# WRITTEN STATEMENT

# BY

# THE WELSH GOVERNMENT

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| **TITLE**  | **Revised eligibility criteria for free school meals in Wales due to the rollout of Universal Credit** |
| **DATE**  | **26 March 2019** |
| **BY** | **Kirsty Williams AM, Minister for Education** |

On 6 December last year, following a public consultation, I issued a written statement announcing that the Welsh Government will introduce an annualised net earned income threshold for Universal Credit claimants who wish to claim free school meals with effect from 1 April 2019. Our most up-to-date analysis suggests around 3,000 more children will benefit from a free school meal by the time Universal Credit is fully rolled out in 2023-24 because of this policy.

I also announced we will set in place a programme of transitional protection funding, which will mean that no child will lose their free school meals during the rollout of Universal Credit, and then until the end of their school phase. We estimate the total number of children receiving transitional protection in any given year during the Universal Credit rollout period will be in the tens of thousands.

It remains extremely disappointing that the UK Government has failed to do the right thing by the people of Wales and provide the additional resources to manage the impact of its Welfare Reform agenda on free school meals. Despite this, Welsh Government allocated an additional £12 million between 2018-19 and 2019-20 to support Local Authorities to meet the costs associated with the changes.

In my statement I made it clear that we intended to publish an additional report setting out in more detail the Welsh Government’s responses to points raised during the consultation. I am publishing this report today.

Our analysis is based on the best available models and data. However, there remains a lot of uncertainty surrounding these estimates due to factors such as behavioural change, for example. In addition, economic forecasts and the underlying data used in the models for our analysis will continue to be updated, which will have an impact on our estimates. Therefore throughout the rollout of Universal Credit, we will keep the threshold under review by monitoring early trends. We will also review the earnings limit set out in the Free School Lunches and Milk (Universal Credit) (Wales) Order 2019, within 12 months of the full roll-out of Universal Credit in 2023.

To help local authorities prepare and make the necessary adaptations, we have commissioned technical changes to the eligibility checking system, which enables local authorities to check eligibility for free school meals online. In addition, we have set in place a programme of change management support. Local authorities are currently being provided with the support they need to ensure that the changeover to the new system is as smooth as possible and in order that free school meal claims can be processed accurately.

The report setting out Welsh Government’s responses to points raised during the consultation can be accessed [here](https://beta.gov.wales/eligibility-free-school-meals) .