



# FOOD GROWING SCHOOLS: LONDON

## FINAL EVALUATION REPORT EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



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**MAYOR OF LONDON**

## **Food Growing Schools: London Final Evaluation Report**

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## Executive Summary



### Food Growing Schools: London partnership

The simple - and ambitious - goal of the Food Growing Schools: London (FGSL) partnership is for every school in London to engage in food growing activities. FGSL seeks to strengthen and build upon existing work to support all schools in London to fully embed food growing into school life. The initiative intends to demonstrate how every school, and the community it serves, can benefit from food growing, so that school leaders, staff and volunteers have the skills and confidence to get involved.

FGSL has been developed by Garden Organic with the support of partners from Sustain's Capital Growth initiative, The Soil Association's Food for Life initiative, The Royal Horticultural Society, School Food Matters, the Greater London Authority, Morrison's Lets Grow (until March 2016) and Trees for Cities (from March 2015). The Big Lottery is the main funding partner for the programme from late 2013 until early 2017, with additional funding provided by the Greater London Authority (GLA). The University of the West of England (UWE)'s Public Health and Wellbeing Research Group has led this independent evaluation of FGSL during this period.

### Evaluation methodology

The evaluation adopted quantitative and qualitative approaches to capture and evaluate both the delivery process and the potential impacts of the programme. Surveys from enrolled schools, head teachers and training attendees were used to assess the Big Lottery outcomes set for the programme. The qualitative element of the evaluation used a case study approach to focus on specific elements of delivery.

### Achieving the programme outcomes

In 2013, FGSL set itself four outcomes expressed as follows:

1. Through involvement in food growing activities at school, children and young people will have gained life skills, knowledge and confidence in food growing

2. Children and young people in London will have an increased awareness of wider benefits of food growing, connection to natural environment, healthy eating, waste and recycling and the actions they can take to achieve enhanced benefits.
3. There will be improved links between London schools and their diverse local communities, including voluntary organisations and local businesses.
4. The community around schools involved in the project, including parents, businesses and voluntary organisations, will develop: improved relationships with their local school, an enhanced environment and increased skills and experience.

By 2017, the UWE led evaluation showed that FGSL achieved its key goals, and created a range of additional benefits. These findings draw upon evidence from 989 schools that responded to the FGSL survey questionnaire. This figure represents 31.6% of all London schools, includes responses from all boroughs, with a weighting towards schools in areas of highest social deprivation. Of schools responding to the initial survey, 298 provided follow up responses on their progress after an average of 20.4 months.

#### *Food growing activity in schools before engagement with FGSL*

The FGSL surveys provide a large-scale picture of the circumstances of schools:

- Before their engagement with FGSL, approximately one third of schools were not growing food. This picture is similar in areas of both higher and lower social deprivation. The proportions were also similar for primary and secondary schools.
- A far smaller proportion of secondary pupils were engaged in food growing than in primary schools (an average of 3% compared to 15%).
- Schools not currently growing food reported a range of barriers, of which those figuring most highly concerned competing curriculum pressures, and lack of staff skills or interest.

#### *The impact of food growing in schools and the role of FGSL*

After an average of 20 months, 298 schools reported increases in food growing activities. This is shown through a range of indicators and in different circumstances:

- The percentage of early years nurseries growing food rose from 75% to 90%.
- The percentage of primary schools growing food rose from 74% to 89%.
- The percentage of secondary schools growing food rose from 67% to 87%.
- For schools in areas of high deprivation, the percentage actively growing food rose from 71% to 94%, representing a 23% rise at follow up.
- 60% of those schools not growing food at the baseline FGSL survey had started to do so at the point of the follow up survey.
- There was a 4.6% rise in the proportion of pupils involved in school food growing, from 16.1% to 20.7%<sup>1</sup>.
- The total number of family members and community volunteers supporting schools rose by 17%, with an 11% rise for schools in areas of high social deprivation.
- Food growing became more embedded in schools with respect to: parental and community involvement, pupil involvement, school ethos and culture, and pupil engagement in wider issues of healthy eating and sustainability.<sup>2</sup>

One in four schools are linking food growing to subjects across the curriculum although, possibly as a result of wider pressures on the curriculum, this trend did not significantly change over the course of the programme. Similarly there was no significant change in schools with respect to growing an extensive range of fruit and vegetables all year round. This could be because many schools have ambitious plans when they start food growing projects.

<sup>1</sup> A statistically significant change using a matched-pair t test.  $p=0.002$

<sup>2</sup> Statistically significant changes using matched-pair t tests. For all measures  $p<0.05$

Schools also identified a number of **positive impacts**:

- 86.6% reported “More pupils became involved in food growing”
- 92.7% reported “Pupils enhanced their skills and confidence in food growing”
- 44.4% reported “Pupils increased their daily intake of fruit and vegetables”
- 78.9% reported “Pupils became more aware of the wider benefits of food growing e.g. to the environment”
- 53.5% reported “Pupils’ behaviour, attention and/or attainment were enhanced”
- 24.4% reported that “We made new or stronger links with local businesses”
- 27.7% reported that “We made new or stronger links with voluntary organisations e.g. allotment group”.

37% of schools attributed ‘some’ or a ‘great deal’ of these impacts to the support they had obtained through FGSL.

Schools that completed the survey after June 2016 were asked to look to the future and rate areas where a London-wide organisation could support food growing in their school. The percentages rating for ‘significantly valuable’ were as follows:

- 83% Material resources such as seeds, plants and equipment
- 68% Networking, signposting and collaboration
- 67% Training, workshops and events for staff and volunteers
- 61% Human resources, including practical advice and one-to-one support
- 50% Help to recruit volunteers
- 49% Resources such as lesson plans, activity ideas and growing guides
- 49% Campaigning for food growing in London schools

### Learning from case studies on key aspects of the programme

Over the course of the programme, the evaluation team developed 22 case studies focusing on topics central to delivery of the programme. Case studies were developed using a combination of data sources and methods, including interviews with key stakeholders, partners and teachers/teaching staff, surveys of participating schools and training participants, and website analytics. The final report focuses on areas set out below:

#### Summary of case study topics covered in the 2016-17 evaluation report

Case study area	Focus
1. Engagement	Working with new schools
2. Engagement	Creating an agenda for enterprise in education
3. Engagement	Using media and communications
4. Supporting schools	Developing resources as a legacy for schools
5. Partnerships	Working with a Flagship Borough
6. Supporting schools	Delivering training and events
7. Supporting schools	Three years of food growing in a primary school
8. Strategy	Influencing policy
9. Strategy	Building partnerships and networks

Taken together the case studies help elucidate how the FGSL programme has met the key outcomes. They point to the need for continuing support for schools to consolidate the work done by FGSL through the Big Lottery grant. Some of this support will be provided through the project legacy and ongoing commitment from project partners. The case studies show:

- FGSL has become a focal point for food growing in London, facilitating partnerships at multiple levels, from city wide networks of stakeholders, through to borough level teacher networks.



This presents a coordinated approach which is easier for schools and other organisations to navigate to access the support they need.

- Schools need support to get started with growing activities and FGSL has provided this in the form of training and networking events, one-to-one support, borough level activities (particularly in the Food Flagship Boroughs of Lambeth and Croydon) and through more recent initiatives, such as the School Assemblies programme, which has developed resources and trained FGSL staff, partners and volunteers to deliver whole school assemblies.
- FGSL has developed and collated a range of resources that schools can draw upon to support their food growing. These 'legacy' resources are available through the FGSL website. Although use of these resources has increased throughout the life of the project, case study interviews suggest that many teachers do not proactively seek information on food growing through web portals such as FGSL. It will be important that partner staff continue to signpost schools to these resources and where possible make tailored resources available direct to individual schools.
- Networking and one-to-one support have been highly valued by participants, helping to cement the feeling that schools are not 'alone' in their food growing activities, but part of a wider movement. Teachers clearly value the opportunity to talk with other schools that have direct experience of food growing projects.
- Feedback from pupils shows that they enjoy participating in food growing projects and learning activities in outdoor spaces. Teachers believe this has positive impacts on behaviour, engagement and personal development
- School growing is an important and tangible part of the Flagship programme, though it is only one element of the way that food features at borough level.

## Conclusions

This final report has looked back across the three years of the FGSL programme and evaluation. It finds that **the programme has developed an effective partnership that has promoted food growing to schools across London, providing networking, training and support for schools with a variety of levels of growing expertise.**

The evaluation has consistently found that **FGSL is well regarded by those engaged with the programme**, and that its activities are meeting needs within schools in relation to supporting them to deliver food growing. Beneficiaries are very positive about the team and their work, and find the resources and events offered valuable. This is being achieved in a context which continues to be challenging, as school staff are under multiple pressures, and public sector bodies have their finances squeezed. FGSL are operating in a crowded market in which many organisations are seeking schools attention and time. In light of this, a strategy emphasising sign-posting and working in partnership is sensible and efficient. However, it is possible that this approach reduces FGSL's visibility, and awareness of the programme's achievements.

**FGSL was found to have unique features** which represent a significant niche in the landscape of related agencies. This was due to its **focus, expertise, partnership approach and specialist advice to schools**. Whilst this distinguished FGSL from others working on food growing in schools, the profile of other organisations can be much higher due to their longevity, scale or ability to invest in public relations. In comparison FGSL is relatively new, and also takes a broader partnership approach to promotion which does not necessarily centre on its own distinct identity.

## Recommendations for the FGSL programme, and related policy and practice

- **Peer-to-peer mentoring:** Schools value direct experience of food growing projects and the chance to learn first-hand from those who have set up a project and worked through difficulties. Hands-on sessions and visits are a desirable component of a programme of support to schools. It also demonstrates value in bringing together groups of people with varying levels of

experience so beginners can learn from those who are more advanced..

- **Meeting sector specific needs:** FGSL could refine resources and services to meet the interests and needs of different sectors to engage more early years children centres and further education by responding to the unique characteristics, priorities and challenges of these different sectors.
- **Assembly formats:** For assembly-based presentations, consideration should be given to developing a range of assemblies to cater for different levels of school expertise. It is also important to promote branding in these types of contexts, particularly for volunteers and partners to flag the support offered by FGSL and the school food growing movement.
- **Brand visibility:** The evaluation has noted the challenge of achieving high visibility for FGSL whilst working via partners and 'behind the scenes' coordination. Better visibility for FGSL would benefit the project and its goals.
- **Building partnerships and networks:** It is important to establish ways for the partnership to continue to work together in a coordinated way. In addition to the website, teachers value face-to-face support and developing mechanisms to provide this in an ongoing, sustainable way will benefit the project.
- **Futureproofing partnerships and networks:** There is some concern that the networks and partnerships established by FGSL may not survive without ongoing support from FGSL or partner organisations. Stakeholders could consider what support or mechanisms can be established that will enable FGSL partners to continue delivering networking activities.
- **Policy influence:** FGSL has provided evidence of what works in terms of encouraging schools to embark on food growing projects. While changing policy has not been a priority of the programme, there is a need for strategic level activity designed to influence systemic drivers like policy to create a supportive context for food growing in schools. Teachers express a clear appetite for policy change, highlighting that this, particularly around OFSTED inspection criteria, would be the strongest way to drive change in this area.

### Recommendations for further research and evaluation

Further research might track the long term impact and identify enduring impacts of a time-specific initiative like FGSL. Further evaluation might focus on better understanding how schools can best build connections with the wider community to support food growing, and which benefits attract community members to participate.