

Universal Free School Meals – information on grant allocations, funding flows, grant conditions and principles

The below information has been developed following engagement with boroughs, review of existing schemes and feedback from finance colleagues.

1. Determining grant allocations

- a) The GLA has replicated the established (Education and Skills Funding Agency) ESFA's funding regime method of calculating in allocating the level of funding required for grants for Free School Meals for primary pupils.
- b) So, for academic year 2023-24 the GLA will fund on an average of the primary pupils taken on census days in October 2022, January 2023 and June 2023 extrapolated across the year multiplied by £2.65 per day. This support will exclude the independent sector.
- c) Payment would be made termly in advance. To allow for upfront costs it is proposed that half of the funding would be paid in July 2023, with a further 20% in December and a further 20% in March. A balance of 10% would be held back for the final payment as set out in d) below.
- d) Based on the census day returns in October 2023 and January 2024 a balancing payment or claw back would be made before the end of the summer term 2024.
- e) Any additional process for clawback or top up will be based on actual differences in uptake of free school meals, except where an LEA chooses not to implement the scheme after having received the advances. This is because currently the ESFA does not operate such a clawback or top-up mechanism beyond the reconciliation payment described in d) above.

2. Funding flows

- a) Payment will be made to LEAs for their maintained schools and non-LEA maintained schools (i.e. Payment to Academy Trusts would be made by each LEA for MATs in their area). LEAs will pass on the exact amount to each MAT based on the allocation set out above and that payment would be made swiftly to each MAT once GLA funds are received.
- b) For those LEAs that currently provide FSM for all their primary pupils, the sum to be paid to them will be based on the calculation described above. Discussions are to take place between the GLA and the five LEAs currently providing this support, as to how the sum to be paid will be used for further cost of living measures. However, a high degree of flexibility will be applied by the GLA to ensure that these LEA can use this funding to best effect to address the cost-of-living crisis.

- c) Allocation does not include any provision for capital expenditure that may be necessary for LEAs or Academy Trusts to provide. An assessment of the potential need for such capital investment will be made in each LEA / Academy Trust and the extent to which alternative remedial steps other than such investment can be taken to ensure the Mayor's commitment can be implemented.
- d) The grant agreement that will need to be made between each LEA and the GLA will need to promote the Mayor and his investment in schools' meals through branding and communication in line with further guidance from the GLA that will be provided. Further, the grant agreement will also require a commitment from each LEA to take part in the evaluation of the programme, including data collection.
- e) Grant conditions would be accompanied by grant giving principles which set out a series of standards boroughs are encouraged to work to and this will include compliance with national school food standards.

3. Standard grant conditions

- a) Boroughs should be aware that the following conditions will be attached to the grant funding:
 - The grant must be spent on provision of school lunch.
 - Local Authorities/ Schools and their catering providers must participate in evaluations or reviews of the Mayor's Emergency Free School Meals provision, as needed. Monitoring will aim to minimise extra reporting burden and instead where possible draw upon existing data sets.
 - The Mayor's investment must be promoted in any branding/communications. This includes ensuring references to the expansion explains the source of the funding as the Mayor of London and supporting the distribution of a communication from the Mayor to all affected families, parents or carers. Further advice will follow.
 - The Mayor proposes to allocate funding to London Boroughs who currently provide USFM to their primary pupils as if they were not currently providing this function. The proposed allocation to these Boroughs is exactly the same as that which will be given to authorities who currently do not provide the function. The Mayor hopes that each Borough that currently provides USFM will use the offset funds to support families in financial hardship as a result of the cost of living crisis.

4. Grant principles

- a) Grant principles will also be provided, setting out national or pan-London initiatives which we would encourage adoption of through borough schemes. This will include:
 - **Pupil premium** – to support approaches which continue to maximise registration by eligible families which may otherwise be impacted by the move to a universal approach through the Mayor's Emergency Free School Meals funding.

- **Supporting families and communities** – by paying London Living Wage (LLW) to catering staff and including LLW in any future tenders; and committing to wider action to support families struggling due to the cost of living crisis.
 - **School food standards** – meeting school food standards and ensuring school food is culturally appropriate.
 - **Healthy schools** – taking a whole school approach to healthy eating, participation in Healthy Schools London and adoption of water only policies.
 - **Sustainability** - Meet sustainable catering guidelines and support environmental aims.
- b) Further information on these principles is outlined in Annex 1. We will further discuss with partners and relevant forums what support is needed for implementation of the outlined principles. This may include for example a toolkit or letter to parents.

Annex 1: Background to outlined grant principles

Pupil Premium

We understand the potential impact a universal offer could have on maintaining levels of registration for free school meals, and the effect this would have on pupil premium funding for schools. To mitigate against this, we would encourage consideration of best practice in promoting registration (and the benefits to schools) including models where all parents are required to complete registration^{1,2}.

How a borough or school chooses to promote registration is for agreement locally. Depending on the processes already in place in the borough for FSM application for years 3-6, this is likely be done either centrally by borough communications, or by the borough working with individual schools. The following will be made available to support local activities:

- Learning on effective approaches will be shared through webinars and other forums
- As part of this we will share examples of messages and copy that have been used to good effect by schools and boroughs, including wording that can be used on borough website registration pages and forms for schools. We will make these resources available in a range of ways, including sharing via our London.gov. pages.
- The GLA will work with boroughs and schools to support local messaging on registration, including as part of their pan-London messaging to Londoners about the scheme

Supporting families and communities

The Mayor has launched a Cost of Living hub which provides information about benefits, grants and discounts Londoners can get if they are in financial difficulty, from the Mayor of London, the government, your local council, charities and advice centers. Schools are encouraged to share resources with families in need:

- <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/communities-and-social-justice/help-cost-living>

In addition to support already being provided by schools, Good Thinking have also developed some resources to support Londoners mental health through the cost of living crisis which can be promoted:

- <https://www.good-thinking.uk/articles/cost-living-crisis-how-look-after-your-mental-health>

School Food Standards

¹ See <https://www.islington.gov.uk/children-and-families/help-with-childcare-and-family-costs/free-school-meals-and-uniform-grant>

² Note that this approach should not impact on children accessing a free school meal – children will not be penalised in the lunchroom if their parents don't register them.

Government's School Food plan sets out seventeen actions to transform what children eat in schools and how they learn about food. As part of the School Food Plan, a new set of standards for all food served in schools were launched and are mandatory in all maintained schools, new academies and free schools.

These school food standards are to ensure that food provided to pupils in school is nutritious and of high quality; to promote good nutritional health in all pupils; protect those who are nutritionally vulnerable and to promote good eating behaviour.

Resources are available to support schools in ensuring these standards are met:

- Checklist for school lunches: <http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Checklist-for-school-lunches-140616.pdf>
- Portion sizes and food groups - <http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/Portion-Tables-1406161.pdf>
- School Food: Guidance for Governors http://www.schoolfoodplan.com/wp-content/uploads/2015/11/Guidance-for-Governors-FINAL-15_10_15.pdf

The School Food Plan includes guidance to ensure meals are served in an attractive, happy and calm dining environment. This includes

- Staff and children eating together.
- Catering staff (including midday supervisors) who are happy and engaged with school staff and children.
- Children and parents are actively consulted.
- Cashless payment system to reduce queues and stigmatization of Free School Meal (FSM) pupils.
- Independent verification that school food standards and relevant Government Buying Standards are met across the school day.
- Making water the drink of choice, freely and easily available.

Healthy Schools

Schools that are not already participating in Healthy Schools London (HSL) should be encouraged to register. HSL is a comprehensive approach to supporting pupil health and wellbeing that includes:

- Healthy Eating
- Physical Activity
- Personal Social Health and Economic Education (PSHEE)
- Emotional Wellbeing and Mental Health

Taking part in HSL, and working successfully through the tiered awards, will enable schools to directly support the health and wellbeing of their pupils and staff. It also bring them in as part of a supportive schools network.

- <https://www.london.gov.uk/what-we-do/health/healthy-schools-london/awards/about>

Schools should also be encouraged to become Water only, offering only low-fat milk or water to drink during the school day. Resources and a Toolkit to support schools have been developed and are available through the Healthy Schools London website:

- <https://www.london.gov.uk/programmes-strategies/health-and-wellbeing/healthy-schools-london-0/water-only-school-toolkit>

Sustainability

Boroughs and schools are encouraged to ensure that sustainable climate friendly catering practices are followed.

Food for Life Served Here sets out guidance for catering partners to deliver on providing healthy and sustainable food, working towards Sustainable Catering Certification.

- <https://www.foodforlife.org.uk/catering/food-for-life-served-here>

Caterers are encouraged to address climate change ambitions by reducing the amount of carbon intensive food they produce, promoting plant-based diets.

The *London Food Procurement Commitment* is a partnership between ReLondon, Hackney and Sustain to empowering local authorities to ensure that food bought and served across council services is healthy, climate- and nature-friendly, and never wasted.

- [Circular food procurement - ReLondon](#)