Young people: can't cook, won't cook?

In February, the Government announced it would be investing £3.3m to recruit 750 cookery teaching assistants and boost existing teachers' cookery skills, as well as introducing compulsory cookery lessons for children aged 11 to 14. This announcement is part of the Government's Change4Life scheme, which aims to start a "lifestyle revolution" to help people eat more healthily and be more active. MYPs were asked for their thoughts on the Government's plans.

Nicole Harding
Age 17
Deputy MYP Hertfordshire

I think compulsory cooking lessons in schools is an excellent strategy to reduce obesity. To learn to cook quickly and cheaply is a wonderful skill to have, one that could be easily taught in schools. It can improve young people's relationship with food, possibly reducing incidences of eating disorders as well as encouraging the use of healthier meals. This is especially important as there are too many stories of students living on baked beans, toast and alcohol. However, this proposal doesn't go far enough. There should be provision for schools to grow some of their own food, in order to promote a fully active, independent and green lifestyle.

Thomas Turrell
Age 17
Deputy MYP Northamptonshire

School is not the best place for young people to learn to cook. There are too many distractions and it costs the parents as they have to pay for the ingredients. It's education in favour of the middle classes. This is why I am having discussions with my local MP and youth worker over educational reform. Lower income families may not have enough money to afford the necessary ingredients, which will fuel bullying or students will pretend to forget and get punished. If an individual does not want to learn then they will not behave and those who do want to learn will suffer.

Ariba Karim
Age 15
MYP Kent

I enjoy cooking when the food is good; therefore the time I spend to make it does tend to pay off. I am concerned about most of our current generation becoming obese. The main thing I think should be done is explaining the importance of health to young people without being draconian or patronising and also encouraging younger people to go to places like the gym in their free time. This, however, can only be done if these facilities are at reasonable prices. My friends are considering leaving the gym as cost per month is £25.00 and for young people this is too much.

What can be done about Britain's rising obesity levels? Debate now at www.ukyp.org.uk/forums

Felicity Probert
Age 17
MYP South Gloucestershire

It's not just about what you eat, it's about how much in terms of proportion and in terms of portion size - it's all about moderation. My food tech teacher always taught me "there's no such thing as a healthy food, only a healthy diet", which is true. Also, some people turn to food as an escape from their problems, so the Government should put the same emphasis on emotional wellbeing as it does with physical wellbeing.

Chloe Donovan
Age 14
MYP Suffolk

I don't believe rising obesity levels are the fault of young people. I think it's down to busy or lazy parents who can't be bothered to cook a proper meal for the kids so they throw something together or order fast food. I think those most responsible are supermarkets and fast food providers. They offer rubbish food for cheap prices so people with little money will buy the rubbish food. It's cheap for a reason!

Lewis Punter
Age 15
MYP Cambridgeshire

This is greatly important with the obesity levels amongst UK youth on the rise. It is also important that children learn about the food that they need to stay healthy, rather than the food that will make them obese. With more education on staying healthy, it will lead to a fall in young people with eating disorders, and a rise in happy, healthy children.

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