

Dear

ATISN 18549 - take up of Universal Primary Free School Meals in Wales

Information requested

Thank you for your request which I received on 1 June 2023 You asked:

- 1) What percentage of eligible pupils have taken up universal school meals in the following months:
September 2022, October 2022, November 2022, December 2022, January 2023, February 2023, March 2023, April 2023, May 2023.
 - i) You asked us to 'provide this information for every local authority in Wales, and within each authority and for it to be broken down by year group (reception, year 1 and year 2) – so the percentage of eligible pupils in each year group who have taken up the meals, in each council and in each month requested'.
 - ii) You asked us to 'provide this information as a whole Wales total (the whole Wales total for each month requested)'.

Our response

The information you have requested is not held by Welsh Government. We do not collect data on number of pupils taking up the universal primary free school meal offer at this time. We do, however, collect data on the number of meals served and, if helpful, have enclosed that information instead.

Below are tables that present take-up of Universal Free School Meals (UPFSM) across each local authority by year group for the period you request (September 2022 to May 2023), however please note this data comes with several caveats:

- This data relates to the uptake of meals by those newly eligible for a meal under the universal offer. It does not include data on uptake or meals served to those children traditionally eligible for a meal under benefit-related routes (eFSM) - local authorities have a duty to provide a school lunch for these eligible pupils as set out in the Education Act 1996.
- Local authority UPFSM grant claims report the number of UPFSM meals served to newly eligible pupils (non-eFSM) in each year group for a given week per month. We are therefore able to use this information to report a % uptake figure, by expressing the number of meals served as a proportion of the total number of meals that might be served if every newly eligible pupil took the offer of a meal on each day of the week being reported on.
- **To note:** While this allows us to express a % uptake figure in terms of meals served, this is different from what you requested (that being the percentage of eligible pupils taking up the offer). By way of example, an uptake figure of 60% (as calculated above) could be the result of 60% of eligible pupils taking up the offer and accessing a meal every day. Equally, it could also be the result of every eligible pupil taking up the offer, but only accessing it on 3 days out of the 5 available in the week being reported on.

- The information provided is based on data collected from local authorities via their grant claims and is for management information purposes only.
- The information provided does not form part of any statutory data collection required by the Welsh Government.
- The data collected is unverified by the Welsh Government.
- Local authorities use several different software systems to record the number of meals served to pupils for UPFSM, paid meals and eFSM. There is no consistent software system used by all 22 local authorities. As a result, the way in which the information is used to calculate the number of UPFSM meals served may vary in local authorities and this could impact on the quality of data subsequently submitted to the Welsh Government.
- You will note % uptake is not included for Flintshire for April and May 2023 as their grant claims were not available when the information request was received.
- Finally, within the tables presented below, you will note some gaps, particularly across Years 1 and 2. This is because, while some local authorities were able to go faster than others initially, national expectations for rollout to these year groups were that these should be reached no later than April 2023 wherever possible. Prior to this date, therefore, some local authorities would not yet have been delivering to these year groups.

All Wales

All Wales	% Uptake (of UPFSM meals served to newly eligible learners - not including eFSM learners)
Sep-22	69.3
Oct-22	67.9
Nov-22	67.8
Dec-22	66.5
Jan-23	69.7
Feb-23	67.4
Mar-23	70.6
Apr-23	69.7
May-23	70.2

Year 2 % Uptake									
Local Authority	Month								
	Sep-22	Oct-22	Nov-22	Dec-22	Jan-23	Feb-23	Mar-23	Apr-23	May-23
Isle of Anglesey					69	56	71	69	70
Gwynedd					75	72	76	75	74
Conwy	61	61	65	68	67	58	68	69	66
Denbighshire								68	71
Flintshire									
Wrexham								69	72
Powys								77	81
Ceredigion	77	74	68	73	78	77	79	80	78
Pembrokeshire	66	62	61	62	66	64	65	65	64
Carmarthenshire								64	63
Swansea									
Neath Port Talbot			65	64	71	70	69	72	73
Bridgend								59	60
The Vale of Glamorgan	98	94	97	90	94	88	94	81	81
Rhondda Cynon Taf								61	62
Merthyr Tydfil								57	59
Caerphilly			54	56	56	70	61	60	59
Blaenau Gwent	68	82	73	74	68	81	81	89	90
Torfaen		66	67	64	70	69	87	72	71
Monmouthshire	77	83	80	75	78	72	79	61	62
Newport	60	61	64	63	68	64	65	83	84
Cardiff									

Next steps

If you are dissatisfied with the Welsh Government's handling of your request, you can ask for an internal review within 40 working days of the date of this response. Requests for an internal review should be addressed to the Welsh Government's Freedom of Information Officer at:

Information Rights Unit,
Welsh Government,
Cathays Park,
Cardiff,
CF10 3NQ

or Email: Freedom.ofinformation@gov.wales

Please remember to quote the ATISN reference number above.

You also have the right to complain to the Information Commissioner. The Information Commissioner can be contacted at: Information Commissioner's Office, Wycliffe House, Water Lane, Wilmslow, Cheshire, SK9 5AF.

However, please note that the Commissioner will not normally investigate a complaint until it has been through our own internal review process.

Yours sincerely