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Eligibility for free school meals under Universal Credit

Thank you for contacting me about eligibility for free school meals under Universal Credit.

While I appreciate your concerns, let me assure you that the introduction of Universal Credit offers a less fragmented, more fairly targeted system that will ensure more children will benefit from free school meals.

Your suggestion that one million children will lose out on free school meals is misinformed. This figure is based on a hypothetical situation where all children in receipt of Universal Credit receive free school meals, which was never the intention. If all children in families receiving Universal Credit were to become eligible for free school meals, around 50 per cent of all school aged pupils would be eligible. Instead, free school meals are rightly targeted at the children who need them most, with around 14 per cent of children eligible for and claiming free school meals last year. The approach of setting an income threshold is comparable to the approach taken in Scotland where a similar net earnings threshold was introduced in August 2017.

You may be encouraged to learn that the Department for Education recently ran a public consultation, seeking the views of parents, schools, local authorities and charities on eligibility for free school meals. In light of this, the Department has proposed transitional protections so that nobody currently receiving free school meals will lose their entitlement when moving onto Universal Credit.

Moreover, recent estimates suggest that by 2022, around 50,000 more children will benefit from a free school meal compared to the previous benefits system. The Government is committed to supporting children go as far as their talents will take them and I am glad that, following public consultations, we can extend free school meals to more disadvantaged pupils.

Thank you again for taking the time to contact me.

Kind regards,

Craig Whittaker MP