

The 13th European Nutrition Conference, FENS 2019, was held at the Dublin Convention Centre, 15–18 October 2019

## Childhood involvement in family food preparation and shopping and attitudes towards food: baseline results from Project Daire

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### Abstract

Evidence suggests that dietary intake of UK children is currently suboptimal. It is therefore imperative to identify effective and sustainable methods of improving dietary habits and knowledge in this population, whilst also promoting the value of healthiness of food products beyond price. Schools are ideally placed to influence children's knowledge and health, and Project Daire, in partnership with schools, food industry partners and stakeholders, aims to improve children's knowledge of, and interest in, food to improve health, wellbeing and educational attainment.

Daire is a randomised-controlled, factorial design trial evaluating two interventions. In total, n = 880 Key Stage (KS) 1 and 2 pupils have been recruited from 18 primary schools in the North West of Northern Ireland and will be randomised to one of four 6-month intervention arms: i) 'Engage', ii) 'Nourish', iii) 'Engage' and 'Nourish' and iv) Delayed. 'Engage' is an age-appropriate, cross-curricular educational intervention on food, agriculture, science and careers linked to the current curriculum. 'Nourish' is an intervention aiming to alter schools' food environments and increase exposure to local foods. Study outcomes include food knowledge, attitudes, trust, diet, behaviour, health and wellbeing and will be collected at baseline and six months. Qualitative data on teacher/pupil opinions will also be collected. The intervention phase is currently ongoing. We present baseline results from our involvement and food attitudes measure from all participating schools. Results were compared by Key Stage and sex using Pearson Chi-Squared test.

Baseline results from our food involvement and attitudes measure are presented for n = 880 KS1 (n = 454) and KS2 (n = 426) pupils. KS1 pupils were more likely to always or sometimes help with food shopping (89.0%) whilst KS2 pupils were more likely to always or sometimes help with food preparation (69.0%). A higher proportion of KS1 pupils reported liking to try new foods (66.1%) and that it was important that food looked (64.5%), tasted (71.1%) and smelled good (60.6%) compared with KS2 children (P < 0.01). Girls were more likely to always or sometimes help with food shopping (96.2%) and preparation (73%) when compared with boys; whilst a higher proportion of girls reported they liked to try new foods (48.2%) and that it was important that food looked (68%) smelled (50.5%) and tasted (71.8%) good compared with boys (P < 0.01).

Results suggest that involvement in food preparation and shopping, willingness to try new foods and attitudes towards food presentation varied by KS and sex in this cohort.

### Conflict of Interest

This project is funded by Invest NI under the Agri Food Quest Competence Centre with 14 food industry partners who can supply food, expertise, educational material and visiting opportunities as part of the Daire interventions.