

*The National Assembly for Wales*  
Cardiff Bay  
Cardiff  
CF99 1NA

Friday 12 October 2018

Dear First Minister, Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Cabinet Secretary for Education,

**55,000 children in poverty will continue to miss out on free school meals under your proposal.**

As organisations committed to tackling child poverty in Wales, we are deeply concerned by the Welsh Government's proposal to restrict eligibility for free school meals under Universal Credit – being debated in the Senedd shortly.

A free school lunch is a lifeline for children in poverty, ensuring an adequate meal when food may be tight at home. Significant research evidence shows that school meals have proven benefits for children's health, education and futures.

Currently, around 55,000 school children living in poverty in Wales are not eligible for free school meals under the old benefits system. Most of these children would soon have gained access to free school meals as the new Universal Credit system rolls out. This is because all families on Universal Credit are entitled to free school meals.

However, the Welsh Government is proposing to change the Universal Credit rules to limit free school meals to those earning less than just £7,400 a year. This is a huge missed opportunity, meaning those children who could have benefited in the future will instead continue to miss out.

We know that, despite working hard, families on low incomes struggle and that teachers end up taking it upon themselves to bring snacks in for students feeling the effects of hunger. These proposals would even mean that those working families at the edge of the earnings threshold will lose money if they work more hours or get a pay rise – shattering the principle that work should always pay.

With free school meals, Welsh ministers have the powers to act and to make a difference. Universal Credit only goes to those families deemed in need of support. We urge you to continue to allow all children in these families to access free school meals. Please make a reality of the ambition we know you share to support Welsh children growing up in hard times.

Yours sincerely,

**The Children's Society**  
**Food Cardiff**  
**Bevan Foundation**  
**Oxfam Cymru**  
**Church in Wales**  
**Church Action on Poverty**  
**Caritas – Social Action Network**