

Developing a Seamless Process Using Web Services

Online
Free School Meals

connect *digitally*

Steps to Success

Local authority (LA) computer systems can now link directly to the Department for Education's Free School Meals Eligibility Checking Service (ECS) using 'web services' technology for verification of free school meal eligibility.

This enables the streamlining of free school meals (FSM) processes, saving time and driving down costs for LAs. It also simplifies and speeds up the application process for parents/carers.

This document is intended to provide LAs with guidance on actions that can be taken in order to successfully implement a fully online self-service application system that incorporates real-time eligibility checking.

✓ Pull together key documentation

- Download the Online Free School Meals (OFSM) Suggested Activity Template and Schedule* for a step-by-step overview of what is involved in a web services project
- Request the Developer Toolkit from the FSM ECS Service Desk (fsm.admin@education.gov.uk). Ensure your Project Manager and IT team have a copy
- Download the OFSM Legal Compliance Guide* which defines how to ensure that your online solution meets legal requirements
- Download the Minimum Features and Relationships document*. This document sets out the basic components for how LAs can group the Connect Digitally core services (OFSM, Online School Admissions and Online Payments) to enhance customer experience and deliver increased efficiencies

✓ Baseline the current process and develop the business case

- Outline the current and future FSM processes. A standard OFSM business process model* is available for download
- Baseline the current process in terms of time and cost. Use the Connect Digitally Cost Calculator* to calculate anticipated savings when the new service is in place
- Create a compelling business case for moving to web services and gain senior management buy-in. Use the OFSM Benefits Flyer*, the Connect Digitally Cost Calculator* and the Business Case Development Tool* for assistance

✓ Initiate the project

- Ensure all business stakeholders affected by the changes are consulted
- Identify all technical interfaces needed for the full OFSM solution (e.g. online form, back-office system, contact centre, schools)
- Involve developers early in discussions to address technical limitations and possibilities
- Investigate whether your LA already has expertise in the use of web service technology
- Ask your FSM system supplier if they offer web service capability

✓ Pull the project team together

- Assign a Project Manager who can coordinate both the business process and technical areas of developing a web service solution
- Ensure someone takes full responsibility for understanding the legal and security requirements for OFSM, and the likely effect on project requirements and timescales
- Identify and brief the Section 151 Officer, the IT Team, the IT Security Officer and those responsible for systems security and data compliance
- Brief the team currently responsible for managing the FSM process
- Organise initial meetings to include representatives from both business and technical areas

✓ Embark on the development

- Design with the future in mind, e.g. if designing a mediated online form, ensure it can be easily adapted to become a citizen facing online form
- Design and develop any additional reports needed for benefits measurement and tracking
- Use the experience of the business users to develop testing and training materials
- Determine how best to communicate the changes to the rest of the business

✓ Update literature and publicise the changes

- Notify schools and 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
- Promote OFSM as the preferred application method in all FSM literature
- Ensure all relevant FSM literature (posters, leaflets etc) is updated
- Keep all aspects of the LA website in line and up-to-date with the changes

✓ Share the news of your success

- Measure and report the time and money saved by moving to a seamless real-time process
- Communicate your success to the project team and LA sponsors and use the 'Forum' area of the Connect Digitally Community of Practice to share the news 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