

LACA National Seminar 2018

LACA Research Presentation

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Evaluation of UIFSM

Summary of findings

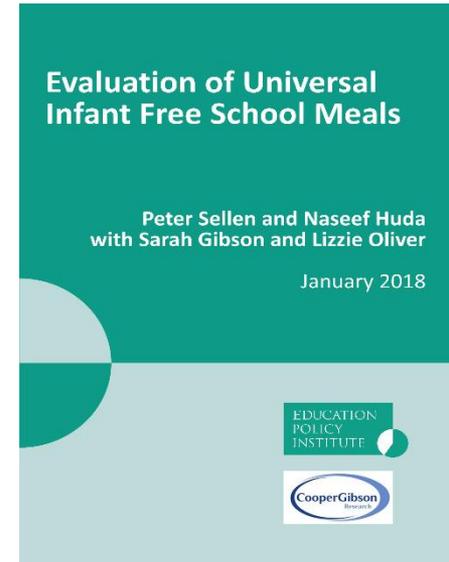
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9th March 2018

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Methodology

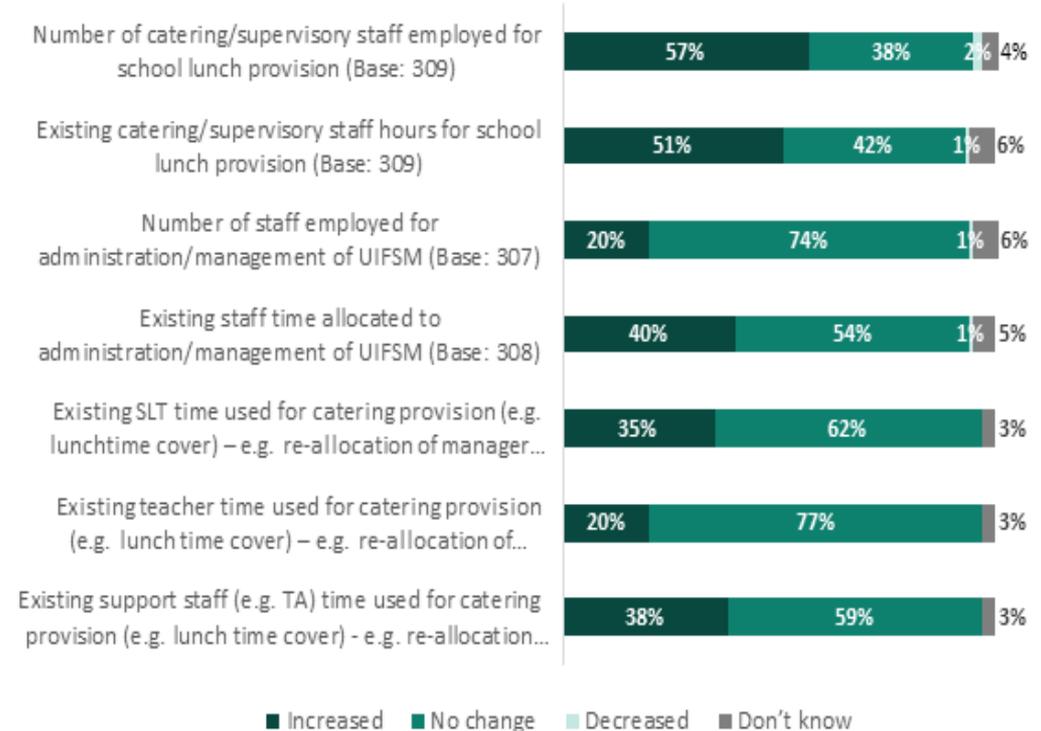
- Literature review
- Fieldwork across May to July 2017, carried out by **CooperGibson Research**:
 - **10 case study visits to primary schools**, including discussions with pupils, parents and parent governors, teachers and support staff, catering staff and midday supervisors, external catering managers, school leaders and business managers
 - A **survey of school-based staff**, with responses from 327 different schools, including 286 senior leaders and business managers, 21 middle leaders, 51 catering staff and meal supervisors, 62 teachers and teaching assistants/SENCOs, and 41 administrators and other staff
 - A **survey of parents** (508 respondents)
 - **17 interviews** with suppliers, catering providers and school leaders
- Statistical analysis of school meal take-up and free school meal (FSM) registration
- Economic modelling of the costs of the policy

Schools & caterers have made significant changes

- 53% of school leaders surveyed reported that communications with caterers had increased, often to collect feedback for menu development and to deal with delivery issues
- 18% per cent reported changing catering contracts
- 47% stated that that they had changed meal time arrangements as a result of UIFSM
- For most schools visited, changes made included seating arrangements, timetables, staggering service, catering provision and ordering systems.
- ‘Family service’ perceived to be a more positive approach to mealtime, providing a calm dining environment with benefits for socialisation
- 29% of leaders reported that their school had started to promote school meals due to UIFSM

These changes have come with widespread investment and increases in the use of school staff time for catering

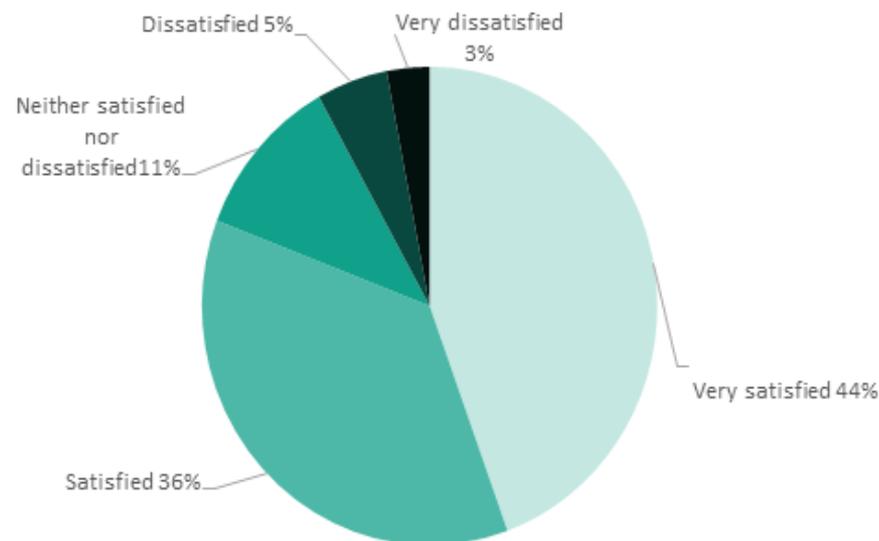
- 54% school leaders reported investment in new catering facilities
- For some, UIFSM represented an ‘opportunity’ to invest in improving the quality of lunch provision
- 8% reported a deficit for school meals referring to the period after UIFSM than when referring to the period beforehand, with no difference in the proportion reporting a profit. Around half attributed the change to the introduction of UIFSM
- UIFSM has affected wider curriculum delivery, particularly with multi-purpose dining rooms and staggered sittings



Caterers have reported improvements in quality of provision, and parents are generally satisfied with school meals

- Most caterers said that a range of approaches to learner engagement were implemented in schools due to UIFSM, such as encouraging children to try new foods and ensuring children leave the serving counter with a balanced meal
- Most caterers felt that the quality of the food produced for schools had either stayed the same or had improved since September 2014
- Where parents had said that their infant child took school meals less than 2-3 times per week, common reasons were 'poor quality food' (58%), 'children not liking the food/is a fussy eater' (42%) and 'children only liking the food on certain days' (35%).

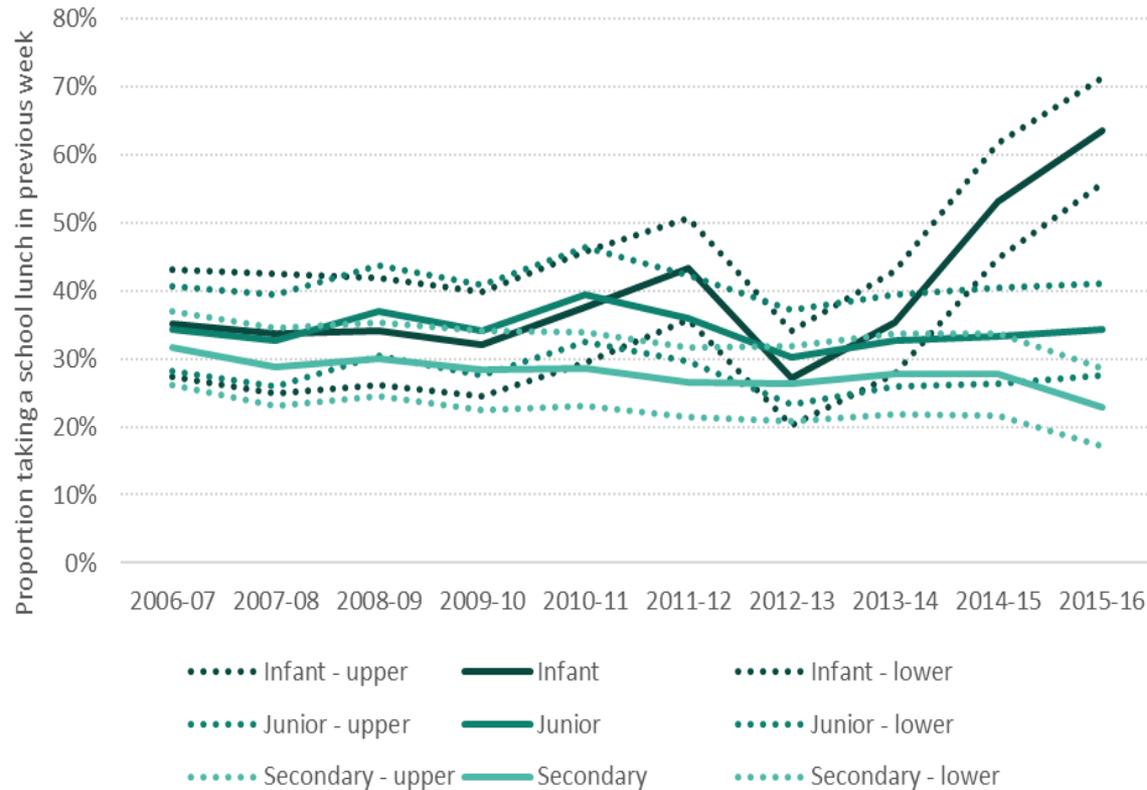
Figure 1.2: If your child does have school lunches, how satisfied are you with the service overall? Parent survey.



Base: 459

Take-up of school meals has increased substantially

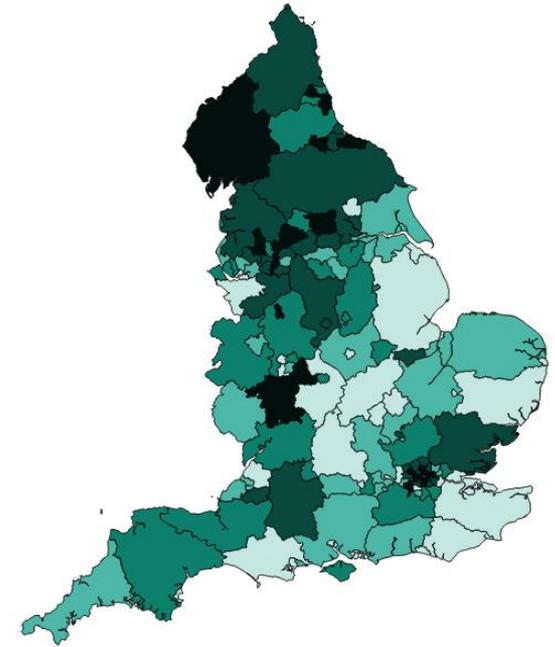
Figure 2.7: Estimated proportion of children in England attending state schools taking at least one school lunch in the last week.



- Schools have reported increases for those already entitled to FSM, as well as those given FSM, under the new policy
- Estimates from the ONS's Living Costs and Food survey suggest an increase in overall take-up on a given school day from 38% in 2013-14 to 80% in 2015-16

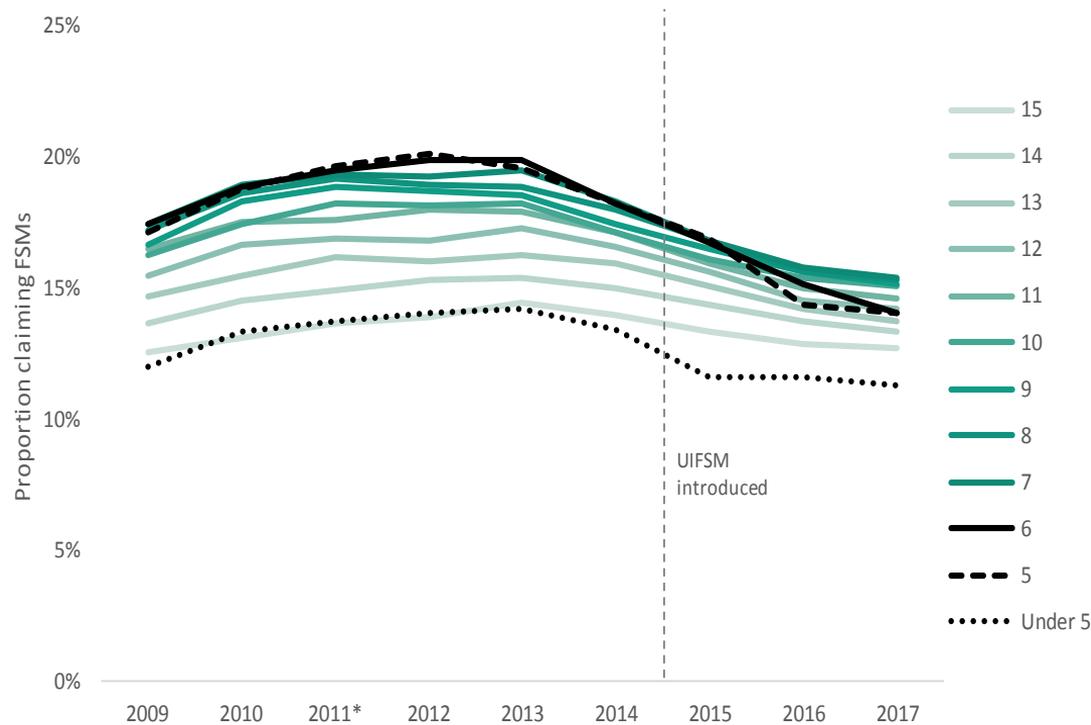
The National Pupil Database suggests take-up rates vary little according to most pupil/school characteristics

- Take-up reported in the School Census (used for funding) is higher than suggested by the ONS survey: 86.1% for all, 87.5% for FSM, and 85.9% for non-FSM infants in January 2017
- Northern areas and inner London tend to have higher take-up rates (as before UIFSM), but there is little overall difference between areas with different levels of deprivation
- Chinese pupils had the highest rate of take-up among major ethnic groups, at 93.4%, compared with 85.5% of white pupils who had the lowest rates (2017)
- Small schools had higher take-up rates (88.0%) than schools with over 500 pupils (85.7%)
- Outstanding schools had the highest take-up rates – 6%pts greater than Inadequate schools



Lightest green	$72.8\% \leq x \leq 82.7\%$
Light green	$82.7\% < x \leq 85.6\%$
Medium green	$85.6\% < x \leq 87.5\%$
Dark green	$87.5\% < x \leq 89.6\%$
Darkest green	$89.6\% < x \leq 96.1\%$

The change in FSM eligibility has made it harder for schools to register pupils for the Pupil Premium



- 31% of school leaders reported that take-up of FSM for pupil premium purposes had decreased, 15% reported that it had increased and 38% reported that it had stayed the same
- This is consistent with national trends in FSM rates (see chart)
- 30% of school leaders reported that they had introduced a strategy to maintain/improve Pupil Premium take-up due to UIFSM

Some, but generally less than half, of school respondents perceived benefits for education and socialisation

- 29% of school leaders identified an improvement in pupils' readiness for learning as a result of UIFSM
- Some teachers reported improvements in attainment and ability to concentrate
- 19% of school leaders felt that behaviour had improved
- 35% of parents felt that their child's dining etiquette had improved since the introduction of UIFSM, and 26% felt that behaviour at mealtimes was better. Around 70% attributed such changes 'a great deal' or 'a little' to free school meals

"Teachers enjoy that time of being with the children and not being the teacher. There is not a conveyor belt lunchtime service, which means it is a positive time... Children love that there is an adult at the table and they can talk about things – and it is important from a safeguarding point of view". (Headteacher)

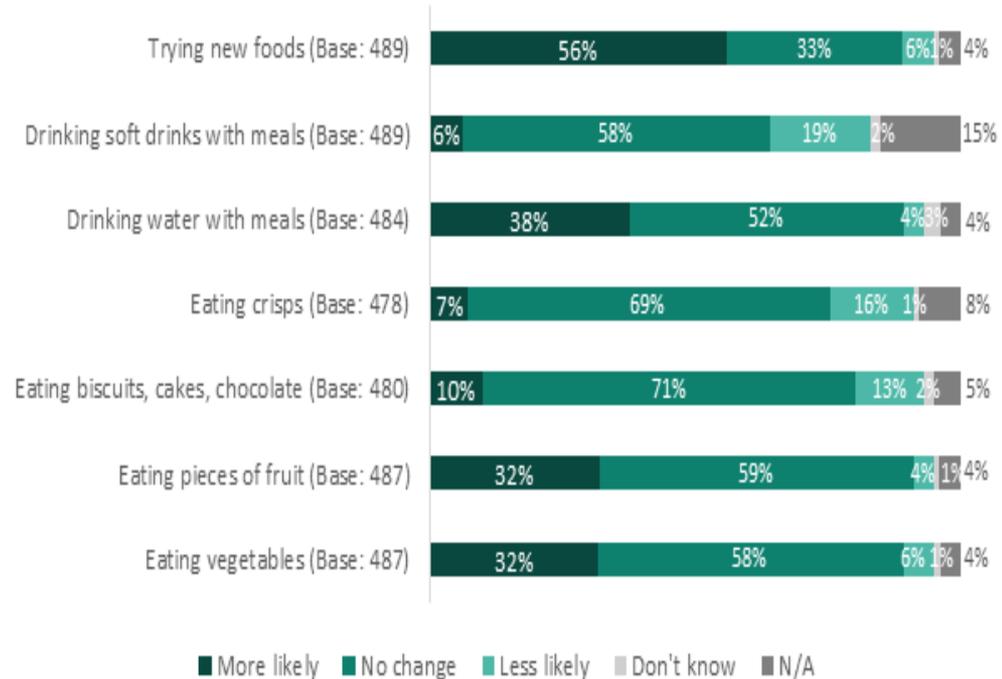
"We like [having adults sitting with us]. When we need something on our table, they are always there. If there's someone rude on your table, you can tell an adult. You can talk to a teacher or teaching assistants more easily [if they have lunch with us]". (Learner focus group)

Some school respondents thought pupil health improved and a larger proportion thought children were more likely to try new foods

- 12% of school leaders said that they introduced policies to engage with parents specifically about healthy eating and school lunch provision as a result of the policy.
- 41% reported that the general profile of healthy eating across the school had improved
- 30% felt that pupils' overall health had improved as a result of UIFSM being implemented
- 56% per cent of parents surveyed felt their child was more likely to try new foods, and most attributed this at least in part to UIFSM (see chart)

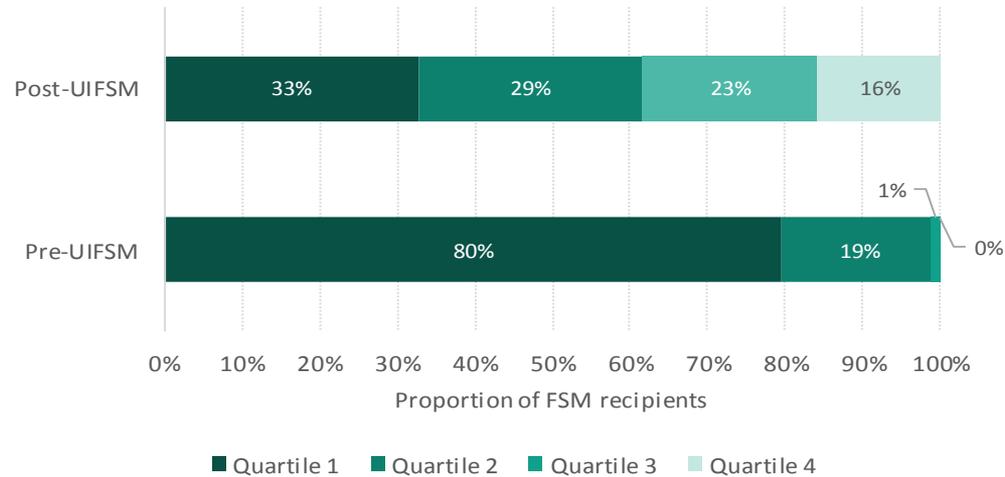
“For many of our children, this is the only hot freshly cooked meal that they will eat in the day and in some cases, generally”. (Senior leader – online survey)

Figure 2.20: Have there been any changes in your child's food choices in the last three years? CGR UIFSM Parent survey data, 2017.



Savings for households

- Parents/carers who no longer had to make packed lunches reported a median weekly saving of £10
- According to the Living Costs and Food survey, the proportion of infants from the lowest quartile of household income receiving a free meal in a given school week increased from 34% to 84%
- But most new beneficiaries of FSMs are not from poor households



“The impact of quality time gained in the evening by not having to cook an evening meal as a result of school lunches is far more important to us than the time saved by not having to make a packed lunch”
(Parent – online survey)

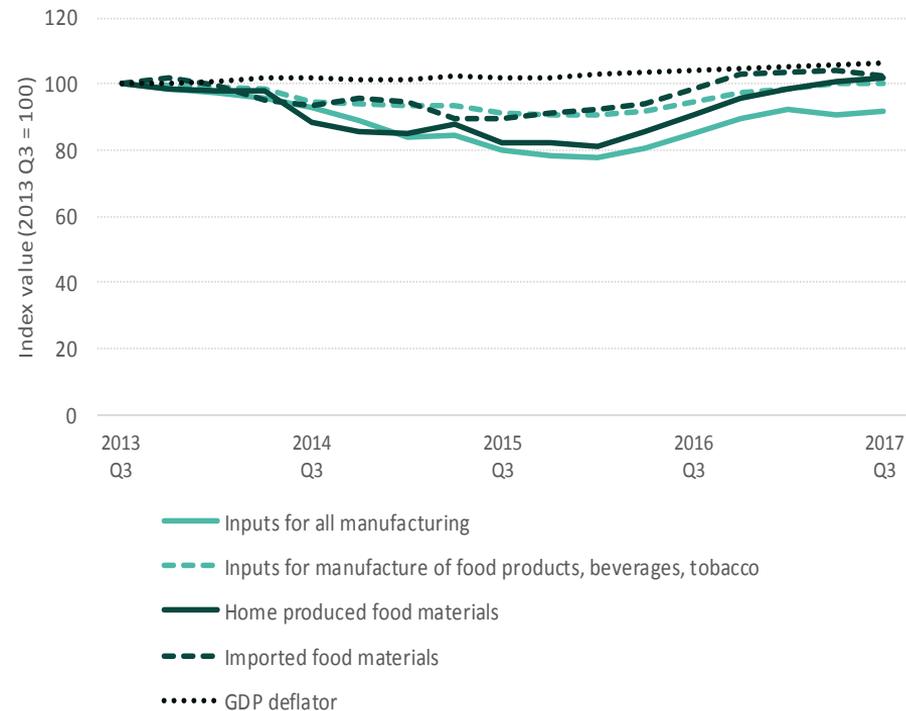
Cost effectiveness of UIFSM as an educational intervention

- The total costs of the policy have been estimated for the first 3 years of the policy, and projected over a 10 year period, using published data and assumptions informed by the fieldwork
- In a central scenario, the additional costs of producing school meals, capital costs, implementation costs, and additional use of school staff time are estimated represent a total cost less than the financial benefits experienced by infants' households – creating a *net economic benefit* of £887m (NPV) over 10 years.
- But...if economies of scale in food productions are not realised, food inflation rises, and parents don't perceive such high benefits, there would be a *net economic cost* of £500m.
- And...considering the costs to the public sector (funded by taxpayers), under any scenario the costs are over £5bn.
- So: as far as constrained public finances are concerned, on the EEF/Sutton Trust's Toolkit for assessing educational interventions the policy has a 'moderate' cost per pupil.
- IF UIFSM were to achieve a similar impact on Key Stage 1 attainment to that observed in the pilot, the 'effect size' would place it in the 'low impact' category on the Toolkit scale – combined with a 'moderate' cost that does not suggest a cost-effective intervention in terms of public spending.
- This does not consider any wider impacts, for instance on health or socialisation.

Net costs for schools

- Considering implementation activity, in the central modelling scenario it is estimated that UIFSM created an initial net cost to schools of around £125m across 2013-14 and 2014-15, taking into account DfE funding
- However, in 2015-16 schools are estimated to have on average received £38m more funding than the estimated revenue costs
- Schools/caterers have benefited from weak wage growth and food input price deflation since the policy was announced – this is now changing
- In a central scenario, if the revenue funding rate is held at £2.30, by 2023-24 the policy would be creating a net annual cost to schools of £109m in today's prices

Figure 3.1: Indices of manufacturing industry and home/food input prices, 2013-2017.



Key conclusions

- There is scope for schools to learn from others' experiences in delivering UIFSM (our report presents 10 case studies outlining different approaches and perceived outcomes)
- Given the public costs of the policy, it is important that schools and caterers ensure FSMs are provided in a cost-effective way that supports healthy eating habits and social benefits
- Further research would be required to establish whether similar impacts on education are likely to have occurred as were found in the FSM pilots, and whether the perceived benefits for dietary habits, dining etiquette and social skills noted by some respondents have longer-term impacts
- The current funding rates applied by the Department for Education are likely to become insufficient
- The Department for Education should monitor the implications of changes in Pupil Premium registration, and consider ways to make it easier for parents to be registered under Universal Credit

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