

Dear Colleagues,

I am writing to inform you that the updated '[Setting the Table, Nutritional Standards and Practical Guidance for Early Learning and Childcare \(ELC\) in Scotland](#)' was published today, on 8 October 2024.

Natalie Don–Innes MSP, Minister for Children, Young People and The Promise, visited Bankier ELC to mark the launch of this updated guidance. The Minister said, *"It has been a pleasure to see the children at Bankier ELC enjoying a nutritious lunch today. Childcare providers have the opportunity to make such a positive difference to children's nutrition and eating habits. The updated Setting the Table Guidance provides the most up-to-date nutritional and practical information on food provision in early learning and childcare settings, to support children's health and wellbeing. The Scottish Government has placed quality at the heart of our funded ELC offer and the free nutritious meal is an essential part of this."*

Updated 'Setting the Table' guidance

The updated guidance aims to ensure that children from birth to five years in childcare settings across Scotland are given meals, snacks and drinks that meet their nutritional requirements and make a positive difference to their health. It replaces the previous 'Setting the Table' guidance, which was published in 2015 and last updated in 2018, and reflects the most up-to-date scientific and nutritional advice.

The update of the guidance was led by the Scottish Government and co-produced by an expert group of key stakeholders, including Public Health Scotland, Food Standards Scotland, Care Inspectorate, Education Scotland, NHS Greater Glasgow and Clyde dietetics, The Children and Young People's Allergy Network Scotland (CYANS), Early Years Scotland, National Day Nurseries Association, Scottish Childminding Association and ASSIST FM Scotland (representing Local Authority catering leads). We have engaged closely with the sector through our expert working group to ensure that the guidance meets the sector's needs.

As you will be aware, the Scottish Government's expansion to 1140 funded hours of ELC introduced a universal entitlement to a free meal for all 3 and 4-year-old children and eligible 2 year old children as part of the ELC day. Provision of a free meal is a requirement under the [National Standard for funded ELC](#) and can be delivered as a breakfast, lunch or dinner. The National Standard criterion 10 outlines that "settings must have a clear and comprehensive policy for the provision of healthy meals and snacks and drinks for children, consistent with Setting the Table".

Support for implementation

All ELC providers in Scotland are expected to implement this guidance by 1 August 2025. Feedback from the expert group emphasised the importance of ensuring providers have sufficient time to read and consider how to apply the new guidance. The Care Inspectorate said: *"We welcome the update to Setting the Table. The August 2025 implementation date offers time for practitioners to familiarise themselves with the guidance and make the necessary changes. We won't be*

inspecting against the updated document until after August 2025. We look forward to hearing about how you have been using it in your settings.”

Setting the Table has been developed as a digital resource. However, it has been designed so that you can easily print checklists, nutritional standards, sample menus and recipes, if you feel printed copies of these would be helpful.

In response to practitioner feedback, we are also making an audio recording of the guidance available, to support effective implementation. This will be available on the Scottish Government [website](#) alongside the supporting documents. We will share details of this via ELC X account ([@ELCScotGov](#)) when available.

After reading this guidance, staff will be eligible to apply for a SSSC [CPL+ MyLearning Badge](#). To be awarded, staff will have to provide evidence of how working through the guidance and implementing some of the practical examples is relevant to their professional learning.

I would also like to invite you to attend a webinar at 7- 8pm on 11 November 2024. During the session the authors of the guidance will provide an overview of the key changes and you will have the opportunity to ask questions. Please sign up [here](#). You can submit any questions using the registration link. A recording will be available afterwards for those who cannot join the live event.

I would like to extend my thanks to those who have worked hard to update this guidance, the settings that opened their doors to assist with providing the updated artwork and those who provided feedback and support during this process. If you have any questions, please get in touch with the team at elc@gov.scot .

I include at Annex A a short Q&A document to support you with any questions you might have.

Best wishes

Eleanor Passmore
Deputy Director for Early Learning and Childcare Division

Setting the Table: Nutritional Standards and Practical Guidance for ELC Providers in Scotland

Questions and Answers

Q – What is Setting the Table?

Setting the Table provides nutritional standards and practical guidance for Early Learning and Childcare Providers in Scotland. It aims to ensure that children from birth to 5 years in childcare settings across Scotland are given meals, snacks and drinks that meet their nutritional requirements and make a positive difference to their health.

Q – Who is this guidance for?

All regulated childcare providers for children aged 0-5 years who provide food (including snacks) and/or drinks will be expected to implement and follow this guidance. This includes local authority and PVI (private, voluntary, or independent) settings, family centres, childminders, playgroups and caterers who provide food or drinks for early years settings, regardless of the length of time that children are being cared for.

Q – How was this updated guidance developed?

This updated guidance has been developed by a Scottish Government led multi-partner working group consisting of national statutory bodies, clinical and nutrition experts, and sector representatives. Membership included Public Health Scotland, Food Standards Scotland, Care Inspectorate, Education Scotland, NHS GGC dietetics, The Children and Young People's Allergy Network Scotland (CYANS), Early Years Scotland, National Day Nurseries Association, Scottish Childminding Association and Assist Scotland (representing Local Authority catering leads). The guidance has also been endorsed by Professor Sir Gregor Smith, Scotland's Chief Medical Officer, and Professor Marion Bain, Deputy Chief Medical Officer with responsibility for public health.

Q – When are we expected to implement the updated guidance?

All regulated childcare providers in Scotland are expected to implement this guidance by August 2025. This is to provide time for settings to familiarise themselves with its contents and make changes where necessary.

The Care Inspectorate is a scrutiny body that supports improvement. When they carry out their scrutiny work, they will expect registered childcare providers to be able to demonstrate how they are meeting this guidance within their individual settings.

Q - Why was this guidance updated?

We are updating the guidance as a result of changes in policy and scientific evidence, including the [Scientific Advisory Committee on Nutrition \(SACN\) review on "Feeding young children aged 1 to 5 years"](#) published in July 2023. The guidance was last updated in 2018.

Q – What is changed and what do these changes mean in practice?

The update to this guidance reflects policy developments since the last update and key changes in scientific evidence, giving childcare providers the most up-to-date, evidence-based standards for food provision as well as easy-to-follow steps on how to make a positive difference to a child's nutritional intake and ultimately their future health.

Because of the extent of the changes, **the guidance should be read in full**. However, some of the key changes are:

- The nutritional advice for all children from birth to 5 years, which includes sample menus and recipes, has been updated to reflect the latest available scientific evidence.
- Food group-based guidance has changed to food standards. There are 14 food standards covering provision at meal and snack times, to ensure children get a balance of nutrient rich foods across the day.
- Practical guidance has been updated to include the Health and Social Care Standards and to signpost to the latest best practice guidance.
- Advice on allergies and intolerances has been updated to clarify the difference between allergy where there is a potential risk of anaphylaxis (allergy action plans, availability of allergy medicines) and other kinds of allergy/intolerance. Inclusion and food safety skills are emphasised as preferable to food exclusion policies.
- The guidance has been shortened and includes signposting to other existing guidance materials to avoid duplication and to help assist the streamlining of guidance materials for ELC sector.

Q – How will I be supported to implement this guidance?

A webinar will be hosted by Scottish Government at 7- 8pm on 11 November 2024 to which you can sign up [here](#). The authors will present an overview of the key elements of the guidance and there will be an opportunity to ask any questions you might have. A recording will be available after the event for those who cannot join the live event.

We will make an audio recording of the guidance available, as a useful tool to support effective implementation. A link to the audio transcript will be included on the SG [website](#) soon.

Q – Will developing knowledge of the guidance count towards continuous professional learning?

After reading or listening to the guidance, reflecting on what you've read and applying your knowledge in your practice setting, you will be eligible to apply for a SSSC [CPL+ MyLearning Badge](#). To be awarded, you will have to provide evidence of how working through the guidance and implementing some of the practical examples is relevant to your professional learning.

Q - I am only serving food that is provided by parents. Do I still need to follow this guidance?

Yes, this guidance applies to providers who provide the food as well as those who serve food regardless of the length of time that children are being cared for.

Q - I am not a 1140 partnership provider. Do I still need to follow this guidance?

Yes, this guidance is for all childcare providers, regardless of if they are a funded provider or not. All regulated childcare providers are expected to follow the guidance, including those who prepare or serve food or supervise children during mealtimes.

Q - I am not involved in preparing meals. Do I still need to follow this guidance?

Yes, all regulated childcare providers who provide food are expected to follow the guidance, including those who prepare or serve food or supervise children during mealtimes.

Q - Why do I need to read this guidance if I am only supervising children at mealtimes?

There is important information in the guidance including practical elements for meal times. For examples, food allergies affect 4% of children under 5, and rates continue to increase. This guidance will assist you having a safe, inclusive and nurturing mealtime environments for all children regardless of their individual needs.

Q – Are there any printed copies of this guidance?

There are no printed copies of this guidance. This is because the guidance is designed for digital use and there are embedded links within the document. However, some sections are set out in a printer friendly format – such as checklists, nutritional standards, sample menus and recipes - to enable you to be able to print these easily.

Q – If I have a question about this guidance, who can I ask?

Please email feedback or questions you may have directly to elc@gov.scot.