



Professor Greta Defeyter with young people at a HAF Plus event at Northumbria University.

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£600m funding announcement: How Northumbria researchers evidenced the importance of HAF provision

- **Government announcement confirms national commitment to HAF programme, after Northumbria research evidenced its positive impacts**
- **Funding news confirmed on day Northumbria hosts a major HAF event for 100 young people on campus**

Research from Northumbria University outlining the critical importance of the

Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) programme has been instrumental in the government's decision to commit £600 million to funding the programme for the next three years.

The Holiday Activities and Food programme gives children and young people who receive means-tested free school meals across England access to healthy food and opportunities to get involved in enriching physical and cultural activities during school holidays.

Northumbria University's [Healthy Living Lab](#) has been leading research into how holiday programmes, school meals, breakfast clubs can be, and are being, provided to millions of children across the UK through schools and community organisations for over two decades.

The research team, led by [Professor Greta Defeyter OBE](#), has delivered clear evidence outlining the huge benefits HAF and HAF Plus provision brings to children, young people, and their families.

[Their findings](#) have confirmed the widespread positive impacts on children's health, social and educational wellbeing – from improving school attendance, motivation and educational attainment, to supporting social relationships, quality of life, and upward social mobility.

Research from the Healthy Living Lab had already contributed to the Department for Education [investing over £200 million per year](#) to local authorities across England to fund the HAF programme since 2021, and the recent announcement of £315 million to roll-out a National School Breakfast programme to an additional 500,000 primary school children in England.

This summer, the research team have worked with 50 local authorities across England, educational technology platform provider Eequ and Professor Paul Stretesky from the University of Lincoln to conduct the country's largest ever survey of parents and carers on their views of HAF.

To date, almost 19,000 parents have completed the survey with more than 99% of respondents calling on the UK government to fund the HAF programme.

- 95% of respondents said that HAF made it easier for them to

- work during school holidays and that HAF helped their child to take part in more physical activity;
- 92% said that HAF helped them to worry less about money;
- 88% said HAF helped their child to make new friends in the community, and;
- 42% of children attending HAF have special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) according to their parents.

The government's announcement of further funding for the HAF programme was made on the same day that Northumbria University welcomed almost 100 young people and local and national leaders onto its Newcastle city centre campus for a major HAF Plus event, led and organised by young people, for young people.

[HAF Plus](#) is a specially developed variant of the HAF programme co-created by Northumbria University in partnership with 13–18-year-olds from around the country to [better meet their needs and interests](#).

Last year, Northumbria became one of the first universities in the UK to [provide use of its facilities](#) during the summer holidays for HAF Plus activities, working with local authorities and partners from the commercial and private sectors

Professor Greta Defeyter OBE, Director of the Healthy Living Lab and Dean of Social Mobility Policy Engagement at Northumbria University, said: “I am delighted that the Department for Education have committed to funding HAF for a further three years.

“HAF is an excellent programme that supports hundreds of thousands of children and young people, and their families across England, by providing them with a range of enriching opportunities to interact with peers, their local community organisations, schools and community assets.

“Our research has shown a Social Return of Investment of £8 for every £1 invested, by the UK government, in the programme. Investing in communities, and young people leads to improved human capital, upward social mobility and supports children and young people out of poverty.”

[Professor Andy Long](#), Vice-Chancellor and Chief Executive of Northumbria

University added: “The HAF programme enables young people from a range of backgrounds to experience new opportunities, build connections and unlock their potential. Its importance for social mobility and eliminating barriers to success cannot be understated.

“Northumbria University’s long-standing commitment to researching areas of health, social equity and inequality has provided the government with clear evidence of the benefits HAF brings at national, local, community and individual levels which has informed this landmark announcement.”

Northumbria University’s [Healthy Living Lab](#) is one of the leading research groups in the UK focusing on issues relating to public health and food insecurity in disadvantaged social groups and under-represented individuals and communities. Researchers develop, inform, evaluate and co-create community and school-based interventions in areas including school breakfast clubs, school meals and the holiday activity and food programme. Importantly, the Lab ensures that the voices of children and young people are heard and they are included in the co-design of all the Lab’s work – from conceptualisation to dissemination of research findings.

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