

A Tuckshop Snapshot 2008

QAST Queensland School Canteen Survey Summary Report

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Key findings

- The vast proportion of Queensland school tuckshops (83%) was found to be profitable, with an average profit of \$11,082. When the data is extrapolated, Queensland tuckshops have estimated total sales of \$154 million per annum based on 2007 figures and this figure has increased in real terms since 1998 when last surveyed. Queensland tuckshops make an estimated profit of \$16.1 million per annum. The mean percentage profit was 10% which indicates a 4% decrease since 1998.
- When asked about menu design, *Smart Choices* and nutrition were considered to be in the top three most important considerations by more than 90% of the convenors. The affordability of food items, customer preferences and the capacity of the tuckshop to prepare items are also indicated as important factors in designing menus.
- *Smart Choices* has almost eliminated high energy, micro-nutrient poor foods (RED items under *Smart Choices*) from tuckshop menus. AMBER foods under *Smart Choices* are high in energy, saturated fat or salt and generally low in fibre but may contribute valuable nutrients to the diet. These foods are most prevalent on tuckshop menus despite the recommendations that they should be selected carefully to ensure that they don't dominate the menu. Tuckshop convenors generally underestimate the percentage of AMBER items on their menu, believing their menus to be healthier than they are. Non-government schools have menus with a higher percentage of AMBER items on their menu.
- Although the vast majority of tuckshops have a paid convenor working an average of 24 hours per week, 17% of convenors are volunteers. Paid convenors commonly also provide additional voluntary services, with seven hours per week donated by the average tuckshop convenor. Queensland tuckshops still rely on volunteers with the average tuckshop having 15 volunteers. An estimated total for Queensland of 1.5 million hours per year is provided by volunteers.
- More than a quarter of convenors have been in their position for less than one year. Only 49% of convenors reported receiving orientation and/or training when they first started as convenor.

Acknowledgements

The Queensland Association of School Tuckshops Inc. (QAST) thanks I-View Pty Ltd for conducting this telephone survey and the project staff involved, and the project's Expert Panel. Special thanks must also go to MBF Foundation, who generously funded this important research.

Most importantly, we must acknowledge and thank the Queensland canteen convenors and others who kindly took the time to complete the survey.

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Foreword

This survey demonstrates that tuckshops have made significant improvements to their menus over the last ten years. The results of this survey will be used by the Queensland Association of School Tuckshops and shared with other support organisations to develop a raft of strategies to assist tuckshop staff in their continued efforts to strive for excellence in the provision of food services to Queensland Schools.

Methodology

A Computer Assisted Telephone Interview (CATI) process was used and the survey was conducted and administered by an independent data collection agency, I-View Pty Ltd, in the first school term of 2008. The CATI process was chosen as it is considered to be quick, economical, achieve high response rates, has direct data entry and a computerised survey management system. QAST provided I-View a copy of the QAST database with contact and demographic information for all schools in Queensland where food is regularly supplied. To ensure confidentiality, all schools were given a unique identifier by I-View that was not made available to QAST or any other party. The survey was of 15 minutes duration. Prior to the CATI interview, canteen menus and the previous year's financial data were collected in response to a written request.

Menus received from schools via fax were assessed by QAST staff for the percentage of GREEN items on their menu using the Smart Choices criteria. Financial information received from convenors and menu assessment information was forwarded by QAST to I-View. This information was then included in the results before the data was de-identified and made available to QAST. Data was provided to QAST as a SPSS (Statistical Package for the Social Sciences) file for analysis. Frequency, cross tabulation and correlations were generated and statistical significance for associations were derived using the chi squared test (two sided) using a probability of less than 0.05 as statistically significant.

Findings

The target was a sample of 500 schools from a total data base of 1454 of all Queensland schools where food is sold. In all, 809 tuckshop convenors were contacted and 11% of these declined to be interviewed. Five hundred interviews were successfully completed. A total of 223 schools faxed in menus to QAST and 266 schools provided some sales and/or profit or loss data via CATI or fax. Of the schools selected in the CATI survey, 133 provided menus and 153 provided financial data.

Profit

The vast majority of Queensland school tuckshops (83%) were found to be profitable, with an average profit of \$11,082. When the data is extrapolated, Queensland tuckshops have estimated total sales of \$154 million per annum based on 2007 figures and this figure has increased in real terms since QAST's 1998 survey. Queensland tuckshops make an estimated profit of \$16.1 million per annum. The mean percentage profit was 10% and this has decreased significantly from 14% in 1998.

Profit and loss figures for Queensland tuckshops for 2007(n=259)

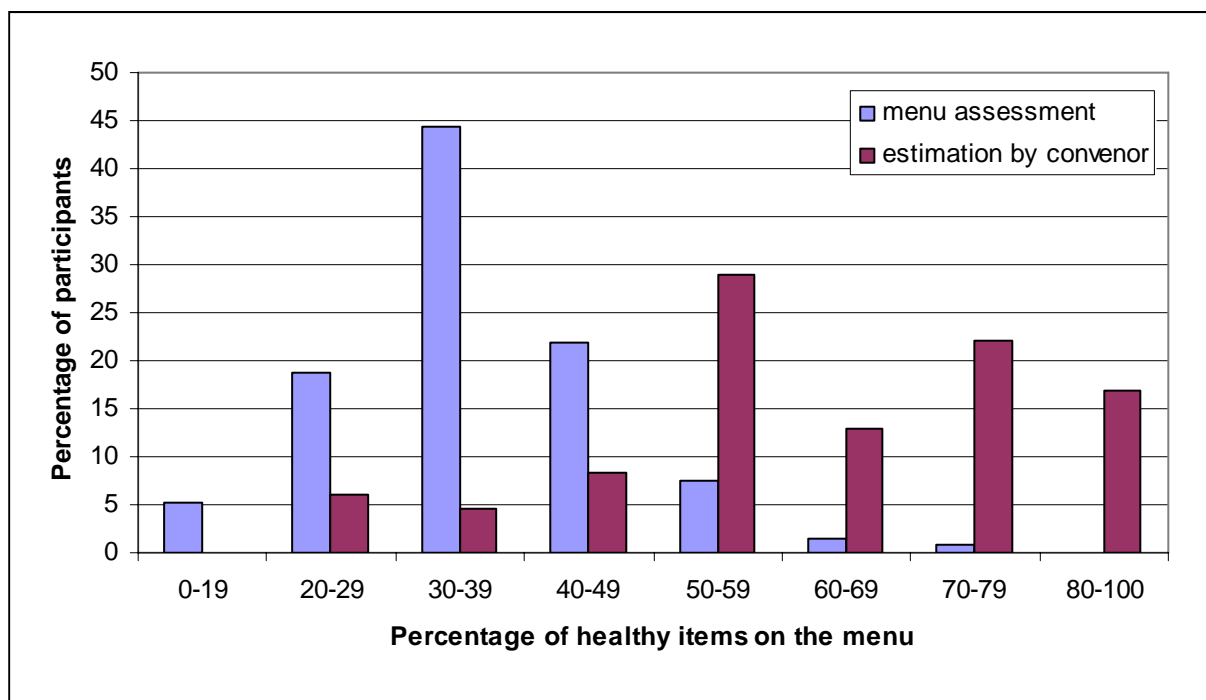


In terms of profitability, only half of tuckshop convenors reported that making a profit was important or very important. This highlights the importance of school tuckshops as a service. Making a profit was found to be more important for state schools than for non-government schools. QAST membership is positively associated with higher profit levels. Profit was associated with the size of the school, with high schools making significantly higher profits than primary schools. Seventeen percent of tuckshops made a loss in 2007 and this figure has increased when compared to the 1998 survey when 7.2% of tuckshops reported this outcome.

Menu

When asked about menu design, the nutritional value of food items was considered to be in the top three most important considerations by more than 90% of the convenors. The affordability of food items, customer preferences and the capacity of the tuckshop to prepare items are also important factors in designing menus. Since the introduction of Education Queensland's *Smart Choices: Healthy Food and Drink Supply Strategy for Queensland Schools* almost all high kilojoule foods that have little or no nutritional benefit such as soft drinks and lollies have been eliminated from tuckshop menus. However foods that are high sugar, salt and/or fat but may contribute valuable nutrients to the diet (such as sausage rolls and hot dogs) are still prevalent on tuckshop menus despite the recommendations that they should be selected carefully to ensure that they don't dominate the menu. Tuckshop convenors generally underestimate the percentage of these foods on their menus, believing their menus to be healthier than they are.

Comparison of the perceived percentage of healthy food items on the menu compared to the percentage determined by menu assessment (n=131)



When the best selling items in tuckshops and their menus were considered, there appeared to be a good range of popular healthy main meals available to school students. However few healthy snack items were represented. Having a menu with a greater percentage of healthier food choices is associated with a greater likelihood that these items will be best sellers.

Staffing

Although the vast majority of tuckshops have a paid convenor working an average of 24 hours per week, 17% of convenors are volunteers. Paid convenors commonly also provide additional voluntary services, with seven hours per week donated by the average tuckshop convenor. Queensland tuckshops still rely on volunteers with the average tuckshop having 15 volunteers. An estimated total for Queensland of 1.5 Million hours per year is provided by volunteers. More than a quarter of convenors have been in their position for less than one year. Only 49% of convenors reported receiving orientation and/or training when they first started as convenor.

Recommendations

1. There is a need to orientate and provide ongoing professional development to train and retain tuckshop convenors in business management (including price setting) and to support the many schools struggling to be financially viable. Further strategies to support convenors to recruit, train and retain volunteers are also required.
2. Further training is also required to increase the proportion of healthy choices on canteen menus, rather than relying on foods that have nutritional benefit but still have large amounts of fat, salt and/or sugar.
3. There is a need for an employer resource to provide basic orientation for convenors and volunteers and for annual training for tuckshop staff on a range of topics (e.g. nutrition, food safety, business principles) due to the high turnover of positions. The geographical isolation of a large number of tuckshop convenors means there is a need to explore a range of innovative options around networking, particularly for regional and remote settings.