

# Promoting healthier food in secondary schools (EPIC Study)

Presentation to the School Food Plan Alliance

Thursday 7<sup>th</sup> March 2024



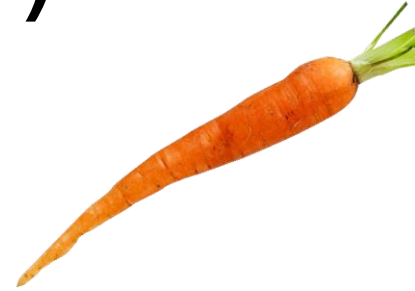
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# Outline of presentation

- Background to EPIC study – the FUEL study
- EPIC Study: Enhancing Policy In sChool food
- Policy relevance
- Next steps



# FUEL Study: Approach

- How well do secondary schools meet School Food Standards?
- What do schools do to support healthy eating? (i.e. Implement School Food Plan)

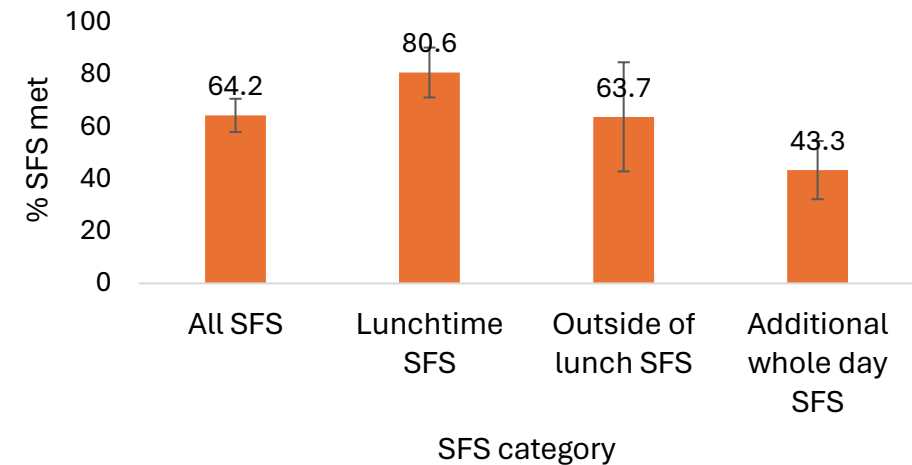


in the Midlands and spoke to over **2000 young people**, and to **school and catering staff**.

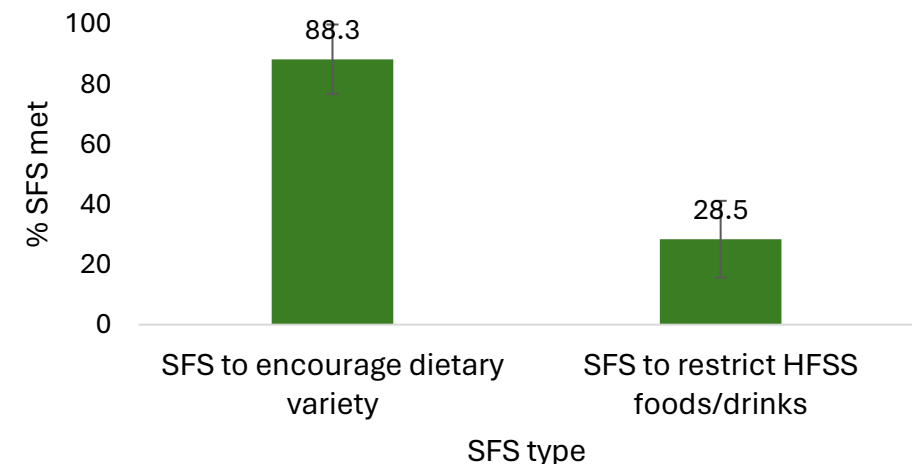
# Findings: School Food Standards

- Schools were providing nutritious lunchtime meals **but no schools met 100% of SFS**
- Standards least well met:
  - SFS for whole day/outside of lunch
  - SFS restricting 'unhealthy' items
- 80% schools did not review compliance with the SFS
- Many school leaders/governors did not see monitoring SFS as part of their role
- No evidence that higher SFS compliance = better nutritional intake in pupils at lunch

% SFS met by schools (by SFS category)



% SFS met by schools (by SFS type)



# Findings: School Food Plan/school food challenges

## Food & School Leadership

- Low awareness of the School Food Plan
- 10% schools had a whole school food policy

## Food and eating environment

- Students wanted choice, convenience, tasty options, value for money
- Caterers - challenging to balance healthy food choices with financial viability/student preferences
- Students perceived school canteens to be busy and stressful
- Bringing unhealthy foods into school was perceived as an issue

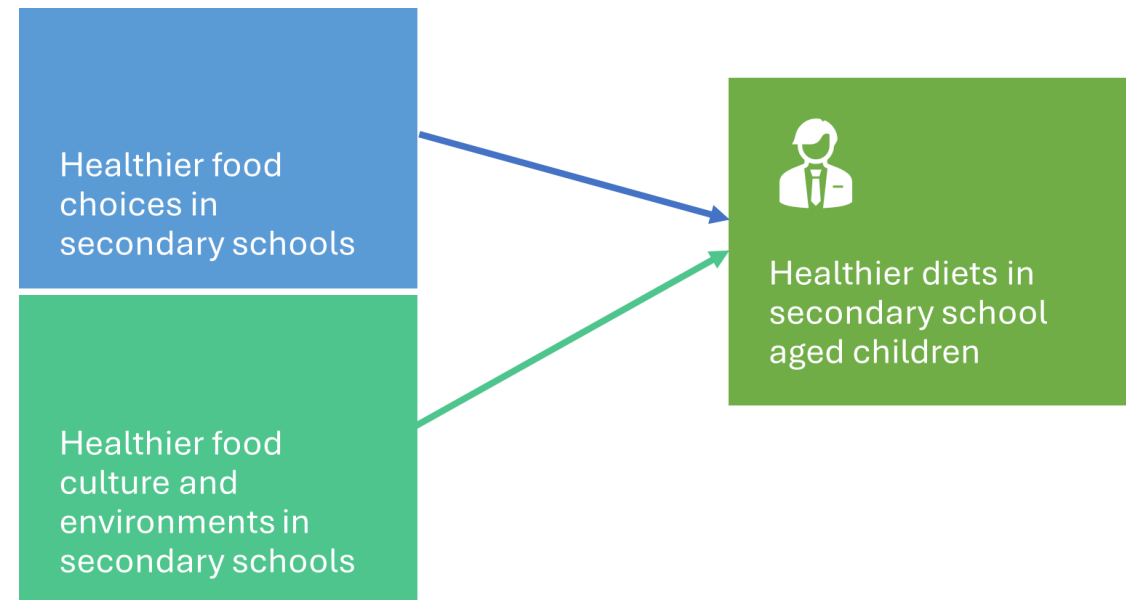
## Talking & learning about food

- Students not always included in conversations about school food
- Food education - not given much focus
- Students perceived education on food and healthy eating messages to patchy and inconsistent



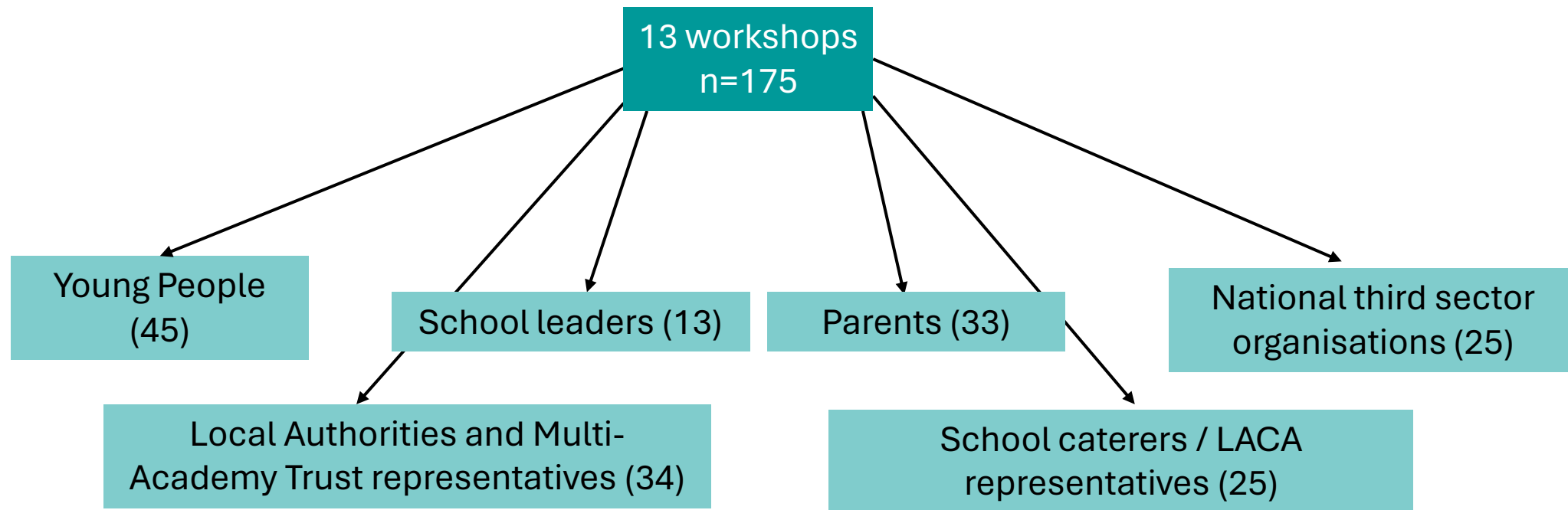
# Rationale for EPIC Study

- Need to improve school food policy to support healthy nutrition in secondary school pupils
- EPIC Study, Nov 2022-Feb 2024, funded by NIHR Policy Research Programme
- **Aim: Use the FUEL study findings to inform discussions to co-develop and prioritise recommendations for healthier school food policy in secondary schools**
- Multiple stakeholder perspectives



# Phase 1: Stakeholder workshops

Aim: To gain a range of perspectives on existing school food policy, considering the empirical research evidence

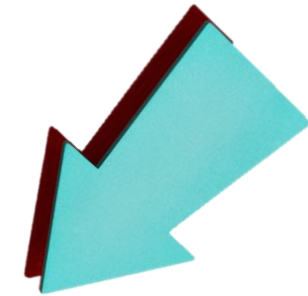


# Workshop approach

- Shared FUEL study findings
- Discussed thoughts on issues
- Identified possible solutions

## Topics for discussion:

- School food standards
- School food challenges
- Foods and drinks
- Eating experiences
- Food education and learning
- Whole school food
- External environment



**AREAS FOR ACTION ON SCHOOL FOOD**



# 26 Action Areas

Healthier food choices at school

Catering and procurement

School leadership and governance

Food environments beyond school

The food space and experience within schools

Priority of food within schools

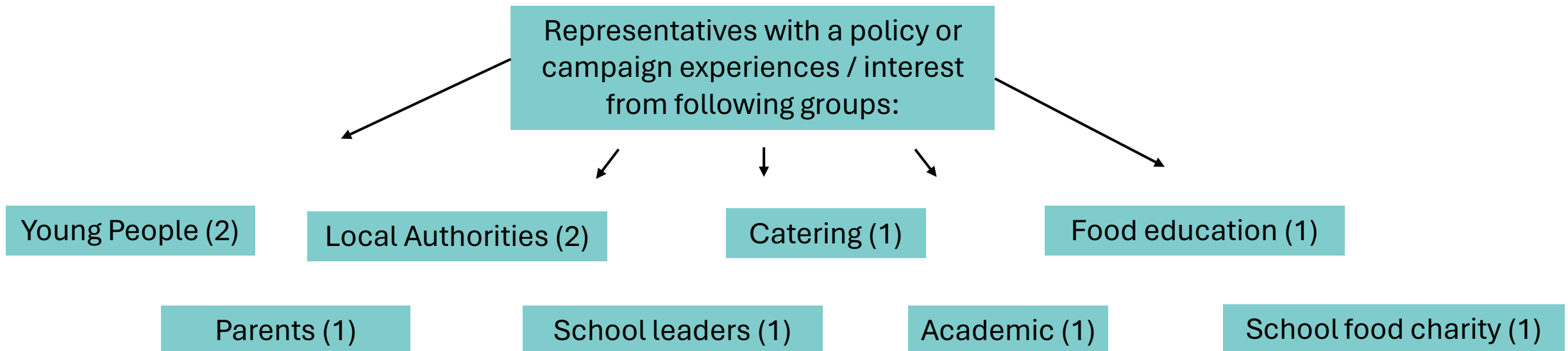
Funding for school food

Secondary school food system elements identified through GENIUS School Food Network project

1. Catering staff investment, training and skills
2. Integration and valuing of catering teams within schools
3. Investment in catering facilities and equipment
4. Support schools in the procurement of school food
5. Reform school food catering provider models
6. Adapt the food offer to increase quality and meet students' needs
7. Changing food service arrangements to promote healthy food uptake
8. Reform breaktime offer
9. School food policies and rules
10. Support for senior leadership and Governors on school food
11. Local Authority support for all schools
12. National government to provide joined-up leadership on school food
13. Adapt and update school food standards
14. Monitoring of school food standards compliance
15. Increase the role of Ofsted in monitoring school food
16. Education and guidance for parents
17. Address the wider food environment
18. Provide longer lunch breaks and protect time to eat
19. Dedicated, appealing and sociable eating spaces
20. Support healthy school accreditation in secondary schools
21. Redesign food lessons and increase emphasis within the curriculum
22. Consistent food and nutrition messaging and cross-curricular education
23. Invest in educators to deliver food and healthy eating education
24. Increase student engagement on school food
25. Increase parental engagement on school food
26. Review/ increase funding for school food provision

# Phase 2: Prioritisation by Policy Interest Group

Aim: Convene a Policy Interest group to prioritise identified action areas relating to secondary school food and healthy eating, to inform future directions for secondary school food policy and practice.



# The prioritisation process



| Action area   | Description   | Examples of actions  | Tensions and alternative views                              |
|---|---|--|---|
| <b>Catering and procurement</b>                             |   |  |   |
| 1. Catering staff investment, <u>training</u> and skills    | Investment in catering staff and their training; recognition of school catering as a career to enable better recruitment and retention of staff and provision of high-quality school food | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Provide investment and face-to-face opportunities for skills development to boost recruitment of catering staff and provide consistency of quality (C, LA, TS, LR)</li> <li>b) Improving caterers' knowledge on compliance with the school food standards and portion sizes / make training mandatory (C, TS, LR)</li> <li>c) Greater promotion of catering as a career, including higher wages, and demonstrate clear pathway to career progression – to better increase and retain number of staff (C, LA, TS, LR)</li> <li>d) Sharing good practice <u>e.g.</u> menus and recipes of what tasty, nutritious and sustainable dishes look like and how they are made (TS, LR)</li> <li>e) Bring professional chefs into school to share skills and inspire kitchen staff and school chefs (LA, TS)</li> </ul> |   |
| 2. Integration and valuing of catering teams within schools | Catering teams integrated, <u>respected</u> and valued in schools, with involvement in food education and collaboration with school Senior Leadership Teams                               | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Greater value placed on school chefs' role and integration / sense of belonging in the school (C, TS, LR)</li> <li>b) Greater links between catering teams and school senior leadership (C, TS)</li> <li>c) Provide opportunities for catering teams to work / interact with students, parents and school staff <u>e.g.</u> menu design; parents' evenings; tasting opportunities (C, TS, LR)</li> <li>d) Integrate food education into canteen offer <u>e.g.</u> link up menus with food technology teaching; use dining room as a learning space / lunch as an educational opportunity; cooking clubs; exploring healthy options (C, LA, TS)</li> <li>e) Caterers to provide cooking clubs to students/parents(C)</li> </ul>   | a) No time for caterers to become involved as educators (C) |
| 3. Investment in catering facilities and equipment          | Investment in school kitchens, <u>facilities</u> and equipment to enable high quality food to be efficiently prepared in sufficient quantities  | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>a) Modernise equipment (C)</li> <li>b) Increase preparation / kitchen space (C)</li> <li>c) Adequate food storage to reduce waste (C, LA)</li> <li>d) Consider impact on kitchens as part of school expansion planning (C)</li> </ul>   |   |
| 4. Support schools in the                                   | Training and support on school food procurement,  | a) Improve schools' ability to procure better catering, challenge inadequate provision / non-compliance with school food standards, including greater  |   |

| <b>Action</b>  | <b>Importance rating<br/>Median (range)</b> | <b>Support rating<br/>Median (range)</b> | <b>Ease rating<br/>Median (range)</b> |
|--|---|--|---------------------------------------|
| 1. Catering staff investment, training and skills                          | 8 (5-10)                                    | 8 (5-10)                                 | 5 (1-8)                               |
| 2. Integration and valuing of catering teams within schools                | 7 (3-10)                                    | 7 (5-10)                                 | 7 (4-8)                               |
| 3. Investment in catering facilities and equipment                         | 7 (3-8)                                     | 7 (5-8)                                  | 6 (1-10)                              |
| 4. Support schools in the procurement of school food                       | 7 (2-8)                                     | 7 (5-9)                                  | 6 (3-7)                               |
| 5. Reform school food catering provider models                             | 8 (3-10)                                    | 8 (5-10)                                 | 5 (1-10)                              |
| 6. Adapt the food offer to increase quality and meet students' needs       | 9 (7-10)                                    | 9 (7-10)                                 | 6 (4-10)                              |
| 7. Changing food service arrangements to promote healthy food uptake       | 8 (7-10)                                    | 9 (5-10)                                 | 6 (3-9)                               |
| 8. Reform breaktime offer  | 8 (5-10)                                    | 8 (5-10)                                 | 7 (5-9)                               |
| 9. School food policies and rules  | 9 (5-10)                                    | 8 (5-10)                                 | 6 (2-10)                              |
| 10. Support for senior leadership and Governors on school food             | 7 (5-10)                                    | 8 (5-10)                                 | 6 (2-8)                               |
| 11. Local Authority support for all schools                                | 6 (5-9)                                     | 7 (5-10)                                 | 5 (3-7)                               |
| 12. National government to provide joined-up leadership on school food     | 9 (7-10)                                    | 8 (5-10)                                 | 4 (1-7)                               |
| 13. Adapt and update school food standards                                 | 7 (5-10)                                    | 8 (5-10)                                 | 6 (4-9)                               |
| 14. Monitoring of school food standards compliance                         | 7 (4-10)                                    | 8 (5-10)                                 | 7 (2-9)                               |
| 15. Increase the role of Ofsted in monitoring school food                  | 7 (1-10)                                    | 5 (1-10)                                 | 5 (0-9)                               |
| 16. Education and guidance for parents                                     | 5 (3-9)                                     | 5 (3-9)                                  | 7 (5-9)                               |
| 17. Address the wider food environment                                     | 8 (3-10)                                    | 9 (3-10)                                 | 3 (0-6)                               |
| 18. Provide longer lunch breaks and protect time to eat                    | 9 (7-10)                                    | 10 (5-10)                                | 6 (2-10)                              |
| 19. Dedicated, appealing and sociable eating spaces                        | 9 (7-10)                                    | 8 (5-10)                                 | 6 (2-10)                              |
| 20. Support healthy school accreditation in secondary schools              | 7 (2-10)                                    | 6 (5-10)                                 | 6 (2-10)                              |
| 21. Redesign food lessons and increase emphasis within the curriculum      | 8 (6-10)                                    | 8 (5-10)                                 | 6 (3-10)                              |
| 22. Consistent food and nutrition messaging and cross-curricular education | 8 (6-10)                                    | 8 (5-10)                                 | 6 (3-10)                              |
| 23. Invest in educators to deliver food and healthy eating education       | 9 (3-10)                                    | 8 (5-10)                                 | 5 (2-10)                              |
| 24. Increase student engagement on school food                             | 8 (6-10)                                    | 7 (5-10)                                 | 8 (5-10)                              |
| 25. Increase parental engagement on school food                            | 7 (5-8)                                     | 6 (3-10)                                 | 6 (3-10)                              |
| 26. Review/ increase funding for school food provision                     | 10 (8-10)                                   | 10 (3-10)                                | 3 (1-10)                              |

# Top 10 priority Action Areas

1 Review/ increase funding for school food provision

2 National government to provide joined-up leadership on school food

3 Increase student engagement on school food

4 Support for senior leadership and Governors on school food

5 Adapt the food offer to increase quality and meet students' needs

6 School food policies and rules

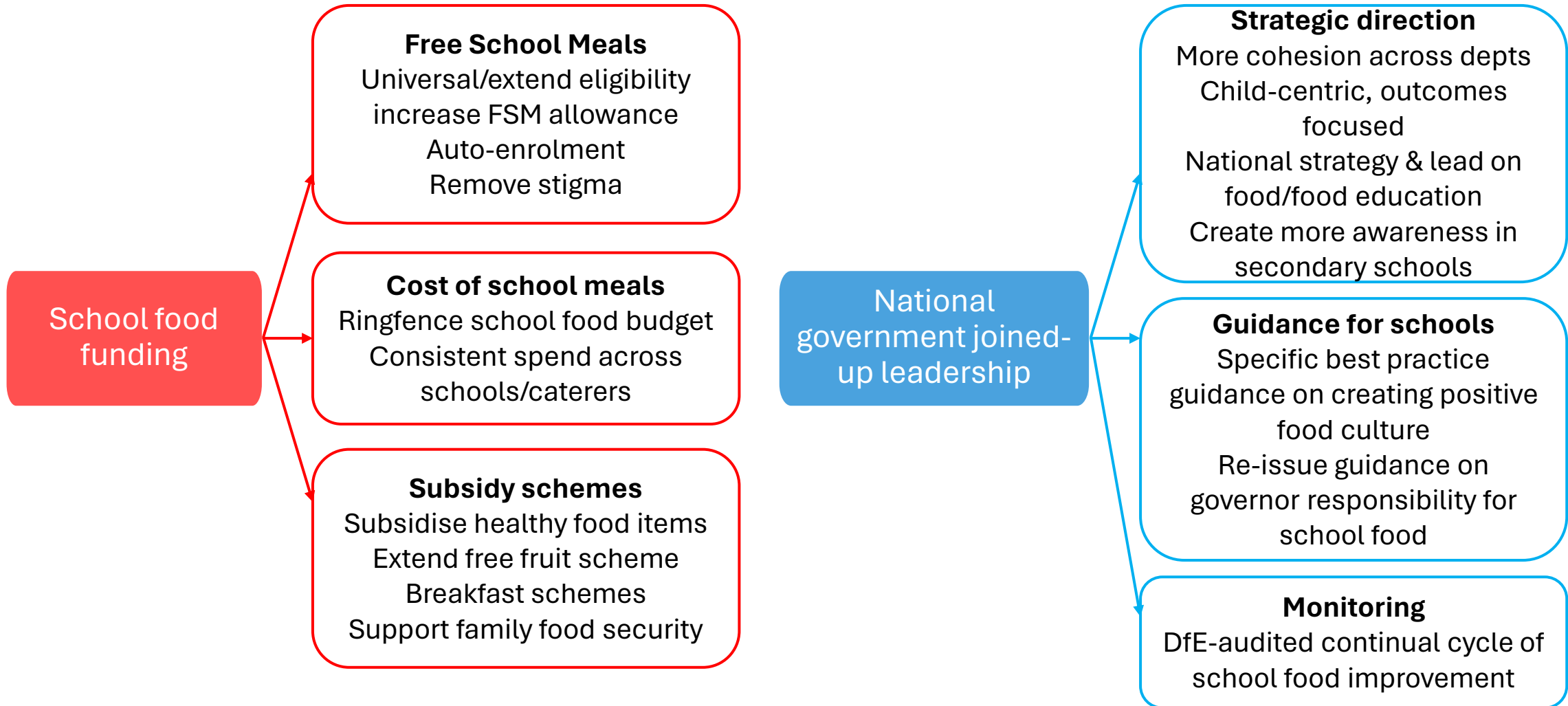
6 Monitoring of school food standards compliance

8 Catering staff investment, training and skills

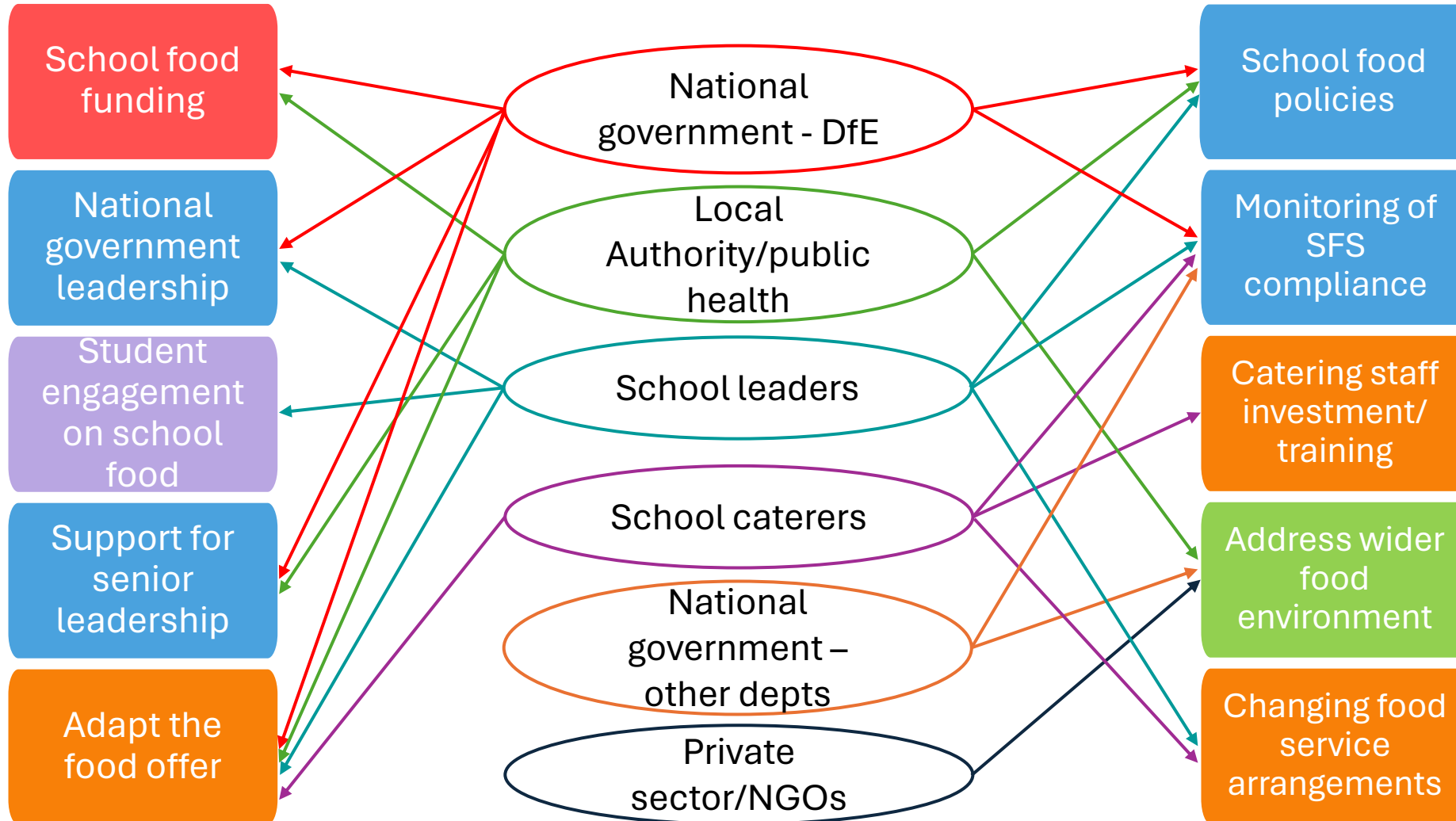
9 Address the wider food environment

10 Changing food service arrangements to promote healthy food uptake

# First 2 priority Action Areas



# Responsibility for prioritised action areas





# Policy relevance

## Government policy commitments

- FSA pilot SFS monitoring programme<sup>1</sup>
- £200,000 investment in pilot training programme for school governors / MATs<sup>1</sup>, publishing school food vision on websites<sup>2</sup>
- £5m investment in food curriculum development & teacher training/leadership bursaries<sup>1</sup>
- Continuous review of FSM and review of School Fruit and Vegetable Scheme<sup>2</sup>
- ‘Get Help Buying for Schools’ service<sup>2</sup>
- SFS review and update<sup>3</sup> (planned pre-pandemic – not progressed)

## National Food Strategy independent review (2021) recommendations

- Extend eligibility for free school meals
- “Eat and Learn” Initiative including accreditation scheme and Ofsted inspection of food and cookery lessons



# What next?

- Knowledge exchange event planned – 20<sup>th</sup> March
- How do we create momentum around these priority areas?
- What can we do as researchers to take this forward?
- How can we support the SFPA to take these findings forward?



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