Autumn Budget 2025

Stakeholder Representation from Feeding Britain

About Feeding Britain

Feeding Britain is an award-winning charity with a vision of a UK where no one goes hungry. We support a national network of 140 regional and local anti-hunger partnerships comprising more than 700 frontline organisations – ranging from community centres and schools, to local authorities and social enterprises.

By piloting innovative and effective new projects, and showing how severe or chronic food insecurity can be prevented, we are designing a road map for eliminating hunger from the communities we serve. By sharing this knowledge with others, and using it to work for systemic changes at a national level, we will ensure hunger becomes a thing of the past.

Stakeholder representation

Household food insecurity continues to impact upon the lives of an estimated 7 million adults across the UK, while the Government has made a welcome commitment to end the mass dependence on emergency food parcels from food banks.[1]

While previous Budget measures and other policy decisions, such as the Fair Repayment Rate, Crisis and Resilience Fund, expanded eligibility for free school meals, and renewing the Holiday Activities and Food programme, will aid the pursuit of that commitment, we urge the Government to address this with these three measures:

Abolish the two-child benefit cap

Food insecurity particularly impacts families affected by the two-child limit within the benefits system. A YouGov survey commissioned by Feeding Britain has shown that while 3% of households with no children report accessing a food bank, this rises to 6% for those with one child and 7% for those with two children. The highest proportion (13%) is to be found among those with three or more children.

Households with three or more children are also four times more likely to skip meals every day (11%) compared to those with one child (3%), and six times more likely to do so than those with no children (2%). Lifting the two-child benefit cap would provide much needed financial support for those families who are by far the most likely to be hungry and reliant on food banks.

Reform uprating of Universal Credit

The risk of food insecurity is exacerbated by deficiencies in the uprating of Universal Credit. Benefits are currently uprated every April in line with the Consumer Price Index from six months prior.

[1] Latest food insecurity tracker shows seven million adults going hungry | Food Foundation

Depending on how inflation varies in the intervening time, this can result in claimants experiencing a real-terms cut.

For example, for a single Universal Credit claimant aged over 25, there is a difference in the money they receive per month, compared to what they would receive if benefits had been increased using whole-year inflation figures instead of those from the previous September. In 2021/22, such a claimant faced a monthly loss of £8.96, and in 2022/23 faced a monthly loss of £17.75. Holding to the Office for Budget Responsibility's inflation forecast for 2025/26, the claimant faces a monthly loss of £4.68 – over £56 for the year.[2]

The Department for Work and Pensions has indicated there is scope for reform uprating of Universal Credit to base it on more recent inflation data.[3] Removing this time lag would ensure the amount of money claimants receive better reflects the current cost of living and ultimately help reduce the need for them to access food banks.

Review funding models for school meals

Schools in England face an annual shortfall of £310 million in 2026/27 in covering the cost of free school meals. While we welcome that the Government has expanded eligibility for free school meals, we urge that this is done alongside a review of funding models and mechanisms for this, so that all schools receive an equitable settlement and all children receive good quality, nutritious school meals.

According to a report led by Northumbria University[4], state primary and secondary schools in England could need to find between £11,000 and £25,000 per year from their teaching and learning budgets to make up the costs of free school meals during the 2026/27 academic year. Schools currently receive £2.58 per free school meal child to cover the cost of providing a meal each day, with an increase to £2.61 due in the 2025/26 academic year. Due to rising costs, however, caterers are charging schools an average of £3.00 per meal; they say this rate is below the real cost of providing a meal that adhering to national School Food Standards.

The greatest impact is felt on schools in the most disadvantaged areas where higher proportions of pupils receive free school meals. In addition, caterers and school food campaigners calculate that the real cost of providing a school meal is between £3.15 and £3.40, depending on contract size, which has resulted in disparities in the quality of meals across schools.

Professor Greta Defeyter of Northumbria University stated that, "While we absolutely welcome the UK government's decision regarding the uplift of free school meals to all in receipt of Universal Credit, and the additional money this brings households, this must not come at a cost to individual schools and investment in children's education. We urge the government to explore funding models and mechanisms that are more socially just to all schools and school caterers regardless of size and geographic location."

[2] Why do benefits sometimes increase by less than inflation?
[3] Ibid.
[4] Free school meals could cost schools over £310 million per year, study reveals | Northumbria University, Newcastle