

What if I got free school meals before 1st April 2018?

If your child qualified for free school meals before 1st April 2018, they can get free school meals until **31st March 2025**, or until they **finish the stage of education they are in** (primary, secondary), if that is later.

You do not need to have made a claim for them before 1st April 2018. You can claim now if you were entitled then.

Example

Julie has a son called Jack.

At the start of 2018, when Jack was in Reception Class, she got income-related ESA and Child Tax Credit.

Julie did not have to claim free meals for Jack - he got them automatically.

Because Jack was entitled to free school meals due to his mum's low income on 31st March 2018, he can have free school meals until he leaves primary school, even if Julie is better off now than in 2018.

Julie should make a claim for free school meals now.



What if we first claimed free school meals after 1st April 2018?

If your children qualified for free school meals on or after 1st April 2018, they will carry on getting them until 31st March 2025.

Example

Peter has 2 children at school.

He was made redundant in April 2022 and claimed **Universal Credit** soon afterwards. When the children returned to school after the Easter holidays, they qualified for free school meals.

Peter starts a new job soon. He will be earning £28,000 a year, which is above the threshold for free school meals, but the transitional protection rules mean that his children's free school meals are safe until **31st March 2025**.

For more information go to www.citizensadvice.org.uk or contact our **Citizens Advice Helpline: 0800 144 8848**



Potteries Gold is a **Citizens Advice Staffordshire North & Stoke-on-Trent** project to help people in Stoke-on-Trent cope with changes to the benefit system www.snsCab.org.uk/about-us/potteries-gold
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Free School Meals

Means-tested Benefits No 15



Who can get Free School Meals?

Universal Infant Free School Meals

Your child can get free school meals as a right while in:

- Reception Class
- Year 1
- Year 2

You do not need to make a claim to get these.

Older Children

Your child can have free meals at [school](#), [sixth form](#) or a [college of further education](#) if you, your partner or your child get any of the following:

- Income Support.
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance.
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA).
- the guaranteed element of Pension Credit.
- Child Tax Credit, but only if your income is [less than £16,190 a year](#) and you [do not get Working Tax Credit](#) as well.
- Universal Credit and your earned income is [less than £7,400 a year after tax](#).
- Working Tax Credit run-on, paid for 4 weeks *after* you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit.
- support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.



How do I claim Free School Meals?

Ask your school for a claim form.

You will need to provide proof of your benefits and, if you are working, evidence of how much you earn.

Once your child is getting free school meals you [do not have to claim again](#), even if your circumstances change, until after [31st March 2025](#).

I meet the rules for Free School Meals but my child is in Reception, Year 1 or Year 2. What should I do?

Apply for free school meals now, for when your child is older. Your children will then get free meals when they are in [Year 3 to Year 6](#), even if your benefits or earnings change.

Free School Meals and the Pupil Premium

Schools get [extra funds](#), called a Pupil Premium, for each child that is eligible for free school meals.

This allows the school to provide extra support and activities, such as breakfast clubs, to all children, whether they get free meals or not.

[If you qualify for free school meals, claim them!](#) It will help your school. It doesn't matter if your child doesn't eat school meals and takes a packed lunch.



What if I get Universal Credit?

[Before 1st April 2018](#), all families on Universal Credit could have free school meals for their children.

Since 1st April 2018, families making a new claim for Universal Credit only get free school meals if they earn [less than £7,400 a year](#) after tax.

If your income varies, it is averaged out across one, two or three monthly assessment periods.

The earnings thresholds are:

- £616.67 for one assessment period
- £1,233.34 for two assessment periods
- £1,850 for three assessment periods.

So you could earn £500 per month for two months, then £845, and still qualify.

Example

Dave and Emma have 2 children.

Dave earned £16,300 a year after tax and Emma earns £8,500 a year after tax, so the children did not get free school meals.

Dave's contract ended last month.

Dave claims Universal Credit but the children don't get free school meals if Emma's earnings stay at more than [£7,400 a year](#).

If Emma's earnings fall to or under [£616.67 per month](#), perhaps because her hours are cut, they should make a claim for free school meals.