



Ministry of Housing,
Communities &
Local Government



Department
for Environment
Food & Rural Affairs



Department
for Work &
Pensions

Robert Halfon MP
Education Committee
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

25th June 2020

RESPONSE TO EDUCATION COMMITTEE

Dear Robert,

Thank you for your letter dated 12 June 2020 considering the extra financial support that is being targeted at children who are living in families entitled to free school meals (FSM).

As you know the provision for free school meals is ordinarily term time only. However, we fully understand there is increased pressure on household budgets, and we recognise families will face particular challenges over the coming months due to an entirely unprecedented situation this summer. That is why we are providing additional funding for a Covid Summer Food Fund which will enable children who are eligible for benefits-related FSM to claim vouchers for the six week holiday period. Further guidance on this will be available shortly.

Thousands of children will also receive additional support through the Holiday Activities and Food programme, which offers activities and free meals throughout the summer holidays.

During the coronavirus outbreak, we have also temporarily extended free school meals eligibility to include some groups who have no recourse to public funds (NRPF), and guidance (<https://tinyurl.com/y7wrkozw>) has been published for schools.

Also, where there is a child in need (for example, because the child is homeless, or the parent cannot afford to meet the family's basic living needs), families with the NRPF status are not prevented from getting additional help from their local authorities (LAs).

We know the Committee has followed closely the performance of the National Voucher Scheme. We are pleased to update you that Edenred have reported that over £183 million worth of voucher codes had been redeemed into supermarket eGift cards by schools and families as of Wednesday 24 June, a clear demonstration of the positive impact this approach is having on families. We're also pleased that schools are opening more widely now, and with that we're beginning to see school kitchens open and provide food for those at school, and where possible food parcels for those at home.

Your letter also asked for more information on what additional cross Government support was available, with specific questions on Universal Credit and the Welfare Assistance Programme.

The increases to Universal Credit and Tax Credits form part of an unprecedented package of support of over £6.5 billion that will benefit those facing the most financial disruption during the pandemic. Excluding the housing element, the Department for Work and Pensions estimates that the increase to the Universal Credit standard allowance means that a family with two children in receipt of Universal Credit is better off by a median average of £20 a week and £1,040 over the next 12 months.

The strategic objective of the £63 million Local Authority Emergency Assistance grant, announced by the Prime Minister is to support individuals and families who are unable to afford food and other essential items for example, household supplies during the Covid-19 pandemic. It will be administered to Local Authorities, who would retain discretion on awarding grants to meet local conditions and needs. They will set their own eligibility criteria to determine the recipients of the scheme as well as the scheme outcomes. Central guidance will be issued to reinforce the stated outcomes of the scheme.

The Local Authority Emergency Assistance grant is not a replacement for free school meals. The people identified are those who have experienced a large income shock and as a result cannot afford food on a temporary basis.

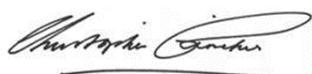
In England, any family with a child eligible for FSM that is experiencing severe financial difficulty and struggling to afford food may approach their council and apply to receive support from this new money, as may anyone else. Wales, Northern Ireland, and Scotland have devolved powers on this issue.

Additionally, the Government has worked closely with front line food organisations and has provided £16 million for food support through charities including FareShare and WRAP (Waste and Resources Action Programme). This funding has helped many different charitable organisations including those which support vulnerable families and young people.

Our four departments continue to work closely on these issues, along with Ministers from DCMS and the devolved administrations through the Food Taskforce, and we will continue to monitor this important issue at this time.

Thank you for your ongoing support during these challenging times

Yours sincerely



**Rt Hon
Christopher Pincher MP
Minister of State for Housing**



**Vicky Ford MP
Parliamentary Under-
Secretary of State for
Children and Families**



**Will Quince MP
Minister for
Welfare Delivery**



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