

FEEDING BRITAIN - WRITTEN EVIDENCE (FDO0088)

1. This submission proposes two reforms – one to government and another to the food and drink industry – with the objective of making healthier food more affordable and accessible for people on lower incomes.
2. The first reform covers the reach and coverage of the nutritional safety net; namely the Healthy Start and free school meals programmes. We propose that the government makes more proactive use of the data it holds, on those children and families who are eligible but not registered for each scheme, to introduce an automatic registration process. This would maximise registration rates among all eligible households at any given time. Moreover, each scheme's eligibility criteria should be revised to ensure, at the very least, it covers all children and families living in poverty. The net effect of this reform would be to ease the pressure on household budgets and free up more money to buy healthier goods, and should be considered one part of a broader approach to increase the disposable incomes of poorer families.
3. The second reform would strengthen the efforts of community and voluntary sector organisations to supply healthier goods at affordable prices, while preventing at least some of the need for food banks, through initiatives such as food clubs, pantries, co-operatives, and social supermarkets. We propose that food and drink companies make available a limited range of goods at discounted rates for initiatives of this nature which massively improve the degree of choice and autonomy among people on lower incomes – bringing nutritious food both physically and financially within reach, free of stigma and in a dignified manner. Our experience suggests that when people are given a meaningful choice along these lines, they will prefer to take home fruit and vegetables, goods that are high in protein, and, more broadly, what they describe as 'things that I can use to make a proper meal'.

8 April 2024