

Free school meals

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Free school meals - what is it and can I get it?

If you have children in reception, year 1 or year 2 and they go to a state school they are entitled to free school meals regardless of your household income.

From year 3 onwards your children could get free lunches, and sometimes milk, at school if you are receiving one of the benefits below:

- 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 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' - the payment someone may receive for a further four weeks after they stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit
- Universal Credit - if you apply on or after 1 April 2018 your household income must be less than £7,400 a year (after tax and not including any benefits you get) at the time of your application. Thresholds vary in

Scotland and Northern Ireland, see below. If your income goes above the threshold in the future, but you remain on Universal Credit, your child will remain eligible. If you applied before 1 April 2018 there was no household income threshold for Universal Credit claimants.

Universal Credit and free school meals

Any child of a Universal Credit claimant, who was getting free school meals as at 1 April 2018 under the old criteria (no income threshold), or makes a successful new claim after 1 April 2018 under the new criteria (with the income threshold) will keep their free school meals until March 2022, even if the household's income rises above the income threshold - as long as they remain on Universal Credit.

At March 2022 if the pupil is still at school they will keep their free school meals until they move to the next phase of education (primary or secondary).

Because of the changes it means that one child could be entitled to a free school meal and a sibling not entitled. For example, if a Universal Credit claimant with 2 children has net earnings of £10,000 and applied for free school meals for their eldest child in September 2017, the application would have been successful as there was no income threshold. The free school meal for that child is protected. In September 2018 the younger child is not eligible for a free school meal because the household income is over the newly introduced threshold.