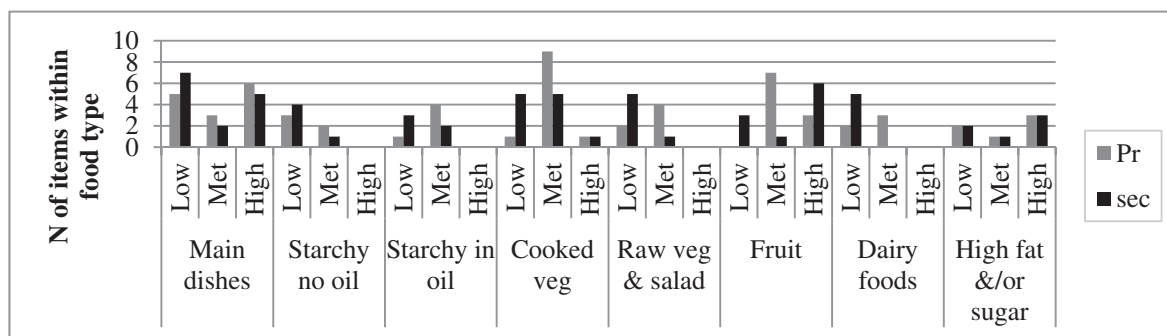


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Portion weights of food served in English schools, how do they compare to the portion size guidelines for Scottish Schools

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The quality of the food and drink provided in English schools has improved greatly in recent years^(1,2) and is reflected in both the steady increase in the take up of school meals⁽³⁾ and the improved food choices and nutrient intakes of pupils at lunchtime.^(1,2) Though recommended portion sizes are not included in the current school food regulations for food and drink provided in English schools, portion weights must be included in the nutritional analysis of school lunch menus. There is an assumption that portion sizes are appropriate for the average school lunch to meet nutrient-based standards.⁽⁴⁾ In the ‘Hungry for success’ document, a whole school approach for school meals in Scotland, portion size guidelines are provided to assist caterers in planning lunches to meet the nutritional standards.⁽⁵⁾ Using data from two recent surveys of school food in England we have investigated how portion weights served in England compare with the Scottish guidance (the only school lunch portion size guidance available). During 2009 and 2010 caterers in 136 primary and 80 secondary English schools were asked to provide two portions of every food and drink item provided at lunchtime, each day. Portions were weighed using kitchen scales and recorded to the nearest gram. Mean and median weights were computed for individual foods that had observations from five or more schools. Foods that were served infrequently and had insufficient individual observations were grouped based on their similarity. Items with weights greater than three standard deviations from the mean of the food item or group of items were excluded, after which mean and median weights, standard deviation (sd) and the 25th and 75th centile for each food or food group were recalculated. In order to identify if items met or were above or below the recommended portion size a weight range was calculated as $\pm 7.5\%$ of the value given (where a weight range was given in hungry for success this was used). Food items were categorised into broad food types. In general, the average weight of starchy food and many of the main dishes served in secondary schools was below the Scottish recommendations. In primary schools the energy content of a meal served met the standard for infant aged pupils and was just below for junior aged pupils.⁽¹⁾ However, in secondary schools the average meal served was significantly below the nutrient standard for energy (530 kcal vs. 646 kcal).⁽²⁾ For secondary schools it is possible that the low portion sizes for the main meals and starchy foods are resulting in the low energy content of the meals. If this is the case, further guidance needs to be given to schools to help them understand how to meet the energy requirements of their pupils.



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