

Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs

Summary of the responses to the school milk consultation

Administration

If you are a school or LEA participating in the Scheme, please give details on the time taken to complete forms, maintain records, deal with payments, and please provide details of any costs associated with participation?

We received two responses to this question that provided us with a detailed breakdown of time, costs and burdens involved in making claims throughout the chain.

A number of other responses talked about the problems involved in the Scheme, with the same comments being made in more than one response. These included:

- cash flow issues arising from delays in making claims, receiving the money and paying it back to schools;
- the forms being difficult and time consuming to compile;
- the fact that school milk is delivered in a third of a pint, but the RPA require information in litres, which can lead to discrepancies with claims and extra administration time;
- claims having to be submitted in quarters, which does not fit in with the annual school year;
- the cost of printing and distributing the new A3 poster; and
- involvement in the Scheme being based on date of birth and not by year group.

Every respondent felt that the administration associated with the Scheme was a burden and would welcome any simplification of it, but the majority thought this did not reduce participation in the Scheme. Some said they use a company to help administer their claims, as it reduces the burden on them and makes them feel confident that the rules of the Scheme are being adhered to. One respondent felt the high levels of administration remained a barrier to participation.

If you are a school or LEA who do not participate, or a parent that chooses that their child does not participate (if participation is an option), why not?

The majority of respondents raised the same reasons why parents choose not to participate in the Scheme. Some of the reasons cited were:

- the Scheme is too expensive and there is a lack of payment flexibility;
- there are taste or intolerance issues with some children;
- there is a perception amongst some children that milk is “uncool”; and
- there is poor availability and lack of product choice.

Again, the majority of respondees raised the same reasons why schools and LEA's choose not to participate in the Scheme. Some of the reasons cited were:

- the complexity of claims and the administration involved;
- lack of resource within the school or LEA;
- unwillingness of individual schools to become involved in the bureaucracy;
- the cost of products and negation of the subsidy by administrative burdens;
- the possible costs associated with delayed payments; and
- the lack of parental interest.

Products

Do you want the products offered to be changed? If so to what?

Opinion on what products to include in the Scheme were split. One respondee thought it was only practical to offer plain milk under the Scheme, and not include the other products. Although the other respondees were split equally between maintaining the status quo and extending the range of products to include flavoured yogurt and cheese.

The arguments for maintaining the status quo were:

- there is insufficient demand for the extended range of products, nor the supply from dairies to warrant this;
- there is no compelling reason to extend the range of products;
- there are health issues concerning the inclusion of cheese; and
- the extended range of products would be unsustainable and difficult to manage in primary schools.

The main arguments for extending the range of products surrounded the inclusion of cheese and to a lesser extent flavoured yogurt. Reasons for their inclusion were:

- it would be sustainable to provide cheese and flavoured yogurt in secondary schools;
- their inclusion would encourage school children to consume a greater range of dairy products;
- cheese has important nutritional qualities; and
- the inclusion of cheese would provide school children with an additional choice of dairy products.

One respondee felt that the extended range of products should only be considered if they do not affect the current levels of provision on plain milk, flavoured milk and plain yoghurt.

Do you see any difficulties in fitting any additional or new products around the nutrient based standards?

One respondent informed us that the industry is proposing to undertake further development work to bring non-compliant products within the guidelines set out by the School Foods Trust.

Another respondent did not see any difficulties in extending the Scheme to include cheese, as low fat cheese would fulfil the nutrient based standard criteria. They also provided us with some comprehensive data on how low fat cheese would fit into these standards.

When are products offered under the Scheme most likely to be consumed during the school day?

Those that responded to this questions all provided very similar answers. The majority of milk consumption in primary schools tends to be at morning break, but can sometimes be at lunch time. However, within secondary schools the provision of milk varies throughout the school day. In both primary and secondary schools, milk is available to children before school, at break time, lunch time and after school.

One respondent saw no problem in cheese being included in the Scheme and being available throughout the school day.

National top-up

Which of the options for the national top-up would you prefer and why?

Continue with the status quo and only offer the national top-up to primary schools on plain milk, flavoured milk and plain yoghurt.

Roughly half of those that responded to the consultation said this was their preferred option. Their reasons varied, but some of the main ones were:

- in the current economic climate, it would not be fair to increase the price of school milk for primary school children;
- mid morning school milk is a primary school tradition;
- by spreading the national top-up further the benefit to primary school children would be reduced;
- there is no evidence to show that a move away from the status quo would prove beneficial; and
- if the status quo was maintained, it would help to encourage milk consumption amongst primary school children and create a lasting habit of doing so.

One respondent thought that even though the status quo was the easiest option, it did not take into account the possible benefits from changing and developing the national top-up, or recognise the potential flexibility the amendments to the EU legislation allowed.

Alternatively, only offer it to secondary schools on plain milk, flavoured milk and plain yoghurt.

All those that responded to this option thought that this was not viable. The main reasons were:

- flavoured milk and yoghurt are generally sold commercially in secondary schools by caterers, and the national top-up would have little effect on this;
- caterers in secondary schools have more flexibility on pricing outside of the Scheme;
- there is a marked fall off in milk consumption as children get older; and
- this option would be detrimental to the current Scheme operated in primary schools.

Decrease the rate of the national top-up we pay to enable us to offer it to both primary and secondary schools.

All but one of the respondents to this question thought this was not an option. The reasons were:

- it would lead to uncertainty in setting the initial rate due to the unknown take up in secondary schools;
- the level of the national top-up would be diluted so there would be little to gain from its provision;
- there would be little or no benefits from expanding the scope of the national top-up; and
- there would be less financial control over the level of national top-up, as it would have to change on a regular basis to stay within budget.

One respondent said they preferred an option that promotes greater access at the point of greater need, and that a split between primary and secondary schools would be appropriate.

Only offer the national top-up on some products, but to both primary and secondary schools.

The responses to this option were split. The majority felt this was not a viable option, but only one respondent provided a reason for this. They felt it could prove discriminatory against dairy products, as children in both primary and secondary schools should be given the maximum opportunity to consume whatever dairy product they like.

On the other hand, one respondent felt that the most benefit from the national top-up would be achieved by concentrating it on one product at primary schools.

Stop paying it as a national top-up for the subsidy and use it in a more cost effective way, for example, to promote milk consumption or as a grant for recycling packaging, (however, there are rules on State Aids which limit what we could use it for).

Roughly half of the consultation respondents preferred this option, and the majority shared the same views. These were:

- promotional activity drives uptake of milk and milk products both at school and at home, and develops lasting consumption patterns;
- a fixed budget for milk promotion will offer greater control and value for money than continuing with the status quo; and
- milk promotion will help educate children on the health benefits of dairy.

Two respondees provided detailed accounts of how they thought the national top-up could be used to fund promotional work in both primary and secondary schools, in order to promote the consumption of milk and milk products.

One respondee provided a detail explanation why this was not their favoured option. The main reasons were:

- the use on promotional activities would be difficult and expensive to monitor and regulate;
- it will take money away from parents and give it to suppliers and interested parties, who will rely on this money instead of using their own for school milk promotion;
- there is uncertainty about who will receive the money; and
- using the national top-up as a recycling grant would remove the responsibility from producers to develop greener packaging.

A levy on the dairy sector to increase the national top-up or the sector financing another contribution.

Everyone that responded to this option felt that this was not an option. The reasons were:

- the dairy sector is currently facing many challenges, and they need support rather than increased burdens; and
- dairy farmers already pay a levy to fund DairyCo, who have their own School Milk Project which invests in the provision of milk in schools.

Stop paying it all together (Member States are not obliged to pay it).

No one that responded to this question supported this option. They all felt very strongly about keeping the national top-up money available for school milk. Some of the reasons were:

- the national top-up makes a difference to the EU subsidy and contributes to milk consumption in primary schools;
- it is very important for the future development of school milk;
- the best use of the national top-up is to continue to utilise it for the benefit of school children; and
- the additional £500,000 that would be available to each Department would not benefit their overall budgets.

Does the EU subsidy and national top-up influence your decision to participate in the Scheme?

From those that responded to this question, only one respondent said that the national top-up influences their decision to take part in the Scheme and this was because of the significant administration cost incurred by partaking in the Scheme.

The other respondents did not think that the national top-up played a significant part, compared to the overall level of EU subsidy, and that it was not a major influence in taking part in the Scheme. One Local Authority said they would still offer milk to all primary schools regardless of the national top-up and EU subsidy.

Does your child have milk in addition to the subsidised milk provided at school?

All those that responded to this question said that their child received milk in addition to the subsidised milk at school, and one respondent said their child received milk at home and did not take part in the Scheme.

Two respondents provided information from research which stated that when children are introduced to drinking milk at primary school, they choose to consume additional milk in and out of home, and continue to drink milk as they move into secondary school.

Assumptions

Can you provide more information about numbers, costs or choices to assist us with our assumptions?

Only one respondent answered this question specifically and they did not disagree with our assumptions. A number of other respondents provided us with useful information in this section that will be used when we develop our final options.