

Distribution Sub-Group (2025) Paper 11 – eFSM data options for the 2026-27 Settlement

This discussion paper has been written by officials of the Welsh Government. Ministers have not had an opportunity to comment on the contents. Exemplifications of changes are provided simply to inform discussion by DSG members. They are not Welsh Government proposals or statements of Government policy for or against changes.

Eligible for Free School Meals (eFSM) data within the settlement

Summary

1. This paper provides analysis of the eligible for Free School Meals (eFSM) pupil numbers taken from the [January 2025 Pupil Level Annual School Census \(PLASC\)](#).
2. This paper summarises options for eFSM data for the 2026-27 settlement following the decision to use a 3-year average (2022, 2023 and 2024) of those pupils recorded as eFSM or Transitionally Protected (TP) for the 2025-26 settlement.

Views sought

3. DSG members are asked to consider the analysis and options discussed throughout the paper and agree on an option for use in the 2026-27 settlement.

Related Papers

4. Distribution Sub-Group (2024) Paper 14 – eFSM data decision for the 2025-26 settlement
5. Distribution Sub-Group (2023) Paper 19 – eFSM data decision for the 2024-25 settlement
6. Distribution Sub-Group (2023) Paper 10 – Eligible for Free School Meals (eFSM) within the settlement.
7. Distribution Sub-Group (2022) Paper 09 – Eligible for Free School Meals (eFSM) within the settlement.

Background

8. Eligibility for Free School Meals (eFSM) is used as a proxy of deprivation in the assessment of relative need to spend on teaching and other services in the local government settlement (it is not used as a proxy for the need to spend on school meals). More information on the background can be found in papers from previous years.
9. The data also includes transitionally protected (TP) pupils who were eligible for FSM under previous eligibility rules, even if they no longer meet the current criteria.

Options

10. The analysis summarises **5 options**:
 - a) **Option 1:** Use the latest data 2025 PLASC data only (pupils recorded as eFSM or TP).
 - b) **Option 2:** Use the latest 3-year average (2023, 2024 and 2025) of PLASC data (pupils recorded as eFSM or TP).
 - c) **Option 3:** Use the latest 4-year average (2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025) of PLASC data (pupils recorded as eFSM or TP).

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- d) **Option 4:** Use the latest 3-year average (2023, 2024 and 2025) of PLASC data (pupils recorded as eFSM only).
- e) **Option 5:** Use the latest 4-year average (2022, 2023, 2024 and 2025) of PLASC data (pupils recorded as eFSM only).
- f) The advantage of using an average of the datasets is that it smooths out volatility. Option 2 is in line with the approach used for the 2025-26 Settlement.

Analysis

Data

- 11. **Table 1** in Annex A shows the number and share of pupils in **primary school** meeting the eligibility criteria for Free School Meals (eFSM) or those recorded as transitionally protected (TP) by local authority.
- 12. **Table 2** in Annex A shows the number and share of pupils in **secondary school** eligible for Free School Meals (eFSM) or those recorded as transitionally protected (TP) by local authority.
- 13. **Table 3** in Annex A illustrates Options 1-3. Option 1, which uses the latest year of data, results in the largest percentage change in AEF values (ranging from -0.15% to 0.14%). In contrast, Option 3 (a four-year average) produces the smallest changes (ranging from -0.04% to 0.03%), with Option 2 (a three-year average) falling in between (with changes ranging from -0.05% to 0.06%).
- 14. Since 2024-25, the data used in the settlement has been a combination of eFSM and TP. For comparison purposes, **Table 4** in Annex B illustrates two additional options based on eFSM data only. Both of these options result in a larger range of percentage changes to AEF when compared to Options 1-3. Option 4 results in a range of percentage changes from -0.53% to 0.51%, whilst Option 4 ranges from -0.54% to 0.55%.
- 15. **Table 5** in Annex C summarises the range in percentage changes in AEF values for all five options presented, with the different averaging time periods and the inclusion and exclusion of TP.

Conclusion:

- 16. The exemplifications reflect only the isolated impact of free school meals data on the 2025-26 Settlement. Note that the data has not been updated to reflect the latest EOTAS data as this is currently unavailable. The exemplifications do not consider any other data changes planned for the 2026-27 Settlement, nor the impact of transfers in and out.
- 17. For the purposes of this analysis, it is assumed that the 2025-26 top-up figures allocated to certain local authorities under the floor funding calculations remain unchanged.
- 18. DSG members are asked to consider and discuss the analysis included in this paper and agree on an option for the free school meals data to be used in the 2026-27 settlement.

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Annex A

Table 1 - Number of primary school pupils eFSM or TP for each option by local authority and year

	Numbers						Proportions					
	2022	2023	2024	2025	3- Year Average	4- Year Average	2022	2023	2024	2025	3- Year Average	4- Year Average
Isle of Anglesey	1,120	1,167	1,172	1,123	1,154	1,146	1.70%	1.71%	1.76%	1.77%	1.75%	1.73%
Gwynedd	1,770	1,904	1,778	1,640	1,774	1,773	2.68%	2.78%	2.67%	2.59%	2.68%	2.68%
Conwy	2,273	2,301	2,161	2,022	2,161	2,189	3.44%	3.36%	3.25%	3.19%	3.27%	3.31%
Denbighshire	2,210	2,307	2,290	2,172	2,256	2,245	3.35%	3.37%	3.44%	3.43%	3.41%	3.40%
Flintshire	2,933	3,053	2,957	2,805	2,938	2,937	4.44%	4.46%	4.45%	4.43%	4.45%	4.44%
Wrexham	2,985	3,122	3,068	2,876	3,022	3,013	4.52%	4.56%	4.61%	4.54%	4.57%	4.56%
Powys	1,654	1,739	1,723	1,579	1,680	1,674	2.50%	2.54%	2.59%	2.49%	2.54%	2.53%
Ceredigion	1,018	1,055	1,017	987	1,020	1,019	1.54%	1.54%	1.53%	1.56%	1.54%	1.54%
Pembrokeshire	2,130	2,080	2,000	1,941	2,007	2,038	3.22%	3.04%	3.01%	3.06%	3.04%	3.08%
Carmarthenshire	3,436	3,663	3,445	3,141	3,416	3,421	5.20%	5.35%	5.18%	4.96%	5.17%	5.18%
Swansea	5,686	5,900	5,701	5,474	5,692	5,690	8.61%	8.62%	8.57%	8.64%	8.61%	8.61%
Neath Port Talbot	3,583	3,636	3,529	3,469	3,545	3,554	5.42%	5.32%	5.31%	5.48%	5.36%	5.38%
Bridgend	3,317	3,389	3,280	3,052	3,240	3,260	5.02%	4.95%	4.93%	4.82%	4.90%	4.93%
The Vale of Glamorgan	2,330	2,432	2,343	2,235	2,337	2,335	3.53%	3.56%	3.52%	3.53%	3.54%	3.53%
Rhondda Cynon Taff	5,713	5,820	5,722	5,479	5,674	5,684	8.65%	8.51%	8.60%	8.65%	8.59%	8.60%
Merthyr Tydfil	1,591	1,687	1,671	1,593	1,650	1,636	2.41%	2.47%	2.51%	2.51%	2.50%	2.47%
Caerphilly	4,057	4,298	4,259	4,112	4,223	4,182	6.14%	6.28%	6.40%	6.49%	6.39%	6.33%
Blaenau Gwent	1,791	1,798	1,743	1,714	1,752	1,762	2.71%	2.63%	2.62%	2.71%	2.65%	2.67%
Torfaen	2,514	2,569	2,499	2,404	2,491	2,497	3.81%	3.76%	3.76%	3.80%	3.77%	3.78%
Monmouthshire	1,107	1,188	1,136	1,037	1,120	1,117	1.68%	1.74%	1.71%	1.64%	1.70%	1.69%
Newport	4,000	4,155	4,166	4,024	4,115	4,086	6.05%	6.07%	6.26%	6.35%	6.23%	6.18%
Cardiff	8,844	9,146	8,851	8,464	8,820	8,826	13.39%	13.37%	13.31%	13.36%	13.35%	13.36%
Wales	66,062	68,409	66,511	63,343	66,088	66,081						

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Table 2 - Number of secondary school pupils eFSM or TP for each option by local authority and year

	Numbers						Proportions					
	2022	2023	2024	2025	3- Year Average	4- Year Average	2022	2023	2024	2025	3- Year Average	4- Year Average
Isle of Anglesey	686	736	862	813	804	774	1.63%	1.57%	1.75%	1.75%	1.69%	1.68%
Gwynedd	1,193	1,334	1,319	1,205	1,286	1,263	2.83%	2.85%	2.68%	2.59%	2.71%	2.74%
Conwy	1,471	1,632	1,751	1,652	1,678	1,627	3.49%	3.49%	3.56%	3.55%	3.53%	3.52%
Denbighshire	1,557	1,734	1,852	1,776	1,787	1,730	3.70%	3.71%	3.77%	3.81%	3.76%	3.75%
Flintshire	1,923	2,101	2,182	2,017	2,100	2,056	4.56%	4.50%	4.44%	4.33%	4.42%	4.45%
Wrexham	1,656	1,850	1,990	1,877	1,906	1,843	3.93%	3.96%	4.05%	4.03%	4.01%	3.99%
Powys	1,079	1,171	1,346	1,173	1,230	1,192	2.56%	2.51%	2.74%	2.52%	2.59%	2.58%
Ceredigion	637	718	775	730	741	715	1.51%	1.54%	1.58%	1.57%	1.56%	1.55%
Pembrokeshire	1,369	1,490	1,566	1,460	1,505	1,471	3.25%	3.19%	3.18%	3.14%	3.17%	3.19%
Carmarthenshire	2,252	2,538	2,632	2,480	2,550	2,476	5.35%	5.43%	5.35%	5.33%	5.37%	5.36%
Swansea	3,609	4,114	4,340	4,199	4,218	4,066	8.57%	8.80%	8.83%	9.02%	8.88%	8.81%
Neath Port Talbot	2,260	2,488	2,631	2,476	2,532	2,464	5.36%	5.32%	5.35%	5.32%	5.33%	5.34%
Bridgend	1,970	2,231	2,339	2,304	2,291	2,211	4.68%	4.77%	4.76%	4.95%	4.82%	4.79%
The Vale of Glamorgan	1,531	1,774	1,857	1,825	1,819	1,747	3.63%	3.80%	3.78%	3.92%	3.83%	3.79%
Rhondda Cynon Taff	3,580	3,896	4,135	3,872	3,968	3,871	8.50%	8.34%	8.41%	8.32%	8.35%	8.39%
Merthyr Tydfil	877	995	1,038	955	996	966	2.08%	2.13%	2.11%	2.05%	2.10%	2.09%
Caerphilly	2,667	2,907	2,999	2,864	2,923	2,859	6.33%	6.22%	6.10%	6.15%	6.16%	6.20%
Blaenau Gwent	978	1,038	1,129	1,075	1,081	1,055	2.32%	2.22%	2.30%	2.31%	2.28%	2.29%
Torfaen	1,655	1,811	1,868	1,831	1,837	1,791	3.93%	3.88%	3.80%	3.93%	3.87%	3.88%
Monmouthshire	674	816	826	761	801	769	1.60%	1.75%	1.68%	1.63%	1.69%	1.67%
Newport	2,611	2,852	3,007	2,765	2,875	2,809	6.20%	6.10%	6.12%	5.94%	6.05%	6.09%
Cardiff	5,890	6,509	6,728	6,452	6,563	6,395	13.98%	13.93%	13.68%	13.86%	13.82%	13.86%
Wales	42,125	46,735	49,172	46,562	47,490	46,149						

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Table 3 – Exemplification using eFSM or TP data for each option by local authority on the 2025-26 settlement (AEF)

Unitary Authority	Settlement 2025-26	Option 1:	Option 2:	Option 3:	Difference Value			Difference %		
					Option 1:	Option 2:	Option 3:	Option 1:	Option 2:	Option 3:
Isle of Anglesey	135,881	136,066	135,965	135,927	184	84	46	0.14%	0.06%	0.03%
Gwynedd	248,390	248,007	248,263	248,294	-383	-127	-95	-0.15%	-0.05%	-0.04%
Conwy	219,010	218,820	218,917	218,963	-190	-93	-47	-0.09%	-0.04%	-0.02%
Denbighshire	215,251	215,391	215,318	215,287	140	66	36	0.06%	0.03%	0.02%
Flintshire	275,984	275,751	275,890	275,927	-233	-94	-57	-0.08%	-0.03%	-0.02%
Wrexham	249,508	249,577	249,575	249,525	69	67	17	0.03%	0.03%	0.01%
Powys	251,461	251,280	251,432	251,415	-181	-29	-46	-0.07%	-0.01%	-0.02%
Ceredigion	144,225	144,275	144,251	144,236	50	26	11	0.03%	0.02%	0.01%
Pembrokeshire	233,534	233,423	233,426	233,508	-112	-108	-27	-0.05%	-0.05%	-0.01%
Carmarthenshire	375,692	375,259	375,584	375,587	-433	-108	-105	-0.12%	-0.03%	-0.03%
Swansea	468,409	468,757	468,576	468,497	348	167	88	0.07%	0.04%	0.02%
Neath Port Talbot	306,177	306,287	306,173	306,204	110	-5	26	0.04%	0.00%	0.01%
Bridgend	276,528	276,564	276,539	276,538	37	12	10	0.01%	0.00%	0.00%
Vale of Glamorgan	224,448	224,631	224,547	224,493	184	99	46	0.08%	0.04%	0.02%
Rhondda Cynon Taff	521,329	521,295	521,256	521,321	-34	-74	-9	-0.01%	-0.01%	0.00%
Merthyr	133,144	133,121	133,158	133,139	-23	14	-6	-0.02%	0.01%	0.00%
Caerphilly	373,900	374,169	374,007	373,964	270	107	64	0.07%	0.03%	0.02%
Blaenau Gwent	154,534	154,627	154,523	154,557	93	-11	23	0.06%	-0.01%	0.01%
Torfaen	192,216	192,311	192,211	192,241	95	-4	26	0.05%	0.00%	0.01%
Monmouthshire	135,248	135,139	135,258	135,221	-110	10	-27	-0.08%	0.01%	-0.02%
Newport	329,322	329,368	329,339	329,329	46	17	7	0.01%	0.01%	0.00%
Cardiff	674,886	674,959	674,869	674,905	73	-17	20	0.01%	0.00%	0.00%
Total Unitary Authorities	6,139,078	6,139,078	6,139,078	6,139,078						

Option 1: Use the latest data 2025 PLASC eFSM or TP

Option 2: Use the 3 year average eFSM or TP

Option 3: Use the 4 year average eFSM or TP

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Table 4 - Exemplification using eFSM only data by local authority on the 2025-26 settlement (AEF)

Annex B

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Settlement 2025-26				Differences			
Unitary Authority	3-yr average FSMTF	Option 4:	Option 5:	Option 4	Option 5	Option 4	Option 5
Isle of Anglesey	135,881	135,763	135,662	-119	-219	-0.09%	-0.16%
Gwynedd	248,390	247,529	247,442	-861	-948	-0.35%	-0.38%
Conwy	219,010	217,845	217,832	-1,165	-1,178	-0.53%	-0.54%
Denbighshire	215,251	215,012	214,833	-239	-419	-0.11%	-0.19%
Flintshire	275,984	275,784	276,141	-201	157	-0.07%	0.06%
Wrexham	249,508	249,592	249,431	84	-76	0.03%	-0.03%
Powys	251,461	250,819	251,173	-641	-288	-0.26%	-0.11%
Ceredigion	144,225	144,232	144,248	8	24	0.01%	0.02%
Pembrokeshire	233,534	233,071	232,963	-463	-572	-0.20%	-0.24%
Carmarthenshire	375,692	375,029	375,649	-664	-43	-0.18%	-0.01%
Swansea	468,409	467,741	467,328	-667	-1,081	-0.14%	-0.23%
Neath Port Talbot	306,177	306,850	306,704	673	526	0.22%	0.17%
Bridgend	276,528	277,739	277,522	1,211	995	0.44%	0.36%
Vale of Glamorgan	224,448	224,551	224,383	103	-65	0.05%	-0.03%
Rhondda Cynon Taff	521,329	520,904	520,596	-425	-733	-0.08%	-0.14%
Merthyr	133,144	133,087	132,966	-57	-178	-0.04%	-0.13%
Caerphilly	373,900	375,690	375,592	1,791	1,692	0.48%	0.45%
Blaenau Gwent	154,534	154,203	154,515	-331	-19	-0.21%	-0.01%
Torfaen	192,216	191,303	191,519	-912	-697	-0.47%	-0.36%
Monmouthshire	135,248	134,932	135,108	-316	-140	-0.23%	-0.10%
Newport	329,322	329,060	328,851	-262	-471	-0.08%	-0.14%
Cardiff	674,886	678,341	678,619	3,456	3,733	0.51%	0.55%
Total Unitary Authorities	6,139,078	6,139,078	6,139,078				

Option 4: Use 3-yr average eFSM only
Option 5: Use 4-yr average eFSM only

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Annex C

Table 5 – Percentage difference in AEF from current FSMTP 3-year average

	FSMTP				FSM only			
	Min		Max		Min		Max	
Time period	% difference	LA	% difference	LA	% difference	LA	% difference	LA
Latest year	-0.15%	Gwynedd	0.14%	Isle of Anglesey				
3-year average	-0.05%	Gwynedd	0.06%	Isle of Anglesey	-0.53%	Conwy	0.51%	Cardiff
4-year average	-0.04%	Gwynedd	0.03%	Isle of Anglesey	-0.54%	Conwy	0.55%	Cardiff