

Food for Life Research Opportunity

Requirement

The Soil Association invites applications for the delivery of the following research question:

Using existing evidence and literature, what long-term, measurable difference has Food for Life commissions made in a local authority in terms of tackling the current obesity crisis?

- (1) Understand the impact of Food for Life on obesity outcomes for primary school children in areas with long-term Food for Life commissioned programmes.**
- (2) Understand the impact of Food for Life on the current obesogenic environments and dietary change for primary school children in areas with long-term Food for Life commissioned programmes, using the Foresight Map.**
- (3) Identify robust proxy metrics for Food for Life's impact on obesity for the future.**

Background

- Food for Life (FFL) is a Soil Association initiative, founded in 2003, which has developed into an award-winning national programme to transform food culture.
- FFL aims to make good food the easy choice for everyone, wherever and whenever they are. We define good food as nutritious, fresh, sustainably sourced and eaten with others and through our programmes over 2 million healthy and sustainable meals are eaten every day, over 407 million meals annually.
- The Food for Life [Schools](#) and [Early Years](#) Awards deliver a whole setting approach to good food. More than 50% of primary schools in England are serving menus certified by the [Food for Life Served Here award](#), which certifies caterers serving healthy and sustainable meals and is part of the Schools and Early Years Award criteria.
- Previous independent evaluation of the Soil Association Food for Life programme has shown pupils in FFL schools are twice as likely to eat five a day and a third less likely to eat no fruit or vegetables than pupils in comparison schools ([Jones et al 2015](#)).
- Pupils in Food for Life schools eat around a third more fruit and vegetables than pupils in comparison schools, and significantly more fruit and vegetables at home ([Jones et al 2015](#)).

The factors affecting people's health are complex and often interrelated ([Dahlgreen and Whitehead 1993](#); [Vandenbroeck et al 2007](#)). Some of these factors are related to the physical environment and social relationships which affect people living in the most deprived parts of England experiencing barriers and challenges to maintaining a healthy diet most acutely ([Marmot et al 2020](#)). There has been a widening gap between obesity rates in the most and least deprived areas, with the [obesity prevalence gap in 2019](#) at 17 percentage points for women (up from 11 percentage points in 2014) and 8 percentage points for men

(up from 2 percentage points [in 2014](#)). The rates of obesity-related hospital admissions in the most deprived areas of England are [2.4 times greater than the least deprived areas](#).

Childhood obesity rates are also rising, especially for children living in the most deprived areas. National Child Measurement Programme data has recently reported the highest annual rise in obesity rates since the programme began. [The report](#) found obesity prevalence among reception classes rose from 9.9% in 2019-20 to 14.4% in 2020-21; among year six pupils it rose from 21.0% to 25.5%. The proportion of reception children who were a healthy weight fell from 76.1% to 71.3% and among year six pupils it fell from 63.4% to 57.8%. Obesity prevalence among children living in the most deprived areas was more than double that of those living in the least deprived areas.

Previous research has shown evidence that points toward Food for Life's potential to contribute to helping 'close the gap' for disadvantaged children in terms of their health and academic attainment ([Teeman et al, 2011](#)).

Research Brief

Food for Life programmes are commissioned by local government public health to support schools and early years in their area to achieve the [Food for Life Schools](#) and [Early Years](#) awards. Public health commissioners have expressed that their top priorities when commissioning programmes such as Food for Life are reducing childhood obesity and health inequalities.

We are looking to understand the impact of Food for Life on improvements to health inequalities and childhood obesity in our [long-term commissioned programmes](#). This research will be used in tendering and retendering for Food for Life public health commissions to express the effectiveness of Food for Life in providing a framework to address childhood obesity and health inequalities through schools adhering to the award criteria, such as serving school meals that meet School Food Standards.

Using existing evidence and literature, what long-term, measurable difference has Food for Life commissions made in a local authority in terms of tackling the current obesity crisis?

- (1) Understand the impact of Food for Life on obesity outcomes for primary school children in areas with long-term Food for Life commissioned programmes.**
- (2) Understand the impact of Food for Life on the current obesogenic environments and dietary change for primary school children in areas with long-term Food for Life commissioned programmes, using the Foresight Map.**
- (3) Identify robust proxy metrics for Food for Life's impact on obesity for the future.**

List of [long-term Food for Life commissioned programmes](#):

January 2022

- Derbyshire (2013 onwards)
- Hull (2016 onwards)
- Leicestershire (2015 onwards)
- Leicester City (2015-2018, 2021 onwards)
- Walsall (2017 onwards)

Budget

£5,000

Methodology

We expect applications to outline their own methodology. We anticipate the research to be desk-based using existing published evidence and data sets. Food for Life will share the postcodes of all school sites with FFL School Award for analysis. The analysis may need to include only pre-Covid data as there has been significant evidence that diets and childhood obesity rates have radically changed across the country during the pandemic.

- (1) Understand impact FFL has had on obesity outcomes for primary school children in areas with long-term Food for Life commissioned programmes:

New data collection is outside the scope of this project. Project leads may analyse national datasets (i.e. National Diet and Nutrition Survey; National Child Measurement Programme, etc) and any relevant information made available through existing FOI requests to compare Food for Life commission areas with similar localities (size/socio-economic) without Food for Life. This may be done by breaking down national data by area (local authority; ward; postcode) and comparing FFL coverage (i.e. how many schools are signed up in the area) or any robust methodology.

- (2) Understand impact FFL has had on the current obesogenic environments and dietary change for primary school children in areas with long-term Food for Life commissioned programmes:

We expect applications to also analyse Food for Life's commissioned programmes for obesity factors as outlined in the [Foresight Map](#) using appropriate proxy data.

- (3) Identify robust proxy metrics for Food for Life's impact on obesity for the future:

Some public health commissioners have used proxies such as improvement in the nutrition profile of menus or the cooking and menu preparation skills of practitioners to analyse childhood obesity programmes. We would like this piece of work to inform the development of a framework of potential measurable proxies that the Food for Life Schools and Early Year award impact within the [Foresight Map](#).

Required Outputs

A report which includes:

1. A short report on the impact of FFL on obesity outcomes for primary school children in areas with long-term FFL commissioned programmes.
2. A short report on the impact of FFL on the current obesogenic environments and dietary change for primary school children in areas with long-term FFL commissioned programmes, using the Foresight Map.
3. A set of recommendations for robust proxy metrics for Food for Life's impact on obesity for the future.

Timescale

- Applications must be submitted by 12pm on 7th March 2022.
- The outcome of the application process will be communicated by the End of March 2022.
- The work is expected to take place from April to June 2022.

Application

Please include:

1. Evidence of understanding of the Food for Life commissioned programmes and objectives of this research.
2. Outline project plan with timeline. We anticipate the following opportunities for online meetings to be included in the plans:

April: Introductory meeting

April: Outline review

May: Draft report review

June: Final report presentation

3. Methodology
4. Overview of research team and credentials, relevant experience, daily rates and number of days allocated to the project.
5. Recent examples of similar research outputs delivered.
6. Outline of systems in place to manage and assure quality of the research.
7. A summary of possible risks to research delivery and plans for responding to identified risks.

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Applicants will be evaluated and scored by a panel of representatives from the Soil Association. The Soil Association reserves the right to determine what is satisfactory.

Scoring and weighting

Criteria	Requirements	Weighting
Methodology	Logical and practical approach Clear timeline of activities setting out key milestones and deliverables	20%
Relevant experience	Evidence of clear, detailed report writing Experience of similar research delivered by research team	30%
Understanding of requirements and context	Knowledge and understanding of childhood obesity public policy in England Knowledge and understanding of impact evaluation and data analysis Knowledge and understanding of the Foresight Map and contributing factors to childhood obesity Knowledge and understanding of obesity prevalence gap between areas of high and low deprivation	40%
Value for money	Clear outline of budget Summary of any associated expenses Number of days contribution by each member of the research team	10%

Management and enquiries

For enquiries, expression of interest, and applications, please email:

Bryn Hamer, Head of Business Development, Food for Life bhamer@soilassociation.org
Robyn Rhule-Samuel, Impact Manager, Food for Life RRhuleSamuel@soilassociation.org