

The cost of school food could also have a bearing on demand. I think there is a real debate to be had about the relative cost of school meals and who and how we should pay for them. Whilst admitting that the cost of a two course school meal is relatively inexpensive for many of us – between £1.50 and £2 – it is nonetheless a hefty whack for a three-child family on a low income.

What we need is innovation and creative ways to develop loyalty amongst our children to the school food brand. A recent experiment in a school in York showed that offering free school meals for a week resulted in a sustained increase in take-up of over 17%. Our own research has also revealed that the two countries with the highest take up in Europe – Sweden (85%) and Finland (90%) – both have free school meals for all. Such findings could be an important consideration for policy makers when they determine how we really ensure children are eating healthily at lunchtime.

Conclusion – we are all in this together

Fulfilling our agenda sounds so simple when writing an article: produce and distribute some guidance here, disseminate some best practice there, and surely all the problems will be solved. Unfortunately, the reality is far different.

Delivering real and lasting change means that we all – children, parents, schools, local authorities, caterers and Government – have to work together.

This means allowing our children enough time to collect and eat their food. It means providing an environment that is interesting and enticing, not dull and depressing. It means providing training for cooks to ensure that food is delicious as well as healthy. It means getting school leadership to encourage, lead and inspire change. And it means reinforcing to parents and children that for their sakes as well as for schools' they should choose school lunches.

This final point is of huge importance if we are to create the demand that will mean an economically sustainable service alongside well-nourished children. So the Trust has decided to use its 'Eat Better Do Better' slogan to encourage parents and children to sign up for school dinners. Getting the message out there that changing your diet will benefit concentration, performance and attainment, as well as your health, could start a move in the right direction – towards eating better and doing better.

The School Food Trust is under no illusions that reforming school food will be a complex and challenging process. But we are optimists, because we know the rewards of improving our children's diet are so fundamental. We believe that together we can ensure healthier, happier and better educated children and young people. We hope that all Parliamentarians will support our activities as we continue to make changes to improve the health and potential of our children.

Yorkshire and Humber – the UK's real powerhouse?

Tom Riordan
Chief Executive, Yorkshire Forward

Too often Yorkshire and Humber's association with the coal industry has held negative connotations. The decline of the industry in recent decades, leading to extensive unemployment and a downturn in the economic fortunes in the region was one of the most challenging in our manufacturing history.

Today, however, the region is moving on, building on the legacy of energy production and the expertise that

Yorkshire and Humber holds in dealing with the environmental consequences of this production. This knowledge is offering our businesses new opportunities to lead the way in addressing the global need for cleaner fuels and the development of sustainable energy.

Our fortunes are still inextricably linked with energy production, as Yorkshire and Humber sits on 22% of the UK's indigenous coal supplies, and is home to three of Europe's largest coal fired power stations,



which collectively generate 27% of the UK's coal fired electricity.

But with the growing emphasis on energy efficiency and greenhouse gas reduction, it is imperative that we learn how to update our production methods by embracing cleaner coal technologies like super-critical

boilers, advanced steam turbines and bio-mass co-firing.

Even with this technology, carbon emissions may not be reduced to an acceptable level. If the region can have the same success with other technologies as it has had with bio-mass co-firing, which is proving to be a real hit with the local farmers as well as power generators, we will be in a position to continue to provide energy in bulk with minimum environmental effect.

Add to this the possibility for a carbon capture and storage network linked to power stations, and emissions from the region could be further reduced.

Recognising the need for action, our power stations are already investing heavily in technical research and there are plans for a self-sufficient business park on the site of a colliery that has recently been re-opened in South Yorkshire. On the banks of the Humber, Conoco has one of the largest combined heat and power plants in Europe. Couple these investments and others like them with technological advances, and there is huge potential for the region to export the engineering and commissioning of new technology in this sector.

The challenge for Yorkshire Forward, as the regional development agency for Yorkshire and Humber and the organisation charged with growing our region's economy, is to bring this expertise together, not only to reduce the carbon footprint of our region, but to support Yorkshire and Humber in becoming a world leader in moving to a lower carbon energy. It is estimated that the global market for environmental technologies is worth £400 billion, and we want to ensure that Yorkshire and Humber gets its fair share of this business.

At a strategic level, Yorkshire and Humber remains the only region in the UK to specify the reduction of

carbon emissions in its Regional Economic Strategy and we are the only region to have set our own targets for this reduction – 20% by 2010. We are working with public and private companies across the region to get them committed to reducing their carbon footprint – already we have some of the biggest names in industry on board as well as almost two-thirds of the NHS. Amongst our allies is Drax power station, Europe's largest coal fired electricity plant, which produces 7% of England's electricity and keeps the lights on in London as well as Yorkshire and Humber.

In terms of knowledge base, the region is home to one of the highest concentrations of universities in Europe and of these, four: Bradford, Leeds, Hull and Sheffield have all developed cutting edge expertise in the field of environmental technologies.

For the past four years, Yorkshire Forward has pioneered a network of unique Centres of Industrial Collaboration, which harness the expertise of research academics from universities across the Yorkshire and Humber region and translate this knowledge into commercially focused research services which can be accessed by companies to develop new products or improve existing processes.

These Centres – CICs – recognise the critical role science and innovation plays in our region's capacity for further economic growth and prosperity. So far they have worked on over 1400 collaborations with industry and generated in excess of £50 million of research income for the region.

A number of these centres are already working in the field of environmental technologies and collaborating with companies to help them reduce their carbon footprint – the Environmental Technologies CIC based at the Universities of Hull and Leeds is home to leading expertise in

environmental forensics, organics processing and water dynamics.

Over at the University of Bradford, The Polymer CIC has been working with companies involved in plastics manufacturing to improve their industrial processes, which use a great deal of energy. One such collaboration has enabled a company to demonstrate the energy efficiency of their plastics manufacturing machinery, helping them to develop their business and reduce their energy consumption in an industry that is known as a high energy user.

Yorkshire Forward has also recently announced an £8.7 million investment in an environmental energy technology centre (EETC) that will provide premises for new and start-up businesses specialising in low carbon technologies. Our region is already attracting innovative companies that are developing new products like fuel cells and ground source heat pumps, and we want to encourage these businesses to develop and grow.

The EETC building, located on the Advanced Manufacturing Park in South Yorkshire, which already provides premises for forward-thinking engineering companies and specialist engineering research centres, will itself incorporate some of the latest technology, including an iconic renewable energy mini grid to supply electricity and heat to the tenants and provide a real life 'plug and play' demonstrator for new technologies.

These developments in research and business support provide a firm foundation for the region's future work in environmental technologies. I have no doubt that by working together with universities and industry, Yorkshire and Humber will continue to be at the forefront of innovative power generation.