

Quick Guide:

Free School Meals Eligibility Checking Service (ECS)

How do I submit free school meal applications for assessment?

Number of applications	Submission method	LA response method
1-5 applications	S2S messaging	S2S messaging
5-10 applications	S2S messaging (maximum 5 per message)	S2S messaging
More than 10	Spreadsheet using FSM master template (must say FSM in filename) – sent via S2S generic files. E-mail siteam@slough.gov.uk to advise when sent.	S2S generic files
All previously ineligible applications; new applications and starters for next term (end of term batch reassessment)	Spreadsheet using FSM master template (must say FSM in filename) – sent via S2S generic files. Must be sent prior to the end of term.	S2S generic files

What information must I send when submitting an assessment request?

The applicant's:

- National Insurance Number or National Asylum Seeker Number;
- Date of Birth (YYYYMMDD);
- Surname

How do I interpret the results sent back by the LA?

Result	Meaning
True / Found	Eligible for Free School Meals
False / Not Found	Not eligible for Free School Meals (<i>unless eligible under transitional protection*</i>)
False / Not Found - No Trace	No match could be found for the applicant. Check data provided is accurate. Pay particular attention to the NI number and applicant's legal surname. Get proof from the applicant if necessary.
False / Not Found - Pending	Unable to determine an eligibility status, but one should be available in 6 weeks. Parent should re-apply later.
False / Not Found - More information required	Unable to determine whether eligible or ineligible. Complete a manual assessment instead. Parent must provide evidence of their entitlement to qualifying benefits (3 most recent statements where parent is applying under Universal Credit – refer to page 15 of full user guide). Contact the LA if more support is required.
Universal Free School Meal	Parent has registered with the LA for a Universal Free School Meal only.

***Please note: Anyone who was eligible for free school meals under one of the benefit related criteria, either on or anytime after 1st April 2018, will remain eligible under “transitional protection” arrangements. This remains the case even if a parent no longer claims one of the qualifying benefits.**

During the rollout of Universal Credit (currently expected to conclude in March 2022), protection arrangements mean that no further eligibility checks will be required for children who are already eligible. Schools should continue to record pupils claiming free school meals – including those being transitionally protected – as eligible for free school meals within their Management Information System and on the termly school census.

Free School Meals – Transitional Protection

On 1st April 2018, the government changed the eligibility criteria for free school meals to reflect the introduction of Universal Credit. They also implemented eligibility protection (known as “transitional protections”) for those pupils who might otherwise have lost free school meals following the update to the eligibility criteria. The transitional protections are awarded as follows:

1. Any pupil who is in receipt of free school meals immediately prior to 1st April 2018 will continue to receive free school meals whilst Universal Credit is rolled out. This applies even if they no longer meet the eligibility criteria during that time.
2. Any pupil who gains eligibility for free school meals after 1st April 2018 will continue to receive free school meals during the Universal Credit rollout period. This applies even if they no longer meet the eligibility criteria at a subsequent point during the rollout period.

Once Universal Credit is fully rolled out, any existing pupil who no longer meets the eligibility criteria at that point will continue to receive free school meals until the end of their current phase of education, i.e. the end of year 6 (primary) or the end of year 11 (secondary).

Which benefits would qualify someone to receive free school meals for their child(ren)?

Children of parents who are in receipt of one of the following benefits are eligible for free school meals:

- Universal Credit (provided the applicant has an annual net earned income of no more than £7400, as assessed by earnings from up to three of their most recent assessment periods)
- 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 Guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit, provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual income (as assessed by HM Revenue & Customs) that does not exceed £16,190 for financial year.
- Working Tax Credit ‘run-on’ – the payment someone may receive for a further four weeks after they stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit

Who can I speak to at the LA for advice about free school meal eligibility?

In the first instance send an e-mail to siteam@slough.gov.uk.

Named contacts

- Anjum Javaid, Systems and Information Officer
- Tel: 01753 476576
- E-mail: anjum.javaid@slough.gov.uk

Escalation contact

- Paul Brotherton, Systems & School Support Manager
- Tel: 01753 875744
- E-mail: paul.brotherton@slough.gov.uk