

Revised Eligibility Criteria for Free School Meals in Wales

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What is happening to eligibility criteria for free school meals in Wales?

- **With effect from 1 April 2019, the Welsh Government will introduce an annualised earned income threshold of £7,400 for Universal Credit Claimants who wish to claim free school meals for their children.**
- **At the same time, the Welsh Government will introduce a programme of transitional protection to protect families from losing eligibility for free school meals until the end of the rollout of Universal Credit (December 2023) and thereafter to the end of the school phase (primary, secondary).**



What are the current eligibility criteria for free school meals?

Eligibility for free school meals prior to September 2013 was largely based on non-working families in receipt of certain means-tested out-of-work benefits:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Child Tax Credit, provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and their annual income does not exceed £16,190
- Guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Working Tax Credit 'run-on' - the payment someone may receive for a further four weeks after they stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit

Pupils who receive income-related Employment and Support Allowance, Income Support or income-based Jobseeker's Allowance in their own right could also be eligible to receive free school meals.

What are the current eligibility criteria for free school meals?

- In September 2013, the Free School Lunches and Milk (Universal Credit) (Wales) Order 2013 (“the 2013 Order”) extended the eligibility criteria for free school lunches and milk to include all families in receipt of Universal Credit.
- This was done in anticipation of the wider rollout of Universal Credit as an interim measure to ensure the children of Universal Credit claimants were not disadvantaged because their parent(s) received Universal Credit instead of benefits which would previously have made them eligible for free school meals.

OK, so why the change in eligibility criteria?

- **Universal Credit will replace benefits which would have made recipients eligible to claim free school meals**
- **It will also replace benefits which would not have previously made recipients eligible to claim free school meals**
- **As a result, as Universal Credit is rolled out, we calculate that the number of pupils eligible for free school meals will increase.**
- **If we do not introduce an earnings threshold, nearly half of all pupils in Wales will be eligible for free school meals (as opposed to 16% compared to 16 per cent in January 2018)**

.....and?

- **The policy aim is to protect the most disadvantaged families.**
- **No additional funding has been provided to the Welsh Government to manage the impact of the UK Government's Welfare Reform agenda on free school meals.**
- **An increase in the size of the free school meals caseload would mean savings would have to be made elsewhere and reductions to other Welsh Government budgets, to fund the additional cost to local authorities of providing free school meals.**

How is the threshold calculated?

- Families who receive Universal Credit and have an annualised net earned income of more than £7,400 will not be eligible to claim free school meals for their children, unless they are transitionally protected
- It is important to note that the net earnings threshold does not represent a household's total income. The sum of £7,400 represents earned income and does not include benefits.
- For example, a typical family earning around £7,400 per annum would, depending on their exact circumstances, have a total household income of between £18,000 and £24,000 per annum once benefits are taken into account.

How will Transitional Protection work?

Transitional Protection will operate as follows:

- Any pupil eligible for free school meals at the **point an earned income threshold is introduced** (1st April 2019) will **have their eligibility protected. This will apply to all applicants until the end of the rollout of Universal Credit** (currently scheduled for December 2023), regardless of whether their circumstances change.
- Any pupil who becomes **eligible under the amended criteria** during the rollout of Universal Credit (from 1st April 2019 to December 2023) will also **retain their eligibility** until the end of Universal Credit rollout, regardless of whether their circumstances change.
- Once the rollout of Universal Credit has completed, **any transitionally protected child will continue to be transitionally protected until the end of their current phase of education**, e.g. primary / secondary.

What support will Welsh Government provide to manage the changeover to the new system?

- We have already commissioned technical changes to the eligibility checking system, which enables local authorities to check eligibility for free school meals online, and we have also set in place a programme of change management support.
- Local authorities are currently being provided with the support they need to ensure that the changeover to the new system is as smooth as possible and so that free school meal claims can be processed accurately.
- Welsh Government has provided an additional £5m as a grant in 2018-19, and will provide an additional £7m in 2019-20, as part of the Local Government Settlement, to support local authorities in meeting the costs associated with changes.

What will be the impact at a local level?

- Our estimates don't show the impact on the number of additional pupils at a school and local authority level.
- Some pupils who become eligible for free school meals or transitional protection, might already be taking paid school meals, so would not require extra accommodation.
- Given the variation in canteen accommodation, it's hard to quantify any potential additional costs of accommodating extra pupils in canteens.
- Costs will include food, staff costs, possibly additional crockery, cutlery, trays, additional dining furniture.
- These factors will need to be considered on a case by case basis by local authorities.

What will be the impact at a local level?

- Our analysis of the potential impact of our new free school meals used an assumed annual cost which covered the cost of ingredients, labour costs and direct costs (e.g. contribution to building overheads) associated with the provision of school meals.
- This has been used to inform levels of additional funding provided by the Welsh Government to local authorities in 2018-19 and 2019-20.

Any Questions?



Thank you for listening

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