

P. Gansallo¹, S. Mahdi¹, N. Nixon¹, R. Oxley¹, W. Burton¹, Z. Caferoglu Akin^{1,2}, B. Doherty³ and M. Bryant^{1,4}

¹Department of Health Sciences, University of York, York, United Kingdom; ²Faculty of Health Sciences, Erciyes University, Kayseri, Turkey; ³The York Management School, University of York, York, United Kingdom and ⁴Hull York Medical School, University of York, York, United Kingdom

Abstract

Cite this article: Gansallo P, Mahdi S, Nixon N, Oxley R, Burton W, Caferoglu Akin Z, Doherty B, and Bryant M (2025). Breakfast clubs: a Yorkshire based review. *Proceedings of the Nutrition Society* **84**(OCE3): E240. doi: [10.1017/S0029665125101092](https://doi.org/10.1017/S0029665125101092)

Breakfast clubs create an opportunity for children to have a nutritious breakfast before school starts⁽¹⁾. Due to the perceived benefits, about 80% of schools across the United Kingdom run breakfast clubs, though this is likely to increase following the new government manifesto commitment on free breakfast provision in schools⁽²⁾. Breakfast clubs are presently offered through the National School Breakfast Programme⁽³⁾, charities or funded by schools' budget⁽²⁾. There is no standard model for delivery of breakfast clubs and research are limited. This study aimed to investigate how breakfast clubs are delivered, types of food provided and the benefits and constraints of delivery.

Primary schools offering breakfast clubs (n=17) across Yorkshire were visited and researchers observed and engaged with students and staff (including those involved in delivery) through participatory research. Researchers conducted interviews with 17 school leads and focus group discussions with 103 children (between 3-7 children from each school). Topic guides were developed by the research team to understand the food system within schools, including barriers to food provision, nutrition education and whole school approaches to food. The data was audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. Thematic analysis was conducted using the CONNECTS-Food principles Framework⁽⁴⁾.

Our findings revealed that breakfast clubs provided children with an enjoyable start to the school day. The main themes developed were Type/quality of provision, Eating environment and Pastoral care. The delivery schemes varied and most schools offered places free or subsidised for children on Free School Meals (FSM) or other government schemes. Several schools considered children from disadvantaged families and offered a free breakfast regardless of FSM eligibility. Our findings revealed that there was diversity of foods on offer. However, the quality was perceived to relate to availability and price and was often dictated by providers rather than through school or child preferences. Offers commonly included bagels, cheese sandwiches, toast, cereals, milk, spreads and juice. The potential of schools to offer breakfast was key, particularly for families who do not have the resources or time to provide breakfast for their children. The eating environment was largely dependent on space and facilities; although, pleasant and supportive atmospheres were commonplace. Activities included drawing, reading books and games. We learnt about the value of breakfast clubs to create an environment with social and educational benefits. Our research specifically highlights the importance of breakfast clubs to support working parents through the childcare provision.

The findings suggest that further research is needed to investigate the adherence of the food provided to school food standards. This study is important as it provides insights into how breakfast clubs can be better delivered considering the new government's manifesto commitment on school breakfast.

FixOurFood Project is funded by UKRI Transforming Food Systems with grant number BB/V004581/1

Acknowledgments: We are grateful to everyone involved in the recruitment process and collection of these research data. We extend particular thanks to the staff and children who spoke to us during the observation sessions across the schools.

References

1. Department for Education (2022). *Education Hub*. [Available at: <https://educationhub.blog.gov.uk/2022/11/24/how-we-are-ensuring-thousands-of-children-receive-a-healthy-nutritious-breakfast/>]
2. Drayton E et al. (2024). Free breakfast clubs in schools: what Labour's plans would mean for pupils and families. *Institute for Fiscal Studies* [Available at: <https://ifs.org.uk/articles/free-breakfast-clubs-schools-what-labours-plans-would-mean-pupils-and-families>]
3. Department for Education (2022). National school breakfast club programme [Available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/national-school-breakfast-club-programme>]
4. Bryant, M et al. (2023). Understanding school food systems to support the development and implementation of food-based policies and interventions. *Int J Behav Nutr Phys Act* 20, 29. <https://doi.org/10.1186/s12966-023-01432-2>