Cabinet Office consultation on

Making public services work for you with your digital identity

Submission from Feeding Britain (May 2026)

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.

Consultation response

This response is addressed to 3.2.Q1 in the consultation document.

Are there examples of any barriers or inefficiencies that prevent you (or people you support) from interacting with public services, that you think the digital ID system could help with?

Feeding Britain supports many people who have had difficulty accessing particular benefits, including the NHS Healthy Start scheme and free school meals (FSM). The digital ID system can be used to rectify this to ensure these families are receiving their full benefit entitlement and ultimately are less at risk of food poverty.

In 2023 the Department for Education permitted Feeding Britain to convene a working group of 29 local authorities in England, to pilot and examine possible routes to automatic registration for FSM. Some local authorities had some success increasing FSM uptake via auto-enrolment, primarily by using a single application form that covered both FSM and other locally administered welfare payments. Several FSM-eligible families still slipped through the net, however – for example, those who lived in one local authority, but whose children attended school in another. In addition, there was a sense of uncertainty and caution among some local authorities around the feasibility and legality of certain local processes under existing legislation. This lack of certainty or guidance from central government, on what is permitted, may continue to prohibit local action in the future and produce of a postcode lottery which would unjustly result in children and young people in certain areas continuing to miss out on their FSM entitlement. It is also understood that local approaches often require the reallocation of scarce resources within and between local authorities which, again, could run the risk of producing a postcode lottery across England.

A major theme to emerge from the working group was the need to move quickly toward a national framework for both the policy and the implementation of automatic registration for FSM. Since then,

the Government has made the welcome step of making all families receiving Universal Credit eligible for FSM. Without national auto-enrolment however, it is likely that many of these newly eligible families will miss out on this vital support.

Several parents participating in our working group said that digital auto-enrolment for FSM could provide a means of alleviating the burden of paperwork and reducing the number of forms to complete for other benefits and services:

"They've changed systems now for like births, deaths and marriages. If you register a birth, that informs the council and informs everybody, so why can't they do that for your benefits as well?"

"It would be good if it was just automatic. Especially these days when you've got like all the computers that can link up to each other, like your council can know what your benefits are before you do, because I've had that before, like they've sent me through a form to say you're getting this from next month, but I didn't even know that. So, if you can link all these computers and systems together, then it would just be automatically done. Then the school doesn't have to worry about all of the extra paperwork."

"If they can put it in place to stop your money then surely you wouldn't even need to be on Universal Credit for them to monitor it to give you it. It's just an algorithm in the computer system really."

Stigma is also a barrier for some people to access FSM and other benefit entitlements. Some parents said an automatic system would reduce this for them:

"I think that would reduce any stigma that was left because no one needs to know. You never have to tell anybody that you've applied for anything."

"If you're going in and asking for something that you don't particularly want to ask for because of the stigma, or you don't understand what you're talking about, it's easier just not going in and getting it. But if that's done automatic, on a tick box or opt out, that'd be wonderful."

The digital ID system presents a great opportunity to more proactively support families facing financial hardship. We would like to work with the Government to ensure the system is designed to ensure all families that are eligible for FSM, Healthy Start and other services are receiving the support they deserve.