

Practical exercise 4: Reducing food waste

The purpose of this exercise is to demonstrate that although sustainability is a complex issue there may be ways you can still improve your existing service provision to make it more efficient. It is designed to make you think differently about the way you and potential partners work. Are there lessons to be learned from this? Car manufacturers Toyota said “the summation of many small, simple, cheap improvements can have a very big impact”.

Learning from others and being willing to adapt new ways can save time and improve service. The following short film demonstrates this. It shows how a relief agency in New York City asked Toyota to help them make small changes to their system to improve food distribution following Superstorm Sandy in October 2012. The film can be found through the following link: <http://www.educationscotland.gov.uk/foodandhealth>

In this exercise, participants are asked to focus on one of sustainability's key challenges – reducing food waste. We throw away a huge amount of food. 80,000 tonnes of food waste is produced each year and of that, 83% is avoidable – it could be eaten. In the context of schools, most waste comes from the dining rooms where children and staff throw away uneaten food (mostly fruit and vegetables). The amount of waste averages at 23g per child per day. Add this up across the whole country and even a 20% reduction would be huge. *Source: Wrap report on Food Waste in Schools (2013)*

Discuss and note down any changes that have been made to reduce food waste within your school or authority. Discuss any short, medium- and long-term changes that could further reduce food waste in your own dining room.

The following may help generate discussion:

- **Have you asked pupils?** – What will they tell you about why they throw food away?
- **Portion size** – Do younger children get the same portion sizes as older children?
- **Outside influences** – Children's food preferences are influenced by external factors such as family, culture, media and advertising, and what is available beyond the school gates.
- **Food taste and presentation**
- **The system** – Do children have enough time to eat their meals? Is there anything you can do to encourage them to choose foods they would otherwise be reluctant to opt for?
- **Marketing** – Think about how dishes are promoted. Might this have an impact on how popular they are? One school found that ‘chicken chow mein’ did not sell at all. However, when the same dish was marketed as ‘chicken with noodles’ it sold out.

You can repeat the same exercise with non-food waste.

Think about:

- Food packaging
- The separation of food and non-food waste using separate bins
- The use of disposable cutlery and serving utensils.

