

School Nutrition Action Group FAQs

This is your quick reference guide for anyone wanting to set up a School Nutrition Action Group (SNAG) in their school. For more information, visit www.healtheducationtrust.org.uk

What does SNAG stand for and what is its function?

SNAG stands for School Nutrition Action Group. It is essentially a working party, formed to help review your school food culture and develop and implement an action plan to improve it.

Why can't I just use the school council?

Firstly the school council rarely includes all the adult members you need to make a SNAG successful. Secondly it means knowledge and information circulates around the same set of pupils. By recruiting a new set of children you increase opportunities for students to have a say in the running of their school. Thirdly, the school council is likely to have a full agenda with the many other tasks that come their way.



How many people should be involved in a SNAG?

Experience suggests that 10-15 people is the optimum number; if this is exceeded it reduces the opportunities for everyone to have their say and the meeting can become unwieldy.

Who do we invite?

A SNAG should comprise representation from all those who have an interest in food in school. Typically this will include the head teacher or a member of SMT, a parent, a governor, the school catering manager and/or Area Supervisor, midday supervisor or equivalent, at least one class teacher at primary level, and at secondary level the food tech teacher and others such as PSHE, geography or science as appropriate. If your school is small you may find one person who is both a member of staff, a parent and a governor and who can come along wearing three different hats! Pupils are also key to the process. Invite around 4-6 children, ensuring you have a mix of boys and girls, some who have dinners and some who have packed lunches. You can enlist/co-opt as required school nurse/local food producer/healthy schools officer as appropriate but remember meetings with more than 15 people can be difficult to manage.



How do we select pupils to be involved?

There are a variety of ways of approaching this; it is simply a question of what is most appropriate for your school. You could make the process formal by writing a job description and inviting pupils to apply for the post and run interviews. Schools have used a subgroup from the school council or healthy schools committee to ensure good continuity - some however prefer to use the opportunity to spread pupil voice. Some hand pick students for developmental reasons... be it to promote self-esteem, develop confidence, reward enthusiasm, or inspire learning. Whichever of these approaches you adopt be sure to be consistent.

When is the best time to hold a SNAG?

Mornings are generally better for pupils, but a cook in a primary school will prefer an afternoon (once service has finished!). It is unlikely your school cook will want to come to a meeting on a Monday or Friday, when there is a lot of preparatory work either. Some parents may not be able to attend during normal working hours – and then of course there is the issue of releasing staff. In short – there probably isn't a "best time"; it may be worth holding the meeting at different times of the school day and different dates to ensure most people attend at some point (it also saves pupils/staff missing the same lessons all the time). Offering to pay those who are usually on an hourly rate can inspire greater commitment too.

How long should the meetings be?

Given that it can be hard to assemble such a wide ranging group of people...once you have pinned them down you will probably want to make the most of them. Typically a 90 minute meeting with a short refreshment break can be most productive, though 45-60 minutes may be more realistic. In an infant school you might elect to have pupils come to a portion rather than the whole of the meeting.



Should we have refreshments?

Absolutely – it's a meeting about food after all! Providing refreshments is an excellent way to model and prompt discussion about the kind of food you want to see in school. Make sure whatever you provide complies with the government's school food guidelines and try to make sure you have something on offer that is local, organic and seasonal too.

Who chairs the meeting?

Initially it is most likely to be the person who set up the SNAG; however it can be beneficial to rotate the role of chair. Indeed in some schools pupils have taken on the role successfully. It can sometimes be helpful if someone other than the head teacher/ SMT chairs as this will free them from managing the meeting and enable them to really listen to what people have to say.

Who sets the agenda?

Good question! Initially we would recommend the person setting up the SNAG sets the agenda. Example templates of agendas can also be downloaded from www.healtheducationtrust.org.uk. Hopefully as your process unfolds and SNAG members gain confidence, the chair will ask for suggestions for the agenda in-between meetings and thus ensure everyone feels they can make a contribution.

Who takes the minutes?

Not the chair person! It is important to agree who is going to do this at the start of the meeting. Some schools ask their school secretary to do it. In other schools parents and/or governors have happily fulfilled the brief. In some secondary schools where there is a strong culture of minute taking with the school council, pupils may be able to take on the task. Remember you can rotate the role – and it can give people a sense of belonging/greater ownership of the work. Make sure that you keep a record of minutes from meetings as these can be used as evidence for achieving Food for Life awards.

Who do we share the minutes with?

Look at your original wish list for whoever you wanted on your SNAG. Make sure they are sent a copy of the minutes. This will keep them in the loop and hopefully ensure there are no surprises for anyone. You might also display them (check confidentiality issues) on an appropriate notice board in school so raising the profile of what you are doing.

How do I ensure pupil involvement & engagement?

Treat the SNAG as a hybrid between a meeting and a lesson. It will be a new and different experience for many pupils to be in a "grown up" meeting with adults. Many of the behaviour management techniques remain the same. Try to ensure pupils are given specific tasks in the meeting (handing out paper, pens, reporting back on surveys) and are given opportunities to speak/share their opinion. In particular try to introduce some work in breakout groups so that there are opportunities to get up, move about, write, record or vote on issues. Further information on strategies and techniques can be found at www.healthedtrust.com/pages/snag-resources.htm



How often should we hold SNAG meetings?

Six times a year – one per traditional half term - usually works well.

How can we inform the whole school and community about the SNAG and the changes which are being made?

What channels do you usually use? Assemblies, displays, notice boards, newsletters, parent mail, web pages and articles in the local newspaper or parish magazine will all help to convey what you are doing. Best of all – try to get the pupils on your SNAG co-ordinating this effort. It is likely to have a much greater impact this way. They may particularly relish an opportunity to keep a SNAG blog or write something on their own Facebook or Twitter pages.