

**Food and Drink purchased 'Through the School Gate'**

Principal Investigator: Professor Wendy Wills, University of Hertfordshire

Tel: 01707 286380 Email: [w.j.wills@herts.ac.uk](mailto:w.j.wills@herts.ac.uk)

# Transcript

## School 3 Deputy Head/Catering Mgr Interview

08/02/2019

Transcribed by  
[www.qbftranscription.co.uk](http://www.qbftranscription.co.uk)

**Duration: 0:31:32**

Interviewer: Attitudes are to eating and to food purchasing. We've had a bit of a look around the town, driven a little bit around the town and seen what kinds of outlets there might be. But we can talk about that a little bit more.

Maybe if we could start by talking a little bit more about school policies on food and drink being brought in or carried around school throughout the day?

Respondent: Well, the first thing I suppose to say is that students aren't allowed out for lunch, so they don't go home. In fact, we've only ever had students who have got some medical concern who go home for lunch. So, everyone stays in for lunch, so they don't actually eat lunch in town.

Students are allowed to bring in their own food for snacks and for packed lunch at lunchtime and there are no restrictions on that apart from energy drinks aren't allowed.

Interviewer: Okay, right. And how soon... sorry.

Speaker: Hello. Elaine was up to her arms in chicken, she is on her way up. [Overspeaking 00:01:09].

Respondent: Literally? Gosh, what a delightful image.

Interviewer: Okay, and when did that come into force, that policy?

Respondent: Gosh, I have no idea. I mean I've been here 17 years. It's generally been the policy and I think what we have to do is occasionally reinforce that. So, if students start to bring energy drinks in we will reinforce that by...

Respondent2: Apologies for being late.

Interviewer: Hi, come and sit down.

Respondent2: Sorry [overspeaking 00:01:39].

Respondent: So, if there is a concern raised that somebody is drinking an energy drink we will reinforce that and just remind students. We don't make a big deal of it, but students know that certainly in lessons we have a water-only policy, so they're not allowed to drink other drinks in lessons or in the corridors.

Interviewer: Okay, and do you know if there is a culture of, what we find often is that students aren't allowed off campus during the day to eat but that there is a bit of a tradition in the mornings or after school of going to certain places to eat. I mean is that something that is known to you or is there a culture of that in the school that you're aware of?

Respondent2: We try to supply everything that the sixth formers, they would be the only ones that would go off site after Christmas time.

Respondent: That's at lunchtime.

Respondent2: At lunchtime only.

Respondent: This is before and after.

Respondent2: Before and after, not that I'm aware of.

Interviewer: Right, right.

Respondent2: Because we basically try to keep everything that they could possibly want on offer in the sixth form, so we don't really have that. And we have a breakfast club in the morning here so the students that come in early don't go around the town, they come in here.

Respondent: I am aware that a few children pick up a very sort of fatty, sugary, don't even know what it's called, coffee-based drink from...

Respondent2: Oh, yes.

Respondent: Costa or Starbucks or something on the way in, but that's very few. I think maybe two or three in the morning and they've walked in with them. After school, I'm not so sure. Immediately after I don't know. I think sometimes students who are spending longer in the town may then stop off and have some, what I would call in Manchester tea, you know, chips or something like that.

Respondent2: Yeah, that's...

Respondent: But I'm usually up here and they're down there so I don't see it. I genuinely don't see that. I was talking to some students yesterday, so this is just really anecdotal, but they said, I asked them what they'd done over the weekend and they said that they'd hit the town on Friday and I said 'What, Our town?' because it's obviously a small market town and they laughed and said 'Yeah, we had a Dominoes'.  
  
So I think there are two pizza outlets in town and I think those are also places that students go to perhaps if they're staying longer in town rather than going home for dinner.

Interviewer: Right, okay, okay. So, in terms of the food policies and the way that the food is served, organised and kind of planned on campus or at the school, could you tell me about how that comes to be? Who makes the decisions, how do the decisions get made and, yes, all about it.

Respondent2: Well we do a lot of talking to students, so for instance in sixth form you might suddenly say, last year we had a number of students who decided that they would like to be vegan and so we introduced things like smoothies and asked them about that, and they worked quite

well. But they weren't really vegan because they fancied a chicken sandwich every now and then.

Interviewer: Got to have a day off occasionally.

Respondent2: Absolutely. But we tried to put things in place where they would have that, and we supplied salads, not huge amounts of them, but we were making sure that if we have a request, we meet that need.

Respondent: Sushi as well.

Respondent2: We do sushi.

Respondent: Shows you how middle class we are.

Interviewer: So, you have sushi now?

Respondent2: Yeah, we do, and we've a salad bar as well that we have at lunchtime. We open it early for the sixth form. So, we generally have the salad bar set up by half-past 11 in the morning so once the first break is over then that's open because the sixth formers and staff are a bit more flexible with their times that they might have a free period so they can come before the big rush and help themselves. And it's self-service as well, so they can pick what they want.

We discovered that when we served it ourselves we had a lot of younger students didn't have anything because they were

embarrassed about coming to say 'I only want a little bit of tomato' whereas we now have tripled the amount of salad that is sold because it's there and it's self-service, you have a mix, you can put it in. You can have a small one or a large one, it's up to you. You can only put so much in it. So, they prefer that.

Respondent: And they are very tasty salads, so you get sort of...

Respondent2: We'd have quinoa, we could have sweet potato, we could have chicken, coronation chicken, we could have roasted mushrooms, roasted curried cauliflower, things like that. We change it a lot and we come up with new things. And when things are in season, we'll use that a lot. So that's what we do.

Interviewer: Better than uni, isn't it?

Respondent: Yeah.

Respondent2: Very tasty. We have tried to use some of the produce from the farm that we have here as well, but we can't use their eggs because of health and safety, because they haven't had the standard stamp yet. But we would use some of the vegetables that they grow in the garden and their potatoes and herbs and things like that.

Interviewer: And so is there a kitchen programme for, what do they call them, the cottage garden programme for the students? Is that part of the

curriculum here as well in terms of...? That's something that some other schools have got.

Respondent2: They are working towards, and they have some students come in from other schools, from primary schools. They come in from primary school and they do, because they have some livestock as well.

Respondent: So, I mean the farm or the agricultural science unit as we now have to call it was in danger of being closed. It's been associated with the school for probably as long as the school has been around, because we are actually in a rural community, and it's got a lot of support from the farming community. But anyway, we've now decided we're going to keep it and really invest in it.

So special needs children from other schools come and we've got level two qualifications in the agricultural science unit. So, it's really blossoming, and I think if we could use the eggs that would be fantastic. We've got ducks, we've got chickens.

Respondent2: It would be fantastic for us for baking, stuff like that. We'd use them in the salad bar. And so, we do advertise to everybody when we do use something, because we get a lot of the rhubarb. It's just a case of planning out what they're going to grow.

Respondent: And making sure they've got enough of it.

Respondent2: And making sure they've got enough, or that they let us know that they haven't so we can use it up for them.



Interviewer: Right. And so, you said about, that really the majority of the way that the food is kind of developed and changed or revised or whatever is based on what the students say?

Respondent2: Some of it is, some of it is on what staff say and some of it we keep an eye on food trends and we try to take those into account. The other thing too, we're in a catchment area where the students have quite good developed sense of taste, they're quite discerning about what they like. So, you can put things like avocado on the salad bar and they're not going to go 'Ew, that's dirty, what's that?' you know what I mean? They know what it is and they've had it before. So that's really fantastic for us that we don't have to.

And we do homemade soups every day and things like that, and they all like those.

So, we try to, there's a lot of things, like carbohydrates are a huge thing for teenagers, so we have baguettes, toasted baguettes that we do and ham and cheese toasties in the morning, and it's like a plague of locusts have swept in. You can't get enough of those, the lady who does the toasties, she is amazing. So, there's that huge build-up, carb build-up, but they also have the options of lots of other healthy things. But they do like, they're kids and they like something like a burger and chips or fish and chips on a Friday, things like that.

Respondent: We have a main meal option which is very good value, isn't it? Which is a sort of either meat or a vegetarian alternative and then potatoes...

Respondent2: Two veg.

Respondent: Two veg and then a pudding and a drink.

Respondent2: Yeah, they can have pudding or they can have a piece of fruit or a yoghurt, and we do make our own yoghurts as well. So, they can have that with a bottle of water, they can only have a bottle of water. If they take a juice the meal deal is gone, everything is charged for. But it's £2.30 and we keep it at that because that's the free school meal allowance for the day, so that's our £2.30 offer and we do very well on it. They get a fabulous roast dinner.

Respondent: They do. I mean staff often have it, so you'll have beef and roast, Yorkshire puddings...

Respondent2: We do pie day and things like that. So, they get, you know, they do like their food.

Interviewer: And what do you think are the most popular options?

Respondent: Roast dinners are popular, aren't they? I mean I'm on the lunch queue outside trying to keep control, so you can almost guarantee there is going to be something really nice when you see the queue because they know in advance. So roast dinners are really popular.

Respondent2: Curry day today. I mean we do a lot of vegetarian curry as well, because that can go as quickly as the chicken curry. So that's served with rice, naan breads and they'll have veg as an option as well. And

that will fly out, they love curries. They love pastas, pasta bolognaise, carbonara, whatever, and they also love the roast days. It's very little that they don't like, you know what I mean?

Interviewer: And you were saying too that students can bring in a packed lunch, what would be the proportion do you think of students, the food is there for them to eat and they can take advantage of the onsite catering, but what...?

Respondent2: There's a lot of students that would take packed lunch twice a week and then they eat for three days. And then you have, I think if you look at the hall where the packed lunches are, there's probably about 200, 150 per day.

Respondent: About 150 at once.

Respondent2: About 150 bring packed lunches.

Respondent: There are some that eat their packed lunch in a picnic area, more difficult to monitor.

Respondent2: Not huge numbers.

Respondent: But I would say that the majority of students eat in school.

Interviewer: Right, okay. And what's the student cohort, what are the numbers?

Respondent: 2,050.

Interviewer: Wow, okay. So only a very small proportion. Could you tell us a little bit about the free school meal programme here and how many students are involved?

Respondent: There are about 40 children on free school meals. All the students use either a card if their parents don't want them to do the finger printing, so the vast majority will use their finger print, so there's no stigma attached to getting a free school meal, nobody knows who is free school meals unless the child tells their friends.

So as Elaine said, the main meal deal is designed for them but we don't force them to have it, obviously. Sometimes they will take a baguette and a drink instead.

Respondent2: We do a deal on those as well so you can have a sandwich and a bottle of water and cake or fruit for £2.30 as well. And everybody gets that.

Interviewer: Right, right. I'm just interested in is there sort of one eating area, because you said there's a picnic area as well?

Respondent: We've got two picnic areas and how long ago, was it only a year ago?

Respondent2: No, two years now.

Respondent: Two years? So, we have two picnic areas which were designed obviously for people to eat their sandwiches, home-brought sandwiches and what have you, and then two years ago we put in a pod which serves...

Respondent2: We serve, in the morning time we do sausage rolls, bacon roll, just quick, because it has to be fast food, and they have a selection of fruit and sandwiches. And we do water, a milky drink or a juice, that's all we offer there.

And then at lunchtime we serve, we do burgers, they do these chicken burgers, hot chicken sandwiches, and we do pasta then at lunchtime. So, they have a choice of vegetarian or a meat sauce, and again as I say, fruit, water, juice or a milkshake and that's it, a little carton of it. And that's what they have.

Interviewer: I think I want to live here.

Respondent: We're hoping to open another eating area. We were only talking on Friday, or was it yesterday?

Respondent2: Yesterday.

Respondent: Feels like Friday, where we actually have another outlet. So, I mean we're basically swamped in the canteen. It's amazing how many kids we get through.

Respondent2: It is actually, yeah, it's really...

Respondent: You wouldn't believe it, it's staggering.

Respondent2: First time I came across, it really is, if you ever opened a room where there were cockroaches, you know the room is black one minute and the next minute they're all gone, that's what it's like. It's just [inaudible 00:15:11].

Interviewer: Wow. The other thing I was interested in was whether you know the demographics of your school as well and whether or not you feel that the families and kind of the demographic mix influence the kinds of choices students make about what they want to eat?

Respondent: Yes, I mean I think Elaine has already alluded to that when talking about avocado. There are some children who will never have tasted avocado.

Respondent2: Absolutely, yeah.

Respondent: So, although we're ostensibly a very sort of middle-class area, very middle-class school, we're actually truly comprehensive and the demographic is, if you looked at it, we've got rural deprivation, we've got families in crisis, financial crisis, real poverty. But it's a smaller number than you would find say in inner-city areas.

But there are children who, you know, are not eating who we're having to help on occasion with free meals when they're not entitled to them.

Respondent2: We always ensure that every child that comes through, if they come and they have no money on their account, we'll always feed them and we'll just put them in a minus, but we always make sure that we have that policy.

Respondent: And then follow it up as a safeguarding issue.

Respondent2: So, if we have a situation where a child is a couple of days in a row, one of the girls, one of my ladies will say to me 'Oh, so-and-so hasn't had any money for a while' or 'He's getting his friends to pay for his meal' we will always flag that up and then he's helped out. Generally something silly, you know, whatever, his mum has given him money and he's spent it down the town or something.

But, you know, at least then everybody knows what's happening.

Interviewer: Okay. And in terms of sort of like cultural mix and diversity, is there much of...?

Respondent: No, I mean we're really pretty monocultural. We do have, gosh, about 200 children who would have an ethnic background that maybe sort of maybe Mum is Lithuanian, but actually in terms of our black and minority ethnic groups we've got very few. So, we have got some Asian, we've got ex-soldiers from The Barracks which is nearby, in

fact we have a lot of, our Asian site team, sorry, our site team is Asian as well.

We have very few actually, very few for a school this size. So, we are trying all the time to introduce them to new cultural experiences and...

So, for example, we've been doing the China trips now for 12 years, so when our Chinese guests come we'll have Chinese, it's usually around Chinese New Year, so we'll have Chinese New Year celebrations and we've celebrated Diwali.

Respondent2: We have. We try to do as many as we can. It's not always possible.

Respondent: And great support for the LGBT Pride Day each year.

Respondent2: We all dress in different colours, rainbow everything and cakes, purple soup, everything, it's fantastic.

Interviewer2: Amazing.

Respondent2: The kids love it. They always stand at the door when they look in at the cakes they go 'Wow' like really vibrant. That is good fun actually.

Interviewer: And I was just sort of, in terms of where students are coming from, are they coming from very local areas or quite a way away?



Respondent: Well, about 50% I would suggest live within walking distance, as in the town of Our town, and then others are bused in or walk further distances or are driven in. So, can't remember now how many villages we do take from, but it used to be 17, but our catchment area has shrunk in the sense that as the town has grown more children come from the town so therefore fewer children come from outside the confines of the town.

But, you know, some children have a 45-minute bus drive to get here because of the nature of the roads.

Interviewer: Yes, we discovered that.

Respondent: So, between Beechfield say and here there used to be a double-decker bus, I think it's a single one now, but it takes a long time because it's stopping everywhere and it's not a very fast road.

Interviewer: The other thing I was wondering about would be do you notice differences along gender lines in terms of the choices that students make in terms of what they eat?

Respondent2: I think, no, I wouldn't say I would notice it. You notice cliques where they come in together, particularly girls, so there's the head girl, she has the tuna baguette and a juice, they'll all have a tuna baguette and a juice. So, you could have five of them all to the till one after the other with exactly the same thing. It's just so funny.

And if one of her pack decides that they wanted a cake instead, she would be 'You're having cake?' do you know what I mean? But that's

a girl thing. You do get a lot of that, but not, no, not really with regards, nothing that would be marked.

Respondent: I mean a lot of the boys do go for the main sort of main meal, especially for a roast. Saying that, so do lots of girls.

Respondent2: Yeah, with the sixth formers, they come down on a Thursday early because we open our hot counter early for them because they like having that, and there's groups of them coming down my, I notice they have these little social groups that are starting to emerge because it's their thing, they go down on Thursday and they sit and wait until the counter opens and they're up and they have their dinner together. So that's nice that they're able to do that.

I notice more girls joining in as the boys become more confident and everything like, girls are adding onto it. So yeah, becomes very social.

Interviewer: Yeah, I think that's it, that from my time at school in Australia, which is where I'm from, we don't have school food.

Respondent: Really?

Respondent2: We don't in Ireland either.

Interviewer: No, no. So, but it is a highly social space but also a very fraught space in terms of, yeah, what are you eating, all these kinds of things. And I just sort of was wondering if...

Respondent2: You do see a lot of that, and when you say, for instance year sevens come in, it's their first time in big school, they've been in a primary school where their choices were made for them, suddenly they come in and they have money on an account and they have choices to make. You can see them wandering around for their whole break time and then they go 'Oh, break is over and I haven't picked'.

And then you see them escalate as the year, as the months go on or the weeks go on they get more confident. They start to spend more. Then you have their mothers on the phone saying 'Can you cap his...?'

Respondent: Just got an e-mail now actually from a mum who has got three boys, 'Rather cheeky request, I'm not even sure it's possible, could John, Stewart and Lewis have some credit on their lunch account until tomorrow?'

Respondent2: I often do that. Parents ring me and say 'I can't get...'

Respondent: I know this mum has got a bit of a cashflow problem at the moment because I met with her last week.

Respondent2: What we'll do is we'll put an overdraft in for her and then she can pay it back.

Respondent: Sorry, I'll just reply to this now otherwise she won't... she's got three boys who will go, one of whom will go off the rails if he doesn't eat, I know that.

Interviewer: Familiar with [overspeaking 00:23:18].

Respondent2: That's the kind of thing we do as well, it's about helping everybody out and we try to make sure that everybody does get something to eat and everybody is, as long as we know about it we can deal with it.

Interviewer: Something that's interesting coming out of what you've both been saying is really the element of choice. It sounds to me you've said you have the breakfast club in the morning, you have the salad bar, you have different days and options and meal deals. I mean I'm trying, it seems to me that if I were a student, to be faced with, there's so much choice. I just wondered if you could say a little bit more about that because it seems to me that I think there is a very old narrative of school food in the UK, at least as an outsider, it comes out of the bain-marie, it's the same thing, everybody gets the same thing and that's it.

Whereas that's a very different sort of narrative, and you're talking about choice in a particular way.

Respondent2: It's one of the things that we would be, well, I come from the catering industry, as does my head chef, so we're both industry based with classical training and everything like that, we don't want Our town to have a name for it, just, you know, school dinners and everybody goes [inaudible 00:24:50] because you listen to people 'Oh God, rice pudding' and we don't want that.

We want to try and give them the stuff that they want but feed them in the correct way as well and make sure they have, because at the end of the day that's what they're learning now, how to make choices, and we need to have the choices there for them.

And we have such a big school, there's so many different needs and whatever. So, we're trying to meet all of those in the best way that we can and to make it as good an experience as possible for them, so that's why we do that. And to get away from that school dinners.

Respondent: I mean I was talking yesterday as well, because I'm on lunch duty quite a bit, talking to a year-11 girl who is a recovering anorexic who is also vegan and she was showing me her sandwiches which were vegan and just the beauty I suppose that she is able to go in and eat with her friends and pick up something, it's calorie controlled and she won't eat anything that's not calorie controlled [overspeaking 00:25:55]. Something there that she could eat and she felt comfortable about eating.

Respondent2: And she came and talked to us about it and everything.

Respondent: Just e-mailed Anthonia because I wasn't sure where you were going after this.

Respondent2: She came to talk to us about it and I have a member of staff who is vegan as well so kind of paired them up and we offered to do things for her but she is more comfortable with seeing it on the packaging. So, we've done labels for her and things as well we can put in if she wishes, but that's what she is happy with and it's working really well for her, isn't it?

Respondent: Yeah, yeah, it is, really well. So, she can go in with her friends and be supported by them and feel comfortable about eating.

Respondent2: And she's not labelled, she's not been pointed out. So that's good.

Interviewer: So, yeah, it's a cool story to think about the fact that the choice is kind of, that sounds quite empowering here for a number of the students as well, and yes there is the kind of, there's the barrier of not being able to go off the grounds during the day by virtue of that being a school rule, but at the same time it does sound as though you have a sense of the student body being quite content and well catered for and having different choices and options that they can pursue.

Respondent: I mean occasionally our student voice, our junior leadership group, will voice some concerns about prices or choice and so they, sushi didn't come from that group I don't think, but they may say 'We want more vegan or vegetarian food' or 'We want more this or that'.

Respondent2: Last year they came to us about the cakes and about fruit and they felt there was too many cakes being sold. They made a request that we would put up the price of the cake and reduce the price of the fruit, which is what we did. And we also restricted the students to one cake per, and that was...

Respondent: That was my rule.

Respondent2: That was restricted to one cake each per day. But it didn't affect sales.

Respondent: So, there are some restrictions to help push children into considering alternatives. Because, you know, there are some children who will just take two cakes because they're easy to eat and they're nice. And okay, it's balanced, but it's not balanced in other ways. So, we put a stop to that. A little bit of kickback from that.

Respondent2: If somebody comes to the counter and they have too much of one thing we will say 'No, you're going to have to...' or for instance is somebody comes in and they have no money and we're giving them dinner, they can't go and just have cake. You're going to have a meal or a sandwich or you're going to have a piece of fruit with it. That's one thing, we're not going to feed you just cake, you're going to have something that's healthy or that is reasonably balanced.

So, from that point of view, yes, we would guide them. But choice is not a bad thing, for them to learn to make choices. I have a 17-year-old who still can't make choices. Stand there half an hour in the shop waiting for him to decide whether he wants a banana or an apple.

Interviewer: These are the big questions. Are there questions that...?

Interviewer2: No, I don't think so.

Interviewer3: I have a question, sorry, you mentioned about 100 to 150 were in packed lunches, do you have any school policies on what they can bring if for a packed lunch?

Respondent: No, none at all. Unlike primary schools I think which often do, no Babybels and this sort of thing, because of the wax on the cheese, we don't. We don't. Yeah, it's interesting.

If you've got friends who eat packed lunches you wouldn't be able to eat with them because the packed-lunch eaters eat separately. So that is actually, just because of logistics and space, but that is quite interesting and I do think that probably restricts the number of people who bring a packed lunch. If you want to be with your friends and eat and they're all eating in the canteen, I suppose you could go to the pod and eat there and have your packed lunch and they could have something, but if they wanted a main meal you couldn't sit with them and eat your packed lunch. I think that naturally restricts the number of children.

And I think when they realise as year sevens what's on offer in the canteen and the range of things, I think they really quite like that.

Respondent2: They do, and they learn how to spend their money properly as well, because some of them as I say go mad, by about the second month they suddenly go 'Wow, choice and money, £10 a day' then their mother is on the phone and they learn 'Actually, no, I need to start thinking about what I'm picking' and they start learning how to spread that money that mum has allocated them over the week. Some just decide to eat well for three days and starve for two.

They make those decisions, and that's not bad for them. I think it's a good thing

Interviewer3: Absolutely.



Interviewer: That's lovely. Well thank you, I really appreciate you talking us through that. I think we've got a good sense of the way that it works here. The other thing, could I ask you just to say your name and to give your consent on the recording?

Respondent2: I'm Miss Jones and I give my consent for the recording.

Interviewer: Thank you so much. That's great.

Respondent: Okay, super.

Interviewer2: Thank you.

Interviewer3: Thank you.

END OF AUDIO