

**P-06-1178 Free school meals for all pupils in Wales, Correspondence –
Petitioner to Committee, 25.08.21**

To: Jack Sargeant MS Chair - Petitions committee
25 August 2021

Dear Jack Sargeant MS

As the originator of the e Petition P-06-1178 (Free school meals for all pupils in Wales) I would very much appreciate it if you could place this response before your Committee to consider as a response to the letter to you from the Minister of Education Jeremy Miles MS dated 8 August 2021.

The People's Assembly Wales which supported the petition has been in communication with the Senedd Labour Group. Our most recent letter to the Group is in this link and it provides in some detail a response to the points made in the Minister's letter:

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1ClwJY68a_eyeazf2aeArQDeMt6CQXqY/edit?usp=sharing&oid=109831181562023645185&rtpof=true&sd=true

As the People's Assembly Wales state in this letter to the Senedd Labour Group they are concerned that the policy of free school meals becomes 'the' priority of the Welsh Government in combating family and child poverty and not just 'a' priority among others. As Previous Senedd reports and the charities mentioned in the Ministers letter have already pointed out, this provision is the most effective way of reducing this experience of poverty which rose by 3% in Wales in 2020.

The Minister places considerable emphasis on the review of eligibility that is taking place. I welcome this review which has been promised from before the May Senedd elections. The Minister's letter makes reference to the increase demand for free school meals under the existing eligibility criteria; the way this is worded is potentially worrying as it could imply that there is a view that the costs need to be constrained by reducing eligibility, we hope the Petition Committee can secure a response from the Minister confirming that this is not the intention and is not part of the terms of reference for the review.

Having said that, it appears that the review focus will be largely on the cost of providing free school meals to all in families in receipt of UC and without recourse to public funds. I also hope that the cost of universal free school meals will be explored as well and would ask that the Petitions Committee put this request to the Minister.

I would also ask, if alongside the evidence and research of Bevan Foundation and Wales Anti-Poverty Coalition, the review also will be seeking evidence from Islington, Southwark, Newham and Tower Hamlets Councils in London who already give eligibility for free school meals to all primary school children, and the Scottish Government who will be rolling out free school meals to all primary school children over the next twelve months?

I understand that the review will evaluate the range of costs that have been undertaken. In this regard I would like to suggest to the Petitions Committee that they propose to the Minister that the review explores a way of separating other benefits 'linked' to school meal eligibility without reducing their current eligibility.

More importantly, I would like to suggest that some 'joined up thinking' and costing would help. Universal free school meal provision could have 'knock on effects' to other Welsh Government spending budgets: procurement could be focused on supporting local food producers so overlapping with agricultural and economic development; the infrastructure providing meals at a community level could be used to support and re-introduce 'meals on wheels' services thus feeding into social care budgets and services; a more healthy population of young people feeds into illness prevention strategies and the health budget; and perhaps also recycling products from local stores and supermarkets and producers that otherwise go to waste, feeds into recycling and green new deal policies and spending, along with the procurement suggestions. I hope that that the Petitions Committee can put this suggestion to the Minister for inclusion in the review or meetings with other relevant Ministers.

Yours

Adam Johannes