

**RCN Scotland response to the Scottish Government  
consultation on:  
The National Good Food Nation Plan**

23 April 2024

## Introduction

The Royal College of Nursing (RCN) is the world’s largest nursing union and professional body. It is the leading national and international authority in representing the nursing profession. We represent over half a million nurses, student nurses, midwives, nursing associates and nursing support workers in the UK and internationally.

The RCN has over 48,500 members in Scotland. We campaign on issues of concern to nursing staff and patients, influence health policy development and implementation, and promote excellence in nursing practice.

## Background

The Scottish Parliament passed the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Act in the summer of 2022. RCN Scotland supported the intention behind this legislation, noting that access to healthy, nutritious food and improved availability and awareness of good food have clear public health benefits. The Act requires the Scottish Government to create a national Good Food Nation Plan. This consultation asks for views on the Plan, the list of national Good Food Nation Outcomes and for views on specified functions which will be defined in secondary legislation.

The consultation lists 6 different Outcomes, with corresponding indicators and specific targets/other measures in the following table:

Outcome	Indicators	Targets/other measures
1. Everyone in Scotland eats well with reliable access to safe, nutritious, affordable, sustainable, and age and culturally appropriate food.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Proportion of households experiencing household food insecurity</li> <li>Number of pupils registered for free school meals</li> <li>Percentage of pupils present at school taking school meals (free or paid for)</li> <li>Number of day care settings and children registered to the Scottish Milk and Healthy Snack Scheme</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Fewer than 10% of children living in relative poverty by 2030</li> <li>Fewer than 5% of children living in absolute poverty by 2030</li> <li>Fewer than 5% of children living in combined low income and material deprivation by 2030</li> <li>Fewer than 5% of children living in persistent poverty by 2030</li> </ul>

	<p>Proportion of children in Scotland living in: relative poverty; absolute poverty; combined low income and material deprivation, and; persistent poverty (after housing costs)</p> <p>Scottish Dietary Goals</p> <p>Proportion of public and private sector food businesses implementing the Eating Out, Eating Well framework and code of practice for children's menus</p> <p>Number of local authorities that participate in the Food for Life Scotland Programme</p>	<p>Halve childhood obesity by 2030 and significantly reduce associated diet-related inequalities</p> <p>Reduce adult diet-related health inequalities</p> <p>Reduce the number of households facing moderate to severe food insecurity</p> <p>Reduce the reported number of households accessing emergency food provision</p>
<p>2. Scotland's food system is sustainable and contributes to a flourishing natural environment. It supports our net zero ambitions, and plays an important role in maintaining and improving animal welfare and in restoring and regenerating biodiversity.</p>	<p>Greenhouse gas emissions produced by the agriculture sector</p> <p>Use of nitrogen fertilisers</p> <p>Percentage of commercial stocks fished at sustainable levels</p> <p>Scottish Dietary Goals</p>	<p>Reduce per capita food waste by 33% by 2025</p> <p>Aim to double the amount of farmland managed organically in Scotland by end of this parliamentary term (2026)</p> <p>Existing legally binding annual emissions reduction targets including: 75% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 (compared with a 1990 baseline), and net zero emissions by 2045</p> <p>Scottish Ministers have international commitments to address biodiversity loss, articulated in the Global Biodiversity Framework of the UN Convention on Biodiversity, which includes targets relating to reducing the global footprint of consumption, global food waste, overconsumption and waste generation</p> <p>The Scottish Government have made a #123 Food Loss and Waste Pledge for Climate Action</p>
<p>3. Scotland's food system encourages a physically and mentally healthy population, leading to a reduction in diet-related conditions.</p>	<p>Percentage of adults and children with a healthy weight</p> <p>Percentage of children at risk of obesity</p> <p>Percentage of adults and children consuming recommended 5 portions of fruit and vegetables each day</p> <p>Number of local authorities that participate in the Food for Life Scotland Programme</p> <p>Fruit and vegetable intake of children aged 2-15</p> <p><a href="#">Scottish Dietary Goals</a></p> <p>Proportion of public and private sector food businesses implementing the Eating Out, Eating Well framework and code of practice for children's menus</p> <p>Number of companies investing in reformulation</p>	<p>Reduce drop off in breastfeeding rates at the 6 to 8 week point by 10% by 2025</p> <p>Halve childhood obesity by 2030 and significantly reduce associated diet-related inequalities</p> <p>Increase levels of adult healthy weight</p> <p>Reduce adult diet-related health inequalities</p>

<p>4. Our food and drink sector is prosperous, diverse, innovative, and vital to national and local economic and social wellbeing. It is key to making Scotland food secure and food resilient, and creates and sustains jobs and businesses underpinned by fair work standards.</p>	<p>Number of people employed in the food and drink industry</p> <p>Number of people employed in agriculture</p> <p>Value of Scottish food and drink exports</p> <p>Value added by the Scottish food and drink industry</p> <p>Number of registered food and drink enterprises</p> <p>Number of registered crofts</p> <p>Median weekly full-time earnings across the Scottish food and drink growth sector</p> <p>Number of companies investing in reformulation</p>	<p>The Scottish Government supports the food and drink sector by providing funding for <a href="#">Sustaining Scotland. Supplying the World – The Food and Drink Industry Strategy</a></p>
<p>5. Scotland has a thriving food culture with a population who are interested in and educated about good and sustainable food.</p>	<p>Funding committed to food education and community food projects</p> <p><a href="#">Scottish Dietary Goals</a></p> <p>Proportion of public and private sector food businesses implementing the Eating Out, Eating Well framework and code of practice for children's menus</p>	<p>Halve childhood obesity by 2030 and significantly reduce associated diet-related inequalities</p> <p>Increase levels of adult healthy weight</p> <p>Reduce adult diet-related health inequalities</p>
<p>6. Scotland has a global reputation for high-quality food that we want to continue to grow. Decisions we make in Scotland contribute positively to local and global food systems transformation. We share and learn from best practice internationally.</p>	<p>Number of engagements with international colleagues on food system</p> <p>Greenhouse gas emissions produced by the agriculture sector</p>	<p>Existing legally binding annual emissions reduction targets including: 75% reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2030 (compared with a 1990 baseline), and net zero emissions by 2045</p> <p>Scottish Ministers have international commitments to address biodiversity loss, articulated in the Global Biodiversity Framework of the UN Convention on Biodiversity, which includes targets relating to reducing the global footprint of consumption, global food waste, overconsumption and waste generation</p> <p>The Scottish Government have made a #123 Food Loss and Waste Pledge for Climate Action</p>

**Consultation questions with RCN Scotland responses  
(Note, only questions with answers have been included)**

**Question 2**

**What, if anything, would you change about the Good Food Nation Outcomes and why?**

RCN Scotland's focus for this response is on Outcomes 1 and 3 in the National Plan which state "Outcome 1: Everyone in Scotland eats well with reliable access to safe, nutritious, affordable, sustainable, and age and culturally appropriate food" and "Outcome 3: Scotland's food system encourages a physically and mentally healthy population, leading to a reduction in diet-related conditions."

RCN Scotland strongly supports both these outcomes as a focus for the National Plan. We are of the view that these outcomes would benefit from specific indicators and or targets to cover two additional points: access to nutritious food for those who use health and social care services and access to nutritious, affordable food for those who work in health and social care.

Evidence shows that investing in prevention and early intervention, of which improving nutrition of the population is an important part, will reduce demand on the NHS and public services, improve health and wellbeing and support economic growth<sup>1</sup> (Public Health Scotland's strategic plan 2022 to 2025).

RCN Scotland therefore supports the ambition of the Good Food Nation Act. We believe that it has the potential to play an important part in a shift towards preventative measures to reduce pressure on and secure the future of health and social care in Scotland. Alongside this legislation and national planning is a need for greater investment in public health as well as other measures to support people to understand the importance of good food to their health and be able to access nutritious, affordable food.

We strongly welcome these outcomes, however, as we indicated during the passage of the Good Food Nation (Scotland) Bill<sup>2</sup>, they need to incorporate prioritisation of both a specific target for those accessing health and social care and a specific target for staff working in those services, as well as relevant indicators for these targets.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://publichealthscotland.scot/our-organisation/a-scotland-where-everybody-thrives-public-health-scotland-s-strategic-plan-2022-to-2025/>

<sup>2</sup> <https://www.rcn.org.uk/-/media/Royal-College-Of-Nursing/Documents/Countries-and-regions/Scotland/2022/RCN-briefing-Good-Food-Nation-Bill-Stage-1-debate.pdf>

## Question 7

### What other indicators, if any, would you like to see included?

Nutrition is essential to people's recovery and wellbeing while in hospital or accessing social care. Nutrition is also one of the fundamental of care. Nursing staff are expected to understand nutritional needs of their patients, ensure that an appropriate diet is being provided in health and social care settings and understand that meals are just as important as medication. Nursing staff have a key role in managing nutrition and hydration to support the quality of care and patient experience. Adequate nutrition and hydration not only assist with recovery from trauma, surgery and disease, but also promotes wound healing and prevents infection. Nutritional deficiencies and dehydration are associated with delayed recovery, increased length of hospitalisation and risk of mortality.

In 2022, National Services Scotland published a Food in Hospitals report which concluded there was insufficient rigour in health boards in ensuring their food provision met the nutritional requirements of the national specification. The specification itself is due to be updated and revised and RCN Scotland suggests that this work should be carried out within the context of the National Good Food Nation Plan's Outcomes.

It is therefore disappointing and a missed opportunity, that there are no targets in the National Plan aimed specifically at the provision of good food for those accessing services health and social care settings. RCN Scotland notes that there is a target for school children to have access to healthy food. A similar target should be established to ensure that patients and those accessing social care have access to healthy nutritious food. As well as being essential to their own care, people's time in hospital should be a good opportunity to educate service users about their own nutritional needs and the importance of good food to their own wellbeing.

Given the important role that nutrition plays in the health and wellbeing of those accessing health and social care services, a specific indicator should be considered for Outcome 3, aimed at access to healthy food for those groups of people.

Similarly, as key deliverers of health care and support, nursing staff in turn need to be supported to be as healthy and as well as possible. The issue of obesity among nursing is highly sensitive and vitally important, not just because of the impact on nursing professionals' own health and wellbeing, but also because of the impact on workplace productivity. Research jointly carried out by Edinburgh

Napier University and London South Bank University<sup>3</sup> found that a high number of nurses in Scotland were overweight compared to elsewhere in the UK and just under 30% were obese. Such high rates of obesity are likely to fuel sickness levels in NHS Scotland, including increased risk of musculoskeletal conditions and mental health conditions.

As health care professionals, nursing staff may sometimes feel motivated to meet the needs of others before themselves. Employers, including but not limited to the NHS, must encourage and support nurses and health care support workers to make healthy choices. Employers should make working environments as conducive as possible to maintaining a healthy lifestyle. The working conditions of many nurses and healthcare support workers may include the need to do nightshifts. This pattern of working can have a chaotic effect on one's body clock and appetite. This is made harder when workplaces don't provide adequate healthy eating options or appropriate space for healthy meal preparation. Other difficulties include the lack of facilities for storing fresh, healthy food, or access to canteens that are either too far from wards to allow nurses to get there in their breaks or are closed during night shifts.

In response to the RCN 2022 Last Shift Survey<sup>4</sup>, we heard from nursing staff, working across all sectors and all levels that they were unable to take their breaks (63% of respondents told us that during their last shift they were unable to take the breaks they were supposed to). We have also heard from many nursing staff<sup>5</sup>, working across all sectors and at all levels, that they are regularly unable to take breaks due to staffing pressures; and that the situation has deteriorated steadily so much over recent years that this has almost become the norm.

In our 'Protect the Future of Nursing'<sup>6</sup> campaign for the Scottish Parliament 2021 elections, RCN Scotland called for steps to be taken to ensure nursing staff can access appropriate break facilities, healthy food and water in workplaces. We have also called for minimum standards for facilities for nursing staff to be set, in all health and care settings, including and access to healthy and nourishing hot food and drinks, as one of our key asks in the Ministerial

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[https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283482589\\_Prevalence\\_of\\_Overweight\\_and\\_obesity\\_among\\_nurses\\_in\\_Scotland\\_A\\_cross-sectional\\_study\\_using\\_the\\_Scottish\\_Health\\_Survey](https://www.researchgate.net/publication/283482589_Prevalence_of_Overweight_and_obesity_among_nurses_in_Scotland_A_cross-sectional_study_using_the_Scottish_Health_Survey)

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.rcn.org.uk/About-us/Our-Influencing-work/Policy-briefings/sco-parl-last-shift-survey-scotland-briefing-060622>

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.rcn.org.uk/-/media/royal-college-of-nursing/documents/countries-and-regions/scotland/2019/employment-survey-scotland-2019.pdf?la=en>

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.rcn.org.uk/magazines/Activists/2021/April/Protect-the-future-of-nursing#:~:text=The%20RCN's%20Protect%20the%20Future,now%20and%20in%20the%20future.>

Nursing and Midwifery Taskforce which is currently considering how to improve retention of nursing staff.

Given the importance of access to healthy food for staff, we therefore suggest that Outcome 1 or 3 should include an indicator for the proportion of staff who have access to healthy food during their shift. This could be measured as a 'target' by either existing staff surveys (such as an amendment or addition to the iMatter Health and Social Care Staff Survey question about health and wellbeing) or a newly established measure. Whatever target is set out needs to measure not just 'theoretical access to' healthy food. Staff must be able to use this opportunity and facilities must be open during their shift and be near enough for them to be able to access good food.

### **Question 12**

**Does [Snapshot: As a public caterer in a Good Food Nation] reflect what you would like your life to look like, as a public caterer in a Good Food Nation?**

The snapshot outlined in question 12 is clearly applicable to the provision of food in a hospital and social care environment.

The aspirations outlined in the snapshot are laudable, but far removed from current practice, where often costs are the main motivator for procurement and there is little evidence that, particularly in hospitals, support for a variety of producers or using healthy, fresh and in-season food is a significant consideration. Health Facilities Scotland's Food In Hospitals National Report 2022<sup>7</sup> recommended that the main area for improvement for most health boards was to complete an up-to-date nutritional analysis of current provision. The report questioned whether the current offer was meeting the food in hospitals specification and found that only half of boards were offering 'healthier eating' choices at each mealtime and only 3 out of 16 boards met the essential criteria for the provision of nutrients for hospitalised adults and children.

To move closer to the vision outlined in this snapshot, health boards and social care providers will need significant additional investment as well as support and guidance to move away from a national model of procurement where the focus is on cost towards more local provisions of nutritious food for both patients and service users as well as staff working in these sectors.

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<sup>7</sup> [https://www.nss.nhs.scot/media/3099/national-food-in-hospitals-2022-report-publis\\_lisa-woodward.pdf](https://www.nss.nhs.scot/media/3099/national-food-in-hospitals-2022-report-publis_lisa-woodward.pdf)