“Like before, was I with you? We were coming up to like 50 minutes; we wasted all our lunch just queuing up” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

In Daleview, the staggered lunch necessitated a shorter lunchtime (35 minutes), which was less popular with pupils.

“How long would you have ideally?” (SA)

“An hour” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

“What did you have in the old school?” (SA)

“We had an hour” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

“It was better” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

Across the four schools, despite variation at the local level, the visual and narrative data highlight similar issues in terms of the school food environment. Across many aspects of school food provision, there is discord in terms of what lunchtime represents to pupils and the reality of institutional practices and policy processes. As a result of the institutional nature of the school dining environment, it fails to meet pupils’ expectations and preferences. Key within this is the provision of food and drinks.

8.4. Food and Drink Availability

Within the Local Authority, the introduction of new catering contracts coincided with a strengthening of the commitment to Appetite for Life and for pupils this has resulted in a significant change in the food served across the four schools. As a result, a key element of the focus group discussion is the choice and availability of food in the canteen, with most discussion relating to recent changes which result from the introduction of Appetite for Life. A key point noted by pupils is the removal of high fat, high sugar foods from the school food environment, in adherence with the new guidelines.

“Did they ban chocolate?” (SNAG Pupil, Ashgrove)

“Yeah” (SNAG Pupil, Ashgrove)

“And crisps and fizzy drinks” (SNAG Pupil, Ashgrove)

In addition to the banning of unhealthy foods and snacks, the Appetite for Life guidance has resulted in a change to the main meals served. Catering

staff noted that the new meals, produced within stringent guidelines are less popular, as is the reduction of serving chips to once a week. The unpopularity of these changes is reflected in the narratives of pupils across the four schools.

“They used to sell pots of chips and now they don’t sell them anymore” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

“They don’t even do proper sausages any more, they only do quorn sausages” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

Although the changes to the menus were introduced at the national level with the introduction of Appetite for Life guidance, these were strengthened with the introduction of new catering contracts by the Local Authority. For pupils, while they were unaware of the broader changes, the new caterers and changing food provision was linked.

“We don’t have burgers or anything now; we did before the new caterers came in” (School Council Pupil, Daleview)

It was also noted that in line with new methods of catering specified in the Appetite for Life guidance, the food was being made to new recipes.

“They have these new sausage rolls and they’re hanging” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

“The old ones were like all soggy and lush; the new ones are really dry” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

In addition to the removal of unhealthy foods and a reduction in the serving of fast foods, pupils felt that the new menus lacked variety and the lack of options was noted.

“It’s like the same every week, stupid stuff, vegetable pie and stuff” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

“There’s nothing exciting, it’s just the same thing every day” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

In addition, the food that was on offer was not always popular with pupils.

“The baguettes are always hard, not everyone can eat the hard bread so I think they should have more variety of baguettes you can have. If you’ve got braces you can’t bite in to hard rolls so you can’t have them” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

“Do they only do baguettes or do they do sandwiches or rolls?” (SA)

“Rolls” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

“Rolls as well, are the rolls hard as well?” (SA)

“Yeah, they are pretty hard; it’s like chewing on a brick!” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

The lack of options noted by pupils across the schools was exacerbated by the fact that towards the end of the lunchtime service food ran out, especially popular items.

“Everything runs out fast” (SNAG Pupil, Ashgrove)

“If you get there a bit later, what’s left?” (SA)

“It’s just leftovers like salads, stuff people don’t want” (SNAG Pupil, Ashgrove)

“The salad nobody wants to touch” (SNAG Pupil, Ashgrove)

“Jacket potatoes, they’re gone” (SNAG Pupil, Ashgrove)

Additionally, a lack of options was noted in other schools, particularly in relation to vegetarians.

“There are not enough options for vegetarians, there’s just potato” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

In addition to reduced choice and an increase in price, a common theme in the focus group discussion is the quality of the food in the canteen, which was considered poor.

*“Oh yeah, I had a sausage roll and I went home and had food poisoning”
(Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)*

*“I remember (boy) had to go home ill, he ate this burnt thing” (Year 8 Pupil,
Briarwood)*

“A sausage roll” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

*“Sometimes their food is overcooked or undercooked, it’s never cooked
good” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)*

These views were reflected in another school, evoking a passionate response from pupils.

*“The baguettes are normally hard, they say it’s fresh but it’s not really, they’re
proper hard” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)*

*“And the salads are squishy and stuff, it’s not fresh” (Year 10 Pupil,
Daleview)*

“The chicken mayo has got bones in it” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

“The cheese taste, like plastic” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

“Does it? It’s not very nice?” (SA)

“It’s disgusting!” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

While pupils note that the food provision has changed in terms of the removal of unhealthy food and changing methods of cooking, they also note that these changes have occurred at the same time as prices within the canteen had increased.

8.4.1. Price

The literature indicates that at the individual level, pricing has a strong effect on food choices and previous research indicates that cost is a key consideration in the take up of school food (The Children's Society 2001; French 2003). The cost of food in the canteen was one of the most significant issues raised by pupils from across the four schools and pupils associate an increase in price with the change in caterers and the change in menus.

"It's really expensive" (School Council Pupil, Daleview)

"Do you think it's more expensive since you've changed the caterers?" (SA)

"Yeah" (School Council Pupil, Daleview)

"Yeah I think so" (School Council Pupil, Daleview)

"Yeah" (School Council Pupil, Daleview)

As a result, food items were considered to be expensive.

"Prices are expensive" (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

"It's a pound for a mini pasta pot" (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

"The salad's a quid!" (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

"It's really expensive" (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

"It is, it's really, really expensive" (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

The price of food was raised repeatedly in focus groups, however, in one focus group there was some debate about price, one pupil who felt that the canteen was not too expensive was contradicted by other focus group members, and the overwhelming consensus was that the prices were too high.

“Some of the food is quite nice, sometimes it’s not too expensive, a sausage roll is 50p” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

“It’s not, its 75p” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

“It changes every week” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

“Its 75p and they’re that big” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

“It would be more expensive in the shop” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

These prices impacted on pupils’ choice, especially if, as was common, they had a set amount of money to spend

“The cost as well, of food and that, baguettes, a luxury baguette is £1.75 I think” (School Council Pupil, Daleview)

“If you have £2 dinner money and it’s £1.75 you’re not gonna have enough for anything else” (School Council Pupil, Daleview)

“The prices on some of the food are a bit too high, if people didn’t have that much dinner money they couldn’t get what they wanted” (School Council Pupil, Daleview)

The increase in price was associated with a fall in the quality of the food provided under the new regime.

“It’s not even nice, the old foods were really nice, it was quite cheap but now it’s like really expensive” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

In addition to the perception that prices had increased, pupils note that they felt portion sizes had been reduced; portion size was an issue which was raised across the focus groups in all of the four schools, especially in terms of value for money.

“They’ve changed the size of pizza and kept the price, they used to be £1.10 and they were quite big, now they’re just half the size and the same price” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

Similar issues were raised in another school

“The prices are going up and the portions are going like really, really, really small” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

In terms of drinks provided in the dining hall, the removal of soft drinks as a result of Appetite for Life was unpopular with pupils, as were the alternatives provided.

“They have fake pop but, it’s like, don’t go there” (Year 10 Pupil, Ashgrove)

“It’s horrible” (Year 10 Pupil, Ashgrove)

*“Taste one, they’re absolutely horrible, I had the apple one, I spat it out”
(Year 10 Pupil, Ashgrove)*

A lack of availability of water in the canteen was highlighted, pupils noted that the bottled water sold in the canteen was expensive but other water provided was unpopular.

“Water should be free shouldn’t it...from the tap?” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

“Are there no taps?” (SA)

“Yeah, they have a jug, but it tastes minging, like chlorine” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

The price of drinks in the canteen was considered too high, especially in comparison to other sources.

“Some of the stuff in there is too dear, like you can get a drink, the drinks in there you can get over the garage about 30p and they’re about 70p in here, 80p” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

The concerns of pupils in relation to the dining environment, the processes within the school meals service and the food provided were found to be consistent across the four schools, transcending local variation in the school context. This indicates that the school food environment, in terms of the

institutional nature of dining and the strict nutritional guidance in place does not comply with the expectation and preferences of pupils, for whom issues of consumption are strongly linked with social identity.

8.5. Food Preference in Adolescence; Consumption and Identity

It has been noted that young people use consumption to create, foster and develop identity (Piacentini and Mailer 2004; Roper and La Niece 2009) and food practices are a vital aspect of managing the identities of young people. Research into the food preferences of adolescents, including within the school food environment, indicate a preference for fast foods and unhealthy snacks (Kortzinger et al. 1994; Ludvigsen and Sharma 2004; Nelson et al. 2004; Cooke and Wardle 2005; Warren et al. 2008). Additionally, the literature notes that while healthy eating messages are part of life at school, such messages do not comply with preferences; also that engaging in healthy eating symbolises something undesirable and exposes young people to uncomfortable social risk (Share 2008; Stead et al. 2011).

These trends are reflected in the visual data provided by focus group pupils within which, burger, chips, pizza, soft drinks and chocolate dominate. The majority of drawings which denote favourite foods included these foods and the majority of meals outlined in the pupils' drawings reflect a preference for fast food and soft drinks. Prominent items include pizza, burger, chicken nuggets, meatballs and chips as main meals with pasta also a popular choice.

In the discussion, pupils noted the limited range of drinks on offer and in the visual data the drinks represented included apple and orange juice, orange squash, water and diet lemonade as well as brands such as Pepsi, Yazoo and Fanta. In terms of high sugar items, not all the drawings included dessert although chocolate, chocolate chip brownies and jelly were included in some. The drawings revealed a preference for salad while vegetables do

not appear on any drawing and in terms of fruit, pupils include apple, banana and peach within their drawings.

8.5.1. Ashgrove High School



Figure 22: Food Preferences (Pupil, Ashgrove High School) (01)



Figure 23: Food Preferences (Pupil, Ashgrove High School) (02)

8.5.2. Briarwood High School

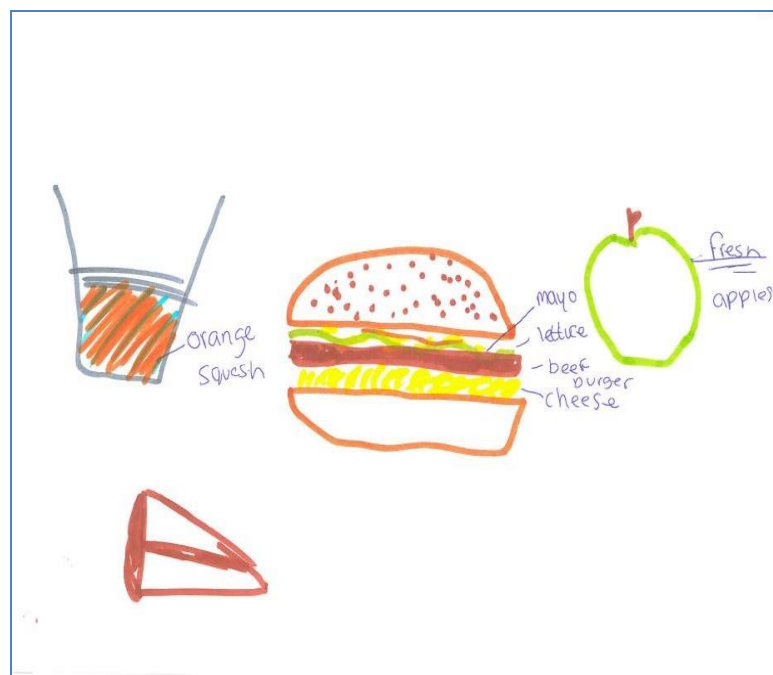


Figure 24: Food Preferences (Pupil, Briarwood High School) (01)

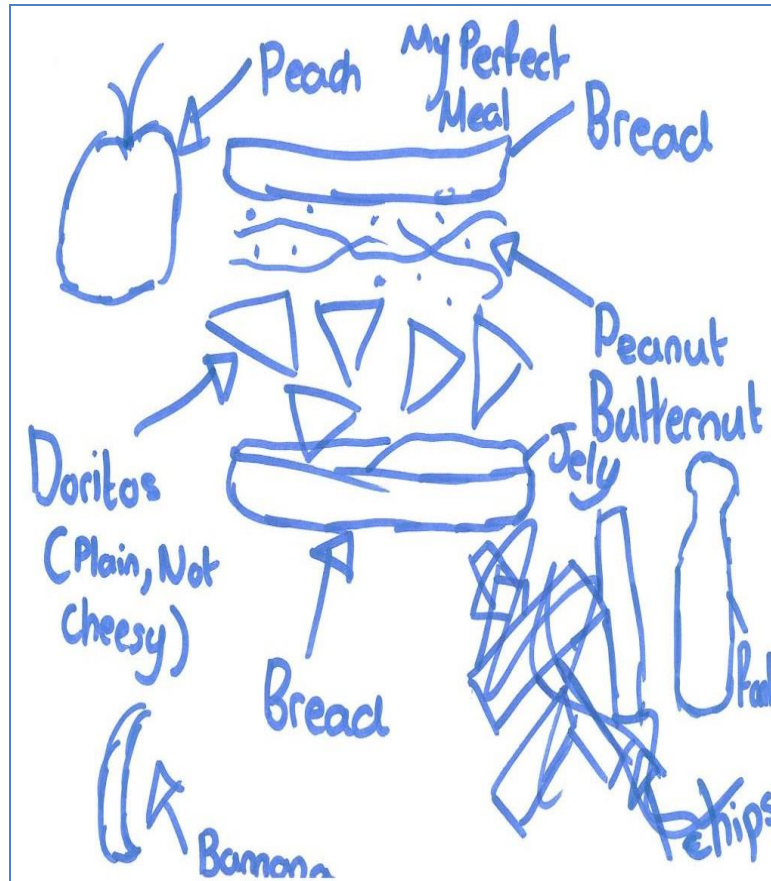


Figure 25: Food Preferences (Pupil, Briarwood High School) (02)

8.5.3. Castlebridge High School

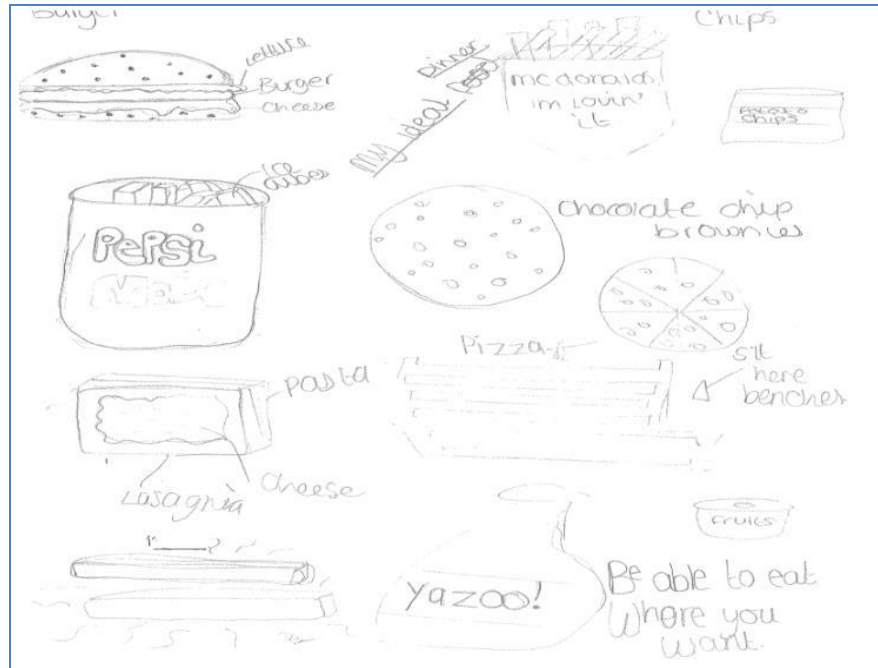


Figure 26: Food Preferences (Pupil, Castlebridge High School) (01)

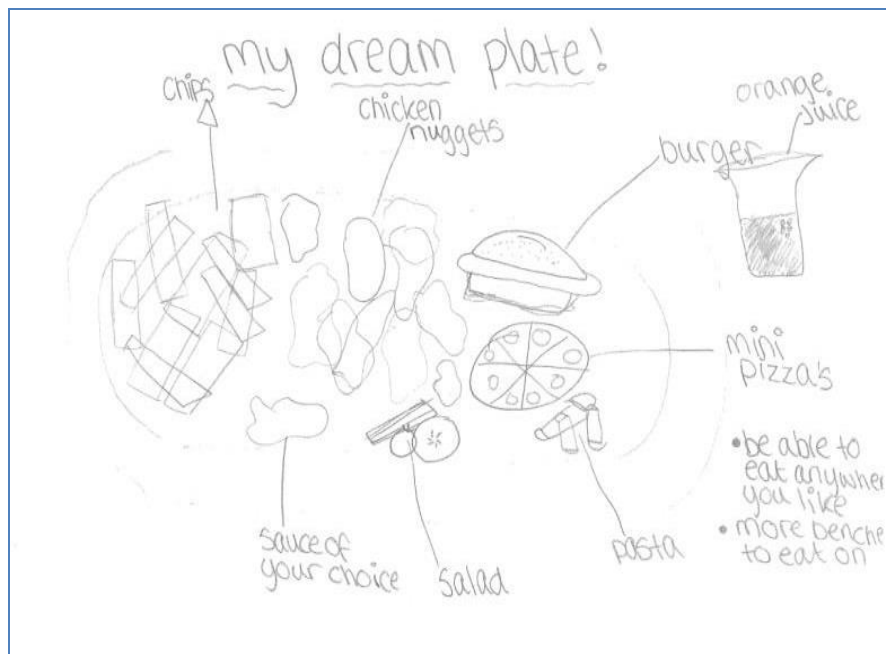


Figure 27 : Food Preferences (Pupil, Castlebridge High School) (02)

8.5.4. Daleview High School

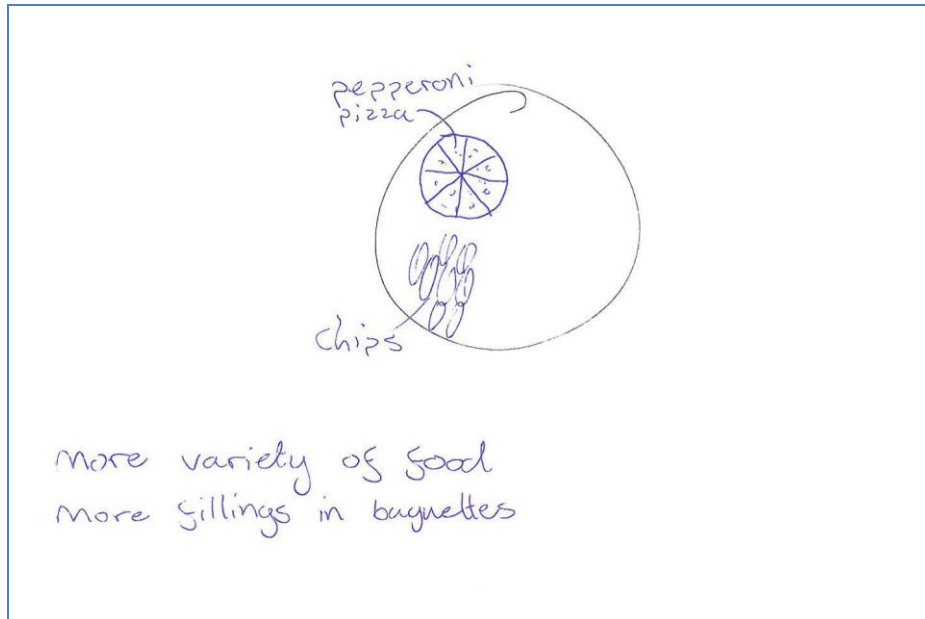


Figure 28: Food Preferences (Pupil, Daleview High School)

The food preferences of pupils across the four schools have significant similarities, indicating that consumption preferences will be defined by peer group norms and values and these supersede local variation. In the narrative data, while the introduction of healthy food is mentioned as a positive by one or two pupils, the overwhelming response is negative as pupils feel that there should be more balance between healthy and unhealthy food in school food provision.

“It’s good that they’ve brought more healthy food in but I think they’ve just got too much into it...now, you can’t get chocolate, it’s all like raisins and stuff and no one really likes that” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

“Yeah, there’s too much healthy stuff now” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

“It’s just overpowering” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

“There is such a thing as too healthy” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

In addition to a preference for unhealthy food, adolescent eating patterns are also characterised by snacking, especially as a means of differentiating meals eaten with peers from those eaten with family (Samuelson 2000; Contento et al. 2006; Kell 2008). This is reflected in the data which indicates that meal choices which resemble those provided for family meals, later in the day are not deemed suitable for lunchtime consumption.

“What have you drawn? What would you like to eat?” (SA)

“I’ve got some pasta and baguettes and jacket potatoes, a bit more light, like lunchy...(the meals) all look a bit too heavy... there’s loads of gravy, they all look a bit like something I’ve had for dinner instead” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

Instead pupils note that the preference is for portable, snack foods which can be easily moved and quickly eaten; there was a consensus within one focus group that these foods were preferred.

*“We never ever have a hot meal; we always have a baguette or something”
(School Council Pupil, Daleview)*

“What would your ideal meal consist of?” (SA)

“Hot baguette” (School Council Pupil, Daleview)

“Drink, baguette, perhaps a snack” (School Council Pupil, Daleview)

*“Half a baguette, a drink and a small cookie” (School Council Pupil,
Daleview)*

For adolescents, adhering to peer group values is essential for being accepted and in terms of school food practices the data indicates that generally, pupils note the unpopularity of hot meals, reinforced by the fact that few pupils will select them.

*“Hot meals are not very popular, more like cold food, like baguettes and stuff and people want more options on the baguettes and stuff” (School Council,
Daleview)*

“Why do you think hot meals are not very popular?” (SA)

“Maybe people don’t like the food that’s on offer or maybe they just don’t like sitting there with a plate of food when everyone else is eating something different” (School Council, Daleview)

“Do you think that puts people off? (SA)

“Yeah” (School Council, Daleview)

“Yeah” (School Council, Daleview)

The general rejection of the main meal, noted by catering staff and confirmed by pupils reflects a general consensus that to sit in the canteen and eat a meal with a knife and fork is not the preference for adolescents. The exception to this is where meals resemble high street provision, for example fish and chips, noted by catering staff as being a popular meal choice and echoed in the focus groups, especially when it represented value for money in the form of a meal deal.

“The meal deals are good though, £1.60 for fish, chips, peas” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

“Yeah, they’re good” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

In this research, school food provision does not meet expectations and preferences but pupils feel that they have little say in the food provided, especially in light of the changes that have been made to the menus.

“They’re trying to force healthiness onto us rather than letting us make our decisions” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

“Yeah, they did it without anyone knowing and they didn’t even ask for any of our opinions” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

“They should have done a survey or something” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

The lack of information and the lack of the opportunity to participate in decision making are perceived by pupils as being due to their status within the school, specifically their age.

“I think they think that we’re at this age...that we’re just stupid and we can’t really make up our minds but really we can really choose our own opinions and stuff, we’re not stupid” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

While school provides an environment in which healthy eating is promoted, this presents a contradiction for pupils since such an environment does not align with the consumption preferences of adolescents. Of interest is the way that pupils respond to the school food environment and the means by which they are able to exert agency through acts of resistance.

8.6. Exerting Agency; Negotiating the School Food Environment

For pupils within the school setting, the ability to negotiate is heavily dependent on the way that they are perceived by school staff and adult understandings of pupils and the school structures that maintain these understandings often leave pupils little scope for negotiation (Mayall 1994; Pike 2010). However, because lunchtime is a more nuanced and negotiated time and space than the rest of the school day, within the dining hall power relationships are continually renegotiated, redefined and contested (Valentine 2000; Pike 2008; Pike and Colquhoun 2009; Pike 2010; Metcalfe et al. 2011).

The complexity of relationships within the school environment, particularly in terms of pupils’ relations to school structures are conceptualised in a model of school ecology which identifies the concept of connectedness (Waters et al. 2009). Key in feeling connected is the provision of information and in this research-h it is evident from the focus group data that pupils’ perceptions are that that they are not kept informed, specifically, pupils felt they had not had any warning of the impending changes to menus.

“The food has got worse, it was good when we came here and then...they changed, there’s no chocolate, nothing there at all” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

“Do you know why that has happened?” (SA)

“No, it just disappeared overnight” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

In addition to lack of information about changing menus, pupils feel that in the day to day running of the canteen, they don’t have the information that they need to make informed choices. In part due to the fact that menus are not displayed prominently.

“Is the menu up in the dining hall?”(SA)

Only a little one” (School Council Pupil, Daleview)

Also, pupils found the four weekly system difficult to follow.

“I can’t read the menu cos it’s really confusing and I don’t know what week it’s on” (School Council Pupil, Daleview)

“Because it’s four weekly and you lose track?” (SA)

“Yeah” (School Council Pupil, Daleview)

Additionally in Briarwood, pupils note a lack of information when choosing options

“They used to do this pre-ordering thing, well they still do it now, but you don’t know what they are offering to put in your baguettes...yeah, you don’t know what is on offer” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

*“If they did do any salads or more healthy stuff we wouldn’t know about it”
(Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)*

“Why not?” (SA)

*“They wouldn’t show us, they wouldn’t tell us about what’s on offer today”
(Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)*

While pupils feel they are not given information to make informed choices, they also feel that they are not consulted. Two of the focus groups were made up of groups established by the school, the School Council in Daleview and the SNAG group in Ashgrove and for these pupils, the perception is that they are able to have some input into decisions made by the school.

“Do they listen do you think, to what you’re saying?” (SA)

“Yeah” (School Council, Daleview)

“Sometimes” (School Council, Daleview)

“Most of the time” (School Council, Daleview)

*“You see an impact sometimes and then other times, it don’t change”
(School Council Daleview)*

In Ashgrove, there is an active SNAG group which has been instrumental in the redecoration of the dining hall, and also a School Council. While school staff indicated that the level of participation by pupils was high, consensus in focus group discussion centred on the fact that they felt their views were not heard.

“We (The School Council) don’t have meetings often but we always say about the food, we say the bottom line is, we just need it back to the way it was” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

“Don’t you think that every time we put in a suggestion it gets worse cos they do the opposite?” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

“They don’t listen to us” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

“They’re not going to listen to us, they never do” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

“They didn’t even ask for any of our opinions” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

“They just need to have another look at it all, and they need to ask pupils about it and see what they think...” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

Where pupils felt that they could not make their voices heard through conventional channels, it was necessary to use other means to express their dissatisfaction with the new menus.

“We’re actually making a petition against it” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

“Against what?” (SA)

“The school canteen” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

Pupils felt that their ability to influence school food provision is limited and a lack of information and consultation exacerbated the feeling that they are unable to influence these processes. It was apparent that pupils resent their choices being controlled but despite the regimented nature of school food dining, there is still the potential for pupils to negotiate in order to exert agency (Gallagher 2008; Share 2008; Pike 2010).

8.7. Resistance; Collective Lifestyles and School Food Practices

Research shows that pupils react to the school food environment in a number of ways, showing their agency through attitudes of resistance which include complaining and the practice of non-purchasing. Also, if pupils no longer have access to preferred foods or if they could not eat lunch with friends, they would opt to leave school at lunchtime and purchase food elsewhere (Share 2008; Wills et al. 2008b; Daniel and Gustafsson 2010). These findings are reflected in this research, with a significant number of pupils in the focus groups choosing to opt out of school food provision, citing a range of reasons.

“So, can I just check, none of you actually have school dinners? You all have sandwiches?” (SA)

“Yeah” (All; Year 8, Briarwood)

“I used to have school dinners” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

“The queues are too long, you waste your lunchtime” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

“My mum won’t let me have school dinners any more cos she says it’s too expensive” (Year 8 Pupil, Briarwood)

For pupils opting out of school food provision, the alternative is to bring a packed lunch or to access food offsite, options which vary according to the school context. For pupils in Castlebridge and Daleview and those in Year 7 and 8 in Ashgrove and Briarwood, there is no option to go offsite, so for pupils opting out of school food provision, it is necessary to bring a packed lunch. There is general agreement that bringing a packed lunch allowed pupils to avoid school food provision while maintaining control over contents.

“Home food is better” (School Council Pupil, Daleview)

“Because you choose what you want to eat?” (SA)

“Yeah” (School Council Pupil, Daleview)

“Have chocolate bars and not cookies that don’t taste of chocolate” (School Council Pupil, Daleview)

At the policy level it is noted that the ability of pupils to go offsite is a key factor influencing the take up of school food (Welsh Assembly Government 2008, 2010). For pupils in the two schools which had an offsite policy (Ashgrove and Briarwood), the policy was popular, because it enabled them to access foods that, due to nutritional guidelines, they were no longer allowed to access in school.

“They don’t sell chocolate or anything” (Year 10 Pupil, Ashgrove)

“Are you missing that or do you just go down to the shops?” (SA)

“I just go down the shops and get a bar of chocolate” (Year 10 Pupil, Ashgrove)

In addition to being able to access foods no longer sold in schools, pupils consider offsite provision as being superior in terms of quality and price.

“They’re much cheaper than school, it’s like a pound” (Year 10 Pupil, Ashgrove)

“It tastes better as well I think” (Year 10 Pupil, Ashgrove)

These views were reflected in other schools with an offsite policy.

“The quality (of the canteen) doesn’t match up with the competition from outside” (Year 10 Pupil, Briarwood)

Additionally, prices charged within the canteen were compared unfavourably to other outlets which were considered cheaper and better value.

“Price” (Year 10 Pupil, Briarwood)

“What about it?” (SA)

“Too much, just get cheaper outside” (Year 10 Pupil, Briarwood)

“Can you give me an example?” (SA)

“The meals are like two pounds or whatever and outside they’re only like starting from 70p really” (Year 10 Pupil, Briarwood)

“What can you get for 70p outside?” (SA)

“Chips” (Year 10 Pupil, Briarwood)

In Daleview, the onsite policy had been in place a short time and pupils were able to remember when they had been allowed offsite.

*“Are you old enough to remember the days when you could go off site?”
(SA)*

“Yeah, that was the best” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

“I loved that, it was amazing” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

“Where did you use to go?” (SA)

“The chippy, that was amazing, or the garage” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

“What did the garage sell?” (SA)

“Just like chocolate, crisps, like everything” (Year 10 Pupil, Daleview)

In general there was a consensus that that, for pupils, there was a desire to opt out of school food provision where possible.

“If you compared the queue in the canteen from what it was before which was like, they used to have 200 students going in... every day; now they have just less than 100 cos nobody likes the food anymore” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

“It used to be really packed in each canteen but now it’s just like fifty people in there” (Year 8 Pupil, Ashgrove)

For pupils, the decision to opt out of school food provision was seen one which was shared across the school community.

“Nobody would want to go to the canteen if everybody was allowed off site, I don’t think” (Year 10 Pupil, Ashgrove)

The overwhelming response of pupils to the school food environment is to opt out of school food provision and the narratives of pupils demonstrate that there are multiple factors which influence this decision.

8.8. Chapter Summary

Despite the pressure placed on schools to address matters of food and health, there is comparatively little research evidence about young people's perspectives on these issues, especially as related specifically to the school setting (Share 2008). This chapter explores how secondary school pupils in Wales perceive and negotiate the school food environment and the resultant outcomes in terms of school food practices.

A collective lifestyles approach provides theoretical guidance for studying the social nature of eating by approaching school food practices as integrally linked to context (Delormier et al. 2009). This focus is in recognition that while eating does involve isolated choice, that choice is conditioned by the context in which it occurs, so by examining eating as social practice we can explore the social relations which connect people to the social world and which generate population eating patterns (Delormier et al. 2009).

The four schools under consideration were selected to represent a range of factors associated with school food provision, relating to the organisation of lunchtime provision and offsite policy. Within the four school contexts, factors across a range of socio ecological levels were considered, these included macro level policy factors associated with the introduction and implementation of nutritional standards; policy related to catering provision introduced at the local authority level; school level factors which included the built environment, the temporal and social processes of school dining and finally, individual level factors as pupils negotiate and exert agency within this environment.

At the macro level, while the four schools were selected to represent a range of school food contexts, initiatives at the level of national policy ensure that to a large extent, in terms of food availability there is consistency across the schools. The introduction of Wales wide Appetite for Life guidance has had an impact on the food served throughout the Local Authority and as such

provides a similar context in terms of the availability of food within the dining hall across the four schools. Similarly, despite initiatives relating to the introduction of private catering provision at the local authority level, the adherence to the Appetite for Life guidance and the limited opportunities for variation by catering staff resulted in food provision across the four schools which was consistent in terms of availability, quality and pricing.

The introduction of the Appetite for Life guidance at the national and local level represents the most significant change to school food provision in recent years. Overwhelmingly, pupils found the changing provision unwelcome as they expressed the view that the food provided failed to meet their preferences. This reflects other research which found that pupils strongly focused on issues of choice in relation to their school food practices and when attempts were made to limit or remove less healthy food items and introduce healthier snacks they strongly resented their choices were being controlled (Share 2008).

In respect of the school food environment, pupils across the four schools noted a range of factors which influenced their decision to use the school canteen. Issues of price, food choice, décor, mess, noise, queues and seating were raised and these issues were perceived similarly by pupils across the four schools. Key within these findings was the inherent tension between the institutional nature of the dining hall and the perception of pupils that lunchtime should be a space for them to pursue their own priorities. As a result, despite local variation, overwhelmingly, pupils' perceptions of school food provision were consistent across the schools, suggesting that the institutional nature of school food provision will supersede local organisation.

A collective lifestyle approach underpinned analysis, and within such an approach behaviour is seen as social practice, generated at the intersection of social structure and agency and manifest concretely in specific places (Poland et al. 2006). The analysis of the interaction between structure, agency and collective lifestyles is facilitated by the identification of dimensions of social context which give substance to analysis and include

power relations, patterns of consumption and the construction and maintenance of identity (Poland et al. 2006).

In terms of power relations, this chapter explored pupils' perceptions of connectedness to school, connectedness is consistently associated with a wide range of health, social and academic outcomes for children and young people (Waters et al. 2009). In this research, the narratives of pupils reflected that they perceive that they have little influence within the school setting, and they were not provided with the information necessary for them to make informed choices about school food provision, reflecting other research which found that students were not generally consulted (Share 2008).

In terms of consumption, the transition to secondary school is acknowledged to result in an increasing level of choice in terms of food practices which is welcomed by pupils (Brannen and Storey 1998). For pupils in this research, the restriction of availability as a result of nutritional guidelines was unpopular, reflecting other research which indicates that for pupils, it is risky to be seen as interested in healthy eating which was associated with being untrendy and which could attract teasing and marginalisation, while unhealthy food was associated with desirable concepts such as friendship, pleasure and relaxation (Stead et al. 2011)

In terms of social practice, pupils opted out of school food provision and alternatives include bringing a packed lunch or accessing food offsite. This can be viewed as the way that pupils show their agency through acts or attitudes of resistance in relation to their responses to the school food environment (Share 2008). The literature notes that this resistance revealed by pupils towards the healthy eating discourse reflects a directed and rational response that suggests positive agency; also that this resistance will often result in complaining via the school council or in non-purchasing and eating in alternative locations where possible (Wills et al. 2005; Share 2008). Offsite policy, in place in two of the schools in the sample was the most significant school policy to impact on school food practices.

This chapter has explored school food practices as rooted within the school food environment in recognition that, far from being a result of individualised behaviour, young teenagers eating habits within the school are deeply embedded within the context within which they occur (Wills et al. 2005). While teenagers in secondary schools are thought to be subject to fewer spatial and social restrictions, they may still be constrained by organisational structures and social expectations and adult led agendas for health promotion and behaviour change may lead them to adopt strategies of resistance (Valentine 2003; Wills et al. 2005; Wills et al. 2008a).

9. Chapter 9 – Free School Meal Uptake; Structure Agency Interactions within the School Setting

An evaluation of a social programme such as free school meals requires a detailed investigation of the impact of the context into which the programme is introduced, in recognition that contextual variations will have an impact on the outcomes of health related programmes or interventions (Pawson and Tilley 1997; Bonnell et al. 2013). The aim of this chapter is to use a multi-dimensional approach which considers free school meal provision within the context in which it is implemented.

Using a socio ecological approach allows context to be considered in the broadest sense and this thesis has considered the free school meal context across a range of analytical levels, including the free school meal policy framework, policy implementation at the local level and the school food environment. Within a socio ecological model, it is acknowledged that factors from multiple levels influence behaviour and that these interact; the challenge for the researcher is to understand these interactions.

Previous empirical chapters have found that key aspects of the policy framework will determine the way that policy is implemented in the local setting; also that the school food environment will influence pupils' school food practices. The chapter explores how the take up of free school meal entitlement is influenced by factors across the socio ecological levels which converge, combining to create conditions within the local context.

Drawing on interviews with parents and pupils, this chapter focuses on the way that free school meals are experienced by parents and pupils within the four schools, assessing how variation in the school context in terms of implementation of national and local policy, school policy and administration and community and individual factors will influence decisions made in terms of the uptake of free school meal entitlement. This chapter then examines

each of the analytical levels in detail, exploring how factors at each level are perceived by the target population. This chapter then considers how free school meal pupils exert agency within the school food environment and the degree to which their free school meal status affects the degree to which they are able to conform to the school food practices of the wider pupil population.

9.1. Responding to the Policy Context

The provision of meals, free to those defined as 'in need' has a long history in the UK and represents a key policy to tackle childhood undernutrition. More recently, the provision of food in schools has been placed at the centre of attempts to address both undernutrition and overnutrition in childhood with the introduction of significant improvements in nutritional standards, implemented in response to concerns regarding inadequate diets of UK children. In addition, policy documents point to the contribution that free school meals make to tackling educational disadvantage and the role that free meals have in addressing inequalities in achievement.

Analysis of policy maker and stakeholders' views reveals that there is a consensus in terms of the purpose of free school meals policy however there is less agreement in terms of the limitations associated with the policy. The contested area revolves around the nature of entitlement, considered too restricted by stakeholders and the contested nature of this aspect of policy has resulted in trials of universal free meals for infant pupils in England and Scotland.

Within Wales, entitlement criteria adhere to pre-devolutionary criteria set by the Westminster Government and while there is the possibility that this will be varied at the local authority level, the Local Authority under study adheres to these criteria. As a result, there is no contextual variation in terms of entitlement criteria among the parents interviewed.

9.1.1. Nutritional and Financial Benefits

Traditionally, free school meals have been viewed as a means of supplementing the diets of children from low income families in order to ensure adequate nutritional status to ensure healthy growth and development. Both policy makers and stakeholders note the role of free school meals in tackling food poverty by acting as a safety net, providing at least one meal a day and therefore contributing to both the nutritional and financial status of the family. Interviews with parents and pupils reveal that they make positive associations with many aspects of free school meal entitlement, specifically the contribution that free school meals make to the family, both nutritionally and financially. The fact that a meal is provided rather than money is appreciated by both parents and pupils.

“He’s getting a good meal every day” (Parent, Ashgrove)

For pupils, the provision of a meal has the potential to make up for a lack of food at home.

“Is there anything you eat here that you don’t eat at home? Is it very different or a bit the same?” (SA)

“Umm, a bit the same...I don’t eat much at my house, so...” (Pupil, Castlebridge)

In addition to provision of the meal, it is important for parents that the children like the food on offer, and this is seen as a positive of free school meal entitlement.

“How easy do you find using free school meal entitlement?” (SA)

“Fine, the children like the food” (Parent, Daleview)

In financial terms, it is estimated that free school meals are worth £370.00 per year, per child (The Children's Society 2012a:4) and £625 per year if additional benefits such as travel subsidies and clothing grants are triggered

(Goodwin 2008). In this research, parents note the financial contribution that free school meals make to household income.

“I still spend about £1, £1.50 per day on top of the school meal allowance, I could still be spending another ten to fifteen pounds per week but if I didn't have the free school meals that would be twenty, thirty pounds a week so...”

(Parent, Briarwood)

“Positive I would say, it saves me a certain amount of money cos they still have money anyway but it saves me another £20 a week I would suppose for the two of them, so it's got a positive impact on that one” (Parent, Ashgrove)

Pupils also appreciate the fact that free meals have an impact on family finances and the perception that they are helping parents was welcome, especially if they were aware that there was pressure on family budgets.

“It saves my mum money to get the meals, saves lots of money to buy food for her” (Pupil, Briarwood)

These views were echoed by pupils in other schools

“What impact do you think free school meals have, positive or negative on your family?” (SA)

“Good, cos if they're struggling and they can't do as much, at least I can get something in school.” (Pupil, Ashgrove)

Also for pupils, an important feature of free school meal entitlement is that they made life easier, for themselves and their parents.

“It's really easy to do, sometimes you can take in a packet of crisps from your house and then buy free school meals and have it for lunch then which is really good” (Pupil, Ashgrove)

The data reveal that both parents and pupils, in receipt of free school meals view them positively and appreciate the nutritional and financial contribution that they make. However, a key criticism of free school meal policy, outlined

in previous chapters is the nature of entitlement and the restriction of entitlement to those on out of work benefits.

9.1.2. Meeting Entitlement

Analysis of free school meal policy reveals that across the UK, policy overwhelmingly conforms to the targeted, means tested approach which characterises neo liberal welfare regimes. In Wales, while there is the opportunity for local authorities to vary entitlement criteria, predominantly free school meal entitlement conforms to the pre-devolutionary criteria set by the Westminster Government. Exploring the nature of free school meal policy reveals that two key characteristics define policy, the fact that entitlement is restricted to those who meet strict eligibility criteria and the association of free school meal entitlement with means tested, out of work benefits.

A small number of parents, from Ashgrove and Castlebridge who were interviewed did not meet the entitlement criteria, and for these parents, the perception was that the entitlement criteria are too harsh since they do not take into account the overall income of a family.

“What do you think about the entitlement criteria?” (SA)

*“In my own circumstances I’d probably say too harsh because obviously they ask about your earnings but I don’t receive any child support off their dad...I’ve got a house that’s mortgaged so I don’t get any help with the mortgage as somebody would with rent, so I think it is quite harsh, yes”
(Parent, Ashgrove).*

In particular, parents highlight the link between free school meal entitlement and out of work benefits and for working parents on low incomes, the fact that eligibility does not take overall income into account is considered unjust.

“It’s quite tricky because I can see a lot of parents who are on income support being eligible but then they seem to fail to realise that people who

are on low incomes and don't claim income support but have low incomes anyway and claim the working tax credits and child tax credit, we struggle just as much as parents who are on income support." (Parent, Ashgrove)

For parents, the strict nature of entitlement is felt to be too severe, and that some form of partial entitlement would be better. More than one parent suggested that if there was even a partial entitlement available, that would be a real help for the family.

"Even if it meant that we had subsidy to cater for, I don't know, two free days of school meals, it can help a lot you know, it's basically you're either entitled or you don't get nothing and I don't think it's fair really" (Parent, Ashgrove)

Due to the strict means tested nature of entitlement, it is common for families to move in and out of entitlement as employment status changed. The interviews reveal that losing entitlement is a significant blow, in particular, the impact on family finances.

"I wish I could be entitled to free school meals forever, it's great, it does ease the burden because it is, it's a lot of money for two children so I'm not looking forward to September now, having to find that extra little bit" (Parent, Ashgrove)

Losing entitlement often means that parents will have to find an alternative to free school meals, most often, parents made the decision to swap children to packed lunches.

"By September I will lose entitlement, I will be worse off and the children will have to have sandwiches" (Parent, Daleview)

However, the loss of school meals and the introduction of packed lunches were often unpopular with pupils, who missed the school meals provided.

"How do you find providing packed lunch?" (SA)

"A nightmare, because they do want school dinners like the rest of their mates" (Parent, Castlebridge)

Additionally, providing a packed lunch represents a significant financial commitment for parents, putting a strain on already overstretched finances.

“I’m giving her a packed lunch which is very, very difficult” (Parent, Briarwood)

Another strategy for a parent who did not meet the entitlement criteria and could not afford to buy a school meal was to have her child home for lunch; however, given the importance of lunchtime for socialising with friends, going home for lunch is acknowledged to have implications for the marginalisation of pupils.

“After year nine, because I literally live just around the corner from the school, he’ll be coming home for dinners...I think he’d rather come home and have a warm meal rather than cold sandwiches” (Parent, Ashgrove)

Generally, not meeting entitlement criteria or losing entitlement has significant implications for both parents and pupils in a number of ways. If extra money has to be found there is an impact on family finances, more commonly, parents would provide a packed lunch which not only increases parents’ workload and put a strain on financial resources but is often unpopular with pupils. For one parent who did not meet the entitlement criteria, the perception is that for those entitled to free school meals, there are many benefits.

“They don’t need to go shopping practically every other day to buy fresh veg or salad and they don’t have to worry about what’s my child going to eat and are they going to have a warm meal or a cold meal, because they have the option of having sandwiches prepared from school or the warm meals so basically the child just chooses what they want and it’s just, it quite easy, I’m quite envious really cos it’s something that I’d like” (Parent, Ashgrove)

Similarly, for one pupil who had recently lost entitlement, there was the feeling that losing entitlement had an impact on all family members.

“Cos my mum’s doing all the hard work and got to pay for the sandwiches that she gives me. All the other mums that have...their children have school meals, they’re just sitting down and they have free school meals” (Pupil, Daleview)

“You don’t think that is fair?” (SA)

“No” (Pupil, Daleview)

“How do you think it affects your mum?” (SA)

“I think it affects my mother a lot because she’s working. She’s got to go early in the morning and she does sometimes forget she’s got to do all the sandwiches before we go to work and school. So it affects my mum a lot” (Pupil, Daleview)

“How do you think it affects you? Did you like having them?” (SA)

“Yeah, it was really nice” (Pupil, Daleview)

For those who meet the entitlement criteria, free school meals are viewed positively by both parents and pupils in terms of the contribution that they make to both financial and nutritional status. However, both parents and pupils note the difficulties associated with losing or not meeting entitlement criteria. While the restricted nature of entitlement has implications for families, there are also implications for the way that policy is implemented and key issues which have arisen in previous chapters relate to the level of information available and the ease of registration.

9.2. Implementing Free School Meal Policy; Context Variation

It is during the process of implementation that public policy takes shape and key to understanding the process of implementation is to understand how policy and setting interact. The variety of school settings means that diversity of practice will reflect varying organisational contexts and this will

influence the way that key aspects of free school meal policy are implemented. Key aspects of policy highlighted are the way that schools promote free school meal entitlement within the school community and the measures that schools take to ensure that the identity of free school meal pupils is protected.

9.2.1. Promoting Free School Meals

Analysis reveals that policy documents, policy makers and stakeholders note the importance of provision of information and ensuring ease of registration to encourage the take up of free school meal entitlement. These measures are supported by the literature which notes that confusion about requirements, the level of information that families receive about benefits and the ease of application can contribute to low take up. Conversely, take up was found to be enhanced by automatic or default enrolment and lowered administrative barriers (Currie 2004; Stuber and Schlesinger 2006).

In terms of the provision of information, a variety of approaches across the four schools was noted, with Ashgrove and Briarwood taking little action to promote free school meals compared to Castlebridge and Daleview which both had initiatives in place to encourage parents to register. These trends were reflected in the narratives of the parents.

“I’ve never seen anything for free school meals, you know, when you go to a leisure centre, anywhere like that, that would have anything to do with kids, even in the school, I can’t even remember seeing anything up in the schools”

(Parent, Ashgrove)

Also in Briarwood

“Are you aware of any information coming from the school or the Local Authority?” (SA)

“Not about free school meals no, they don’t publicise the fact” (Parent, Briarwood)

However, even where it was felt that the schools did not actively promote free school meals, parents indicate that information was available from other sources such as the internet and job centre websites. Additionally, receipt of other benefits triggered entitlement.

“I was informed by the job centre...I was claiming benefits...and the jobcentre informed me of my entitlement to free school meals” (Parent, Ashgrove)

The majority of parents had some knowledge of free school meals, this often stemmed from receiving free school meals themselves when they were children.

“Well I’ve known about it before because when I was a little girl...I had free school meals” (Parent, Briarwood)

However, where there was little information, there was the chance that families would miss out even though they met the entitlement criteria. For one parent, lack of knowledge had resulted in her daughter missing out on free school meals throughout primary school.

“I think it was end of the juniors, when she finished one of the parents said to me about it” (Parent, Briarwood)

“Would you have been entitled before that and not known?” (SA)

“Yeah” (Parent, Briarwood)

Key in the promotion of free school meal entitlement is the level of interaction between home and school; where there was a high degree of liaison, parents express the feeling that they had built up a good rapport with school staff. This was the case in Castlebridge where the Student Support Officer maintained a close relationship with families.

“How do you find the school, in terms of getting information?” (SA)

“If you get to talk to (Student Support Officer), then that’s absolutely fab, I’ve never had a problem with her, she’s absolutely fantastic. She always says she thinks the world of my two boys” (Parent, Castlebridge)

Generally, parents found the process of applying for entitlement straightforward, reflecting new processes put in place by the Local Authority.

“Once they had all the information it was pretty straightforward” (Parent, Ashgrove)

However, for one parent, the factor deterring them from applying was not the process of application, but rather the fact that they might get turned down.

“Is there anything that would put you off applying?” (SA)

“Sometimes the fear of getting turned down, they (the children) obviously know you’re putting in for them and then when it comes back or you’ve been not accepted, they get upset and I get upset and then I think well, why should I bother?” (Parent, Castlebridge)

The literature suggests that a significant number of families meet the entitlement criteria but do not register, estimated by comparing data on benefits to free school meal data (Iniesta-Martinez and Evans 2012). Within this research, no parents who met the eligibility criteria for free school meal entitlement but did not register came forward for interview and as a result, it is not possible to draw conclusions for the potential reasons for non-registration among these groups.

While policy makers and stakeholders cite a lack of information as a deterrent for free school meal registration, the narratives of parents suggest that this is not the case. In terms of promotion of free school meals, with one exception, the evidence indicates that the majority of parents interviewed felt that information about free school meal entitlement was available, if not from the school, then from a variety of sources. Possibly a more significant deterrent associated with the restricted nature of free school meal entitlement is welfare stigma.

9.2.2. Welfare Stigma; Contextual Influences

It is hypothesised that, for those applying for welfare benefits, two distinct forms of stigma will occur, identity stigma and treatment stigma. Identity stigma is related to internalised negative stereotypes associated with users of means tested programme and concerns about being labelled, while treatment stigma reflects concern about being poorly treated by others. Treatment stigma involves the expected action of other parties and while related to the concept of discrimination it remains distinct because treatment stigma may be anticipated even if discriminatory treatment is not experienced (Stuber and Schlesinger 2006)

It is noted that along with other means tested benefits, free school meal entitlement has the potential to result in welfare stigma for those in receipt. Welfare stigma has been described as a negative attribution towards individuals who participate in means tested programmes, related to the perception that such individuals lack independence and autonomy (Moffitt 1983; Currie 2004; Scambler 2006; Stuber and Schlesinger 2006). For pupils on free school meals, research has found that the stigma associated with free school meal entitlement is associated with teasing and bullying (Storey and Chamberlain 2001; The Children's Society 2001). In this research, for parents, concerns about negative stereotypes and being labelled, often stem from their own knowledge or childhood experiences.

“From when I was in school and the stigma attached to free school meals and tickets I remember, I never ever had to have free school meals but I know children who had and I know they were picked on in school. People used to say they were poor, so of course then there was that stigma attached to it” (Parent, Ashgrove)

As a result, parents were sensitive to the idea that their children would be labelled as a result of being on free school meals.

“I remember getting tickets as a kid and I can remember not liking it. I do sort of worry for them, hoping that they’re not gonna get bullied or they’re not gonna feel embarrassed by using them” (Parent, Briarwood)

The literature notes that those in receipt of welfare benefits are often perceived as lacking independence and autonomy however, children are often seen as deserving recipients of aid, even though parents may experience stigma (Stuber and Schlesinger 2006). In terms of free school meal entitlement, for pupils, there is a need to negotiate these perceptions of stigma as they relate to parents, and parents are aware that their children may want to protect them.

“It’s a very big issue; this is why (daughter) won’t go get school dinners off the dinner ticket, cos she does not want people to know that I’m not working.”
(Parent, Briarwood)

This resonated with the interviews in which many pupils, when asked why they were on free school meals claimed that they didn’t know. For pupils who did acknowledge why they were in receipt of free school meal entitlement, they associated entitlement either with worklessness or a low income.

“Do you know why you are on free school meals? (SA)

“Is it because if your mum and dad doesn’t have a proper job?” (Pupil, Ashgrove)

“My mum doesn’t have a very good job or something so she doesn’t have much money and stuff, so I think that’s why” (Pupil, Briarwood)

Overall there was a mix of attitudes towards the idea of stigma associated with free school meals among both the parents and the pupils interviewed. Where stigma was not a concern, this was associated with changing attitudes.

“I think in our day and age it was an issue, but these days I don’t think anybody really cares” (Parent, Ashgrove)

This attitude was reflected in the narratives of the majority of the pupils who noted that stigma was not a concern for them; only one pupil noted that that she had been teased as a result of her free school meal status. However, rather than being a reflection of the proportion of pupils affected by stigma, this is more likely to reflect the fact that pupils sensitive to stigma would be less likely to come forward for interview than those who were comfortable with their free school meal status.

It is noted in policy documents that a key way of minimising the stigma associated with free school meal status is to ensure that school processes protect the identity of free school meal pupils.

9.2.3. Confidentiality and Anonymity; School Processes

Policy documents and policy makers highlight the importance of school systems which protect the identity of free school meal pupils and payment methods have been recognised as key. Cashless systems are noted as being the most effective way of protecting the identity of free school meal pupils within the school setting and three of the four schools within the sample had a cashless system in place. For both parents and pupils within these schools, they express the view that they felt these systems worked well and that they are beneficial to pupils.

“As far as I know free school meals is just you have your card...unless it’s the children that tell their friends they’re on free school meals...I don’t think they know” (Parent, Ashgrove)

“Do you feel that’s a better system?”(SA)

“Definitely, 100%” (Parent, Ashgrove)

For a pupil in Briarwood, the only school with a ticket system in place, a preference for a cashless system was expressed.

“In (another school) they’ve got these cards...I think that would be OK, better for everyone” (Pupil, Briarwood)

“Why do you think that?” (SA)

“Cos no one knows if you buy it or put money on there or have free school meals” (Pupil, Briarwood)

In Briarwood, free school meal pupils were given tickets on a daily or weekly basis, parents note that the use of tickets would result in an element of visibility for pupils.

“Well it’s only the fact that he’s got to hand over this ticket, I should imagine, so there’s that visibility there” (Parent, Briarwood)

The use of tickets in Briarwood and the identification of them as free school meal pupils was enough to deter them from using their free school meal entitlement.

“You said your daughter gets embarrassed?” (SA)

“Since she has been in Briarwood, she’s not once ever had a dinner ticket, she just point blank refused from the word go” (Parent, Briarwood)

The way that tickets led to the identification of free school meal pupils was emphasised by one pupil.

“I get quite embarrassed using them so I don’t use them that often any more... everyone tends to laugh at you cos you’ve got tickets and they’ve got money” (Pupil, Briarwood)

However, it was not only payment systems which were found to potentially lead to the identification of free school meal pupils. The free school meal application form, given to pupils on a yearly basis was handed out in class to those pupils already on free school meals. Since it only those pupils who are

on free school meals who received these forms, this was a cause of embarrassment for pupils.

“The only thing is when they do hand these forms out, a lot of children know who’s having free meals anyway because they come home with a great big brown envelope, it’s like (daughter) said, in a way it’s a bit embarrassing because she comes home with this envelope” (Parent, Briarwood)

It is apparent that stigma was more of an issue for some pupils than others and factors which have been found to mitigate stigma in other research include personal resilience and not feeling ashamed of family backgrounds (Farthing 2012). Also of importance was a sense of solidarity, if a large proportion of the school were in receipt of free school meals and in this way the literature notes that the impact of stigma may be mediated by social context and in particular, the homogeneity of the student population in terms of socio economic status (Farthing 2012; Sahota et al. 2013).

9.2.4. The School Community; Level of Entitlement

It is proposed that a possible shield against welfare stigma involves explanations for poverty that deemphasise failure on the part of the individual, so if jobs are scarce then a person cannot be faulted for being unemployed. In this way, stigma may be linked to local economic conditions and in an area of high unemployment residents would be expected to be more understanding about the difficulties of finding a job (Stuber and Schlesinger 2006).

In this research, perceptions of free school meal entitlement varied according to the school community, specifically the overall level of free school meal entitlement. In Briarwood, the school with the lowest level of entitlement (3%), parents associated the low level of entitlement with the affluence of the school community, and it was felt that this would result in stigma.

“Do you have any idea of what percentage of pupils has free school meals at Briarwood?” (SA)

“I think it’s quite a low percent cos like I said, (area) is a bit of a posh area, so I think it is quite low” (Parent, Briarwood)

“Do you think that has any impact on the way that free school meal pupils are viewed?” (SA)

“Yes, you can see a class thing going on within the school...you can see that going on even when the kids are walking to and from school, you can see who’s who” (Parent, Briarwood)

Parents associated the low level of free school meal entitlement in the school to stigma.

“There is stigma, especially in Briarwood, it’s got sort of upper class appeal...and there is stigma” (Parent, Briarwood).

For pupils, the implication of stigma was bullying, and one pupil in Briarwood admitted that her free school meal status resulted in her being bullied within the school.

“It’s just people seem to just pick on me and I get quite offended by it, and then they say things about my family, saying they don’t have any money” (Pupil, Briarwood)

However, in Castlebridge which had the highest level of entitlement (42%), these findings were reversed. Parents noted that free school meal entitlement was openly acknowledged among the school community and the estimate of the number of pupils who were in receipt of free school meal reflected the socio economic status of the catchment area, which was a local housing estate.

“How many pupils do you think get free school meals?” (SA)

“Three quarters of the...estate” (Parent, Castlebridge)

“Are people open, do you think, about being on free school meals?” (SA)

“Yeah, some people discuss it; they say ‘oh does your kid get free school meals?’” (Parent, Castlebridge)

Due to the high number of pupils who were in receipt of free school meals at Castlebridge, it was acknowledged by parents that while the cashless payment system in place protected the identity of free school meal pupils, it was still possible to identify those pupils on free school meals, by the fact that they were the pupils who were having school lunch.

“Is it kept confidential by the school? Who’s on free school meals and who’s not?” (SA)

“I think the other kids know really, because if your kid’s not sat at the dinner table, they know you don’t get free school meals” (Parent, Castlebridge).

In Briarwood, the receipt of free school meal entitlement was the exception and entitlement was associated with stigma and bullying; in Castlebridge the response was reversed and pupils who received free school meals were envied.

“And there is a list in the school of who gets free school meals, which I don’t think that’s fair to the ones that don’t, I think it should be discouraged a little bit more and not said really” (Parent, Castlebridge)

“Why do you think that? (SA)

“Because they tend to get a bit spiteful over it, they wind each other up over it ‘we get free school dinners and you don’t, ha, ha, ha, sort of thing” (Parent, Castlebridge)

“Who gets teased then do you think?” (SA)

“I reckon it’s the kids that don’t have free school meals that get teased... and then they retaliate, ‘well mum and dad’s working so we should get it’, there’s

*been a full force fight and my boy actually ended up with a broken nose”
(Parent, Castlebridge)*

Even in schools with lower levels of entitlement, pupils on free school meals noted that friends who were not in receipt of free school meals could be jealous; this was the case in Ashgrove where the overall level of entitlement was 17%.

“What do your friends think about it?” (SA)

“Sometimes they say it’s not fair that they have to pay” (Pupil, Ashgrove)

Also in Daleview, where the level of entitlement was 28%.

“Are you open with your friends, about having free school meals?” (SA)

“Yeah, but sometimes they don’t think it’s fair...they have to pay for their food” (Pupil, Daleview)

For pupils on free school meals, the impact of welfare stigma is complex and contradictory and there is a need for free school meal pupils to negotiate their position in relation to the wider pupil population and friendship groups. Previous analysis of the way that pupils perceive and negotiate the school food environment needs to be considered from the perspective of pupils on free school meals to assess the way in which relations, both to the environment and to peers is influenced by free school meal status.

9.3. The School Food Environment; the Place of Free School Meal Pupils

Analysis of focus group data in Chapter 7 revealed that, for the majority of secondary school pupils, the school food environment failed to meet their expectations and preferences in relation to many aspects of school dining. As a result, it was noted that for many pupils, exerting agency resulted in opting out of school food provision and as a result, school meal practices revolved around packed lunches or offsite provision. This section places free school meal pupils within the school food environment, focussing on school food provision and cost and assessing how free school meal status might act to influence the school food practices of free school meal pupils and ultimately the uptake of free school meals.

9.3.1. Perceptions of Food Availability

The introduction of Appetite for Life guidance within the schools in the Local Authority resulted in a significant change to school food provision and the focus group data demonstrated that these changes were not always popular with pupils. However, for some parents, the new Appetite for Life menu was welcome since they felt it gave pupils more options.

“What are your impressions of the new menu?” (SA)

“I’m quite relieved to see there’s more of a vegetarian and halal options because of Muslims...I know on a couple of days they don’t offer much of a choice, children would struggle if they were to have dinners every single day but it’s ok, it’s a lot better than the previous menu.” (Parent, Ashgrove)

For pupils on free school meals, responses to the new menus were mixed; many of the pupils liked the food on offer and spoke with enthusiasm.

“What are the positive things about having a free school meal?” (SA)

“That you know you’re gonna have something that you like, that you ain’t gonna feel disappointed about what you eat” (Pupil, Ashgrove)

Pupils spoke with enthusiasm about favourite foods

“It was really amazing food, I tried it, cooked dinner, it was my favourite, I liked the swede, it was lush” (Pupil, Castlebridge)

In the focus group data there was a strong consensus that the food provided within the canteen was unpopular however the interviews with free school meal pupils indicate mixed views in terms of the food provided, with many pupils expressing positive attitudes towards the food.

“They’re really nice and tasty, that’s the thing I like about them” (Pupil, Ashgrove)

The fact that the free school meal pupils had a more positive view of school food provision may result because they were interviewed individually and as a result there was less pressure to conform to group norms. Alternatively, free school meal pupils liking of the meals may result from an appreciation of the food on offer, if food at home is limited. This resonates with the experience of a parent who had received free school meals as a child.

“I was one myself, we didn’t have much food at home and going to school and having a proper meal was like heaven for me” (Parent, Ashgrove)

However, reflecting the focus group data, for some pupils on free school meals the shift to healthier provision was unwelcome; some parents noted that the change in menus did not always suit their children.

“They’ve gone all the way to the healthy way, so it’s all pasta and stuff like that which none of my kids will touch with a barge pole” (Parent, Ashgrove)

These views were echoed by pupils.

*“In terms of the food that they give you at school, what do you think of it?”
(SA)*

“It’s alright, but they’re trying to make us eat healthier but it’s not working for me” (Pupil, Daleview)

“What don’t you like about it?” (SA)

“They’ve taken away all the crisps. Now they’re making homemade food which is not as nice as it was at the beginning of year 7” (Pupil, Daleview)

Reflecting the findings of the focus groups, pupils on free school meals expressed the view that the changing menu had led to a reduction in the type and availability of popular foods.

“Can you tell me what has changed that you’re not very keen on?” (SA)

“The sandwiches, I used to have chicken tikka and then they didn’t have it and then they had chicken burgers and then they didn’t have them and the chips are not that nice now and the pasta, they used to have hot pot pasta like with sauces and now they just have plain pasta and it’s just all watery and not nice.” (Pupil, Briarwood)

“And there’s nothing you like there anymore?” (SA)

“Well there’s beans and chips, but after a while you go off it” (Pupil, Briarwood)

Added to the perception that the type of food available was more limited as a result of the new guidance, both parents and pupils note other issues related to food availability, that food ran out by the end of the lunchtime service.

“One major problem with Briarwood, they don’t cook enough food, cos (Daughter) quite often comes home and says she hasn’t eaten or she’s only had a cold sausage roll that was left” (Parent, Briarwood)

This criticism was also made by a parent at Ashgrove.

“My son does tell me occasionally when they’re in a big line in a queue...sometimes they don’t get the chance to get their school dinner” (Parent, Ashgrove)

These problems were reflected in the narratives of pupils, especially in Briarwood.

“You’ve got to go and get your dinner, there’s nothing there left to eat” (Pupil, Briarwood)

“It’s all run out has it?” (SA)

“Yeah, and it’s a bit cold as well” (Pupil, Briarwood)

This view was echoed by another pupil in the same school

“There’s just never enough food, someone always goes without” (Pupil, Briarwood)

“Is it only certain things that run out or is it everything that runs out?” (SA)

“Um, it’s normally stuff like sausage rolls and burgers; they normally always run out” (Pupil, Briarwood)

While it is noted that food availability is consistent across the four schools as a result of national policy initiatives, previous chapters noted variability within school policy and the organisation of food provision. In relation to the school food environment, the perceptions of free school meal pupils resonate with the wider pupil population.

9.3.2. Perceptions of the School Food Environment

In the focus group data, key issues raised by pupils reflect issues associated with built environment and the temporal and social processes of school dining and these issues were reflected in the narratives of free school meal pupils. In terms of the built environment, issues of seating were raised, especially where seating arrangements prevented friendship groups sitting together.

“They’ve moved the tables so they’re not a good space to sit with your friends...you can’t fit anybody on there basically” (Pupil, Briarwood)

Queues were an issue that had been raised in the focus group discussions as a significant deterrent to the uptake of school food. For pupils on free school meals, the option to opt out was limited and where friends chose to do so because of long queues, it was difficult for free school meal pupils to conform.

“There’s always big queues and her friends all wait for her sometimes and the odd day I know she has gone out with them and gone back to see if the queue has gone down because she says by the time she queues up to get her food half of the dinner hour has gone anyway cos there’s always huge queues” (Parent, Briarwood)

For other pupils on free school meals, the necessity of having a meal in the canteen meant that they had to find ways to negotiate the queues.

“If I go in and there’s a massive queue, I just wait ‘til the end” (Pupil, Briarwood)

“Well I just run to the canteen, so I usually don’t have to queue up” (Pupil, Daleview)

“Is there queues?” (SA)

“Oh they’re horrendous, madness!” (Pupil, Daleview)

The general ambience of the school dining hall was noted across the schools with pupils mentioning the noise and mess, these issues were reflected by free school meal pupils.

“It’s alright, but everybody just chucks their food on the floor and it’s not a very pleasant place to eat” (Pupil, Daleview)

Other concerns raised within the focus groups related to price within the canteen and portion size, for pupils on free school meals, these elements of lunchtime provision have more impact. The free school meal allowance is limited, set by the Local Authority and evidence indicates that for free school

meal pupils, the lunchtime meal provides a greater proportion of the daily nutritional intake (Nelson et al. 2007b).

9.3.3. Price; Free School Meal Allowance

Reflecting focus group discussions, parents and pupils note that food prices within the canteens have increased; this was noted across the schools.

*“The actual school dinners have gone up in price and that seems to be a regular thing every year, they seem to be going up by ten or fifteen pence”
(Parent, Ashgrove)*

Many parents feel that the prices that were charged in the canteen were too expensive.

“I think it’s very expensive; I mean just for a baguette, you’re talking £1.80 for a plain simple baguette” (Parent, Castlebridge)

However, some pupils feel that the prices charged in the canteen were fair, in comparison with other outlets.

“It’s cheaper than...over (Supermarket), sandwiches are two quid aren’t they? Where like, its £1.80 for chips and stuff” (Pupil, Daleview)

However, for the majority of pupils, prices charged in the canteen were considered too high.

“What do you think about school meals in the school?” (SA)

“They are overpriced” (Pupil, Briarwood)

Increasing prices was of particular concern to pupils on free school meals since the allowance set by the Local Authority was calculated to cover the ‘meal of the day’ option set at £2.20. The amount was credited daily after morning break and could not be carried over or spent earlier in the day. The increase in prices had been noted across the four schools, and the impact of

rising prices meant that free school meal pupils could simply afford less for lunch.

“The cost of the food, how do you feel that is?” (SA)

“It’s not very good because its loads of money, it’s like 75p for a cookie, it should be 50 or 60 or something. And with sandwiches it’s £1.25 for a roll and stuff like that. So I tend to get the small stuff, I don’t really eat much. Anything else it’s fine but it is just they cost too much” (Pupil, Daleview)

Both parents and pupils note that the rising prices had resulted in free school meal pupils eating less at lunchtime.

“With my £2.20 I used to buy a little cake, a drink and a roll all at the same time, now I can only afford a drink and a roll” (Pupil, Ashgrove)

“Is that enough?” (SA)

“No” (Pupil, Ashgrove)

Parents were concerned that pupils would be hungry and often felt that they had to provide extra money to ensure that pupils would have enough to eat.

“I don’t think it’s quite enough to buy what he really wants cos the prices have gone up and even (daughter) said it’s nigh on impossible to get a meal, a pudding and drink with the allowance that they give you, so you always need extra money” (Parent, Briarwood)

As a consequence, parents note that pupils were not eating enough at lunchtime

“I know (allowance) doesn’t cover her for a proper meal, dessert and drink...She’s always hungry when she comes home” (Parent, Briarwood)

With the increase in prices, the allowance was insufficient to cover the cost of a complete meal, and it was often a drink that was left out.

“(Allowance) is not a lot, could be a bit more so they could get an extra drink” (Parent, Daleview)

For pupils,

“What can’t you afford?” (SA)

“Well its normally like drinks, they’re expensive” (Pupil, Briarwood)

The allowance, set by the Local Authority is assessed to ensure that pupils could afford the main meal and either a drink or a dessert. However, the focus group data indicated that except for fish and chips, the main meal option was not one which was popular with pupils who preferred more portable, snack type foods. However, buying individual items presents a problem for free school meal pupils since they may add up to more than the allowance and they had to calculate cost carefully to ensure that they could afford everything they wanted.

“If you have a meal you may not be able to afford a drink so sometimes...you’ve got to level out your food so you can buy a drink” (Pupil, Ashgrove)

“How do you manage it?” (SA)

“If you want a drink you have to have a pizza, cos if you have pasta I think that’s the full amount of the money they give you on your card, so you have to put a bit of extra money on to get a drink (Pupil, Ashgrove)

Pupils felt that there was a need for a higher allowance in order to be able to buy what they would like.

“If you had say, three or four pounds a day what would you buy?” (SA)

“I’d buy a proper dinner, a drink and a dessert” (Pupil, Ashgrove)

Another pupil

“Do you ever find that £2.20 is not enough to buy what you want? (SA)

“I would say that it’s not enough, I think it should go up to about £3 cos then everyone has got enough for their dinners and then if they want to and they’re still hungry they can get a sandwich as well.” (Pupil, Ashgrove)

When asked what they would buy if the allowance was increased, pupils had varying responses

“If I could choose I would have round about a fiver, so I could get a drink, a pudding, a main meal and a slice of pizza” (Pupil, Briarwood)

“I’d just buy a little cake with it or something like that at least” (Pupil, Briarwood)

For free school meal pupils, the issues associated with the school food environment chimed with issues raised by the wider school population in terms of the school food environment and the food on offer. However, in terms of the amount that they had to spend, free school meal pupils were constrained as a result of their free school meal status and a set allowance meant that they were limited in terms of the food that they could buy.

The narratives of the wider pupil population reveal that when school food provision does not meet their preferences, they have the option to opt out of school food provision. This next section considers how these structure agency interactions play out for free school meal pupils, influencing the uptake of free school meals.

9.4. Uptake of Free School Meals; the Outcome of Structure Agency Interaction

For free school meal pupils, the decision to take up free school meals resonates with the decision making process evident for the wider school population. Liking or disliking the food, the constraints of the school food environment and the food practices of peer networks and friendship groups will all influence the decision of whether or not to take free school meals. A

key consideration of this research is how these decisions are influenced by the context in which they are made.

9.4.1. The School Food Environment

9.4.1.1. Food Availability

It has been noted that changing food availability has had an impact on both the wider school population and on free school meal pupils, and the evidence is that these concerns are consistent across the four schools. For free school meal pupils, there is a need to adapt in respect of school food availability, planning consumption according to foods that they liked.

“It depends what’s on the menu, cos some things I like and some things I don’t” (Pupil, Ashgrove)

“What do you like?” (SA)

“On the Wednesdays are cooked dinners... I have that every Wednesday, on Fridays I have the fish and Mondays I have the pizza” (Pupil, Ashgrove)

However, for some free school meal pupils, the changing menus have resulted in them opting out of school food provision. For one parent, the impact of the changing menu was that her daughter refused to have her free meal.

“Not happy at the moment because they’ve changed the school meals so my daughter is not happy to have school dinners, where before she was quite happy to have them and now she doesn’t want them” (Parent, Briarwood)

Analysis of focus group data reveals that pupils often opt out of the school food provision, usually bringing a packed lunch or accessing food from offsite sources as an alternative. For pupils on free school meals, due to financial constraints, the evidence demonstrates that their ability to opt out of school food provision was more limited. It has been noted that parents found

providing a packed lunch difficult and consequently, for one free school meal pupil, this was not an option.

“You have school meals every day do you?” (SA)

“Yeah” (Pupil, Castlebridge)

“Do you ever bring a packed lunch or anything like that?” (SA)

“Only once... cos I don’t like some of the stuff; we haven’t got much stuff at home” (Pupil, Castlebridge)

However, for other pupils, the decision was made to opt out of free school meal provision completely.

“Your mum is making you sandwiches every day is she?” (SA)

“Yeah” (Pupil, Briarwood)

9.4.1.2. School Food Environment & School Policy

It was not only the issue of food availability which deterred pupils from taking their free meal. Reflecting the findings of the focus groups, free school meal pupils note the unpopularity of the canteen as a factor which deters them from taking their free school meal.

“They do a set meal don’t they? (SA)

“Yeah, they do a meal of the day and a pudding and stuff but I don’t really bother with that” (Pupil, Briarwood)

“It doesn’t appeal to you?” (SA)

“It’s not that it doesn’t appeal to me, it’s that I just don’t want to be stuck in the canteen to be honest” (Pupil, Briarwood)

For many of the free school meal pupils interviewed, their friendship network consists of other pupils on free school meals and in this way, they were able to maintain school food practices that were similar to their friends. However,

in the two schools with offsite provision, it was evident that the ability to go offsite resulted in a dilemma for free school meal pupils, who found themselves unable to conform to the school food practices of their friends.

“I noticed with my children it wasn’t a big issue when they all had meals in school it was when they were allowed out, when they were a certain year and they were allowed out to go out in the village and buy their dinner anywhere else, that’s when the issues started” (Parent, Briarwood)

“Otherwise they were fine?” (SA)

“Yeah, because their friends weren’t allowed out and they had nowhere else to go they would all get food from the same place in the canteen” (Parent, Briarwood)

Parents found that children were unwilling to stay in school while friends went off school premises to get their lunch and this had an impact on the uptake of free school meal entitlement.

“He was having it some days, but if all the friends wanted to go out, he didn’t want to be queuing up and then having to find them later on” (Parent, Briarwood)

Pupils had various strategies to ensure that they were able to conform to peer group practices, bringing their own money was one strategy.

“We just sit on the grass, just outside school but sometimes if I have some money from pocket money I just go to the Spar and get something” (Pupil, Briarwood)

Otherwise pupils had to rely on friends to make changes to their routines to accommodate them.

“If there’s a few girls she hangs around with, they go out to get their dinner, one of the girls will wait in with her, she’ll get hers then they’ll go and find the other lot or if one of the girls have got home sandwiches then the two will sit in the school and eat their dinner together” (Parent, Briarwood)

Pupils note the need to fit in with the school food practices of friends, particularly where there was an offsite policy in place and pupils were able to leave the school site at lunchtime. This meant that free school meal pupils had to select portable foods from the canteen, so they could take them out of school.

“My friends go out, so I just get baguettes cos it’s easier, and then I take it out” (Pupil, Briarwood)

For pupils on free school meals, the data indicates that of key importance is flexibility, and that a key deciding factor is the school food practices of friendship networks. Fitting in with friends often determined whether pupils took up their free school meals and it was evident that, for many pupils, a mix of lunchtime options were used.

“How many times a week would you say, you use your free school meal?”
(SA)

“Maximum of four, minimum of two” (Pupil, Briarwood)

The evidence is that likeminded adolescents become involved in friendship groups and these social relations are an essential aspect of social identity, providing important social resources, including emotional support and information (McLeroy et al. 1988). Since identity is expressed symbolically through dietary habits and food preferences, school friends are crucial in shaping young people’s eating behaviours and peer group identities have a considerable influence on behaviours (Wills et al. 2005; Carter et al. 2007; Sylow and Holm 2009; Fletcher et al. 2011). For free school meal pupils, complying with the food practices of friends is essential in order to fit in with group norms.

9.4.2. The Influence of Friendship Networks

It has been noted that free school meal status can often result in differentiation and that free school meal pupils have to negotiate their position within the school community and particularly friendship networks as a result of their free school meal status. In terms of the pupils who came for interview, it was often apparent that their friendship group was made up of other pupils who were on free school meals and within this group, they are happy to share information.

“Who knows that you are on free school meals?” (SA)

*“Well, my best friend, and my friends that have free school meals as well”
(Pupil, Briarwood)*

This was echoed by a pupil in another school

“Who knows that you are on free school meals?”(SA)

“All my friends” (Pupil, Daleview)

In addition to sharing this information, the fact that friends had free school meals, seemed to encourage pupils to use entitlement.

“How do you think you daughter finds having free school meals?” (SA)

“She’s fine... she’s got used to it you know, and her friends, some of her friends have it as well, so she’s alright with it you know” (Parent, Castlebridge)

While sharing the free school meal experience with friends appeared to mediate issues of stigma, the opposite was true for pupils whose friends did not have free school meals.

“I know my eldest won’t have free school meals, she just point blank refuses to take a dinner ticket and none of her friends have free school meals so therefore she doesn’t want them” (Parent, Briarwood)

In the narratives of pupils, there was evidence of the shared food practices that occur within friendship groups.

“If me and my friends, if you haven’t got enough and we haven’t had nothing to eat, we’ve had sandwiches and I’ve got money on my card I’ll go and pay for what they want as well. So we do it like that sometimes” (Pupil, Daleview)

The evidence is that pupils on free school meals often have to negotiate their position within the school community and particularly friendship networks as a result of their free school meal status. This will have implications for friendship networks which have been noted to be of paramount importance for pupils.

9.5. Chapter Summary

Existing research has attempted to explain the take up of free school meal entitlement by the identification and isolation of factors. However, within such an approach contexts are broken down into a series of factors or variables which are generalizable across settings and populations. As a result, rather than preserving the integrity of context, the emphasis is on the allocation of variables to categories and in doing so factors are abstracted from their context (Popay et al. 1998; Poland et al. 2006).

The aim of this chapter is to address these shortcomings by the use of a multi-dimensional approach which combines multiple ways of characterising and understanding places and as a result gives insight into how people relate to places and the resources available to them (Green et al. 2000; Poland et al. 2006; Cummins et al. 2007). This chapter has explored the free school meal context from a multi-level perspective, including the policy framework,

implementation variation and the school food environment to understand how factors from across a range of levels can combine to influence the take up of free school meal entitlement.

In terms of the macro and political nature of free school meal entitlement, the restricted nature of entitlement has significant implications for both parents and pupils, in terms of meeting entitlement criteria but also the impact on families who do not meet, or lose entitlement. Additionally, means tested benefits are often associated with stigma which is frequently cited as a key deterrent in the uptake of free school meal entitlement. Definitions of stigma refer to the impact of negative attributions towards those in receipt of means tested benefits however the data demonstrates that this narrow definition does not encompass the myriad ways that free school meal pupils can experience marginalisation.

The fact that free meal pupils don't have to pay for meals differentiates them from the wider school population in terms of the way that they are perceived by others. While these perceptions can conform to stigma in the traditional sense, there was also evidence that this differentiation could take the form of jealousy and such perceptions are mediated by social context in the form of the overall level of entitlement and community level perceptions of welfare benefits.

The issues associated with marginalisation were often mitigated by friendship groups and where friends were in similar circumstances and maintained similar lunchtime choices; this encouraged the take up of entitlement. However where friendship groups consisted of pupils who were not on free school meals, pupils were constrained by their free school meals status and often were not able to participate in the school food practices of friends. This was particularly apparent in the schools where an offsite policy was in place and pupils on free school meals had to adapt school food practices or opt out of free school meals.

For pupils on free school meals, the constraint associated with free school meal status can result in less ability to exert agency within the school food setting, including restriction in the location and type of food consumed. In terms of meal choice, the free school meal allowance is tailored for pupils to afford the meal of the day option which has been proven to be unpopular with the majority of pupils. In purchasing individually priced items, pupils are often restricted to familiar combinations that they know they can afford, often at the expense of a drink. These findings echo earlier research which notes the difficulties of purchasing sufficient food on the allowance provided.

For adolescents, food serves as a medium through which social groups are produced and maintained and in this way food is symbolic since it marks the culture and identity of an adolescent peer group, conveying meaning and marking the social relationship of exclusion and inclusion (SyLOW and Holm 2009). Of key importance for pupils is the ability to share in consumption practices which reflect peer norms and where free school meal status makes this difficult, it is likely that free school meal pupils will be deterred from taking their free meal.

10. Chapter 10 – Discussion

This thesis began with an exploration of malnutrition and the implications of nutritional inadequacies in terms of growth and development in childhood, focussing on the role of poverty and food insecurity in the development and the maintenance of both undernutrition and overnutrition (World Health Organisation 2000, 2014). A global recognition of the need to address childhood malnutrition has resulted in the development of a number of strategies used to tackle nutritional inadequacies; a significant one is the provision of food in school, in operation in the majority of countries in the world (World Food Programme 2013b; Harper et al. 2008).

The provision of free school meals for pupils from low income families has a long history in the UK, and current provision had been shaped by key political, economic and social milestones; most recently the introduction of devolved powers across the UK territories. Concerns in respect of current free school meal policy revolve around the non-take up of entitlement as the evidence indicates that a significant proportion of those entitled don't register, or once registered, don't consume the meal.

Research indicates that levels of both registration and take up of the meal will vary by Local Authority, indicating that take up is influenced by local and contextual factors (Iniesta-Martinez and Evans 2012). Existing research has identified a range of factors which are influential in the take up of free school meal entitlement, relating to issues associated with entitlement such as stigma and implementation, such as anonymity, food provision and the school food environment.

However, the methodology used in existing studies tends to isolate influential factors and the emphasis is on the allocation of variables to categories, rather than preserving the integrity of context. As a result, factors are abstracted from their context and such an approach tends to overlook why

these factors exist, how they are interrelated and why they affect the people they do (Frohlich et al. 2001). Such an approach fails to encompass the full complexity of social processes, understood by preserving the integrity of context and the social context of individual behaviour (Popay et al. 1998; Poland et al. 2006).

The aim of this thesis was to understand the uptake of free school meal entitlement by parents and pupils in the secondary school setting. Building on existing studies, the focus was to understand the way that the social context influences free school meal uptake by exploring the way that contextual factors influence the decision to use entitlement. Using a case study methodology, this thesis undertook an in-depth qualitative investigation of the uptake of free school meal entitlement in secondary schools within one Local Authority in Wales, exploring how interactions between structure and agency across a range of socio ecological levels influenced the uptake of entitlement.

This study makes a unique contribution to the research base by placing free school meals uptake within a socio ecological framework and providing understanding of the way that the interaction of structure and agency within those contexts influences the uptake of free school meal entitlement in Welsh secondary schools. This study illuminates the impact of marginalisation on pupils in receipt of free school meal entitlement, highlighting the way that the dimensions of power, consumption and identity are played out within the secondary school setting, influencing the take up of entitlement. This study also provides recommendations for policy and practice

Beginning with the policy framework, interviews with policy makers, local authority and school staff allowed understanding of the way that policy level factors structure implementation processes. To understand the way that pupils negotiate the school food environment, focus groups were conducted to explore how pupils perceive and enact relations and the school food

practices which result. Finally, interviews with parents and pupils explored how structure and agency interact to influence the take up of entitlement.

Reflecting on the empirical data outlined in Chapters 5–8, this chapter considers the implications of these findings in terms of understanding uptake of free school meal entitlement. This chapter begins by reflecting on the study design, including ethical issues in terms of conducting research with children and young people. This chapter then goes on to consider the theoretical approach, placing the findings within these frameworks. The implications of recent developments in free school meal policy across the UK are considered. Finally, this chapter considers implications for policy and practice.

10.1. Reflections on the Study Design

This thesis places the uptake of free school meal entitlement within the social context within which it occurs. Analysis of the literature was framed using a socio ecological model as a framework and this framework informed the methodology, design and recruitment strategy by the identification of analytical levels which determined the thesis structure.

10.1.1. A Socio Ecological Model; a Methodological Framework

A socio ecological perspective encompasses context in its broadest sense, providing a comprehensive framework for understanding the multiple and interacting determinants of health behaviours (Sayer 2000; McLaren and Hawe 2005; Richard et al. 2011). By focussing on the cultural context of behaviours, a socio ecological model acknowledges the dynamic interplay between situational and personal factors and in doing so attempt to understand how the same environmental conditions may affect people's health differently (Stokols 1996; McLaren and Hawe 2005).

Using a socio ecological approach provided an analytical framework within which to identify factors from across a range of levels which constitute the free school meal context. The potential for levels to interact is key within an ecological model and using this model as a framework allows analysis of these interactions in order to determine which are of most importance (Sayer 2000; Richard et al. 2011).

Within this framework, health behaviours are seen as a product of interdependence between the individual and the environment (Green et al. 2000) however, the interrelationships between individuals and contexts are difficult to capture using quantitative methods and this study used qualitative methods in order to discover actors reasoning according to specific circumstances (Sayer 2000).

Understanding the social contextuality of meaning is achieved by tapping into the subjective experience of individuals and this thesis used semi structured interviews and focus groups in order to explore the way that structure is 'practiced, lived in, enacted and challenged' (Frohlich et al. 2002:1414). It is acknowledged that qualitative methods can be useful in making sense of children and young people's food and eating practices, and in particular, speaking and writing about food and eating can offer participants of all ages and most abilities the opportunity to delve into their own world of practice (Share 2008; Wills 2012).

The use of focus groups provided the opportunity to examine the norms and practices of pupils in terms of school food practices, acknowledging that in the school setting, food and eating takes place in social groups and school lunch represents an inherently social occasion (Share 2008). Within this research the focus group data provided a powerful insight into the reasoning behind the school food practices of secondary school pupils, although the shared nature of the discussion and the peer pressure which is acknowledged to be influential during adolescence means that the consensus of opinion, apparent within the data may be overemphasised.

10.1.2. Understanding the Influence of Context

Considering the role of the environment allows the exploration of the effects of collective or group characteristics on individual health outcomes, in recognition that social context may be the key to understanding health related behaviours and policy outcomes (Frohlich et al. 2001; Poland et al. 2006). The adoption of a critical realist approach enabled this research to understand how certain mechanisms, operating in particular circumstances, create certain outcomes (McCormack et al. 2007).

Within critical realism, the stratified character of the real world is acknowledged so it is recognised that generative mechanisms will operate at different strata or levels of reality (McEvoy and Richards 2003). Key in this is understanding the impact of implementation variation since contextual conditions are crucial to a realist evaluation which is about unearthing and inspecting vital programme mechanisms and distinguishing contexts that generate diverse effects (Hanberger 2001; Pawson 2003; Barrett 2004).

A case study method facilitated a focus on the peculiarities of context, in recognition that any phenomenon under study will be embedded in a number of contexts (Eisenhardt 2002; Stake 2005). A case study methodology is a useful method for placing individual behaviour within levels of hierarchically nested ecological context, allowing the exploration of the dynamics and causal pathways of each case and examining the processes in which influences from multiple levels of ecological contexts converge in an unusual way, thus structuring social action (Sullivan 2002).

A case study methodology is an inductive process and the need for in depth investigation means that the sample size is too small to warrant random selection. As a result, the case from which the most can be learnt will be chosen, an atypical case, chosen for its explanatory power rather than its typicality (J Clyde Mitchell 1983; Stake 2005). In order to select an atypical case, a priori theoretical framing is used to justify sampling choice (Tavory and Timmermans 2009) and within this thesis, case study selection was

based on factors highlighted as influential by the literature and within existing research.

Beginning with the policy framework, free school meal policy in Wales was compared with that of the other devolved territories. At the local authority level, factors found to be influential to the uptake of free school meal entitlement (level of entitlement, free school meal allowance, catering provision and the payment methods in operation) were used as selection criteria. Within the Local Authority, four secondary schools were selected to reflect a range of the criteria, including a range of levels of free school meals uptake and these provided a starting point for the examination of contextual factors which may have resulted in this variation. These contextual factors included the school level of entitlement, school policy including the payment methods in place and offsite policy and factors associated with the school food environment such as the nutritional standards in place.

Using a case study methodology facilitated an in-depth exploration of the school environment which allowed specific contextual factors, identified by the literature as important to be explored.

10.1.3. Reliability

Traditional measures of quality, drawn up for quantitative methods do not transfer to qualitative methods and so alternative methods of quality have been put forward. In terms of sampling, case study research builds on theoretical sampling; even in the larger collective case studies the sample size is usually too small to warrant random selection and a purposive sample acknowledges opportunities for intensive study. As such, it makes sense to choose cases such as extreme situations and polar types in which the process of interest is 'transparently observable' (Eisenhardt 2002:13). In this way, the case from which the most can be learned is selected, a different and sometimes superior criterion to representativeness since often, more

can be learned from an atypical case than a seemingly typical case (Stake 2005).

Prediction based on case study techniques tends to be theoretical rather than empirical and consequently, statistical inference is not invoked in case studies (J Clyde Mitchell 1983). The purpose of a case study is not to represent the world, but to represent the case and the goal of the extended case method is to situate the case in the necessary context for explanation rather than to be generalised to other cases (Sullivan 2002; Stake 2005).

As a result, extrapolation is based on the validity of analysis rather than the representations of the events, which are often unique (J Clyde Mitchell 1983) and an important step in these replication procedures is the development of a rich theoretical framework which becomes the vehicle for generalising to new cases (Yin 2009). An essential feature of theory building is comparison of emergent concepts, theory or hypothesis with the extant literature, this ties together underlying similarities and the result is theory with stronger internal validity, wider generalisability and higher conceptual level (Eisenhardt 2002).

10.1.4. Limitations

Chapter 4 highlighted the potential difficulties of researching free school meal entitlement which may be stigmatising for recipients and as a result, may have implications for the recruitment of participants. Despite the use of snowballing and information being made available for the whole school population, families who met the entitlement criteria for free school meals but had not registered are not represented within the data. Other research which highlights the gap between the those on the relevant benefits and those registered for free school meals, uses data from HMRC (Iniesta-Martinez and Evans 2012) and it is possible that to access these 'hard to reach' participants may require a different method of recruitment rather than through the school setting.

Secondly, other studies which have focussed on dietary practices in childhood have noted that food choice across home and school settings varies according to age (Share 2008; Warren et al. 2008; Fitzgerald et al. 2010). Within this research no attempt was made to distinguish differences by age range within the secondary school setting however this may be a useful analytical tool to further understand the way that pupils formulate and act out school food preferences, the school food practices that result and the resulting influence on free school meal uptake.

Finally, the potential ethical issues associated with undertaking research with children and young people were highlighted in Chapter 4 and it was acknowledged that gaining freely given and fully informed consent is often problematic, not least because children's participation is usually dependent on adult gatekeepers (Harden et al. 2000; The Research Ethics Guidebook). For this study, the need to gain informed consent from all pupils had significant implications in respect of the planned observation of the dining hall in each of the schools. In the first two schools where consent was sought, the level of opt outs made the observation unworkable. While issues associated with the dining hall environment were explored in depth within the focus groups, the inability to obtain consent from all the potential users of the dining hall had implications for the research design, reflecting wider debates regarding the need for individual level consent for observation studies.

The standard for the involvement of participants in research is that of informed consent, and the central argument for obtaining consent is that research is liable to be intrusive and that intrusion is only legitimate if consent is obtained (National Children's Bureau ; American Sociological Association 1999; British Sociological Association 2002; Spicker 2007). However, the difficulties of gaining informed consent for projects such as observing behaviour in public places are acknowledged, and guidance accepts that in these types of research, obtaining consent from every individual is neither practical nor feasible (The University of Sheffield ; The Research Ethics Guidebook).

Throughout the literature there is a concession that covert methods are necessary in some circumstances, if methods are not intrusive and pose little or no risk of harm to participants or where it is impossible to use other methods to obtain essential data (Economic & Social Research Council ; British Sociological Association 2002; The Research Ethics Guidebook). The key element of this argument is that informed consent has an adverse effect on participation rates and in the extreme makes some groups of people or topics un-researchable (Crow et al. 2006).

It is recognised that it is not always possible to give people the opportunity to decline to be observed without making the research highly disruptive or rendering it impossible in practice (Hammersley and Atkinson 2007; McKenzie 2009). In reality, it would seem that the principle of individual informed consent and voluntariness seems utopian (Oeye et al. 2007) and that the 'standard discourse on ethics is abstracted from the doing' (Calvey 2008:905). As such, researchers have expressed reservations about the way in which consent is handled; if not about the underlying principle of consent.

10.2. A Socio Ecological Model; a Theoretical Framework

A Socio ecological model provided a framework to guide the research design and provided a framework for the analysis and organisation of the findings. A key strength of a socio ecological model is that it encompasses context in the broadest sense, focussing on multiple levels of influence and offering an elegant conceptual contour of those levels of influence (McLaren and Hawe 2005; Sallis et al. 2008; Richard et al. 2011).

This thesis considered the free school meal environment using McLeroy's socio ecological model as a framework within which to understand the influence of contextual variation on free school meal uptake (Figure 29). The levels of influence considered include the way that macro and political variables will shape the policy framework which in turn will interact with the

local setting to shape implementation. The interaction between pupils and the school food environment was considered, in terms of the way that pupils negotiate the school food environment and the school food practices that result. Finally, this thesis considered the experience of free school meal entitlement and the way that interactions between structure and agency will result in the uptake of entitlement.

Interpersonal (Pupil Population)

The strengthening of nutritional guidelines resulted in the removal of many popular foods; This shift to healthy eating was unpopular with most pupils.

Additionally, the institutional nature of school dining was disliked and as a result, pupils often opted out of school dining, especially where an offsite policy allowed them to access foods offsite.

Individual (Free School Meal Recipients)

Few pupils experienced stigma in the traditional sense however free school meal status determined where, when and what free school meal pupils could eat for lunch, limiting their ability to conform to the school food practices of their peers and resulting in their marginalisation from the wider pupil population.

Public Policy (UK & Wales)

As a means tested benefit, free school meal entitlement has the potential to result in stigma for recipients and this has implications for policy implementation.

Devolution has resulted in policy divergence across the UK with a shift towards universality in England and Scotland

Community (Local Authority Level)

National and local factors influence the context within which free school meal policy is implemented. The Nationwide introduction of nutritional guidelines in Wales resulted in significant change to school food provision.

Implementation of policy by the Local Authority includes the processing of applications and the setting the free school meal allowance.

Organisational (School Level)

Local factors, including the overall level of free school meal entitlement will influence how policy is implemented at the school level and payment methods and the level of home school contact will vary by school. Additionally, factors such as the built environment will influence offsite policy and the school food environment.

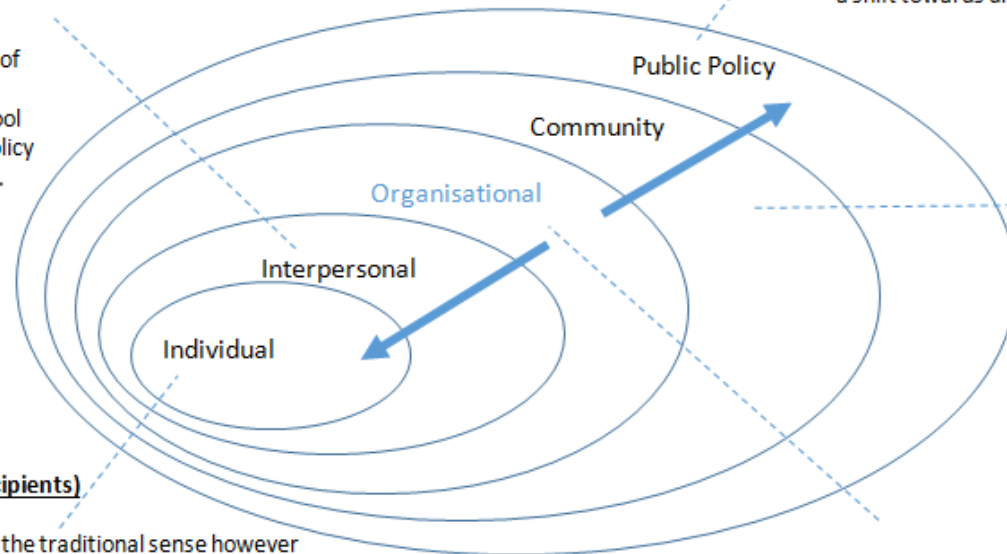


Figure 29 : Key Findings within a Socio Ecological Model

10.2.1. The Policy Framework

By starting with the policy framework, it is possible to understand the many and varied processes that may lead to an intervention's success or failure (Pawson 2003). Chapter 5 explored the policy framework underpinning free school meal policy in recognition that understanding implementation requires understanding of the macro and political variables which structure the process (Sabatier 1979; Hill 2003). Understanding the policy framework requires locating policy both within the socio historical and political context, as well as exploring stakeholders' perceptions of the current policy problem (Hanberger 2001).

Exploration of the free school meal policy framework revealed that the defining feature of free school meal policy is the restricted nature of entitlement, reflecting a broader neo liberal approach to welfare in which social benefits are targeted and directed at those defined as in need. The policy context underpinning free school meal entitlement is common to many interventions, reflecting the fact that policy levers are remarkably few and interventions which operate in different policy domains are expected to operate through the same or very similar programme mechanisms, with welfare payments, the most basic form of incentive (Pawson 2003).

However, such money and associated benefits have social meaning and a key factor is the association of means tested benefits with stigma. This has implications for policy implementation and in the case of free school meal policy, effective policy implementation was perceived by policy makers to revolve around the promotion of entitlement and ensuring anonymity for those entitled.

The introduction of devolved powers has in other policy areas provided a significant agent for change (Greer 2004; Rees 2007; Davey et al. 2008; Hill 2009) and policy makers and stakeholders acknowledged that the limitations of free school meal policy provided an impetus for change. The way that

policy had developed across the UK territories was explored through interviews, building on the historical outline provided in the literature review. The constraint that societal structures imposed echoed the literature which noted a wider approach to welfare in which the focus is on targeting and means testing and within this system, policy change is often piecemeal and incremental (Kasza 2002)

Subsequently, a shift towards principles of universality is evident in both Scotland and England and this has resulted in policy divergence across the UK territories. As well as providing the opportunity for policy entrepreneurship, devolution also represents a more direct means of policy implementation (Musingarimi 2009; Morelli and Seaman 2010) and policy makers were found to attempt to influence the implementation of policy according to policy priorities and concerns while acknowledging autonomy at the local level.

10.2.2. Implementation at the Local Level; the Interaction between Policy and Setting

Throughout the implementation chain, running through policy makers, practitioners and subjects, there is always negotiation about the precise delivery of an intervention (Pawson 2003). Within a socio ecological framework, it is acknowledged that institutions such as schools and workplaces provide the setting for interventions and McLeroy (1988) highlights the importance of the organizational context in the diffusion of health promotion programmes.

Understanding of the variability of context is essential to the understanding of the variability of policy outcomes since the execution and delivery of policy has been found to be a central determinant (Ryan 1995). Chapter 6 identified factors that influenced implementation processes by considering the delivery of free school meal policy within the national, local and school

environment and investigating the effects of the political, institutional and organisational contexts on implementation processes (Sanderson 2000).

Within Wales, free school meal policy remains means tested and this has implications for implementation in terms of the promotion of free school meal policy entitlement and ensuring the anonymity of pupils on free school meals. Four key aspects of free school meal policy implementation, noted to influence the uptake of free school meal entitlement were considered; the promotion of free school meal entitlement, ensuring anonymity of free school meal pupils, implementing minimum nutritional standards and offsite policy.

Crucial in terms of implementation was the promotion of free school meal entitlement and ease of registration since the literature notes that confusion about requirements, the level of information that families receive about benefits and the ease of application can contribute to low take up (Currie 2004; Stuber and Schlesinger 2006). At the school level, policy implementation was found to be influenced by the wider policy framework as the introduction of new policy initiatives were found to have unintended consequences on the way that free school meal entitlement was promoted. Community level factors also played a part in terms of shaping staff policy, particularly the level of entitlement within the school community and concerns regarding the level of entitlement had an impact on the degree to which each school promoted free school meal entitlement varied.

For the majority of parents, while good home-school relations were valued, information about free school meal entitlement was available from a range of sources and registration was straightforward. Of more significance for parents were broader issues related to the strict entitlement criteria and movement in and out of entitlement which had implications for both parents and pupils.

The second significant impact of the restricted nature of free school meal entitlement for parents and pupils was the association of welfare benefits with stigma, however, issues related to stigma were found to be more

complex than traditional concepts suggest. The way that stigma is manifest will relate both the school community and also to the way that free school meals policy is implemented by the school, and it is noted that the school is a key mediating factor in terms of the level of stigma that pupils may experience.

In terms of the school community, stigma may be mediated by local conditions as community level perceptions of welfare stigma will determine micro level interactions. This reflects the literature which proposes a shift away from the traditional focus of stigma in terms of micro level interactions towards an emphasis on stigma's social aspects and towards an appreciation of the casual potential of social structures (Link and Phelan 2001; Scambler 2006; Yang et al. 2007; Pescosolido et al. 2008).

For pupils in an area of low entitlement, traditional attitudes were apparent however in areas of high entitlement, perceptions of free school meals entitlement were reversed and rather than being subject to teasing or bullying, pupils on free school meals were envied. While the perception of free school meal entitlement varied according to the school community and overall levels of entitlement, school processes were also important mediators of stigma. Payment processes were particularly important as cash systems resulted in the identification and in one case bullying of a free school meal pupil.

The strengthening of the commitment to the Appetite for Life guidance meant that food provision across the schools was consistent. The literature notes that the transition to secondary school and the increasing autonomy in terms of food choice is welcomed by pupils (Brannen and Storey 1998) and for pupils in this research, the restriction of availability as a result of nutritional guidelines was unpopular. This reflects other research which indicates that for pupils, it is risky to be seen as interested in healthy eating which was associated with being untrendy and which could attract teasing and marginalisation, while unhealthy food is associated with desirable concepts such as friendship, pleasure and relaxation (Stead et al. 2011)

Finally, an offsite policy was in place in two of the schools in the sample and was found to have a significant impact on school food practices. Offsite policies were determined by physical aspects of the school although there was the potential for school staff to adapt local conditions to attempt to overcome these constraints. The impact of offsite policy was particularly noted by catering staff, as pupils rejected school food provision to access foods offsite that were no longer served in school.

10.2.3. Structure Agency Interaction; School Food Practices

To understand the variability of policy outcomes, it is necessary to understand the socially contingent nature of human action and the particular confluences of factors that characterise different categories of settings (Green et al. 2000). A collective lifestyles approach was therefore used to understand school food practices since it is acknowledged that teenagers eating habits within the school are deeply embedded in the context in which they occur, as well as relationships with peers (Wills et al. 2005; Delormier et al. 2009; Backett-Milburn et al. 2010).

Exploring the impact of the school food environment in terms of pupils' school food practices revealed a complex interaction between pupils and their environment. The school food environment was shaped by a number of factors which resonated with pupils; these included the built environment, the temporal and social nature of school dining and food availability. While many aspects of the school food environment were subject to local variation, in many cases these variations were superseded by macro level factors associated with school food provision.

Previous literature noted that the institutional nature of schools dining is unpopular (Daniel and Gustafsson 2010; Sahota et al. 2013) and this was reflected in the data as pupils across the schools noted a range of factors which influenced their decision to use the school canteen. Issues of price,

food choice, décor, mess, noise, queues and seating were raised by pupils across the four schools. Key within these findings was the inherent tension between the institutional nature of dining and pupils' perceptions that school lunch should be a time for them, reflecting other research (Metcalf et al. 2008; Daniel and Gustafsson 2010).

In part, the response of pupils was in relation to policies implemented at the national level and operationalised by the Local Authority. In relation to the introduction of Appetite for Life menus, overwhelmingly, pupils found the changing provision unwelcome as they expressed the view that the food provided failed to meet their preferences. This reflects other research which found that pupils strongly focused on issues of choice in relation to their school food practices and when attempts were made to limit or remove less healthy food items and introduce healthier snacks, they strongly resented their choices being controlled (Share 2008).

Exploring the perception that pupils have of their ability to exert power and agency within the school food environment, pupils felt that they had little influence within the school setting and this was reflected in the perception that they were not provided with the information necessary to make informed choices. This reflects other literature that notes that students felt that they were not generally consulted however the literature notes that connectedness is consistently associated with a wide range of health, social and academic outcomes for children and young people (Share 2008; Waters et al. 2009).

The literature reports that pupils strongly focus on issues of choice in relation to their school food practices. The top down approach, taking precedent over individual choice does not sit comfortably with the desire of young people who see school food as the opportunity to make their own choices and decisions. As school food provision became increasingly influenced by changes at the national level, pupils increasingly resisted efforts of control from the school; within these relations, the macro nature of policy change superseded any contextual variation as pupils found themselves faced with

increasing standardisation within the school food environment, as prescribed nutritional standards and predetermined menus became paramount (Metcalf et al. 2011).

In this way, secondary school pupils remain constrained by organisational structures and social expectations and adult led agendas for health promotion and behaviour change may lead them to adopt strategies of resistance (Valentine 2003; Wills et al. 2005; Wills et al. 2008a). Pupils' responses to the school food environment emphasised the recursive nature of structure agency interaction and the collective nature of school food practices (Delormier et al. 2009) as pupils indicated that they opted out of school food provision. To understand young peoples' responses to the school food environment, it is useful to draw on the concept of resistance, building on literature which examines the social and cultural context of resistance, drawing in particular on concepts of youth and health resistance, conceptualised within debates about power and agency (Share 2008).

10.3. The Take up of Entitlement

While stigma is often cited in policy documents and the literature as a key deterrent in the uptake of free school meal entitlement, definitions of stigma often refer to the impact of the negative attribution towards those in receipt of means tested benefits. However this thesis moves beyond this simple definition towards an acknowledgment that this understanding does not encompass the myriad of ways that free school meal pupils experience marginalisation as a result of their free school meal status. For pupils on free school meals, in addition to traditional concepts of stigma, constraints associated with their free school meals status result in less opportunity for them to exert agency within the school food setting.

10.3.1. Poverty and Marginalisation

The literature reveals that poverty penetrates deep into the heart of childhood, permeating every facet of children's lives from economic and material disadvantage through the structuring and limiting of social relationships and social participation to the most personal, often hidden aspects of disadvantage associated with shame, sadness and the fear of social difference and marginalisation (Ridge 2011). School is where young people spend a lot of their lives, and there are many young people who do not enjoy school due to the inability to afford many aspects of school life, including uniforms, meals, materials and trips.

In addition to going without, there is an emotional aspect of poverty in school which can set children apart, particularly if it is not addressed sensitively by schools; children can be made to feel different and poverty can make children feel singled out, stigmatised and bullied (Holloway et al. 2014). Entitlement to free school meals is a key aspect of poverty and for many pupils on free school meals, the identification of their free school meal status will result in the highlighting of difference from peers.

A key aspect of the stigma associated with free school meal entitlement is the association of a means tested welfare benefit with poverty; as such free school meal entitlement is evidence of family poverty. The literature notes that pupils work hard to hide their poverty, for example often buying expensive items like designer trainers in an attempt to hide their poverty from their peers (Elliott and Leonard 2004). For pupils on free school meals, being identified as such will make home circumstances apparent, potentially leading to embarrassment.

10.3.2. Consumption and Social Identity

It has been noted that for young people, particularly at the onset of adolescence, patterns of consumption are vital for establishing and

managing identities (Piacentini and Mailer 2004; Wooten 2006). For those who make the wrong choices, there are critical social consequences in the form of teasing, bullying, stigma and exclusion (Valentine 2000; Stead et al. 2011). While food is a more ephemeral, lower involvement product category than for example clothing or music, similar concerns and processes have been found to come into play in terms of food choice and the literature indicates that food is used by young people to inform and support their identity and the way they relate and judge others (Stead et al. 2011).

For adolescents, the consumption of products serves two important functions, it helps them create and present a desired identity and it helps them fit in with a desired peer group (Stead et al. 2011). Young people are highly conscious of how others in their social group may interpret the meanings of particular products and brands and may choose to reject items accorded to the perceived values and opinion of others who matter to them (Piacentini and Mailer 2004). Certain products may evoke negative stereotypes which may associate the consumer with an undesired identity, group or trend, this is based on a shared understanding and is particularly important where products are conspicuously consumed for example within the school setting (Stead et al. 2011).

The lines between what is acceptable and what is not acceptable in terms of consumption of food and drink are strictly drawn (Stead et al. 2011). In this thesis, pupils' response to the school food environment reflects the way that responses to school food provision are collective, and that those who deviate from the collective response to school food provision are acknowledged as being different.

It has been noted that changing food provision within the canteen as a result of the introduction of new menus was met with opposition from pupils and as a result, pupils noted that they often opted out of the school food environment. However, for pupils on free school meals, the options open to them are determined by their free school meal status, as decisions about

what to eat and where to eat are determined by the free school meal allowance.

The free school meal allowance, set by the Local Authority determines many aspects of the free school meal experience for free school meal pupils. It has been noted that the amount is often insufficient to buy the type and amount of food that meets pupil's needs and preferences, especially in light of increasing prices. The allowance is credited daily and any unused credit is lost, as a result, in order to avoid overspending and embarrassment at the till, pupils on free school meals tend to limit themselves to the same range of foods that they know will keep within the allowance.

The allowance is calculated based on the 'meal of the day' option however, pupils noted that the meal of the day is often an unpopular choice since consumption of a traditional meal does not adhere to the pupil's preferences for portable and snack style foods. This has implications in terms of marginalisation pupils deemed to be making the wrong choices and eating the wrong foods since, for adolescents, food is a social cultural product with meaning and importance far beyond its nutritional and calorific content (SyLOW and Holm 2009; Stead et al. 2011).

Finally, the allowance is only available for pupils to spend at lunchtime so while other pupils are able to purchase food in the break time and therefore avoid the school canteen at lunchtime; this option is not available for pupils on free school meals. Pupils on free school meals lack the flexibility of other pupils to avoid the canteen at lunchtime, and this is especially pertinent in schools where pupils have the option to go offsite at lunchtime.

For pupils on free school meals, the options for consumption but also resistance are constrained by their free school meal status, both in terms of the food that they can afford but also where they can access food. As the school food service shifts towards the provision of healthy menus and the elimination of unhealthy food, free school meals pupils are left with little

option but to eat the food provided by the school or to opt out of school food provision.

10.4. The Shift towards Universality; the Implications of Policy Change

Since its introduction, the free school meal policy framework has changed in response to changing political, economic and social contexts. For the most part, these changes have been incremental however a significant driver for policy change has been the introduction of devolution across the UK territories. At the time of data collection, the free school meal policy framework across UK territories was characterised by similarity rather than difference however, subsequent developments have resulted in divergence across the UK territories.

10.4.1. The UK Policy Framework

This divergence has taken the form of the extension of universal free school meal provision to all pupils in the first three years of primary school in both England and Scotland. In Scotland, while early pressure for change was resisted at the Local Authority level, the commitment to universal entitlement was realised in January 2015 (The Scottish Government 2014). In England, while the Coalition Government initially removed funding that had resulted in trials of universal entitlement, subsequent policy saw the introduction of universal entitlement in England from September 2014 (Laws 2014). However, it has recently been noted that this policy is now under review in England (Sandhu 2015)

The introduction of universal free school meals in England and Scotland represents a significant shift in policy and a withdrawal from the principles of means testing within a narrow age range. As a result, within the primary sector, free school meal entitlement across the UK has diverged, with Wales and Northern Ireland maintaining an approach which focuses on means

testing and Scotland and England introducing universal provision. These developments highlight issues related to wider debates in terms of means testing versus universality.

10.4.2. Targeting Welfare

The principle of targeting welfare in line with a neo liberal welfare regime is entrenched in the UK, harking back to the traditions of the poor law. As a result, targeting continues to play a significant role, supported by the view that across a range of policy spheres, the most effective use of resources is to target them at the most disadvantaged (Korpi and Palme 1998). However, policy makers and students of social policy are divided on the issue of targeting versus welfare universalism and there has been increasing criticism of the targeting of social policies at the poor.

While the assumption is that social policies directed at the needy constitute the most efficient strategy for reducing poverty and inequality, analysis indicates that the more benefits are targeted at the poor, the less likely it is that poverty and inequality will be reduced. This is evidenced by the fact that countries such as the UK which use the basic security and targeted models have the highest income inequality figures, while welfare states based on a universal strategy are likely to result in greater redistribution (Korpi and Palme 1998).

The universalism versus targeting debate resonates in terms of free school meals and it is argued that the restricted entitlement currently in place for the majority of pupils is found to be the least effective method of welfare provision (Morelli and Seaman 2005). Inherent within the process of targeting is the necessity of establishing 'need', and the means test for free school meal entitlement has been criticised as inaccurate since it is based on income data which, due to its complexity, may not provide an accurate reflection of the disadvantage faced by poor students. Additionally, evidence suggests that the rate of eligibility under the current system is woefully

narrow and an eligibility rate of at least 20% should be considered (Morelli and Seaman 2005).

The second issue is that entitlement is derived from receipt of a subset of benefits in the UK welfare state system; as a result, since children are entitled to free school meals through the intermediary of a parent or carer, there is difficulty in ensuring free school meal policy successfully targets the poorest children. Overall, receipt of benefits is considered an inefficient proxy for poverty since it does not take into account the entirety of the household's financial position. To overcome these issues it is suggested that poverty should be defined by a household's position in the income distribution (Morelli and Seaman 2005).

10.4.3. Universal Provision

While the recent introduction of universal provision in England and Scotland has not yet been evaluated, evaluations of previous trials indicate that universal entitlement has a number of effects. The earliest evaluation was based on Hull's 'Eat Well Do Well' project which ran between 2004-2007 and provided universal free healthy breakfasts, lunches and after school meals for all primary school pupils in Hull (Colquhoun et al. 2008). In Scotland, pupils in the first three years of primary school in five Local Authorities received universal free meals between 2007-2008 (MacLardie et al. 2008). Finally, two English Local Authorities, Newham and Durham hosted a trial of universal meals for pupils in the first three years of primary school between 2009 – 2011, while in Wolverhampton, entitlement was extended to include those on working tax credit (Kitchen et al. 2012). The findings of these trials indicate that the introduction of universal free meals had an impact in a number of areas including the uptake of school meals, attainment and behaviour and dietary intake.

In terms of uptake, in both Scotland and England there was evidence of an increase in the uptake of school food provision. In Scotland, uptake

increased in all five trial areas, in total uptake increased from 53% to 75%; among pupils not registered for free school meals from 41%-69% and those previously registered for free school meals from 89%-94% (MacLardie et al. 2008). In England, pupils taking a school meal at least once a week increased to around 90% compared to 60% of pupils in areas which were not in the trial (Kitchen et al. 2012). Despite the increase in uptake, in Scotland a ceiling of 75% was maintained, explained by 'fussy eaters' (MacLardie et al. 2008)

For pupils in Newham and Durham, the introduction of universal entitlement was found to have a significant impact on attainment and pupils in these areas made between 4 and 8 weeks more progress over a two year period than similar pupils in other areas (Institute for Fiscal Studies 2012). The effect of the universal entitlement pilot appears to be stronger among pupils from less affluent backgrounds than among pupils from more affluent backgrounds, it also appears to be stronger from pupils with low prior attainment than among those with higher prior attainment, findings which suggest that universal entitlement may help to reduce educational inequalities (Kitchen et al. 2012).

In respect of dietary intake, as a result of the increased take up of school meals, there was a shift in the types of food that pupils ate at lunchtime, away from the food typically associated with packed lunches towards those associated with hot meals. Children were more likely to eat hot food, vegetables, chips, rice, pasta and potatoes while consumption of other foods fell; sandwiches (27%), soft drinks (16%) and crisps (18%) (Kitchen et al. 2012; Dimpleby and Vincent 2013). In Scotland, the trial acted as a catalyst for pupil's willingness to try new foods (MacLardie et al. 2008) and in Hull, respondents felt that children knew more about healthy eating (Colquhoun et al. 2008).

The evidence indicates that universal free school meals had a positive impact across a range of measures, however in Wolverhampton the extension of entitlement had few significant benefits for pupils in terms of the

outcomes noted in Newham and Durham where universal entitlement was trialled (Institute for Fiscal Studies 2012). The evidence from the trials noted that many teachers felt that the trial had helped to foster a sense of cohesion within the school and the removal of old divisions (Dimbleby and Vincent 2013).

10.4.4. The Implications of Policy Change

As a result of these trials, commentators initially noted that the roll out of universal free meals may disproportionately benefit children from middle and higher income families (Institute for Fiscal Studies 2012). However, it was subsequently recommended that the Government should embark on a phased roll out of free school meals for all children in primary school (Dimbleby and Vincent 2013).

The justification for the focus on primary schools is based on the fact that trials of universal free school meals in primary schools have been successful and because it is far easier to implement in schools that offer a set meal as most primary schools do. However, in terms of secondary school provision, it has been noted that the introduction of universal free school meals in the secondary school setting would require considerable reworking of the cafeteria style service that is usually in place, and this would require further trials (Dimbleby and Vincent 2013).

Consequently, within secondary schools across the UK the free school meal environment remains unchanged by recent policy developments and improving the level of free school meal uptake within this setting requires the need to address issues associated with restricted entitlement.

10.5. Recommendations

The value of acknowledging the influence of factors at different levels as a way of understanding and tackling various current health issues is acknowledged across a number of areas of concern in public health. Using

such a framework serves as a useful tool in understanding complex disorders such as obesity, implying that interventions should be multi-level (British Medical Association 2005). A socio ecological model provides a framework for understanding the complexities of influences on children's food choices, given the multitude of variables which emerged as salient from research, allowing the presentation of a system where factors within the various sub systems interact with each other and across levels (Piscopo).

10.5.1. Recommendations for Practice; Promoting and Ensuring Uptake

A key factor in protecting free school meal pupils from marginalisation is the protection of identity and while payment methods are often cited as key, confidentiality for pupils on free school meals needs to be maintained in throughout school processes. This includes the administration of free school meal entitlement, such as registration forms, given out in class should be replaced with correspondence sent directly to the home address.

In Wales, a survey of secondary schools found that 38% of secondary schools have a cashless system in place, alternative methods where a cashless system was not in place included a daily ticket card collection from the office (15%), pupils giving a number at the till (13%) and saying name at till (13%) (Welsh Government 2013). Payment systems are key to ensuring the anonymity of free school meal pupils and the use of cashless systems goes some way to protecting their identity and should be in place in all secondary schools.

For pupils on free school meals, the process of marginalisation occurs within many aspects of school dining; these relate to the free school meal allowance, school food processes and the school food environment.

The shift to private provision within the selected Local Authority highlights the need for the monitoring of food prices within the canteen, especially in light of the fixed allowance for free school meal pupils. In terms of the free school

meal allocation there is a need to ensure that free school meal pupils are able to access sufficient and appropriate food that meets their needs and preferences, to include a full meal (but not necessarily the meal of the day) and a drink. For pupils on a set allowance, there is a fear of inadvertently overspending and there is a case for provision of a 'meal deal', to include various items for a fixed price, offering an alternative to the meal of the day.

In relation to school processes, the crediting of the free school meal allowance after break prevents pupils on free school meals from using their allowance at any time other than lunchtime, additionally, any unspent money is lost since the daily budget cannot be carried forward. Free school meal pupils should have the same level of flexibility as non-free school meal pupils, the ability to budget and the flexibility that other pupils have to spend their money throughout the school day.

In terms of the school food environment, there is a need to create environments and policies that make it convenient, attractive and economical to make healthful choices (Sallis et al. 2008) and policy makers suggest that schools should attempt to ensure that pupils can be kept on site for lunchtime (Welsh Assembly Government 2010). The introduction of policies which facilitate a lunchtime which is less rushed such as a staggered lunchtime are recommended, more effective systems to prevent queuing and considering the seating, lighting and décor in light of pupils preferences may make the school food environment more acceptable to pupils.

10.6. Conclusion

Poverty can structure and limit social relationships and social participation and within the school environment, poor pupils constantly strive to hide their poverty in an attempt to avoid being singled out, stigmatised and bullied. Entitlement to free school meals is a key aspect of poverty, providing evidence of family poverty that may otherwise be hidden and the identification of free school meal status will result in the highlighting of difference from peers.

For adolescents, consumption is closely linked to identity and the lines between what is acceptable and what is not acceptable in terms of food and drink are strictly drawn. The main implication of theorising structure agency interactions is that in terms of school food practices, pupils on free school meals have much less opportunity to exert agency than their peers. Key within this are processes of marginalisation which exist in terms of many aspects of school food practice since free school meal entitlement brings with it restrictions in terms of the type and amount of food that free school meal pupils can eat and where they can access their food. As a result of these processes, pupils in receipt of free school meal entitlement struggle to participate in the consumption patterns of the wider pupil population and this will influence the uptake of entitlement.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 – The Development of School Food Policy

1834 The Poor Law

Enabled children defined as malnourished by medical experts to be given free meals

1906 The Education (Provision of Meals) Act

(LEAs in England and Wales had power to provide free or reduced charge meals for those children who would otherwise be unable to benefit from education, now universally provided. This provision only benefited the neediest; other children had to pay cost)

1908 Education (Scotland) Act

(School Boards were empowered but not required to provide school meals; except for neglected children and those in other special circumstances, children were expected to pay the cost of the food.

1914 The Provision of Meals Act

(Gave the Chancellor of the Exchequer the power to make available grants to cover half the cost of meals)

1924 Free milk in school is introduced

1940 National school meals policy introduced (Government providing 95% of the cost of meals in 1941. Recommendations for nutritional content, staffing levels and a fixed price were established)

1944 Education Act

(Required LEAs to provide a meal to every child in a maintained school.)

1967 100% grant for school meals expenditure is withdrawn and replaced by a system of general rate support.

1979 A White paper estimated the cost of school meals at £380 million, the target was to reduce this to £190 million.

1980 Education Act

(Takes away the duty of LEAs to provide school meals, except for those in receipt of free school meals; abolition of minimum nutritional standards and the fixed price)

1986 Social Security Act (came into operation in 1988)

(Children with parents in receipt of family credit lose their entitlement to free school meals with the price of the meal nominally included in the benefit. Those in receipt of income support still eligible.)

1988 Local Government Act

(Introduction of Compulsory Competitive Tendering, CCT)

1992 Eligibility rules for free school meals are tightened further for those on income support when the allowed number of hours worked per week fell from 24 to under 16.

2001 Education (Nutritional Standards for School Lunches) England

2001 Educational (Nutritional Standards for School Lunches) (Wales)

(Reintroduction of minimum nutritional standards, based on food groups)

2002 Hungry for Success (Scotland)

(Publication in 2003 of nutrition, rather than food based guidelines)

2002 Education Act

(Amended the free school lunch eligibility criteria thus increasing the number of children eligible to receive free school meals)

2005 Turning the Tables (England) published

2005 Jamie Oliver 'Feed me Better Campaign'

(The TV campaign gathered massive public support and led to the then secretary for education Ruth Kelly promising a further investment of 220 million for school meals)

2006 Appetite for Life (Wales)

(Consultation document circulated)

2007 Appetite for Life Action Plan launched

(Setting out the strategic direction and actions required to improve nutritional standards of food and drink provided in schools in Wales. Recommendations are currently undergoing a two year action research project to be completed September 2010.)

2007 Scottish Trial of Universal Free Meals for Infants in Five Local Authorities

2008 English Trial of Universal Free Meals for Infants in Three Local Authorities

2010 Healthy measure Wales

2014 Introduction of universal free meals in infants in England

2015 Introduction of universal free meals to infants in Scotland

2015 New nutritional guidance in England

Appendix 2 – Take up of Free School Meal Entitlement; Existing Evidence

Study	Aim	Setting and Participants	Methods	Key Findings
Storey and Chamberlain (2001)	<p>To examine how the nature of school and school meal provision, in particular management and administration, influences the take up of free meals.</p> <p>To identify models of good practice and successful strategies for schools to maximise take up.</p>	<p>13 Schools from 7 LEAs in England were selected as case studies</p> <p>7 secondary schools</p> <p>2 middle schools</p> <p>4 primary schools</p> <p>Representing high and low levels of registered eligibility, with the exception of one, high take up levels</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Pupils • Parents • School catering staff • LEA Staff 	<p>Observation</p> <p>Individual and group interviews with 250 pupils</p> <p>Questionnaires with 470 secondary school pupils</p> <p>Telephone interviews with 50 parents</p> <p>40 Interviews with school, catering and LEA staff</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embarrassment of fear of being teased put both parents and pupils off taking a meal • Most pupils reported no instances of those receiving meals being teased or bullied though there was evidence that this did occur. <p>Discrimination</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Payment system, pupils had to identify themselves to school staff • In school which provided only packed lunches free, high profile packaging and storage methods deterred parents. <p>Quality of the Meal</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Choices unappealing • Allowance insufficient to afford a balanced meal • Overcrowded dining rooms and long queues • Separation of packed lunch pupils • Pupils had no choice over content of the packed lunch • Parents felt they could provide a better packed lunch than that provided by the school <p>Lack of knowledge</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 11% of parents did not know their entitlement or how to apply • Parents unsure how the free school meal policy operated.

Study	Aim	Setting and Participants	Methods	Key Findings
<p>The Children's Society 2001</p>	<p>To improve the take up of free school meals by looking at children and young people's experiences of the service</p>	<p>Two secondary schools in Somerset</p> <p>Pupils</p>	<p>Questionnaires</p> <p>Interviews</p> <p>Participatory research, the children shaped and developed data collection tools</p>	<p>Key themes (from the questionnaires)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Cost is too high • Food quality is poor and portions are too small • Limited choice especially around healthy options • Separate queue for free meals was in operation • Getting free meal replacement cards • There is stigma attached to claiming free meals <p>Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Abolition of separate queues for free and non-free school meal pupils • Abolition of dinner cards for free school meal pupils • More ability to decide what money is spent on • Involve children and young people in decision making at school • Increase the amount allocated for free school meals • Lower the cost of the meals • Extend provision to all families on low incomes including working family tax credit.

Study	Aim	Setting and Participants	Methods	Key Findings
Morrison and Clarke (2006)	The objective was to assess barriers to registration and uptake of free school meals in primary and secondary schools and to make recommendations to increase uptake.	Six secondary school Two primary schools Pupils Parents Head teachers/school staff School cooks	Focus groups with pupils Telephone interviews with 30 free school meal parents Interviews with 18 Head teachers/school staff Interviews with 18 School cooks	<p>Key themes</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The majority of pupils did not know who was in receipt of free school meals • For primary school pupils, a key deciding factors for the uptake of meals was food choice • For secondary school pupils, food choice and queue length were the main deterrents for using the canteen • Pupils considered socialising with friends the most important aspect of lunchtime. <p>Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Determine a universal method of payment in primary school • In secondary schools allow free school meal pupils to buy food at break time • Increased information about free school meal entitlement • All pupils should be treated the same regardless of packed lunch or school meals • Food choice – ensure varied and interesting menu with a 6 week menu cycle. • Introduce regular theme days • Decrease queuing with grab and go service

Study	Aims	Setting and Participants	Methods	Key Findings
Goodwin 2008	Focus was on the impact of recent changes to application procedures for school meals from a paper based system to an online and telephone based system	<p>Three primary schools within one LEA</p> <p>Two stage research a case study of parents in the local area followed by an ethnographic study of three primary schools</p> <p>qualitative data collected from</p> <p>Parents</p> <p>School staff</p> <p>Pupils</p>	<p>Survey conducted with parents</p> <p>'vox pop' sessions with pupils</p>	<p>Survey</p> <p>Of those parents who had not registered their child for free school meals,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 38% said their child preferred a packed lunch • 20% said that their child did not like the school dinners • 10% said their child had specific dietary requirements or allergies. <p>Qualitative data (parents)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Preconceptions of school meals, often negative • Few parents were aware of the savings associated with free school meals • Packed lunches enabled parents to retain control over their children's lunches • Change in parental circumstances may lead to parents being unsure whether they can claim • Lack of internet access <p>Pupils</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Stigma was not an important factor. • Peer influence – packed lunches were associated with the quality and style of the packed lunch boxes and products included • Quality and choice of school food, salad bar was popular

Study	Aims	Setting and Participants	Methods	Key Findings
Sahota 2009	<p>A three phase review conducted over two years investigated why many children do not take up their free school meal entitlement.</p> <p>Phase 1 was an exploratory phase which used a review of literature and exploratory research in school to identify factors which influenced the uptake of free school meals and identify examples of good practise</p>	<p>Four secondary and four primary schools in Leeds were selected using levels of entitlement to free school meals, ethnic intake and varying provision of school meals to determine selection.</p>	<p>Interviews conducted with</p> <p>School staff</p> <p>Catering managers</p> <p>Parents (with children who were entitled to and receiving free school meals.)</p> <p>Focus groups in secondary schools</p> <p>Classroom activities in primary schools</p> <p>Lunchtime observation</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Head teachers felt parents were deterred from claiming due to bureaucracy/low literacy/desire for privacy/isolation • Payment – parents felt that for primary school children, payment was not an issue but preferred cashless systems in secondary school • Free school meal allowance not considered sufficient. • Most Heads felt that stigma was not an issue and the majority of secondary school pupils said they felt there was no stigma associated with free school meal receipt. • Food choice and portion size was an issue as was cost and lack of time. • Queuing and seating <p>Recommendations</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase awareness of free school meals • Minimise stigma within school processes • Allowance should encompass healthy meal • Ensure adequate portion size across all age groups

Study	Aims	Setting and Participants	Methods	Key findings
James (2011)	This paper investigates peer effects in the take up of free school meals, examining two potential channels, stigma and information.	Using the Pupils level annual school census (PLASC) which collects data on every child attending school in England	This paper tests whether information plays a role by comparing the peer effect for those who have claimed in previous years with those who have not.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The results suggest the presence of stigma dampens the peer effect and information makes it larger. Information is found to be a more important part of the peer effect for those living in areas of greater deprivation and stigma is more important for those in the least deprived regions. • The policy implication of this is in areas of greater deprivation information campaigns will have a greater marginal impact than those that attempt to remove visible stigma.

Study	Aims	Setting and Participants	Methods	Key Findings
Farthing (2012)	To capture young people's experiences of free school meal in the UK today.	<p>Child poverty action group ran an online survey of 1026 young people (of which 190 were or had been in receipt of free school meals)</p> <p>Also conducted a focus group with 13 young people</p> <p>(no identification of free school meal pupils was attempted)</p>	An online survey was conducted with young people, this data was supplemented with a focus group	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Many young people felt that free school meals should be available to all young people in low income households • The amount allocated for a free meal was insufficient to buy a full meal • The way that free school meals were delivered and accessed was important – one in four complained about the delivery system within the school. Young people were concerned about confidentiality and wanted to access their lunch without the embarrassment of peers knowing they were in receipt of free school meals. • Stigma was reduced when the school used electronic cards and fingerprint systems but these didn't guarantee confidentiality completely. • Over half the students expressed no concern about confidentiality or actively noted that stigma was not a concern for them. Mitigating factors seemed to be the culture of the school and individual resilience • Other factors identified included long queues and not being able to eat with friends

Study	Aims	Setting and Participants	Methods	Key Findings
Iniesta-Martinez (2012)	Analysis of data is determine the proportion of pupils who are entitled to receive frees school meals but are not currently claiming in England		Analysis of HMRC tax credits and benefits data alongside information from the Department of Education school census.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Estimate that of the 21% of pupils who meet the entitlement criteria, 18% are registered. • Levels of registration will vary by local authority with a range of 0-33% of pupils failing to register. • The proportions of pupils not claiming is the same for primary and secondary school pupils, a drop off is evident in the 15-16 year age group • Approximately 1 in 5 pupils will experience a change in circumstances during the school year and lose entitlement to free school meals • The characteristics of pupils identified by this research as having a lower likelihood of claiming free meals include <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Pupils living in a less deprived area ➤ Pupils attending schools with a lower free school meals rage ➤ Pupils from families with higher status occupations ➤ Pupils living with a family with higher parental qualifications ➤ Pupils of Chinese ethnic origin ➤ Pupils of parent in part time work

Study	Aims	Setting and Participants	Methods	Key findings
Holford (2012)	To explore why individuals registered for the free school meal programme choose not to participate	Pupils in the first three years of primary school in Scotland taking part in the universal free school meal pilot	Analysis of data resulting from the trial of universal free school meals in Scotland in year P1-P3	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The trial of universal free meals in Scotland saw a rise of 14% among non-free school meal pupils and a rise of 5% for free school meals pupils. • In primary schools, children on free meals are rarely identifiable so the removal of stigma was discounted as an explanation • The rise was attributed to a positive peer effect, in part because pupils were allowed to eat with their friends and secondly due to the signal that participation in school meals was desirable and good • Pupils registered for free meals were more likely to participate because a greater proportion of the pupils within the school were doing so.

Study	Aims	Setting and Participants	Methods	Key findings
Sahota (2013)	To explore factors that influenced registration for free school meal and the subsequent take up following registration in Leeds, England.	4 primary schools 4 secondary schools (schools with a high free school meal entitlement)	Interviews Head teachers School staff Parent (of fsm pupils) Focus groups with pupils (fsm pupils were not distinguished)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • In the claiming process, effective working practices within the school, particularly between the administration, parent support staff and multi-agency partnerships with benefit services were regarded as key to encouraging the uptake of free school meals. • For pupils, stigma was not found to be of concern • Of more concern was availability and food choice, quality with influential factors identified as portion sizes, quality, lack of choice, drinks and prices, also the environment, particularly queues. • Choice, familiarity and taste of food on offer appeared to be important factors, many pupils wanted culturally safe choices

Study	Aims	Setting and Participants	Methods	Key findings
Welsh Government (2013)	To understand the range of factors which may impact on the uptake of free meals in Wales	8 secondary schools from seven Local Authorities across Wales included high, medium and low free school meal uptake and eligibility.	213 Questionnaires on payment systems sent to schools 1018 Questionnaires asking pupils to consider a list of 10 factors and rank them in order of importance.	<p>Payment systems</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 38% of secondary schools have a cashless system in place. of which 37% of biometric, 35% card systems • For schools without cashless systems, systems for free school meal pupils were <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ 15% a daily ticket/card collection from the office ➤ 13% giving a number at till <p>The information indicated that cashless systems do not always result in higher levels of uptake of free school meals.</p> <p>Pupils Opinions</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • For free school meal pupils, queues were of most concern; other factors included the type of food provided, the cost and what lunch option friends choose. • There was little evidence that free school meal pupils had concern about payment systems

Appendix 3 – Recruitment Materials

Appendix 3a: Leaflet for Recruitment of Pupils for Focus Groups

Who is carrying out the project?

My name is Samia Addis. I am a PhD student at Cardiff University. The research is funded by the Welsh Assembly Government.

Your school has agreed to take part in this research and I would like to invite you to get involved, with your parents'/carers permission. If you wish to take part, details what you will be asked to do are in this leaflet. Please read the leaflet carefully and if you have any questions please contact me, my contact details are on the back.



Contact details.

If you have any comments or questions about the research please contact me,

Samia Addis

Email:
addiss1@cardiff.ac.uk

Tel: 02920 870192

Cardiff Institute of Society &
Health

Cardiff University
1-3 Museum Place
Cardiff
CF10 3BD

**Research
Project:**

**What
Influences the
take up of
School Meals
and Free
School Meals?**

Samia Addis

What is this project about?

What is the research about?

The purpose of the research is to gather your opinions on school meals as well as looking at free school meals in your school.

As part of the research I would like to look at how the school organises the lunchtime and school meals. To find out what you think, I would like to invite some pupils to take part in a focus group, to get opinions about how lunchtimes and school meals are organised in the school.

You don't need to be getting free school meals to be part of this research.

What will you be asked to do?

You are invited to take part in a focus group, this is a group of people who get together to give their opinions about a topic. The focus group in this school will be made up of 5-10 pupils, boys and girls.

The discussion will take place in school, in a place such as the library or a classroom. It should last 30-45 minutes.

With your permission I will record the discussion and it will be typed up so that I have a record of what was said.

The discussion from the focus group will be used, along with other information gathered for this research to write a final report, to write articles to be published and to provide a summary for others.



How will your identity be protected?

An important part of this research is to make sure that everyone who takes part remains anonymous and that everything that is said in the focus group is confidential. The information that is collected in the focus group will only be used for this research, quotes may be used but no names will be included.

All notes and records will be kept in locked filing cabinets at the university.

What should you do if you want to take part?

Please sign the consent form. If you change your mind you can withdraw at any time.

Thanks for reading this leaflet!

Appendix 3b: Flyer for Recruitment of Parents for Interview

PARENTS

CAN YOU SPARE SOME TIME TO TALK ABOUT SCHOOL MEALS AND FREE SCHOOL MEALS?

(you will receive a £20 Tesco voucher)



I am a student at Cardiff University and I am carrying out research into what makes parents and pupils decide whether or not to take up free school meal entitlement. I am looking for parents with children at (Name of School) who would like to take part in an interview.

I AM KEEN TO HEAR PARENTS' VIEWS ABOUT FREE SCHOOL MEALS SUCH AS;

- Do you know what the criteria for entitlement are or how you would find out?
- Do you know how to go about registering for free school meals?
- If you are entitled are there any factors which might put you off from signing your child up for free school meals?
- What do you think about the way the school runs school meals and free school meals and how this affects your child?

Please contact me if you would like to be interviewed for this research. The interview can be in person or over the phone and a £20 Tesco voucher will be given for completed interviews. There are more details on the back of this flyer.

For more information or to arrange an interview please contact me:

Research Project: An Investigation of the take up of Free School Meal Entitlement in Secondary Schools: Barriers and Facilitators.

General information

You are invited to take part in this research study but it is entirely voluntary. Please read and keep the following information, feel free to contact me if you have any questions or comments about the research and what it will involve.

Background to the study

The Welsh Assembly Government has funded this research study which is to be undertaken between October 2009 and September 2012. The researcher, [Samia Addis](#) is a PhD student, based with the Cardiff Institute of Society and Health (CISHE) which is part of the School of Social Sciences, Cardiff University.

The aim of this research is to examine the process of choice and decision making by secondary school children and their parents and carers in respect of registering and using free school meals entitlement and to identify influential factors across a range of levels. Data will be collected from Government Departments, Local Authorities, secondary schools, parents/carers and pupils by interviews, focus groups and documentary analysis.

What are you being asked to do?

As part of this study I am keen to get the views of parents who have children in secondary schools. The focus of the research is free school meals but you or your child doesn't have to be in receipt of free school meals to be part of this research. The interview should last between 20-30 minutes and can take place in person or over the phone. With your permission the interview will be taped and typed up so that I have a record of what was said.

What will happen to the information that you give?

The transcript of the interview, together with other information collected during the course of the research will be written into a final report (thesis), in academic papers to be published and to provide information to interested parties. In all publications and presentations all participants will remain anonymous and confidentiality will be maintained. Quotes may be used but no names will be included. The data which is collected during this research will be stored securely, and in accordance with university guidelines.

Does the research meet ethical guidelines?

This research has been approved by Cardiff University School of Social Sciences Ethics Committee, if you have any concerns about this research and the way it is conducted you can contact the supervisors of this research:

Professor Gareth [Williams](#) williamsgh1@cardiff.ac.uk

Dr Simon Murphy murphvs7@cardiff.ac.uk

If you agree to be interviewed it is entirely voluntary and you can change your mind at any time and without giving a reason. If you would like to take part, please contact me to arrange an interview.

Appendix 3c: Leaflet for Recruitment of Pupils for Interview

Who is carrying out the project?

My name is Samia Addis. I am a PhD student at Cardiff University. The research is funded by the Welsh Government.

Your school has agreed to take part in this research and I would like to invite you to get involved with your parents/carers permission. If you wish to take part, details about what you will be asked to do are in this leaflet. Please read the leaflet carefully and contact me if you have any questions.



Contact details

If you have any comments or questions about the research please contact me,

Samia Addis

Email:
addiss1@cardiff.ac.uk

Tel: 02920 870192

Cardiff Institute of Society & Health

Cardiff University

1-3 Museum Place

Cardiff

CF10 3BD

**Research
Project:
What
Influences the
Take Up of
School Meals
and Free
School Meals?**

Samia Addis

What is this project about?

What is the research about?

The purpose of the research is to gather your opinions about school meals and free school meals within your school.

As part of the research, I would like to look at how the school organises the lunch time and school meals. I would also like to carry out an individual interview with some pupils who are registered for free school meals; one of those pupils could be you!

What will you be asked to do?

I would like to invite you to participate in an individual interview which should last about 15 minutes. The interview can take place in school, at home or over the phone, whichever you prefer.

I will be asking questions about school meals and free school meals at your school.

With your permission I will record the discussion and it will be typed up so that I have a record of what was said.

The information that you give me in the interview will be used, along with other information gathered for this research to write a final report, to write articles to be published and to provide a summary for others who may be interested.



How will your identity be protected?

An important part of this research is to make sure that everyone who takes part remains anonymous and that everything that is said in the interview is confidential. The information that is collected in the interview will only be used for this research, quotes may be used but no names will be included.

All notes and records will be kept in locked filing cabinets at the university.

What should you do if you want to take part?

Discuss this with your parents or carers and you both will need to sign a consent form. If you change your mind you can withdraw at any time. A £10 voucher will be given to pupils for completed interviews.

Thanks for reading this leaflet!

Appendix 4 - Interview Schedules

Appendix 4a; Interview Schedules for Policy Makers, Stakeholders and Local Authority Staff

Could you give an outline of your roles and responsibilities?

Section 1 – School meals

1. What would you say are the main policy developments in school meals that have occurred over the few years?
2. What has been the purpose of these policy changes?
3. Have they been successful in achieving those aims?
4. Have these been evaluated and if so, how?
5. What overall impact have policy changes had on the take up of secondary school meals?
6. How would you assess the current school meals system in secondary schools?
7. Can you outline
 - Lessons learnt
 - Recommendations for further action

Section 2 – Free school meals

1. What would you say the purpose of free school meals are?
2. How successful are free school meals at achieving those goals?
3. Has this been evaluated, and if so how?
4. What would you say are the main barriers/facilitators to achieving the goals outline above?
 - At policy level (national and devolved)
 - At local authority level (policy and implementation)

- At school level
5. Could you outline the policy initiatives that have been introduced in respect of free school meals?
 6. Have these been evaluated? If so what were the findings?
 7. What reasons would you give for success or otherwise?
 8. What practical steps have been introduced to ensure that the requirements of policy are being implemented at the different levels (e.g. Local Authorities, schools)?
 - Could any further steps be taken, or are proposed?
 9. Overall, how well do you feel the free school meal system works?
 10. Can you outline
 - Lessons learnt
 - Recommendations for further action

Anything else you would like to add?

Can you suggest anyone else you feel it would be useful for me to talk to? This could include policy makers, stakeholders, and researchers in the field or pressure groups

Thank you

Appendix 4b; Interview Schedules for School Staff - Teaching Staff/Administrative Staff

School background

Age of buildings

Catchment area

Level of paid for school meal uptake

Level of free school meal entitlement in the school

Level of free school meal uptake in the school

Is there an onsite/off site policy within the school?

- What are the reasons behind it?
- What factors would have to change to allow this policy to change?
- How do you feel those changes could be implemented?

Who provides the catering within the school?

- What are the reasons behind that choice?
- What does the school hope to achieve?

School meals policy within the school

Does the school have a school food policy? If so what is it?

e.g.

- Healthy schools
- Fruit tuck shop
- Vending machines
- Member of healthy schools network?
- SNAGS

Have there been any recent changes to provision of food within school?

- What are they?
- What prompted these changes?
- What are you trying to achieve in terms of school food?
- Have these changes been evaluated or measured in any way?

In terms of school meals has the school brought in any initiatives or changes?

- What has prompted these changes?
- Have they been successful?
- Have they been evaluated/measured in any way?

Does the school attempt to increase uptake of paid for school meals?

- Does any marketing go on to pupils?
- Does any marketing go on to parents? e.g.

1. Newsletter
2. email
3. taster sessions
4. information for new pupils

What kind of payment system is in place in the school?

- Why was this introduced?
- Has it been successful at achieving the aims outlined above
- Are there any problems associated with this payment method?

Do you feel that the levels of take up of paid for school meals could be improved?

- If so, how?

In general, what factors do you feel have prompted these changes to food/school meal provision within the school?

- WAG policy
- LA policy
- Pressure from staff
- Pressure from parents
- Pressure from pupils

How influential are each of the above in driving policy changes within the school?

What policy initiatives are you aware of any nationwide policy initiatives that have been introduced in terms of:

- School meals
- Free school meals

Are you aware of Local authority policy initiatives in school meals/free school meals?

Do you receive guidance from the local authority?

If so, in what form?

Free school meals

How are free school meals administered in terms of payment?

- Card
- Cash

How long has this been the case?

How much money is allowed for free school meals pupils

- Is this a daily amount?

- Is it set by LA?

How well do you feel that this system works?

Could any improvements be made?

Are there any plans to change this system?

- If so why what do you hope to achieve?

What actions does that school take to attempt to:

- Encourage take up of entitlement by families who meet the entitlement criteria?
- Encourage children who are registered to take their meal?

Is this evaluated or measured in any way by the school?

Do you feel that any further steps could be taken to increase uptake?

If so what?

What guidance is received from the Local Authority in terms of free school meals?

What guidance is received from the Welsh Assembly in terms of free school meals?

What do you feel are the barriers/facilitators of:

- Registration by parents for free school meals
- Take up by pupils of free school meals

Anything else you would like to add?

Thank you

Appendix 4c; Interview Schedules for Catering Staff

School Environment

Is the hall multipurpose?

How many pupils does it hold?

What furniture does it have in it?

Is the dining hall a comfortable place to sit and eat?

- lighting
- temperature
- tables and chairs
- Noise
- Levels of cleanliness

Is there enough space to walk freely around, between tables and chairs and to queue and collect food?

Is there any promotion within the hall of:

- School meals
- Healthy eating

Are pupils able to pre order?

Is the food that is on offer evident before the pupils reach the serving hatch?

Is there a menu/visual aid available to those in the queue?

How many entry/exits are there?

Are the pupils able to take purchased food outside?

How many serving hatches are there?

Are these divided into the type of food that they sell?

Are there queues at the serving hatches? Is one more popular than others?

How many staff are serving?

How many tills?

Are there queues at the tills?

What type of payment system is in place for paid meals?

- Card
- Cash
- Other

What type of payment system is in place for free meals?

- Card
- Cash
- Ticket
- List
- Other

Lunch time Structure

What time is lunch?

Start

Finish

How many sittings?

Number of pupils served per sitting

Age of Pupils

Number of tables

Number of pupils per table

Can pupils sit with their friends, Is there any segregation?

By:

- Meal type?
- Age/year?
- Gender?

Are pupils expected to finish their meal within a period of time?

Food on offer

Who provides the catering within the school?

Is there an onsite kitchen?

Are all meal cooked onsite?

How many pupils are catered for on a daily basis?

How are the menus planned?

Do they adhere to any initiatives/policy/guidelines?

Which foods are on offer daily?

How many choices are available?

- Mains
- Sandwiches/baguettes
- Vegetables
- Fruit
- Salad
- Pudding

Details of any specials on offer today

Are all the choices available at the beginning still available at the end of lunchtime?

Do any foods commonly run out?

Are there vending machines within the hall?

What do they sell?

What is the cost?

Is fresh drinking water accessible to the pupils within the hall free of charge?

How is food presented and offered?

Are pupils able to serve themselves with any foods?

Cost

What is the average cost of a set meal?

Costs of other foods

- Vegetables
- Fruit portion
- Salad
- Jacket potato
- baguette

What amount is allowed to free school meals pupils?

Are free school meals pupils identifiable in the queue?

Are free school meals pupils identifiable at the till?

Do you have any ideas to improve the take up of

- School meals?
- Free school meals?

Do you have any ideas for the improvement of the school meal/free school meal service.

Are there any means by which you can suggest/implement any proposals?

Have any changes been made in response to WAG or LA policy initiatives that you are aware of?

What do you see as the barriers to implementing these policies?

Have these been evaluated in any way?

Anything else you would like to add?

Appendix 4d; Focus Group Schedule

Introductions

Confidentiality

House Rules

Activity 1: what is your idea of an ideal school lunch?

Aim: gathering information about what is deemed to be important by the pupils, recorded by drawing or writing

I would like to know what would be your ideal school lunch time, you can draw something, such as a plate of food or write a list, or write a description of your ideal lunchtime service. You can focus on the food, the surroundings, the setting, entertainment offered; it is what is important to you that is what I would like to know.

Time

5-8 minutes drawing/writing

8 minutes going round all

Activity 2: What factors are important which influence school meals uptake?

Aim: information sharing: deciding factors in school meal uptake.

Identify factors that are important and write them on a post it note individually, once completed, stick on a large piece of paper, grouping them together if they refer to the same thing. Need two pieces of paper, one for negative one for positive

Time 3-5 minutes to write post its

3-5 minutes to rearrange

Activity 3: Placing those factors in some kind of ranking/order

Aim: to explore factors considered important and put in order, also to gauge areas of consensus or variation

Place coloured dots on groups of post its in order of importance, the post its can then be moved into a diamond formation to represent most to least important (blue boys/red girls)

Time 5-10

Appendix 4e; Interview Schedules for Parents

Entitlement Criteria

Could you tell me how you became aware of your entitlement to claim free school meals for your child?

Do you find that there is information freely available about free school meals?

- To renew old claims
- To recruit new families into claiming

If so where is the information from?

- School
- Local Authority
- Family or friends
- Child
- Other

Do you feel any other methods would be useful in getting information out to parents?

Such as?

Do you know what the criteria for entitlement are?

Are they easy to find?

Where would you look/who would you ask?

Do you feel that the entitlement criteria are clearly laid out?

What do you think about the entitlement criteria in terms of who it is targeted at?

- about right
- too harsh

- Too generous

Do you feel that the eligibility criteria should change or stay as they are?

Are you aware of any policy changes that have been put into place recently in terms of entitlement?

If so, how they may affect you?

Do any of these issues put you off or encourage you from taking up your free school meal entitlement?

Registration/Application

How easy is it to apply for free school meals for your children?

Are there any ways that it could be made easier?

- In terms of access,
- difficulties in understanding
- keeping the claim going,
- reassessing the claim
- delays in putting it into place once entitled

Have you been in a position that you have moved in and out of entitlement?

If so how flexible do you feel that the system is?

Do any of the issues related to registration or applying for free school meals put you off or encourage you to take up your free school meal entitlement?

Using Free School Meal Entitlement

How easy do you find using free school meal entitlement?

- For yourself
- Your child/children

Do you feel happy that confidentiality is respected?

- For you
- For your child

- By the Local Authority
- By the school

How well do you feel that the Local Authority manages free school meals?

How well do you feel that the school manages free school meals?

Do any of these issues put you off or encourage you from taking up your free school meal entitlement?

School Policy

In general, how do you feel that the school manages school meals?

In terms of:

- Time allowed
- Seating
- Surroundings
- Queuing
- Cost/price (also amount allowed by fsm)
- Payment methods

What do you know about any changes to the food that is provided in school?

How do you feel these changes to school meals (in terms of the food on offer)?

Do you feel that these changes will lead to changes in what your child eats?

Does it influence what your child will eat at home?

Do you feel that these changes have impacted on free school meals?

Do any of the issues of how the school manages free school meals put you off or encourage you or your child from taking up your free school meal entitlement?

The Impact of Free School Meals

What impact do free school meals have (positive and negative?)

- As a family
- On yourself
- On your child
- On the family food budget
- Nutritionally

Do any of your family or friends claim free school meals for their children?

Do you feel that people commonly are aware of who is on free school meals and who is not?

How do you feel about your child having free school meals?

Have there been any problems or issues with your child having free school meals?

- Stigma/teasing/bullying/embarrassment

Are you aware of roughly how many children within the school are entitled to free school meals?

- Do you feel that this has any impact on the way that free school meal pupils are viewed?

Would you recommend a friend/family member to apply for free school meals if you thought that they were entitled?

Did you ever have free school meals as a child? If so what were your experiences?

Do any of these issues put you off or encourage you from taking up your free school meal entitlement?

Appendix 4f; Interview Schedules for Pupils

What type of lunch do you have in school?

- School Meals (paid for)
- School meals (free)
- Packed lunch
- Off site
- Other

Entitlement Criteria

Are you eligible for free school meals?

- If so, how often do you have free school meals?

How long have you been eligible for free school meals?

Do you know how your parents get free school meals?

Do you ever see or hear information about free school meals?

- In school?
- Family or friends
- Other sources?

What do you understand about who is entitled to free school meals?

What do you think about free school meal entitlement? Do you think it is...

- about right
- too harsh
- Too generous

Do you feel that the eligibility criteria for free school meals should change or stay as they are?

School Meals

What do you think about meals in school?

- Time you are allowed
- Seating
- Surroundings
- Queuing
- Cost/price (also amount allowed by fsm)

Do you feel that the amount that you get to spend on free school meals is enough?

What do you know about any changes to the food that is provided in school?

How do you feel these changes have affected school meals (in terms of the food on offer)?

Do you think that these changes will lead to changes in what you eat every day in school?

Do the changes of the food provided by school change what you eat at home?

Do these changes in food that is provided that we have discussed impact upon free school meals?

- If yes, in what way (more likely to have/not have free school meals?)

School Administration

Who knows that you are receiving free school meals in the school?

- School nurse,
- Canteen staff
- Teachers

Do you feel that who is on free school meals is kept confidential by those people?

Do you mind if other pupils in the school know that you are receiving free school meals?

What kind of payment does the canteen use?

Are you happy with the payment system that is in place in the school?

If you could change the payment system, what would you have instead?

- Why?

How well do you feel that free school meals are managed by the school?

Have you ever had any problems getting a free school meal at school?

The Impact of Free School Meals

What impact do you think free school meals have (positive and negative?)

- On your family/parents
- On yourself
- On what you eat (in terms of your daily intake)

Do any of your friends have free school meals?

Do you feel that other pupils in the school know who is on free school meals and who is not?

Do your friends know that you are receiving free school meals?

What do you think your friends think about free school meals?

What do you think your family think about free school meals?

How do you feel about having free school meals?

Have there been any problems or issues with you having free school meals?

- Stigma/teasing/bullying/embarrassment

Are you aware of how many children within the school are entitled to free school meals?

- Do you feel that this has any impact on the way that free school meal pupils are viewed?

Would you recommend a friend or brother or sister should apply for free school meals?

Do any of these issues put you off or encourage you from taking up your free school meal entitlement?

Do you think free school meals could be better? If so how