

**Good Food Nation Proposed National Plan**

**15 August 2025**

**NASUWT evidence to the Health, Social Care and Sport  
Committee and Local Government, Housing and Planning  
Committee**

The NASUWT's submission to the Scottish Parliament Health, Social Care and Sport Committee and Local Government, Housing and Planning Committee sets out the Union's views on the key issues which should be explored by the Committees in their joint inquiry into the Good Food Nation Proposed National Plan. The NASUWT's evidence is informed directly by serving teacher and headteacher members and also by the work of its representative committees and consultative structures, made up of practising teachers and school leaders working in the education system.

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**1. Thinking about those aspects of the Proposed National Good Food Nation Plan related to public health, health services and social care, what, if any, specific changes would you like to see reflected in the finalised national plan?**

No response.

**2. Thinking about the role of local government in delivering the Plan, particularly through procurement, what, if any, specific changes would you like to see reflected in the finalised national plan?**

In our response to the Scottish Government consultation on Equality and Human Rights Mainstreaming Strategy (5 February 2025), the Union raised issues of siloed working, inconsistency of approaches across the public sector alongside variability in relation to budgetary decisions:

*“The Union agrees that the public sector, including the Scottish Government, should embed equality and human rights throughout the work of the public sector and policymaking. There are, though, deep systemic barriers which require to be addressed, including: existing silo working in the public sector; inconsistency of training and approaches across departments; lack of specificity around intersectional and gender-competent budgeting; failures to consistently embed the voices of lived experience; ensuring decision-makers within the public sector and government are representative of the communities they serve; and ensuring systems and processes are established to include impact monitoring, review, analysis and genuine reflection”.*

Many of these systemic challenges would apply to this policy area also and it would be helpful to have a greater degree of specificity around expected activity within local government.

Clarity around data collection responsibilities will also be important. An evidence-based approach to examining existing practice is a critical first step.

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There are already systemic gaps in accountability in many national policy areas between a variety of national organisations, including both data collection as well as audit functions.

NASUWT is strongly supportive of the need to gather and use intersectional data. Indeed, greater evaluation of the correlation between diversity in the workforce and the effectiveness of policy drivers and reviews is something we have been advocating for with the Scottish Government.

Unfortunately, concerns about a cluttered and incoherent policy landscape are not addressed by the current proposals. NASUWT is against any additional burdens which are bureaucracy-heavy and action-light.

A key driver for change will be the workforce. A passive approach to upskilling staff, either simply by proximity or information-sharing or even by attending a one-off training event, may not be sufficient. Prioritisation and investment in the development of staff will require not just a budget, but also a model for delivering sustainable learning and development. It is also to be anticipated that the recognised workforce Unions would have a significant role to play in negotiating and agreeing any workplace proposals in relation to training and professional learning.

The system is currently over-burdened and under-funded which is a massive barrier to drive change. NASUWT is concerned that the legislation currently makes insufficient progress in unifying the significant and varying existing legislative duties facing local authorities: while part 2 of the plan outlines a cross sectoral approach to policy development this falls short of providing a route map from current practice within the system to a sustainable model approach.

**3. Thinking about the aspects of the Plan on allotments and community growing, what, if any, specific changes would you like to see reflected in the finalised National Plan?**

No response.

**4. Thinking about other aspects of the Proposed National Good Food Nation Plan (not covered above), what, if any, specific changes would you like to see reflected in the finalised National Plan?**

Universal Free School Meals:

NASUWT has been campaigning to expand universal free school meal (UFSM) provision to all young people to meet their rights to food, education and fun. It is an ambitious campaign founded in dignity, respect and rights, particularly the rights of children and young people in line with the UNCRC.

The Union have been calling for UFSM expansion with immediate effect as one mitigating response to the cost of living crisis in Scotland. Poverty isn't always seen and those experiencing poverty are not always eligible for free school meals; therefore, expansion of entitlement is particularly important when many families are experiencing in-work poverty or where income may fluctuate due to insecurity of work. And indeed, even for those who are eligible, many do not wish to claim because of persistent issues around stigma, shame and accessibility.

NASUWT had supported amendments to the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill submitted by Monica Lennon during the drafting process - these amendments would have realised the STUC Women's Committee's Food for Thought campaign and embedded universal free school meals - securing a nutritional safety-net that supports all children to learn and achieve. Although we understand the Scottish Government agreed with the sentiment of free school meals for all, they said they were concerned it would place an unfair obligation on all public bodies, which was a disappointing response.

There remains a real opportunity for the Scottish Parliament to do something transformative, to normalise universality and to ensure both access to nutritious food and a positive culture around food are embedded within Scottish education and society more broadly.

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Whilst NASUWT has recognised recent moves to include more upper primary pupils and a secondary trial as positive, we remain disappointed that the Scottish Government has chosen not to go further, especially as means-testing is inextricably linked to stigma.

Every school day our members see the benefits free school meals provide to those currently entitled. For many, it is the only hot, nutritious meal they have in a day. A quality school meal helps improve children's concentration and behaviour during lessons. Teachers witness, first-hand, the effect this can have on improving school attendance, on children's health, and academic performance. Schools see the devastating reality of children unable to afford to buy lunch because their family circumstances mean they fall outside the restrictive free school meal eligibility criteria. The financial worry and anxiety that many parents are already experiencing is also being felt by children and is likely to have a negative impact on their education.

The cost saved by families is not insignificant - the Scottish Government has confirmed that they estimate providing free school meals will save families around £400 per child, per year on average.

As part of a cost/benefit analysis, NASUWT would suggest the financial cost of additional bureaucracy is weighted against the established benefits of implementing universal free school meals. NASUWT has consistently campaigned to ensure the Government addresses the cost of education and makes provision for regulations which will ensure that poverty-proofing of the school day is prioritised and this plan is a missed opportunity: universal free school meals for all should be a foundational commitment at the core of this plan.

#### Drinks in Schools:

The Government must go further and not simply focus on food in schools but also on drinks, especially alcohol and energy drinks. NASUWT has long campaigned for the need to address issues related to the consumption of

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energy drinks by children and young people and has recently shared evidence via the Scottish Advisory Group on Relationships and Behaviour in Schools (SAGRABIS) in relation to misuse of substances including alcohol and energy drinks.

Respondents to an NASUWT national survey were asked if they were concerned about the pupils they teach misusing alcohol: 18% said 'yes - in school' and 98% said 'yes - outwith school.' 89% of teachers said they were concerned about the pupils they teach misusing energy drinks in school and 64% said they were concerned about behaviour outside school.

The biggest difference between energy drinks and fizzy drinks is caffeine. It is important that everyone and, in particular, young people, children and parents are aware of the difference between energy drinks and fizzy drinks. A 500ml bottle of cola has almost 40mg of caffeine whereas the same amount of an energy drink has around 160mg of caffeine. Research undertaken by Seifert et al (2011) stated that, *'frequently containing high and unregulated amounts of caffeine, these drinks [energy drinks] have been reported in association with serious adverse effects, especially in children, adolescents, and young adults with seizures, diabetes, cardiac abnormalities, or mood and behavioural disorders or those who take certain medications.'* (Seinfert et al, Health Effects of Energy Drinks on Children, Adolescents and Young Adults', Pediatrics, 2011).

Action must be taken to ensure that energy drinks cannot be bought or consumed at school and a consistent and coherent approach to tackling misconceptions about energy drinks as suitable food/drink should be applied.

### Conclusion

The Union believes better defining success should be the first step and ensuring we can do so clearly. In short, how will we know if this policy approach has been successful? The outcomes need to be split into short, medium and long-term, alongside clear and rigorous review mechanisms.

The implementation of a theory-of-change model would be most welcome as this might encompass some drivers for change which have been ignored. This may be because the Government is not able or does not wish to legislate around these factors, however, they should nevertheless be acknowledged e.g. press, social media, the political sphere, communications strategies.

The Plan cannot be limited to bringing together existing policies, targets and indicators when transformational change for the next generation is within the government's grasp.