

Food for Life

An SROI analysis of the locally commissioned programme Summary Report

Introduction

With a focus on healthy and sustainable food culture, Food for Life delivers a wide range of activities that aim to have a positive and lasting influence on people's lives, social institutions and the natural environment. Food for Life originated as a school and catering settings initiative, and has evolved as a local authority-wide programme that can involve a range of settings including hospitals, children's centres and care homes – as well as schools. The aim of this study is to evaluate the impact of Food for Life's programme activities in local authority areas using the Social Return on Investment (SROI) methodology.

Food for Life

Food for Life is led by the Soil Association and works in partnership with Garden Organic, Focus on Food, the Health Education Trust and the Royal Society for Public Health. Food for Life seeks to promote a "good food culture" through supporting practical delivery and influencing public decision making.

Food for Life (FFL) operates a programme of schools awards to support work to embed food within the curriculum and the wider setting, and have recently introduced a parallel award for early years settings. FFL have also established a

programme specifically for hospitals, to support NHS trusts to deliver a health-promoting approach to food. A distinct but related programme is the Food for Life Catering Mark (FFLCM), an independent audit of caterers. This offers food providers accreditation for "taking steps to improve the food they serve, using fresh ingredients which are free from trans fats, harmful additives and GM, and better for animal welfare" (FFLCM 2015).

A number of local authorities in England have commissioned FFL to support delivery of their priorities, with some areas now looking beyond their initial focus on schools to connect with food in other settings. FFL locally commissioned programmes involve a coordinated approach between networks of schools, food producers, food suppliers, caterers and other agencies. In order to examine the social value created by the FFL local commissions we selected two local authority areas of Calderdale and Kirklees for case study analysis.

Social Return on Investment

Social Return on Investment (SROI) is a framework for measuring and accounting for change in ways that are relevant to the people or organisations that experience or contribute to it. It provides an assessment of whether value is being created by

measuring social, environmental and economic outcomes and uses monetary values to represent them. SROI captures value often left out of more traditional methods of economic evaluation such as cost benefit analysis. A number of SROI studies have been conducted on FFL and similar initiatives. These have mainly identified benefits to the local economy. Little research has examined the health, educational and wider benefits of programmes such as FFL when delivered at the local authority level.

Methods & research process

The study followed the standard stages of SROI analysis. Approval for the research was obtained through the UWE HAS Research Ethics Committee. For the two case study areas we

focused on a 24 month period and sought to reflect all aspects of commissioned work. **Forty seven stakeholders were interviewed** to provide perspectives on the outcomes of the programme. These individuals included school teaching staff, school cooks, catering managers, catering suppliers, staff from local food business and producers, hospital staff, programme delivery staff, commissioners and advisors to the programme (see box below). Additional sources of information about stakeholders' perceptions of outcomes were available through programme records. A total of **78 written statements were analysed** from training feedback forms, FFL and FFLCM award application forms, pupil survey teacher questionnaires, case study reports and press releases.

Stakeholders report on the outcomes of Food for Life

Examples of feedback from 47 interviewees

"The skills one of our students got [from cooking skills in school] directly helped him get an apprenticeship with a caterer." [Calderdale, Secondary Head Teacher #1]

"I've found we've been able to do some quite difficult topics through food-based lessons, for instance cooking lessons have been a great opportunity to compare food origins and learn about carbon footprints." [Kirklees, Primary Teacher, #3]

"Parents have said to me that their children are asking lots of questions about where food comes from. It's been a good project for getting whole families involved" [Calderdale, Primary Teacher, #4]

"We have had well attended events with the majority of parents and the local community attending. We've got to meet people from local groups we didn't know about, like the bee keepers club and the allotment society." [Calderdale, Primary Teacher #2]

"I now have a very active role in cooking club, tasting sessions...I'm getting listened to... I'm very proud of my kitchen." [Kirklees, Primary Cook #3]

"Business has been good. With me and the rest that's six jobs and I'd say most of them are off the back of our schools [and local authority] contracts... [These contracts are] helping us get over the 'stigma' about organic - that organic is time-consuming to process, expensive or unreliable. They're learning. We're learning too about what orders we can and can't do." [Kirklees, Supplier #4]

"For us the [FFL] catering mark has given us a structure. We've got a very good relationship with FFL. We need to continuously promote the service and FFL helps with this... If we hadn't been working together the [school meal] take up might not have been as high as it is." [Kirklees Caterer #2]

The research sought to make a **comprehensive assessment of costs**. In addition to local authority and clinical commissioning group funds, we factored in funds from the Big Lottery, the Department for Education and the cost of some staff time in school, hospital and catering settings.

Although SROI is not centrally focused on outputs, a notable feature of the programme was the scale and reach of the initiative, particularly in primary and special schools in the two areas. For example, over the 24 month period of the commission:

- in Kirklees 56 schools out of a total of 182 had enrolled with FFL or achieved an FFL award.
- in Calderdale 27 schools out of a total of 113 had enrolled with FFL or achieved an FFL award.
- in both areas FFL continued to support schools (40 in Kirklees and 43 in Calderdale) that had already enrolled with the programme prior to the commission.

These data indicate that **over 60,000 children and young people, 2,500 teaching staff and almost 1000 catering staff were exposed to the FFL programme** for the two areas combined.

Stakeholders reported 55 outcomes that we grouped thematically, assessed in terms of their potential overlap, and examined their viability for inclusion in the next stage of analysis. This involved the identification and collection of potential sources of evidence to estimate the impact of these perceived outcomes. We used data from a cross-sectional evaluation survey of Key Stage 2 pupils; staff training feedback evaluations; FFL programme monitoring and evaluation records; other survey data, for example on hospital food; questionnaire returns from food suppliers and caterers; and direct reports from interviewees. **The study examined both negative and positive outcomes**, and sought to locate appropriate financial proxies to support monetary valuation.

Overall SROI result

The social return is expressed as a ratio of present value divided by value of inputs. Although there are likely to be impacts of the programme over many years, we calculated the value of the impacts only up to three years. This was intended

to provide funders with an understanding of the social value of the programme over the shorter term of a local planning cycle.

Stakeholders in the two case study areas identified a similar range of outcomes and data sources. This was not surprising given that the commissions had similarities in programme design and delivery. Stakeholders also reported collaboration between the two local commissions with regard to staff training, food procurement and hospital settings work. We therefore produced a SROI ratio based upon the combined findings of the two case studies.

The total financial value of the inputs for the two case studies was £395,697 and the total present value was £1,743,046. **This provided a SROI ratio of £4.41 of social value created for every £1 of investment.**

Share of value by stakeholders

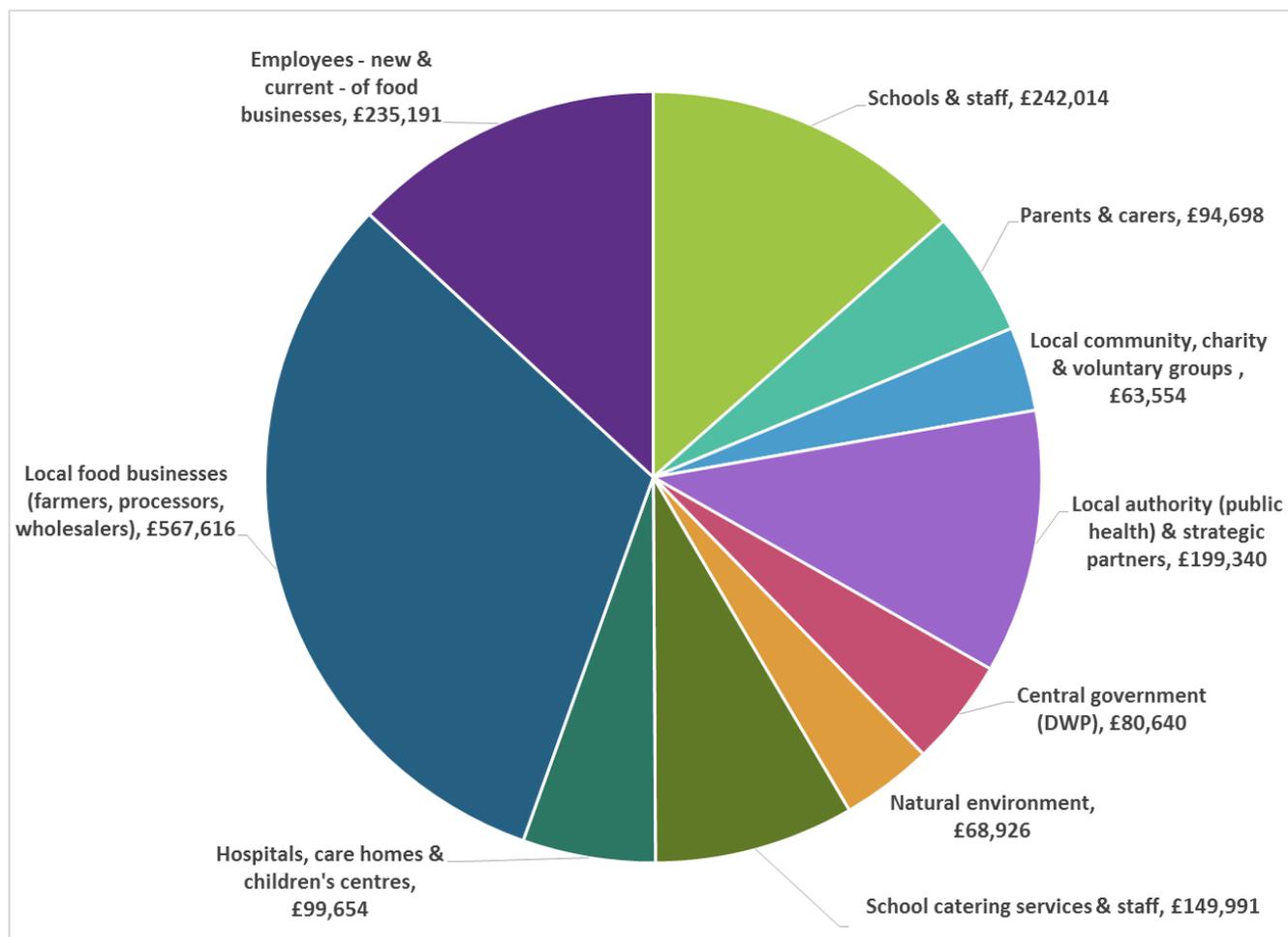
The value of the programme can be expressed with regard to different stakeholders or sectors of interest. A breakdown is provided in the chart on page 4.

Local suppliers (farmers, processors and wholesalers) retained or gained new sales through contracts with caterers. The stability of large ongoing contracts lent greater business security, contributed towards new local job opportunities, job security and increased sales of goods direct to the public through farm shops, market events and other outlets. These changes are also beneficial to **central government** in the form of local employment creation, tax revenues and reduced welfare spending.

School catering services benefited from the FFL Catering Mark in terms of business security, retention of contracts, improved staff performance and increased capacity to develop and implement procurement of sustainable foods. Small increases in school meal sales over the 24 month period could be attributed to FFL in some schools, although the evidence was mixed in this respect. Cooks and other catering staff benefited from training opportunities, peer networking and improved job satisfaction.

A leading finding was the role of Food for Life in supporting the **working practices of teaching and catering staff**. Some of this took the form of curriculum support, skills development, expert support and networking opportunities. Other outcomes - albeit less tangible - were reported to carry equal weight, including the role of FFL in

promoting enjoyment and a sense of accomplishment at work. Some senior leaders in schools, catering agencies and other settings felt that the link between positive food culture and staff wellbeing was not a peripheral benefit, rather it underpinned a productive and high performing education workplace.



Local Authority Public Health and the local NHS are likely to have benefited from improvements to the dietary health of children. Research in Kirklees and Calderdale, along with three other local authorities, found that Year 4-5 pupils in schools engaged with FFL were twice as likely to eat five or more portions of fruit and vegetables compared to pupils in schools not involved in the programme. We used this data to estimate the short term and longer term impact on reduced healthcare use.

Food for Life is a popular programme in schools and other settings and acts as a bridge with local communities. **Parents and carers** benefited through improved relationships with school,

volunteered at FFL school events, which in turn support children's readiness to learn and overall wellbeing. Rather than duplicating the work of other **community and charitable agencies**, FFL largely helped stimulate local voluntary activities through, for example, market events and community visits. The proactive approach of the FFL programme teams in partnership work with other agencies was a theme running through the stakeholder interviews.

New settings work with **hospitals, care homes and early years settings** were in the early stages during the 24 month commission period. The main benefits took the form of staff training and expert support to caterers and senior

management in changing organisational practices. Work in hospital settings had advanced quickly, despite major challenges in terms of the organisation scale, and there was some evidence of a positive impact on food waste and patient satisfaction with hospital food.

Improvements in reduced food wastage and reduced transportation were the main environmental benefits that we were able to quantify. As has been reported in other research, other outcomes for the **natural environment** and sustainability were more difficult to evidence at the level of a local authority study. A scaled up SROI analysis of the national FFL initiative, and particularly the FFLCM, would provide an evidence platform to examine more clearly the impacts of, for example, improved biodiversity from organic food production methods, reduced consumption of meat and dairy products and higher animal welfare standards.

Towards the end of the SROI study Food for Life and Age UK started a **pilot intergenerational project** in the case study areas. This was directed at supporting socially isolated older people to help with growing and cooking activity in FFL schools. Although it was too early for us to collect evidence of impact for this study, it is plausible that the pilot would add further social value to schools and care sector locally commissioned work, arising from new partnerships and economies of effort between volunteers, staff, caterers and members of the local community.

The case study areas

Kirklees and Calderdale case study areas illustrate important features of FFL local commissions including the role of grass-roots networks, coordinated local food strategies and different catering models. They show how benefits can be created through extending work from schools into other settings such as hospitals, early years and

care homes. As adjacent local authorities the two areas also acted as a basis for understanding the social value of FFL at a sub-regional level.

The SROI ratio for Calderdale (£1:3.70) was lower than that for Kirklees (£1:5.12). A number of reasons could account for these differences:

1. The pupil and other populations of Kirklees are about twice those of Calderdale. This means that potential reach and scale of the programme in Kirklees was significantly greater than that of Calderdale.
2. The catering systems are very different. The local authority caterer in Kirklees has contracts with nearly all schools in the authority and holds the Silver Food for Life Catering Mark. Large numbers of stakeholders are therefore affected by changes in FFLCM-related practices. By contrast reforms to school catering in Calderdale are more heterogeneous and less systemic across all schools.
3. It is possible that the Calderdale programme creates similar value to the Kirklees programme. However the availability of evidence, suitable indicators and appropriate financial proxies was more difficult to locate in the case of Calderdale than in Kirklees.

These factors show that it is not advisable to make simple comparisons between the two areas, without first taking into account the different local contexts.

Testing the results

Sensitivity analysis is a method for testing the extent to which the SROI results would change if we adjust estimates or removed factors from the analysis. The lowest estimate, based on halving the value of all outcomes, produced a ratio of £1:2.21. The highest estimate, based on reducing drop-off for all outcomes, produced a ratio of £1:6.29. **The majority of sensitivity analyses found SROI ratios between £1:3.06 and £1:4.46.**

| Sensitivity Analysis | Calderdale | Kirklees | Two case studies combined |
|---------------------------------|------------|----------|---------------------------|
| Findings from the main analysis | £3.70 | £5.12 | £4.41 |
| Increasing deadweight to 50% | £2.33 | £3.16 | £2.75 |
| Increasing displacement to 50% | £2.89 | £3.18 | £3.04 |
| Increasing attribution to 50% | £3.06 | £3.60 | £3.33 |

| | | | |
|--|-------|-------|-------|
| Changing drop-off to 10% for all outcomes | £6.91 | £7.51 | £6.29 |
| As above, drop-off 75% | £3.48 | £4.03 | £3.75 |
| Halving all values of outcomes | £1.85 | £2.56 | £2.21 |
| Removing all dietary health-related outcomes | £3.18 | £4.56 | £3.87 |

The role of the programme in improving the dietary health of children was a challenging area for valuation due in part to the lack of well-established financial proxies. Removing the value of all dietary health-related outcomes for children reduced the SROI ratio by a relatively small amount overall, from £1:4.40 to £1:3.87. Overall, multiple changes to the estimates of deadweight, attribution and drop-off indicates that substantial changes would have to be made to the assumptions in order for the ratio change from positive to negative. These calculations show that even when significant changes are made to the analysis the results still show clear evidence of social value being created up to 3 years after the FFL intervention.

Study strengths & limitations

This study builds upon the principles and methods adopted in previous SROI research. We gathered the perspectives of a large number and variety of stakeholders and used this information to underpin the analysis of outcomes. We took into account a considerable body of evidence from evaluation fieldwork and external research and the study benefited from the availability of well recognised and established financial proxies for many of the outcomes. In order to avoid over-claiming on role of the programme in creating change we factored in the role of other initiatives and changes in the national policy environment such as the introduction of Universal Infant Free School Meals. The validity of the findings have been explored with key stakeholders and further assessment will be made as the findings of the study are disseminated.

One of the challenges concerned creating an account that adequately captured the scope and breadth of the impacts.

This placed limits on the resources available to collect comprehensive data across all outcomes. Some stakeholders declined or were unable to provide detailed supporting data. We focused on short term outcomes rather than those that might result over a longer period beyond three years.

Conclusion

This study found that FFL is valued by schools, civil society, local business and wider stakeholders as a locally commissioned programme in local authority areas. The SROI provides a financial measure of this value: that for every £1 spent on FFL there is social value of £4.41 created over a three year period. In the analysis, multiple adjustments to the role of different outcomes and other factors shows that the social value is likely to fall between a lowest estimate of £2.21 and a highest estimate of £6.29. The clustering of values around a narrow range of £3 to £4 lends confidence to the validity of the results.

The methods and findings from this research are significant for other Food for Life local commissions, the Food for Life Catering Mark and other area-based food programmes, such as the Sustainable Food Cities initiative, both in the UK and internationally. In many instances, the bottom-up research method places limits on the generalisability of SROI results. However in this study the close correspondence with other SROI studies in terms of methodology and findings suggests that a similar range of outcomes can be anticipated in other areas where an FFL programme model is implemented, especially where the programme is directed at schools and public service catering - and engages with other settings such as early years settings and hospitals.

This study is part of the national evaluation of Food for Life 2013-15 conducted by Mat Jones, Hannah Pitt, Judy Orme, Selena Gray, Debra Salmon, Robin Means, Emma Weitkamp, Liz Oxford, Richard Kimberlee, and Jane Powell from the Public Health & Wellbeing Research Group at the University of the West of England, Bristol (UWE Bristol). The full report is available from Mat Jones matthew.jones@uwe.ac.uk and Food for Life ffl@foodforlife.org.uk

Jones M, Pitt H, Oxford L, Orme J, Gray S, Salmon D, Means R, Weitkamp E, Kimberlee R & Powell J (2016) *Food for Life: a Social Return on Investment Analysis of the Locally Commissioned Programme. Full Report*. UWE Bristol.

