

Question and answers: Early Education Funding and 30 hours Childcare

The existing 15 hours of childcare a week, for all 3 and 4 year olds, will be referred to as the universal entitlement. The additional 15 hours of funded childcare a week, for the working parents of 3 and 4 year olds, will be referred to as the extended entitlement.

What is the 30 hours (extended entitlement)?

All 3 and 4 year old children in England are entitled to 15 hours of free early education and childcare a week. This is a total of 570 hours, over a minimum of 38 weeks a year, and is known as the Universal Entitlement.

The government has extended the amount of free early education and childcare a week, from 15 to 30 hours a week for children of working families who meet an eligibility criteria. This means that eligible families will be able to access up to a total of 1,140 hours of free early education and childcare, over a minimum of 38 weeks, a year. This is known as the extended entitlement.

How can I apply for the extended entitlement for my child?

Parents wishing to access the 30 hours free childcare entitlement from September, will now be able to check their eligibility and apply using the Childcare Service System. If you do not have online access, you can contact the HMRC helpdesk to support you with the application process on the following number: 0300 123 4097.

You will need to reconfirm your eligibility every three months, via the online system, to continue accessing the extended entitlement. A reminder will be sent to you by HMRC one month before your eligibility period ends.

Am I eligible to receive the extended entitlement?

All 3 and 4 year olds will continue to be eligible for 15 hours a week of free early education. This is a universal entitlement for all children starting the term after their third birthday.

The extended entitlement is in addition to the universal entitlement, providing an extra 15 hours a week of free childcare, for families that meet the eligibility criteria. It will be made available to families where:

- both parents are working (or the sole parent is working in a lone parent family)
- each parent earns on average a weekly minimum equivalent to 16 hours at National Living Wage, or if under 25 years of age, the equivalent of 16 hours at National Minimum Wage
- each parent has an income of up to £100,000 a year
- The extended entitlement will also be made available to families where:
- both parents are employed but one, or both parents, is temporarily away from the workplace on parental, maternity or paternity leave

- both parents are employed but one, or both parents, is temporarily away from the workplace on adoption leave
- both parents are employed but one, or both parents, is temporarily away from the workplace on statutory sick pay
- one parent is employed and one parent has substantial caring responsibilities based on specific benefits received for caring
- one parent is employed and one parent is disabled or incapacitated based on receipt of specific benefits.

Please note:

- parents on zero hours contracts will be able to access the extended entitlement if they meet the eligibility criteria
- parents that are newly self-employed (i.e. in a start-up period) do not need to demonstrate that they meet the eligibility criteria for the first 12 months

Where can my child access the extended entitlement?

Childcare providers on the Ofsted Early Years Register can offer the extended entitlement although they may not choose to participate in offering the extended hours. Childcare providers include childminders, day nurseries, playgroups, pre-schools, nursery schools, schools with nursery classes and out-of-school providers. Nannies will not be able to offer the extended entitlement as they are not on the Early Years Ofsted register.

You are able to take up the extended entitlement hours across a maximum of two sites in one day (this includes different types of provision on one site). This is to support the wellbeing of your child by minimising the number of transfers experienced in one day.

By setting the limit over one day, you are able to use a combination of providers at different points in the year.

How can the extended entitlement hours be used?

The extended hours can be used as flexibly as possible over the year. There is no requirement for them to be taken on a particular day of the week. However, you will not be able to have:

- more than 10 funded hours a day
- funded provision any time before 6am or after 8pm
- more than 30 funded hours a week
- more than 1,140 funded hours a year

When can my eligible child start to receive the extended entitlement?

A parent can claim for 30 hours the term after both of the following conditions are met (whichever is the later):

- The child's third birthday
- The date they apply and receive a 30 hour eligibility code from HMRC

For example, a parent whose child turns 3 in November applies for a 30 hour code in September and receives an eligibility code will be able to start claiming funding from January (provided that the parent still meets the eligibility criteria in January)

Child born between or date you apply and receive the 30 hour code (whichever is later):	Can receive free hours from
1 September to 31 August	September (Autumn)
1 September to 31 December	January (Spring)
1 January to 31 March	April (Summer)
1 April to 31 August	September (Autumn)

Can I access the extended entitlement for a child I foster?

The government has extended eligibility for 30 hours childcare to children in foster care where the foster parents meet certain eligibility criteria. Children in foster care will be able to receive 30 hours of free childcare, if the following criteria are met:

- The decision to access the extended hours must be consistent with the child’s care plan (this will be decided by the foster care team)
- In single parent foster families, the foster parent engages in paid work outside their role as a foster parent (there is no minimum earnings limit)
- In two parent foster families, both partners must be engaged in paid work outside their role as a foster parent. If one partner is not a foster parent then they must be in qualifying paid work and meet the eligibility criteria, please refer to “Am I eligible to receive the extended entitlement?” paragraph above.

Further details on how Foster Carers can apply for the 30 hours will be released soon.

What happens if I no longer meet the eligibility criteria?

If your family no longer meets the eligibility criteria, your child will not immediately lose their childcare place for the extended entitlement, as there will be a grace period to give you the opportunity to regain employment. If circumstances change during the grace period, you can reapply again and if eligible your child can continue to receive the extended hours.

The grace period dates can be found below:

Date parent reconfirms	If no longer eligible, grace period end date
1 January – 10 February	31 March
11 February – 31 March	31 August
1 April – 26 May	31 August
27 May – 31 August	31 December
1 September – 21 October	31 December
22 October – 31 December	31 March

After the grace period, if you still do not meet the eligibility criteria, your child will no longer be able to access the extended entitlement, but will still be able to receive the universal 15 hours a week (570 hours a year) of free childcare for all 3 and 4 year olds.