

Oxfordshire Schools Forum
9 January 2018

Response to DfE Consultation on Eligibility for free school meals and the early years pupil premium under Universal Credit

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PVI Nurseries	<input type="checkbox"/>	Secondary	<input type="checkbox"/>	COTO Representative	
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1. Item for Information and Decision

2. Purpose of Report

- 2.1 To note Oxfordshire County Council response to the Department for Education consultation: Eligibility for free school meals and the early years pupil premium under Universal Credit

3. Background

- 3.1 The rollout of Universal Credit means a number of benefits that currently entitle families to free school meals will cease to exist.
- 3.2 Since 2013, as a temporary measure to ensure that any families moving on to Universal Credit in the early stages of rollout (for example, those in pilot areas) did not lose their entitlements, all such families were entitled to free school meals pending the introduction of eligibility criteria. The DfE is now bringing forward proposals to replace this temporary measure with clear eligibility criteria under Universal Credit.
- 3.3 The economic eligibility criteria for the early years pupil premium are the same as for free school meals. This means that any changes to eligibility to free school meals also impacts on eligibility for early years pupil premium.
- 3.4 The full consultation document can be accessed here:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/consultations/eligibility-for-free-school-meals-and-the-early-years-pupil-premium-under-universal-credit>

4. Summary of consultation

The consultation proposes the following:

4.1 The Proposed change in eligibility

- To enable a greater number of children to benefit from free school meals, the DfE are proposing a net earnings threshold of £7,400 per annum for a household's eligibility for free school meals. under this threshold, an extra 50,000 children would become eligible for free school meals, compared to today's number of claimants
- The same level of net earned income will be used to determine eligibility for the early years pupil premium
- The threshold will be implemented for new claimants in April 2018

4.2 Protection for existing claimants

- From April 2018, all existing claimants should continue to receive free school meals whilst Universal Credit is rolled out. This will apply even if their earnings rise above the new threshold during that time.
- In addition, any child gaining free school meals eligibility after the threshold has been introduced should be protected against losing free school meals during the Universal Credit rollout period.
- Once Universal Credit is fully rolled out, any existing claimants that no longer meet the eligibility criteria at that point (because they are earning above the threshold) would continue to receive protection until the end of their current phase of education (e.g. primary, secondary).
- Similar protection is proposed for children who are eligible for the early years pupil premium. This would ensure that no child in England stops attracting the early years pupil premium (to their early years setting) during the transition to Universal Credit

4.3 Changes in the Free school meal cohort and implications for breakdowns of data by disadvantage

The new eligibility criteria will alter the make-up of the free school meals cohort, and consequently affect the cohort included in the disadvantage metrics. The headline performance measures, such as Progress 8, will be unaffected. However, the breakdowns of data by disadvantage will be affected in two ways:

- there will be some discontinuity in the time series for the disadvantage breakdowns of our performance measures between years, both nationally and at a school level; and

- in some cases it may be hard to make direct comparisons between the performance of schools within the same year, or between a school's own performance between years. This is because Universal Credit is rolling out over a number of years, resulting in the cohorts for individual schools' disadvantaged pupils changing at different points across this period.

5. The Consultation questions and Oxfordshire response

Question 1: Do you agree with our proposed net earnings threshold to determine eligibility for free school meals and the early years pupil premium under Universal Credit?

Agree with methodology, difficult to comment on the proposed net earnings threshold.

If 50,000 extra children will be entitled to Free School Meals (FSM) , how will this be reflected in all funding that uses FSM as a factor. Will more funding go into the system to pay for increased Pupil Premium and to fund the higher numbers in the funding formulas?

Although paragraph 5.10 of the consultation (see below) gives assurance over the impact on Schools from the increase in eligibility but there is no detail of the financial support proposed, so it is difficult to comment on this.

Extract from Consultation

5.10 As free school meals eligibility increases, schools will be required to provide a greater number of free school meals. This increase will be reflected in the data that local authorities use to determine funding allocations. However, we recognise that for some schools this increase may be difficult to manage in the short term because of the lagged nature of the schools funding system. We will put financial support in place to protect schools in this position.

Question 2: Do you agree with our intention to protect those pupils who would otherwise lose their entitlement to free school meals, and those children who would otherwise lose their entitlement to the early years pupil premium, under the new eligibility criteria?

Yes

Question 3: Do you feel that the proposals in this consultation may adversely affect any children who share one or more of the relevant protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act 2010?

No

Question 4: Do you have any views on the proposed management of the changes to the disadvantage measures or on the metrics we publish for the measurement of disadvantaged pupils' performance?

This seems a reasonable approach.

6. Equal Opportunities Implications and Impact on Equality Groups

6.1 The DfE has undertaken an equalities assessment as part of the consultation.

7. Contact Details of Lead Officer/Author

If you have any queries or comments in advance of the Schools Forum meeting about this report, please contact:

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