

Changes to Free School Meals for families on or going on to Universal Credit as from 1st April 2018



What are the changes being made?

Following a recent consultation by the Department for Education (DfE), there will be a **new income threshold** for all families receiving or going onto Universal Credit (UC).

From 1st April 2018, the new Income Threshold will be **£7,400 net (take home pay)**. This change means more low-income working families will be entitled.

During the roll out period of UC across the Country, (until March 2022), the DfE have implemented a Transitional Protection for children currently receiving free school meals.

What does Transitional Protection mean?

The transitional protections will ensure that existing recipients of FSM will NOT lose their entitlement following the introduction of the new eligibility criteria.

- **All children receiving Free School Meals under the old criteria will continue to receive Free School Meals until the end of the UC roll out in March 2022, and until the end of their current school phase.**
i.e. if in March 2022 they are in NCY 4, they will receive FSM until end of NCY 6, (end of Primary Phase). If a child in March 2022 is in NCY 9 they will receive FSM until end of NCY 11, (end of Secondary Phase)
- Any child who was previously in receipt of Early Year Pupil Premium (EYPP), while receiving their universal three and four year old entitlement, will have their parents details reassessed to see if they qualify for FSM for the beginning of their Reception Year.
- **All children that become entitled under the new criteria from the 1st April 2018 up to the completion of the roll out of UC (March 2022), will also continue to receive Free School Meals until the end of current school phase**
I.e. if in March 2022 they are in NCY 4, they will receive FSM until end of NCY 6, (end of Primary Phase). If a child in March 2022 is in NCY 9 they will receive FSM until end of NCY 11, (end of Secondary Phase).

More Guidance will be sent to schools shortly from the DfE about “Key to Success” and how the data will need to be recorded shortly

How do these changes affect families who have not yet been transferred onto UC?

Families who are in receipt of existing benefits but have not yet been transferred onto UC, will continue to qualify under the current criteria. A full list of the eligibility criteria is provided below.

How will the Education Welfare Benefit (EWB) Service check eligibility?

The EWB Service will continue to use the Eligibility Checking System to carry out eligibility checks. This system has been updated to reflect the new income threshold, giving additional information. For example, it will inform us if the data we have entered is not matching the data HMRC hold for the parent. We may, therefore, need to recheck the data we hold for the parent, or ask for paper evidence of their Income to carry out further checks for the income levels.

We may ask the school to check the details, if the information has come via SIMS or we will write to the parent if they applied via our online form. With this additional process there may be more parents bringing in paper evidence or screen shots of their UC earning statement which will need to be scanned and send to EWB.FSM@Cambridgeshire.gov.uk.

(Please use the generic email address, rather than individual staff members so emails can be actioned accordingly, as the generic email is always monitored). Individual email accounts can't be access on the staff member's non-working day

Any parents who have any queries regarding the changes or the claim process should contact the Education Welfare Benefit Team by either email at EWB.FSM@Cambridgeshire.gov.uk or by telephone on 01223 703200

Further information is also available on our website at www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals

What other eligibility criteria is there for those families who are not yet receiving UC?

The Economic eligibility criteria for families who have not yet been transferred onto UC, which will be phased out by 2022, are;

- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- the guaranteed element of Pension Credit

- Child Tax Credit (provided you're not also entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
- Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit

Other economic criteria for Free School Meals which are not affected by the UC implementation are;

- Part 6 of Immigration and Asylum ACT 1999 and the
- Guarantee element of state pension credit

Next Stage

The EWB Service will recheck all previous rejected claims (since 2015) to assess whether any new families are now entitled under the new eligibility criteria from April 2018. Please don't resend in any SIMS files for batch bulk checking at this time, unless they are for new children only. We have all the claims on our system and will be working through them to identify the families that will now be entitled.

Website and Application forms will also be updated to reflect the new eligibility criteria.

Please contact EWB team if you have any questions about the new eligibility criteria for FSM.

01223 703200 or ewb.fsm@cambridgeshire.gov.uk

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