



RABI[®]
the farmers charity



RABI's

Return to School Campaign

Empowering farming families: The impact of the Return to School grant

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Introduction

RABI's generational Big Farming Survey gave a robust insight into the pressures and challenges facing the farming community in the 2020s. The data collected from over 15,000 farming people in England and Wales evidenced for the first time the causal links between the mental, physical and financial health of the farming community and found that the overall mental wellbeing of the community was alarmingly lower than the rest of the UK population.¹

The financial pressures the farming community face are often exacerbated by the higher living costs of rural life², with a recent study by the Rural Services Network finding that almost 1 in 5 rural households have no income left after critical living expenses.³

For many farming families the demands of children attending school only adds to this financial strain. Research by The Children's Society estimates that school uniform costs alone for parents and guardians are an average of £422 for secondary school pupils and £287 for primary pupils per year.⁴

The expense continues through the school year. Analysis by the Centre for Research in Social Policy (CRSP) shows that adults typically pay at least £39 per week for a child's secondary school education and £19 for primary school education. Their statistics uncovered that the average family will spend £1,755.97 per year per child in secondary school and £864.87 for a primary school child, excluding before/after school childcare costs and household items, such as printers. That comes to a huge £18,345.85 for children to go through all 14 years of school.⁵

About the Return to School grant

RABI introduced the Return to School (RTS) grant in 2022 as a response to the impact of the cost-of-living crisis on the farming community. The grant aims to help alleviate some of the anxieties caused by financial pressures and allows recipients to focus on their wellbeing. It helps cover the costs of start-of-term essentials such as school uniform, PE kit and equipment as well as associated ongoing educational costs, such as school meals, school travel costs, breakfast or after school clubs.

This report

This Social Return on Investment (SROI) report outlines the significant impact of the Return to School grant on not only the child attending school but also the parents and siblings within the family.

The project was carried out by researchers at Moore Kingston Smith (MKS) Nonprofit Advisory and focused on grants given out between June to September 2023. MKS carried out detailed research of a randomly selected, representative sample of the 2023 Return to School grant applicant pool in early 2024.

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Overview of findings

Social Return on Investment (SROI) ratio

The Return to School grant, which provided £250 per household in 2023, had a measurable impact on participating families, generating a social return on investment ratio of between £1.03 and £2.25 for every £1 spent.

Having supported **20,000** people with almost **£3 million** since 2022, the SROI ratio indicates that the Return to School grant has generated **£6 million** in social impact value and **£9 million** in total campaign value.

Key insights

Stakeholder groups

Five main stakeholder groups were identified as recipients of the RTS grant's impact:



Parents / guardians

The primary recipients responsible for managing school-related expenses for children.



Primary school children

Younger students whose school experience was influenced by the grant.



Secondary school students

Older students facing more complex social and educational needs.



Siblings

Indirect beneficiaries within recipient households.



Education welfare services

Benefiting indirectly through reduced absences and associated support needs.

Findings on social value

The Return to School grant created notable social value across various aspects of family and student wellbeing. Below is a summary of key outcomes observed for parents, primary pupils and secondary students.

Beyond individual family members, the Return to School grant generated benefits for the broader household and community support systems.

Parents and guardians

1. Reduced financial stress

Parents felt a decrease in anxiety around managing educational expenses. Single parents highlighted how the grant allowed them to provide essential items for their children without external support.

2. Sense of normality and inclusion

Many parents noted that having the means to buy appropriate uniforms and supplies helped them feel “like a normal parent,” able to provide for their children in the same way as others in their community. This sense of normalcy was particularly important in regions where economic disparity is more visible.

3. Improved family relationships

The reduction in financial pressure also led to a more harmonious home environment. Parents felt they could focus on family time and essential tasks without the added burden of meeting school-related costs. This in turn fostered better relationships and reduced stress within households.

Primary and secondary school students

1. Increased confidence and belonging

Children reported feeling more accepted and less isolated at school. Having new uniforms, shoes, and other essentials boosted their self-esteem, making them feel more comfortable in peer settings. This was particularly impactful for teenage students, for whom social belonging is a priority.

2. Enhanced focus and engagement

Parents observed that children’s improved appearance and school readiness increased their motivation and comfort at school. This greater confidence translated into higher participation in class activities and fewer instances of school reluctance.

3. Access to nutritious food and improved concentration at school

With funds available for meals, students experienced better nutrition, which contributed positively to their concentration and academic performance. Parents reported fewer instances of “hungry days” and noted a general improvement in their children’s school experience.

Wider household and community benefits

1. Support for siblings

The presence of the grant reduced household tensions, allowing families to allocate resources more flexibly, benefiting siblings as well. This effect fostered a more stable family environment, which positively influenced all household members.

2. Reduced demand on education welfare services

The grant’s impact on reducing school absences and promoting greater engagement in school activities indirectly benefited the Education Welfare Services. By supporting children’s needs, the grant helped alleviate some pressures on these services, contributing to a more effective educational support system.

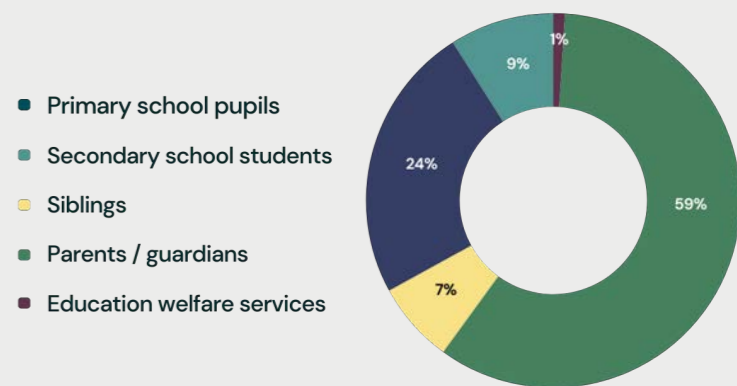
Social value calculations

This study estimates the total social value created by the grant through a detailed analysis of outcomes experienced by the different stakeholder groups.⁶

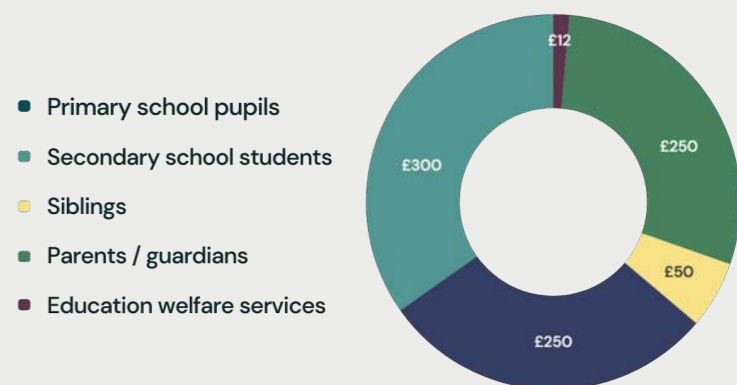
The social return on investment ratio is calculated by comparing the grant’s cost to the value of the social benefits it generated.

The charts below show both the percentage share of social value as well as a value per head of each stakeholder group.

Percentage social value across stakeholder groups



Per head value across stakeholder groups



The future

Targeted campaigns such as RABI's Return to School grant provide critical assistance to enable multiple generations of farming families to cope better with the soaring cost of living as well as with the uncertain landscapes they face in their daily working lives.

This research has given a snapshot of how powerful the Return to School grant has been for RABI's major stakeholders. It has revealed the broad social value that has been produced for each family, plus it has uncovered the personal stories of how such grants can make a significant difference in alleviating some of the pressures of back-to-school costs.

“The cost-of-living crisis, coupled with the rising prices of school uniforms and supplies, has significantly impacted the finances of many families across the UK.

Our Return to School grant is ensuring that thousands of school children across our farming community are equipped and ready to thrive when they return to their classrooms each year.”

– **Caron Whaley, RABI Director of Services**



The Return to School grant criteria

Families currently residing in England, Wales or Northern Ireland can apply for the Return to School grant if they are parents or guardians of children returning to/starting school from reception class (age 4) to year 11 (age 16). Applicants must also currently work in farming in England, Wales or Northern Ireland (or have previously done so for a minimum of 2 years), and be in receipt of child benefit, have less than £500 per month in disposable income after critical living expenses, or be in receipt of state benefits.

The amount provided per family has varied over the past 3 years with RABI utilising yearly campaign data to determine the most appropriate levels of support to:

- ensure the greatest number of farming families in need are reached
- overcome the barriers to accessing support even when families are in need which is endemic to the farming population.

Besides assisting back-to-school costs, the grant also serves as an important gateway to provide more members of the farming community with access to RABI's wider wrap around support. Figures from the last three years show that **between 50 – 90% of the applicants each year were new to RABI**, with many going on to access further support from the charity such as mental health counselling.



Quotations from RTS grant recipients

"My son's definitely more motivated so in that sense the grant has made a massive difference. He's prepared to stay for an extra class or do extra study at college. I think it is because he's not as hungry as we can now afford school lunches – he's coming home happy!"

"We have four primary age children and the grant has enabled us to buy each of their school shoes and PE trainers. It's been a huge weight off our shoulders in the back to school run-up."

"This year has been difficult as my husband had to leave full-time employment due to ill health. The Return to School grant has been a huge relief to us and I encourage anyone who finds themselves in a predicament like ours to get in touch with RABI."

"I would say my daughter's mental wellbeing has improved a lot because she's no longer stressed about looking untidy or wearing hand-me-downs. Looks are very high up for teenage girls and she's happy as everything is new and she looks smart."

"It was nice to be able to give my son dinner money without him running out on Thursday and going hungry on the Friday."

"Rather than me just choosing one activity per term, I can now let my son go to a couple of after school clubs instead. He's obviously much happier about that!"

"The grant has helped with our children's mental wellbeing, especially with my daughter who's just turned 10. She's got quite tall and wears trousers, so I think not having her ankles showing has given her more confidence. She has better fitting clothes and doesn't stand out."

"This year, we've had a lot less incidents of 'I don't feel very well,' 'can I not go to school today,' 'my stomach hurts' etc."

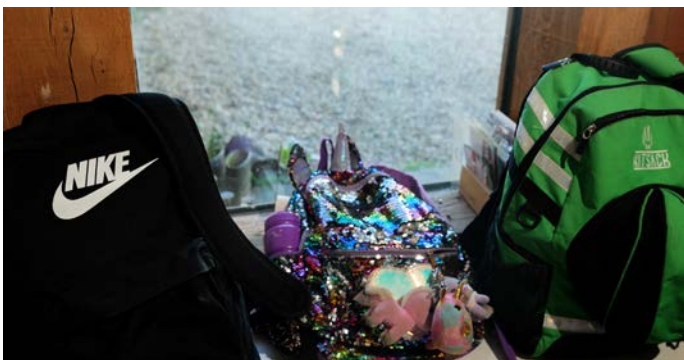
"It was noticeable that my daughter was happy going to school in something that was new, rather than feeling slightly ashamed of something that was clearly worn. She was no longer under any peer pressure and therefore happier going to school, whereas before she was often reluctant."

Scan to watch
our short film on the
Return to School Grant



More than Just a Grant

A short film from RABI



Endnotes

1. RABI Big Farming Survey: The health and wellbeing of the farming community in England and Wales in the 2020s (2021) <https://rabi.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/RABI-Big-Farming-Survey-FINAL-single-pages-No-embargo-APP-min.pdf>
- 2 Rural cost of living, Overview of key differences in cost of living between rural and urban locations (2022) <https://rsnonline.org.uk/images/publications/rural-cost-of-living.pdf>
3. Rural Cost of Living Survey 2023: Final Report Rural Services Network and Citizens Advice – Rural Issues Group
4. The Children’s Society (2024) <https://www.childrensociety.org.uk/what-we-do/our-campaigns/cut-the-cost-school-uniforms/ealing>
5. Loughborough University (2023) Education costs parents at least £39 per week for secondary school kids <https://www.lboro.ac.uk/news-events/news/2023/may/education-costs-parents-%C2%A339-a-year/>
6. Figures from Moore Kingston Smith’s ‘Social Value of The Return to School Grant: A report for RABI’ (2024)

Methodology

This publication summarises the findings of research undertaken by Moore Kingston Smith Nonprofit Advisory in early 2024. The findings are based on the examination of the project’s Social Return on Investment (SROI) for 2023. Analysis was also carried out on a series of online interviews completed by families from across England and Wales who had received grants.

The Social Return on Investment (SROI) approach used in this report is a recognised methodology which summarises and values the most important changes that a project or service makes to the lives of the people it affects. SROI combines quantitative data and personal experiences to understand the impact on people’s lives and evaluates the outcomes for primary stakeholders, including parents, children and related support systems.

The outcomes for all the key people affected are then transferred to a Social Value Map, a spreadsheet which models, calculates and combines the value of each outcome for a period of time, in many cases for a period of years.

Acknowledgements

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About RABI

At the core of RABI's mission is the commitment to address the individual needs of farming people across England, Wales and Northern Ireland through practical, financial and emotional support.

The charity's expert mental health support builds emotional resilience to help farming people feel better equipped to tackle the many uncertainties and challenges they face today, whilst its grants empower farming people to become financially resilient.

RABI's financial support includes targeted, emergency cost-of-living grant campaigns including its Return to School and Winter Fuel campaigns.

RABI has provided around a £1/4 billion of direct financial support to the farming community over the past 25 years.

RABI

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