

Early School Leavers and Nutrition

A needs assessment from a nutrition perspective
Report of workshops 9th and 10th October 2012



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1 Workshop overview

1.1 Research background and objectives

In May 2009, **safefood** issued a call for proposals to undertake a research study; Early school leavers (ESLs): a needs assessment from a nutrition perspective. Following a tendering process, the research contract was awarded to Dr Michelle Share (Children’s Research Centre, Trinity College Dublin (CRC)), who brought together an all-island interdisciplinary team with research expertise in educational disadvantage, nutrition and health promotion. The team comprised Dr Barbara Stewart-Knox, (Northern Ireland Centre for Diet and Health, University of Ulster (NICHE)) and researchers Marita Hennessy (CRC) and Jennifer Robinson (NICHE). The research objectives (ROs) established by **safefood** were to:

- provide an overview of the key structures/networks for accessing ESLs in NI and ROI [RO1]
- identify relevant key existing health promotion activities and gaps in health promoting activities that focus on healthy eating and active lifestyles which target ESLs [RO2]
- identify potential healthy eating and physical activity-related programmes, that are appropriate and acceptable to ESLs in NI and ROI, that could be implemented by **safefood** in the out-of-school setting [RO3].

The research highlighted different structures and approaches in both NI and the ROI. Therefore separate workshops were held in each jurisdiction to take into account these fundamental differences.

2 Recommendations from the research

Further to the completion of the research, the authors presented the findings in a report and proposed a number of recommendations in relation to policy, training, programmes and research. These recommendations were further refined by **safe food** and the lead researcher to the following:

Policy

1. Existing policy related to the ESL sector should be developed in the following areas:
 - a) funding for meals
 - b) kitchen equipment and facilities
 - c) food quality and safety.

Training

2. Training should be developed/offered in the following areas:
 - a) guidelines for good practice in food education and provision in ESL settings for staff involved in the delivery of food, health, and physical activity programmes
 - b) food and nutrition policy.

Programmes

3. There should be a review of the nutrition-related curriculum in ESL settings, to determine where subjects/modules can be aligned, so that practical skills can be transferred into young people's lives outside of centres.
4. Work of relevant organisations:
 - a) Relevant organisations should undertake a review of their nutrition promotion resources to determine their suitability for the ESL sector
 - b) The work of relevant organisations, that complements the current nutrition education in alternative education and training settings, should be tailored and

expanded to reach a wider audience of young people who are early school leavers, in particular young parents.

5. Role-models or champions should be identified to support the ESL sector in food-related health issues.
6. Resource development:
 - a) Any programmes developed for ESL settings should be accredited by FETAC¹ (ROI) or OCN/OCR/CCEA (NI)
 - b) Resources developed for the ESL sector should be meaningful and enjoyable, interactive and activity-based and develop young people's food literacy and their critical awareness of food and eating and its relevance to other issues in their lives
 - c) Those developing resources for the ESL sector should work with young people in ESL settings to develop suitable resources, for use in settings, e.g. posters, curricular materials, recipes, cookery books, cooking for children.

Research

7. Best practice guidelines/standards for the sector regarding food provision in alternative education and training settings (quality/cost) should be developed.
8. Research should be undertaken that examines qualifications and training needs of staff in ESL settings in relation to nutrition/physical activity/health promotion.
9. Any new programme/resource/module should be evaluated for effectiveness.

A full report on the outcomes from the research project can be accessed on the **safefood** website at www.safefood.eu.

¹ Since the research was conducted, FETAC has been integrated into Quality and Qualifications Ireland QQI (www.qqi.ie).

2.1 Workshop attendees

A number of representative stakeholders from both NI and ROI were invited to attend the workshops in Belfast and Dublin, respectively. The workshops took place on 9th and 10th October 2012 in the **safefood** Dublin office and in the Northern Ireland Council for Voluntary Action (NICVA), respectively. Details of the organisations represented at both events are listed below.

2.1.1 Northern Ireland

- Food Standards Agency
- Digital Media Choices
- Southern Health and Social Care Trust
- Barnardo's NI
- Southern Education and Library Board
- Youth Justice Agency
- The Pathways Project/Extern
- Department for Employment and Learning
- NIACRO - Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders
- Bryson Charitable Group
- Belfast Health and Social Care Trust
- Chartered Institute of Environmental Health
- Healthy Food for All (HFfa)
- Children's Research Centre, Trinity College
- University of Ulster
- **safefood.**

2.1.2 Republic of Ireland

- National Educational Welfare Board
- Environmental Health Officers' Association
- Educational Disadvantage Centre, St Patrick's
- Irish Association of Community Training Organisations (IACTO) Ltd
- Foroige
- National Educational Psychological Service
- City of Dublin Vocational Educational Committee Youthreach Programme
- Tallaght Youthreach
- Musgrave Group
- Kilmore Road Youthreach
- Healthy Food for All (HFfa)
- Children's Research Centre, Trinity College
- ***safefood.***

3 Objectives of workshops

The workshops were convened to bring stakeholders together to discuss the recommendations made in the research and to establish the next steps to progress these. Specifically, the stakeholders were invited to provide feedback on the following questions in relation to the recommendations:

1. Do you support this recommendation?
2. Is this a low/medium/high priority recommendation?
3. Is this recommendation achievable?
4. What stakeholders might be involved? Who is best placed to lead on this and how should it best be resourced?
5. How would the stakeholders mentioned above move forward with this recommendation?
6. What are the key challenges to implementing this recommendation?

4 Feedback from stakeholders

Feedback from stakeholders was sought on the recommendations proposed in the report. This was facilitated by Sarah Jane Flaherty from HFFa, via a roundtable session, where those in attendance worked in groups to consider each of the recommendations in respect of the questions outlined above. The feedback from each venue is presented for each of the recommendations below.

Policy

1. *Existing policy related to the ESL sector should be developed in the following areas:*
 - a) *funding for meals*
 - b) *kitchen equipment and facilities*
 - c) *food quality and safety.*

Feedback from ROI

The group agreed that this was a high priority recommendation. It was noted that this policy area straddles a number of government departments, all of which have responsibility, yet no one department is taking the lead. It was agreed that the establishment of a multi-stakeholder group to promote the issue of food for ESL would be an excellent starting point. To support this, piloting of some policies at a local level to demonstrate effectiveness was required.

Feedback from NI

It was noted that the recommendation regarding the ‘funding for meals’ should be changed to ‘funding for food’ (not always in the form of meals). The need to consider that school meal provision is not available/funded everywhere was discussed and that a key issue is how the money for the funding for food is allocated. A key aspect of the implementation of this recommendation was considered to be that school meal funders/young people and catering staff need to be involved in deciding how funding is used. In addition, given the stigma of free school meals and the lack of a pattern of eating regular meals among some early school leavers, the focus of using funds needs to be on promoting a positive approach to food, trying new foods, eating together, appreciating the value

of food and how to live on a budget, i.e. use funds in ways which not only promote food with nutritional value, but also assist in educating people about food.

There was a strong consensus that kitchen equipment and facilities are a key building block of an ESL facility and that a high priority should be given to make such facilities and equipment available. It was noted that statutory provision can provide for great kitchen facilities, whereas other settings may only have very limited facilities, for example a two-ringed hob. Again, the issue of different funders was raised, especially in identifying the relevant stakeholders to be involved, i.e. education and library boards are the relevant bodies for those funded by the Department of Education and Learning, and European Social Fund is the relevant funder for Registered Organisations.

The development of policy related to food quality and safety was again considered to be a high priority, especially given that health and safety supports are provided in relation to food, e.g. EHO support. It was noted that food quality can be varied and it is important to recognise that food will often take a back seat, as it is not considered core business.

Training

2. *Training should be developed/offered in the following areas:*
 - a) *guidelines for good practice in food education and provision in ESL settings for staff involved in the delivery of food, health, and physical activity programmes*
 - b) *food and nutrition policy.*

Feedback from ROI

It was considered to be a high priority recommendation. It was noted that training should be 'available' rather than developed/offered. Training will depend on the number of trained staff in a particular setting and the number of staff involved in food education and provision. In terms of how this recommendation is delivered, the following comments were made:

1. A set of guidelines be developed for those staff involved in food education and provision and/or that there be a support mechanism for 'training the trainers' re diet and nutrition. One example given was the Caroline Walker Trust www.cwt.org.uk.
2. It is entirely achievable and would help to raise awareness if there was signposting to what is already available.
3. There should be clarity as to the needs of those staff involved, so that the training can meet their needs.

4. A senior cycle programme for senior cycle social, personal and health education is available to all schools and there is an opportunity to shape the programme re healthy eating content, as the programme is not yet agreed.
5. There is a possible role for VECs in providing training.

Feedback from NI

There was support for this as a high priority recommendation. It was proposed that there be a broad approach to staff training, considering aspects such as continuous professional development and responding to the needs of those staff who deliver food-related subjects. Considering that the young people have a relationship with their trainers/tutors and do not wish to have external parties deliver content, staff therefore need to be properly equipped for their roles.

The priority of supporting and training the range of staff involved in food provision/education was highlighted, as was the importance of working towards behaviour change for young people. The NEET forum was proposed as a channel for facilitating the development/provision of training, and it was clear that the two key challenges are that (1) there should be no cost to service providers and that (2) any initiative should reach all those involved in food education/provision.

Programmes

3. *There should be a review of the nutrition-related curriculum in ESL settings to determine where subjects/modules can be aligned, so that practical skills that can be transferred into young people's lives outside of centres.*

Feedback from ROI

This was regarded as an essential recommendation, as the current food and nutrition-related curriculum is not working at engaging the ESL. Furthermore, there is no consistency in provision. It is essential to recognise and potentially involve the parents, guardians and other people who live with the early school leaver, in order to optimise the development of life skills outside of the early school leaver setting. There is a role for this review to take place at a local level to take account of each centre's engagement with the Quality Frameworks. It was felt that the focus of this recommendation was less to do with content and more to do with approaches taken to engaging ESLs with food.

Feedback from NI

There was support for this recommendation with the caveat that the associated aims and action plan be developed detailing how it would be progressed, by whom and what the vision is. Commented upon were the issues of sustainability, how this recommendation be progressed in the short-, medium- and long-term and how any aspects related to curriculum need to be built into a sustainable curricular approach and not just 'added on'. The 'Dig it and Eat It'² programme was cited as an example of a relevant programme. In terms of responsibility, it was noted that this recommendation requires partnership involving Education and Library Boards, the Public Health Agency, psychologists, dietitians/nutritionists, service providers, families and **safefood**. Also considered was the importance of responding to the needs of different cohorts, i.e. those living at home and those living independently.

Programmes

4. *Work of relevant organisations:*
 - a) *Relevant organisations should undertake a review of their nutrition promotion resources to determine their suitability for the ESL sector.*
 - b) *The work of relevant organisations that complements the current nutrition education in alternative education and training settings should be tailored and expanded to reach a wider audience of young people who are early school leavers, in particular young parents.*

Feedback from ROI

There was support for this as a highly achievable and priority recommendation. At present, service providers use materials from: community dietitians, local stakeholders, **safefood**, Health Service Executive, Health Protection Unit, chefs and Food Safety Authority of Ireland, and they also develop their own materials. On this basis, it was considered that all these providers of materials should consider early school leaver settings as users of their materials and focus on bridging the gap between learning and associated transferrable life skills. These materials could be used for a 'health week' initiative, for example. Such resources would also help deliver on the SPHE content for the student, which is a focus of inspection independent of certification.

² <http://www.belfasttrust.hscni.net/livewell/HowCanWeHelp.htm>

Feedback from NI

There was support for this recommendation with the caveat that individual organisations do not complete the review alone, but that there be co-ordination with a lead agency appointed to ensure a strategic approach, e.g. Fitter Futures, Investing for Health.

Programmes

- 5. Role-models or champions should be identified to support the ESL sector in food-related health issues.*

Feedback from ROI

All agreed that this was a good recommendation of medium to high priority. Different types of champions were identified, including media, political and local champions. There are risks and benefits to choosing individual champions. It was suggested that a stakeholder group be responsible for identifying suitable champions.

Feedback from NI

There was support for this recommendation. It was agreed that it is achievable and high priority. There are examples of best practice in NI where this is happening, e.g. engaging young people in sport in Northern Ireland Association for the Care and Resettlement of Offenders (NIACRO). Local champions who can promote healthier food choices were considered the best approach. Examples of activities suggested (a) cooking with young people – facilities and training need to be considered and (b) highlighting healthy special offers in supermarkets. Stakeholders included the Consumer Council, FSA (work with retailers to promote local healthy food promotions) and the Community and Voluntary Forum.

Programmes

6. Resource development:

- a) Any programmes developed for ESL settings should be accredited by FETAC (ROI) or OCN/OCR/CCEA (NI).*
- b) Resources developed for the ESL sector should be meaningful and enjoyable, interactive and activity-based, and develop young people's food literacy and their critical awareness of food and eating and its relevance to other issues in their lives.*
- c) Those developing resources for the ESL sector should work with young people in ESL settings to develop suitable resources, for use in settings, e.g. posters, curricular materials, recipes, cookery books, cooking for children.*

Feedback from ROI

In relation to accreditation, it was noted that not all programmes need to be accredited, as many programmes are already accredited, e.g. Fetac Level 3, and that there is a need for food content to be delivered in the format of a 'special award', for example the active youth challenge initiative of the Vocational Education Committees (VECs) delivered in schools. A key focus should be on linking theory with practice/life skills. There was strong agreement that resources developed should build young people's food literacy and critical awareness. It was considered critical that resources be developed in partnership with early school leaver settings, both users and providers.

Feedback from NI

There was unanimous agreement that accreditation of resources was a low priority and that engagement with the young person was far more important. Those elements of this recommendation, which related to the development of food literacy and the involvement of young people in resource development, were viewed as priority recommendations. Phone applications were viewed as a potential novel format. Education Library Boards, Public Health Agency, the Food Standards Agency and **safefood** were viewed as key stakeholders to drive this recommendation forward.

Research

- 7. Best practice guidelines/standards for the sector regarding food provision in alternative education and training settings (quality/cost) should be developed.***

Feedback from ROI

This was agreed to be a medium priority recommendation. It was felt that this recommendation was somewhat aspirational in the short-term, but given that a lot of schools and centres already provide food, it is achievable. It needs to be supported by a needs assessment on current practices.

Feedback from NI

There was lack of agreement on this recommendation, in view of the very different degrees of provision of food by service providers, where some provide food and some do not. This was, however, considered to be a high priority, especially in reaching hard-to-reach groups. It was proposed that a checklist be developed for those involved in food provision, and that this should emphasise the need for practical facilities and for practical education involving the young people.

Regarding the implementation of this recommendation, it was proposed that the Department of Education in NI, the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Security, the Public Health Agency, and whoever is involved in the provision of food, should be the stakeholders involved. In addition, it was proposed that Sure Start, health visitors, young parents' groups and the voluntary sector should also participate.

Also discussed was the concern that recommendations may not be translated to ESL groups/organisations and that service pathways between organisations should be developed to promote healthier lifestyle choices. Participants were agreed that it was a challenge to get the information to the right people and to have appropriately trained and skilled staff in place. Dr Michelle Share clarified that this recommendation specifically relates to the commissioning of research to inform the development of best practice guidelines.

Research

8. *Research should be undertaken that examines qualifications and training needs of staff in ESL settings in relation to nutrition/physical activity/health promotion.*

Feedback from ROI

There was agreement that the provision of training/support needs to be underpinned by a robust sense of the needs of staff in relation to training (not qualifications). The following points are of note:

- The information in the setting can be different to the up-to-date guidance, therefore a need for on-going Continuing Professional Development to address this and keep staff up-to-date is required;
- The information being delivered may not be familiar to the staff member, e.g. Hazard Analysis Critical Control Point (HACCP) is more recent and not all staff were confident in this area at first, therefore a particular topic can need support;
- Again there needs to be signposting to supports and resources;
- One approach is to propose a checklist for those involved in food education and provision in relation to best practice, i.e. training programmes/content; available resources; examples of good initiatives;
- There is a need to refer to the National Youth Health Programme and their approach;
- There is a need to consider that, in some instances, there is very good co-ordination and identification of and response to training needs, but that this does not happen consistently.

Feedback from NI

This was accepted as a high priority recommendation. Aspects discussed included the importance of remembering that 'it's not just what you do, but the way that you do it', and that training needs to take a relational approach, respond to skill/sector needs and acknowledge the lack of facilities. From a funding point of view, it is key that funders be provided with evidence of achievement.

The Education and Library Boards and the Public Health Agency were identified as key stakeholders in progressing this recommendation. Other key considerations included the need for the establishment of a project board; partnership working; the involvement of young people in development and design; the generation of an action plan including evaluation; the need for award- or incentive-based participation; and the need for funding to be provided, so that a sustainable, long-term approach be taken, rather than as a 'project' or 'add on'.

Research

9. *Any new programme/resource/module should be evaluated for effectiveness.*

Feedback from ROI

There was broad agreement that this recommendation was high priority, on condition that the following are taken into consideration:

- Evaluation needs to be mainstreamed and built into initiatives from the start;
- The focus must be on basic checks and balances; in reality there are competing interests for time, so evaluation must be realistic;
- A higher value is given to outcome markers compared to process evaluation, therefore a balance is required.

Feedback from NI

This was viewed as a high priority recommendation. It was agreed that evaluation must be part of any initiative and not an 'add on'. In evaluation, 'effectiveness' must be viewed from the young person's perspective, as well as from the organisation or funder's perspective.

5 Conclusions and next steps

Further to the workshops, the full report from the research project and the report of the workshops will be disseminated to stakeholders on the island of Ireland (IOI), including those stakeholders identified during the mapping of service providers on the IOI. The research report has added significantly to the evidence base, in relation to the nutrition needs of early school leavers on the IOI. It was also evident from the workshops convened to progress the report, that there is a huge level of enthusiasm and momentum for meeting the nutrition needs of early school leavers on the island. In addition, the approach of the workshops has allowed for a jurisdictional approach, which is important given the differing infrastructure, north and south.

Further to the workshops, the principal focus of *safefood* will be to work in consultation with stakeholders in 2013/2014, to develop an island of Ireland resource that best meets the needs of trainers in the early school leaver setting. This project is in partnership with the Food Standards Agency Northern Ireland and will be designed to address issues relating to the development of food-related life-skills by the early school leaver. Following on from the discussions at the workshops, key considerations will include:

- Consultation with stakeholders to ensure that the resource meets their needs. This project will involve working with the ESL sectors in each jurisdiction respectively;
- Ensuring that the content, format and style suits the needs of the early school leaver who is not likely to interact well with materials developed for the post-primary setting;
- Consideration of the range of early school leaver service providers on the island of Ireland, given that there is great diversity of provision, which in turn impacts on facilities, trainers, students and curriculum;
- Consideration of the range of abilities among early school leavers, including literacy and attendance aspects;
- The need to provide a resource that complements the curriculum;
- The need to disseminate the resource in a way that it can be easily accessed by the trainers for use in their particular circumstance;
- The need to evaluate the resource for effectiveness, and develop or adapt it according to the needs of users, especially the young people.

Feedback

safefood would welcome any feedback from those involved in the early school leaver sector, and this can be provided via the **safefood** helpline on 0800 085 1683 (from Northern Ireland) or on 1850 404 567 (from the republic of Ireland) or by email to info@safefood.eu.

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