The Business Services Association
130 Fleet Street,
London.
EC4A 2BH

BSA Member Briefing: Government Response to the School Food Standards Consultation

September 2026

The Government has published its response to the consultation on updating the School Food Standards. While Ministers have proceeded with the majority of the proposed nutritional reforms, the response reflects many of the practical implementation concerns raised by the BSA and its members.

Key Outcomes for the Sector

Implementation timelines have been extended and phased.

The revised standards will come into force from September 2027, with several secondary school requirements delayed until September 2028. The Government explicitly cited concerns around procurement cycles, existing contracts, menu planning, pupil acceptance and meal uptake when making this decision.

A new national compliance framework will be introduced.

This is one of the clearest areas where the Government has responded to industry concerns. From September 2027, there will be a national compliance framework, enhanced monitoring arrangements, greater transparency requirements, publication of menus and food policies, and the expectation that every school appoints a lead governor for school food.

The Government recognises the risk of reduced meal uptake.

Throughout the response, there is repeated reference to concerns that pupils may opt for packed lunches, purchase food off-site or reject less familiar menu options. These concerns informed changes to proposals on desserts, cheese, drinks and implementation timescales.

Greater flexibility has been introduced in several areas.

Following consultation feedback, the Government has:

- removed the proposed fruit-only dessert day;
- allowed secondary schools to continue serving two sweetened desserts per week;
- provided greater flexibility on processed meat in secondary schools;
- phased restrictions on cheese and drinks in secondary schools; and
- amended several fibre and protein requirements to improve deliverability.

Inclusion and SEND

The response places significant emphasis on inclusion, recognising concerns raised by schools, caterers and stakeholders about pupils with SEND, neurodivergence, sensory sensitivities, ARFID,

The Business Services Association Limited is registered in England No. 2834529
Registered office as above.

allergies, medical conditions and cultural or faith-based dietary requirements. The Government has committed to issuing guidance on reasonable adjustments and inclusive implementation.

Areas where Industry concerns were acknowledged but not resolved

No additional funding or capital has been allocated to support implementation

While the Government recognises concerns around:

- increased food costs;
- labour costs;
- staffing and skills pressures;
- equipment requirements; and
- catering viability,

it has not announced any additional funding or capital investment to support implementation. Nor has it committed to funding kitchen upgrades or infrastructure changes that many operators consider necessary.

The Government has also decided to retain the central nutritional direction of the reforms, including tighter restrictions on:

- sugar;
- sweeteners;
- fruit juice;
- processed foods; and,
- foods high in fat, salt and sugar.

Overall assessment

The final response reflects many of the practical issues highlighted by BSA members, particularly around implementation, compliance, accountability, meal uptake and inclusion. In spite of this, the absence of additional funding remains a significant concern, and the Government has maintained the overall policy direction towards stricter nutritional standards.

The BSA will continue to engage with the Department and is arranging a roundtable with officials to discuss the announcements.