



## European healthy Pupils and skilled Educators via integrated School food Systems (EPESS) Summary Report

January 2020



### Introduction

The current food system is producing major negative impacts for our health and the environment. Recent international research evidence - from the dietary burden of disease, to climate change and biodiversity loss, to nutritional insecurity and the breakdown of culinary traditions - show that the urgency for action is escalating. In this context, schools are well recognised as important locales for action to change the food system, not least because they prove a population-scale platform to transform how younger generations engage with food.

Few exemplars are derived from studies of 'everyday practice': they concentrate on interventions designed for research purposes, or programmes supplementary to the mainstream of educational practice. Given the current and impending scale of the issues, there is an urgent need to better understand how educational practitioners develop innovative work with the complex challenges of food system education.

The aim of this programme was to develop and reinforce networks within the area of European healthy Pupils and skilled Educators via integrated School food Systems [EPESS]. Through exchange of good practice activities, the participants share ideas, practices and methods across whole school food culture, school food education and teacher training. The collaboration brings together expertise from across the

UK, DK and the CZ and intends to disseminate work to schools, organisations and communities across Europe.

The programme consisted of four voluntary and higher education sector partners and six school partners:

- Soil Association Food for Life (FFL), UK
- University College Lillebaelt (UCL), DK
- Skutecne Zdrava Skola z.s. (SZS), CZ
- University of the West of England (UWE), UK
- Washingborough Academy, UK
- Newland St John (Primary), UK
- Nymarkskolen, DK
- Ørkildskolen, DK
- ANGEL school, Prague, CZ
- Maternity and Family Centre Mateřinka Brno, CZ

EPESS was an exchange programme between three countries, involving two schools and one leading food-in-schools NGO in each country (LOMA in Denmark; Food for Life in the UK; Skutecne Zdrava Škola in Czech Republic). The group consisted of a range of educational practitioners from Early Years, Primary and Secondary sectors; NGO programme coordinators and development leads; and academic and independent researchers. A leading goal of the programme was to increase the skills, confidence and competences of education practitioners with regard to food-related activities, and to enable implementation of new or enhanced approaches contributing to good food culture in schools. The programme was informed by Community of Practice principles.

The programme took place over 24 months and consisted of one exchange to each of the three participating countries. The exchanges included visits to core participating schools and additional schools, participation in experiential food education activities, presentations, and group critical reflections. The periods between exchanges involved a series of webinar learning events and ongoing group communications on best practice through a closed social media platform. The programme, and the associated research process, was informed by systems thinking and the World Health Organisation's whole settings conceptual framework for health promotion.

The feedback from participants was overwhelmingly positive about the EPESS programme in terms of its organisation, delivery and opportunity to obtain an insight into a wealth of innovative practices in school food education. The programme helped build a community of practice with a group of educationalists with many common interests and shared commitments. The hands-on experiential learning during the exchange visits were seen as vital to feel inspired, obtain depth of understanding and to see practice from the 'inside'. The programme enabled participants to have dialogue with experts with experience, to take a step back and see the wider educational and social importance of food education, and to be surprised and sometimes challenged by different ways of working. An important feature of the programme has been to enable schools to share what they do, to be more confident to do so, and – despite a range of obstacles - to show what they can achieve.

As part of the programme, participants identified a number of opportunities for enhancing and developing these forms of exchanges. Some of the greatest challenges revolved around finding shared understanding of the core elements of whole settings approaches to food in schools. This was particularly complex given the diversity of schools taking part (nursery through to secondary), and diverse national

policy and societal contexts. Nevertheless, these challenges had a beneficial role in getting participants to think laterally and strategically about the overall pedagogical mission of school food initiatives.

Analysis of the critical reflections and feedback showed that participants identified a considerable number of micro-level actions to address common pedagogical challenges and create innovative solutions in real-world practice settings. We organised and classified these using the whole settings conceptual framework for food in schools. Further analysis identified a number of higher order themes. These included:

- “Persistence, passion and belief”: the scale of the tasks involve a high level of personal commitment
- “Deeply embedding practice into organisational memory”: it is important to plan and anticipate staff, organisation and policy changes
- “Enthusiasm and fun”: innovative practice can only be sustained where there is a generative culture that feeds staff enjoyment and sense of achievement in their work
- “Bending the rules”: innovative practice often involves creative interpretation of guidance and rules, and positive risk taking.
- “Curiosity and the search for new issues and ideas”: in a rapidly changing context, there is a constant flow of new and interesting pedagogical opportunities to apply whole settings approaches for good food in schools
- “Giving practitioners the chance to experiment”: staff need the opportunities to try out new ways of working
- “Having a holistic vision”: it is essential to keep a bigger vision across the whole educational journey for student learning
- “Supportive, respectful and united teams”: whole settings approaches require high levels of coordination and shared understanding of purpose
- “Real leadership”: leaders need to not only support and authorise, but to encourage innovation and experimentation
- “Resistance”: some outside forces – such as the large corporate food industry – need to be challenged and resisted
- “Making do”: it is important to act with discretion around funding, the allocation of resources, and the scope for drawing upon pupil, parent and community assets

Overall, these themes illustrate the potential for innovation at the school level, and the opportunities for scaling-up the transfer of learning at national and cross-national levels. The feasibility of such work shows the way for greater proactive policy in a key field for societal and environmental action.

This is a summary report of the full evaluation of the EPESS project. Please use the following citation:  
Jones, M., Ruge, D., Rasmus Puck, M, & Jones, V (2019) *EPESS: European healthy pupils and skilled Educators via integrated school food systems. Final Evaluation Report on the Erasmus Plus programme.* UWE & UCL.