



Llywodraeth Cymru
Welsh Government

STATISTICS, DOCUMENT

Using free school meal history as an indicator of deprivation for apprenticeship and adult learning outcomes: August 2021 to July 2022

Data on apprenticeship outcomes by learners' free school meal eligibility status during secondary school. An investigation into the suitability of this measure as an indicator of deprivation for apprenticeships and adult learning.

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Main points

Apprenticeships

- Free school meal (FSM) eligibility during secondary school is a meaningful measure of deprivation for apprenticeship outcomes.
- The difference in the success rate between never and ever FSM eligible apprentices in 2021/22 was 13 percentage points.
- The gap in outcomes was three times wider than before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic in 2018/19.
- In 2021/22, the more years that a learner was known to have been FSM eligible, the lower the success rate.
- The gap between outcomes for never and ever FSM eligible exists even between apprentices living in similarly deprived neighbourhoods.
- Data on FSM eligibility is available for 91% of apprentices who started at the age of 24 or younger.
- Overall, FSM eligibility data was obtained for 7,670 out of 17,200 apprentices in 2021/22.

Adult learning

- FSM eligibility is not a suitable measure for adult learning outcomes currently, due to the low proportion of learners for whom FSM eligibility data is available.

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Free School Meals (FSM) eligibility as a measure of deprivation

FSM is often used as an indicator of deprivation in education statistics.

This report contains new data linking apprentices and adult learners to their previous free school meal eligibility in secondary school.

All measures in this report are based on the secondary school period:

- Ever FSM eligible means that a learner was eligible for FSM at some point in secondary school
- Never FSM eligible means that a learner was not eligible for FSM at any point in secondary school

See the [coverage of data section](#) for more information.

Apprenticeships

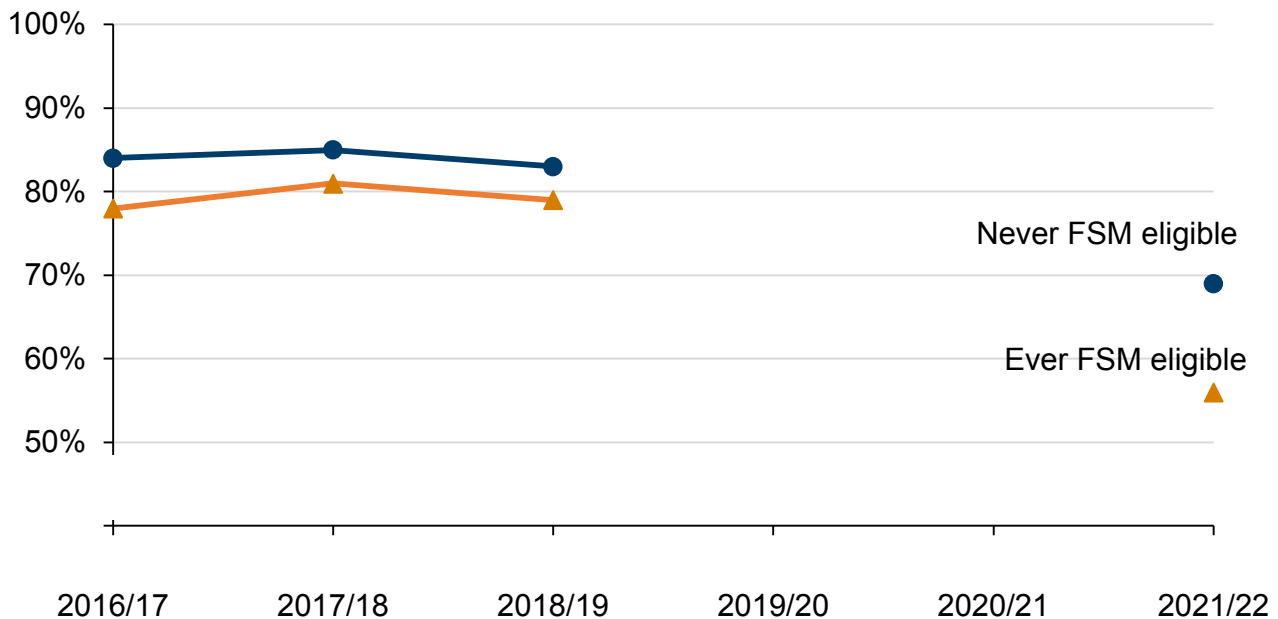
Learners on apprenticeship programmes must achieve a range of qualifications to attain their apprenticeship. The success rate is the percentage of leavers from apprenticeships who attained the full apprenticeship framework.

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Figure 1: Apprenticeship success rate for learners who were never FSM eligible and those who were FSM eligible, academic years 2016/17 to 2021/22 [Note1]



Description of Figure 1: The chart shows that apprentices who were FSM eligible during their secondary school years were less likely to successfully complete their apprenticeship than those who were never FSM eligible.

Source: Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR), Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), Matched Education Dataset (MED)

[Note 1] Outcome measures were not produced for 2019/20 and 2020/21, see [notes](#).

[Data can be found in Table 1 of the accompanying spreadsheet](#)

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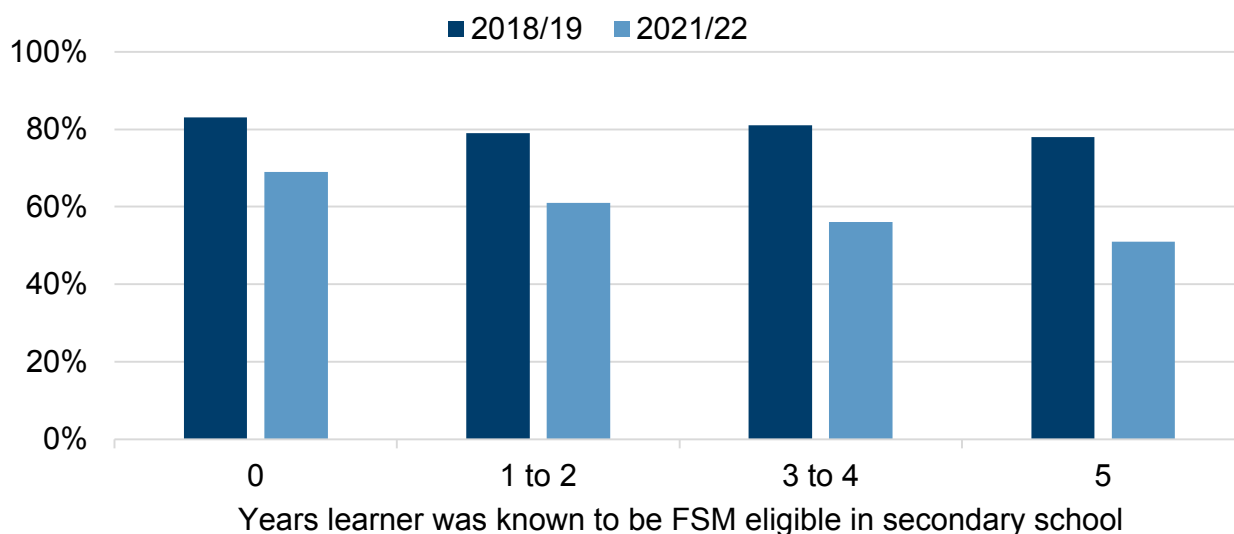
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In 2021/22, apprentices who were eligible for FSM at some point during their secondary school years had a success rate of 56%. Apprentices who had never been FSM eligible had a success rate of 69%.

Before the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, apprentices who had never been eligible for FSM had higher success rates than those who had been eligible, but the gap was narrowing. In 2021/22, the gap increased to more than 3 times the difference in 2018/19.

The success rate decreased for all learners between 2018/19 and 2021/22 but the fall was much greater for those who had ever been FSM eligible.

Figure 2: Apprenticeship success rate, by number of years that a learner was known to be FSM eligible, academic years 2018/19 and 2021/22



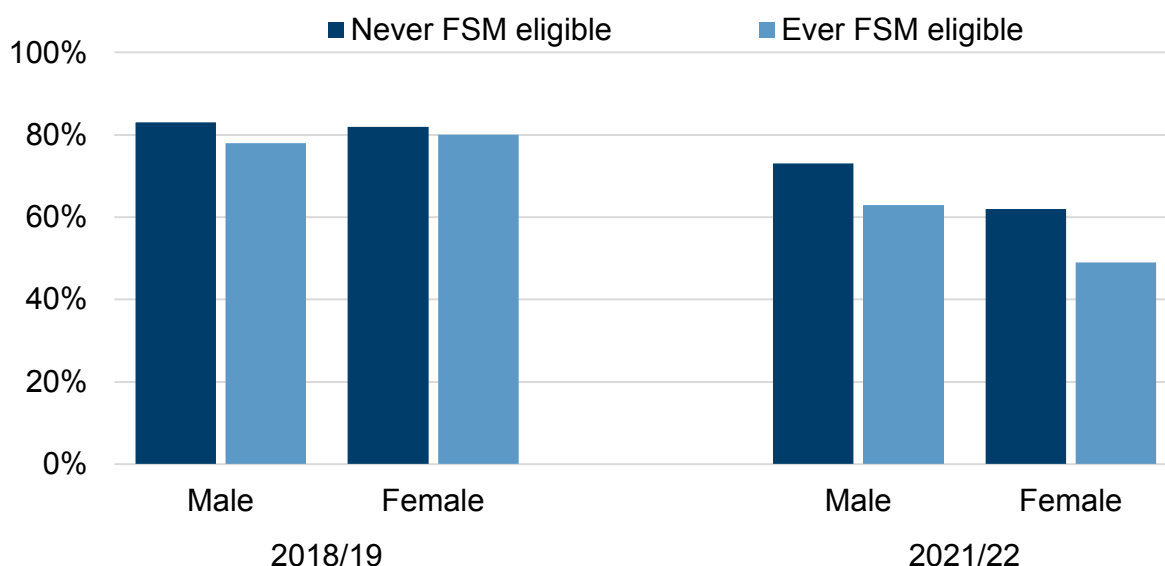
Description of Figure 2: Bar chart showing that the apprenticeship success rate in 2021/22 was lower for apprentices who were known to have been FSM eligible for longer. This was not true in 2018/19.

Source: Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR), Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), Matched Education Dataset (MED)

Data can be found in Table 2 of the accompanying spreadsheet

In 2021/22, 610 apprentices were known to have been FSM eligible for 5 years. Just over half of them (51%) successfully completed their apprenticeship. The success rate for these apprentices was 18 percentage points lower than for learners who were never FSM eligible (69%).

Figure 3: Apprenticeship success rate for learners who were never FSM eligible and those who were, by gender, academic years 2018/19 and 2021/22



Description of Figure 3: Bar chart showing that the gap between those who were never and ever FSM eligible widened for both males and females between 2018/19 and 2021/22, but more so for females.

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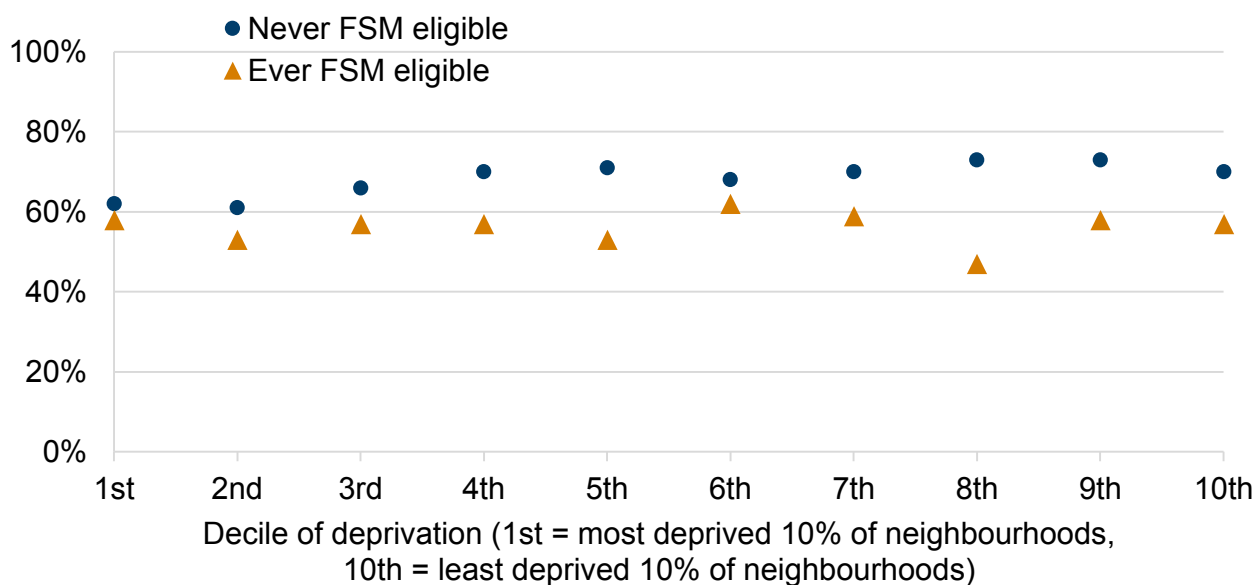
Source: Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR), Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), Matched Education Dataset (MED)

Data can be found in Table 4 of the accompanying spreadsheet

Before the pandemic the difference in success rates between apprentices who had never and ever been eligible for FSM was slightly wider for males than for females. The trend was reversed in 2021/22, when the gap was 10 percentage points for males and 13 percentage points for females.

Females who had ever been FSM eligible had an average success rate of 80% in 2018/19. This fell to 49% in 2021/22. For males who had ever been FSM eligible the success rate was 78% in 2018/19 and 63% in 2021/22.

Figure 4: Apprenticeship success rate for learners who were never eligible for FSM and those who were, by deprivation of home neighbourhood, academic year 2021/22 [Note 1]



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Description of Figure 4: The chart shows success rates by decile of deprivation of the home neighbourhood of the learner. The 1st decile represents the most deprived 10% of small areas with the 10th decile being the least deprived. Learners who were ever FSM eligible had lower outcomes than those who were never eligible, even when their home neighbourhoods were similarly deprived.

[Note 1] Deprivation deciles based on the main index of the Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD), 2019.

Source: Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR), Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), Matched Education Dataset (MED), Welsh Index of Multiple Deprivation (WIMD)

Data can be found in Table 5 of the accompanying spreadsheet

The current measure of deprivation used in our **Learner outcome measures for work-based learning and adult learning** statistics are based on the deprivation of the area in which the learner lives at the time of their apprenticeship and not the circumstances of the learner themselves. Historical FSM eligibility provides information about the individual learner.

Within each decile of deprivation, learners who were never FSM eligible had a higher success rate than those who were ever eligible. The gap was smaller in the most deprived areas of Wales.

For apprentices who were never eligible for FSM, success rates in 2021/22 generally increased as the deprivation of their home area decreased. There was not a clear pattern for apprentices who were known to have been eligible for FSM.

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Coverage of data

The free school meals eligibility history of a learner is found by matching apprenticeship and adult learning records to historical school records. This uses the Matched Education Dataset. The Matched Education Dataset links datasets to trace a learner's progression through the education system in Wales. It matches records going back to 2010/11. Not all learners are able to be matched.

FSM eligibility history is not available for learners who attended school before 2010/11 or attended school outside of Wales.

Table 1: Proportion of apprentices where FSM eligibility status was known, by age and academic year

Age group	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2021/22
16	96%	96%	94%	94%
17	95%	96%	96%	94%
18	93%	94%	95%	93%
19	92%	93%	93%	94%
20 to 24	33%	49%	65%	87%
25 to 29	[low]	[low]	2%	30%
30 to 64	[low]	[low]	[low]	[low]

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Age group	2016/17	2017/18	2018/19	2021/22
All	38%	32%	33%	45%

Source: Lifelong Learning Wales Record (LLWR), Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC), Matched Education Dataset (MED)

[low] represents a value that is less than 0.5% but greater than zero.

Data can be found in Table 6 of the accompanying spreadsheet

In 2021/22, the FSM eligibility data was available for 45% of apprentices. This is higher than previous years.

The match rate was better for younger apprentices. For learners who were aged 19 or less at the start of their apprenticeship, the match rate was over 90% for all 4 years. The match rate for older age groups has improved over time as more learners are included in the Matched Education Dataset, and should continue to improve. In 2021/22, 59% of apprentices were age 29 or younger at the beginning of their apprenticeship.

Adult learning

FSM eligibility is not a suitable measure for adult learning outcomes currently, due to the low proportion of learners for whom FSM eligibility is available.

In 2021/22, FSM eligibility data was available for only 10% of adult learning activities. This is because most adult learners attended secondary school before the period covered by the Matched Education Dataset. In 2021/22, 78% of adult learners were aged 25 or over when they started their course.

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Notes

All the data contained in this report is in the [accompanying spreadsheet](#).

Further data on apprenticeship and adult learning outcomes can be found in the [Learner outcome measures for work based learning and adult learning](#) reports, as well as key quality information about the measures. Future reports will include information on apprenticeship outcomes by the free school meal eligibility measures explored here. The WIMD based measures will continue to be used as well.

Data sources

Lifelong Learning Record Wales (LLWR) - this is the official source of statistics on learners in work based learning and adult learning in Wales. Learning providers submit the data to Welsh Government. It is collected on a rolling basis. The data used for official statistics is taken in the December after the end of the relevant academic year.

Pupil Level Annual School Census (PLASC) - this is an annual collection of pupil and school level data. It is provided by all maintained schools in Wales in January each year.

Matched Education Dataset (MED) - this links datasets to trace a learner's progression through the education system in Wales. It matches records going back to 2010/11. It is updated annually.

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Suspension of performance measures in 2019/20 and 2020/21

During the first two years of the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic, apprenticeship learning took place, but some apprentices were affected by furlough and redundancies. Adult learning took place in available venues where they existed, otherwise learning was moved online. For both types of provision some assessments were cancelled, delayed or adapted.

Due to the disruption to learning caused by the pandemic, the Welsh Government did not produce any of its usual performance measures for post-16 learning in 2019/20 or 2020/21.

FSM eligibility

Pupils are eligible for **free school meals** if their parents or guardians receive certain means-tested benefits or support payments.

In this report, historical free school meal eligibility is calculated by matching learners back to the school record. The matching is made through the Matched Education Dataset. Not all learners can be matched.

The following learners were not matched to their school record:

- learners who went to school outside of Wales
- learners who finished school before 2010/11
- learners with a missing learner identifier number who also could not be matched by other information

When a learner was matched to their school record, their eligibility for free school meals in secondary school (Years 7 to 11) was used to calculate the

following measures:

Ever FSM

- A learner was eligible for FSM at some point in secondary school.

Never FSM

- A learner was not eligible for FSM at any point in secondary school.

Years FSM

- The number of secondary school years in which a learner was eligible for FSM.

FSM in Year 11

- Whether the learner was eligible for FSM in year 11.

A learner's eligibility status was given as unknown if there were no secondary school records found for the learner.

In some circumstances, a learner couldn't be matched to a record for every year of secondary school. The measures were calculated for the years which could be matched.

If a learner was eligible and not eligible in records for the same year, they were counted as eligible. This might include when a learner went to multiple schools within a year.

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The number of pupils who were FSM eligible may have been over recorded between 2020 and 2022. [The Chief Statistician wrote a blog updated data on pupils eligible for free school meals published following additional validation exercise](#) with more details. This may affect some 16- and 17-year-olds who started their apprenticeship in 2021/22. The issue would affect the data on the number of years they were FSM eligible and whether they were eligible for FSM in year 11, but not whether they were ever FSM eligible.

Rounding

All figures are rounded to the nearest 5. Percentages are rounded to the nearest whole number.

Notes on the use of statistical articles

Statistical articles generally relate to one-off analyses for which there are no updates planned, at least in the short-term, and serve to make such analyses available to a wider audience than might otherwise be the case. They are mainly used to publish analyses that are exploratory in some way, for example:

- introducing a new series of official statistics in development
- a partial analysis of an issue which provides a useful starting point for further research but that nevertheless is a useful analysis in its own right
- drawing attention to research undertaken by other organisations, either commissioned by the Welsh Government or otherwise, where it is useful to highlight the conclusions, or to build further upon the research
- an analysis where the results may not be of as high quality as those in our routine statistical releases and bulletins, but where meaningful conclusions can still be drawn from the results.

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Where quality is an issue, this may arise in one or more of the following ways:

- being unable to accurately specify the timeframe used (as can be the case when using an administrative source)
- the quality of the data source or data used
- other specified reasons.

However, the level of quality will be such that it does not significantly impact upon the conclusions. For example, the exact timeframe may not be central to the conclusions that can be drawn, or it is the order of magnitude of the results, rather than the exact results, that are of interest to the audience.

The analysis presented does not constitute a National Statistic, but may be based on National Statistics outputs and will nevertheless have been subject to careful consideration and detailed checking before publication. An assessment of the strengths and weaknesses in the analysis will be included in the article, for example comparisons with other sources, along with guidance on how the analysis might be used, and a description of the methodology applied.

Articles are subject to the release practices as defined by the [release practices protocol](#), and so, for example, are published on a pre-announced date in the same way as other statistical outputs.

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