



# FEED BRITAIN BETTER!

Putting the health of  
**ALL** young people at the  
heart of **COVID** recovery



by the Feed Britain Better coalition  
October 2020

Feed Britain Better is supported by the Health Foundation



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# Foreword

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**2020 hasn't been easy for young people.** The fear, isolation and loss of loved ones will stay with us. Lockdown, the exam results fiasco, and chaos at universities have also taken their toll.

At times we have felt completely forgotten by the Government and at other times under fire from the media for being irresponsible in spreading the virus.

For some of us what we eat and drink has improved. We've cooked more with our families and even found we enjoy it, and not had the temptation of fast food outlets. But for many of us what we can eat and drink has got worse just as COVID is teaching us a powerful lesson about the importance of food for our health.

Working on Feed Britain Better has been an incredible experience. Young people have been at the heart of this, not just being asked questions but co-developing solutions. And we've done it with leaders from the food industry, NGOs and government who really want to work with us. We hope they have learned something too, from the experience. And we are really proud of the result.

We have developed the 10 recommendations in this report based on unique and detailed research with young people. We think these insights are all the more important as we enter another period of lockdowns, uncertainty and disruption.

So please, help us to turn these ideas into reality. The challenges we are highlighting are urgent and need your attention. Please listen to us this time round.

If you work for the Government or a food business then please do everything you can to implement the recommendations that are directed at you. Our health depends on it.

And to our peers, our friends and everyone out there, please keep working for a fairer, healthier food system. COVID has been hard but it has been a wake-up call.

**It's time to Feed Britain Better!**



**Jess & Freya**

*Feed Britain Better Youth Panel*



# Executive Summary

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**Ahead of us are 6 months of living under extensive and shifting changes to our previous way of life. Although things are changing rapidly, there is a lot that we can learn from the first 6 months of the pandemic, including the profound ways in which it impacted what we eat and drink.**

This paper starts from the perspective of young people. We carried out multiple, new and detailed research projects to explore their experience of food during lockdown and beyond.

COVID has changed young people's relationship with food. During lockdown they felt a loss of structure to their days and were snacking more. Some have seen improvements – cooking from scratch more, eating together as a family more, and drinking more water. But our poorest communities have seen things get a lot worse with loss of income making diets poorer, many more going hungry, and parents and relatives dying from COVID.

Some changes are opportunities to build on, some must never be allowed to happen again. Feed Britain Better is a new youth-led coalition of child health organisations, youth campaigners, food charities, education leaders, and organisations representing food businesses. We have come together to develop fresh ideas for how we can put the health of all young people at the heart of COVID recovery, how we can limit the damage that is being done, and how we can build on some of the opportunities that present themselves.

The pandemic has brought about rapid shifts in government policy on health and food. There are some good foundations to build on. We fully support the swift implementation of the Government's new Obesity Strategy and of the National Food Strategy. And we recognise the important role 'Eat Out To Help Out' played in boosting both the restaurant sector and public morale.

Our in-depth research has led us to 5 key youth insights...

# Executive Summary

## Key Youth Insights

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### **YOUTH INSIGHT 1: WE WANT TO END CHILD FOOD POVERTY**

Half of all young people have become more aware of food injustices due to COVID and Marcus Rashford has invigorated a whole generation of campaigners to fight for food justice



### **YOUTH INSIGHT 2: WE FIND HEALTHIER OPTIONS ARE TOO EXPENSIVE RELATIVE TO UNHEALTHIER OPTIONS**

Per calorie healthier foods are three times more expensive than unhealthy foods. And young people are very “price sensitive”



### **YOUTH INSIGHT 3: WE ARE BEING BOMBARDED ONLINE BY JUNK FOOD ADVERTS MORE THAN EVER**

Since being at home under lockdown, young people have been online more and are more likely to report seeing an increase in food adverts than older age groups



### **YOUTH INSIGHT 4: WE ARE DRINKING MORE WATER AND WANT TO KEEP IT THAT WAY**

Water became young people’s go-to drink as they spent all their time at home. Now they are back at school it’s going to be hard to keep that level of water consumption going



### **YOUTH INSIGHT 5: WHEN WE HANG OUT IN FAST FOOD PLACES IT'S MORE ABOUT THE SAFE SPACE THAN THE FOOD**

77% miss hanging out with friends in their usual social spaces.  
66% miss the food in their usual social spaces

# Executive Summary

## Five Big Challenges

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Next we took these key insights to our youth panel who worked them into **5 big challenges they set to business, Government, and other stakeholders:**



### **BIG CHALLENGE 1:**

**HOW DO WE PROVIDE FREE SCHOOL MEALS FOR EVERY YOUNG PERSON WHO NEEDS THEM DURING THE HOLIDAYS?**



### **BIG CHALLENGE 2:**

**HOW DO WE MAKE HEALTHIER OPTIONS MORE AFFORDABLE THAN UNHEALTHIER OPTIONS FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?**



### **BIG CHALLENGE 3:**

**HOW DO WE LEVEL THE PLAYING FIELD SO YOUNG PEOPLE SEE HEALTHIER OPTIONS PROMOTED AS THE NORM ON DIGITAL?**



### **BIG CHALLENGE 4:**

**HOW CAN WE MAKE WATER THE GO-TO DRINK FOR YOUNG PEOPLE?**



### **BIG CHALLENGE 5:**

**HOW CAN WE CREATE SOCIAL SPACES THAT FULFIL YOUNG PEOPLE'S SOCIAL NEEDS?**

We knew that solving these 5 big challenges would require co-creation with young people and collaboration between different sectors, building on the positive sense of unity and community spirit that has emerged in response to the COVID crisis. So we engaged with 50 organisations and held a series of workshops to develop our solutions.

Some of our recommendations are fresh twists on existing ideas. Others are new innovations which we have been led to by our young people. They include 3 pilots and prototypes that we will drive forward with young people and partners to create new evidence for what works (and what doesn't).

The recommendations **highlighted in RED** on the next page are emergency actions that could and should be implemented immediately. The other recommendations are less urgent given our immediate COVID situation and should be addressed when we finally emerge from this crisis. **The most urgent of all is the extension of school meal provision over holidays. As this report is launched we have just 10 days to ensure adequate provision over the October half term for 1.4 million children.**

# Executive Summary

## Our Solutions

Recommendations **highlighted in RED** are emergency actions that could and should be implemented immediately.



### OUR SOLUTIONS 1: A permanent solution to holiday provision of free school meals



**GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDATION 1:** Extend the Holiday Activity and Food programme so every child gets a decent meal all year round



### OUR SOLUTIONS 2: Making healthier options more affordable than unhealthy options for young people



**PILOT 1:** SMASH (Save Money And Stay Healthy) young person discount and rewards app for healthier food



**GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDATION 2:** 'Eat Well to Stay Well' initiative giving young people 20% off healthier food



**BUSINESS RECOMMENDATION 1:**  
Sign up for SMASH



**GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDATION 3:** Reconfigure tax to encourage reformulation, shift consumption, and raise funds for child health



**GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDATION 4:** A £50 million innovation fund for research and development into reformulated and new food products



### OUR SOLUTIONS 3: Creating an online environment for young people that puts healthier food centre stage



**GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDATION 5:** Fast forward an end to advertising of products high in fat, salt, and sugar (HFSS) online



**BUSINESS RECOMMENDATION 2:**  
End advertising of HFSS products online now



### OUR SOLUTIONS 4: Making water the go-to drink for young people



**PILOT 2:**  
Youth-designed reusable water bottle and campaign



### OUR SOLUTIONS 5: Creating social spaces that fulfil young people's social needs



**PILOT 3:**  
Youth pods: exciting youth-designed social spaces with healthier food

# Executive Summary

## Our Solutions

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**5 of our recommendations are to the Government at a time when it faces multiple very difficult competing priorities.** The need to bolster health during a pandemic, to help the economy bounce back, to support struggling sectors (including some parts of the food industry), and to protect families on the brink; whilst not losing sight of its core levelling-up agenda and the need eventually to balance the books.

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We recognise these competing priorities and so our recommendations will make health and the economy work together. They will help the British economy bounce back stronger, support the parts of the economy that have been hit hardest, and over time they will help the Chancellor raise revenues and balance his books.



# Introduction: The COVID Context

COVID has made us all think more about food, what we are eating, and where it comes from. We've all faced some uncertainty and inconvenience. But families on low incomes have too often been pushed right to the brink of not being able to feed themselves enough decent food. As we head towards a wave of greater unemployment and poverty many more families will be pushed over the edge.

## CHANGES IN EATING HABITS DURING LOCKDOWN

### MORE HOME COOKING

Surveys assessing if people are cooking from scratch more have found that anywhere between 38-55% are doing so<sup>1,2,3</sup>

### MORE FREEZING

35% of people report using the freezer more<sup>6</sup>

### MORE TIME TO COOK

A third of people viewed lockdown as an opportunity to improve their cooking<sup>4</sup>

### MORE EATING AS A FAMILY

44% of households with children were eating as a family more<sup>5</sup>

### MORE SNACKING

A large number of people have reported eating more confectionary (39%), cakes and biscuits (34%), and savoury snacks<sup>7</sup>

## FAMILIES STRUGGLING TO GET FOOD DURING LOCKDOWN

### FOOD INSECURITY WAS

**250% HIGHER** than pre-COVID in the second month of lockdown and this persisted into the third month<sup>8</sup>

### A THIRD OF SHIELDING

**PEOPLE** in England struggled to obtain food, including a fifth of clinically vulnerable people<sup>9</sup>

The Trussell Trust reported an **81% INCREASE IN FOOD PARCELS** given out in the last 2 weeks of March compared to the same time last year<sup>10</sup>

The impact of COVID on the food industry has also been profound. Some parts of the food industry have been particularly badly hit by COVID (especially the restaurant and hospitality sector) while other parts of the food industry have fared better (including retail, manufacturing, and delivery).

## IMPACT OF COVID ON THE FOOD INDUSTRY

Long term predictions are that **22% OF HOSPITALITY OUTLETS WILL BE PERMANENTLY CLOSED** by the end of 2020<sup>11</sup>

Delivery Apps like **DELIVEROO AND JUST EAT SAW ORDERS SOAR IN LOCKDOWN.**

Just Eat's UK business saw 33% year-on-year growth in April and May – generating 29 Million orders<sup>16</sup>

**COLLAPSE OF "ON-THE-GO"** – sandwich sales from delis and convenience stores during a 4 week period in May were down 58%<sup>12</sup>

It is predicted that the **UK ONLINE FOOD MARKET WILL EXPAND BY 25%** this year. Ocado has seen a 40% growth in sales<sup>15</sup>

Compared to 2019, food retail has seen a **13.7% GROWTH IN SALES**<sup>13</sup>

An additional **£19 MILLION HAD BEEN SPENT ON BISCUITS** by July<sup>14</sup>

In July **ONLINE SALES MADE UP 13% OF THE GROCERY MARKET** compared to 7% when lockdown started

"We executed well in the first quarter, even as the virus was spreading... In-home, there is more grazing, more continuous eating, and snacking takes up a much bigger role,"<sup>17</sup>

**Dirk Van de Put** - CEO of Mondelez International

Meanwhile we've learned that what we eat can even affect whether we live or die if we catch COVID, with overweight people at greater risk, and people with obesity 48% more likely to die if they catch COVID.<sup>18</sup>

## THE HEALTH AND ECONOMIC IMPACT OF OBESITY IN THE UK

**1 IN 5 CHILDREN HAVE OBESITY** by the time they leave primary school<sup>19</sup>

Obesity prevalence among children is more than **TWICE AS HIGH IN THE MOST DEPRIVED AREAS** compared to the least deprived areas<sup>20</sup>

People with obesity are **48% MORE LIKELY TO DIE IF THEY CATCH COVID**<sup>21</sup>

Overweight and obesity related conditions cost the **NHS £6.1 BILLION PER YEAR**<sup>23</sup>

Costs to the wider economy through **LOST PRODUCTIVITY AND REDUCED WORKFORCE** participation, are estimated at £27 billion<sup>24</sup>

There were nearly **900,000 OBESITY RELATED HOSPITAL ADMISSIONS** in 2018 and 2019<sup>22</sup>

Obesity, among the current cohort of children, over the course of their lifetime, could **COST THE NHS £74 BILLION** and wider society £405 billion through lost productivity and reduced workforce participation<sup>25</sup>

Our coalition is particularly focused on young people and how we can put their health at the heart of COVID recovery. So our starting point for this report is young people's experience of food in lockdown and beyond. We took multiple approaches:

- a **survey of 1,000 people** aged 14-19 across England from May to June 2020
- a week-long **digital ethnographic immersion** into the lives of 30 young people
- a series of **visioning workshops** with 12 additional young people
- a **youth panel** of 8 who have been shaping the project from the start

## YOUNG PEOPLE'S EXPERIENCE OF FOOD DURING LOCKDOWN

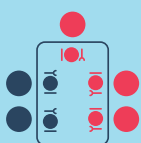
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45% of young people say that they are now **MORE AWARE OF THE INJUSTICES THAT EXIST IN THE FOOD SYSTEM**, and 40% are worrying about those injustices more now than before lockdown<sup>26</sup>



**A THIRD OF TEENS REPORTED COOKING MORE**, although those from less affluent socio-economic backgrounds were less likely to<sup>27</sup>



60% of young people feel **EATING AS A FAMILY** has positively impacted their health and wellbeing while in lockdown<sup>28</sup>



**40% OF YOUNG PEOPLE ARE SNACKING MORE** and this was higher with children from poorer backgrounds who were also more likely to consume less healthy snacks<sup>29</sup>



**OVER 50% SAID THEY WERE DRINKING MORE WATER**<sup>30</sup>

We triangulated our youth research with a review of all available quantitative data relating to food and lockdown. In addition, we interviewed dozens of experts from the food industry, restaurants, delivery companies, the government, think tanks, NGOs, and the health sector to see how things look from their perspective.

# 5 Key Insights from young people into their food experience

It's an obvious point, but young people know what's really going on with young people.

When it comes to their relationship with food, the food environment, and the food industry, young people have their own unique insights. For example, by talking to young people you may discover that a visit to a chicken shop can be much more about having a warm and safe environment to hang out with friends, than it is about chicken.<sup>31</sup>

Young people are becoming increasingly aware of the role food and drink plays in their lives. When it comes to what young people were eating and drinking, lockdown was both positive and negative. On the positive side more young people cooked for themselves and ate food cooked from scratch with their families. On the negative side there was more unhealthy snacking, a breakdown of healthier routines, and many young people found it increasingly hard to access healthier food.<sup>32</sup> Almost half of 18-24 year olds reported eating more confectionary, cakes, biscuits, and savoury snacks.<sup>33</sup>

**POLL:** Once isolation has ended, do you want things to go back to the way they were in relation to the food and drink options you had available before?<sup>34</sup>

	Young people from HIGHER INCOME families (ABCD1)	Young people from LOWER INCOME families (C2DE)
I want to KEEP ALL CHANGES from isolation in relation to the food and drink options I had available before	19%	13%
I want to KEEP SOME CHANGES from isolation in relation to the food and drink options I had available before	48%	42%
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>67%</b>	<b>55%</b>

Unfortunately it was young people from low income families who tended to see less of the positives and more of the negatives.

Our in depth research gave us **5 key insights** into young people's experience of food during lockdown and beyond.

## YOUTH INSIGHT 1:

# We Want to End Child Food Poverty



The queues outside food banks made food poverty much more visible during lockdown and many young people either experienced food poverty for the first time or had friends who did as families were hit financially by COVID.

### YOUNG PEOPLE AND FOOD POVERTY DURING LOCKDOWN



Children entitled to free school meals in London and North East England were consuming **FOUR TIMES AS MANY SUGAR-SWEETENED BEVERAGES** in lockdown and also consuming more crisps, chocolates, and sweets<sup>35</sup>



45% of children entitled to free school meals in London and North East England **HADN'T EATEN ANY FRUIT** in the last 3 days. 55% hadn't eaten a portion of vegetables in the last 3 days<sup>36</sup>



**15% OF 16-24 YEAR OLDS HAD TO USE A FOOD BANK** in April<sup>37</sup> and the Trussell Trust reported a 122% increase in food parcels given out to children<sup>38</sup>



A month into lockdown **2 MILLION CHILDREN HAD EXPERIENCED FOOD INSECURITY**<sup>39</sup> and a third of children eligible for Free School Meals were still not receiving any substitute provision<sup>40</sup>



33% of frontline workers reported that not being able to access food was the factor that had **IMPACTED CHILDREN'S EDUCATION** the most during lockdown<sup>41</sup>

Young people themselves are becoming increasingly concerned about these injustices, especially those from low income families who have seen them first hand. And they want to do something about it.<sup>42</sup> After lockdown they want things to change.

This new hunger for change found its voice in the campaign to #SaveOurLunches as the true absurdity of families getting support during term time but not during holidays became apparent when young people were stuck at home during term time as well as holidays.



Bite Back 2030 campaigner Christina kicked off the campaign with a successful petition to support young people on free school meals at Easter and at summer half term. Then Marcus Rashford smashed it into the back of the net and secured a government U-turn on providing support over the summer. Campaigners now want a permanent solution to holiday food provision for young people on free school meals.



“It has made me realise the issue of how many children rely on school meals as their meals and the Prime Minister needs to think about that”

-Talulah, 16

## YOUTH INSIGHT 2:

# We find healthier options are too expensive relative to unhealthier options



"I've always thought healthy food is a lot more expensive. If you go to the shop you can get a pot of mango for £2 but a chocolate bar for £1 and it's the same at schools and restaurants- you're paying £13 for a salad when it's £10 for a pizza."

**-Amber, 16**

In opinion polls and focus groups members of the public repeatedly state that the relatively high cost of healthier food is a critical factor that prevents them from improving their diet.

Recent research by Demos estimated nearly a fifth (18%) of those earning under £20,000 say cost is the most important reason for eating unhealthy foods. This

makes them twice as likely as those earning £40,000 and above (8%) to make decisions mainly based on cost. And almost 4 in 10 people - roughly 19 million - say healthy food isn't available in shops close to their homes.<sup>43</sup>

Per calorie healthy foods have been found to be three times more expensive than unhealthy foods (although the gap is less if we look at price per kilogramme).<sup>44</sup> Young people are very aware of this. In the language of economists, young people are very "price sensitive". They don't have a lot of their own money to spend so the cheaper option tends to win when it comes to what to eat or drink.

Young people are also very aware of the difficult choices parents are making when it comes to buying food. According to the Food Foundation, nearly 4 million children live in families where income is too low to meet Public Health England's dietary recommendations.<sup>45</sup>

The wave of unemployment now rushing towards us will inevitably put huge pressure on family budgets and is likely to force families to buy cheaper and less healthy.

"For a pound you can get wings and chips but you couldn't get any healthy options, you'd have to spend more. At the end of the day you are thinking about what is going to taste nice, and what is going to fill me up."

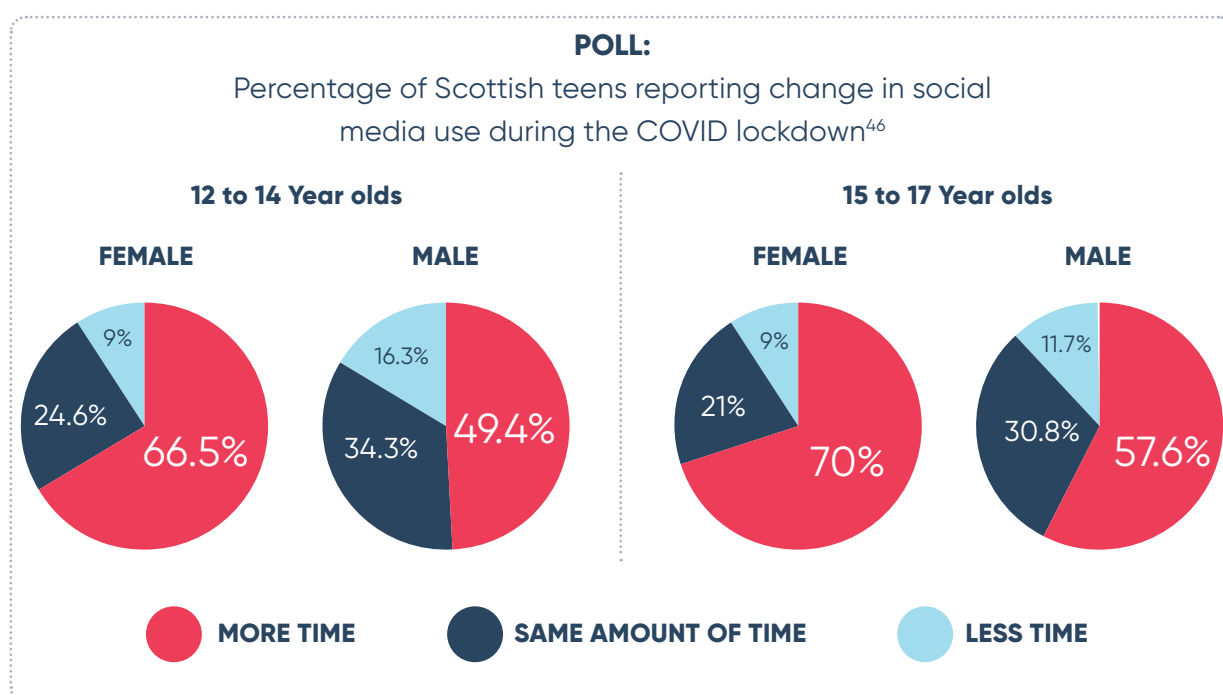
**-Ruth, 17**

## YOUTH INSIGHT 3:

# We are being bombarded online by junk food adverts more than ever



Young people's screen time went through the roof during lockdown.



Although there is extensive research into the negative impact of screen time on children's health,<sup>47</sup> many young people feel online gaming, TV, phones, ipads, and laptops largely had a positive impact on their health and wellbeing during lockdown. They offered something to do and a way to connect with friends.<sup>48</sup> The vast majority of young people have connected with people virtually more often under lockdown.<sup>49</sup>

Critically, as young people spent more time at home and on screens they were exposed to more adverts for unhealthy food. Food companies were brilliantly creative in framing their advertising during lockdown.<sup>50</sup> We had Snoop Dog's irresistible adverts for Just Eat; Pringles' "pop skip and jump" adverts attaching their brand to Joe Wicks' workouts;<sup>51</sup> and Cadbury's beautiful adverts aimed at lifting spirits and consoling the nation.





At a time when the nation's health is at risk and when being overweight or obese dramatically impacts the chance of a person surviving COVID, young people are being encouraged to consume more of the stuff that makes them unhealthy. Algorithms are creating a feedback loop that reinforces and extends prior behaviour. If you are a young person struggling with your weight and you order unhealthier food online, you may unwittingly become part of a gamified process that aims to make you buy more and more frequently.

Young people feel constantly bombarded with adverts for unhealthier food. When we asked young people in focus groups to describe their walk home from school they all highlighted the deluge of advertising on bus stops, billboards, and social media.

"When I see ads from places like McDonalds it does make me want one, so yeah, if I didn't see them I would probably want them less"

-Patrick, 14

Food companies constantly say they are not targeting children. While this may be formally true in that they are not specifically paying Facebook to serve adverts to children; it is hugely misleading because the content they create, the influencers they work with; and the algorithms they deploy all drive young people's behaviour. This is blindingly obvious to young people themselves.



## YOUTH INSIGHT 4:

# We are drinking more water and want to keep it that way

During lockdown young people drank more water. This was revealed very clearly in the food diaries we asked young people to keep as part of our research.<sup>52</sup>

At home water is often the only drink available and young people have less ability to get hold of alternatives, with shopping decisions often made by other family members.

Significantly, this increase in water consumption is something young people would like to see continue after lockdown. This is especially true for those from urban areas who normally have much more access to shops and restaurants.<sup>53</sup>

"I am definitely drinking more water. It's basically the only thing that I drink now."

**-Timothy, 17**

**POLL:** How much more or less water, if any, would you like to continue drinking after isolation?<sup>54</sup>

### ANSWERING "MUCH MORE":

URBAN	SUBURBAN	RURAL
26%	17%	21%

When young people returned to school, they faced a watershed moment for access to water in schools. A number of issues restricted children's access to water including water fountains and water jugs being deemed not safe and limited access to water bottles. Meanwhile the Department for Education issued guidance in relation to water which left already struggling school leaders feeling powerless.<sup>55</sup>

Young people confirmed that there were issues in relation to water access. Water access may be worse for children on Free School Meals. One young leader described how her Free School Meals allowance means that now there is no free water she has to choose between a drink or food, she can't afford both.

"I receive free school meals and I've had to choose between a meal and a drink, as the amount I have isn't enough for both. It's not fair."

**-Zoe, Bite Back 2030 Youth Leader**

In some places children may still be going without adequate hydration, leading to poor nutrition and poor attainment. Alternatively children may be buying water or other drinks creating plastic waste and drinking excess calories.

## YOUTH INSIGHT 5:

# When we hang out in fast food places it's more about the safe space than the food



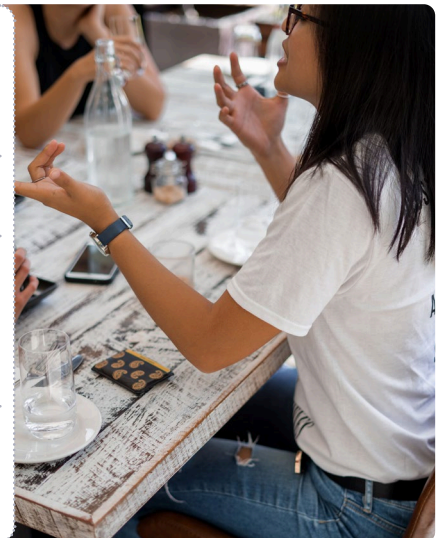
"I'm excited to go and eat out again at McDonald's KFC, TGI Fridays, and Nando's."

-Jauvane, 16

During lockdown young people missed going to their favourite fast food restaurants. But scratch the surface and you discover that for young people, it is not just about the food and drink, it's even more about spending time in a warm safe place with friends and wifi.

**POLL:** Percentage of young people who miss social spaces and food<sup>56</sup>

	YES	NO
Do you miss <b>HANGING OUT WITH FRIENDS</b> in usual social spaces?	77%	21%
Do you miss <b>FOOD</b> in your usual social spaces?	66%	22%



Not seeing friends had a negative effect on mental health as did not having places to go. During this long period of uncertainty and beyond, we need places for young people to socialise that are safe.

# 5 Big Challenges – what young people want to change

Armed with these 5 insights from young people we worked with our youth panel to turn them into **5 BIG CHALLENGES** that young people set businesses, Government, and others when it comes to improving their food environment.



## **BIG CHALLENGE 1:**

**How do we provide free school meals for every young person who needs them during the holidays?**

“Almost 300,000 people have signed our petition now. Hopefully the government continue provisions that so many families depend on during half term and Christmas.”

**Christina and Dev**

*Bite Back 2030 Youth Board Members*

During lockdown the lack of holiday provision for children on free school meals became the single most profound issue

of food injustice in the UK. For many young people in the UK this meant going hungry. For many more it meant not having access to a decent and nutritious meal to fuel their progress.

Young campaigners were disappointed that they had to repeatedly campaign on this issue to find short-term solutions for the Easter, half term, and summer holidays. In each case the Government was forced into a last-minute U-turn. When it came to the summer holiday it took the intervention of Marcus Rashford to finally make the Government see sense.

The last-minute nature of these U-turns inevitably led to problems in policy delivery, with teachers, parents, officials, and local authorities scrambling to respond. The voucher scheme that was put in place had many well documented flaws and the Government's other policy in this area, the Holiday Activity Fund, currently only operates for a few weeks in the summer and only supports 50,000 of the 2.6 million children up to the age of 16 from a household where the parent or guardian is in receipt of Universal Credit (or equivalent benefits).

The challenge now is to find a permanent solution.



## **BIG CHALLENGE 2:**

### **How do we make healthier options more affordable than unhealthier options for young people?**

Price is a critical factor in determining people's food choices. This means changes in the relative prices of healthier and unhealthier food are probably the most powerful tools we have in tackling obesity. So the big challenge is how to help make healthier food more affordable compared with unhealthier food?

Chancellor Rishi Sunak has some critical decisions to make in the coming weeks and months about how to boost food businesses and rebuild high streets while also balancing the books. Smart policies to make healthier food more affordable than unhealthier food can play an important role.



## **BIG CHALLENGE 3:**

### **How do we level the playing field so young people see healthier options promoted as the norm on digital?**

Young people are spending more time online. Online advertising is like the wild west and young people feel constantly bombarded by adverts. Meanwhile social media influencers routinely push unhealthier products and the online shopping experience is gamified to make young people buy more and more of the less healthy stuff.

"The issue of junk food advertising has got worse during lockdown. It's harder to avoid. 2022 is too late to wait for action, especially now COVID has made the link between what we eat and our health even clearer."

**Jess, 18**

We welcome the Government's commitment to introduce a ban on HFSS food adverts online and on TV before 9pm and to consult on a complete ban on HFSS ads online. We support a full ban and we think it should be implemented as quickly as possible. We are concerned that the Government is only committed to taking action by 2022.

With COVID here to stay and a need to make rapid progress on obesity, we need to move more quickly.



## **BIG CHALLENGE 4:**

### **How can we make water the go-to drink for young people?**

Young people drank more water during lockdown. It was easy to access at home, free, safe and clean. Young people want it to stay that way. But how can we make it happen?

As young people re-emerge from lockdown there are several challenges. Firstly, schools are very often not set up to make cold, clean drinking water available. Many pupils still have to buy bottled water in school, sometimes meaning they cannot afford a meal and a drink. Secondly, young people very often don't have their own water bottle so don't refill and even if they did, access to water fountains is scarce. Thirdly, fizzy drinks and high sugar fruit juices are promoted by influencers, marketed and advertised on their journey home, and included at reduced prices in meal deals to incentivise them to buy an unhealthy drink. Finally there is an infrastructure problem, with too many old water fountains leading to the perception that water fountains are dirty and don't provide nice cold fresh water.

This challenge is even greater because of COVID.

"You only have so many water fountains, but you have so many pupils and if they're all using it, it just doesn't feel clean especially if you think about now with COVID-19."

**Georgia, 16**





## **BIG CHALLENGE 5:**

**How can we create social spaces that fulfil young people's social needs?**



The first lockdown took away all social spaces for young people to hang out. They really noticed this gap and turned to the digital realm to connect. But the system was already creaking - reduced funding to local authorities have caused many youth spaces to close. Ownership of decisions at local level on youth spaces often get lost between decision making silos between public health, youth and planning. And the ones that do open are not co-designed with young people which make them unattractive. And finally, they are not always safe. This is most acute in our poorest neighbourhoods, the places the Government wants to level up.

For young people their world is hyperlocal. It's the high street, the walk home from school, the local park. In the absence of these public safe spaces, young people turn to commercial options, which often means fast food outlets or dessert bars. They are safe, have wifi, you can stay as long as you like and only spend £1.50. Young people report missing the social space more than the food.

As we emerge from COVID can we create youth spaces where young people want to go, but which are not fast food joints? Is there an alternative we can co-create with them?

# Practical solutions to achieve the changes young people want

We knew that solving these 5 big challenges would require co-creation with young people and collaboration between different sectors, building on the positive sense of collaboration and community spirit that has emerged in response to the COVID crisis. So we organised a series of workshops to develop our solutions.

Our solutions are a mix of:



Recommendations to **Government** where evidence is clear



Recommendations to **businesses** where evidence is clear



**Pilots and prototypes** that we will drive forward with young people and partners to create new evidence for what works (and what doesn't).

We prioritised from a longer list of recommendations based on an assessment of achievability and impact. We believe that the interventions that have most impact do one or more of 4 things:

- 1. Reduce the cost of healthier food compared to unhealthier food**
- 2. Increase the availability of healthier food compared to unhealthier food**
- 3. Increase the desirability of healthier food compared to unhealthier food**
- 4. Reformulate the recipe of unhealthier food**

Young people themselves will need to be involved in the delivery of our recommendations if they are to be successful. And successful implementation will need to build on the links between community groups, businesses, local authorities and others that have been strengthened during the COVID crisis.

We are heartened by the fact that all major supermarkets in the UK have made significant contributions to food banks this year and that they have also joined Marcus Rashford's child food poverty task force.



## OUR SOLUTIONS 1:

# A permanent solution to holiday provision of free school meals



### GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDATION 1:

**Extend the Holiday Activity and Food programme so every child gets a decent meal all year round**

**So far the Government's solution to holiday hunger, the Holiday Activity and Food Programme (HAF) has only reached 50,000 children in a few places for a few weeks over the summer. And the vouchers scheme introduced during lockdown has had many problems.**

Despite the Rashford task force, as this report is published there is still no long term solution and the Government has just ten days to ensure provision over October half term for 1.4 million children eligible for Free School Meals at a time when many families are desperately struggling to get by.

Going forwards the Government should extend the HAF to provide universal, year-round holiday support to all 2.6 million children up to the age of 16 from a household where the parent or guardian is in receipt of Universal Credit (or equivalent benefits). Students over 16 years of age who are eligible for Free School Meals should also receive holiday provision while they continue to attend education.

Reform of the existing HAF programme will be necessary to achieve the goal of national coverage and all-year-round holiday provision for 2.6 million children. We think the most effective delivery model would be to distribute resources via local authorities combining central clarity on goals, monitoring, and evaluation with flexibility retained for locally tailored provision in partnership with schools, caterers, NGOs and others.

## OUR SOLUTIONS 2:

# Making healthier options more affordable than unhealthy options for young people



### PILOT 1:

## SMASH (Save Money And Stay Healthier) young person discount and rewards app for healthier food

**SMASH<sup>57</sup> is an early stage discount app that has just completed a £1 million seed fund-raising. It is targeted exclusively at the UK's 9 million young people aged 13-24 and is building a simple technology solution that can work across supermarkets, fast food retailers, and restaurants to shine a light on and discount healthier items and provide rewards, creating a wave of demand for healthier food.**

SMASH has a strong team. Chris Holmes was on the Board of KFC and before starting SMASH was Managing Director of ASK Italian. Paul Lindley, SMASH's Chairman, founded Ella's Kitchen and is Chairman of the Mayor of London's Childhood Obesity Taskforce.



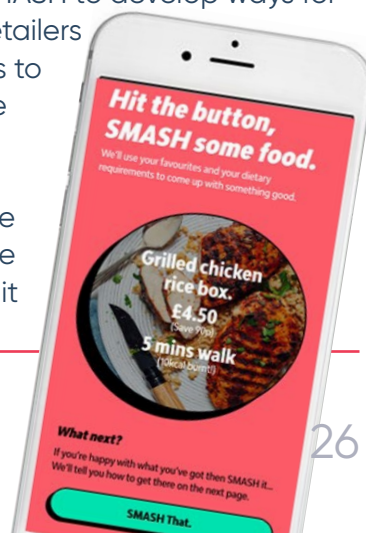
"Eat out to Help Out worked well. But it didn't do anything for our health. Do I love the idea of 20% healthier food for young people? of course I do! I've been working with SMASH on providing incentives to young people for eating healthier options at restaurants and stores"

**Jacob**

*Bite Back 2030 Youth Board Member*

### Feed Britain Better will support SMASH by:

- Leveraging youth insights in the design and development of the app (8 Bite Back Youth Leaders are working with SMASH to support this)
- Engaging key retailers and restaurants to become partners
- Proposing a government trial to fund the cost of a price reduction element for the scheme
- Encouraging SMASH to develop ways for independent retailers and restaurants to join the scheme and to ensure young people from low income families are able to benefit from it





## **BUSINESS RECOMMENDATION 1:** **Partner with SMASH**

SMASH is launching in early 2021 and is already in advanced talks with a number of fast food brands, coffee shops, restaurant chains and supermarkets who are looking to shine a light on their healthier options as well as reach out to new customers who may not previously have chosen to go there.

They are seeking new partners looking to create an environment where healthier options are more affordable, accessible and engaging to young adults. The more brands that participate the greater the impact on young people's health.



## **GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDATION 2:** **'Eat Well to Stay Well' initiative giving young people 20% off healthier food**

The Eat Out to Help Out scheme made a big difference to kickstarting hospitality post lock-down and proved to be extremely popular with diners. It once again demonstrated the importance of price when it comes to people's food choice.

However the scheme- much like the current VAT system - does not help improve the health of British people. We propose that it should be adapted and extended to support young people to buy healthier options in restaurants and at retailers.

We propose that the Government launch a 6 month initiative giving young people 20% off healthier food in restaurants and retail. This would also serve as a test of concept to see whether it can increase demand for healthier products and provide evidence for a future policy to restructure the VAT system on food to promote healthier choices.

Such an initiative is technically feasible (it could use the SMASH app) and would define "healthier" in line with Government guidelines relating to both calories and the nutrient profile model.

Assuming 50% of young people participate in the scheme and use it once per week we estimate that a 6 month trial would cost the Government £108 million. This scheme could save over 54 billion calories per year (the equivalent of removing 106 million big macs from the diets of young people).<sup>58</sup>



## GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDATION 3: Reconfigure tax to encourage reformulation, shift consumption, and raise funds for child health

**Measures that cost money, such as an 'Eat Well to Stay Well' initiative, will need to be balanced with measures that raise money.**

The Sugary Drinks Levy is an example of that rare thing, a popular tax which 7 out of 10 people support.<sup>59</sup> This was in part due to the channeling of funds raised into child health projects.

**The levy has been breathtakingly successful:**

- Removing more than 50 million kg of sugar a year from the British diet
- Driving the reformulation of sugary drinks, resulting in an average 43.7% reduction in sugar per 100ml, plus a consumer shift towards zero or lower sugar products
- Resulting in an **increase** in soft drinks sales of 7.7% in the first year as consumers switched to the healthier options
- Raising £340 million a year for child health programmes in schools



Given the success of the sugary drinks levy and the need for the Government to raise funds to balance the books, there is a strong case to consider further taxes on unhealthy non-essential food.

One of the great benefits of the Sugary Drinks Levy has been the way it has incentivised industry reformulation. Indeed soft drinks is the only category on track to hit the government's reformulation targets. Other food categories are wildly off track.<sup>60</sup>



Any further tax on unhealthy non-essential food should be geared to encourage reformulation in the same way. The Sugary Drinks Levy could also be increased and new tiers introduced to drive further reformulation.

Other parts of the tax system should also be geared towards promoting child health. The VAT system on food is a messy patchwork full of anomalies that has been pieced together over decades. It does little to serve our nation's health.

**Realignment of VAT with health and sustainability goals could include:**

- Zero VAT for healthier food and drink including that eaten in restaurants
- Negative VAT for fruit and vegetables
- Tiered VAT levels for unhealthier food
- The elimination of temperature as a factor in determining VAT level

The goal of such a realignment could be zero net impact on the nation's finances. It could build on proof points created by a 6 month trial of a 20% reduction in the price of healthier food for young people as per our recommendation above.

Brexit gives the UK new flexibility to determine our own VAT rates.



## **GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDATION 4: A £50 million Innovation Fund for research and development into reformulated and new food products**

**Reformulation is one of the most powerful and direct levers we have when it comes to improving the nation's diet. It is literally about changing the recipe of what people are eating.**

Small food companies often say that they cannot take the risk of investing in reformulating their products or developing new healthier products. Larger companies are failing to invest enough in collaborations with universities because they don't see the immediate return.

A new challenge fund could encourage much needed investment and could create new global capabilities for brand Britain in a sector that will surely grow globally as people and governments in other countries increasingly see the need to tackle obesity.

Such a fund could be administered by the Department of Business, Energy, and Industrial Strategy (BEIS) and UK Research and Innovation (UKRI).<sup>61</sup> Funds could be allocated based on an assessment of the number of calories per year a proposal is aiming to take out of the British diet and its likelihood of success.



### OUR SOLUTIONS 3:

# Creating an online environment for young people that puts healthier food centre stage



#### **GOVERNMENT RECOMMENDATION 5:**

**Fast forward an end to advertising of products high in fat, salt, and sugar (HFSS) online**



#### **BUSINESS RECOMMENDATION 2:**

**End advertising of HFSS products online now**

We welcome the Government's commitment, announced in July's Obesity Plan, to deliver a 9pm watershed on adverts for products high in fat, salt, and sugar (HFSS) on TV and online by 2022 and to consult on a total ban online. We fully support a total online ban.

Given young people's experience of HFSS advertising during lockdown we are concerned about the long timeframe the Government is proposing and we urge them to step up the pace. In the meantime we ask companies to unilaterally commit to end all advertising of products high in fat, salt, or sugar online immediately.

Evidence suggests that ending HFSS adverts need not damage the finances of food companies, advertising agencies, or online platforms. This is because almost every food company has a healthier product they can advertise in place of an unhealthy one. When Transport for London introduced a ban on HFSS adverts it did not lead to a reduction in advertising revenue. Indeed quarter on quarter revenue actually increased slightly as companies switched to advertising their healthier products.<sup>62</sup>

"Young Londoners are still bombarded with these adverts on TV and online. I'm urging the Government to deal with this head-on. The changes TfL brought in didn't lead to a drop in overall advertising revenue – so the Government really doesn't have any excuse not to take the bold action needed to protect young people's health."

**Sadiq Khan**  
Mayor of London

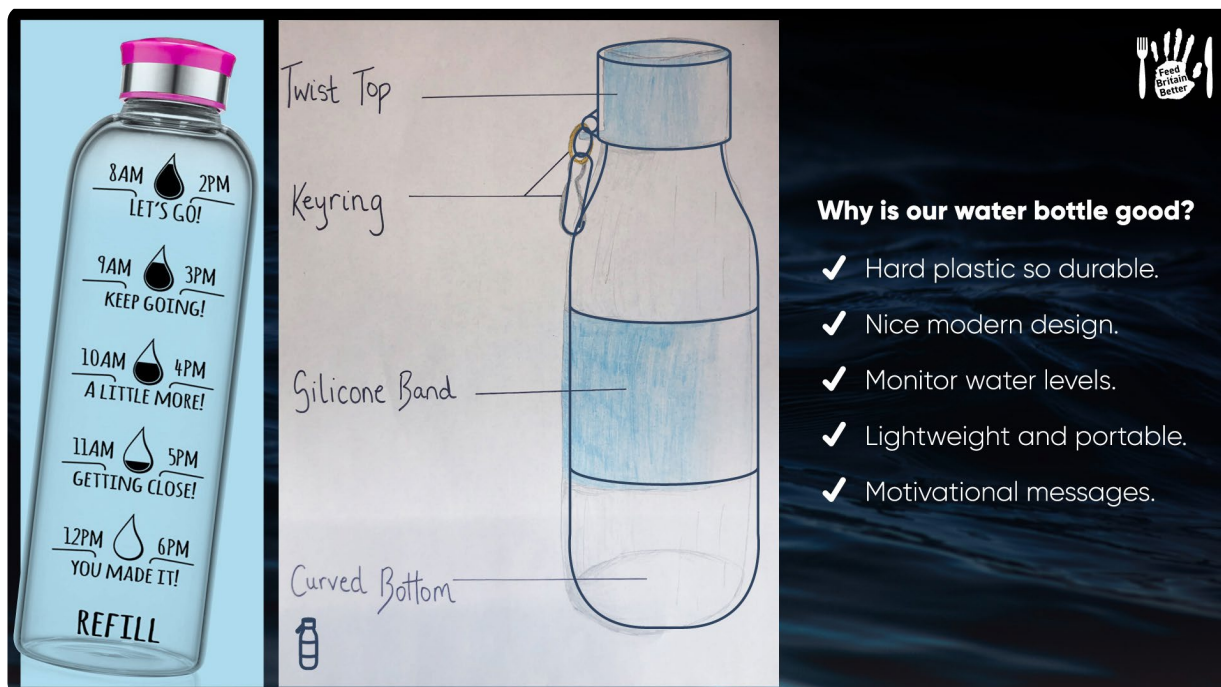
## OUR SOLUTIONS 4:

# Making water the go-to drink for young people



### PILOT 2:

## Youth-designed reusable water bottle and campaign



**Young people want to keep water as their go-to drink post lockdown. So we need to make it easy and attractive.** That means every young person having a bottle so they can refill at no cost and a campaign to make water more attractive than soft drinks. We are working with young people to design and develop the perfect reusable water bottle for young people. When the time is right in relation to COVID we will launch the bottle as a pilot in low income communities and seek a commercial sponsor. We will create demand for water with an influencer-led marketing campaign to make water exciting to young people with athletes and other relevant people, including at the major sporting events in summer 2021. The campaign will also advocate for provision of new COVID-secure water fountains and for water-only schools.



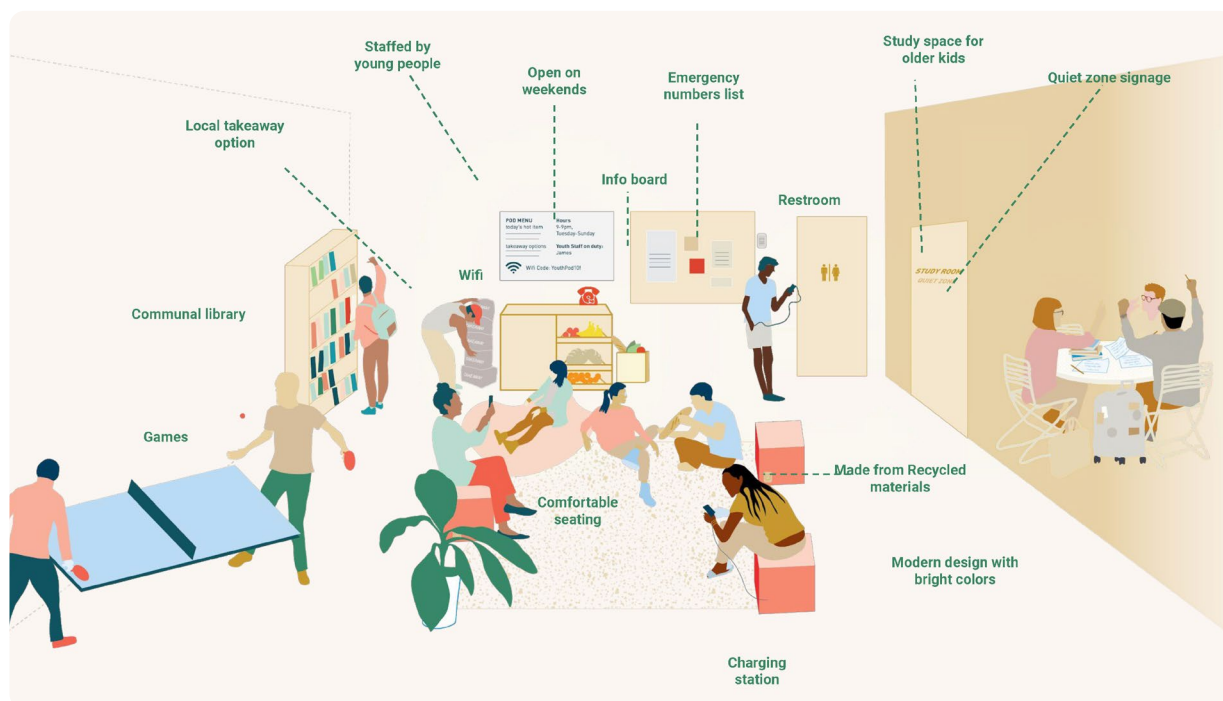
## OUR SOLUTIONS 5:

# Creating social spaces that fulfil young people's social needs



### PILOT 3:

## Youth Pods: Exciting youth-designed social spaces with healthier food



**The idea to pilot youth pods - spaces designed by and exclusively used by young people - resonated very strongly with the Feed Britain Better Youth Panel.**

The youth pods will be indoors, created in an existing space (e.g. empty stock owned by a property management company or a vacant retail unit owned by a local authority) or within a transport hub. Feed Britain Better will lead an initial design sprint to create a list from "nice to have" to "need to have" identified by young people. Each youth pod would then choose from that list based on what is most needed for their local area. We already know that young people are drawn in by charging points, wifi, seating, and toilets and we also want to provide a healthy food offer. These places need to be safe and located on the way home from school for easy access. Ideally the space would be youth-led and any adults required to be present should reflect this (i.e. be youth workers or similar).

## Essential Kit of Parts



Comfortable, colorful furniture



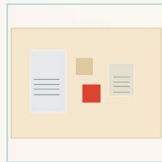
Modular seating made from recycled materials with charging ports



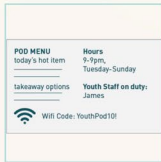
Bathrooms



Plants, rugs, artwork to create a welcoming atmosphere



Information board about local happenings, politics and partnerships



Open on weekends, operated by youth staff, and equip with wifi



Food available - a full hot meal option and takeaway option



Heating

The youth pods will be spaces where young people feel welcome; at the same time the local community will feel like it benefits from them congregating in a space.

Our pod pilots will need to take careful account of requirements around social distancing during the COVID pandemic. And if we are to scale up beyond pilot phase we will need to overcome a number of constraints including decision-making silos at the local authority level. We will also need to balance the mix of capital costs and revenue costs - we hope there will be vacant spaces so we can minimise capital costs except for the furniture but we will need funding to run the space, and we will need to work with local youth service providers to do this.

**We will also continue to advocate for healthier food provision in existing youth spaces.**





# CONCLUSION

The issues raised in this report are of vital importance. Right now, across the country, young people are not getting the good food and drink they need to be healthy and to do well at school. And this at a time when COVID has reminded us just how important a good diet is to our health.

This is an emergency and demands urgent collective action if our young people are to grow up to be resilient in the face of whatever life throws at them.

So we are urging everyone to get behind the recommendations in this report. That means Government, businesses, NGOs, schools, adults, and young people building on the COVID community spirit and all coming together to put the health of all young people at the heart of COVID recovery.

**Most urgent of all is the extension of school meal provision over holidays. As this report is launched we have just 10 days to ensure adequate provision over the October half term for 1.4 million children. So let's get to it.**

**Let's Feed Britain Better.**



# ABOUT

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REPORT DESIGN: 89up

## ABOUT FEED BRITAIN BETTER

Feed Britain Better is a youth-led coalition aiming to put the health of all young people at the heart of COVID recovery.

Steered by a Youth Panel made up of youth representatives from the coalition partners, the coalition is made up of leading organisations across education, youth, food industry, health, and food research and policy.

The coalition partners are Bite Back 2030, UNICEF UK, Royal Society of Public Health, OnSide Youth Zones, Association of School and College Leaders, Food Foundation, City University Centre for Food Policy, Sustainable Restaurant Association and Guy's and St Thomas' Charity.

Our work has been supported by the Health Foundation and Guy's and St Thomas' Charity.

## APPROACH

The Feed Britain Better project ran from April to September 2020 across 4 key phases. The Coalition met three times at the end of each key phase of work to monitor progress and approve findings and direction.

### 1. Initial hypothesis generation (April)

### 2. Youth insights and challenges: Research and testing (May-June)

- "Hungry For Change" youth research by Bite Back 2030 and Guy's and St Thomas' Charity, conducted by Livity
  - (i) Week-long digital ethnographic immersion into the lives of 30 young people
  - (ii) Quantitative survey of 1,000 people aged 14-19 across England from May to June 2020
  - (iii) Visioning workshops with 12 additional young people
- Food system quantitative analysis by Food Foundation
- Food system qualitative interviews with 30 leaders from food companies, industry bodies, thought-leaders and NGOs, with a member of the youth panel attending all meetings

### 3. Recommendations & solutions: Stakeholder working groups (July-September)

- Six working groups met at the end of July and the end of August/early September to develop solutions to the youth challenges
- 50 organisations participated in the working groups from leading manufacturers, retailers, technology platforms, NGOs, local authorities and policy makers
- Youth panel met and Bite Back 2030 youth leaders worked on co-creation projects to develop solutions

### 4. Feed Britain Better Report and Youth Summit (October)

# ABOUT

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## THE FEED BRITAIN BETTER COALITION



## WITH SUPPORT FROM THE HEALTH FOUNDATION



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