

15 April 2024

Dear

Access to Information (ATI) Serial Number: **20356 – Free School Meals**

Information requested

Thank you for your request which I received on 4 March 2024. You asked seven questions about Free School Meals.

Our response to each question

1. What was the cost of providing free school meals to primary school children by region prior to the introduction of free school meals for all primary school children?

It is not possible to identify the cost of providing free school meals to primary school children prior to the introduction of Universal Primary Free School Meals ('UPFSM'). Funding for delivering free school meals for means tested eligible pupils ('eFSM'), both prior to and following the introduction of UPFSM, is provided to Local Authorities through the [Revenue Support Grant](#). This funding from the Welsh Government is un-hypothecated and Local Authorities are responsible for allocating budgets in relation to their school meal provision.

2. What will be the cost providing free school meals to all primary school children by region now that this scheme has been fully implemented?

For the reasons set out above, it is not possible to identify the cost of local authorities fulfilling their duty to provide free school meals for means tested eligible pupils (eFSM).

The UPFSM grant makes funding available to provide meals for the remaining cohort of primary learners i.e. those not eligible through means-tested routes. The commitment will be fully rolled out by September 2024 and £93.5m has been made available to support delivery during the 2024-25 financial year. Funding for the policy is demand led and the final cost will depend on the level of take up of the offer. The budget beyond 2024-25 has not yet been set.

Please note the Access to Information Request found here [FOI release 20025: Free School Meals | GOV.WALES](#) which provides further details of the funding allocated to roll out the UPFSM offer.

3. Who decided on this approach and was there any consideration to parents/ guardians who could afford to pay for such meals?

Universal Primary Free School Meals is a [Programme for Government](#) commitment and was announced as part of the [Co-operation Agreement](#). The policy has undergone comprehensive integrated impact assessment during its development and delivery. The

latest version of this assessment will be published shortly on the Welsh Government website.

4. How is healthy eating across schools being monitored since some regions are offering very basic non healthy packages whilst others are providing a far superior range of healthy options?

Our Food in Schools offer is underpinned by the Healthy Eating in Schools (Nutritional Standards and Requirements) (Wales) Regulations 2013 ('Regulations'). These set out the type of food and drink which may be provided during the school day. There is a duty on the local authority or governing body of a maintained school that provides food to comply with requirements as set out in these Regulations.

The Regulations are accompanied by the Healthy eating in maintained schools statutory guidance ('statutory guidance'). As this guidance is statutory, a local authority or governing body needs to have clear and justifiable reasons for not adhering to it.

The Welsh Local Government Association (WLGA) continues to support Local Authorities and schools in achieving and maintaining compliance with the Healthy Eating in Schools Regulations.

5. Increasing the variety of food options may be the aim but who is checking that this is happening across the regions and what is happening to those regions who are not following the guidelines?

Local authorities, schools that provide in-house catering, and schools that organise contract catering have the discretion to design their own menu cycles, as long as they are compliant with the Regulations and Guidance. The Guidance recommends a variety of food options are provided.

As outlined above, the WLGA supports local authorities and schools to follow the guidelines as set out in the Healthy Eating in Maintained Schools Guidance. This involves providing ad-hoc support and training as well as feedback on school menus. Further information on how the WLGA supports healthy eating in schools is available online.

In addition, the WLGA have developed a monitoring process where a school or local authority that engages with them can work towards receiving a Certificate of Compliance – this certificate can be shared with governors, parents, and pupils to demonstrate that the local authority or schools is performing well.

6. What consideration was given to the impact of free school meals and their associated costs against the provision of Additional Learning Needs and other key school needs?

A Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment is undertaken-as part of the budget setting process. For 2023-24, this is available here. There is no published Strategic Integrated Impact Assessment for 2024-25 yet.

7. For how long will free school meals in primary schools be in place and what metric is being used either nationally or regionally in establishing the wider benefits as laid out by Gov Wales?

There are no current plans to withdraw the universal offer of a meal in primary schools or to remove the statutory duty for local authorities to provide means tested free school meals to primary school pupils.

An independent evaluation of UPFSM will commence later this year and will give consideration to the impact of the policy.

Next steps

If you are dissatisfied with the Welsh Government's handling of your request, you can ask for an internal review within 40 working days of the date of this response. Requests for an internal review should be addressed to the Welsh Government's Freedom of Information Officer at:

Information Rights Unit,
Welsh Government,
Cathays Park,
Cardiff,
CF10 3NQ

or Email: Freedom.ofinformation@gov.wales

Please remember to quote the ATISN reference number above.

You also have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office,
Wycliffe House,
Water Lane,
Wilmslow,
Cheshire,
SK9 5AF.

However, please note that the Commissioner will not normally investigate a complaint until it has been through our own internal review process.

Yours sincerely,