## 6.7 Targeted food aid provision

This section is based on a detailed review of 10 of the most relevant studies.

**Definition – targeted (tailored) food aid provision**

This section considers work being done by organisations to tailor food support to particular population groups[[1]](#endnote-1), with a particular focus (owing to the availability of evidence) on targeting of food aid for children and families experiencing financial struggle or insecurity.

Tailored food provision, such as school meal and holiday hunger clubs, are an example of ‘attended programmes’ one of two strategies that provide different possibilities for supporting families experiencing food insecurity:

*“Attended programmes can be devised in ways where children access support in spaces and places that they already attend (e.g., school) as universal provision which reduces the risk of children being further stigmatised.”*[[2]](#endnote-2)

Holiday hunger has been defined as: *"a situation that occurs when economically disadvantaged households with school-aged children experience food insecurity during the school holidays."[[3]](#endnote-3)*

The support required follows an annual cycle in line with the school year. A Scottish study identified three broad phases: term time, 1 month before the school summer holidays (pre-school summer holiday period), and during the 6- or 7-week summer break.[[4]](#endnote-4)

**Models**

Holiday food clubs are interventions which mainly focus on household strategies to mitigate food insecurity especially as it relates to school holidays and lack of access to free school meals. Research has found that these are mainly accessed by children aged 4 to 16.

During COVID-19, tailored food support played an important role in feeding people who were vulnerable, unwell or shielding.

While the mix and blend of activities offered varied, the primacy is *“giving people quality food.”[[5]](#endnote-5)*

Tailored food aid is also aimed at particular communities with different diets and food requirements and preferences. A meta review of COVID responses identified examples of tailored provision being made available to families with school aged children, Black, Asian and minority ethnic groups, and asylum seekers and refugees made available during March to August 2020.

In the absence of statutory support to certain groups during the pandemic, VCSEs had stepped into the gap – often temporarily.[[6]](#endnote-6)

There was also some concern that there may still have been population groups who were missed by the support then, or indeed since COVID.[[7]](#endnote-7)

As with other food models, tailored support can also be extended to include advice and support.

**Evidence**

**A Systematic Review of the Evaluation of Interventions to Tackle Children's Food Insecurity (Published online: 14 February 2019)**

* UK stakeholders perceive benefits of universal free school breakfast, including alleviating hunger and improving health outcomes, as well as providing social, behavioural and educational benefits.
* A 2004 randomised controlled trial (RCT) of UK school breakfast provision reported that post-intervention, participating children demonstrated significantly improved concentration, skipped fewer classes and ate fruit for breakfast more when compared to control children.[[8]](#endnote-8)

**A free, universal, before-school breakfast club - Magic Breakfast Club evaluation**

* The Magic Breakfast project provides schools with support and resources to offer a free, universal, before- school breakfast club. Offering schools support to establish a free, universal breakfast club boosts attainment at Key Stage 1 by around two months' expected progress. There was no statistical impact at Key Stage 2 (Year 6 pupils).
* Key factors for successful implementation of the breakfast clubs were (a) communication with parents to encourage take-up, (b) an established school breakfast routine, and (c) a well-functioning delivery team supported by the wider school. The main challenges were compensating staff for additional hours of work and balancing the supply of, and demand for, food. In some schools, barriers to take-up included earlier start times for pupils, breakfast charges, and a lack of ongoing promotion from the school.
* Pupil behaviour, as measured by a teacher survey, improved in breakfast club schools. This is interesting because it shows that breakfast clubs may improve outcomes for children who do not even attend breakfast club by improving classroom environments. This key conclusion is unchanged from the original report. Activities thought to increase take-up of the breakfast provision included promoting it to parents and encouraging all children to attend while sensitively targeting pupils most likely to benefit.

**The Holiday Activity and Food Programme (HAF) was a national programme**

* HAF 2021 was delivered at considerably greater scale than previous HAF programmes, with funding totalling £220 million available to all 151 local authorities in England to run clubs in the spring, summer and winter holidays.
* A range of positive outcomes were reported, including:
	+ improved and increased food intake
	+ physical activity levels
	+ social and wellbeing outcomes
	+ increased engagement; and
	+ willingness to try new things.
* Seeking to raise nutrition levels proved complicated to achieve and evidence at scale. The results show a complex picture. At the simplest level, children believed they had healthier lunches on club days, but parents/carers reported that their children both ate less healthy types of food and less unhealthy types of food when attending HAF. The discrepancy between child and parental findings clearly raises questions about how much the parents knew about the reality of food available at the holiday club (recall), their knowledge about ‘healthy food,’ and the potential bias in reporting the food consumed by their child at home on days they were not attending the club.

**Evaluation of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme: A Yorkshire-based review of the implementation and impact of the Holiday Activities and Food programme (2021)**

* There was equality of opportunity for children to access opportunities. Children who were eligible for Free School Meals (FSMs) attended the programmes alongside children who paid for their places, at the discretion of the provider. Once children were participating in the programme, there was no indication that children were aware of who was attending with a free place or a paid place. Children had lots of opportunities to socialise and make friends with other children both from their own school and others. This was particularly important after a period of much reduced socialisation due to Covid restrictions.
* Attending a holiday club meant that if children were from households experiencing food insecurity, they were guaranteed a full, nutritious meal that day.

**Working in collaboration - Leeds Food Insecurity Taskforce**

* As part of the pandemic response (March - September 2020) an estimated 64,000 food bags (equivalent 34,000 food parcels) were distributed from the food warehouse including breakfast and lunch bags for up to 230 homeless people daily (over 68,000 meals)
* Catering Leeds also worked with schools to provide a total of 95,826 daily grab bags and 170,910 daily hampers (34,182 weekly hampers).
* There was no evidence relating to the efficacy of food nutrition available.

**StreetGames Fit and Fed Wales report (2021 unpublished)**

* StreetGames developed the Fit and Fed project to provide free meals to children within disadvantaged community holiday sports clubs across the UK. The programme aims to tackle three main inequalities—holiday hunger, isolation, and inactivity—by providing food alongside the opportunity to participate in sporting activities and physical activity.
* 93% were more active compared with normal school holiday activity levels
* Sharing learning, good practice and facilitating conversations between delivery partners is a key tool in connecting with wider offers and ensuring Fit and Fed adds value, rather than spreading delivery thinly and with diminishing quality.

**Outcomes**

The outcomes below are derived from the following 10 sources:

1. A Systematic Review of the Evaluation of Interventions to Tackle Children's Food Insecurity Published online: 14 February 2019
2. Evaluation of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme: A Yorkshire-based review of the implementation and impact of the Holiday Activities and Food programme. 2021
3. Food Cycle Social Impact report. 2021
4. Food Insecurity: A Constant Factor in the Lives of Low-Income Families in Scotland and England. 2021
5. Food vulnerability during COVID-19. Local responses to household food insecurity across the UK during COVID-19 (September 2020 – September 2021) An analysis of experiences from 14 local areas from around the UK and recommendations for future policy and practice appendix
6. Going universal - The impact of free school lunches on child body weight outcomes. 2020
7. Holiday Hunger Project, a report on the holiday food and activity clubs monitored and supported by York Food Poverty Alliance June 2018-April 2019
8. Rose Vouchers for fruit and veg: Final Evaluation Report. 2017
9. Shaping Places for Healthier Lives: about the programme. 2022
10. Ways to care: Forms and possibilities of compassion within UK food banks. 2021

**Outcomes**

* Improved variety and quality of diet
* Willingness to try new things
* Reduced risk of obesity\*
* New skills for young people
* Social connectedness
* Parents can work
* Reduced household expenditure
* Reduced food insecurity
* Improved budgeting
* Changed shopping behaviours
* Reduced takeaways/ fast food
* Improved attention
* Fewer skipped classes

For supermarkets / food providers:

* Improved CSR for supermarkets
* Reduced cost of food disposal
* Increased market trader revenue (i.e., from the tailored voucher scheme.

**Examples**

**Tang Hall Big Picnics and Breakfast Club (York)**

The food poverty alliance in York has been a collective measure / model now known as York Food Justice Alliance. Research identified 32 organisations delivering varied community food aid in the city, ranging from traditional soup kitchens to community allotments. One of these was Tang Hall Big Picnics & Breakfast Club (THBBBC).

THBBBC was delivered by Tang Hall Big Local in partnership with Tang Hall Community Centre and Community Base, Tang Hall Food Coop and Food Circle. Community Base, an organisation for people with learning disabilities was already volunteering during termtime and needed the opportunity to continue in the holidays and find a space for people to come to eat their pack-ups in the day e.g., those on Direct Payments having to find their own care/day services.

Tang Hall Big Local picked up on this need and started the holiday picnic. On average, 50 people per week attended for lunch. Part of this tailored offer that worked well was the provision of advice and support, with outside workers from Credit Union, THCC groups, children's centres, all coming & joining in (i.e., not just setting up a stall and waiting for people to come to them). Another learning point was the direct and relentless promotion/holding hands required to encourage people to come for the quality food offer is needed. Cooking sessions developed too to increase knowledge of what people have eaten and how this could be replicated at home plus.

**Red Tower CIC helping tackle holiday hunger (York)**

A report looking at the role played by different providers, including Red Tower Community Hub and Chapelfields and Foxwood Community Hubs in York to tackle holiday hunger (2018-2019) through holiday food and activity clubs found that attendees of the 'food club' found it harder to make ends meet during the school holidays than during the school year. Whilst the report doesn't explore impact it presents three different case studies including the route of Red Tower CIC from basic food provision developing into a 'service-plus' project with a rotating programme of advice, support and activity embedded.

Red Tower CIC’s model comprised a project manager with volunteers and a cafe (open every Monday for 7 weeks) with fresh food / lunches for every child and baked goods donated with advice on healthy amounts, plus teas/coffees/juices and a Pay As You feel PAYF signs / donations box (takings used to cover overheads). There was also a Food 4u Shop operated upstairs (produce that couldn't be made into lunches) for people to take a bag of groceries home (£1 suggested donation per bag) and volunteers talked to people about the value of the otherwise 'free' food and encouraged people to share what was there/think about how to use it best to limit journey towards waste. There were also craft activities for children and advice giving provided by council staff if needed it on at least 2 of the weeks and toys and games provided every week by the venue. The report found certain aspects that worked well for this approach:

* Outdoor well-being: The garden was enjoyed by customers young and old every week; in the beautiful sunshine mainly and even in the downpours (children literally dancing in the rain.)
* Inclusion: Elder neighbours enjoyed a sit-down, a hearty lunch and others to chat to; Some neighbours who had not been keen on the project to begin with, came to eat at the cafe by the end of the holiday period; People of minority ethnic origin came to the cafe.
* Alleviating hunger: There was enough tasty, varied food for everyone volunteers included every week. Left-over food was taken away by volunteers to feed people at home.
* Zero-Waste: In total approx. 785kg of food was intercepted before being sent to landfill. All recyclable products and waste food was collected for proper disposal by a local compost expert.
* Volunteer experience: 1 intern, 1 coordinator (with one lady piloting her own cafe-concept), 2 staff from the CIC and 13 other volunteers repeatedly contributed their time, resources and enthusiasm. They appeared to benefit, get along well and enjoy it.

There were also some wider benefits. Feedback from OCAY, a local advocacy organisation said that they got more potential users of their services than they did when they ran some standalone events at Red Tower. It showed that the basic idea of a PAYF meal and shop with advice available, it people want it, will work better together than splitting it into two events.

**Persistence of the model**: The PAYF lunch and food shop was going well on Mondays in 2019 and the aim was to continue running this, as there were frequently more than 50 people coming along. The kitchen equipment received in the autumn was working well. More craft workshops were being delivered and more organisations were offering advice including the credit union, OCAY, Healthwatch and North Yorkshire Police. The Guildhall Ward local area co-ordinator was also coming every week.

**Rose Vouchers**

This example is selected because it is an approach that has been refined, adopted more widely, and with significant ambition to grow. The Rose Vouchers for Fruit and Veg is an Alexandra Rose Charity project designed and delivered in partnership with Food Matters. Projects provide vouchers for fruit and vegetables to low-income families who have children aged 4 and under. Vouchers are collected at Children’s Centres and redeemed at independent retailers in the local community, supporting the local economy[[9]](#endnote-9) and to give their children the healthiest possible start. The ambition of the charity is to increase the scale of their offer five-fold by 2025.[[10]](#endnote-10) To achieve this however, a more (more) sustainable, balanced funding mix will be required.

Evaluation results from Lambeth showed[[11]](#endnote-11).

* 90% of adults and 95% of children are eating more fresh vegetables
* 92% of families say they are feeling healthier 95% felt happier
* 87% of families say they are eating more home cooked meals.

**Learning**

**Enablers / barriers**

The literature identifies a range of enabling factors, alongside barriers.

Enabling ingredients:

* ‘Contextualised – tailored to local needs
* Mix of approaches to meet different needs – through local partnerships
* More than FSM, for example, FSM+15%. Or ‘Open to all’ - equality of opportunity
* Parents can eat too, or unused food can be taken home
* Opportunities for participants and volunteers to build relationships
* Food vouchers reduce the risk of trying new food / wasting money
* Deliverers include voices of lived experience
* Involvement of VCSEs with deeper links to target communities
* Communicated and promoted through multiple channels – “requires more direct and relentless promotion.”

Challenges

* Variability of approach and quality
* Evidence is often based on a narrow set of desired outcomes – for example attainment rather than social outcomes
* Families are rarely involved in the design of these services
* Funding is often short term and insecure, whereas the cycle of food insecurity is entrenched around the school year.

A systematic review published in 2019 found that the evidence for the impact of tailored support to support children’s food insecurity was patchy, constrained by a lack of high-quality evaluation and in particular a too narrow set of outcomes measured. [[12]](#endnote-12) Consequently,

*“It is not clear the extent to which families experiencing food insecurity are influencing the design of the interventions that they are the beneficiaries of.”*

Again, the need for, and difference created by such intervention is determined by the wider system families find themselves in.

Similarly, a challenge with any approach that is tailored to specific contexts is that while this promotes local leadership and creativity, it also introduces variability – not only of approach but also quality.[[13]](#endnote-13)

**The case for tailored food aid models?**

Interventions that target particular communities (for example refugees) or needs (holiday hunger) provide a more targeted approach compared to ‘business as usual’ food support. Holiday provision faces similar eligibility deliberations to other models; to restrict to those most in need or open up to encourage great mixing and social cohesion.

An over-arching finding of this review is the ongoing challenge to ensure that dietary requirements, cultural requirements and tastes can be catered for. Cultural [[14]](#endnote-14)adaptations can often be found in the literature in the ‘desirable next steps’ section.

Tailored food aid models can be justified on a number of levels. Loopstra (2019) argues that “As specific groups have been disproportionately affected by the pandemic and its aftermath[[15]](#endnote-15), while already being at greater risk of food insecurity, we consider that targeting and tailoring of support warrants particular attention from practitioners and policymakers.”[[16]](#endnote-16)

If a food support ecosystem aims to be inclusive, then including offers that will be appropriate for different community groups has a contribution to make. Similarly, a people-centred approach, would ideally include universal access to sustainable, healthy, culturally appropriate and affordable food.[[17]](#endnote-17)

**Questions arising**

1. How to resource the coordination, quality assurance and requirement to scale up and down in response to need?
2. The challenges in implementing holiday food schemes that have wider eligibility than Free School Meals. Where then to place thresholds?
3. How best to work with the VCSE sector that may not have food-related expertise but have the trust of people in groups where targeted food support might be most beneficial?
4. How best to build on all the learning from HAF in the past and over the next 3 years, somehow creating conditions for resilience rather than long-term dependency?
5. How to redress the evidence finding that families experiencing food insecurity were not sufficiently influencing the design of the interventions intended for them.
1. Local responses to household food insecurity across the UK during COVID-19 (September 2020 – September 2021) An analysis of experiences from 14 local areas from around the UK and recommendations for future policy and practice, page 36 [↑](#endnote-ref-1)
2. Source: A Systematic Review of the Evaluation of Interventions to Tackle Children's Food Insecurity Published online: 14 February 2019. In contrast, ‘subsidy programmes’ provide families with more flexibility to make decisions about how the additional resources they are provided with can best be utilised within individual families, but they have the disadvantage of potentially further stigmatising families who are defined by their low socioeconomic status. [↑](#endnote-ref-2)
3. Source: Food Insecurity: A Constant Factor in the Lives of Low-Income Families in Scotland and England. 2021 [↑](#endnote-ref-3)
4. Source Food Insecurity: A Constant Factor in the Lives of Low-Income Families in Scotland and England. 2021 [↑](#endnote-ref-4)
5. Source: Holiday Hunger Project, a report on the holiday food and activity clubs monitored and supported by York Food Poverty Alliance June 2018-April 2019 [↑](#endnote-ref-5)
6. Loopstra (2019) cites examples in Cardiff and Bradford where VCSEs then stopped providing direct food support after the pandemic, on the basis, the need was no longer there. Local responses to household food insecurity across the UK during COVID-19 (September 2020 – September 2021) An analysis of experiences from 14 local areas from around the UK and recommendations for future policy and practice, page 36 [↑](#endnote-ref-6)
7. Lambie-Mumford, H., Gordon, K., Loopstra, R. and Shaw, S. (2021) ‘Comparing local responses to household food insecurity during COVID-19 across the UK (March – August 2020). [↑](#endnote-ref-7)
8. Shemilt I, Harvey I, Shepstone L, Swift L, Reading R, Mugford M, et al. A national evaluation of school breakfast clubs: evidence from a cluster randomized controlled trial and an observational analysis. Child Care Health Dev. 2004;30:413–27 This is one of a small number of RCTs captured in this review. It exemplifies the difficulties with conducting RCTs with public health interventions and makes a clear statement about the necessary policy changes to overcome such difficulties. [↑](#endnote-ref-8)
9. The nearest location is Barnsley, where Rose Vouchers report market traders make on average £150‑£250 a week more because of the vouchers. [↑](#endnote-ref-9)
10. Source: Evaluation Strategy 2020/2021 – 2024-2025. https://www.alexandrarose.org.uk/rose-vouchers/impact/ [↑](#endnote-ref-10)
11. Source: Rose Vouchers for fruit and veg: Final Evaluation Report. 2017. Since 2014, the Rose Vouchers for Fruit & Veg Project has supported over 7,766 families to access fresh fruit and veg in their community. [↑](#endnote-ref-11)
12. For example, narrow focus on selected outcomes, for example a meta review of breakfast club evaluations found that measurement was orientated to assess impact on children in the classroom (e.g., behaviour, educational achievement). Asa result of eating fruit and vegetables measure but ignoring any potential wider impacts that may impact positively (or negatively) on children's outcomes. Source: A Systematic Review of the Evaluation of Interventions to Tackle Children's Food Insecurity Published online: 14 February 2019 [↑](#endnote-ref-12)
13. Source: Evaluation of the Holiday Activities and Food Programme: A Yorkshire-based review of the implementation and impact of the Holiday Activities and Food programme. 2021 [↑](#endnote-ref-13)
14. See for example Meals on wheels for the 21st century. A report exploring meals on wheels services in London before, during and after Covid-19. Sustain. July 2020 and Can food vouchers improve nutrition and reduce health inequalities in low-income mothers and young children: a multi-method evaluation of the experiences of beneficiaries and practitioners of the Healthy Start programme in England. (2014) [↑](#endnote-ref-14)
15. https://www.health.org.uk/news-and-comment/charts-and-infographics/same-pandemic-unequal-impacts [↑](#endnote-ref-15)
16. Local responses to household food insecurity across the UK during COVID-19 (September 2020 – September 2021) An analysis of experiences from 14 local areas from around the UK and recommendations for future policy and practice [↑](#endnote-ref-16)
17. Alkon 2018 quoted in Shaping more resilient and just food systems: lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic (2021) [↑](#endnote-ref-17)