

The **Potteries Gold** Post

FREE SCHOOL MEALS?

NEW RULES IF YOU GET UNIVERSAL CREDIT

Since **Universal Credit** was introduced in **2013**, all families with school-age children claiming this benefit have been entitled to **free school meals**.

Working families getting UC have therefore been treated **more generously** than those claiming Child Tax Credit, who cannot get free school meals if their annual gross income is **more than £16,190**, and families getting Working Tax Credit, who cannot get free school means at all.



Under these rules, working families on UC could earn a lot more and still get free school meals. However, most families were not able to claim Universal Credit, as it has not rolled out across the whole country for families with children, so they did not benefit from this improvement.

The Government have been planning for some time to limit access to free school meals for families getting UC and have now introduced an **earnings threshold**. From **1st April 2018**, a household must have an annual net earned income equivalent to **no more than £7,400** at the point of claim. The limit is the same whether you have one, two or more school-age children needing school meals.

If you **already get Universal Credit** and free school meals, you will carry on being entitled to them - even if your earnings are above this amount – until **31st March 2022** or longer, if your child stays at the same **stage of education**.

For new claims, whether you qualify is worked out looking at your earnings in a **relevant period**, which can be one, two or three UC assessment periods preceding the request for a free school meal. The limits are:

- **£616.67** if your relevant period is the **one UC assessment period** immediately before you request free school meals;
- **£1,233.34** where the relevant period is **two assessment periods** and
- **£1,850** where the relevant period is **three assessment periods**.

IF YOU QUALIFY FOR FREE SCHOOL MEALS, CLAIM THEM!

You are **entitled to free school** meals for your children if you receive:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act



Many people who are entitled to Free School Meals don't claim them, perhaps because their children choose to take sandwiches or they think there is a stigma attached to claiming. However, claiming Free School Meals for your children can also **help their school**, which gets extra **Pupil Premium** funding, based on the number of children entitled to them, so please don't be ashamed to ask if you think you could be entitled.

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

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