

Young Food Ambassadors meet with Children's Minister

Young Food Ambassadors have met with Children's Minister Vicky Ford to discuss their role in promoting healthy eating and activities, following confirmation in the Spending Review of the Government's extended support for disadvantaged children.

The Minister and a group of seven of the Young Food Ambassadors for the Children's Right2Food Campaign were joined by their Ambassador Dame Emma Thompson and Food Foundation Executive Director Anna Taylor for a Zoom meeting on Thursday 26 November where they spoke about their shared ambition to tackle childhood obesity and improve access to nutritious meals for all children, especially those most disadvantaged.

It follows the Government's [announcement](#) of a £170m support package for the most vulnerable over winter and the expansion of the £220m Holiday Activities and Food programme to cover Easter, summer and Christmas in 2021. This was confirmed again by the Chancellor on Wednesday as part of the Spending Review settlement.

Children's Minister Vicky Ford said:

I'm so grateful for the energy and dedication shown by the Young Food Ambassadors, who have shared their experiences with me of school food and healthy eating.

We all agree on the importance of a healthy, nutritious meal and the impact it can have on children's development. Through our expanded Holiday Activities and Food programme, thousands more young people will benefit from this during the Easter, summer and Christmas breaks next year.

Executive Director of the Food Foundation Anna Taylor said:

Today we saw a high level of engagement from Minister Ford on the issues of child food insecurity and inequalities in obesity. Since our last meeting with the Minister in July, the Government has made significant commitments to tackling child food insecurity during the holidays, which we applaud.

It was clear today that the Minister understands the importance of engaging with young people living with food insecurity when considering these solutions. The Young Food Ambassadors look forward to collaborating further with the Minister on decisive action to ensure no child misses out on a healthy diet.

Minister Ford, who recently wrote to schools to encourage them to make every effort to provide hot meals that meet the School Food Standards, praised the work of school caterers for getting kitchens back up and running since September.

At least 99% of schools have been open each week since the start of term in November, and schools, colleges and early years settings across the country have worked extremely hard to remain open.

The Minister spoke to the Young Ambassadors about their experiences of healthy eating at school and encouraged them to work with the Governments from across the four nations to promote this.

She also invited Dame Emma to visit a Holiday Activities and Food project next summer after the expanded programme has been rolled out across England.

Asha, 14 from Cumbria, one of the seven Young Food Ambassadors to meet with Minister Ford, said:

In our meeting today we thanked the Minister for what she's done so far to address holiday hunger. We're pleased she listened and took action on our feedback from our previous meeting in the summer and we look forward to that happening again this time. We're excited that now we'll now have regular meetings with her team so we can work together to deliver our Charter recommendations and make sure all children can access a healthy diet every day.

Another Ambassador, Ryan, 18 from Glasgow, said:

It's so important for Ministers to not only listen to children and young people's views and experiences of food poverty, but make sure they are taking their views into account as early as possible during the policy-making process. Today, we had our second meeting this year with the Minister Ford – we're glad she values our input and we hope to keep engaging with Government in a more formalised way so that us young people can be part of lasting policy solutions.

The Ambassadors, who met with the Minister earlier in the summer to discuss their 'Right2Food' charter and new podcast series, spoke positively about the expansion of the holiday activities programme and the increase in the value of Healthy Start vouchers from £3.10 to £4.25 a week from April 2021.

These were both announced by the Government on 8 November, alongside a new £170 million Covid Winter Grant Scheme to be run by local authorities in England, at least 80% of which is earmarked to support with food, bills and other essential costs to cover the period to the end of March 2021.

The Department for Education this week wrote to local authorities with

further details of the £220 million Holiday Activities and Food programme and will appoint a national organisation to support with local delivery of these projects from next spring.