



Free School meals: Impact, Policy and Future Directions

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For every child, for every school, for the future of our region.

Food insecurity in the UK

Figure 1. Percentage of UK households reporting moderate or severe food insecurity in a 1 month recall period

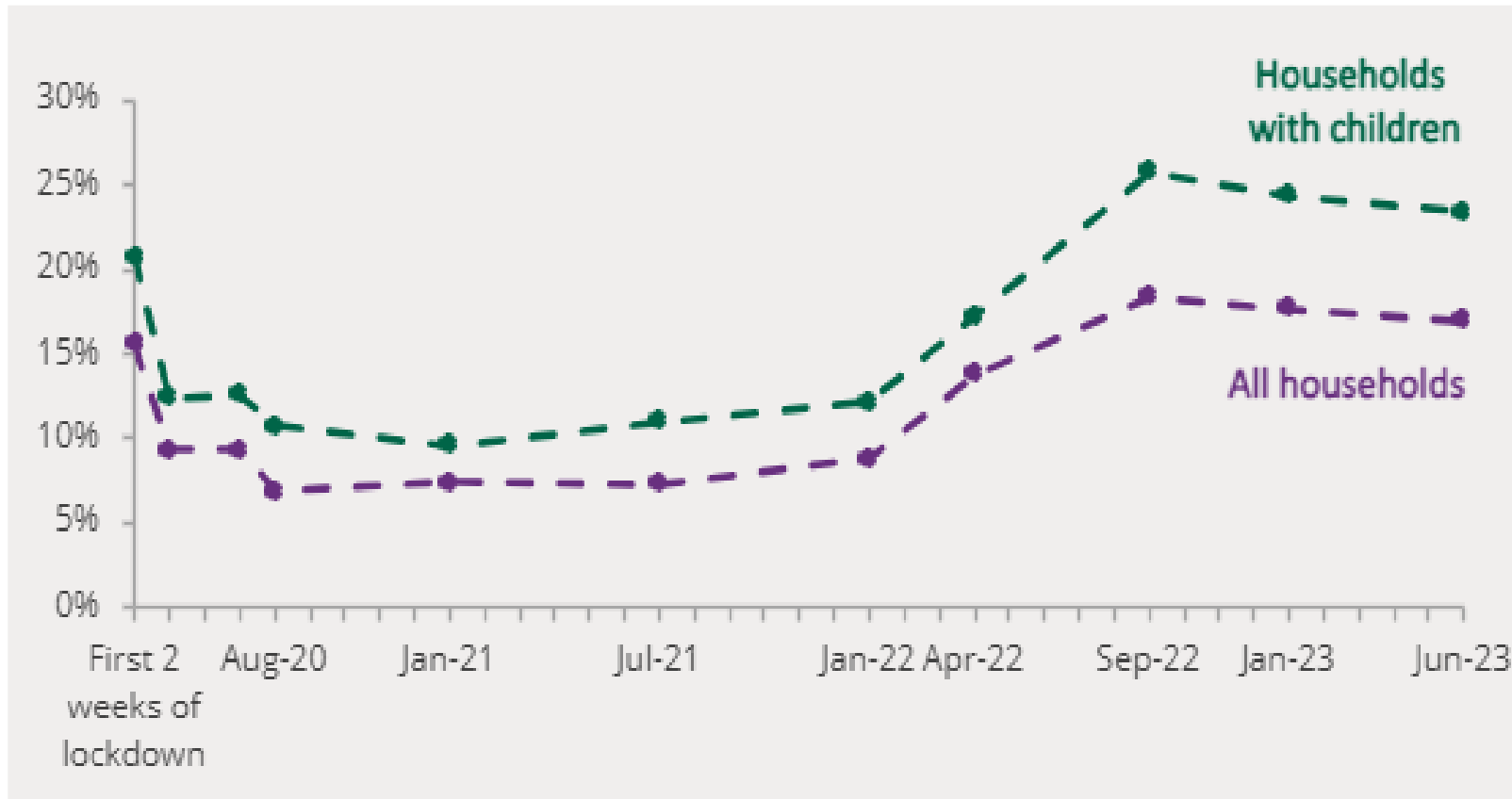
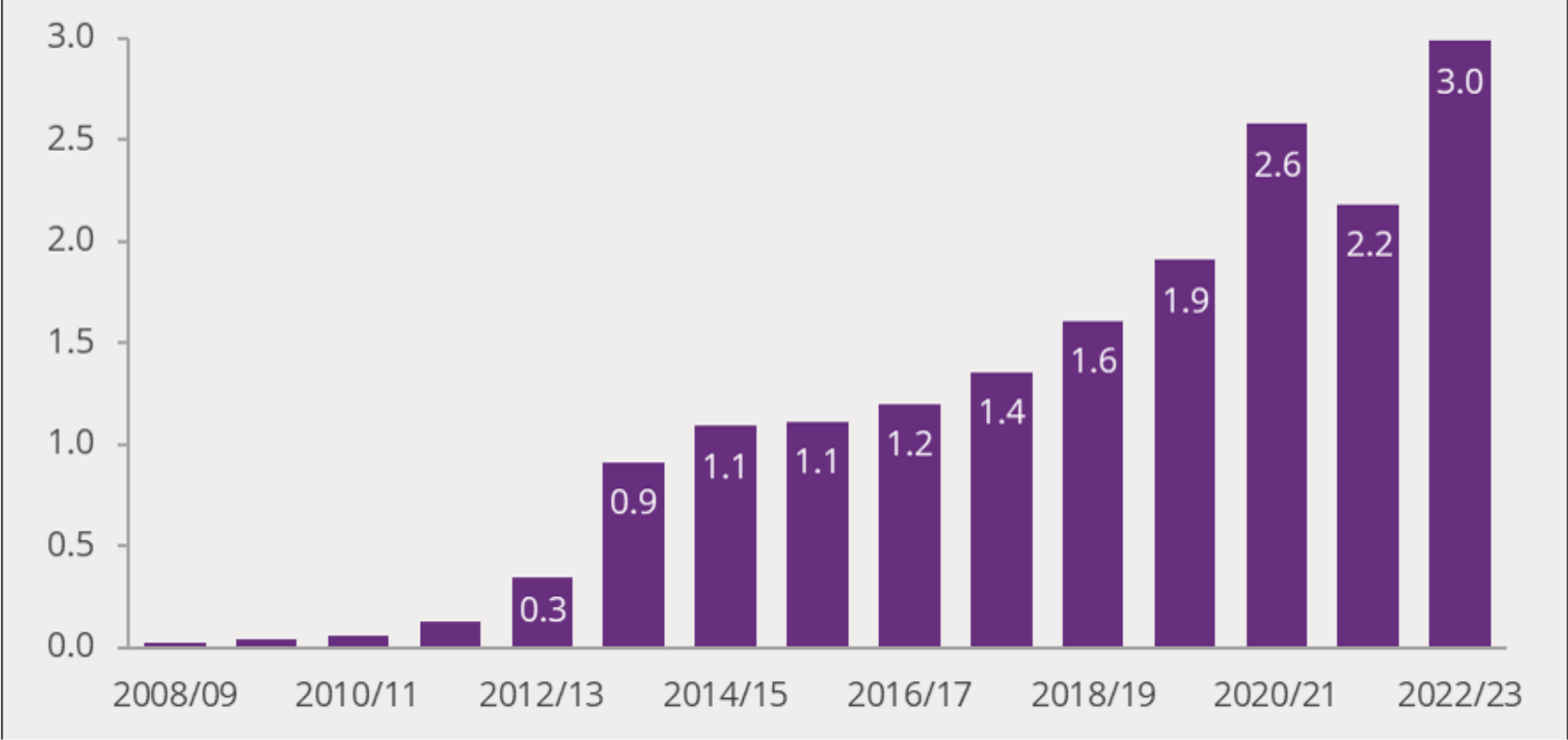
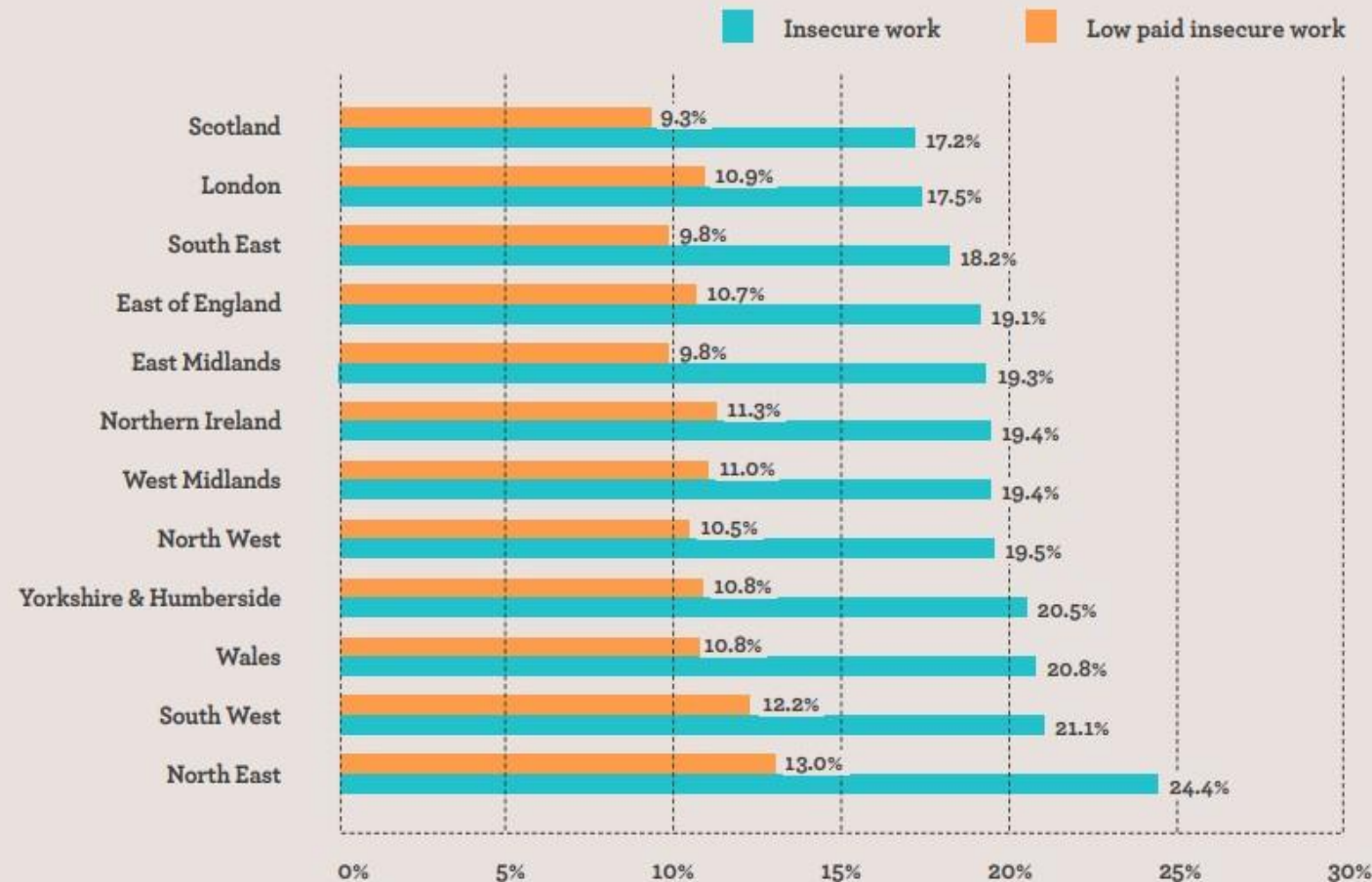


Figure 2. The number (in millions) of three-day emergency food supply parcels provided by Trussell Trust food banks



Source: Trussell Trust, End of year stats, 2023. These data do not include all distributed food parcels, only those provided by food banks in the Trussell Trust network.

Graph 9: Percentage of UK workers in insecure work and low paid insecure work by region, UK, 2021-22:

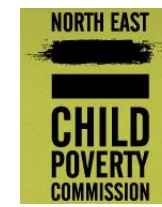


Source: LWF analysis of Labour Force Survey and Family Resource Survey, 2021-22

North East has UK's highest % of insecure jobs (24.4%) **and** the highest % of jobs that are **both** low paid & insecure (13%) (Living Wage Foundation, 2023)

c.25% of those in 'temporary work' are so because unable to find permanent job & c.10.5% of those in PT work as unable to find FT job (ONS, 2023)

Worklessness and Low pay



- High rates of poverty in the North East ‘driven by higher rates of worklessness and **the higher proportions of adults in lower-paid ‘routine’ occupations**’ (JRF, 2022)
- North East lowest weekly earnings (7% or £40 a week less than UK median). Only North Tyneside keeping pace with UK median wage (TUC, 2023)
- 41% of North East children in key worker families living in poverty, followed by North West at 29% (TUC, 2022)
- Even in North East families where **all** adults worked, 21.5% of children in poverty – compared to 16.1% across the UK (End Child Poverty, 2023)



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School food



- 2013 School Food Plan included revised School Food Standards
- Introduction of Universal Infant Free School Meals
- 2022 Government Food Strategy & Levelling Up White Paper
 - Encouraged a whole school approach to food
 - Ensured greater compliance to SFS through collaboration between the DfE and the FSA
 - Allocated £5M to a “school cooking revolution”

Government scraps £5m plan to fund school cooking ‘revolution’ less than 2 years after unveiling

Free school meals

- Eligibility varies across the UK
- Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM): Reception to Year 2
- Universal Primary Free School Meals (UPFSM): Reception to Year 6
- Unlike universal initiatives, pupils must be eligible and registered to receive means-tested FSM
 - 2020 FSM eligibility was extended to families with No Recourse to Public Funds

The Guardian • Monday 20 February 2023

London to offer Free School Meals to all primary pupils for a year !!



FREE SCHOOL MEALS

HOW THE UK NATIONS COMPARE



NORTHERN IRELAND

- » No Universal Free School Meals for infants
- » Means-tested Free School Meals available in primary and secondary schools, with a threshold of family earnings of £14,000 (after tax, not including benefits). There is also a commitment to review eligibility

SCOTLAND

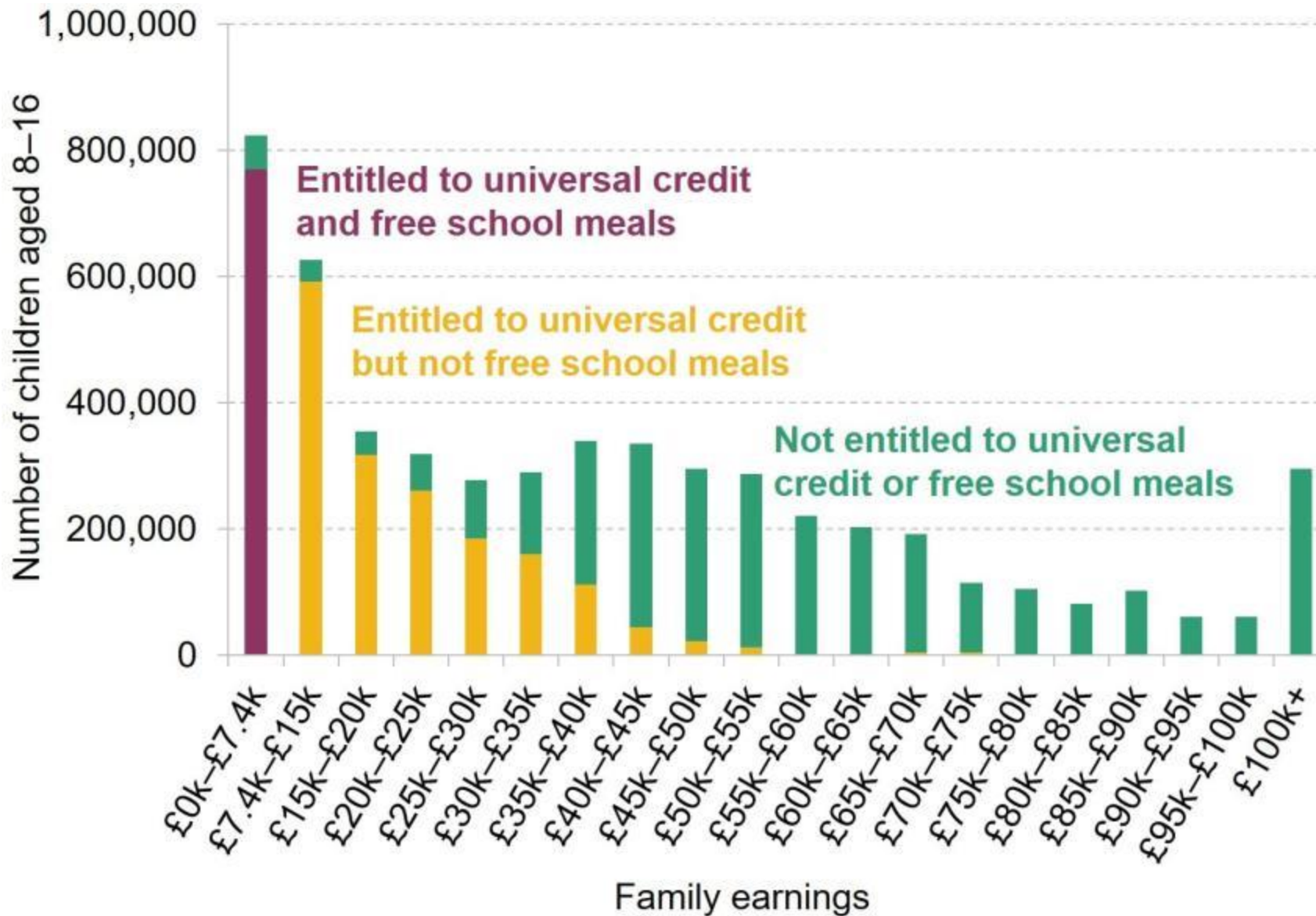
- » Universal Free School Meals for infants (Primary 1-3)
- » Universal Free School Meals rolled out to Primary 4 and 5, with a commitment to extend this to primary 6 and 7, and to pilot delivery in secondary schools
- » Secondary school threshold for eligibility at £7,920 (after tax, not including benefits)

WALES

- » In the process or rolling out Universal Free School Meals to all primary pupils (roll-out already complete in reception)
- » Secondary school threshold for eligibility at £7,400 (after tax, not including benefits)

ENGLAND

- » Universal Free School Meals provision for infants (Reception to Year 2)
- » Families means-tested in both primary and secondary school with eligibility for Free School Meals set at family earnings of less than £7,400 (after tax, not including benefits)

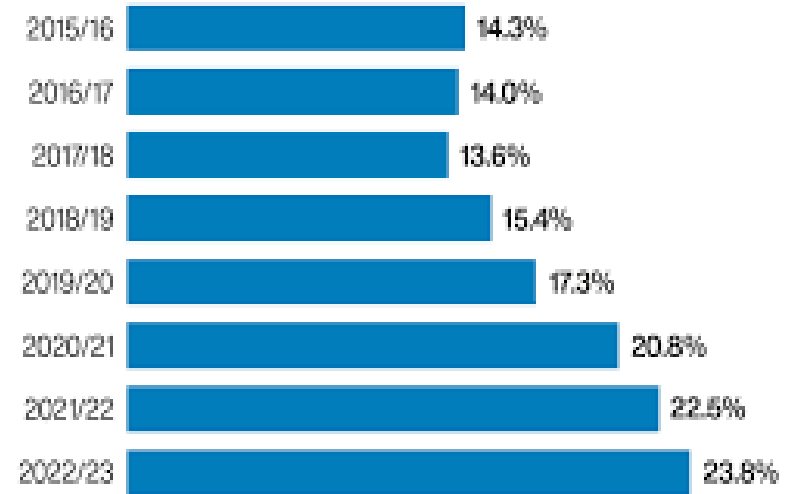


Source: Authors' calculations using Family Resources Survey, 2019-20, updated to 2023-24 prices, and TAXBEN, the IFS tax and benefit microsimulation model.

The North-South Divide

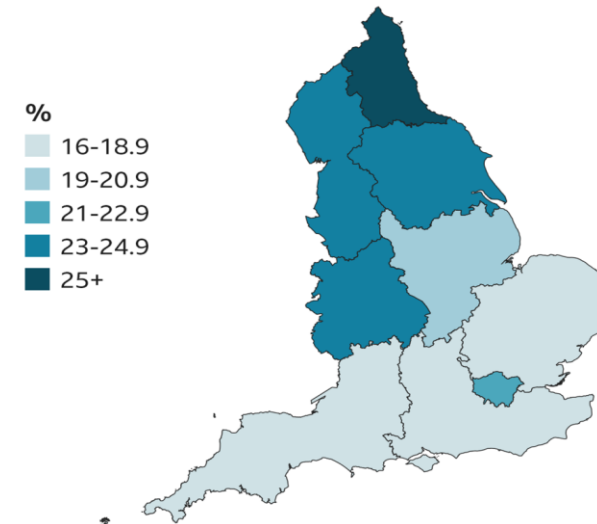
- In England, the number of children determined as eligible through means-testing has continued to increase since 2017/18, peaking at 23.8% in January 2023 (**over 2 million**). Increases could be due to many factors including transitional protections.
- Eligibility rates vary regionally, with lowest 2023 rates in the South East (18.8%) and **highest in the North East (30.4%)**.
- Non-mainstream schools have much higher rates of eligibility, including special schools (46%) and pupil referral units (57.8%).

Pupils at state-funded schools in England eligible for free school meals



PA graphic. Source: Department for Education

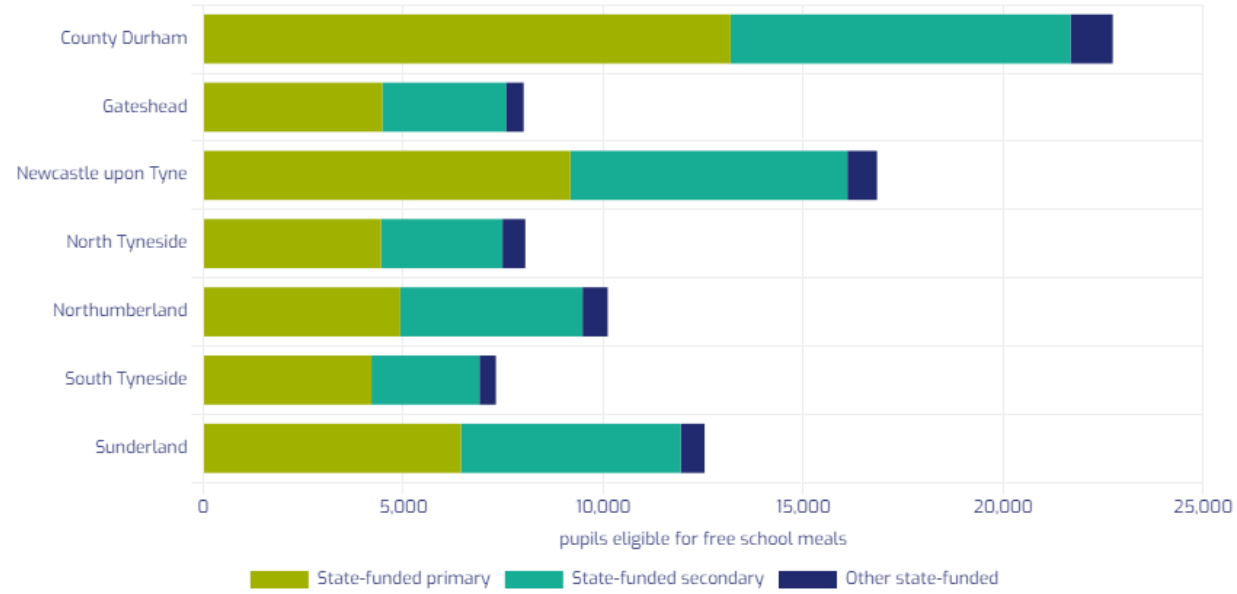
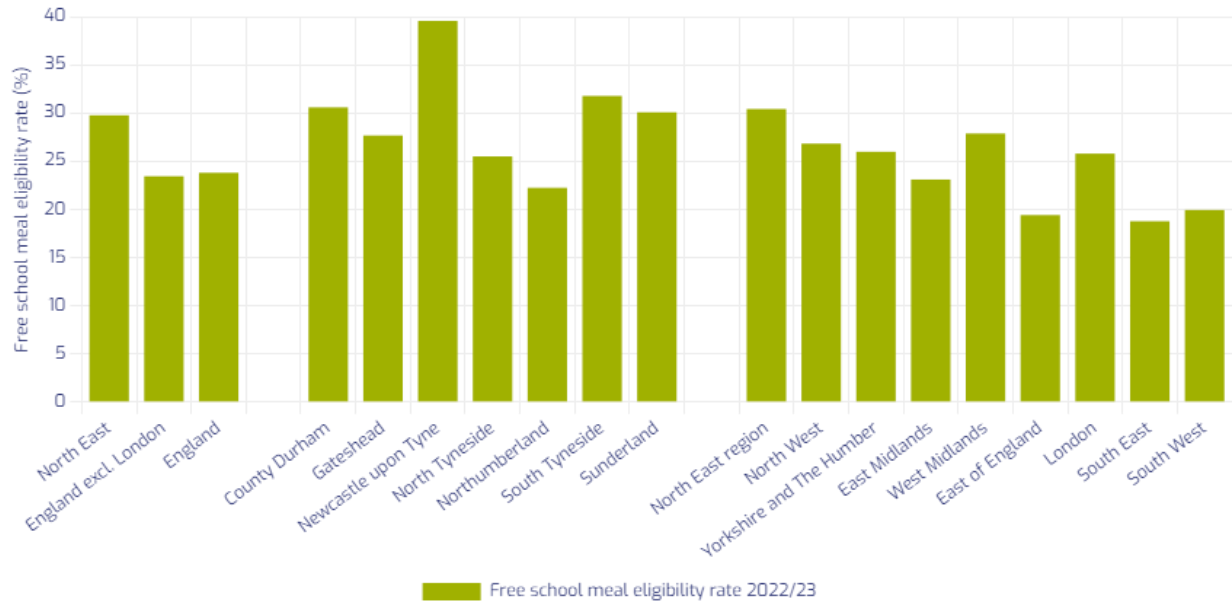
Proportion of pupils eligible for free school meals in England (2020/21)



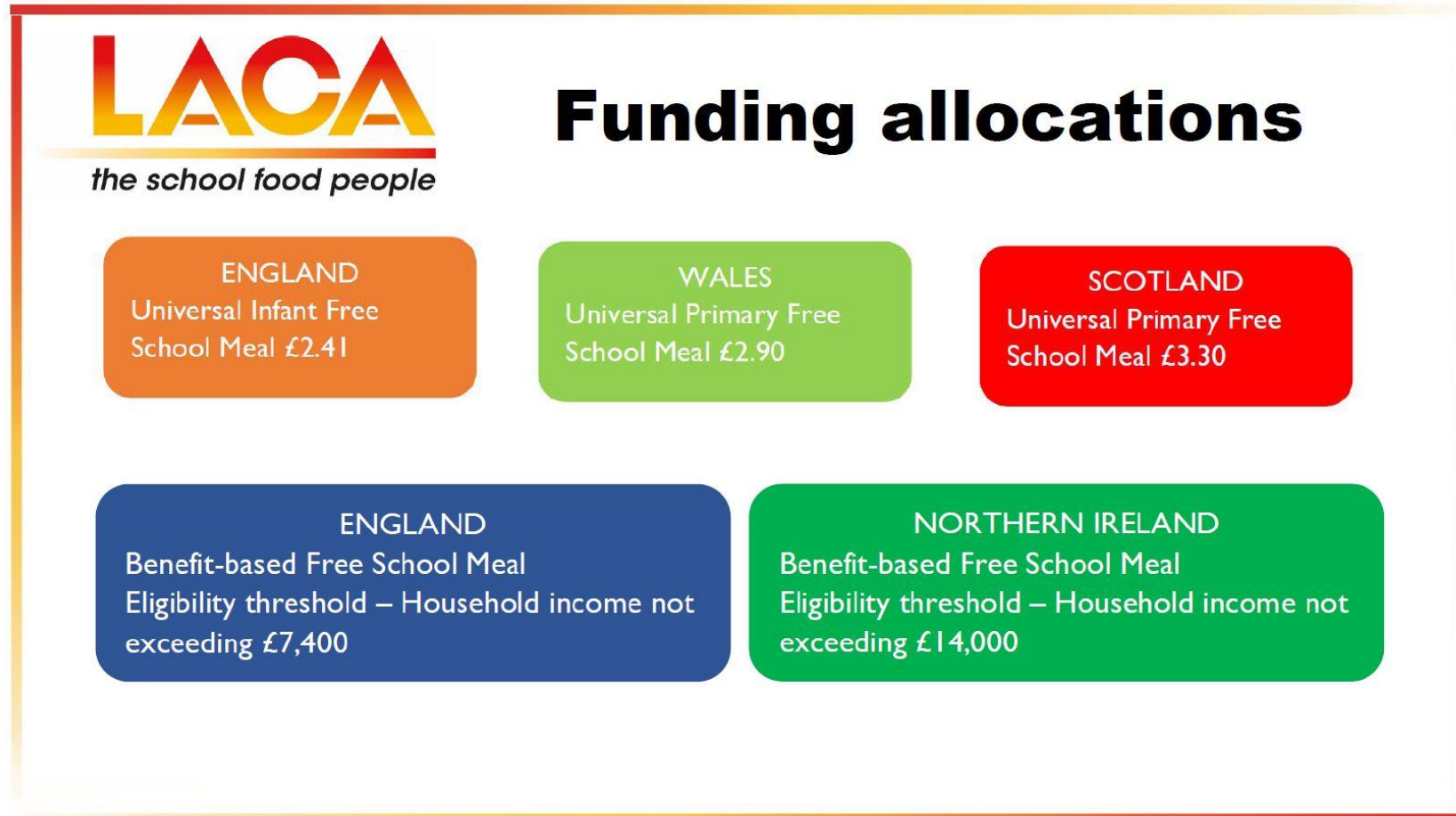
Source: School Census

BBC

Free school meal eligibility



School meals: Nutritional policy



National Funding Formula based on the GDP Deflators of the previous June and not CPI (so currently increase is only 2.5%). Current rate of funding in England is £2.47 per meal, 20% less than Wales and 37% less than Scotland.

FREE SCHOOL MEALS HAVE ARRIVED



The Mayor of London, Sadiq Khan, is funding free school meals for all children in state primary schools from September.



The emergency cost-of-living funding will help almost 300,000 children get a nutritious meal every schoolday to help prevent child hunger.



The Mayor, who received free school meals as a child, said families would save upwards of £440 across the academic year.

- £135 Million based on 90% uptake
- Funded at a rate of £2.65 per meal
- Schools Week suggest a shortfall of £33 Million across London
- £5 Million fund for extraordinary costs associated with implementation



School meals: Research

- Holford, A. and Rabe, B. (2022) 'Going universal. The impact of free school lunches on child body weight outcomes', *Journal of Public Economics Plus*, 3:100016.
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.pubecp.2022.100016>
 - Reduction in obesity
- UIFSM no improvement in consumption of fruit and vegetables, or reduction in sugar sweetened beverages but a reduction in food typically found in packed lunches (Haney et al., 2022).
- Taher et al. (2020) found adolescents (15+) who consumed packed lunches had higher diet quality scores than pupils who consumed school meals.
- School meals meet more of the SFS, compared to packed lunches (Evans et al., 2020).
- Hunger in the classroom (Gooseman, Defeyter, Graham, 2019)
- School Breakfast Clubs (Harvey-Golding, Donkin, & Defeyter, 2016)
- IFS Report on expanding free school meals in England
 - [The policy menu for school lunches: options and trade-offs in expanding free school meals in England | Institute for Fiscal Studies \(ifs.org.uk\)](https://ifs.org.uk)

*Forthcoming Chapter: Hunger in the Classroom in *Routledge Handbook on Promoting Equity in Education through Inclusive Systems and Societies* (2023).



CASE STUDY OF UK SCHOOL MEALS SUMMARY

HISTORY AND EVOLUTION

The UK is home to the **world's oldest school meals programme**, dating back to **1906** when free school meals (FSM) were introduced for impoverished children. School food policy and provision have expanded and evolved since then but the core purpose of providing a **safety net** for children who need it endures. School food provision has developed beyond just delivering school lunches to encompass breakfasts, fruit and vegetable schemes, after-school provisions, milk schemes, holiday provisions, and food education.

POLICY TIMELINE

EDUCATION PROVISION OF MEALS ACT	1906
FIRST NATIONAL SCHOOL MEALS POLICY	1941
NEW EDUCATION ACT REQUIRED SCHOOL MEALS TO SUFFICE AS THE MAIN MEAL OF THE DAY	1944
NEW EDUCATION ACT ABANDONED PROVISION OF MILK AND REDUCED NUMBER OF CHILDREN ELIGIBLE FOR FSM	1980
SCHOOL FOOD STANDARDS	2000

Inefficient and Socially Unjust Processes (Defeyter, Stretesky & Capstick., 2023)

- Despite significant efforts by schools and local authorities, the DfE estimates that approximately **11% of total eligible pupils are not registered for FSM.**
- **Loss of Pupil Premium**
 - Pupil premium was introduced by the Coalition Government in 2011, with an aim of raising the attainment of disadvantaged children.
 - Pupil premium funding is set **at £1455 per primary school pupil and £1035 per secondary school pupil.**
 - Importantly, the introduction of UIFSM removed parental incentives to register their children for FSM, with 31% of school leaders saying pupil premium had decreased.
- **Loss of Income to Family**
 - A loss of £2.42 per meal per child

Loss in Pupil Premium Monies to Schools and Families

-
- Data for London
 - Data for the North East



What we did

- First, we use COLLECT data (from DfE) to estimate the annual value for unclaimed FSM for London. Unclaimed FSM is the equivalent monetary value that would cover the cost of providing eligible children with a FSM but children can't claim this meal as they are not registered for FSM. This costs families £2.42 for each meal they could claim, but don't. Next slide in Columns 1 and 2.
- Second, we estimate the costs to schools through lost pupil premiums that cannot be claimed when families do not register for FSM. This premium is £1,455 for each primary school pupil and £1,035 for secondary school pupil. Next slide in columns 3 and 4.
- Third, we use COLLECT to estimate for secondary school pupils the annual costs to pupils / families when they are unable to roll over credited FSM monies. Next slide in columns 5
- Fourth, we calculate totals for each of these to show the costs to the North East.

Table 1. Estimated Costs Associated with Missed FSM and Lost Pupil Premiums across London in 2021/22

London Borough	Estimated costs when eligible families do not register pupils for FSM				Estimated costs to pupils who are unable to roll-over FSM credit (c)	Total lost costs
	Estimated costs to families (a)		Estimated costs to schools (b) (lost pupil premium)			
	Primary School	Secondary School	Primary School	Secondary School		
Barking and Dagenham	£345,635	£290,511	£1,093,735	£653,934	£327,837	£2,711,652
Barnet	£331,371	£310,288	£1,048,597	£698,451	£499,343	£2,888,050
Bexley	£238,512	£189,014	£754,753	£425,466	£234,958	£1,842,703
Brent	£284,601	£228,965	£900,596	£515,395	£457,961	£2,387,518
Bromley	£230,954	£193,617	£730,835	£435,828	£206,910	£1,798,144
Camden	£255,220	£226,294	£807,623	£509,383	£657,974	£2,456,494
City of London	£3,523	N/A	£11,150	N/A	N/A	£14,673
Croydon	£525,784	£385,586	£1,663,801	£867,946	£464,398	£3,907,515
Ealing	£406,613	£301,252	£1,286,694	£678,111	£580,727	£3,253,397
Enfield	£469,750	£364,048	£1,486,487	£819,464	£467,157	£3,606,906
Greenwich	£397,293	£243,400	£1,257,202	£547,887	£464,398	£2,910,180
Hackney	£393,429	£344,499	£1,244,973	£775,459	£653,376	£3,411,735
Hammersmith and Fulham	£167,817	£141,050	£531,042	£317,501	£218,405	£1,375,815
Haringey	£282,555	£231,124	£894,122	£520,256	£495,664	£2,423,721
Harrow	£178,614	£178,216	£565,210	£401,161	£268,983	£1,592,185
Havering	£255,959	£175,432	£809,961	£394,893	£313,124	£1,949,369
Hillingdon	£330,064	£244,252	£1,044,461	£549,806	£441,868	£2,610,451
Hounslow	£276,531	£268,461	£875,060	£604,300	£373,358	£2,397,710
Islington	£322,449	£214,985	£1,020,364	£483,926	£734,760	£2,776,484
Kensington and Chelsea	£132,071	£105,873	£417,928	£238,317	£294,272	£1,188,461
Kingston upon Thames	£109,908	£80,129	£347,794	£180,369	£142,538	£860,738
Lambeth	£411,103	£299,092	£1,300,901	£673,250	£379,335	£3,063,681
Lewisham	£307,617	£226,976	£973,428	£510,918	£481,870	£2,500,808
Merton	£228,283	£143,153	£722,383	£322,234	£325,998	£1,742,051
Newham	£547,038	£534,365	£1,731,058	£1,202,844	£1,333,420	£5,348,725
Redbridge	£227,601	£288,067	£720,225	£648,433	£657,514	£2,541,840
Richmond upon Thames	£111,442	£83,084	£352,649	£187,021	£153,113	£887,309
Southwark	£446,962	£373,141	£1,414,374	£839,932	£400,946	£3,475,354
Sutton	£176,796	£159,974	£559,456	£360,099	£253,810	£1,510,135
Tower Hamlets	£521,351	£468,159	£1,649,774	£1,053,816	£911,783	£4,604,883
Waltham Forest	£310,344	£237,944	£982,060	£535,607	£378,875	£2,444,830
Wandsworth	£279,429	£195,492	£884,231	£440,049	£246,913	£2,046,115
Westminster	£178,216	£252,379	£563,951	£568,099	£478,192	£2,040,837
Total	£9,684,835	£7,978,822	£30,646,665	£17,960,355	£14,299,780	£80,570,456(d)

(a) Calculated using DfE COLLECT database on *Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics 2021/22* as follows: *Lost Family Uptake Costs* = $[(\text{No. of Pupils Eligible for FSM} / 0.89) - \text{No. of Pupils Eligible for FSM}] * £2.42 \text{ per pupil} * 190 \text{ days (minimum required school days by law)}$.

(b) Calculated using DfE COLLECT database on *Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics 2021/22* as follows: *Lost Pupil Premiums* = $[(\text{No. of Pupils Eligible for FSM} / 0.89) - \text{No. of Pupils Eligible for FSM}] * £1,455 \text{ per pupil for primary schools (or } £1,035 \text{ pupil for secondary schools)}$.

(c) Estimated using DfE COLLECT database on *Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics 2021/22* as follows: *Lost Family Costs Missing Meals* = $[\text{No. Pupils Eligible for FSM} - \text{No. Pupils that take FSM on Census Day}] * £2.42 \text{ per meal} * 190 \text{ School Days (minimum required school days allowed by law)}$.

(d) Column values may not sum up exactly to column totals due to rounding error.

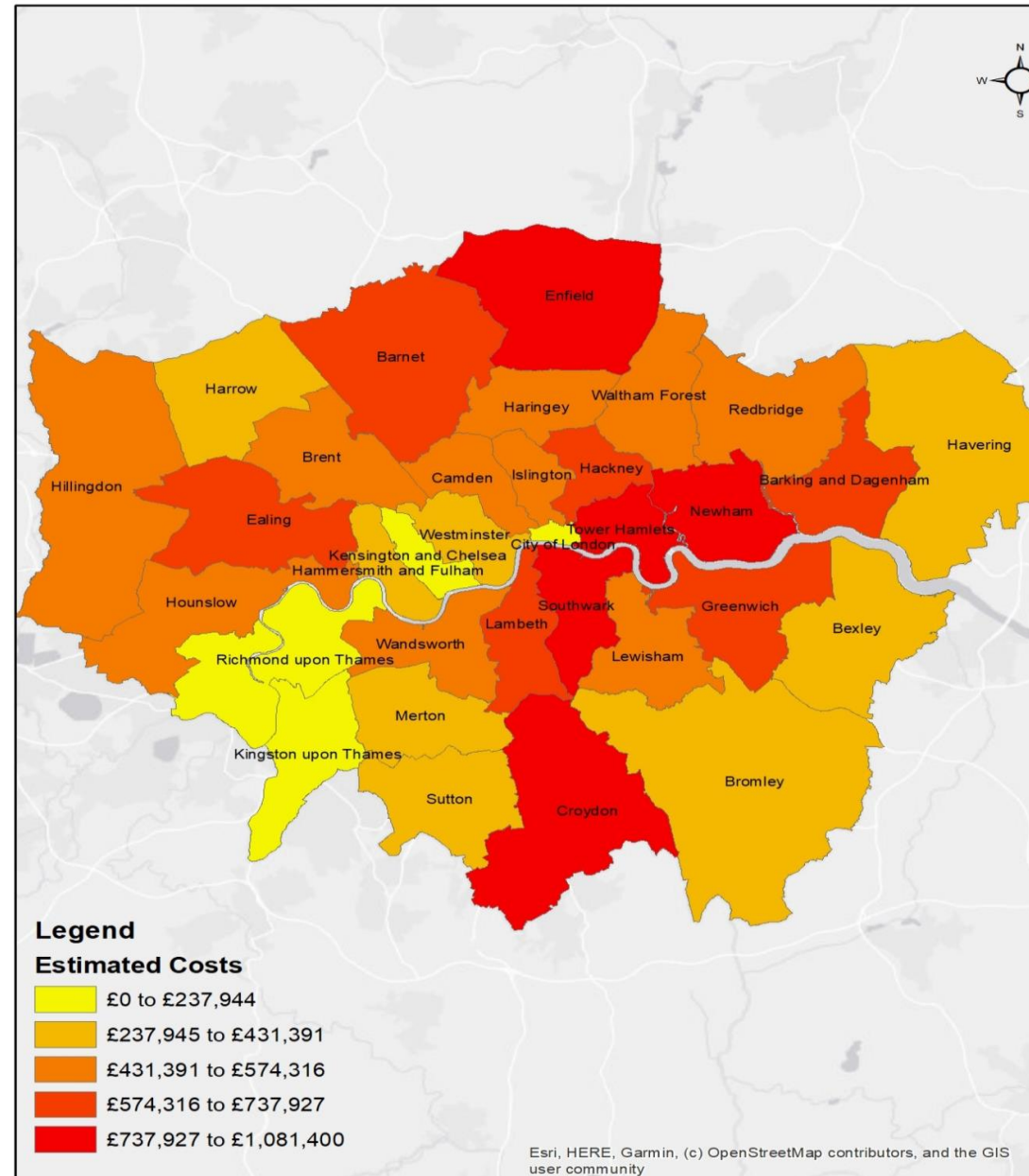


Figure 1. Costs to Primary and Secondary School Families Eligible but not Registered for FSM, London FY2021/2022

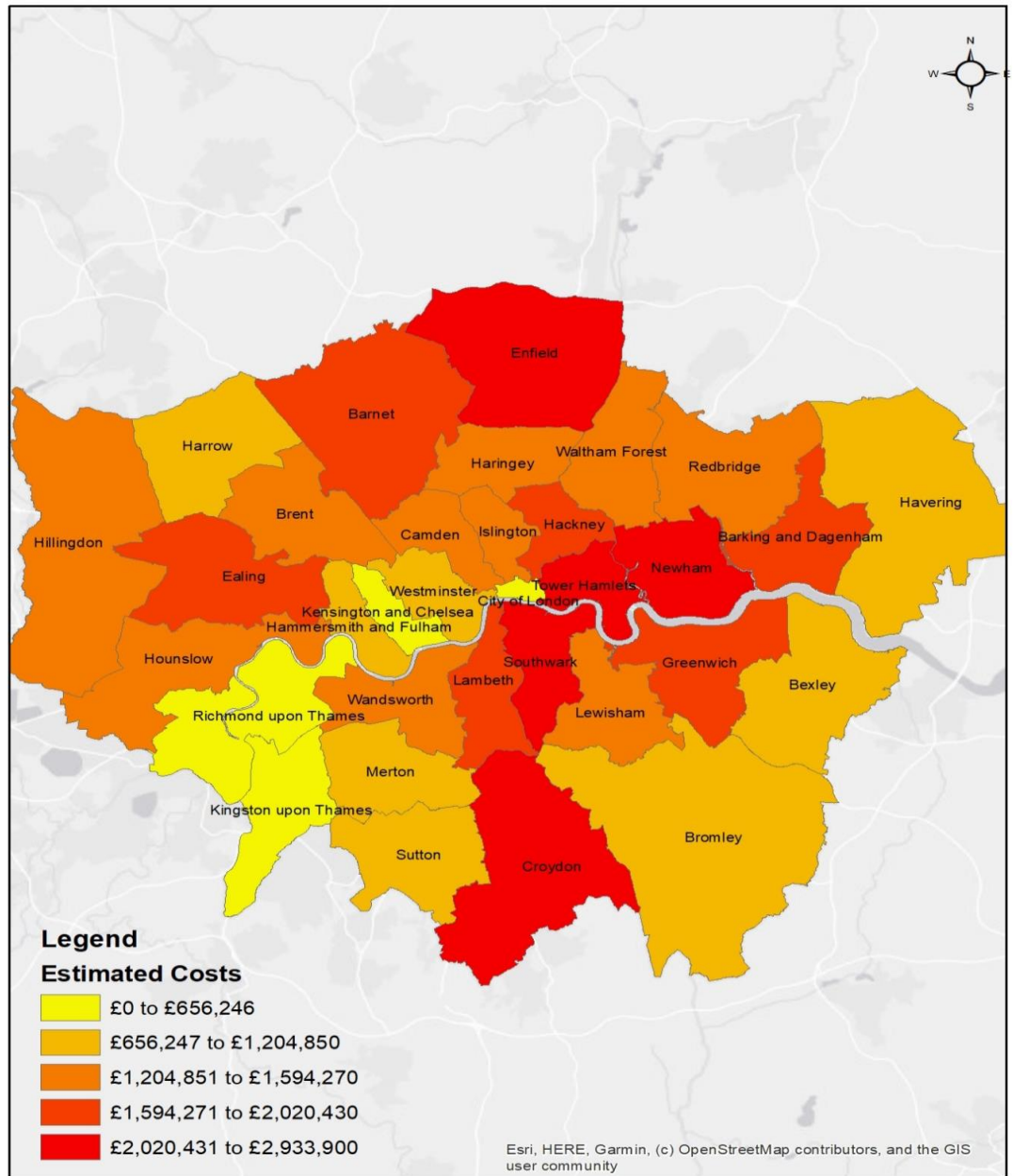


Figure 2. Costs to Primary and Secondary Schools from Lost Pupil Premiums, London FY2021/2022

Table 1. Estimated Costs Associated with Missed FSM and Lost Pupil Premiums across North East England in 2021/2022

Local Authority	Number of Schools in Analyses		Estimated costs when eligible families do not register pupils for FSM				Costs to pupils who are unable to roll-over FSM credit (c)	Total lost costs
	Primary	Secondary	Costs to families (a)		Costs to schools from lost pupil premium (b)			
			Primary	Secondary	Primary	Secondary	Secondary	
County Durham	212	31	£735,143	£439,858	£2,326,300	£990,111	£1,252,035	£5,743,447
Darlington	29	8	£141,675	£84,846	£448,320	£190,987	£174,724	£1,040,552
Gateshead	67	10	£246,980	£161,679	£781,548	£363,936	£274,041	£1,828,184
Hartlepool	30	5	£179,808	£122,410	£568,987	£275,543	£339,792	£1,486,540
Middlesbrough	41	8	£333,076	£196,800	£1,053,992	£442,992	£581,187	£2,608,047
Newcastle upon Tyne	72	18	£516,521	£375,471	£1,634,488	£845,176	£976,155	£4,347,811
North Tyneside	55	16	£246,923	£154,462	£781,368	£347,690	£531,989	£2,062,432
Northumberland	127	30	£274,542	£234,477	£868,766	£527,803	£380,255	£2,285,843
Redcar & Cleveland	44	11	£208,109	£128,945	£658,543	£290,254	£346,229	£1,632,080
South Tyneside	45	8	£232,147	£137,697	£734,612	£309,953	£308,526	£1,722,935
Stockton-on-Tees	60	13	£292,500	£167,589	£925,593	£377,240	£298,410	£2,061,332
Sunderland	81	18	£367,003	£290,966	£1,161,352	£654,957	£482,790	£2,957,068
Total			£3,774,427	£2,495,200	£11,943,869	£5,616,642	£5,946,133	£29,776,271

Notes:

(a) Calculated using DfE COLLECT database on *Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics 2021/22* as follows: Lost Family Uptake = $[(\text{No. of Pupils Eligible for FSM} / 0.89) - \text{No. of Pupils Eligible for FSM}] \times £2.42$ per pupil $\times 190$ days (minimum required school days by law).

(b) Calculated using DfE COLLECT database on *Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics 2021/22* as follows: Lost Pupil Premiums = $[(\text{No. of Pupils Eligible for FSM} / 0.89) - \text{No. of Pupils Eligible for FSM}] \times £1,455$ per pupil for primary schools (or £1,035 per pupil for secondary school).

(c) Calculated using DfE COLLECT database on *Schools, Pupils and their Characteristics 2021/22* as follows: Lost Pupil Premiums = $[\text{No. of Pupils Eligible for FSM} - \text{No. of Pupils that take FSM on Census Day}] \times £2.42$ per meal $\times 190$ school days (minimum required school days allowed by law).



National Level:

- At a minimum, the government should restore the previous FSM eligibility threshold to all in receipt of UC.
- Increase funding provided per meal to ensure quality of meals
- Develop a phased approach for the introduction of UFSM (relative to increases in overall educational budget)
- Implement auto-enrolment for FSM at a national level (DWP & DfE)

ENSURING AN EQUITABLE AND INCLUSIVE APPROACH TO SCHOOL MEALS: NOT A POSTCODE LOTTERY

What can we do in the North East to Level Up?

Local authorities to adopt auto-enrolment for FSM

IMPACT

- Reduce pressure/reduce stigma/improve dietary intake in and out of school/reduce obesity/reduce food insecurity.
- Increase funding drawn down to schools and families

For every child, for every school, for the future of our region.



@SCHOOLSNE
#SNESummit23

Thank you for listening

- Further details about our research can be found:
- <https://www.northumbria.ac.uk/takeontomorrow/it-is-time/holiday-activity-and-food-programmes>