

Free School Meal Transitional Protection - March 2025

As you are aware, in April 2018, the criteria used to determine eligibility for free school meals was updated to reflect the introduction of Universal Credit (UC) and phasing out of other income-based benefits. To ensure families were not disadvantaged during this rollout, protection arrangements were put in place. This was known as transitional protection.

Since 1 April 2018, all existing free school meals pupils, in addition to any pupils gaining eligibility for free school meals after this date, have been protected against losing their free school meals whilst Universal Credit was rolled out.

The most recent free school meal guidance issued by the Department for Education, dated March 2024, suggested that the Universal Credit rollout would be complete by March 2025, at which point, any pupil whose parent/guardian is identified as no longer meeting the eligibility criteria at that point, either because they are earning above the threshold or are no longer a recipient of Universal Credit, will only continue to receive this protection until they finish their current phase of education (ie. Primary or Secondary)

Although local authorities have not been provided with any update regarding the Universal Credit rollout end date, we are preparing for the protection to end. When we do receive further advice from DfE colleagues to confirm if this is the case, or whether a further extension is to be applied, we will communicate this to you.

If the Universal Credit rollout does end this month (March 2025), then any new free school meal claims approved with effect from 01 April 2025 will no longer be protected. This means any child confirmed as eligible for free school meals from 1 April 2025, will be subject to ongoing checks to confirm continued eligibility. This will not impact any children who are already confirmed as eligible. Those already confirmed as eligible will maintain their eligibility until the end of their current phase of education. At that point, they will be re-assessed for their eligibility status. This will apply to all year 6 students moving into year 7 in September 2025 and potentially (but not yet confirmed) year 11 students moving into Year 12. These children will then be subject to ongoing checks to confirm continued eligibility.

If your school subscribes to the Council's Free School Meal Checking Service SLA, we will undertake these routine checks on the school's behalf and notify schools of any change to FSM status. Most schools and academies in North Yorkshire subscribe to the SLA but, if your school/academy does not subscribe to the SLA, you will need to make appropriate arrangements. If you wish to purchase the SLA, you can do so on [NYES Free School Meals | NYES Info](#)

Action required before the end of March 2025

It is important for schools to remind all parents and guardians who do not have a current claim or eligibility for free school meals, including those parents of children in KS1, to apply for this provision by the end of this month (March 2025), if they think their child may be eligible. This is to ensure their claim and future funding are protected. **Only applications processed before 1 April 2025 will maintain transitional protection.** Parents can make an application for free school meals through the council's website [Synergy - Enquiry](#).

Please send any queries to the Free School Meals Eligibility Team at: schoolwelfare@northyorks.gov.uk