

TRINITY ACADEMY NEWCASTLE TRUST

Post 16 Free School Meals Policy

Approved by the Committee – September 2025

On behalf of the Board

Next Review Date – August 2026

Free school meals Policy

The 1996 Education Act requires to provide free meals to disadvantaged students who are aged over 16. In the 2014 to 2015 academic year, the requirement was extended to disadvantaged students following further education (FE courses) at the range of FE funded institutions. Funding Agreements place a legal duty on institutions to comply with this requirement.

Institutions must make a free meal available for all eligible students for each day the student attends their study programme, where this is appropriate.

Institutions receive funding at a rate equivalent to £2.61 per student per meal taken

Students aged over 19 who are continuing on the same study programme (19+ continuers) that they started before they turned 19, or who have an Education Health and Care Plan (EHCP) are eligible for a free meal where they meet the criteria.

Transitional protections continue to apply. The protection means that all students already receiving free meals on or after 1 April 2018 continue to be eligible to receive free meals until the end of their phase of education. This also applies to students who were eligible for free schools meals (FSM) prior to moving into further education provision. The transitional protections will end at the conclusion of the 2025/26 school year.

Student eligibility

Age

A student must be aged between 16 or over but under 19 on 31 August 2025 to be eligible to receive a free meal.

Students aged 19 or over are only eligible to receive a free meal if they are continuing on a study programme they began aged 16 to 18 ('19+ continuers') or have an Education, Health and Care Plan (EHCP).

These 2 groups of aged 19 plus students can receive a free meal while they continue to attend education (in the case of a 19+ continuer, this must be the same programme they started before they turned 19), as long as their eligibility continues.

The following groups of students are not eligible for free meals in further education:

- students aged between 14 and 16 (these students are already covered by free school meals (FSM) provision)
- students aged 19 or over at the start of their study programme, unless they have an EHCP or are a 19+ continuer
- apprentices, including those with an EHCP

Residency

- Students must also satisfy the residency criteria set out in:
- <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/advice-funding-rules-for-16-to-19-provision/advice-funding-rules-for-16-to-19-provision-2025-to-2026>

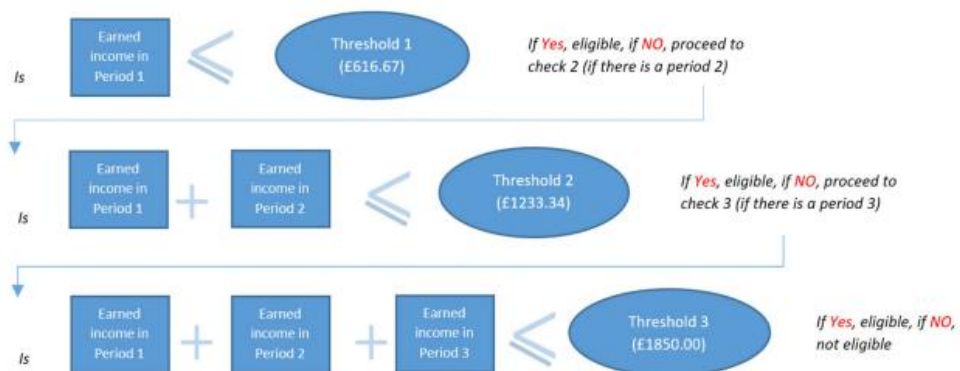
Eligible benefits

Free meals are targeted at disadvantaged students. Free meals in further education defines disadvantage as students being in receipt of, or having parents who are in receipt of, one or more of the following benefits:

- Income Support
- income-based Jobseekers Allowance
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance
- support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- the guarantee element of State Pension Credit
- Child Tax Credit (provided they are not entitled to Working Tax Credit and have an annual gross income of no more than £16,190, as assessed by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC))
- Working Tax Credit run-on – paid for 4 weeks after someone stops qualifying for Working Tax Credit

Universal Credit (UC) with net earnings not exceeding the equivalent of £7,400 for each year Universal Credit

A copy of the Universal Credit award notice that includes their monthly earnings must be provided. The following diagram shows the assessment process:



Changes to Free School Meals Eligibility from September 2026

Extended Eligibility for Free School Meals

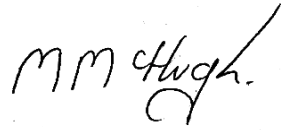
From September 2026, free school meals (FSM) eligibility will be extended to all households receiving Universal Credit, regardless of their annual income level. This represents a significant expansion of the current eligibility criteria.

Students who were previously protected will no longer receive FSM if they no longer meet the new eligibility criteria.

Policies this is linked to:

Bursary Policy

Signed on behalf of the Board:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "M McHugh". The signature is written in a cursive style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Michael McHugh (Chairperson of the Board)

Date: September 2025