

Removing Paper Proof of Benefit

Local authorities (LAs) using the Department for Education's Free School Meals Eligibility Checking Service (ECS) and still asking parents/carers to submit paper proof of benefit with their Free School Meal (FSM) applications or renewals, are missing a huge opportunity to simplify the application process and reduce cost of service delivery.

This document is intended to give guidance to LAs on actions that can be taken to remove the need for FSM applicants to provide paper proof of benefit as part of the application process.

✓ **Baseline the current process and plan the new process**

- Outline the current and future FSM processes in your LA. Standard business process models* are available to assist with this
- Plan how you will manage any "not found" responses given by the ECS for new applications, renewals and audits. Refer to the FSM ECS Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)* for guidance
- Plan how you will use the ECS batch service to audit your FSM database and manage your renewals process. The ECS User Guide and ECS User FAQs* describe how to do this
- Baseline the current costs of processing paper proof of benefit and calculate the reduction in costs once this process is removed. Use the Connect Digitally Cost Calculator* to calculate these

✓ **Publicise the changes internally**

- Ensure you get senior management buy-in. Use the Connect Digitally FSM Business Case Development Tool* to create a compelling business case for removing the need for paper proof of benefit
- Ensure that FSM administrators buy in to the new way of working and are clear about the changes that are being made and why
- Notify schools, One Stop Shops, libraries and any other relevant partners of the planned new process. Provide details on the impact of the changes and dates by which these changes will be implemented

✓ **Update all application and renewal forms**

- Update application forms, website and any other relevant FSM material, clearly stating that paper proof of benefit is no longer required
- Keep all aspects of the LA website in line and up-to-date
- Use language that parents/carers will understand e.g. "we will check entitlement for Free School Meals via a secure government website" rather than "we will use the DfE FSM ECS for LAs to check your eligibility"

✓ **Share the news of your success**

- Publicise within the council the cost and efficiency savings that have been achieved by no longer collecting paper proof of benefit
- Use the 'Forum' area of the Connect Digitally Communities of Practice to share your success with colleagues at other LAs

*All products referred to in this Steps to Success can be found in the library of the Connect Digitally Community on communities.idea.gov.uk

For more information on Connect Digitally visit the Community of Practice on communities.idea.gov.uk or email us at connectdigitally@hertsc.gov.uk