Slough Holiday Activities and Food Programme (HAF) discretionary fund referral guidance

We believe that every child deserves the opportunity to enjoy safe, enriching and supportive holiday experiences that promote their wellbeing, development and overall life chances.

The Slough Holiday Activities and Food (HAF) Programme is primarily funded to support children who are eligible for Targeted Free School Meals (FSM). However, a limited discretionary fund is also available to support children who do not meet the standard eligibility criteria but who may significantly benefit from accessing HAF provision.

Free School Meal (FSM) Eligibility

For families receiving Universal Credit, there are two categories of FSM eligibility:

1. Universal Credit – Targeted FSM Eligibility

Children living in households receiving Universal Credit, with annual household earnings of £7,400 or less (the threshold that applied before the expansion of FSM eligibility), qualify for Targeted FSM.

In addition to receiving free school meals, these children attract Pupil Premium and other disadvantage-related funding for their schools. Other educational entitlements previously linked to FSM eligibility, including the HAF Programme and the 'extended rights' element of school travel assistance, will also continue to be based on Targeted FSM eligibility.

2. Universal Credit – Expanded FSM Eligibility

Children living in households receiving Universal Credit, with annual household earnings exceeding £7,400, qualify for Expanded FSM. This entitlement provides access to free school meals only and does not include the additional educational benefits associated with Targeted FSM eligibility.

Discretionary Funding Allocation – 2026/27

For the 2026/27 financial year, Slough Borough Council has allocated 2% of its total HAF funding, equivalent to **£12,840.60**, to support discretionary referrals.

Due to the high number of children eligible for FSM, children who meet the HAF eligibility criteria will be prioritised for support in the first instance. Discretionary



referrals will be considered only where funding is available and will be assessed against the criteria outlined in this guidance.

Purpose of the HAF Programme

The HAF Programme aims to provide children and young people with enriching experiences during school holidays by:

- Promoting a greater understanding of food, nutrition and healthy lifestyles.
- Providing enjoyable and engaging activities that support children's development and wellbeing.
- Encouraging physical activity and healthy habits.
- Supporting children's social, emotional and physical wellbeing.
- Improving access to services and support for children and families.

This guidance is designed to support professionals in identifying and referring children who fall outside the standard eligibility criteria but would benefit from accessing HAF provision.

Young People Aged 16+ with SEND

Discretionary funding may be used to support young people aged 16 and over with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND), where there is a suitable HAF provider able to meet their needs.

Prior to making a referral, professionals should ensure that an appropriate provision has been identified, as not all HAF providers are able to accommodate young people above statutory school age.

Elective Home Education

We recognise that education is compulsory, but school attendance is not.

Section 7 of the Education Act 1996 states:

"The parent of every child of compulsory school age shall cause him to receive efficient full-time education suitable:

- to his age, ability and aptitude; and
- to any special educational needs he may have,

either by regular attendance at school or otherwise."

Children who are electively home educated are not automatically eligible for HAF because they are not registered at a school and therefore cannot access HAF places through the usual benefits-related FSM route.



However, local authorities may use a limited discretionary element of HAF funding to support children who would benefit from the programme but do not meet the standard eligibility criteria.

Electively home educated children may therefore be considered for a HAF place through the discretionary fund, subject to funding availability and the criteria outlined in this guidance.

Determining Eligibility

The Local Authority will undertake a benefits-related FSM eligibility check. To complete this check, the following information is required:

- Parent/carer's full name
- Parent/carer's date of birth
- Parent/carer's National Insurance number
- Child's full name
- Child's date of birth

Outcome of the Eligibility Check

- Children found to be eligible for **Targeted free school meals** will be eligible to access HAF provision through the standard route.
- Children who are eligible for **expanded free school meals** may still be considered under the discretionary fund if they meet one or more of the criteria set out below.

Please note that discretionary funding is limited. Meeting one or more of the criteria does not automatically guarantee a funded place.

All applications will be assessed individually, with priority given to children demonstrating the greatest need and likely benefit from participating in the programme.

Prioritisation Framework

To support fair and transparent decision-making, discretionary referrals will be considered using the following prioritisation framework.



Tier 1: Higher Priority Consideration

Referrals within Tier 1 are generally considered the highest priority for discretionary funding. Applications demonstrating multiple factors within this tier are more likely to be approved, subject to available funding.

Children who:

- Are experiencing emotional wellbeing or mental health difficulties.
- Have persistent or severe school attendance concerns.
- Have limited opportunities to participate in physical activity or would benefit from developing healthier lifestyle habits.
- Have recently experienced the bereavement of a close family member that is affecting their emotional wellbeing.
- Are living in families experiencing temporary but significant financial hardship beyond general cost-of-living pressures.
- Are from refugee or asylum-seeking families and would benefit from social, emotional or educational support.
- Are young carers.

Tier 2: Additional Consideration

Referrals within Tier 2 may be considered where there is evidence of additional need or where more than one factor is present.

Children who:

- Are experiencing short-term instability or significant changes in family circumstances, such as parental illness, family breakdown or housing difficulties, and are not currently receiving Children's Social Care support.
- Have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).
- Live in families with No Recourse to Public Funds (NRPF).
- Are receiving support from Children's Social Care, including Child in Need or Child Protection plans, where alternative funding options (including Section 17 support where appropriate) have been explored.
- Have siblings who are eligible for benefits-related FSM but are not themselves eligible.

Circumstances That Would Not Normally Meet the Threshold

The following factors alone would not normally be sufficient for discretionary funding:

- General household cost-of-living pressures.
- A request based solely on a child's wish to attend activities.
- Lack of alternative childcare arrangements.



- Previous approval for discretionary HAF funding.

These circumstances may be considered alongside other identified needs.

How Referrals Will Be Assessed

Referrals will be reviewed by the HAF Team, who will consider:

- The child's individual circumstances and level of need.
- The potential benefit of HAF participation for the child.
- The presence of multiple vulnerability factors.
- Whether alternative support or funding options have been considered.
- The availability of funding and places.

Decisions will be based on the information provided in the referral and the funding available at the time of application.

Please note that previous approval does not guarantee future funding. Applications will be assessed separately for each holiday period, and priority will be given according to the child's current circumstances.

Supporting High-Quality Referrals

We encourage professionals to provide clear and detailed information about the child's circumstances and the reasons why participation in HAF would be beneficial.

The more information provided, the better we can understand the child's needs and make informed decisions about the allocation of limited discretionary funding.

While we strive to support as many children as possible, demand may exceed the funding available.

Notification of Outcomes

Professionals will be notified of the outcome of their referral.

Where funding is approved, parents/carers will be provided with details of how to access and book suitable HAF provision.

Where funding cannot be approved, this does not reflect the value or validity of the child's needs, but rather the limited discretionary funding available and the requirement to prioritise children with the highest levels of need.