

**GENIUS**  
**School**  
**Food**  
**Network**



**QUEEN'S**  
**UNIVERSITY**  
**BELFAST**

## The GENIUS (Generating Excellent Nutrition in UK Schools) network: what does it mean for schools?

**Overarching aim:** to build a community working towards a more health-promoting food and nutrition system in UK schools

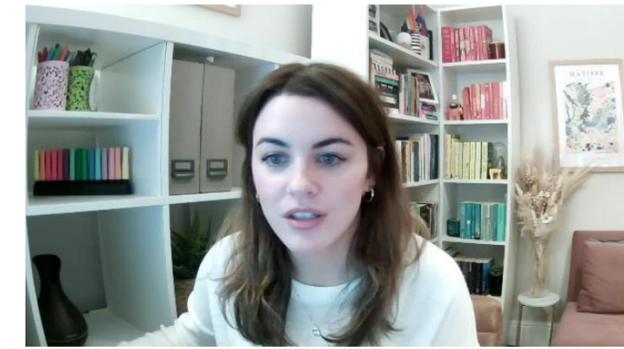
Dr Niamh O'Kane, Professor Jayne Woodside

Queen's University Belfast

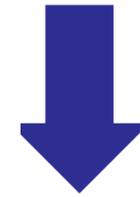
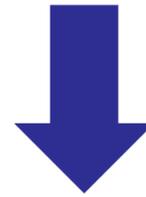
[geniusschoolfoodnetwork@qub.ac.uk](mailto:geniusschoolfoodnetwork@qub.ac.uk)

@GeniusSFN



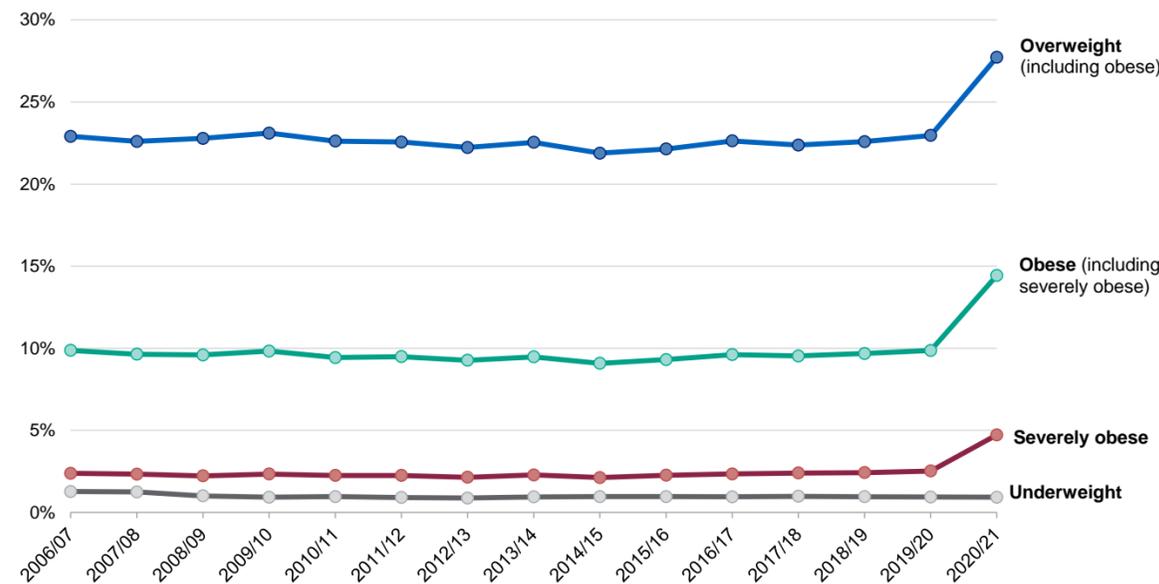


## UK children's diets:

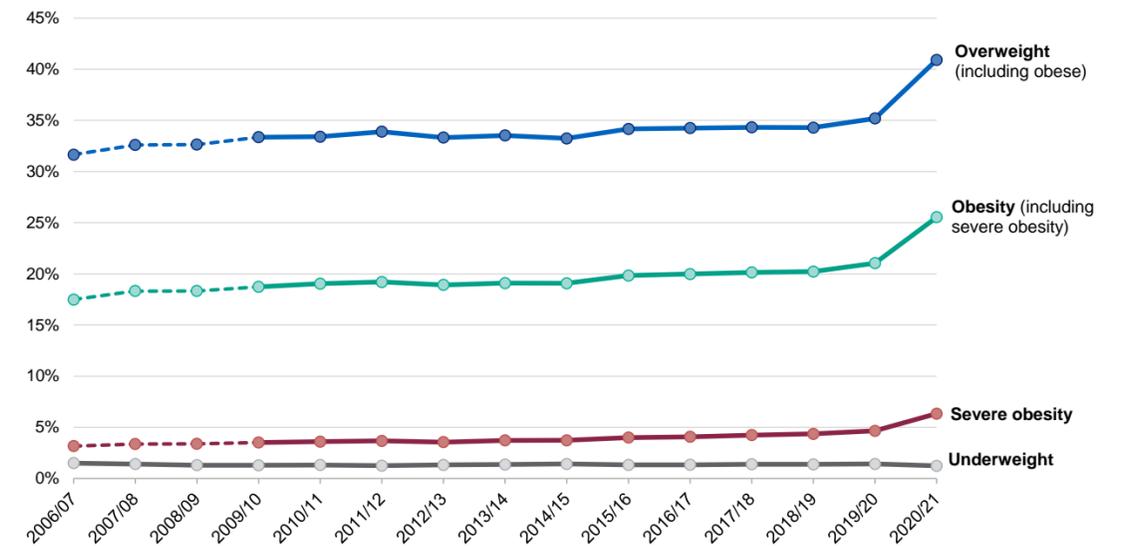


Only 8% of UK 11-18 year olds are meeting the “5-a-day” guideline, with socioeconomic differentials

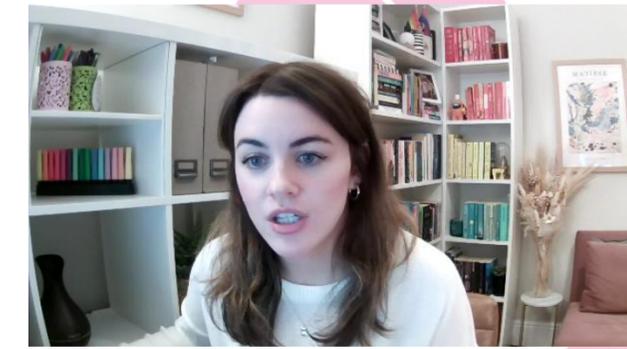
Reception



Year 6



# What did the network set out to do?



WS1 :  
Building  
the  
network

WS 2:  
Understandi  
ng the  
current  
system

WS 3:  
Sustaining the  
network and  
driving impact

- Build a network of researchers and non-academic stakeholders working within the UK food and school systems
- Facilitate interactions that do not currently exist
- Build research capacity regionally and UK-wide
- Gather data regarding the school food system in the four different UK nations
- Use innovative research methodologies to understand how the school food system operates as a complex adaptive system and how the network develops and functions
- Identify areas of best practice that may lead to more evidence-based practice and policies in relation to school food; to co-produce with project partners and stakeholders key priorities in terms of changes to practice to be recommended to schools
- Co-produce with project partners and stakeholders key priorities in terms of research questions
- Use pump-priming funds to support data collection and develop larger scale funding applications co-produced with decision makers and users



## School Food Survey

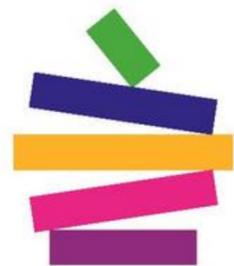
GENIUS and the School Food Review (review of school food policy in England led by School Food Matters, BiteBack2030 and Food Foundation)

Versions for those involved in operational matters and other stakeholders and users; *1280 participants (teachers, parents, caterers, pupils, policy makers, researchers, nutritionists, etc.); June-Sept 2021*



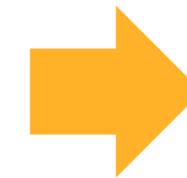
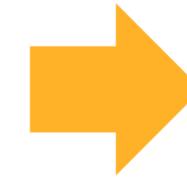
# SCHOOL FOOD RESEARCH PRIORITY SETTING PROCESS

Process informed  
by the James Lind  
Alliance



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- 1 Create steering group
- 2 Gather evidence uncertainties
- 3 Summarise responses
- 4 Evidence checking
- 5 Interim priority setting
- 6 Workshop & Follow-up
- 7 Publish & promote Top 10 priorities



**Survey 1**  
n=1280 participants

**Outcome:**  
136 research  
questions  
(16 themes)

**Survey 2**  
n=107 participants  
**Outcome:**  
19 research questions

**Workshop:**  
n=30 participants  
**Outcome:**  
18 research priorities  
(including the Top 10)

# School Food: Top 10 Research Priorities

1

What is the value to pupils' health and well-being of a UFSM vs means-tested FSM policies, which may have different criteria for eligibility?

2

How can we improve uptake of FSM for those who are eligible?

3

What are the facilitators and challenges for decision-makers to engage with and prioritise school food?

4

How can school food systems deliver school meals to pupils while keeping within the school food standards, procurement requirements and budgets?

5

How do we implement changes to FSM policies (e.g. extended or UFSM) to achieve optimal participation and benefits?

6

How do school food policies and interventions impact on and address inequalities in pupils from different sub-groups?

7

How can policies create a positive food culture and affect pupils' relationships with food?

8

How do we overcome the challenges that schools have in implementing an optimal eating environment?

9

What innovative approaches can be used to help drive uptake of healthy food consumption in schools?

10

What is the impact of food consumed at school on pupils and to what extent can it reduce inequalities?

## Abbreviations

**FSM:** Free School Meals

**UFSM:** Universal Free School Meals



# What does it mean for schools?



- Ten priorities for school food related research were identified, covering the topics subsidisation of school meals, implementation of policy and food standards, leadership, inequalities, social norms and nutrition.
- Teachers have played a really important role amongst other school staff and stakeholders to identify these priorities.
- This research will help to guide policy makers, researchers and others to areas related to school food that are most important to focus on and are likely to make the biggest difference to pupils diet, health and well-being.



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# MAPPING THE SCHOOL FOOD SYSTEM



Produce a comprehensive and visual overview of the factors driving food choice in a secondary school food setting

## 1) Pre-workshop survey with school stakeholders

- Participants asked to identify which factors driving food choice
- Responses collated and categorised

## 2) Group model building workshop

- Online workshop with school stakeholders (n=13)
- Interactively produce the map using online software (STICKE)

## 3) School workshops

- Feedback gathered from two secondary schools (n=17 pupils)
- Changes made to map based on feedback

## 4) Circulation of final map with stakeholders for comment

*"Please identify **factors** you believe drive food choice within the secondary school food system"*

*"Do you think this map accurately represents the food system for you, your peers, and your school?"*



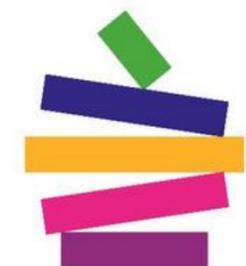
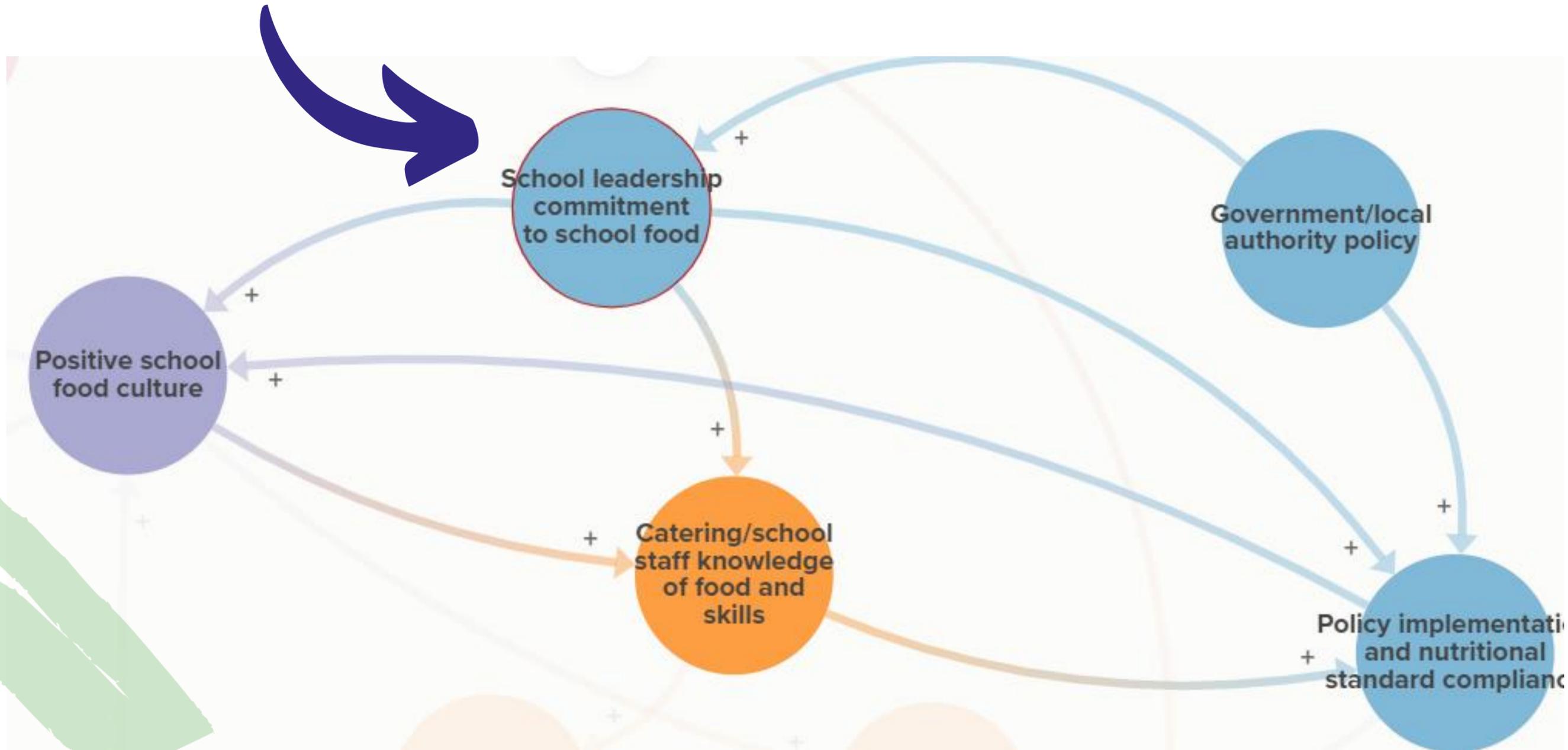
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# Factors driving food choice in a secondary school food setting (GENIUS)



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Visualise direction of influence of factors (what factors influence other factors, and is this a positive or negative influence?)  
Demonstrates potential systemic benefits of intervention within one factor

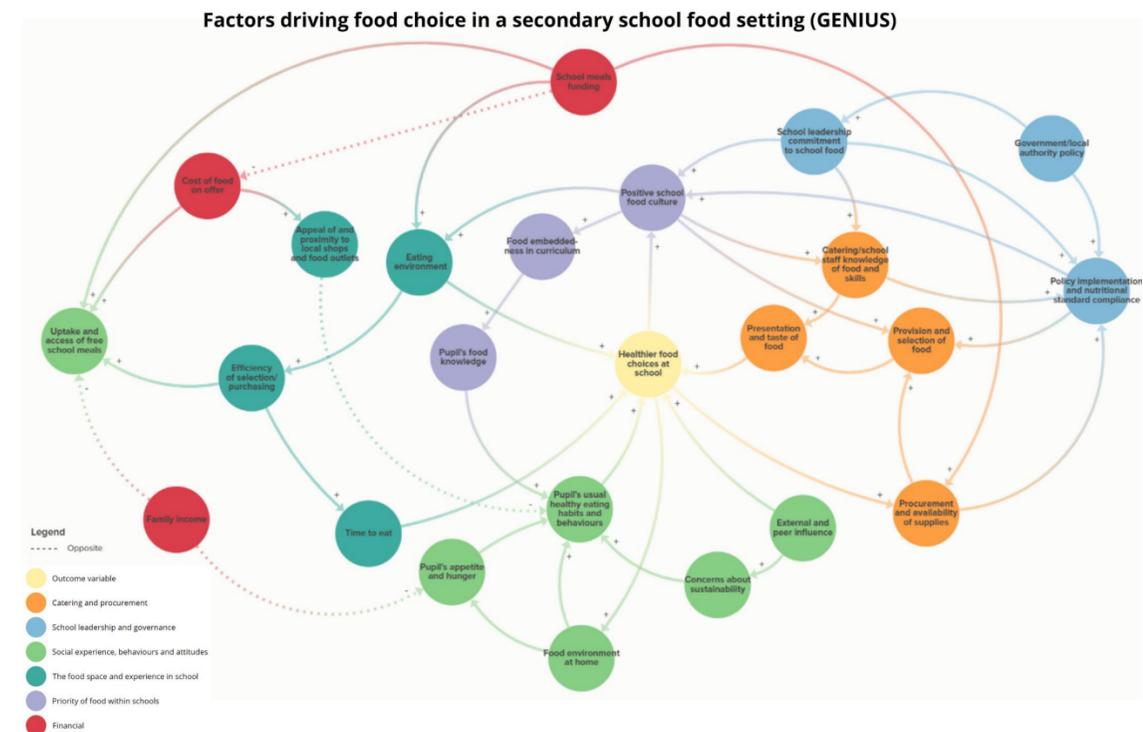


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# What does it mean for schools?



- Our map demonstrates the complexity of the school food system and the many factors at play
- This research can be used to help visualise the impacts of changes made within the school food system



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# Pump priming



- Specific guidelines
- Small scale research projects
- Independent panel reviewed against set criteria
- 4 projects awarded funding (£29K total; ~£7k each)



## Ulster University

PI: Prof A Gallagher  
*Effectiveness of a peer-led school based intervention to promote healthy food choices in adolescents: a pilot feasibility study*

## University of Wolverhampton

PI: Dr G Singh Lalli  
*Secondary school food policy approaches across the UK*



## University of Dundee

PI: Prof A Anderson  
*An assessment of the role of Parental Networks on uptake of school meals*

## University of Birmingham

PI: Dr M Murphy  
*Acceptability and feasibility of choice architecture to promote healthy dietary choices in secondary school canteens: a qualitative study with catering staff*



# MAPPING THE NETWORK



To **visualise the interactions** and engagements among Co-Is of the GENIUS Network, and **provide indication of success** of the network in forming **new relationships** and collaborations within school food

- Online survey disseminated among named co-Is from original GENIUS proposal, Sept 2022
- Participants asked to identify which other named co-Is they engage with, and estimate how long they have had a working relationship with regards school food
- Online mapping software (Kumu) used to input survey data
- Network mapped and duration of relationships summarised

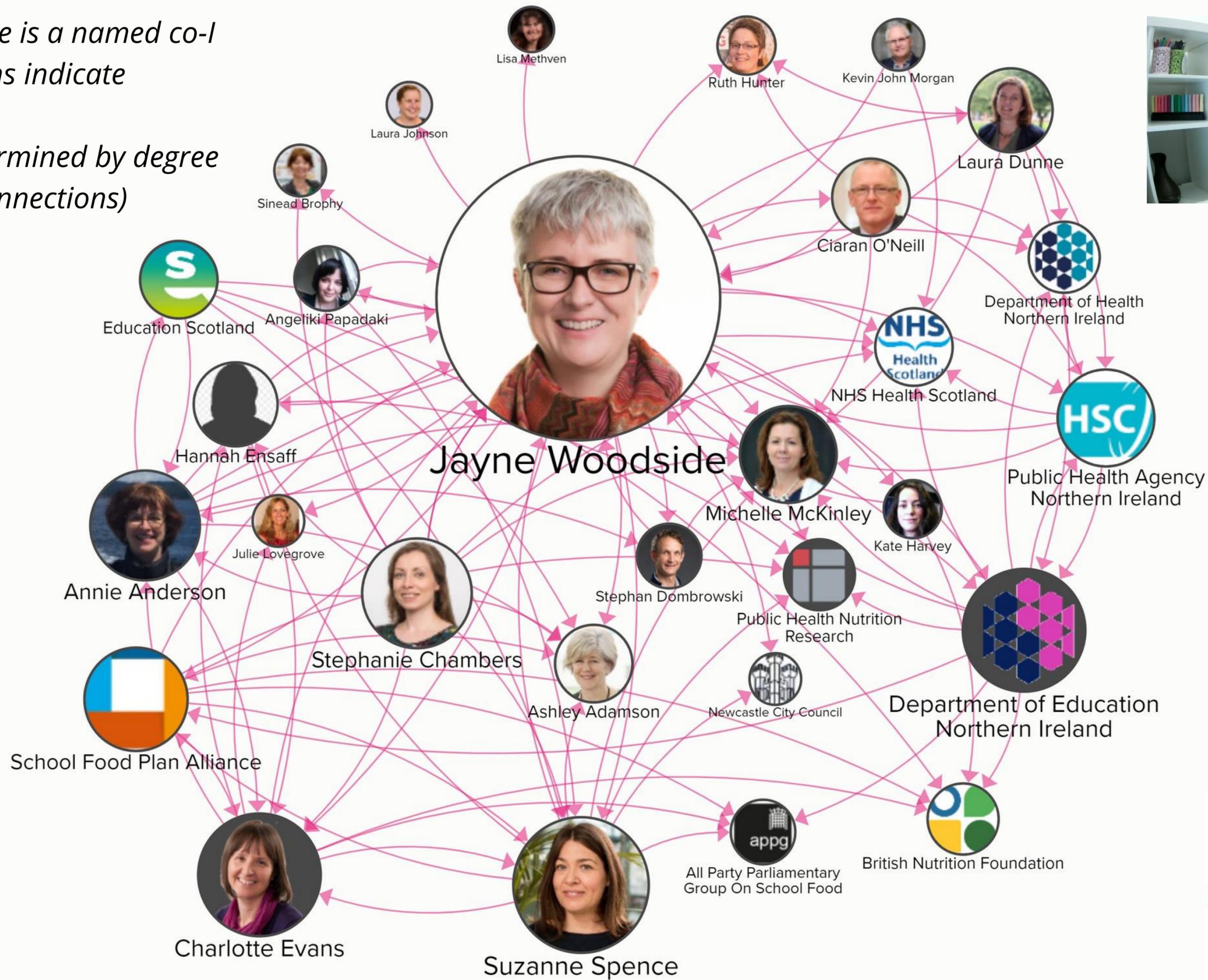
*"Please identify the individuals/ organisations you engage with"*

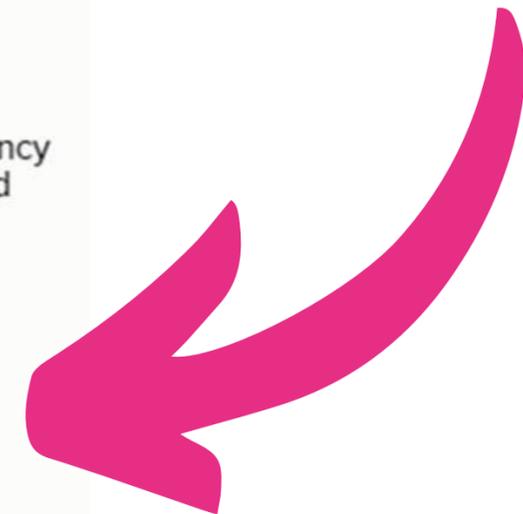
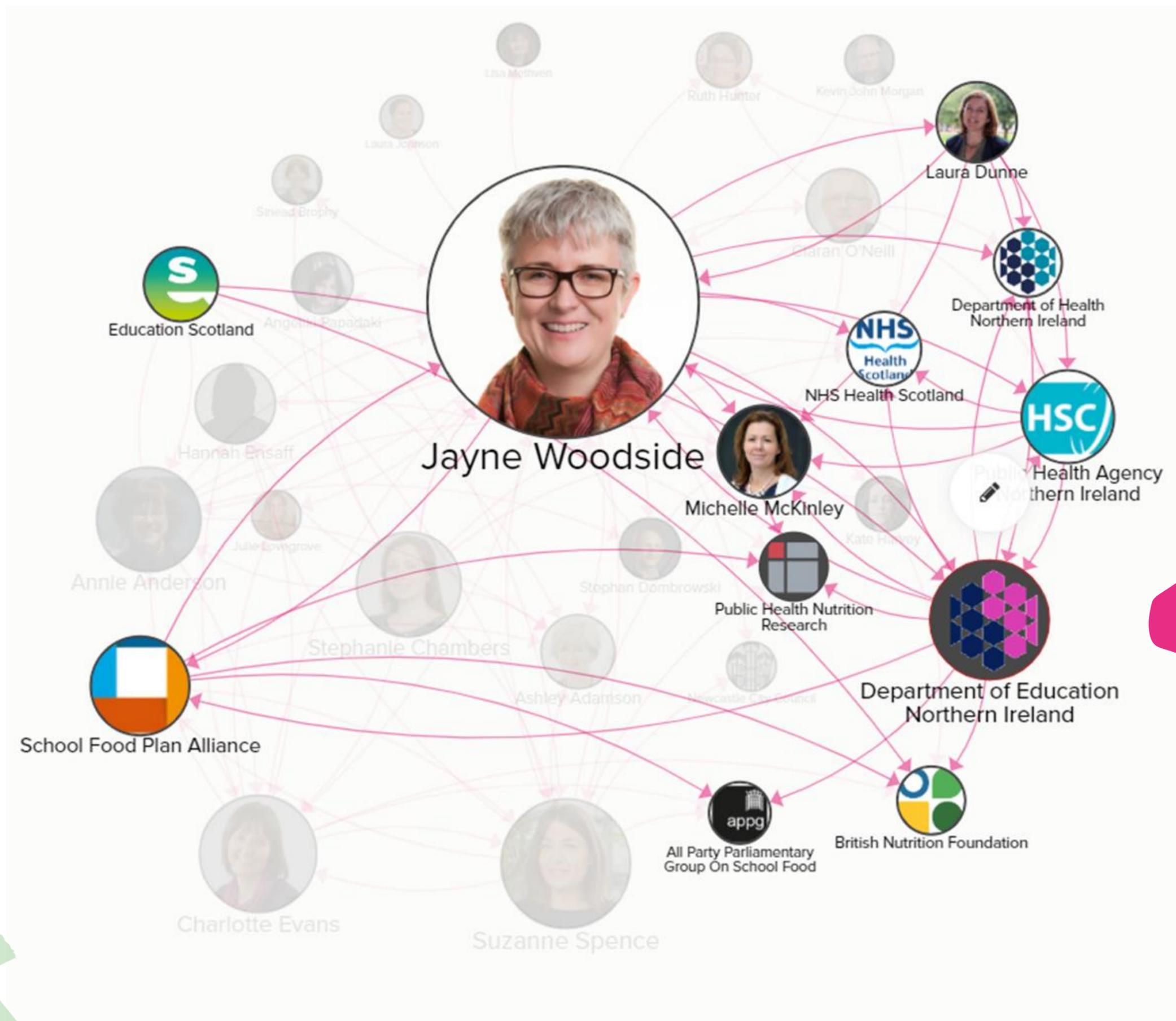
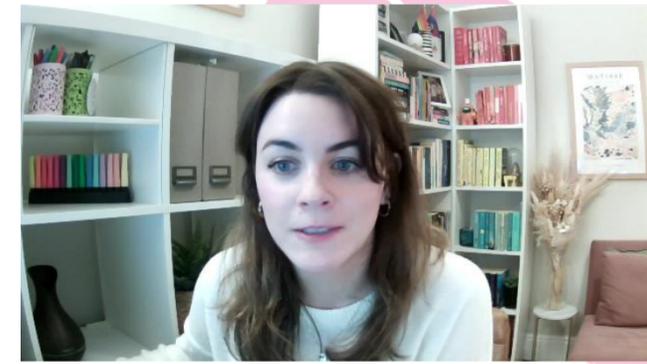
*"Please estimate **how long** you have been collaborating, in years"*



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Each element/circle is a named co-  
Arrows/connections indicate  
relationship  
Size of image determined by degree  
(i.e., number of connections)



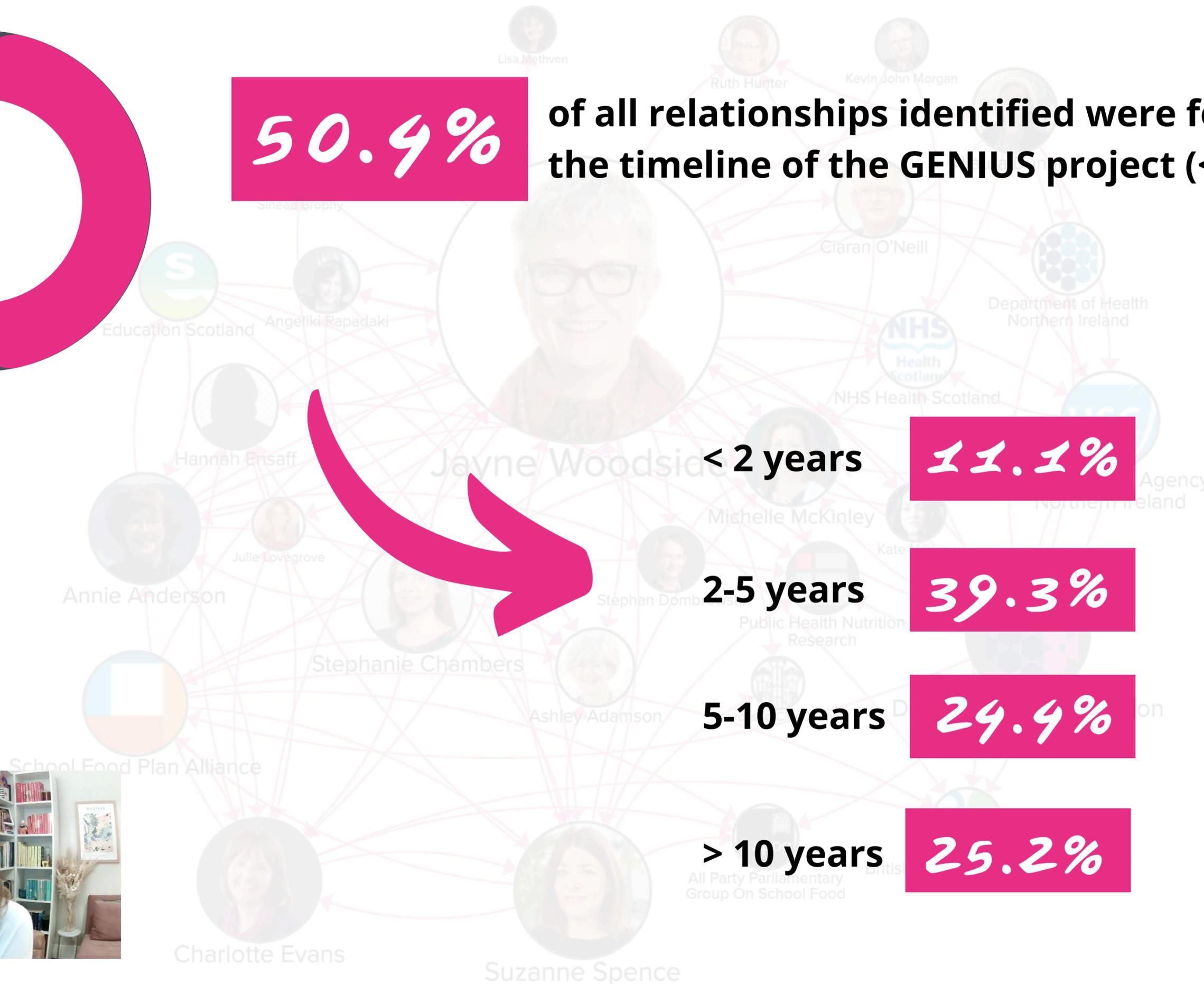


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**50.4%**

**of all relationships identified were formed within the timeline of the GENIUS project (<5 years)**



**< 2 years**

**11.1%**

**2-5 years**

**39.3%**

**5-10 years**

**24.4%**

**> 10 years**

**25.2%**



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# Other key achievements



- Grant funding
  - PhD studentships
  - MRC PHIND
  - NIHR PHR
  - NIHR Policy Research Programme



**NIHR** | National Institute for Health and Care Research

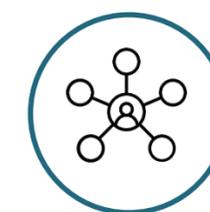


- Nutrition Society SIG – member communications
- Nutrition Society SIG and UKSBM SIG - dissemination



## Social media

- GENIUS website  
<https://geniusschoolfoodnetwork.com>
- GENIUS Twitter @GENIUSSFN; 428 followers



## Engagement

- APPG School Food
- School Food Plan Alliance
- Global Research Consortium for School Health and Nutrition

# MEMBER FEEDBACK



Online survey circulated among GENIUS members (n=39 valid responses)



68.4%

respondents stated that participation in the GENIUS network helped them **develop new relationships** or collaborations in the area of school food

Interacting and networking with individuals in roles and institutions similar to and different from their own

&

Accessing new resources, information, knowledge, expertise and training

THE MOST USEFUL OPPORTUNITIES FOR MEMBERS



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# We are looking for teachers who want to make a difference.

## Why?

We are looking for the unique perspectives from teachers to help us inform a large research study being conducted in Northern Ireland (2023-2025).

The aim of the study is to evaluate **free school meals** in **secondary schools**.

## What?

You will be invited to:

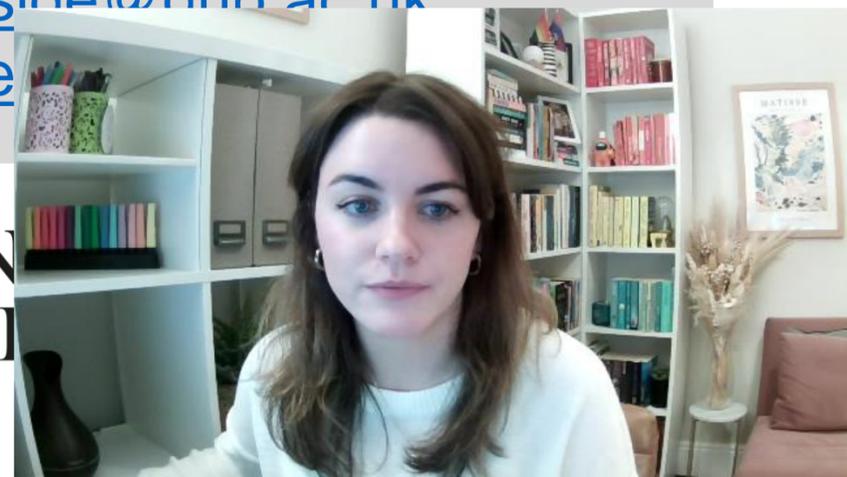
- Join informal meetings
- Give your opinion on pupil & parent recruitment, data collection, design of study materials, etc.
- Help make research more meaningful and impactful

## Also...

If your school is also interested in taking part in this study, please let us know and we will be happy to share more information.

### Contact:

[j.woodside@qub.ac.uk](mailto:j.woodside@qub.ac.uk)  
[d.schlie@qub.ac.uk](mailto:d.schlie@qub.ac.uk)



# CALLING PRIMARY SCHOOL TEACHERS

Tell us your thoughts and experiences about food and nutrition education (even if you don't teach it right now)!

Take an anonymous 15 minute survey and go into the draw to win one of five **£30 gift vouchers**

[www.redcap.link/foodeducation](http://www.redcap.link/foodeducation)

REFERENCE NUMBER: HEAG-H 127\_2022





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# Acknowledgements

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*THANK YOU*

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