

POLICY NOTE

THE EDUCATION (SCOTLAND) ACT 1980 (MODIFICATION) REGULATIONS 2024

SSI 2024/40

The above Regulations were made in exercise of the powers conferred by section 53(8)(a)(i) and (ii)¹ of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 (“the 1980 Act”). These Regulations are subject to negative procedure.

The purpose of the Regulations are to amend sections 53(7)(aa) and (c) of the 1980 Act which relates to pupil eligibility for free school meals. The amendment to section 53(7)(aa) ensures that a pupil will be eligible for free school lunches where the parent(s) of the pupil are in receipt of both Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit provided that the income as calculated for the purpose of awarding those tax credits does not exceed £9,552. This amendment is required as a result of the increase in the National Living Wage which will take effect from 1 April 2024 and will protect eligibility for those pupils whose parent(s) are in receipt of both Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit.

The amendments to section 53(7)(c) ensures that a pupil will be eligible for free school lunches if the pupil is, or the parent(s) of the pupil are, in receipt of Universal Credit provided that qualifying criteria about earned income of the pupil or the parent(s) are satisfied. Where the person in receipt of Universal Credit is not a member of a couple, the criteria will be satisfied if the person’s earned income does not exceed £796 in the assessment period preceding the application. Where the person in receipt of Universal Credit is a member of a couple, the criteria will be satisfied if the couple’s combined earned income does not exceed £796 in the assessment period preceding the application. This amendment will protect eligibility for those pupils who are, or whose parent(s) are, in receipt of Universal Credit as a result of the increase of the National Living Wage which takes effect on 1 April 2024.

Policy Objectives

Free school lunch is a “passport benefit”, where the entitlement depends on a child or young person being an eligible child or young person, where their parent(s) or the young person themselves, are in receipt of certain benefits as prescribed in section 53 of the 1980 Act.

Section 53(2) of the 1980 Act provides that an education authority must provide or secure the provision of a school lunch free of charge to pupils falling within section 53(7). A school lunch is defined by section 53(12) of the 1980 Act.

The Regulations will amend section 53(7)(aa) of the 1980 Act, to require provision of a free school lunch to a pupil if the parent(s) of the pupil are in receipt of both Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit and the income calculated for the purpose of awarding those tax credits does not exceed £9,552. The amendment will increase the current maximum annual income

⁽¹⁾ Section 53 of the Education (Scotland) Act 1980 was substituted by section 22(2) of the Education (Scotland) 2016 (asp 8).

level from £8,717 to £9,552. This will protect eligibility for those who will be affected by the forthcoming increase to the National Living Wage from 1 April 2024.

There is a separate eligibility criterion² for those in receipt of Child Tax Credit only, whose annual income does not exceed the expected level of £19,995³. These Regulations will not change this annual income level since it is automatically updated by virtue of regulation 4(a) of the Education (School Lunches) (Scotland) Regulations 2009 (“the 2009 Regulations”) which refers to the income level set in UK regulations. The previous revision to the income level for Child Tax Credit only was made by regulation 4(2)(b) of the Tax Credits, Child Benefit and Guardian’s Allowance Up-rating Regulations 2023.⁴ It is anticipated that further Regulations amending the maximum income level for Child Tax Credit to £19,995 will be made shortly.

These Regulations also amend section 53(7)(c) of the 1980 Act to require provision of a free school lunch to a pupil if the pupil or their parent(s) are in receipt of Universal Credit. This amendment will increase the current monthly earned income level from £726 to £796, bringing the monthly earned income level for families in receipt of Universal Credit into line with that for families in receipt of both Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit.

EU Alignment Consideration

This instrument is not relevant to the Scottish Government’s policy to maintain alignment with the EU.

Background

Impact of Changes to the National Living Wage on recipients of both Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit

Since the introduction of the Education (School Lunches) (Scotland) Regulations 2009, pupils have been eligible for free school lunches where their parent(s) received both Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit.

It would not be possible for pupils whose parent(s) are in receipt of both Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit to receive free school lunches if the maximum income threshold set out in section 53(7)(aa) was to be maintained at its existing levels. This is a result of the UK-wide policy which will increase the National Living Wage (this is the legal minimum wage for those aged 21 years⁵ and over – not to be confused with the ‘real living wage’ as calculated by the Living Wage Foundation).

² Regulation 3 of the Tax Credits (Income Thresholds and Determination of Rates) Regulations 2002.

³ This proposed figure is set out at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/rates-and-allowances-tax-credits-child-benefit-and-guardians-allowance/tax-credits-child-benefit-and-guardians-allowance>. Regulations confirming this maximum income level have not yet been made.

⁴ <https://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2023/237/made#:~:text=Regulations%206%20and%207%20increase,the%20tax%20year%202023%2D24.>

⁵ The age at which the National Living Wage becomes payable will change from 23 to 21 years of age on 1 April 2024. Details of new rates are available at: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/minimum-wage-rates-for-2024>.

Keeping the maximum income level at its existing level of £8,717 for families in receipt of both Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit would be too low to allow them to receive free school lunches if they were currently eligible through this qualifying benefit.

Accordingly, following the increase to the National Living Wage, the maximum annual income level in section 53(7)(aa) of the 1980 Act requires to be increased to £9,552 in order to protect the eligibility of the existing cohort of families which are currently entitled to a free school lunch. Further amendments to section 53(7)(aa), to take account of increases in the National Living Wage, will continue until such a time as all recipients of both Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit have been migrated to Universal Credit.

Impact of changes to the National Living Wage on recipients of Universal Credit

Universal Credit has been a qualifying benefit for free school lunches since April 2013. As the roll-out of Universal Credit became more widespread, it became necessary to introduce a monthly earned income amount that could not be exceeded. This level was set at £610 per month from 1 August 2017.

The Regulations increase the monthly earned income amount for recipients of Universal Credit (set out in section 53(7)(c) of the 1980 Act) from £726 to £796, in line with the increase in the National Living Wage from 1 April 2024 and this ensures consistency with the position of families who are eligible to receive free school lunches through being in receipt of both Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit.

The monthly earned income level for recipients of Universal Credit will continue to be monitored and future increases to the National Living Wage will be taken into account in order to protect the eligibility of the existing cohort of families which are currently eligible to a free school lunch.

Consultation

The amendments made by these Regulations protect existing eligible families, through amending eligibility criteria for recipients of both Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit, and Universal Credit, in response to UK Government policies. There is no statutory requirement to conduct a consultation and no public consultation was carried out.

The proposed maximum annual income level of £9,552 for recipients of both Child Tax Credit and Working Tax Credit, and the proposed monthly earned income level of £796 for recipients of Universal Credit, have been discussed with the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities (COSLA) in order to inform COSLA of the intention to protect the eligibility of all families currently entitled to a free school lunch.

Impact Assessments

An Equality Impact Assessment and a Children's Right and Wellbeing Impact Assessment have been completed on the provisions of these Regulations. It is not considered that these Regulations will be discriminatory on the basis of age, disability, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation or gender reassignment. There is no negative impact on children's rights and wellbeing and we do not consider there to be any impacts on privacy or the environment.

Financial Effects

A Business and Regulatory Impact Assessment has been completed and is attached. The revised income level proposed is based on cost-neutral estimates which will protect the current levels of entitlement to a free school lunch for the 2024-25 financial year. The relevant income level will continue to be reviewed annually to take account of future increases in the National Living Wage.

Scottish Government
Directorate for Learning

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