

TITLE OF REPORT: Discretionary School Meals - Universal Credit

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Summary

To provide information on the process in place for schools to claim funding to provide a discretionary school meal following the roll out of Universal Credit in Gateshead. Schools Forum agreed that Dedicated Schools Grant reserves could be used for this purpose whilst reserves are available.

1. Introduction

1.1. Universal Credit is a national benefit which will replace Income Support, Income related Jobseekers Allowance, Income based Employment and Support Allowance, Housing Benefit, Working Tax Credit and Child Tax Credit. People in Gateshead may currently claim Universal Credit, but generally only if they are a single person.

2. Background

- 2.1. From mid October 2017 Universal Credit in Gateshead was expanded to include anyone making a new claim to any of the benefits referred to above. This includes families with children and lone parents.
- 2.2. Anyone applying will need to sign a claimant commitment. For those not working, or only working part time, they may be expected to spend up to 35 hours a week doing "work requirements" i.e. looking for work/training. If a person does not fulfil these commitments they will be subject to a sanction.
- 2.3. Universal Credit is paid monthly in arrears and directly to the majority of claimants. In general, there is a delay of between 6 and 8 weeks before someone will receive a payment, although there is the ability to apply for an advance payment (a partial payment).

- 2.4. At present, anyone in receipt of Universal Credit is entitled to free school meal (FSM), this includes people who would formally have only applied for Working Tax Credit, or both Child and Working Tax Credit and who are not presently eligible for FSM. Therefore, there is likely to be an increase in the number of pupils who may be eligible for FSM.
- 2.5. Department for Education (DfE) have advised that anyone who has applied for a benefit but not yet been awarded it, is NOT eligible for FSM. This applies to Universal Credit claimants even where they may be waiting for 6 to 8 weeks for their entitlement to be confirmed.
- 2.6. Due to the hardship the rollout of Universal Credit can cause some families officers on the direction of Schools Forum have developed a process and procedure to fund schools to provide a Discretionary School Meal (DSM) for those children of households that have applied for Universal Credit, but not yet been awarded.
- 2.7. Forum approved the use of DSG reserves to fund DSM at £2.55 per meal taken during the 8 week period or until the household is either awarded or denied Universal Credit. The process is attached (appendix 1).

Discretionary School Meals

- Universal Credit -

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1. Overview

This procedural guidance is for **new Universal Credit claims only** as Free School Meals cannot be awarded until entitlement to Universal Credit has been confirmed at the end of the first assessment period – this can mean a delay of around 6 weeks. In these instances a Discretionary School Meal can be awarded by the school.

If a parent is already receiving Universal Credit they should make an application for Free School Meals from the Local Authority's Benefits department.

Applications for Free School Meals are available online at <http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/freeschoolmeals>. The application form should then be returned to the Benefits department.

Any reference to parent in this guidance also covers guardians or a person who has legal responsibility for the child. It does not include foster carers

2. Discretionary School Meals – Universal Credit

2.1 Who can claim a Discretionary School Meal?

The child's parents can make a claim for Discretionary School Meals.

Discretionary School Meals are for children who are not yet eligible for a Free School Meal, when a child's parent has claimed Universal Credit, but a decision on their award has not been made. A Discretionary School Meal will be granted for an initial period of 8 weeks or until the child's parents are eligible to claim Free School Meals (whichever time period is the shortest).

2.2 Is an application needed by the parent to enable the school to award Discretionary School Meals?

An application will not be required by the parent. You the school, will only need confirmation that the child's parent has made a claim for Universal Credit. However an **application for statutory Free School Meals must be submitted straight away** to allow the Benefits department to check when Universal Credit is awarded.

2.3 How will the school become aware that a Discretionary School Meal can be awarded?

There are two ways, you the school, could become aware that a child is entitled to Discretionary School Meals. The first is via the Local Authority's Benefit department, where the parent has applied for Benefit and the second is that, you the school, have become aware of it. This could be because you have been approached by the child's parent or you may notice that the child is not being provided with school lunch.

If the **Local Authority has become aware** that a parent has claimed Universal Credit, you the school, will be sent a proforma by email from the Benefit department. This proforma will detail the parent and child's name, date of birth, address and the date that they have made the claim for Universal Credit. You the school, will be able to identify these by the email subject heading 'Discretionary School Meal – Universal Credit Decision'.

If you the **school, become aware** before the Local Authority's Benefits department, you will need to complete a proforma and send it to the Benefits department, with the email subject heading 'Discretionary School Meal – Universal Credit - Decision. This will allow the Benefits department to keep checking on a daily basis to see if or when Universal Credit has been awarded. Once Universal Credit has been awarded, you the school, will be notified by email via the Local Authority. You must also tell the parent to complete a statutory Free School

Meals application form. Having this will allow the Benefit department to continually check to see when their parents eligibility to Universal Credit is confirmed.

2.3(b) Completing and Sending the proforma to the Local Authority?

You the school should complete all the relevant fields on the proforma. This proforma then needs to be emailed to the Benefits department with the following details:-

Proforma is 'Discretionary School Meals – Universal Credit – FSM Eligibility'.

Email address is CSBenefitsFSM@Gateshead.Gov.UK

Subject Field should have the following text **only** 'Discretionary School Meal – Universal Credit FSM Eligibility'.

2.4 When can Discretionary School Meals be paid from?

As long as the parent makes the claim for a Discretionary School Meal within one month from the date they have submitted their claim for Universal Credit, the child can be awarded a Discretionary School Meal from the date the parent has claimed Universal Credit – this can be a mid-week date.

The following should be noted:-

- if a parent has already **paid** for their child's school meals for any period since they applied for Universal Credit, the parent will not receive a refund. Discretionary School Meal's will start from the first day a meal has not been paid for.
- if a parent is in **arrears** with their child's school meals payment, then Discretionary School Meals can be awarded to reduce the arrears from the date the parent has claimed Universal Credit.

2.4(b) What happens when a person has made a claim for a Discretionary School Meal after 1 month?

Discretionary School Meals can only be claimed for a maximum of one month in arrears irrespective of the date of the application for Universal Credit. See 4 for a further explanation.

2.5 How long should Discretionary School Meals be paid for?

Discretionary School Meals will be awarded for a maximum of 8 weeks. There are exceptional circumstances which could allow a Discretionary School Meals to be awarded for a longer period, such as if a person's Universal Credit has not been determined because they are waiting for a second property to be valued. However if you the school, would like to award a Discretionary School Meal beyond 8 weeks, this is the schools decision and the amount will not be subsidised by Dedicated Schools Grant (DSG) Reserves.

There are instances where a Discretionary School Meal will be awarded for less than 8 weeks. This is where a Discretionary School Meal has not started from the date the parent has applied for Universal Credit or they have already paid for the child's school meals up until the point where the parent has applied for Discretionary School Meals. In these cases Discretionary School Meals should only be awarded for the remaining weeks within the 8 week period.

2.5(b) How will the child's parents know that Discretionary School Meals have been granted?

You the school, will provide the child's parent with a letter to confirm that their child(ren) will receive Discretionary School Meals. The letter will detail the dates the child will receive Discretionary School Meals for and it will also outline what they need to do when they are awarded Universal Credit – such as making a Free School Meals application and notifying the Local Authority of their award.

The letter is called 'Discretionary School Meals – Universal Credit – Awarded'.

3. Free School Meals

3.1 When should a parent complete a Free School Meals application?

An application form for Free School Meals should be completed straight-away and sent to the Local Authority's Benefit department.

3.2 When will the child's parents know that they need to make a claim for Free School Meals?

You should advise the parent to still apply for Free School Meal's straight away. Once the Benefits department has received the application they can continually check to see when eligibility to Universal Credit is confirmed to award Free School Meals under the statutory scheme. If they have not been able to do so, 2 weeks prior to the child's Discretionary School Meals ending, you the school, will send a letter to the child's parents warning them that their child's Discretionary School Meals will end in 2 weeks. The letter will also inform them that if they have not done so already, they need to make an application for Free School Meals to the Benefits department if they want their child to receive a school meal, but that this can only be awarded from the date their eligibility to Universal Credit is confirmed.

The letter is called 'Discretionary School Meals – Universal Credit – 8 week letter'.

3.3 When can Free School Meals be awarded?

A child's entitlement to Statutory Free School Meals will start from the day their eligibility is confirmed by the Department for Education's Free School Meals Eligibility Checking service, or from the date they are notified they are eligible for Universal Credit.

The school will be notified by email (the subject field will have the following text, 'Discretionary School Meal – Universal Credit – FSM Eligibility) or on the weekly schools list that an award for Free School Meals has been made. This will detail the date the award has been made from and Discretionary School Meals should end the day before. If you the school continue to pay Discretionary School Meals beyond the date Free School Meals have been awarded from, then funding will not be awarded from DSG Reserves for this period.

3.4 How will I know on what date a claim for Universal Credit has been made?

The Benefits department do not get notified of every claim to Universal Credit, therefore they will not be able to help you establish when an award has been made. As part of the Universal Credit claim, the child's parents will have access to an online journal, which will detail the date a claim for Universal Credit has been submitted.

The parent will have to show you this entry or provide a copy of it. You should retain a copy of the entry, or a note that you have seen it for your records.

3.4(b) What if the parent does not want to share this information with the school?

Some parents may not want the school to see their Universal Credit information. If this happens, you the school have the following options available:-

- ring the Benefit FSM department to see if they have any information;
- ask the parent to print off their online journal entries, which will enable them to cross out any potentially sensitive information before providing the evidence;
- ask the parent to see if their work coach can provide them with something which will confirm they have applied for Universal Credit and when;
- finally if the parent is prepared to show their online account to the benefits team, the parent can come into the benefits office

3.5 How will I know if Universal Credit has been awarded or not?

The Benefits department will be checking on a daily basis to see if a parent has been awarded Universal Credit. Once eligibility to Free School Meals is confirmed the school will be notified either by email or on the weekly list sent to the school.

4. Recording and Funding

4.1 How are the children(s) details recorded?

You the school will need to keep your own record of every eligible child who is receiving Discretionary School Meals on the Discretionary School Meal – Universal Credit spreadsheet.

The spreadsheet needs to detail every Discretionary School Meal that the child has received. Therefore if the child was off sick or has been provided a packed lunch, then monies cannot be claimed back and should be detailed on the spreadsheet. In these instances there should be an end date when a child does not have a school meal and a separate period should start when the child starts school meals again.

4.2 How is the funding claimed back?

You the school will be able to claim back £2.55 per meal, each day for every child to whom you awards a Discretionary School Meal

The Discretionary School Meal spreadsheet needs to be sent to carolesmith@gateshead.gov.uk at the end of every school term. The details should only include any child who has finished receiving Discretionary School Meals within that term.

4.3 Census Return

Any children who are awarded a Discretionary School Meal **should not** be indicated as being eligible for a FSM on the school census return, until their Free School Meals status has been confirmed.

5. Documents

The following documents are required in awarding Discretionary School Meal.

5.1 Send by the School

Appendix 1 – Discretionary School Meals – Universal Credit – Decision

A word document which should be emailed CSBenefitsFSM@Gateshead.Gov.UK. It is used to inform the Local Authority's Benefit department that a Discretionary School Meal has been awarded

Appendix 2 – Discretionary School Meals – Universal Credit - Awarded

A letter used to inform the child's parents that an award of Discretionary School Meals has been successful

Appendix 3 - Discretionary School Meals – Universal Credit – 8 week letter

A letter used to inform the child's parents that their child's entitlement to Discretionary School Meals is due to end and also used as a reminder to submit a Free School Meals application form if they have not already done so

5.2 Actioned only by the School

Appendix 4 – Discretionary School Meals – Universal Credit spreadsheet

This is to record all the child which have been granted Discretionary School Meals. This needs to be emailed to carolesmith@gateshead.gov.uk at the end of every school term

5.3 Received from the Benefits Department

Appendix 5 - Discretionary School Meals – Universal Credit – Decision

An email which is used to inform the School that the Benefits department have received a claim for Free School Meals and that Discretionary School Meals can be awarded

Appendix 6 – Discretionary School Meals – Universal Credit – FSM Eligibility

An email which is used to inform the school that an award of Universal Credit has been made. It will also detail that an application for Free School Meals has been received and the date FSM will be awarded from

Appendix 7 – Discretionary School Meals – Universal Credit – School Meals

An email which is used to inform the school that a crisis payment has been made to cover the cost of school meal arrears

6. Unable to award School Meals

6.1 What if a Discretionary School Meal or Free School Meal cannot be awarded?

In these instances the parent could consider requesting an Advance payment of Universal Credit, if they have not already done so. To do this they can make an entry in their online journal or ask their work coach. As a last resort, they can apply for a Crisis Payment from the Local Authority, by completing the Local Crisis Payment online application.

A Crisis Payment may be made depending on a person's circumstances and comes from a cash limited fund. Therefore you should not guarantee that they will definitely be awarded the money. When the Local Crisis Payment form is received by the Crisis Team, they will determine whether money can be awarded to cover the cost of school meals and they will also consider any other help they can provide. If it is agreed that monies will be paid to cover the cost of the school meal, this money will not go to the parent, instead it will be transferred to the school.

The Local Crisis Payment online application is available at <http://www.gateshead.gov.uk/LocalCrisisPayments> - paper forms are available from the Crisis Support Team at the Local Authority.

The Crisis Payment phone number is 0191 433 3676.

6.1(b) How will I know that a Crisis Payment has been awarded to cover the cost of School Meals?

The Crisis Support team will email you the school. The email will confirm the dates an award for school meals has been granted for.

6.1(c) How will a Crisis Payment for School Meals be recorded?

The child's details will be recorded in the same way as you do for a Discretionary School Meal, see 5.1 for details.