
School food waste and handling methods

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1. Introduction

One of the most recent in-depth reports into school food waste, *Food Waste in Schools*, carried out by WRAP in January 2011, estimates that a 40-week school year in England alone generates a total food waste weight of 80,382 tonnes. This equates to 253,000 tonnes in greenhouse gas emissions annually, comparable to the carbon produced by more than 80,000 cars in a year.

The Department for Education's January 2011 report 'Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics', also states that the proportion of pupils eligible for – and claiming – free school meals is increasing overall across maintained nursery, state-funded primary, secondary and special schools.

In a drive to become more sustainable and environmentally responsible, schools are reported to be increasingly looking into more environmentally friendly solutions, such as wormeries, to help reduce the amount of food waste going to landfill.

This research report was commissioned by Enterprise Plants to look at the reality of the situation from the perspective of head teachers. The findings reveal a huge disparity in how schools currently address the removal and recycling of their food waste. The research examined a number of different issues relating to the food waste and handling methods of schools. This included not only current methods and future plans but also cost implications, the influence of environmental factors and the barriers to adoption.

Research method

Conducted online, a total of 73 schools from the South East completed the survey. The survey was completed by head teachers or a relevant person on their behalf. The research examined the views of schools of various size and level, from infant to secondary and across both the State and Independent sectors. The schools participating in the survey produced a total of 22, 379 school meals per day, which worked out as an average of 279.74 meals per school.



2. Findings overview

The findings of the report can be summarised under two headings – environmental and financial issues.

Environmental Drivers

One of the key aims of the research was to ascertain how environmentally aware schools are, and how they currently regard their waste, to discover if wormeries could fulfil an important role in improving environmental performance.

The society-wide shift to having a more environmentally aware outlook is reflected in the report with 70% of respondents either having, or having plans to, put an environmental policy in place and 69% indicating a reduction in the school's carbon footprint as a target.

However, only 43% of respondents have undertaken a waste audit in the last five years to see exactly what their waste streams are. This indicates that providing an initial waste audit – to see how much waste is actually food waste – could be a useful exercise, as 93 % of respondents indicated that they generate some food waste from either a canteen or restaurant on site.

Over half of schools in the survey currently have to pay directly for waste removal (61%). Given that the heaviest element of mixed waste is normally food, savings from collection charges could be realised if the food waste element is removed from the general waste.

Interestingly, over half of schools already segregate food waste which then seems to be treated by a variety of means. The removal of food waste from general waste has many benefits, not least the financial one of general waste not having to be collected as regularly, reducing costs and environmental impact.

There were many comments in favour of the concept of wormeries, together with a range of concerns covering costs (most common concern), health and safety issues, training and management and transport. The benefit to the curriculum was also commented on. Overall, it is clear from the findings that the main barrier to up-take would be financial.

Economic Drivers

Several comments indicated that as budgets are being tightened there is very little or no money for new applications like this from traditional school funds. Over 85% of respondents indicated they would be willing to pay only £300.00 or less per annum to have food waste processed through a digester unit. Additionally, 69% identified cost as the likely cause of preventing having a digester on site. However, 86% would not object to having a branded digester unit on site – presumably if this helped to remove or reduce the financial constraints.

Summary

In summary, the consensus is that wormery units are a good thing. There were one or two concerns regarding the practicalities which can be easily addressed but finance is the key barrier which will need to be overcome.

3. Survey results

Figure 1: Type of school (independent or state)

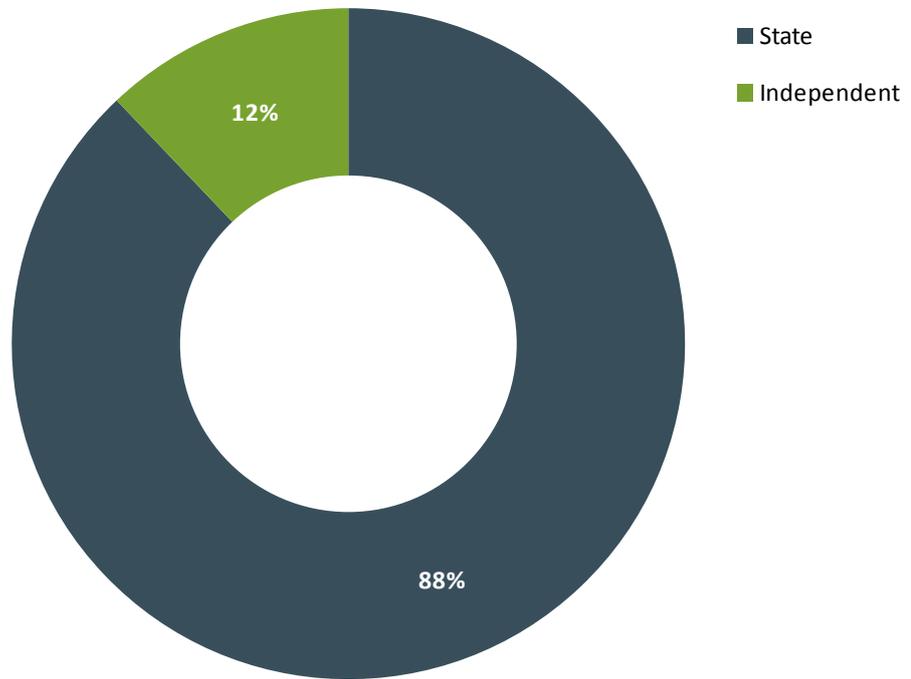


Figure 2: Age group school caters for

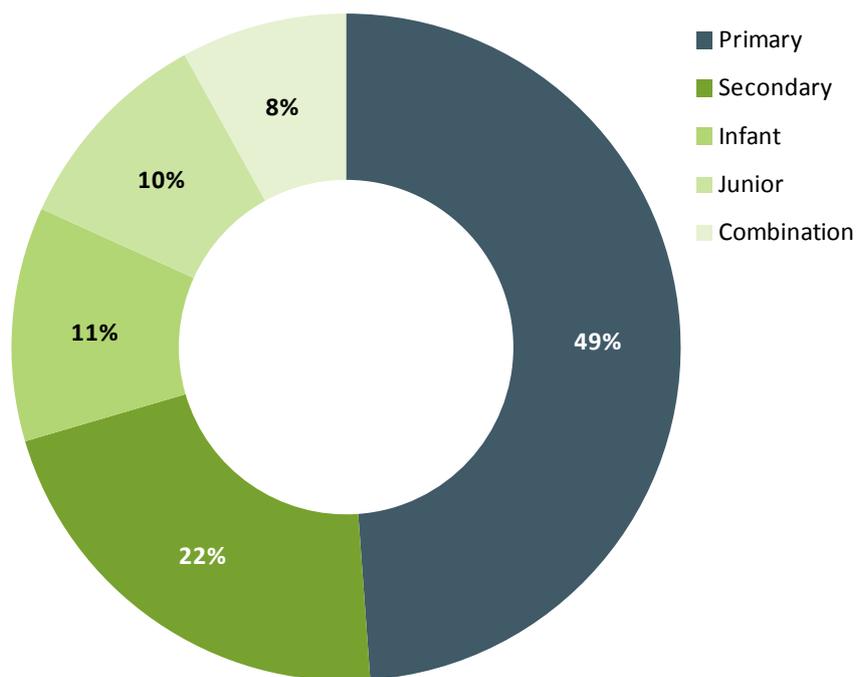


Figure 3: Size of school based on number of pupils

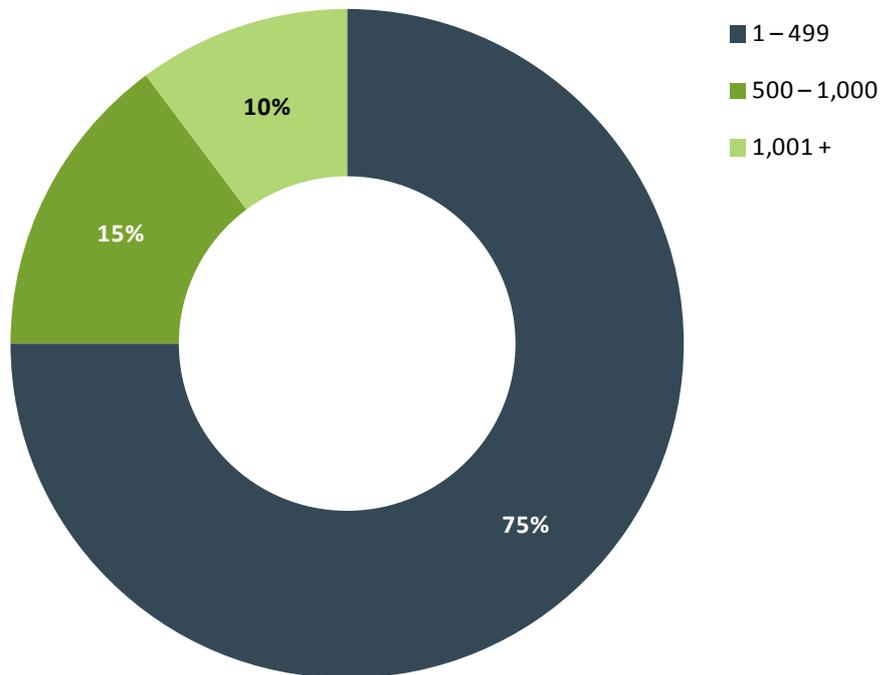


Figure 4: Whether school has an environmental policy

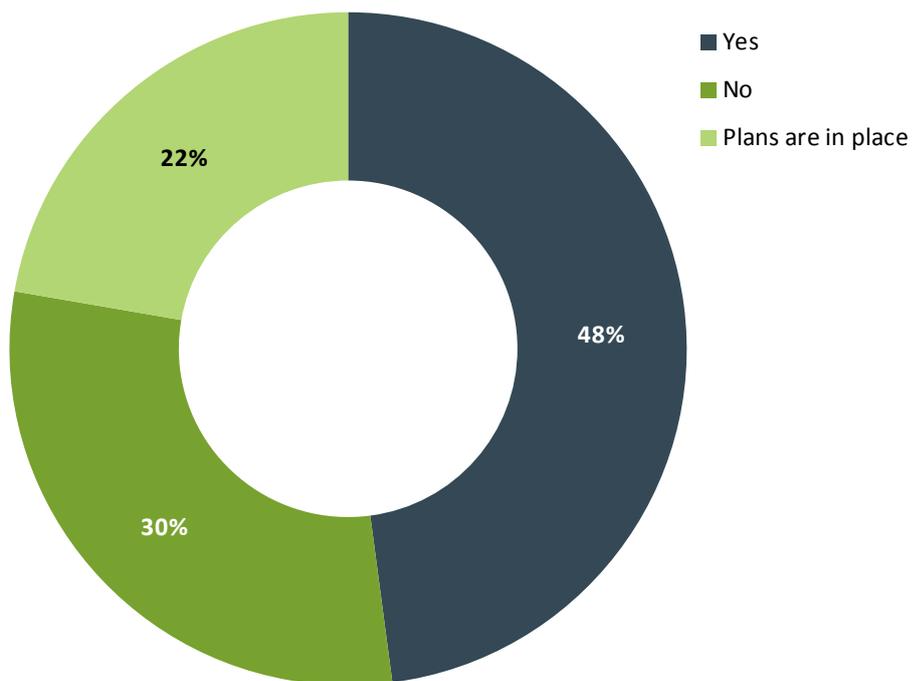


Figure 5: Whether the reduction of the school's carbon footprint forms part of its environmental policy?

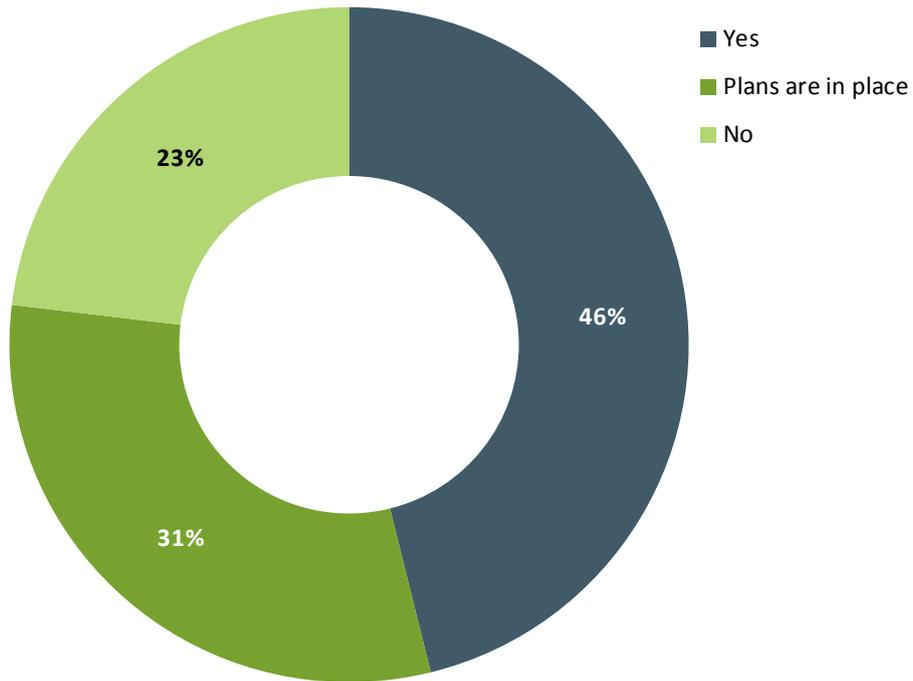


Figure 6: When the school has undergone its most recent waste audit

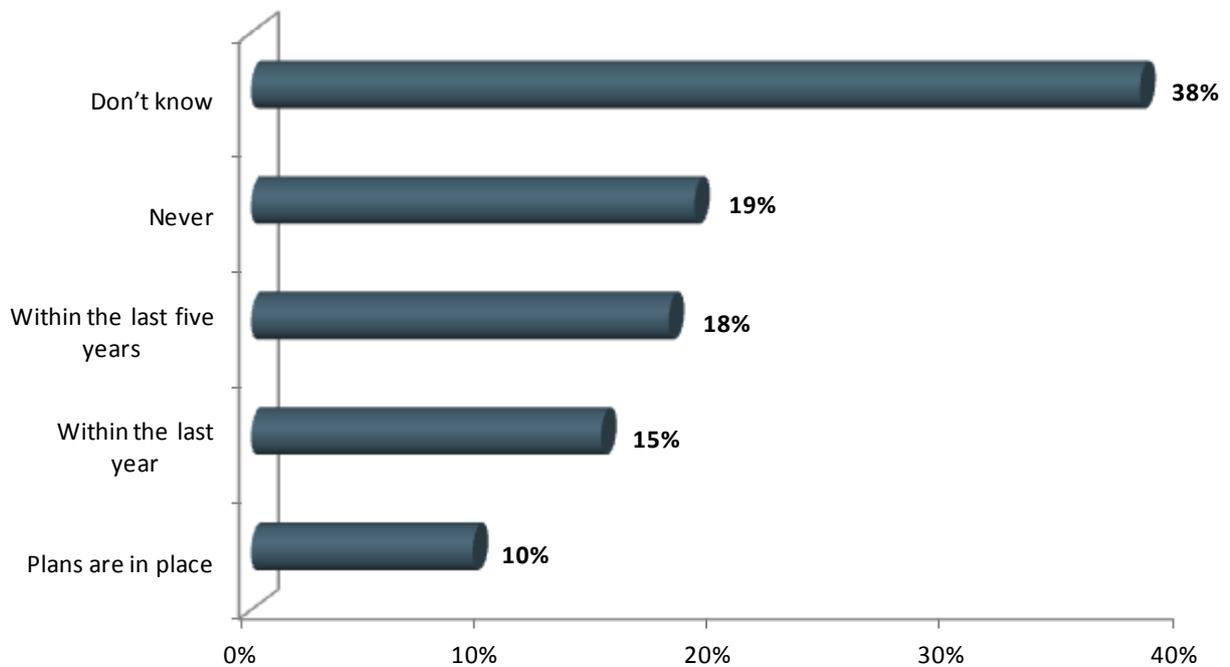


Figure 7: Whether the schools currently generate food waste from a canteen/restaurant

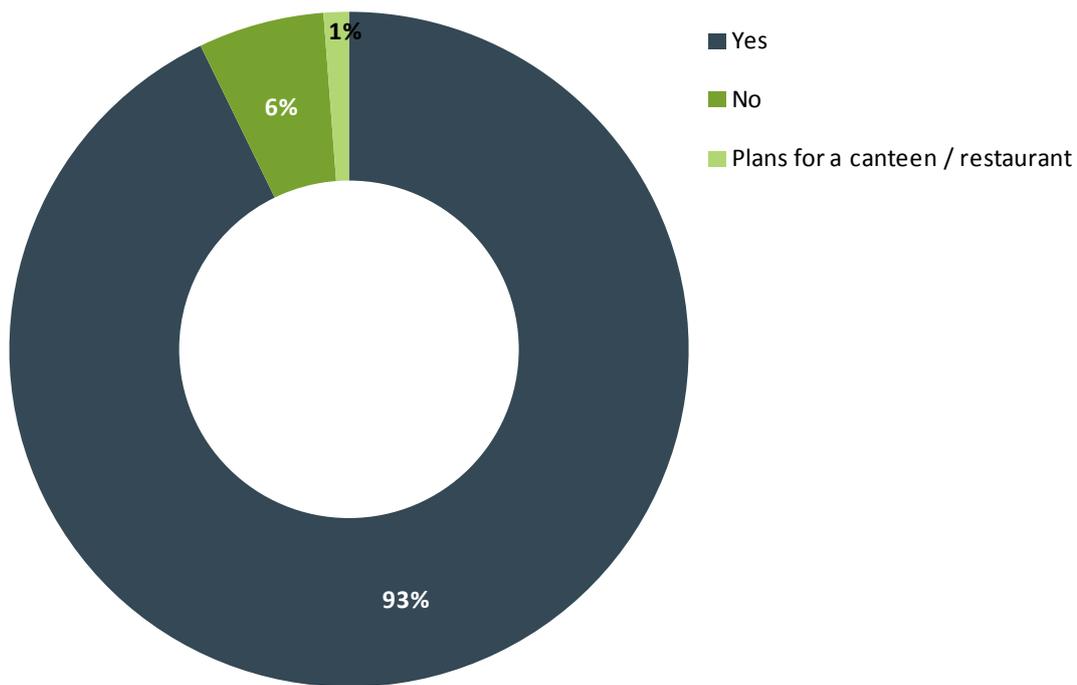


Figure 8: Methods currently being used by the schools to deal with food waste

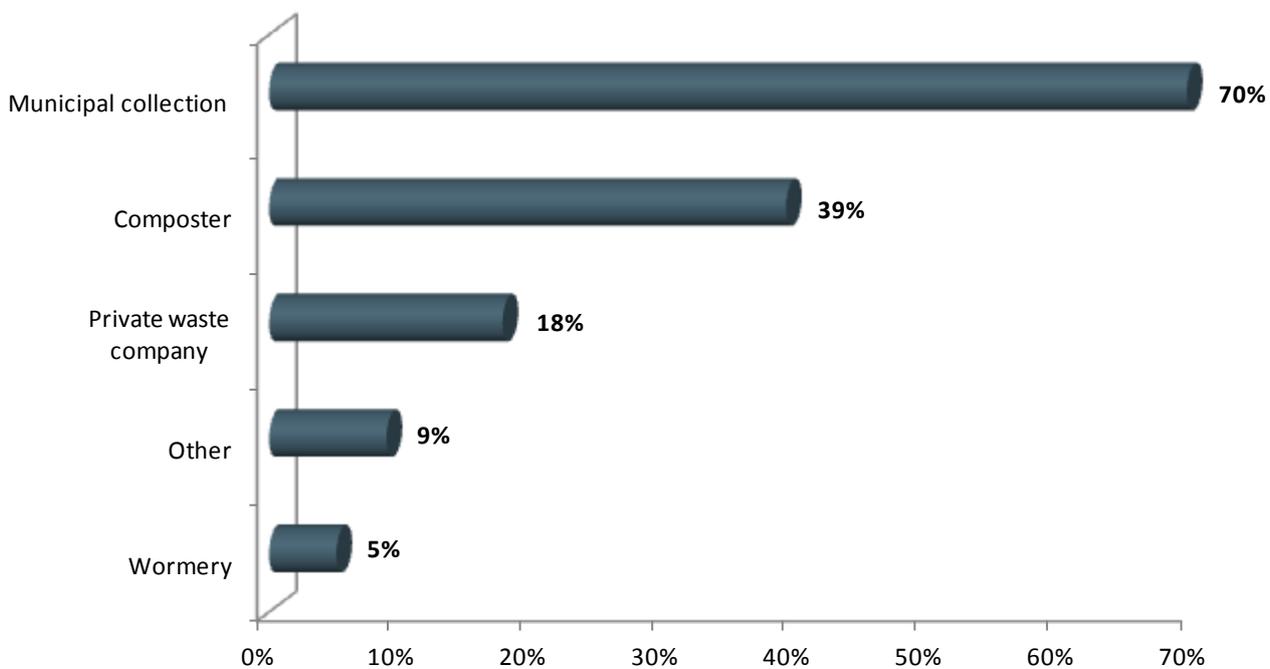


Figure 9: Whether food waste is collected and treated separately from other school waste

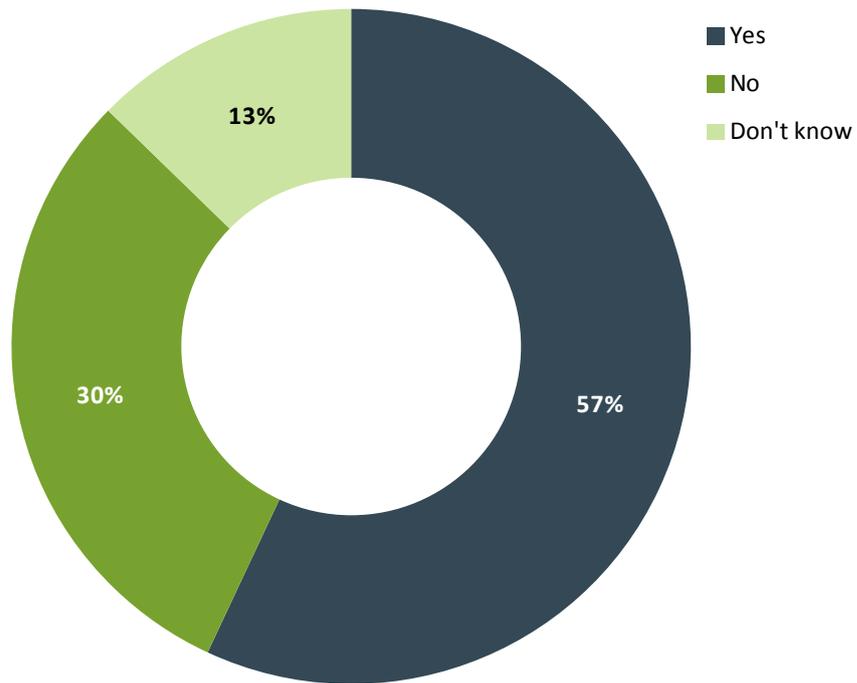


Figure 10: The percentage of schools currently paying to have waste removed

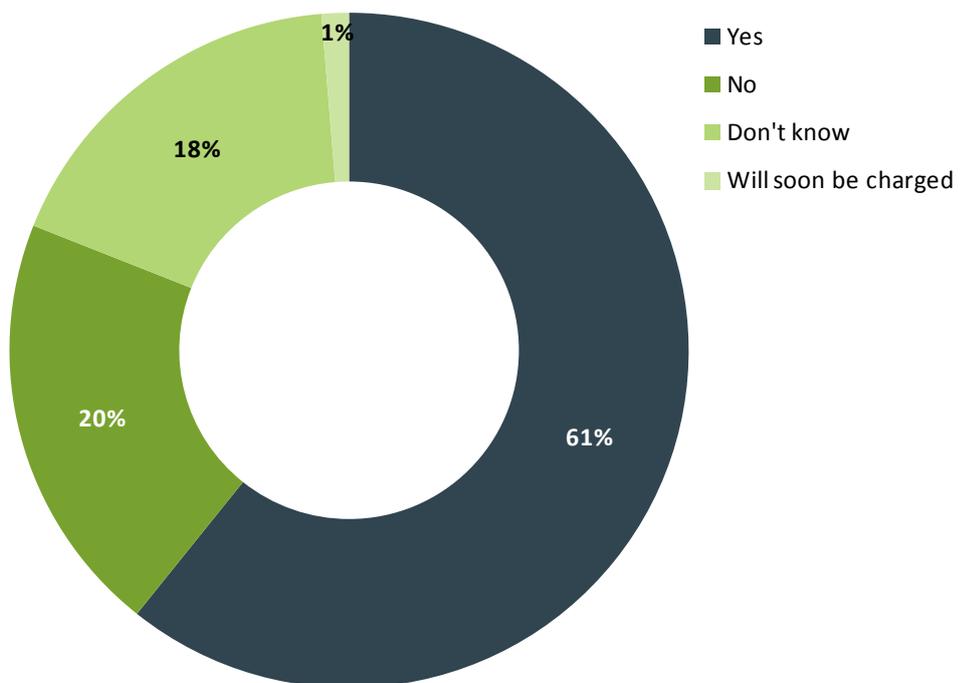


Figure 11: Out of those schools currently being charged for waste removal, the amount being paid by the school on an annual basis

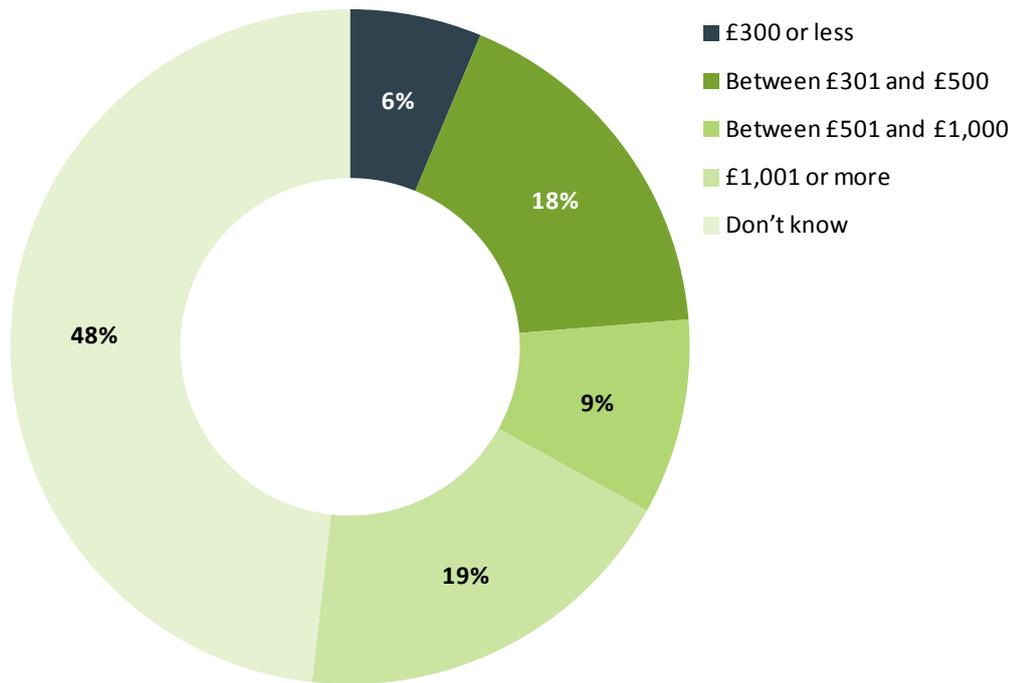


Figure 12: The percentage of schools interested in an environmentally friendly solution to recycle food waste on site

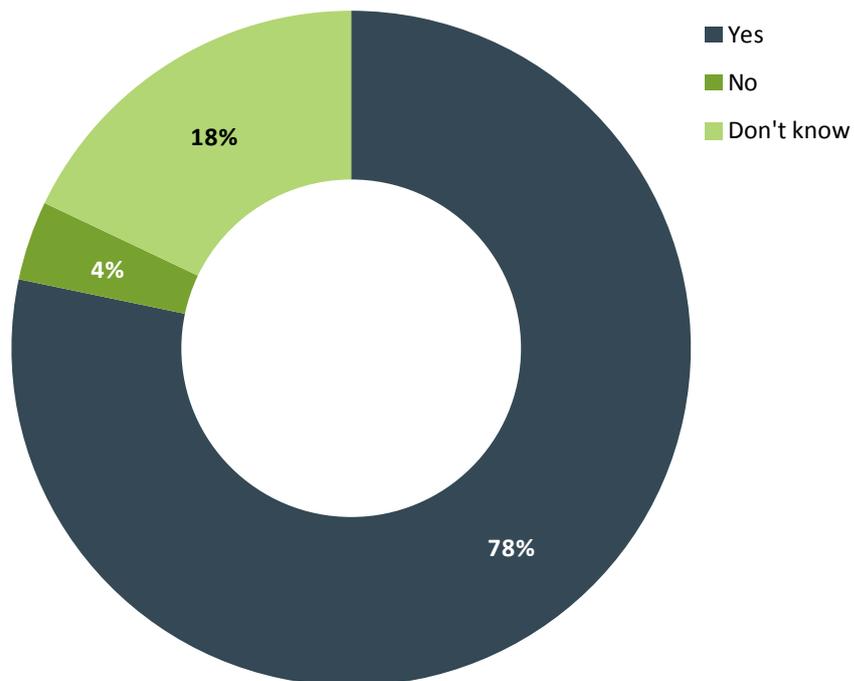


Figure 13: The figure schools would be prepared to pay for having an environmentally friendly solution for recycled food waste provided as a fully managed service

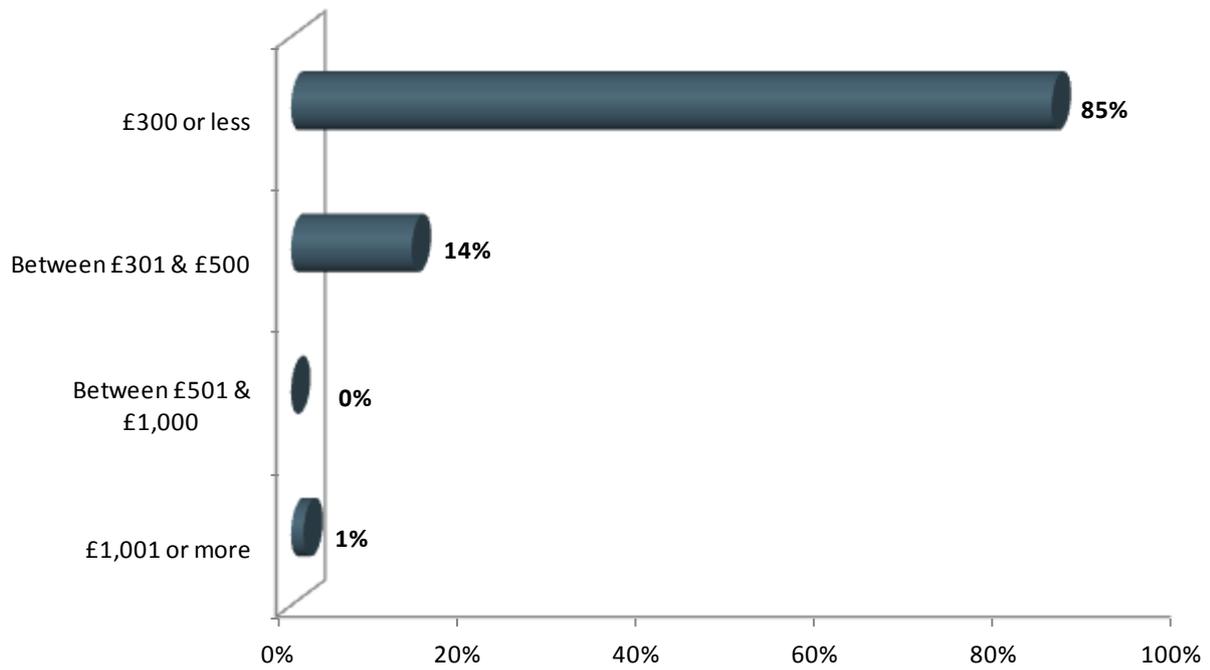


Figure 14: The percentage of schools that would be open to having sponsor branded worm digester unit to reduce the costs?

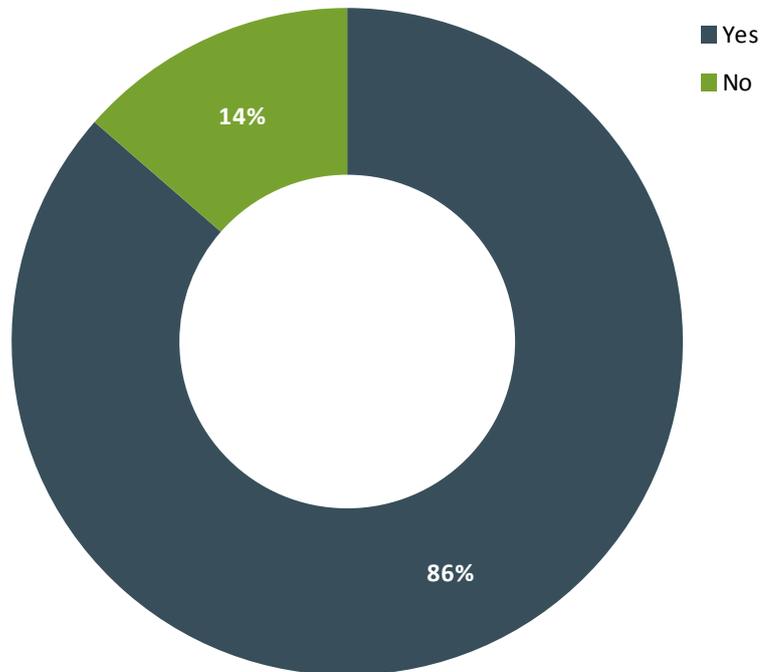
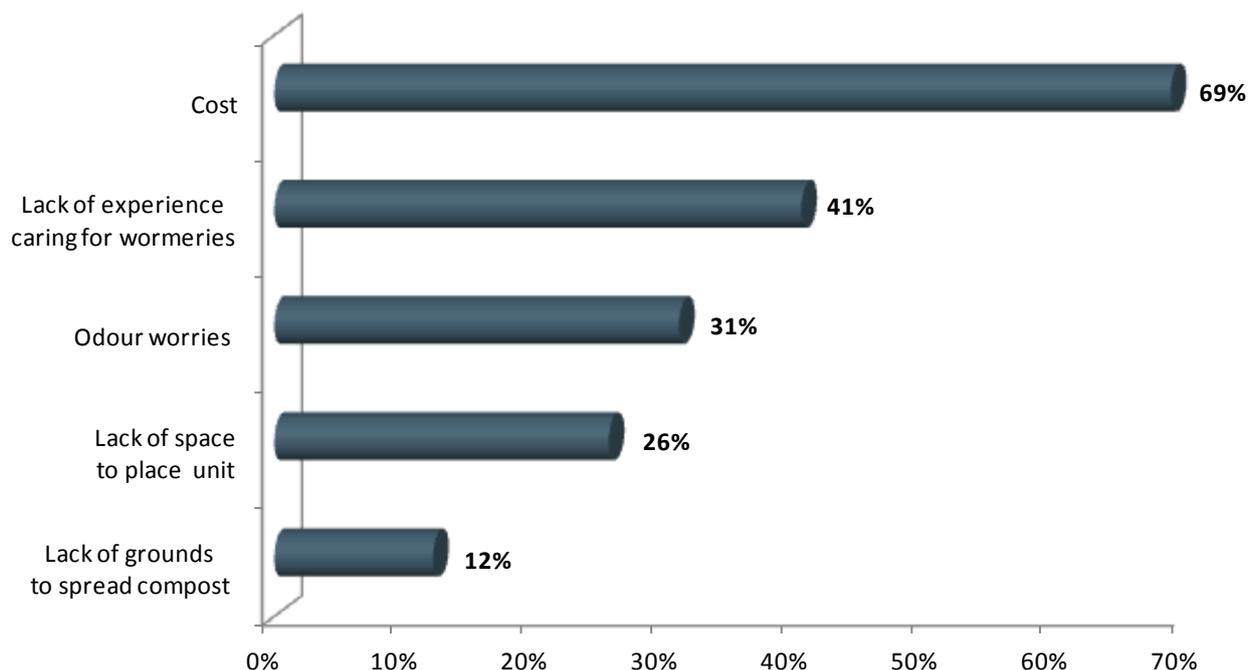


Figure 15: Concerns likely to prevent the schools from having a worm digester unit on site



4. About Enterprise Plants

Established in 1984, Enterprise Plants Limited is one of the largest independent plant companies in the UK offering a range of horticultural services to more than 600 commercial clients. Its customers range from small businesses to multi-national corporations.

The company tailors its services to meet each of its clients' different needs, including fresh flowers, interior plant displays, exterior landscape construction and manicuring, as well as organic food handling solutions.

In 2007, Enterprise Plants extended its offering to include the installing, and ongoing fully managed service, of online worm digester units. An environmentally friendly solution for dealing with organic kitchen waste, the units use *Dendrobaena* worms to digest ordinary kitchen waste such as peelings, cooked and uncooked scraps, teabags, eggshells, paper kitchen towels, and shredded newspaper.

Enterprise Plants is proud of its reputation for quality and reliability, reflected by its recent gold medal at the 2012 Chelsea Flower Show.

For more information on Enterprise Plants products and services, visit

www.enterpriseplants.com/wormeries or contact Matt Monkton on 01708 858505 / mattm@enterpriseplants.com