

**University of
Northampton**

Evaluation Report

**Holiday Activities and
Food Programme 2022 -
Northamptonshire**

For Northamptonshire Sport



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Benefits of the HAF programme

Within the online feedback surveys, parents and providers were asked to provide any comments that demonstrated the benefits of the HAF programme, responses included:

"Just amazing, new opportunities that we could never have afforded. We are so thankful!"

"Thank you for this opportunity. It has been invaluable to keep our children happy and safe. The time that everyone puts into running these schemes is MASSIVELY appreciated. Honestly don't know how we would have survived 6 weeks without it!"

"I'm really grateful that my son was allowed to attend, as there is such a demand for holiday clubs for children with SEN and they are oversubscribed with waiting lists. Where he would have only been attending both the [club name] and [club name] clubs - twice a week and the rest of the time spent at home like in previous years, this year he was able to attend more sessions combined together, which made the school holidays go faster and gave both my husband and me time to work while he was not at home."

"I wouldn't be able to get through the holidays without these clubs. My son has had things to look forward to and has given him the physical activity he needs. It has prevented him having as many meltdowns, has given him confidence. These clubs have been absolutely fantastic and have meant that we can enjoy the school holidays."

"I am a kinship foster carer so in my retirement age it has been great to have confidence the children were happy, socialising and being active and most of all having great fun and learning new skills. The food was a real bonus as packing for 3 every day is a chore. They came home having had a good drain on their energy through activities."

"The HAF programme has benefited us all as a family - it has meant he has had something to look forward to and attend on a regular basis, so he hasn't got bored during the holiday, it has meant I've been able to spend time 1-1 with my daughter while my sons been on a has programme, it has meant I've had childcare when I've needed it."

"It gave him stability and the ability to learn new skills in sport and meeting new people. I saw a huge difference in his wellbeing."

"My child has become more confident all around, they won an award for their behaviour and work they did. What was good was that the children thought they were playing yet they have learned a lot. My children were also able to show me work they had completed."

"Helped them to experience things which aren't a normal thing for us whilst providing some food and drink too."

"The play sessions have provided some much-needed respite to us as parents and to our son. Having a child/sibling with ADHD can be very difficult at times. The time apart really made our time together more enjoyable, and we were able to provide our children with much needed 1:1 time, which is so important."

"The week that [holiday club] came to [town name] was an exceptional week. The group made looking after a group of children with a wide variety of ages and disabilities look easy. They were very respectful and just fantastic."

"The best thing about this programme is you see those, you do get those breakthroughs with those kids where you've made their day a little bit better and you see the parents are like thanks, they were raving about it and that's a little bit magic and that's why we do it. And then we're lucky, we've been working with a little restaurant next door to us. So, we've taken the kids in to experience sitting down and having lunch over lunchtime, which that's an experience for some of those who have never done that before. So, for these kids to go away feeling like they've had an experience, I think it's great."

"A parent came up to us today and was like, 'I've just bought like a load of fruit and they've never ate fruit before this programme'. We were like, 'ooh, like what'? Just little things from our point of view that we can just relay on to them is, I don't know, big, and it hits them, you know, really hard and it's good to see them taking it out of the camp into home life because the parents are enjoying it too, and seeing positive impact from the kids behaviour, you know, emotions sometimes."

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Executive summary

Children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds are more likely to be isolated and experience 'unhealthy holidays' during the school holiday period because of the increased financial strain on families through this period. Across the two unitary authorities of Northamptonshire (North and West) there is an estimated 87,000 and 101,000 children and young people aged 0-19 years, respectively. In North Northamptonshire, 13.4% (7,491 pupils) of all pupils are eligible and taking Free School Meals (FSM), while in West Northamptonshire, 11.1% (7,397 pupils) of all pupils are eligible and taking FSM, which is below the 16.2% average for 59 local authorities, nationally, but in absolute terms equates to an extra 1,503 and 1,409 more pupils than the national average, respectively¹. There is a learning and development gap between children and young people that are eligible and are not eligible for FSM, with 57% of Key Stage 1 pupils eligible for FSM achieving a good level of development compared to 74% of pupils not eligible for FSM, in 2019. Despite FSM offering some financial relief to families during term-time, its absence during school holidays can leave children and young people at risk of experiencing further inequalities. The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme was created to reduce this 'holiday experience gap' by providing free holiday clubs, which aim to reduce food insecurities and provide vital learning and development opportunities for FSM eligible children and young people.

In 2021, Northamptonshire Sport co-ordinated the first year of local HAF programme provision. The University of Northampton evaluated the Summer 2021 local programme to identify the barriers and facilitators to programme delivery and the outcomes on children and their families. The current report evaluates Northamptonshire's Summer 2022 HAF programme, whilst drawing comparisons with the 2021 programme's delivery and the recommendations provided by the 2021 evaluation to understand how they were acted upon.

The current evaluation utilised a mixed-methods approach to investigate the facilitators and barriers to delivery and the outcomes on children and families by aligning the evaluation's objectives with the Government's HAF programme theory of change. Data were collected from co-ordinators, providers, school staff, and parents/carers using a combination of online surveys and focus groups.

Northamptonshire Sport's contract extension to co-ordinate the HAF programme provided a longer lead-in time, which overcame many of the issues experienced in Summer 2021. There was a greater offer of healthy food and nutrition education to children by holiday club providers in comparison to Summer 2021, with providers utilising the online nutrition education resources that Northamptonshire Sport commissioned in response to recommendations from the Summer 2021 evaluation.

Areas for further investigation include the enhancement of school engagement with the HAF programme, understanding non-attendance and methods to reduce non-attendance at holiday clubs, improving provider's communication with parents so they are more aware of and play a more active role in the HAF programme, ensuring holiday club providers are suitably staffed to support children with special educational needs, and signposting families to wider support networks and groups that they can engage with outside of the HAF programme provision. Notably, communication is a central theme to these recommendations.

In North Northamptonshire, 24% of eligible children and young people attended the HAF Programme. In West Northamptonshire, 30% of eligible children and young people attended the HAF Programme. Countywide this represents 27% of eligible children attending the HAF programme. A near doubling of uptake from the Summer 2021 HAF programme (15.2%).

Within the Summer 2022 evaluation, it was evident that Northamptonshire Sport made a concerted effort with the longer lead-in time to act on recommendations to improve the quality and consistency of holiday club provision across Northamptonshire, which subsequently led to greater engagement with the programme. The HAF programme clearly supports vulnerable families and funding for the programme should continue in the future.

¹ LG Inform (2022). Percentage of all pupils known to be eligible for free school meals in North Northamptonshire. URL: https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=17655&mod-period=2&mod-area=E06000061&mod-group=AllUnitaryLalnCountry_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup.

Background

Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme

The school holidays can be a stressful period for some families, with increased financial pressures due to additional costs (e.g., food, childcare, activities, days out) and reduced income¹. This is especially the case for children from low-income families, with many facing moderate food insecurity² and isolation³ in the holiday periods. Children and young people from families in receipt of State benefits are eligible for Free School Meals (FSM), which offer some financial relief during term-time but leave children at risk of experiencing further inequalities through the school holidays. The national number of children eligible for FSM has increased by 1.7% since January 2021, equating to an extra 160,000 pupils⁴. During the summer of 2022, the country incurred a cost-of-living crisis with record levels of inflation⁵ after the challenges of the Covid-19 pandemic. Subsequently, these societal issues placed financial strain on a substantial proportion of the population, which led to a rise in the number of children facing food insecurities⁶, and an increased use of foodbanks and food charities⁷. The Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme was piloted in 2018 in response to such rising issues, with the aim of addressing food insecurities and reducing the learning and development gap between children and young people from disadvantaged backgrounds, compared to those from less disadvantaged backgrounds⁸.

In 2021, the HAF programme was rolled out across all upper tier local authorities in England. Following the success of the 2021 provision, the Government announced that the HAF programme would receive a further investment of over £200 million per year for the next three financial years⁹. This funding would enable local authorities to co-ordinate the provision of healthy food and enrichment activities for school aged children in receipt of FSM. In 2022, the required provision had been increased to span the entirety of the six-week summer holiday period. The Government created eight main aims (Box 1) and a framework of standards for holiday club providers (Table 1), to ensure children and families received high-quality and consistent provision across the country.

¹ Stewart, H., Watson, N., & Campbell, M. (2018). The cost of school holidays for children from low income families. *Childhood*, 25(4), pp. 516-29.

² Shinwell, J., & Defeyter, M, A. (2021). Food insecurity: A constant factor in the lives of low-income families in Scotland and England. *Frontiers in Public Health*, 9, 588254.

³ Kellogg's Foundation (2015). Isolation and Hunger: the reality of the school holidays for struggling families.

⁴ Department for education (2022). Schools, pupils and their characteristics [online]. Available from: <https://explore-education-statistics.service.gov.uk/find-statistics/school-pupils-and-their-characteristics>.

⁵ BBC (2022). Inflation: Fuel, milk, and eggs push prices up at fastest rate in 40 years [online]. Available from: <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/business-62233571>.

⁶ The food foundation (2022). Food Insecurity Tracking [online]. Available from: <https://www.foodfoundation.org.uk/initiatives/food-insecurity-tracking>.

⁷ The Trussell Trust (2021). State of hunger. Building the evidence on poverty, destitution, and food insecurity in the UK [online]. Available from: <https://www.trusselltrust.org/wp-content/uploads/sites/2/2021/05/State-of-Hunger-2021-Report-Final.pdf>.

⁸ Long, M., Stretesky, P., Graham, P., Palmer, K., Steinbock, E. and Defeyter, M. (2017). The impact of holiday clubs on household food insecurity – A pilot study. *Health and Social Care in the Community*. 26, 2. P261-269.

⁹ HM Treasury. (2021). Autumn budget and spending review 2021: A stronger economy for the British people. (HC 822). [online]. Surrey: HH Associates Ltd. Available from: https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/1043688/Budget_AB2021_Print.pdf.

Government aims for the HAF programme

Box 1. Government HAF programme aims

As a result of this programme, the Government aims for children who attend this provision to:

1. Eat healthily over the school holidays
2. Be active during the school holidays
3. Take part in engaging and enriching activities which support the development of resilience, character, and wellbeing along with their wider educational attainment
4. Be safe and not to be socially isolated
5. Have a greater knowledge of health and nutrition
6. Be more engaged with school and other local services

The Government also aims for the families who engage with the programme to:

7. Develop their understanding of nutrition and food budgeting
8. Be signposted towards other information and support, for example, health, employment, and education

Government standards for the HAF programme

Table 1. Government framework of standards

Standard	Expectation
Food	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providers must provide at least one meal a day (breakfast, lunch, or tea) and all food provided at the club (including snacks) must meet school food standards. - Expectation that the majority of food served is hot. Although it is acknowledged that on occasion this will not be possible and cold food should be used where appropriate. - All food must comply with food preparation regulations and take into account any allergies, dietary requirements, and religious or cultural requirements for food. - Local authorities should ensure that the providers they work with, where applicable, are registered as a food business to provide reassurance that food standards are being met. - Local authorities should ensure that all food provision for the HAF programme meets the updated food information regulations 2014 – changes applicable from Oct 2021.
Enrichment activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Holiday clubs must provide fun and enriching activities that provide children with opportunities to develop new skills/knowledge, consolidate existing skills/knowledge, try out new experiences, and have fun and socialise. - These activities could include (but are not limited to) physical activities, creative activities, experiences (e.g. nature walk), or free play.
Physical activities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All children and young people (CYP) should engage in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity for an average of at least 60 minutes per day. This can include active travel, free play, and sports. - CYP should engage in a variety of types and intensities of physical activity to develop movement skills, muscular fitness, and bone strength. - CYP should aim to minimise the amount of time spent being sedentary, and when physically possible should break up long periods of not moving with at least light physical activity.
Nutritional education	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providers must include an element of nutritional education each day aimed at improving knowledge and awareness of healthy eating for children. This could be through activities such as, getting children involved in food preparation and cooking, growing fruit and vegetables, taste tests, discussing food and nutrition or including food and nutrition in other activities.
Food education for families and carers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providers are expected to provide weekly training and advice sessions for parents, carers, or other family members. These should provide advice on how to source, prepare, and cook nutritious and low-cost food.
Signposting and referrals	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Providers should be able to provide information, signposting or referrals to other services or support that would benefit the children and families who attend their provision.
Policies and procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - All organisations and individuals involved in the delivery of the HAF programme must be able to demonstrate that they have in place relevant and appropriate policies and procedures for, safeguarding, health and safety, insurance policies, and accessibility and inclusiveness.

Local context – Northamptonshire

Northamptonshire is organised into two unitary authorities – North Northamptonshire and West Northamptonshire – with a combined population of over 750,000¹ (approximately 350,000 and 400,000, respectively). North Northamptonshire is comprised of four districts, Corby, East Northamptonshire, Kettering, and Wellingborough², with West Northamptonshire covering, Daventry, Northampton, and South Northamptonshire³.

Of the 750,000 people in Northamptonshire, 188,000¹ are aged 0-19 years (split by unitary authority, approximately 87,000 in North Northamptonshire and 101,000 in West Northamptonshire). In North Northamptonshire, 13.4% (7,491 pupils) of all pupils are eligible and taking FSM, while in West Northamptonshire, 11.1% (7,397 pupils) of all pupils are eligible and taking FSM, which is below the 16.2% average for 59 local authorities, nationally, but in absolute terms equates to an extra 1,503 and 1,409 more pupils than the national average (5,988 pupils), respectively⁴.

In 2021, Northamptonshire Sport (a physical activity, health, and wellbeing charity working with both unitary authorities) was commissioned by Northamptonshire Public Health to co-ordinate the first year of the Summer HAF programme. This engaged 2,490 children and young people (15.2% of FSM eligible pupils)⁵ across 103 different locations. An evaluation of this provision found several government aims were met but the impact was limited by a number of factors. Notable shortcomings were the lack of priority given to healthy eating and nutrition education, little targeted provision for older children, and foremost, the short lead-in time for providers and co-ordinators because of the late awarding of the HAF programme contracts. These issues were consistent across the national HAF programme provision⁶, which led to updated guidance to overcome these issues in the Summer 2022 provision. Northamptonshire Sport has managed the local HAF programme for two-years, which has allowed them and the holiday club providers to develop their processes and provisions to enhance the offer to the local community and reach a larger percentage of FSM eligible pupils.

The HAF programme evaluation

The University of Northampton led the evaluation of Northamptonshire's Summer 2022 HAF programme. This evaluation report incorporates the experiences of multiple parties, such as co-ordinators, providers, school staff, and parents/carers, to assess the impact of the programme on family health and wellbeing, as well as reflect on the implementation of the 2021 local recommendations.

¹ Office for National Statistics [ONS] (2021). Population estimates mid-2020 to April-21. Available from: <https://www.ons.gov.uk/filter-outputs/3849a544-0476-4bd1-b4a8-16b6abbcefd1>.

² Northamptonshire County Council (2019). Indices of Multiple Deprivation [IMD] 2019 Profile: *North Northamptonshire (proposed unitary)*.

³ Northamptonshire County Council (2019). IMD 2019 profile: *West Northamptonshire (propose unitary)*.

⁴ LG Inform (2022). Percentage of all pupils known to be eligible for free school meals in North Northamptonshire. URL:

https://lginform.local.gov.uk/reports/lgastandard?mod-metric=17655&mod-period=2&mod-area=E06000061&mod-group=AllUnitaryLainCountry_England&mod-type=namedComparisonGroup.

⁵ Bayes, N., Stringer, A., Bradley, S., Kay, A.D., Jones, P., and Ryan, D.J. (2021). Evaluation report – Holiday activities and food programme for Northamptonshire Sport, full report. University of Northampton, Northampton, United Kingdom. URL: <https://pure.northampton.ac.uk/en/publications/evaluation-report-holidayactivities-amp-food-programme-for-north-2>.

⁶ Campbell-Jack, D., et al. (2020). Evaluation of the 2019 holiday activities and food programme. URL:

https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/945255/Evaluation_of_the_2019_holiday_activities_and_food_programme_-_December_2020.pdf.

Methods

Evaluation aims and objectives

There were three main aims to this evaluation:

1. Assess the ability of Northamptonshire’s Summer 2022 HAF programme to meet the aims and standards set out by the Government (outcome evaluation),
2. Assess the facilitators and barriers to implementing the HAF programme in Northamptonshire, and identify recommendations for future provision (process evaluation),
3. Map changes in HAF programme delivery compared to the recommendations in the 2021 local evaluation.

As part of the Government’s evaluation of the Summer 2021 HAF programme, a theory of change was developed¹ (Figure 1). The theory of change illustrates the actions (‘inputs’, ‘activities’, and ‘outputs’) required to achieve the intended outcomes of the HAF programme.

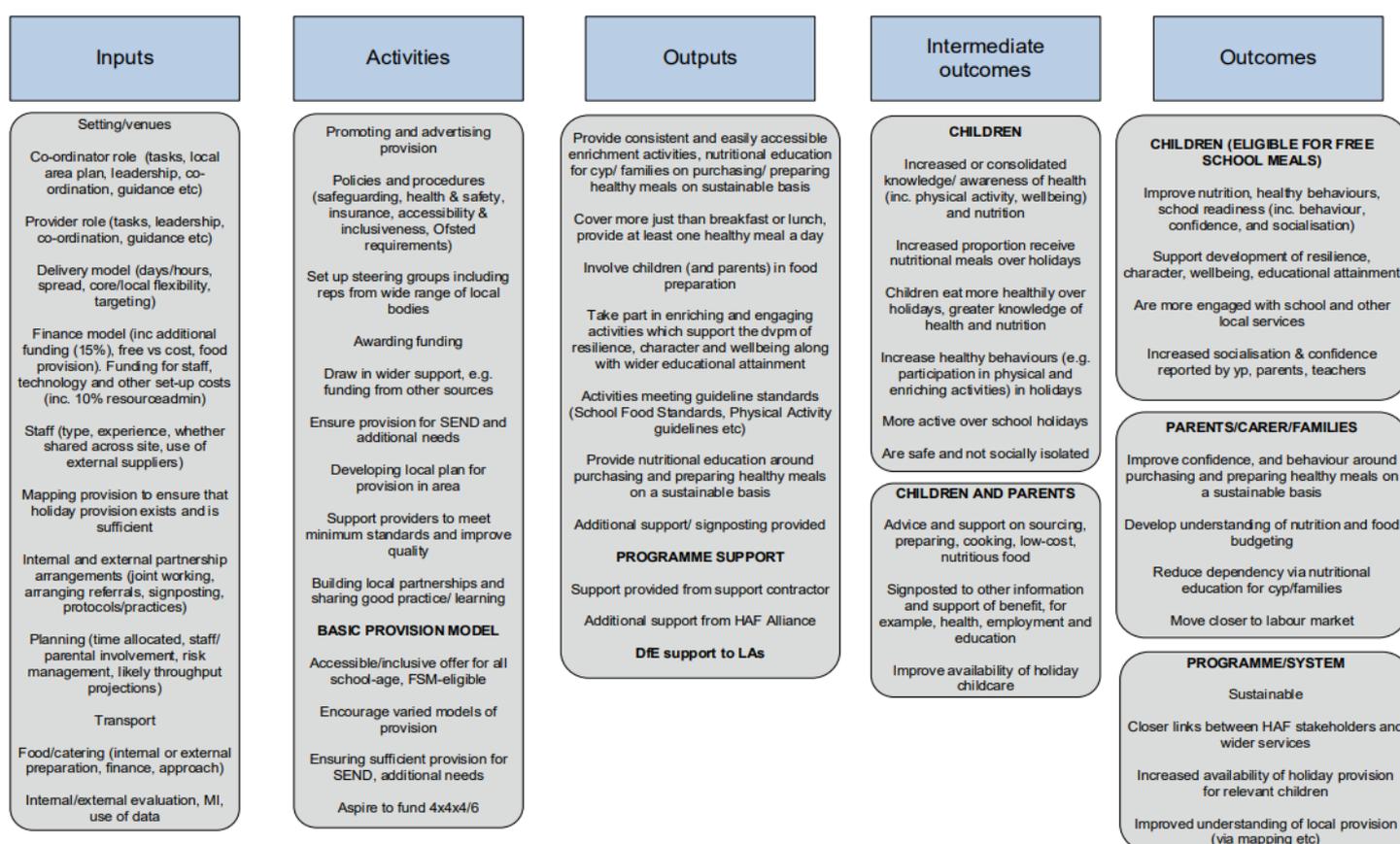


Figure 1. Theory of change from the 2021 Government HAF programme evaluation

To address the evaluation aims of the current report, evaluation objectives were aligned with the Government’s theory of change (Figure 1) to create consistency and comparability with the national evaluation. Table 2 outlines the alignment of evaluation objectives and against theory of change actions and outcomes.

¹ Department for Education (2022). Evaluation of the 2021 holiday activities and food programme. Research report. URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-the-2021-holiday-activities-and-food-programme>.

Table 2. Evaluation objectives mapped against the theory of change model

	Actions			Outcomes		
	Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Children	Parents/carers	Programme/System
Evaluation Objective	1. To examine what input factors facilitated or impeded the co-ordination and implementation of the programme.	2. To examine what factors facilitated or impeded the delivery of the programme activities.	3. To examine the extent that the HAF programme met the standards outline by the Government.	5. To examine the changes in CYP nutrition, healthy behaviours, and school readiness.	9. To examine the changes in parent/carers confidence and behaviour around healthy meals.	12. To examine the sustainability of the HAF programme.
				6. To examine the development of resilience, character, wellbeing, and educational attainment.	10. To examine the development of nutrition and food budgeting knowledge.	13. To examine opportunities to develop links between HAF stakeholders and wider services.
			4. To examine what factors facilitated or impeded the implementation of the programme and the attainment of outcomes.	7. To examine opportunities to engage with school and other local services.	11. To examine nutritional education opportunities.	14. To examine changes in holiday provision for eligible children.
				8. To examine opportunities for socialisation and develop confidence.		

Data collection

Ethical approval for the evaluation was provided by the Faculty of Arts, Science, and Technology Ethics Committee, University of Northampton. Informed written consent was provided by parents/carers, providers, and co-ordinators.

Focus groups

To ensure data captured the experiences of providers and parents across both unitary authorities, 12 providers were selected to attend and facilitate the arrangement of focus groups. Each district was represented by one to two holiday clubs from a range of venues (Table 3). These clubs were based in sport clubs ($n = 1$), community centres ($n = 2$), leisure centres ($n = 2$), schools and colleges ($n = 5$), soft play centres ($n = 1$), and art and creative centres ($n = 1$).

Table 3. Breakdown of holiday clubs and participants associated with each data collection phase

Holiday club number	Location	Unitary authority	Number of participants per data collection phase (n)	
			Parents focus groups	Providers focus groups
1	East Northants	North Northamptonshire	4	1
2	East Northants	North Northamptonshire	3	1
3	Wellingborough	North Northamptonshire	5	2
4	Corby	North Northamptonshire	3	1
5	Wellingborough	North Northamptonshire	3	1
6	Kettering	North Northamptonshire	5	1
7	Northampton	West Northamptonshire	2	1
8	Kettering	North Northamptonshire	1	1
9	Corby	North Northamptonshire	0	3
10	Daventry	West Northamptonshire	0	1
11	Daventry	West Northamptonshire	0	1
12	Northampton	West Northamptonshire	0	1
Total number of participants:			26	15

Note: Holiday Clubs 9, 10, 11, & 12 were unable to recruit participants for the parent focus groups.

Providers focus group

The 12 targeted HAF programme providers were invited to take part in online focus groups via Microsoft Teams towards the end of programme delivery (22nd August – 6th September). Three focus groups and one interview (due to lack of availability of one of the participants) were conducted with a total of 15 participants from 12 different providers (7 women, 8 men; Table 3). Participants were from a range of roles including camp directors, head coaches, and youth development officers. The focus groups lasted an average of 60 minutes. A semi-structured approach was adopted, with questions aimed at facilitating discussions surrounding their experiences and opinions of the HAF programme. The purpose of the focus groups was to understand what worked well in the delivery of the programme and what could be improved for future provision.

Providers focus group	
Used to assess evaluation objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 2. To examine what factors facilitated or impeded the delivery of the programme activities (Activities). 4. To examine what factors facilitated or impeded the implementation of the programme and the attainment of outcomes (Outputs). 12. To examine the sustainability of the HAF programme (Programme/System). 13. To examine opportunities to develop links between HAF stakeholders and wider services (Programme/System).

Parents focus group

Parents/carers from the 12 targeted HAF programme providers were invited to take part in a focus group, at the holiday club delivery venue, to discuss their experience of engaging in the HAF programme. Recruitment of parents to focus groups was facilitated by the providers, who advertised a focus group date and time, and encouraged parent engagement. Six focus groups, three one-to-one interviews and one two-person interview, were conducted with parents from eight different holiday club delivery venues between 15th August – 20th September (Table 3). A total of 26 parents engaged in this stage of data collection, with the focus groups lasting an average of 30 minutes. A semi-structured approach was adopted, with questions covering outcomes of the programme (food, enrichment activities, nutritional education, and physical activity) and the impact this had (if at all) on themselves, their child, and their family.

Parents focus group	
Used to assess evaluation objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 6. To examine the development of resilience, character, wellbeing, and educational attainment (Children Outcome). 9. To examine the changes in parent/carers confidence and behaviour around healthy meals (Parent Outcome). 10. To examine the development of nutrition and food budgeting knowledge (Parent Outcome). 11. To examine nutritional education opportunities (Parent Outcome).

Co-ordinators focus group

At the end of the programme, co-ordinators of the HAF programme were invited to an online focus group to discuss their experiences of the programme's delivery. Five participants engaged in the focus group (held on 16th September; lasting 81 minutes). Four participants were co-ordinator staff members involved in the programme, from management to administrative roles, and one participant was from Children's Services. A semi-structured approach was adopted, with questions aimed at facilitating discussion around their experiences of planning and preparation, implementation, delivery, outcomes, and reflections of the Summer 2022 HAF programme. Prompts were used to gather insight on what worked well, what could be improved, and any differences to the Summer 2021 delivery.

Co-ordinators focus group	
Used to assess evaluation objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To examine what input factors facilitated or impeded the co-ordination and implementation of the programme (Inputs). 2. To examine what factors facilitated or impeded the delivery of the programme activities (Activities). 4. To examine what factors facilitated or impeded the implementation of the programme and the attainment of outcomes (Outputs). 13. To examine opportunities to develop links between HAF stakeholders and wider services (Programme/System).

Online surveys

Providers survey

Providers of the HAF programme were invited to complete an online survey relating to their experience of the co-ordination and delivery of the programme. The co-ordinator facilitated recruitment by emailing the online survey link to the 48 HAF programme providers towards the end of delivery (22nd August - 30th September). The survey used a combination of open-ended and multiple-choice questions, with opportunities to expand on selected answers. The survey comprised of 20 optional questions relating to:

- Planning and preparation
- Strengths of delivery
- Areas for improvement of delivery
- Recommendations for next year

The survey was completed by 31 providers, five of which indicated that Summer 2022 was their first experience of delivering the HAF programme. Twelve of the respondents delivered their holiday clubs in North Northamptonshire, 18 respondents delivered their holiday clubs in West Northamptonshire, and one provider delivered holiday clubs across both unitary authorities.

Providers survey	
Used to assess evaluation objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 3. To examine the extent that the HAF programme met the standards outline by the Government (Outputs). 4. To examine what factors facilitated or impeded the implementation of the programme and the attainment of outcomes (Outputs). 14. To examine changes in holiday provision for eligible children (Programme/System).

Parents survey

All parents who booked their child onto a HAF programme holiday club were invited to complete an online survey towards the end of delivery (22nd August - 30th September), irrespective of whether their child attended any sessions. The co-ordinator facilitated recruitment by emailing the 4,213 parents who registered on the HAF programme online booking system (significant email bounce-back occurred however). Two surveys were created, one for engaged parents (whose children attended a booked HAF programme holiday club) and one for non-engaged parents (whose children did not attend their pre-booked HAF programme holiday clubs). Surveys used a combination of open-ended and multiple-choice questions, with opportunities to expand on selected answers. 'Non-engaged parents' acted as a comparator group to draw comparisons with 'engaged parents' for child health and wellbeing outcomes, where possible. The survey comprised of 36 optional questions focussed on the HAF provision:

- Support healthy eating
- Provide a range of physical and enrichment activities
- Provide a safe and socially inclusive environment
- Provide education on healthy lifestyles
- Support engagement with school and local services
- Provide nutrition and meal planning support to families
- Provide signposting to wider services
- Basic demographic information

The engaged parent survey was completed by 71 parents. The non-engaged parent survey was completed by 111 parents however, there were several occurrences where the non-engaged survey went to engaged parents incorrectly. Making it difficult to draw comparisons between respondents. Survey respondent demographics are provided in Table 4.

Table 4. Parent demographics of those who completed the 'engaged' and 'not engaged' survey

	Engaged in the HAF programme	Not engaged in the HAF programme
Unitary Authority		
West Northamptonshire	62.7% ^a	58.5% ^b
North Northamptonshire	37.3% ^a	41.5% ^b
Parent Ethnicity		
Asian or Asian British	2.9%	1.7%
Black or Black British	4.4%	6.9%
Mixed Ethnicity	5.9%	3.5%
White	86.8%	87.9%
Parent Religion		
Christian	37.3%	33.3%
Hindu	1.5%	1.8%
Muslim	1.5%	1.8%
Another Religion	3%	3.5%
No Religion	56.7%	59.6%
Children with SEN*		
Yes	38%	61%
No	56.4%	37.3%
Not Sure	5.6%	1.7%

Note: ^a 51 postcodes provided, ^b 41 postcodes provided. * Special educational needs.

Parent Survey	
Used to assess evaluation objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 5. To examine the changes in CYP nutrition, healthy behaviours, and school readiness (Children Outcome). 6. To examine the development of resilience, character, wellbeing, and educational attainment (Children Outcome). 7. To examine opportunities to engage with school and other local services (Children Outcome). 8. To examine opportunities for socialisation and develop confidence (Children Outcome). 9. To examine the changes in parent/carers confidence and behaviour around healthy meals (Parent Outcome) 10. To examine the development of nutrition and food budgeting knowledge (Parent Outcome). 11. To examine nutritional education opportunities (Parent Outcome).

School staff survey

The co-ordinators invited all schools in the county to support the advertising and delivery of the HAF programme, with around 50% of schools actively supporting the HAF programme and the other 50% engaged in varying degrees from mild to none. Last year's evaluation identified schools as a key gatekeeper to help families engage with the HAF programme¹. As such, the co-ordinators distributed a school staff survey to 570 contacts to investigate the views and experiences of school staff involved with the HAF programme advertisement and referral process.

Schools that were involved as a referral organisation for the HAF programme were invited via email to complete an online survey towards the end of delivery (22nd September - 7th October). The co-ordinator facilitated recruitment by contacting the school staff member who was responsible for supporting the HAF programme (not always fully identified or role shared between staff members) to share the online survey link. The survey comprised of 16 optional questions that gathered information about the school and the staff member's role, alongside feedback on their experience of advertising and facilitating engagement with the programme. A combination of open-ended and multiple-choice questions were used, with opportunities to expand on selected answers.

The survey was completed by 18 staff members in a range of roles, mainly administrators ($n = 4$) or family support workers ($n = 6$), with 38.9% from North Northamptonshire and 61.1% from West Northamptonshire.

School staff survey	
Used to assess evaluation objectives:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. To examine what input factors facilitated or impeded the co-ordination and implementation of the programme (Inputs). 4. To examine what factors facilitated or impeded the implementation of the programme and the attainment of outcomes (Outputs).

¹ Bayes, N., Stringer, A., Bradley, S., Kay, A.D., Jones, P., and Ryan, D.J. (2021). Evaluation report – Holiday activities and food programme for Northamptonshire Sport, full report. University of Northampton, Northampton, United Kingdom. URL: <https://pure.northampton.ac.uk/en/publications/evaluation-report-holidayactivities-amp-food-programme-for-north-2>.

Data analysis

Focus groups

All focus groups were recorded and transcribed verbatim. The transcripts were analysed using the six steps of thematic analysis outlined by Braun & Clarke¹. A deductive approach was adopted, using the theory of change² to guide coding.

Online surveys

Descriptive statistics for demographic questions were calculated. Multiple-choice questions were presented by percentage split and open-ended questions were analysed using a deductive approach to thematic analysis.

It is important to note that the recruitment method for data collection likely biased responses to the most engaged parties and therefore, the findings drawn from the data represent these parties and not necessarily the views of everyone involved in the HAF programme.

¹ Braun, V. and Clarke, V. (2006). Using thematic analysis in psychology. *Qualitative Research in Psychology*, 3, 2. p77-101.

² Department for Education (2022). Evaluation of the 2021 holiday activities and food programme. Research report. URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/evaluation-of-the-2021-holiday-activities-and-food-programme>.

Findings

Inputs

Objective 1 - To examine what input factors facilitated or impeded the co-ordination and implementation of the programme - views from the co-ordinators focus group and school staff survey

HAF programme mapping

As the co-ordinators moved into the second year of the HAF programme, they have been able to build a consistent network of holiday club providers. The co-ordinators' day-to-day operation as an Active Partnership allowed them to regularly engage with local charities, community groups, and organisations, which facilitated their ability to fill geographical gaps in their HAF programme provision. Figure 2 (left panel) displays the 125 delivery venues for the Summer 2022 HAF programme, delivered by 48 providers. Eleven percent of the delivery venues were within lower layer super output areas that were the most deprived (deciles 1 – 3) for Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI) (Figure 2 right panel):

“There are some fairly constant people within that network of providers, but we're adding people and we're dropping people or people are dropping...But we are constantly looking for new providers. So [Participant name], mentioned our community team, you know they're working in lots of local areas of deprivation and they're looking for groups and charities and organisations.”

- Co-ordinators focus group

Of the 31 provider survey respondents, there were only five that were part of the HAF programme for the first time in Summer 2022 (three in North Northamptonshire, one is West Northamptonshire). Most providers, who completed the survey, had delivered three phases of the HAF programme prior to the Summer 2022 programme and 67% were existing holiday clubs that applied for further HAF programme funding to expand their offer, demonstrating that the co-ordinators had secured consistency in holiday club delivery and had experienced HAF programme providers.

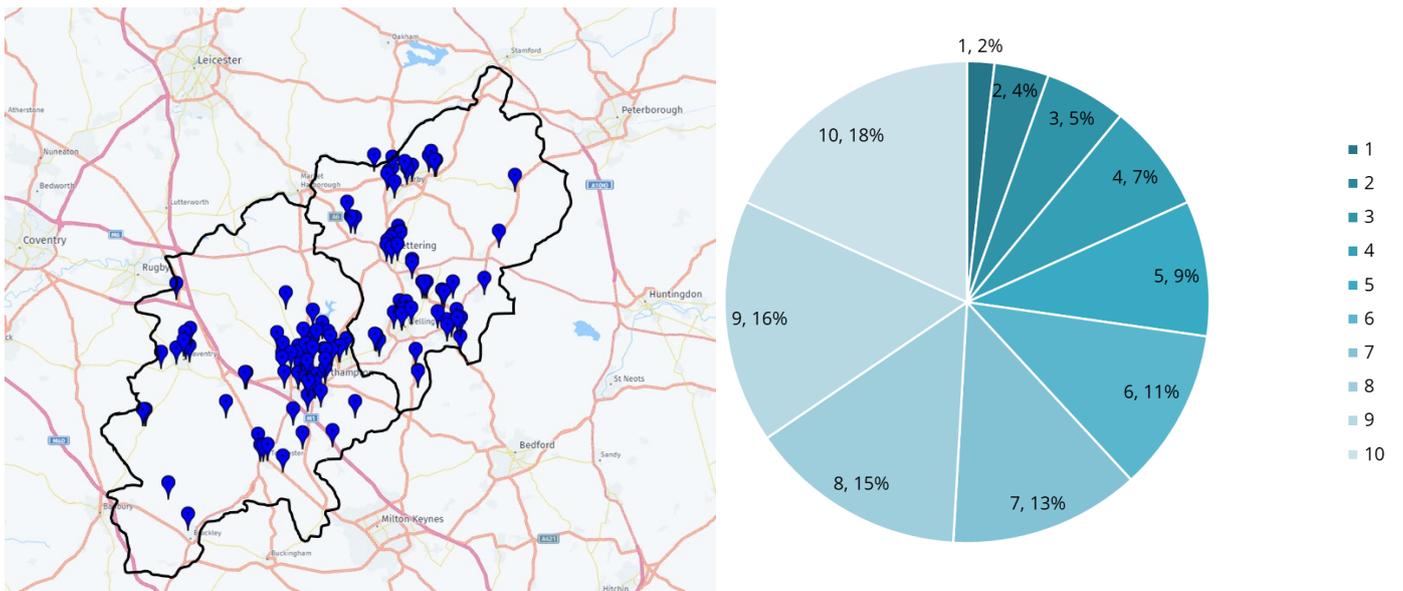


Figure 2. Left: Map of HAF programme delivery venues in North and West Northamptonshire. Right: Delivery venue postcode lower layer super output area decile for Income Deprivation Affecting Children Index (IDACI), 1 - most deprived, 10 - least deprived

2021 recommendation	Steps taken/improvements in 2022
Consideration should be given to the idea that HAF Programme funding could be provided to Holiday Clubs that already have an existing programme offer, and therefore, the HAF Programme can extend the offer while benefitting from the existing resources and provision that is already in place.	The co-ordinators have built a network of holiday club providers who they have retained over numerous HAF programme phases, which has built experience and consistency in the local offer. The co-ordinators continue to fill geographical gaps in HAF programme provision by identifying suitable charities and organisations to fund.

Lead-in time

The co-ordinators spoke of various factors that influenced their ability to successfully implement the HAF programme. A notable input was the financing of the programme, suggesting it generally “went a lot more smoothly this year” compared to last year due to the greater lead-in time and learnt experiences. Although, there were some challenges, such as adapting scheduled payments to support smaller providers who were forced to pay suppliers, venues and staff, up front, which led to cash flow issues. Co-ordinators noted that they were able to be flexible and quick in making those payments since “we’re fortunate we’ve got a sort of a bit of money in the bank, as it were. We’ve got a bit of flow”. They cautioned that this may be an issue if a smaller organisation were to co-ordinate the HAF programme in the future.

The greater lead-in time coupled with their contract extension meant co-ordinators felt they were better able to plan, by creating a project plan for the programme that “covers everything through recruitment of providers, communication with schools, social media marketing comms.” An obstacle in their planning that potentially impeded the implementation of the programme was the difficulty engaging schools. Co-ordinators identified the challenge of identifying the right member of staff within schools:

“It’s a different role in every school...knowing who that person is a challenge.”

– Co-ordinators focus group

2021 recommendation	Steps taken/improvements in 2022
It is recommended that the awarding of the HAF Programme contract be announced sooner by central government in order for local authorities and Holiday providers to have more time to effectively plan and implement their HAF Programme provision (e.g. the Programme marketing, signing up and booking, gathering the resources needed, building relationships with gatekeepers and food and activity partners, etc.).	The co-ordinators were awarded a one-year extension to their management contract for the HAF programme, which provided funding certainty that allowed the co-ordinators to begin planning earlier than they did in the previous year.

School engagement

Schools are the best link to reach pupils who are eligible for the HAF programme, thus the co-ordinators were constantly working to develop these contacts. This summer, the co-ordinators were in contact with all schools in the county, with HAF programme attendance representing 301 schools. Most school staff members (staff survey, 18 respondents) indicated having a 'good' (50%) or 'very good' (27.8%) relationship with the co-ordinators, praising the prompt responses to any queries raised. School staff survey respondents stated that the 'free-access codes' and information materials were delivered with plenty of time to distribute the codes to eligible children and that identifying eligibility was a clear and simple process by using the school's local data:

"The flyers were helpful to share with eligible families to explain the programme. I could then follow up with a call or in person to support them to access the available bookings."

- School staff survey, West Northamptonshire school

"A presentation by [the co-ordinator] at a networking event explained the programme and they were able to answer questions about the finer details. This then helped us at school to better understand the process and to support families to access the programme."

- School staff survey, North Northamptonshire school

However, the co-ordinators acknowledged that, generally, schools were reluctant to accept leafleted information and that schools did not pass on information about the HAF programme straight away, opting instead to wait until the end of term. This caused timing issues for parents trying to access their 'free-access code' so they could book onto holiday clubs when the online booking system went live:

"They will sit on the information. So, despite the fact that you say these things are going live, places are limited. They will sit on it for weeks sometimes and there seems to be no real kind of thing that we can do to trigger them along on that."

-Co-ordinators focus group

This year, the HAF programme was passed over from local Public Health to Children's Services "to make better links with other children services in schools and I don't think we made best use of that, as in 'we', the council". Leveraging local authority networks is something that can be improved upon in the future delivery to ensure that schools understand the importance of their role to enable the HAF programme to reach as many eligible children as possible, as the co-ordinators stated, "the single biggest challenge... is how we communicate the information to parents and engage in schools in that process."

2021 recommendation	Steps taken/improvements in 2022
It is recommended that schools assign a core member to deliver the responsibilities assigned to schools as key gatekeepers of the HAF Programme in order to support co-ordinator planning.	This happened in most schools, but it was a different role/title in each school, which made it difficult for co-ordinators to get information to the right person.
It is recommended that co-ordinators reach out to Bursar's within schools to assist Providers in making relationships.	Administrators and Family Support Workers were the most frequent responders to the school staff survey. Each school may allocate the HAF programme to a different staff member and thus early communication and relationship building is required to identify the most suitable member of staff.
It is recommended that when marketing the HAF Programme, the Programme gatekeepers (particularly schools) need to provide sufficient information to parents to make it clear what the HAF Programme is and exactly what families can use the codes for.	Co-ordinators made a greater investment in resource and time to promote the HAF programme to schools and special educational needs co-ordinators by providing leaflets, presentations, meetings, and emails.
It is recommended that schools should be provided with more information about the HAF Programme, what the role of the school will be and what to expect to happen as part of this role.	Co-ordinators made a concerted effort to engage schools, but they could be better supported by the local authorities to ensure schools understand that they are the pivotal link between the HAF programme and FSM eligible children.

Food provision

The final factor that impeded the successful implementation of the HAF programme was the food provision:

“The biggest issue is capacity of organisations who specialise in providing hot food, wanting to do it.”

-Co-ordinators focus group

Co-ordinators noted that most school caterers do not or will not work during the holiday periods as their staff are on holiday or they conduct deep cleans of kitchens after operating through term time. They stressed that they are working “to improve that the quality of the variability of hot food in particular” but struggle to find external suppliers that are willing to support the HAF programme. Many suppliers are restricted by how long food can be in transit before it no longer meets food hygiene standards, thus local provision is necessary. However, caterers that can supply meals, usually require upfront payment for a set number of meals, which is a financial risk for holiday club providers as not all booked places will be attended.

Activities

Objective 2 - To examine what factors facilitated or impeded the delivery of the programme activities - views from the co-ordinators focus group and providers focus group

Provider training

To facilitate successful delivery of the HAF programme, co-ordinators hosted training sessions for providers. These covered all aspects of HAF programme provision, such as physical activity, safeguarding, and health and safety but also “based on last year's evaluation, we have concentrated on nutrition”. Co-ordinators voiced their frustrations in relation to poor attendance of training sessions, despite providers expressing a need for them:

“You know what more can we do because we trained you, we give you resources. We spent thousands of pounds getting recipes and resources developed by this company. But I can't make you use it.”

- Co-ordinators focus group

In the focus groups, providers were grateful for the training offered by the co-ordinators as the training enabled them to work towards their aims of providing a holistic offer to children, but were disappointed with the low attendance rates to the training:

“In terms of support for a new provider, they [the co-ordinators] put on so many training sessions for us to access, which were fantastic, and I had a lot of new, inexperienced staff that were working with me that I wanted to put through that training, which was great. The sad thing about it, every training session I went on, only six other people were there, and you go out of all the providers in Northamptonshire...I thought it was really good training and you don't go to too much good training nowadays, do you? So, it was nice to go to good training.”

- Providers focus group 2

Some of the providers suggested that missed internal communications led to staff missing opportunities to engage with training opportunities, which they would have valued attending:

“My business partner gets the e-mail and obviously hasn't forwarded on to me because he's just recently had a baby himself. So, he's been dealing with his family situation with new home and all that sort of thing. Had I'd seen the training videos I would have put my head coaches onto those sorts of courses help spread awareness.”

-Providers focus group 2

Besides online training sessions, providers were also using online resources to develop the offer of their programme, with ‘Change4Life’ being a popular source of information. Providers felt that the majority of supporting resources can be found online and thus, signposting to these resources would be recommended.

“We looked at ‘Change4Life’ on their sort of website, I know they're quite like kid friendly as well, got all the cartoon little figures and stuff. We often like take a few wordsearches off there for like the more creative kids and obviously going off the government website as well using the healthy eating plate, literally just grabbing and taking them templates really.”

-Providers focus group 1

2021 recommendation	Steps taken/improvements in 2022
There needs to be greater uptake in provider training in relation to improving children's (and parents) knowledge of health and nutrition, to enable them to plan and implement activities that support this aim in future provision.	Co-ordinators worked with a local company to provide training on nutrition and to develop activity resources for providers to use. However, it was implied that attendance of these training sessions and uptake of activity resources was low.
It is recommended that a formal HAF Programme delivery package is developed, which provides training and information resources for Providers to empower them with the skills and confidence to deliver various aspects of the Programme (e.g. safeguarding training, ideas on activities to implement to achieve the HAF programme aims, sensitivity and wellbeing training).	The co-ordinators provided a range of training resources, which included guidance, activity booklets and face-to-face training.

Special educational needs and young person offer

As part of the basic provision model there should be varied and sufficient provision for all FSM eligible children, including teenagers and those with special educational needs (SEN). The co-ordinators and providers spoke of the challenges of establishing a specific teenage offer as most providers are used to working with primary school aged children. It was also suggested that the lack of youth services in the county has added to the struggles as “there is nothing to build on top [of]”:

“When they get somebody who’s fourteen, fifteen, sixteen, they don’t know what to do...then try and give secondary aged kids primary school activities and the kids get bored and don’t go back”.

- Co-ordinators focus group

“I think there is probably bigger push in secondary schools needed and I don't know whether that's just because obviously the audiences are older, and they might have not experienced that sort of camp and maybe it's a bit more of an effort on our part of sort of promoting it and compared to promoting it to parents, who are sort of pushing their younger children to get involved in that sort of thing. And sometimes when they're a bit older, they have a bit more ownership over it and I think we just need to be a bit open to that.”

- Providers focus group 1

The co-ordinators noted that the lack of a specific teenage offer extended nationally again this summer, judging from national meetings that they had attended, and that work needs to be done to understand how to effectively engage teenagers, as existing provision for this age group had low attendance.

In relation to providing a holiday club offer for children who have SEN, some providers highlighted challenges supporting their needs because providers are often not fully informed about the needs of children prior to them arriving at the holiday club, these are discussed further in the Outputs chapter.

2021 recommendation	Steps taken/improvements in 2022
It is recommended that providers start to (or continue to) consider the remit of their provision and try to provide activities that are appropriate for children of a range of age categories.	Appropriate activities for older children continue to be an area for improvement. Even when clubs were offered to older children there was little engagement.

Booking system

The providers focus groups illustrated mixed reviews about the booking system that was used by parents to book their child(ren) onto the HAF programme holiday clubs. Some of the providers reported that parents found the booking system simple to use, and how this simplicity made a positive impact on their overall experience of the programme:

“I did have conversations with parents as well about how easy they found it and obviously how they were like booking on and they've they said it was really easy. It was really efficient and if it wasn't as easy as it was, and they didn't have the codes, and they didn't have the uptake, then they probably wouldn't have enjoyed it as much, and they wouldn't have been willing to sort of sing the praise of the programme because, yes, it's sort of electronic, but they said it was quite simple and they said that that made it easier for them from a parent point of view.”

- Providers focus group 1

In other cases, providers reported that there were challenges using the booking system, which had implications for providers in the delivery of their programme:

“It just doesn't integrate with what we need, particularly with the HAF children is you've got some quite complex needs, and even if they're not medical conditions, the parents need to be able to give us the information. And because we can't access that information through [the online booking system], we felt we were going in blind particularly if a parent phoned us.”

- Providers focus group 3

“Yeah, I got in touch with [the online booking system] and complained about it because it was saying that we were fully booked, and I'd got parents phoning me as an organisation because [the online booking system] itself was saying it was fully booked, but it's not. But it's like you say, some of these families don't have the understanding and knowledge how to do it. Yeah, they don't have those skills. So, we've been managing a lot of that as well. And it's this accessibility for them, to make it easy and ultimately making it the best we can for these vulnerable kids, because that's the whole purpose of HAF, isn't it?”

- Providers focus group 2

One of the providers described a challenge they experience with the booking system, where parents were unable to select food choices for their child using the booking, which causes extra workload for the providers to establish these food choices:

“Our main issue really is around the food choices. So, we do ours on [the online booking system] by the add-ons function. And in the description of the activity that we're delivering, we then give the food choices, but that's not necessarily always translating to them making their choice.

So, you then have to then go back and phone all those participants that haven't made a food choice. And I emailed [the online booking system], and the response I had was that it depends on what device

they're using, which wasn't overly helpful. I said isn't there an easy way they can just click the menu, and they came back to me and then went, 'oh no, the facility doesn't do that. You can't opt for different meals just hot or cold'. And I'm like well then how are we providing the food for all, and you're trying to collect all that information when they come, and it's so difficult because I would try to do that a couple of days in advance. So, we close our bookings then. So, we're ready, so caterers know what we need effectively. But yeah, I think they mentioned if they were booking on a mobile phone and they might not necessarily be able to see the options, which clearly, I guess, most people are trying to book on their phone. We're unable to provide the meal that they want if they don't tell us what they want. But I don't necessarily think it's the participant's fault."

- Providers focus group 2

Overall, the online booking system has improved from the previous year and continued refinement of the online booking system will help enhance accessibility and the information that it supplies to parents and providers.

2021 recommendation	Steps taken/improvements in 2022
It is recommended to consider a non-digital booking alternative so that families without internet access are not missing out and can still benefit from the Programme.	Providers are now given the option to use their own booking systems, be the digital or non-digital.
It is recommended HAF Programme and its booking system needs to be reviewed to ensure the processes are not exclusionary to the most vulnerable families that the Programme is trying to target (e.g. those experiencing digital poverty/exclusion).	Reported issues with the online booking system were mainly related to the functionality of the system for providers, and therefore, refinement of the online booking system needs to continue to improve its functionality and ease of use.

Outputs

Objective 3 - To examine the extent that the HAF programme met the standards outline by the Government - views from the providers survey

AND

Objective 4 - To examine what factors facilitated or impeded the implementation of the programme and the attainment of outcomes - views from the providers survey and focus group, co-ordinators focus group, and school staff survey

Delivery structure

Sixty-two percent of providers self-reported, in the provider survey, that they delivered at least four-weeks of provision in the Summer 2022 HAF programme, with 87% providing at least four-days of provision per week and 96% delivering at least four-hours per session (Table 5). This data shows at even an individual provider level, the expected core offer across the county of 4 hours per day, 4 times a week, across 4-6 weeks was widely attained, demonstrating the co-ordinators provided a strong variety of holiday clubs for parents to choose from across the entirety of the programme. The most common delivery locations were schools, sports complexes, and community centres. Thirty-five percent of holiday clubs were exclusively for FSM eligible children, while the remaining clubs had catered for a mixture of children who pay to attend and free attendance for children on FSM. The majority of the 31 survey respondents catered for children between 5 years of age (minimum age; 48% of respondents) and 11 or 16 years of age (maximum age; 30% of respondents), representing an average age range of 8 years.

Table 5. Individual provider HAF programme provision aligned to the county-wide 4x4x4/6 core offer

Location	Number of weeks of provision					
	1 week	2 weeks	3 weeks	4 weeks	5 weeks	6 weeks
North Northamptonshire	3	2	1	2	1	4
West Northamptonshire	0	3	2	3	4	6
	Number of days per week of provision					
	≤2 days	3 days	4 days	5 days	6 days	7 days
North Northamptonshire	1	1	1	9	1	0
West Northamptonshire	1	1	4	13	0	0
	Number of hours per day of provision					
	≤2 hours	3 hours	4 hours	5 hours	6 hours	≥7 hours
North Northamptonshire	0	0	4	3	5	1
West Northamptonshire	0	1	7	4	3	4

Varied models of provision

In the providers focus groups, providers emphasised that the HAF programme provides an opportunity for them to provide a holistic offer to children and families, rather than address individual needs of children and families, whilst other providers highlighted that they had a main topic in the provision they offer their child attendees, with some leading, for example, in sport and physical activity provision, and others focusing on the arts.

“We’ve come over this way to Northamptonshire for summer and obviously moving forwards it was more sort of the idea of obviously trying to provide the programme to those obviously that needed the free school meals and trying to provide more of a holistic sort of programme to students rather than just maybe one that might be of physical activity and having the HAF programme. Obviously,

we're trying to hit more pillars and rather than just the physical, which obviously with being the children that it's aimed at is quite a big thing. And like I said before, it has been really well received."

- Providers focus group 1

"It's our first year doing it to provide the arts because not everyone's sporty, so we've run an art space camp offering, dance, drama, music, technology and art over the four weeks...So I think historically it's been much more of a sports-based programme and hopefully we've filled the gap a little bit with the different type of provision."

- Providers focus group 2

The providers reflected that overall, the HAF programme offers a wide variety of activities, and the varied offer has been well received by families:

"So, we've had to be quite inventive with the activities and how you do it so that they're getting a variety. But actually, the feedback and stuff we've had has been really positive, so it's worked."

"Yeah, I think I'd say the same. I think the actual programme itself, when you go on [online booking system] there is something for everybody on there. And I think that's quite refreshing to see. It's not just a sports activity. So, I think as a programme we're catering for the needs of everybody and like we're having a lot of families that have come, tried, and then wanting to come back."

-Providers focus group 2

Food provision

All providers self-reported that they delivered at least one meal per day, although these were not always hot meals (Figure 3). The provision of hot meals was fairly similar to the 2021 local evaluation data (36% 'every meal', 4% 'majority of meals', 12% 'even mix', 16% 'some meals', 32% 'no hot meals', of 25 respondents). However, this summer 94% of providers stated that they delivered healthy meals at every session, which is in contrast to 2021, where the short lead-in time meant the providers' priorities were to feed the children, with the healthfulness of the meals being a lower priority.

How frequently did you provide hot meals when delivering your programme?

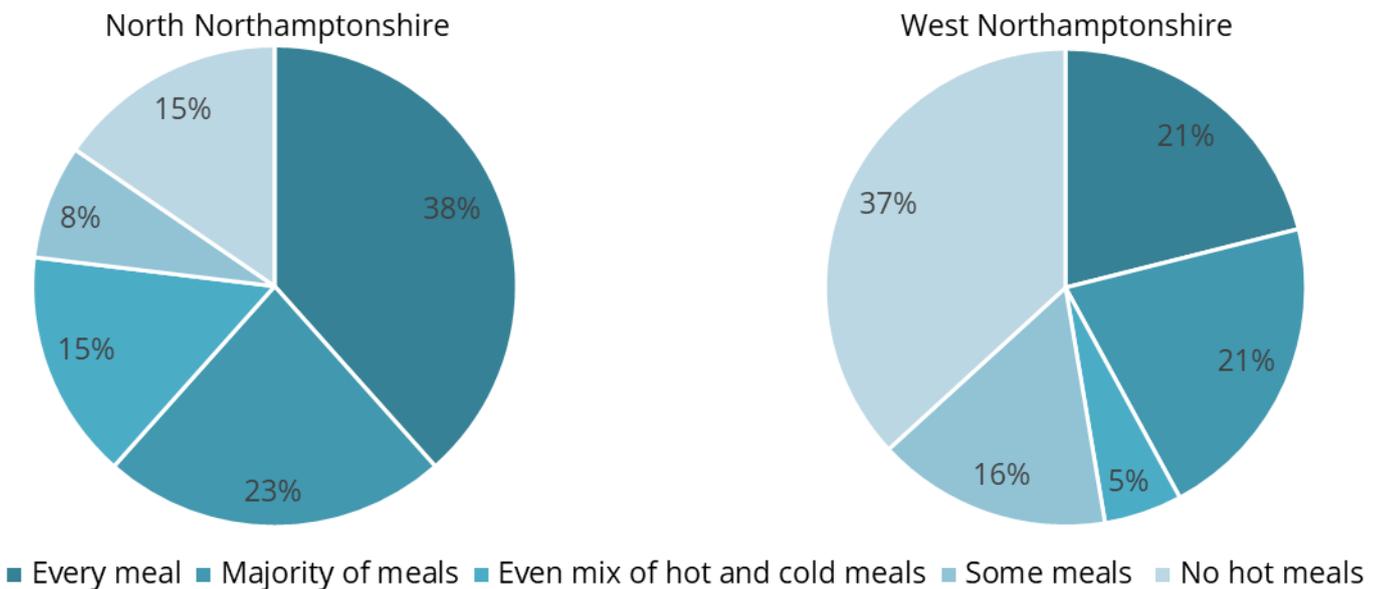


Figure 3. Provision of hot meals by HAF programme providers in North (n = 13) and West Northamptonshire (n = 19)

Barriers to delivering hot meals were cited by 10 provider survey respondents as, a lack of facilities or a suitable caterer, exponential costs of outsourcing hot meal provision, and a family preference for packed lunches. Conversely, 11 providers stated that the provision of hot meals was helped by having a simple menu, on-site facilities, and building relationships with outsourced caterers. The majority of food provision was outsourced to some form of caterer who provided a variety of meals, including but not limited to:

- Fruit and vegetables
- Curry and rice
- Vegetarian meals
- Jacket potatoes with different toppings
- Sandwiches
- Homemade pizza
- Salad

Nutrition education was consistently provided during holiday club sessions, with 38% in North Northamptonshire and 53% in West Northamptonshire providing nutrition education at every session (Figure 4). There has been an increase in the percentage of providers delivering nutrition education 'every session' in comparison to the Summer 2021 local evaluation, which was 26%. In addition, there has been an increase in the number of providers delivering nutrition education at 'most sessions' (21 and 23%), in comparison to Summer 2021 (15% of 27 respondents). In Summer 2021, the most frequent response was 'some sessions' (37% of 27 respondents) and overall, the data from Summer 2022 shows a shift towards more nutrition education sessions. Most providers indicated being very confident (38.7% of responses to provider survey) or quite confident (35.5% of responses) in their ability to deliver nutrition education, which may have been supported by their use of the 'HAF Northants – Information for Delivery Partners' resources (*n* = 20), the Government HAF website (*n* = 15), School food standards guidance (*n* = 16), and in-person training (*n* = 7) that they were signposted to by the co-ordinators. Example activities for nutrition education included: healthy plate making arts and crafts, fruit tasters, smoothie making, including children in food preparation, and quizzes.

How frequently were you able to provide nutrition education per session of your Programme?

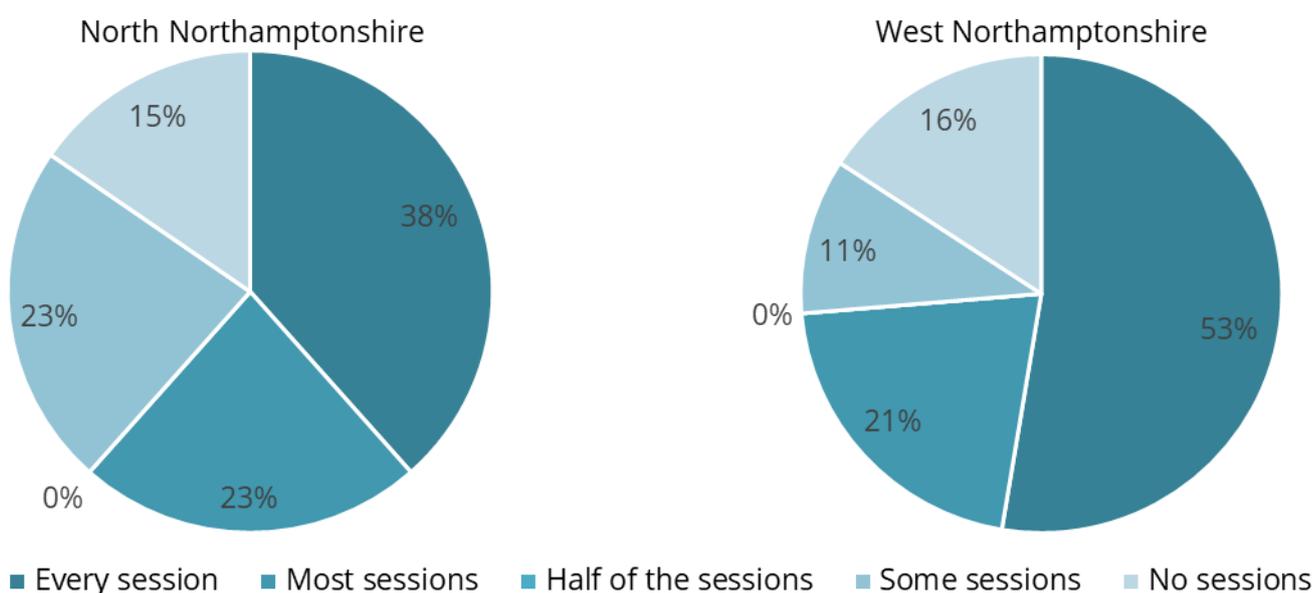


Figure 4. Provision of nutrition education by HAF programme providers in North (n = 13) and West Northamptonshire (n = 19)

The providers offered some specific examples in the focus groups of activities they deliver to provide nutrition education to children, which could be used as examples of best practice:

“One thing that was a major hit in the last couple of weeks is we managed to get hold of sort of like a cardboard cut-out of a like a little shop, and we sort of got them to play the role of like, oh this is a shops/ restaurant and we got them to make their own menus that could then be used there and we sort of, made a sign that had, like, the food wheel on it and spoke about right, what mains are we gonna have so that it has something for each food group and we sort of like did some of that little fake money and they took some money to the shop. They asked for the food and to make their meal. And they got a plain sort of picture of different food, and they had to colour in what they've ordered and then that sort of lead into a conversation about what we should have on our healthy plate and what are they gonna got and what food group does that then fall into? And then obviously we sort of spoke about all different types of food and what each food does for your body.”

- Providers focus group 1

“The children have tried foods they have not even seen or even experienced before, which is quite nice, and we've had quite a few people go back to family members because they've liked something so much. I think when this week was wraps. So, then they wanted to have wraps for packed lunches and stuff, so the family gone out and bought them, so they were now eating more healthfully because they've tried foods that they have never had before...And similar sort of thing in terms of Kiwi and melon and things like that. And it's something that the parents, obviously these sorts of fruits are luxury to some of these families. So, they get a chance to experience things that they wouldn't necessarily outside of our camps.”

- Providers focus group 2

2021 recommendation	Steps taken/improvements in 2022
It is recommended that providers reflect on their food-related activities to identify what ideas they can further implement and improve on, while considering what resources they need, or what they can achieve with the existing resources they have.	There has been an evident shift in the amount of nutrition education provided during the HAF programme with providers describing several examples of how nutrition education was delivered.
It is recommended that the Holiday Clubs should further plan their food provision to enable them to work towards the provision of a healthy food offer rather than just the provision of food.	Ninety-four percent of providers stated in the survey that they delivered healthy meals at every session.

Physical activity

Ninety-three percent of providers ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that they received sufficient guidance to feel confident about delivering sessions to meet the 60-minutes per day of moderate-to-vigorous physical activity guideline. This was reflected in the delivery as most providers (96.7% of survey responses) were able to provide 60 minutes of physical activity at ‘every session’, with one provider achieving this ‘most sessions’ and one non-response. Activities were varied across providers, which included traditional team sports, such as football and dodgeball, athletic based activities and some camps providing access to water sports and adventure activities, such as high ropes and bouldering.

Overall, the physical activity aim of the HAF programme appears to be met consistently across providers.

2021 recommendation	Steps taken/improvements in 2022
It is recommended that providers identify some opportunities to increase their physical activity provision.	Each provider was meeting the physical activity guideline and the variety of activities offered had increased to include non-sporting physical activity offers.

Enrichment activities

There was consistent delivery of enrichment activities among providers with 72% (of 29 survey respondents) indicating these were included in ‘every’ or ‘most sessions’. Children were offered a wide variety of opportunities with common enrichment activity themes involving nature exploration, arts and crafts, and historical site visits. Many providers had a particular focus in their holiday club provision (e.g., some are sports camps, some are arts and crafts), while some offer a range of activities within their provision. These approaches are perfectly acceptable, but it is also possible to meet wider HAF programme aims within the club’s core provision, such as clubs that focus on sport activities can engage children to learn about nutrition, for example 'the fruit bowl parachute game' and using elite athletes as models for healthy eating¹.

Special educational needs accessibility

Twenty-eight survey respondents out of 32 delivered provision that was open to children with special educational needs (Table 6). The co-ordinators also felt that a larger amount of children with special educational needs accessed the HAF programme this summer, which meant further investment in staff time was required to ensure these children were supported. The increase in attendance by children with special education needs was attributed to the co-ordinators engaging with more Special Educational Needs Co-ordinators this summer. Conversations between the providers and co-ordinators suggested that providers were not sufficiently prepared to meet the support requirements of children with special educational needs and that there was a lack of holiday clubs that were specifically aimed at children with special educational needs. To overcome this issue, providers felt that they required further information from parents in advance of attendance so they could appropriately plan for and support children with special educational needs:

“...you're trying to be inclusive, but actually you end up being quite exclusive in a in a sense. So it's about understanding what is available for children that have those significant needs because, you know, we've gotta be honest to suggest that there comes a point where we're unable to cater for their needs and then again you end up excluding others because of that. So, it's not a lack of trying or understanding that we're responsible, it's more to do with just being realistic that the skills that we have within our workforce aren't sufficient enough for some of the additional needs that we've seen.”

- Providers focus group 2

“Maybe like a communication from the school and a register being put through the school and the school having a little bit of feedback as well. Like. Oh yeah. Like [this child] does have a one to one, so be aware of it and they pass it on to us. Whereas like you say, turn up on the first day on the Monday

¹ Bayes, N., Mason, C. and Holley, C.E., (2022). Staff perspectives on the feeding practices used in holiday clubs to promote healthy eating in disadvantaged communities. Health & Social Care in the Community.

morning where it's like, OK, yeah, he's up there. He's down there. And yeah, I don't know. Just maybe something from the school or something external just to say, right. This person does have these additional needs and that I don't know, something along the lines would be just a little bit more, reassuring, you know, I mean."

- Providers focus group 1

"We do request that families complete our documentation, however, we did have a lot of SEN without knowing their needs and requirements as it's not always mentioned or explained in detail."

"We are able to include children with our additional needs on our schemes, however we need adequate information in advance and support on site with regards to staffing numbers, which has cost implications."

- Providers survey

Table 6. Holiday club accessibility for children with special educational needs

Count	Percentage	Offer
3	9%	Our programme is exclusively attended by children who have special educational needs.
1	3%	Our programme is attended mostly by children who have special educational needs as well as a small number of children who do not have known special educational needs.
24	75%	Our programme is attended by a small number of children who have special educational needs as well as mostly children who do not have known special educational needs.
2	6%	Our programme is exclusively attended by children who do not have known special educational needs.
2	6%	Not sure.

2021 recommendation	Steps taken/improvements in 2022
It is recommended that providers check the remit of their provision, and where possible, ensure children with additional or complex needs are provided with relevant activities or additional support from staff.	There was an apparent increase in children with special educational needs accessing the HAF programme, which holiday club providers can manage but require time to discuss needs with parents and carers so the children can be properly supported.

Programme support

For those providers who delivered the HAF programme in Summer 2021, their survey responses suggested that Summer 2022 was much improved and ran smoother. The main reasoning was the longer lead-in time, more experience with the online booking system, supportive co-ordinators, and greater confidence to provide a broader programme offer. Delivery issues that were highlighted in the survey were predominantly last-minute cancellations or 'no shows' and a reflective need for more staffing to help manage challenging behaviour. It is evident that the co-ordinators and providers are refining the delivery of the HAF programme and many of the issues in Summer 2021 are being addressed:

“The support and guidance from [the co-ordinators] have made the programme run more efficiently this year, especially the booking portal and the quick email replies. However, it is still very frustrating when you have a waiting list and parents’ book, don't cancel the places and don't turn up on more than one occasion which means children miss out as it is too late to contact the waiting list.”

- Providers survey

The co-ordinators conducted site visits to ensure the providers were meeting the HAF programme standards. Of the 22 provider survey respondents who received a site visit (nine reported no site visit), they all ‘agreed’ or ‘strongly agreed’ that the site visits were helpful for ensuring they were meeting standards.

“[Co-ordinator] was great on the site visit and while discussing the HAF scheme and its progress, we managed to also discuss other work and possible projects. [Co-ordinator] also shared info about what other schemes were experiencing.”

“Good to have someone come along and discuss how the programme was going and ways in which we could look to attract and provide opportunities for more children in the future.”

- Providers survey

It is evident that the co-ordinator site visits are viewed as good practice, which is valued by the providers to identify ways in which they were meeting, or working towards meeting, the HAF programme standards, and identify ways in which they could build on their activities to meet the programme standards.

Outcomes

Children

Objective 5 - To examine the changes in CYP nutrition, healthy behaviours, and school readiness - views from the parent survey and secondary school aged children survey

AND

Objective 6 - To examine the development of resilience, character, wellbeing, and educational attainment - views from the parent survey and focus group and secondary school aged children survey

AND

Objective 7 - To examine opportunities to engage with school and other local services - views from the parent survey and secondary school aged children survey

AND

Objective 8 - To examine opportunities for socialisation and develop confidence - views from the parent survey

Access and attendance

Communication from school was the main way that parents found out about the HAF programme (65% of 71 survey responses), followed by social media (17%) and leaflets (11%). Parents' (71 responses) main reason for booking their child onto the HAF programme was for physical activity provision (72%), enrichment opportunities (65%), and childcare provision (42%). Notably, food provision had the lowest number of responses (23%). Reasons for non-attendance from the non-engaged parent survey varied. In terms of reasoning that are within the co-ordinators' and providers' abilities to improve, themes from open-text responses centred around limited availability on the online booking system and need for special educational needs support. When asked to provide recommendations to reduce non-attendance, parents suggested the need for more detail on the booking website so they were aware of what each holiday club was offering and whether the parents needed to stay with the children (see Image 1 as an example of the information provided to parents), to make it easier to cancel bookings on the online booking system, that holiday clubs provide a greater variety of activities in their day to account for different interests and age ranges, that more staff are needed who are able to support children with special educational needs, and continue to expand the number of clubs to reduce travel distances:

“There wasn't any information about any activities they would be doing or if I needed to pack them lunch etc, I had to email and ask.”

- Parents survey

“This year it's okay to use, but it's complicated cancelling a booking. If you need to cancel a booking, it's really hard...It's to do with, you have like accounts. Like you have one account for one child and one account for another. And then its swapping the accounts over, 'cause you book in like bulk so its remembering what you've booked for one child to get it correct for the other child, at the correct times.”

- Parents focus group

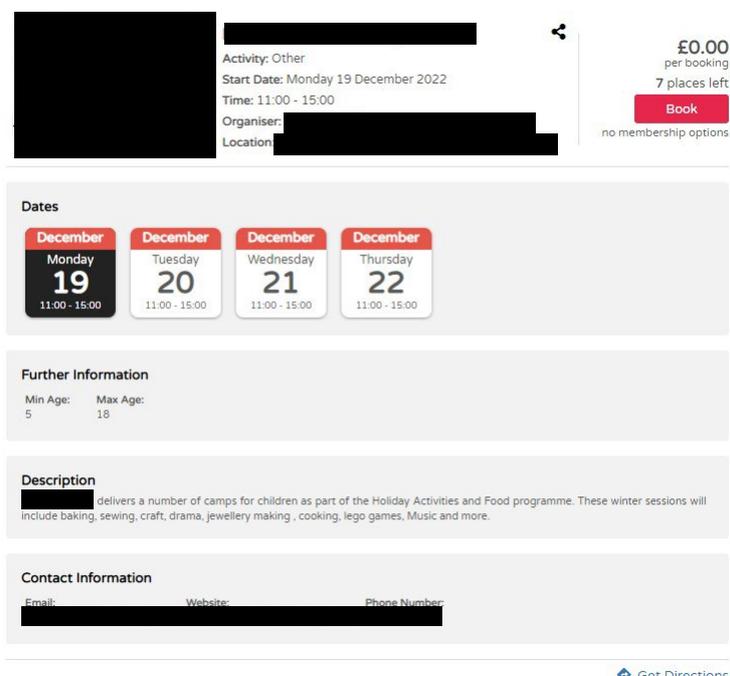


Image 1. Example holiday club advertised on the online booking system

Overall, there were 57,198 total holiday club bookings, resulting in 38,484 attendances across the county. In North Northamptonshire, attendance comprised of 1,665 primary school children and 144 secondary school children. Self-reported demographics stated 55% were male, 44% were female, and 1% preferred not to say, 153 schools had students attend camps, 15% of those attending said they had a disability or special educational need, 19% of the individuals said they were from an ethnically diverse community, and 2% declined to say. In West Northamptonshire, attendance comprised of 1,929 primary school children and 274 secondary school children (Table 7). Self-reported demographics stated 56% were male and 44% were female, 182 schools had students attend camps, 15% of those attending said they had a disability or special educational need, 25% of the individuals said they were from an ethnically diverse community and 12% declined to say.

In North Northamptonshire, 24% of eligible children and young people attended the HAF Programme. In West Northamptonshire, 30% of eligible children and young people attended the HAF Programme. Countywide this represents 27% of eligible children attending the HAF programme. A near doubling of uptake from the Summer 2021 HAF programme (15.2%).

Table 7. Non-unique attendance data from the online booking system

	North Northamptonshire	West Northamptonshire	Total
Total bookings (n)	27,527	29,671	57,198
Total attendances (n)	17,951	20,533	38,484
Total no shows (n)	6,396	5,266	11,662
Total cancellations (n)	3,180	3,872	7,052

Note: *n* = number.

2021 recommendation	Steps taken/improvements in 2022
It is recommended that providers communicate more with parents to provide more detailed information about the specific sessions/activities they could book their children onto.	This continues to be a recommendation, so parents are more aware of what physical activity and food is provided at the holiday club as well as signposting to wider groups.
It is recommended that there be an advertising template used for consistent marketing approaches across the different providers to ensure all the provision of a Holiday Club is advertised with all the necessary information provided.	There are still inconsistencies with the descriptions that each provider uploads to the online booking system. An example or minimum standards could be developed to show providers what details need to be included in the description for the club being advertised (for example, whether parents need to be present at the session they are signing their child up to attend).

Healthy eating

Most parents (94% of 64 respondents) stated that the food offered at the HAF programme was 'satisfactory' to 'very good quality'. Open text responses (54 respondents) suggested that the children were predominantly offered sandwiches, crisps, or pasta dishes for their meals at the holiday clubs and that 68% of children enjoyed the food on offer. The food provided at the HAF programme met 76% of the children's dietary requirements (No: 10%, Not sure: 14%, of 66 respondents in total), which was also echoed in the themes from the parents focus group. The main theme for improvement from the online survey open text responses (34 respondents) was a wider variety of food to meet the children's preferences, as well as ensuring gluten free and halal options:

"My daughter, she's autistic and she's got additional needs, which food is the major problem. And like every time the first couple of weeks, I always gave her a packed lunch 'cause I knew she's not going to touch any of it [the holiday club food provision]. And now I don't give her anything because the food was coming back and getting wasted cause she was eating here. So that's what I mean, I am very, very happy. Like I say, this is the first year I've used this and I'm really, really happy."

- Parents focus group 5

"There's a nice variety, there's plenty of fruit here that's on display the whole time they're here, so they can help themselves. Erm, all the kinds of foods children like, er pizza, sausage rolls. Yeah, cause my sons really fussy, so they don't go hungry. If they feel that they need something through the day, they can ask for it."

- Parents focus group 1

2021 recommendation	Steps taken/improvements in 2022
It is recommended that providers should work towards offering more variety within their food provision, while considering a variety of dietary needs.	Emphasis needs to continue to be focussed on the nutrition aspects of the HAF programme as well as greater communication between providers and parents about dietary needs and the food offered.

Physical activity

One of the main aims of the HAF programme is to provide opportunities for children to be active in the holidays. A greater percentage of parents of children who engaged with the HAF Programme reported an increase in their child’s physical activity levels in comparison to their typical summer holidays, and this was also evident in the parents focus groups. Whereas a greater percentage of parents of children who did not engage with the HAF programme reported no change in their child’s physical activity levels in the 2022 summer holidays in comparison to a typical summer holiday (Figure 5). The activities offered at the HAF programme included den building, Bhangra dancing, climbing, tennis, gymnastics, forest school, among others. As a result of the programme, 35% of the children were motivated to frequently try these physical activities elsewhere, such as at home and at the local park. Open text responses in the survey suggested that most parents were satisfied with the physical activities offered at the HAF programme and the main suggestion for improvement was greater signposting to clubs and offers to join clubs after the HAF programme:

“[child’s name] is quite lazy at home, but when he’s up here he’s not. He’s using all that energy.”

“Being out, being with other people it’s taking her mind off food. Plus doing the exercise with it she doesn’t, she struggles doing stuff like running and stuff. But I haven’t heard that at all. She’s enjoyed herself and she’s loved it.”

- Parents focus group 1

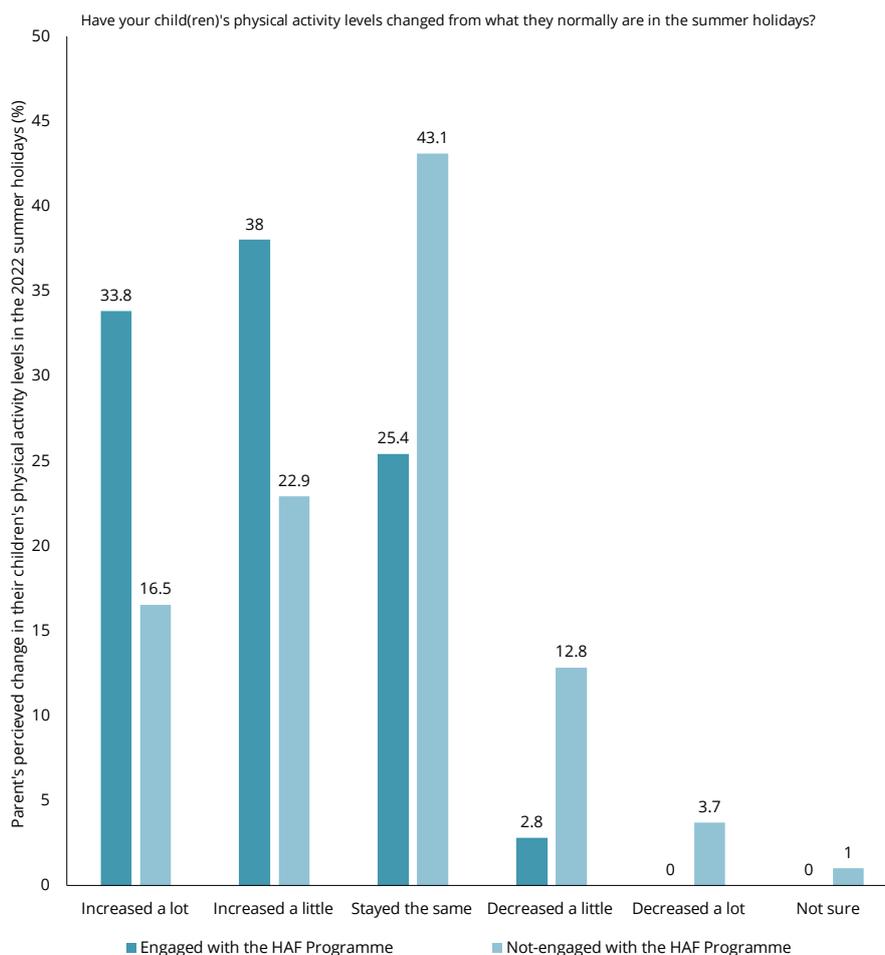


Figure 5. Parent’s perceived change in their children’s physical activity levels for Summer 2022 in comparison to a usual summer holiday. Responses from parents whose children engaged with (71 respondents) or did not engage with the HAF programme (109 respondents)

2021 recommendation	Steps taken/improvements in 2022
It is recommended that providers consider how to overcome the barriers that prevent children attending/participating in clubs outside of the Programme after that initial contact and link has been made. For example, an adjusted financial scheme or using facilities that are less of a challenge to reach.	Providers need to ensure consistent signposting to clubs that run throughout the year along with some introductory offer that may help manage financial constraints.

Character

Fifty percent of the parents survey respondents stated that attending the HAF programme had increased their child's ability to socialise with other children and that their confidence had increased (64% of respondents). Evidence from the survey open text responses and the parents focus groups suggested that the programme created an environment that helped socialise children who had previously struggled in the past:

“My children are relatively isolated due to their needs and the needs of our family. It was a wonderful opportunity for them to make friends.”

“My daughter suffers with anxiety meeting new children, but she has really enjoyed meeting new children and making friends.”

“The older one is autistic at a SEN school. So being at [the HAF programme] regularly he has learned to build new relationships, but also a little more tolerance of others, he has also shown what a fantastic leader he can be!”

- Parents survey

“My son he finds it quite hard to make friends. So, at school, he goes to a little village school, there's only eleven in his class. And it's only him and another boy, the rest are girls. And he doesn't get on with that boy, so he hasn't got no male friends. So, then he's come here, and the last time was the easter holidays and he made two friends, and they've come back. So, he was so excited to see them.

So, it's helping him build that friendship, 'cause he only knows how to approach girls. And 'cause there's only one boy in the class and 'cause of covid every class was completely separated, and they were only in their own bubble, he's only known his class and this one boy. So, it was just getting him out there to try and socialise a bit more and it has, it's helped loads.”

- Parents focus group 3

“They have a young leader programme, so they actively encourage those children that, well, I suppose they want the responsibility, but also show that they've got values to demonstrate like be a role model to the younger children. So [child name removed] was made a young leader and he absolutely loved the opportunity to be able to help the leaders look after the children and be a role model to them.”

- Parents focus group 8

Parents/Carers

Objective 9 - To examine the changes in parent/carers confidence and behaviour around healthy meals - views from the parent survey and focus group

AND

Objective 10 - To examine the development of nutrition and food budgeting knowledge - views from the parent survey and focus group

AND

Objective 11 - To examine nutritional education opportunities - views from the parent survey and focus group

Nutrition and food support

Notably, a percentage of parents responded 'not sure' to the nutrition questions in the online survey, suggesting a lack of awareness about the HAF programme's food offering and parental engagement with the programme. This resonated with survey responses where 44% of parents reported that they did not attend any family session for health and nutrition and 55% were not offered or aware of any family sessions. Furthermore, as providers struggled to engage parents in face-to-face nutrition sessions, more emphasis could be placed on signposting parents to the nutrition resources provided on the HAF programme website as most parents did not receive this information (Table 8).

Overall, 34% of 67 survey respondents stated that they 'agreed' or 'strongly agreed' that the provision of meals at the HAF programme helped with meal planning at home. Most of the reasoning for these responses focused on cost savings. However, 36% of respondents were 'not sure' about the provision of meals and 30% 'disagreed' about the provision of meals to help support home meal planning. Most of the reasons behind these responses focussed on not knowing what the children had been given at the holiday club and having to provide pack lunches that were suitable for their child's preferences. Overall, providers need to engage parents more frequently in nutrition conversations, so parents are aware of what their children are eating, as well as being signposted to wider support resources.

Table 8. Signposting to health and nutrition resources provided by the HAF programme

Have you received any of the following information in relation to health and nutrition?	Yes	No	Not sure
The Northamptonshire Holiday Activities and Food Christmas booklet	3 (4%)	63 (90%)	4 (6%)
The Northamptonshire Holiday Activities and Food Activity and Recipe Ideas website	2 (3%)	62 (89%)	6 (8%)
Other materials	2 (3%)	57 (86%)	7 (11%)
Those who used the resources:	Found them on the HAF website	Providers informed me about them	
How did you receive these resources?	7 (77%)	2 (23%)	

2021 recommendation	Steps taken/improvements in 2022
There is a need for co-ordinators and providers to develop a range of activities that can engage the parents in the Programme to improve knowledge of nutrition and food budgeting.	Co-ordinators developed a range of online nutrition resources and training to support providers with their nutrition sessions.
It is recommended that providers communicate more with parents to provide more detailed information about the specific sessions/activities they could book their children onto.	This continues to be a recommendation, so parents are more aware of what physical activity and food is provided at the holiday club as well as signposting to wider groups.

Availability of holiday childcare

There are a variety of different motives for families to attend the HAF programme provision but overall, a leading reason for enrolment was because the HAF programme gave parents time to attend work and other parental responsibilities:

“It’s just the convenience again of a meal being provided. It’s one less thing to worry about them, knowing they’re being fed. I mean I’m quite lucky that they’re not fussy eaters, they tend to eat anything they’re given. So, I don’t have to worry about making a pack up or anything. And yeah it’s just good I can come and know they’re getting a nutritious meal.”

- Parents focus group 2

“For him and for me a big thing was getting him out and keeping him active cause one of his needs, his hyperactivity, so I need somewhere for that excess energy to be burnt off. So, it’s more for me, especially about the physical side because perhaps...and I’m talking about a task I do with him at home, if were to try and make cookies or bake cakes that can be quite challenging because its, you’ve got to focus your attention. Whereas I think with physical activity children can be a bit more free, and a bit more expressive.”

- Parents focus group 2

“It [the HAF programme] is for your mental health as well...just that few hours in a day knowing they’re entertained, you can get so much done. And I, I’ve been able to go to work so you know, I need that.”

-Parents focus group 1

“When I’m at work I book them in the activity club for the day. Yeah, so I can still work, which makes it good for me ‘cause I don’t have to worry about paying for lots of childcare in the holidays... She [school family support worker] knew I was on my own, worried about the school holidays. Me going back to work when the children had gone back to school, and I sort of said to her [school family support worker] like I’m struggling, like I’ve got to literally find £200 a week to put my children in to go to like a nursery or a camp. I haven’t got a spare £200 every week to send them. And she was like oh we’ve got this programme starting, please look into it. And then that’s when I started booking them on stuff.”

- Parents focus group 7

Programme/System

Objective 12 - To examine the sustainability of the HAF programme - views from the provider focus group

AND

Objective 13 - To examine opportunities to develop links between HAF stakeholders and wider services - views from the provider focus group

AND

Objective 14 - To examine changes in holiday provision for eligible children - views from the provider survey

Reaching children who need the programme

In the focus groups, the providers highlighted that while the HAF programme delivered holiday provision for children who are FSM eligible, there was also a need “to cater for those children that weren't getting picked up by HAF” (Providers focus group 2). Providers highlighted that when families who are not FSM eligible but show a need for the programme, they have been allowing non-FSM eligible children to attend their provision:

“I'll be honest, we've taken the kids on regardless of whether or not they've been able to supply a HAF code. We'll have to deal with those repercussions after with [co-ordinators], because that that's one area that I just, it is a national issue, it's not just Northamptonshire. They'll [the co-ordinators] either pay me or they won't. You're dealing with a massive project here. I think the infrastructure will build, but it's probably not quite there yet.”

- Providers focus group 3

2021 recommendation	Steps taken/improvements in 2022
It is recommended that the HAF Programme eligibility criteria are reviewed, as free school meal eligibility is only one proxy for food insecurity. Some families are not eligible for free school meals but are still from food insecure backgrounds and are therefore, missing the opportunity to access this vital provision for families from disadvantaged backgrounds.	It is evident that there are still many families who are not FSM eligible but are from disadvantaged backgrounds and in need of access to HAF programme. Therefore, the recommendation remains, which may be required at national level programme decision making rather than local.

Educating parents

In many of the discussions within the providers focus groups, it was clear that some of the challenges faced in the delivery of the HAF programme, such as accessing HAF codes, using the booking system, and frequent non-attendances to booked activities, related to parent factors, such as not fully understanding what they were eligible for, how to sign up, how to use the booking system, and the implications of not cancelling booked sessions. Therefore, part of the future sustainability of the programme may relate to educating parents about the programme and how they can meaningfully engage their families in the programme:

“People don't quite understand what it is, I don't think. And then you've got some families that ask the questions but again it goes back to, we're also dealing with not just children but families and parents with additional needs that don't understand, that won't ask questions, won't go and find out and ask for help. And so, it's a bigger picture, I think.”

- Providers focus group 2

Partnership working

The data collected in this evaluation highlighted that schools have an important role in the implementation of the HAF programme, through advertising the programme to parents and linking them with their 'free-access codes'. However, the providers discussed in the focus groups that the HAF programme may be placing too much responsibility on schools to advertise the programme. The providers acknowledged that schools already have a lot of existing responsibilities and thus, may be difficult for schools to manage the additional pressures of advertising the HAF programme:

“The summer holidays are notoriously busy for schools as well. They're obviously trying to fire a lot of information out very quickly, and because the HAF code comes in, I think a lot of them miss it and it's not a priority, let's be honest, for the schools, they just wanna get their admin side sorted and shut the doors, whereas obviously you know, there's a focus here where the children need that.”

- Providers focus group 3

In addition, some providers highlighted that:

“Some of these children we're dealing with and the families, they don't necessarily have positive relationships with the school as well. So, then they wouldn't really want something that comes from school as well. They see as a negative”

- Providers focus group 2

With these considerations in mind, the providers suggested that other strategies should be in place to advertise the HAF programme to families beyond the schools:

“There's not a one-size-fits-all. I think it needs to be a more multi-avenue approach to it and more cohesive of everybody working together in partnership.”

- Providers focus group 2

Providers expressed their interest in having the opportunity to attend a stakeholder event for providers to discuss their ideas about how to best deliver the HAF programme:

“There's perhaps a cost associated, but an opportunity for all providers to get together perhaps prior to a HAF holiday in that there's almost like a conference... so you can share a lot of these ideas. This [evaluation interview] has been really good for me, being on the call and that's the reason I was keen to get on the call was to understand whether others are having similar concerns. Time where we could all get together physically prior to holiday I think would be would be a good thing.”

“I completely agree, it's nice to see other people in our position and we see day-to-day the struggles that we have, but it's coherent across a number of providers. So, it's nice not to feel isolated in terms of we're having these struggles...it would be nice again to speak with other people. I don't know if you can make it mandatory before a HAF, but somebody from each provider goes to a meeting like you've just said, and we discuss all these sorts of things.”

- Providers focus group 2

One of the providers also highlighted that they would like more opportunities to increase partnerships with other organisations in the county that could work together, share resources, ideas and initiatives that can be mutually beneficial:

“I also think just a final point for me around the, perhaps the wider opportunities for partners. So, I mentioned that [local healthcare weight management] team, for example, we don't necessarily work directly with them to deliver some of the activities that we do, but we've got the resources from the relationship that we've had in the past. So, it might be actually that local Public Health have got programmes running, like [the local authority], for example, in areas where they could have an impact. So it might be that there's a wider acknowledgement of the programme where others, you know, could benefit from their own agenda effectively.”

- Providers focus group 2

2021 recommendation	Steps taken/improvements in 2022
It is recommended that Co-ordinators consider how to make the Programme more sustainable so that children and families can still benefit from the Programme in the future.	Increasing partnership working opportunities, such as a conference and signposting, and educating parents about the programme, were suggestions from providers about how to contribute to the sustainability of the programme, as well as continuing to fund the programme, increasing funding where this is possible.

Summary

The HAF programme represents a 'complex' intervention, which requires the adoption, implementation, and maintenance of many parties, including local authorities, active partnerships, holiday club providers, schools, caterers, parents, and children. With each iteration of the HAF programme, the coordinators and providers have been able to refine their offer to families, which is highly valued by parents and children in the county. Following the evaluation in Summer 2021, Northamptonshire Sport made a concerted effort to act on recommendations to improve the quality and consistency of holiday club provision across Northamptonshire. The HAF programme clearly supports vulnerable families and funding for the programme should continue in the future.

Areas for further investigation include the enhancement of school engagement with the HAF programme, understanding non-attendance and methods to reduce non-attendance at holiday clubs, ensuring holiday club providers are suitably staffed to support children with special educational needs, and signposting families to wider support networks and groups that they can engage with outside of the HAF programme.

Notably, improved communication was a priority recommendation throughout the evaluation. For the future sustainability and success of the HAF programme in Northamptonshire, it is important that communication with parents is improved to inform, educate, and engage them more successfully. In particular:

- Communicate more to parents about the HAF programme and what activities and nutrition education sessions are offered to children in the holiday clubs,
- Communicate more with parents about what food is available for children,
- Communicate more about opportunities for parents, e.g., information, resources, workshops, wider support networks,
- Improving the functionality of the booking system and the information it provides about the holiday clubs within HAF programme.

“I just can’t reiterate just how much of a lifeline this has been for us this year.”

Acknowledgements

The researchers would like to thank the co-ordinators, providers, school staff, and parents who kindly volunteered their time to participate in the evaluation. Without their involvement, it would not be possible to demonstrate the benefits of the HAF programme and the steps that can be taken to refine the programme.

