

# Citizen Participation and Public Petitions Committee

11th Meeting, 2023 (Session 6), Wednesday  
28 June 2023

PE1926: Expand universal free school meals  
for all nursery, primary and secondary school  
pupils

<b>Lodged on</b>	8 March 2022
<b>Petitioner</b>	Alison Dowling
<b>Petition summary</b>	Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to expand universal free school meals provision for all nursery, primary and secondary school pupils.
<b>Webpage</b>	<a href="https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1926">https://petitions.parliament.scot/petitions/PE1926</a>

## Introduction

1. The Committee last considered this petition at its meeting on [22 February 2023](#). At that meeting, the Committee agreed to write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills.
2. The petition summary is included in **Annexe A** and the Official Report of the Committee's last consideration of this petition is at **Annexe B**.
3. The Committee has received a response from the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills which is set out in **Annexe C**.
4. Written submissions received prior to the Committee's last consideration can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).
5. Further background information about this petition can be found in the [SPICe briefing](#) for this petition.
6. The Scottish Government's initial position on this petition can be found on the [petition's webpage](#).

7. Every petition collects signatures while it remains under consideration. At the time of writing, 91 signatures have been received on this petition.
8. Members may wish to note that Jeremy Balfour MSP lodged a parliamentary question seeking an update on the Scottish Government's plans to roll out universal free school meals, which was responded to in the Chamber by the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills on 18 May 2023. In her reply, the Cabinet Secretary said she had not yet met with officials to discuss proposals for the secondary school pilot but indicated a willingness to engage directly with young people on the roll-out of universal free school meals. The Official Report is available [here](#).
9. Members may also be aware that Cabinet Secretary for Finance responded to a question on the budget allocated to the roll-out of free school meals to all primary school pupils on 24 May 2023. The question and the Cabinet Secretary's response are available [here](#).

## **Action**

The Committee is invited to consider what action it wishes to take.

### **Clerk to the Committee**

## Annexe A

# PE1926: Expand universal free school meals for all nursery, primary and secondary school pupils

## Petitioner

Alison Dowling

## Date lodged

8 March 2022

## Petition summary

Calling on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to expand universal free school meals provision for all nursery, primary and secondary school pupils

## Previous action

I have contacted a number of MSPs and local authority councillors. They have given positive and supportive responses to the petition aim.

I've consulted with low income families who struggle to meet the cost of school dinners for their children and supported families in accessing affordable credit, advice, benefit entitlement and local foodbank provision.

## Background information

Urgent action is needed at a national level to tackle child and young person's food poverty in Scotland. No child or young person should go through the school day hungry. The Scottish Government can ensure that schools are free from hunger by providing universal access to a free, healthy meal for all pupils, regardless of age.

Free school meals for all pupils would remove the stigma of 'difference'. Some children entitled to free meals don't take them because of the stigma.

A national expansion of free school dinners by Scottish Government will alleviate hunger for pupils of all ages during the school day.

Some low-income families are not entitled to free meals but can't afford them or can only afford to pay for a school dinner for a few days each week.

Food poverty is sometimes hidden within schools, especially with secondary school age pupils. Many children lose access to free school meals because of moving out of the year group that provides a free school dinner. While P1-4 provision is intended to expand to include older primary children, no such expansion is planned to include children attending secondary school.

Hunger doesn't recognise an age limit therefore the Scottish Government should not discriminate against tackling school day hunger on the basis of age. This is set against a backdrop of rising food and energy prices that disproportionately impact families with the lowest incomes.

## Annexe B

### Extract from Official Report of last consideration of PE1926 on 22 February 2023

**The Deputy Convener:** PE1926, which was lodged by Alison Dowling, calls on the Scottish Parliament to urge the Scottish Government to expand universal free school meals provision for all nursery, primary and secondary school pupils.

When we previously considered the petition on 28 September 2022, we agreed to write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills seeking an update on the work that is being undertaken to expand the provision of free school meals, specifically on where priority is being given to extending the provision to pupils in secondary schools.

In response, the cabinet secretary notes that £30 million of capital funding has been allocated to support the expansion of catering and dining facilities to help plan for the expansion of free school meals to pupils in P6 and P7. The cabinet secretary also states the Government's commitment to running a pilot of free school meals in secondary schools to support its consideration of further expansion.

Do members have any comments or suggestions?

**Fergus Ewing:** The £30 million of funding is welcome, but what is it being spent on, and when? What is the timetable? Can we write to the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills to seek further information on the planned pilot of free school meals in secondary schools, especially on the anticipated timescale for carrying out the pilot?

**Carol Mochan:** Similarly, my point is that it is very disappointing that we do not have a timeframe. There is a growing body of evidence that that is an important policy to progress. Commitments have been made on school meals but nothing has come forward. We should send a strongly worded letter to the minister asking that the Government please sets out an exact timeframe for the measure.

**The Deputy Convener:** Do we agree with those recommendations?

**Members** *indicated agreement.*

## Annexe C

### Cabinet Secretary for Education and Skills submission of 18 April 2023

#### PE1926/I: Expand universal free school meals for all nursery, primary and secondary school pupils

Thank you for your letter of 22 March seeking an update on the timescales associated with the pilot of universal free school meal provision in secondary schools.

We remain focused on working with delivery partners to progress our free school meal expansion programme. This includes planning for providing universal free school meals for all primary school pupils and delivering a pilot of universal free school meal provision in secondary schools, to inform our consideration of further expansion.

In December we announced that the next phase of our free school meal expansion programme will be to expand provision to primary 6 and 7 pupils who are in receipt of the Scottish Child Payment, as the next step towards universal provision in primary schools.

Previous engagement with local authorities indicated that a number of areas faced challenges in planning for the substantial expansion of free school meals in primary schools. We are working in partnership with COSLA and other key delivery partners to undertake planning work for the next phase of expansion, including considering appropriate timescales for rollout.

I will update the committee on anticipated timescales for the pilot in secondary schools once our planning work has further progressed.

I hope this information is helpful.

**JENNY GILRUTH MSP**