

**P-06-1178 Free school meals for all pupils in Wales, Correspondence –
Petitioner to Committee, 09.11.21**

Dear Jack Sargeant MS & Chair and Petition Committee colleague MSs

Once again, thank you for the opportunity to comment on the Minister's letter 19 October in relation to improving the eligibility for state school students to receive free school meals.

I note the Minister's comments on our previous letter to and welcome the intimation of some positive thinking in relation to improving the eligibility to free school meals, hopefully in line with our petition request and the ultimate goal of free school meals for all students in state schools and FE colleges.

The Minister's letter of 19 October explicitly makes reference to the long term funding implications of universal free school meals as being a major factor to weigh against widening eligibility and the impacts on other spending heads.

I would like to make two key points in this regard.

As clearly spelt out in our previous letter I would like to suggest that tackling family and child poverty in Wales should be the main priority, which with the recent UK Tory government removal of the £20 a week Covid uplift to universal credit has become increasingly pressing for all who depend on this benefit. The Child Poverty Review announced by Welsh Government Minister Julie James in December 2019 rightly recommended extending free school meals to all families on Universal Credit. As the previous Senedd report argued, free school meals is the main policy the Welsh Government has at its disposal, given that welfare is not a devolved responsibility, to offset the impact of this callous cut.

As stated in our first letter and as referred to in the Minister's penultimate paragraph of the 19 October letter, we would like to strongly suggest that the budgeting and funding of universal free school meals should be seen not just as a funding item to be covered from the Education budget but one that should be supported from Health and Social Services; Local Government and Public Services; Rural Affairs; and Economy and Transport, both in terms of health prevention and supporting the local economy. We would strongly urge the Minister to put this case to Cabinet colleagues as being a very practical and beneficial application of the principles of 'joined up governance'.

Once again thank you for the opportunity to put this case to you.