

Frequently Asked Questions for Parents 30 hours free childcare for 3 and 4 year olds

Existing offer of 15 hours Free Nursery Education for 3 and 4 year olds:

Currently, all children aged 3 and 4 are eligible for 15 hours per week (term time only) free nursery education which can start the term following their third birthday until they start school in the September following their 4th birthday. This is known as the universal offer.

From September 2017, many working parents could be entitled to 30 hours per week free childcare, which is an additional 15 hours per week. These are known as the extended hours.

Will my child be eligible for 30 hours of free childcare?

Your child will be eligible from the term after their 3rd birthday, if they meet the following criteria:

- Both parents are working – or the sole parent is working in a lone parent family
- Each parent earns, on average, a weekly amount equivalent to 16 hours at National Minimum Wage or National Living Wage
- Each parent earns less than £100,000 per year
- The family lives in England

What if one parent in a couple isn't working?

Families where one parent does not work, or neither parent works, will not usually be eligible for the offer unless:

- Both parents are employed but one (or both) is temporarily away from the workplace on:
 - parental, maternity or paternity leave
 - adoption leave
 - statutory sick pay
- One parent works 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)

Foster Carers – Foster carers are eligible for the extended entitlement if they meet the earning or carer criteria for the **own** children, however, they are **not eligible** for the extended entitlement for the children that they foster.

Will I be expected to pay a contribution for the additional childcare?

Providers can charge parents a deposit to secure their child's funded place but should refund the deposit in full to parents within a reasonable time scale. Settings should refund the deposit only after the census has taken place in which the child has been included and funding has been paid to the setting.

If a parent withdraws the child prior to the census the deposit will not be refunded. Parents must be informed of this if providers decide to charge a deposit.

Childcare providers will be able to charge for any childcare over and above the free entitlement hours taken. Childcare providers are able to decide which hours across the day/year they will offer free and which hours will need to be paid for. Additional fees may also be payable for lunch, or specific activities offered by the provider, i.e. dance / language lessons.

Will all nurseries / childminders provide 30 hours?

The Department for Education (DfE) have stated that no provider will be forced to offer 30 hours of free childcare. Therefore you may not be able to access the additional free hours at a place of your choice, or at your current childcare provider.

Can I split the 30 hours childcare between more than one nursery or childminder?

Children are able to take up their entitlement to a funded place at times that best support their learning, and at times which fit with the needs of parents to enable them to work or increase their hours of work if they wish to do so. There are certain rules that apply:

- You can use a maximum of three childcare providers
- No session can be longer than 10 hours
- No session can be shorter than 3 hours between 9am – 3.30pm
- No minimum session length for funded places taken before 9am or after 3.30pm
- Childcare cannot be taken before 7am or after 7pm

Parents may be able to take up their child's free funded hours flexibly, for example during school holidays rather than just term times. The offer is for 30 hours a week free childcare based on 38 weeks a year, generally to fall in line with the school terms.

Depending on your chosen provider, you may be able to spread this across the year. If you do this, you will receive fewer than 30 hours a week, but over a longer time. Some providers may offer funded hours at weekends.

Individual early years childcare providers will decide on the model/s of delivery which suits them best in relation to staffing and financial viability.

What if I can't get a space at my chosen nursery?

Childcare providers including schools and nursery schools will have an 'Admissions Policy' in place which will clearly state how places will be allocated and the criteria they intend to use for selection.

If you are unable to secure a place at your first choice there will be sufficient places across the city and the Families Information Service will be able to support you to find childcare to meet your needs. The link below will take you to a list of childcare providers in Sunderland.

<https://sunderland.fsd.org.uk/kb5/sunderland/fis/results.page?familycategories=2150>

Can I move my child to a different provider within the year?

Yes you will be able to move your child to a different provider within the year, as long as there are spaces available. However, a child would not be able to move setting if they are within their grace period.

A census return is collected from all settings each term. This determines which setting is allocated the funding for the child for that particular term. If the move is to take place after census, the providers would have to come to an agreement between themselves for the relevant amount of funding to be transferred between settings.

Can I take up my 30 hour place in a different Local Authority to where I live?

Yes you can take up your 30 hour place at any setting that offers the extended hours, provided they have places available.

If my child is 4 and has started primary school, can I use some of the 30 hours to cover outside-school childcare?

No – because the time your child is at school counts as the free childcare hours.

However, if you have officially 'deferred' your child's start at school you can claim the 30 hours childcare until the term after they become statutory school age (5), at which time they should move into a primary school.

What if one parent loses their job once the child is accessing a 30 hour place?

As the offer is for working parents, if either parent is no longer in employment then entitlement to the additional hours will be removed. However, there will be a "grace period" which will be put in place to allow parents time to find a new job.

You should speak to your childcare provider as soon as your circumstances change to find out when your entitlement will come to an end.

How do I apply to receive 30 hours a week free childcare?

You will be able to check whether you are eligible by completing an online application form at <https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk/> . They also have a helpline for parents who need assistance. Make sure you have the following information to hand in advance:

- Your National Insurance number (or, if you're self-employed, your Unique Taxpayer Reference)
- The date you started, or are due to start work
- Details of any Government support or benefits you receive

Eligible parents will receive an 'eligibility code' that they can take to a childcare provider. The provider will then validate the eligibility code by using the Local Authority's Provider Portal.

When should I apply?

30 hour places follow school terms. Applications should be made during the term before you want your child to start (they are eligible from the term after their 3rd birthday). The deadlines for applications for **each term** are:

Spring – 31st December
Summer – 31st March
Autumn – 31st August

You need to allow time to find a provider and for them to verify your eligibility code before your child will be able to start.

When the provider verifies your eligibility code, they will be able to provide you with your eligibility end date. This is the date by which you must reconfirm your eligibility.

How do I maintain eligibility for a 30 hour free entitlement place?

You must reconfirm your eligibility every three months (from your eligibility end date) via the HMRC website or else you will lose the entitlement, subject to a grace period.

You can reconfirm up to 4 weeks before your eligibility end date. You will be contacted by HMRC advising you to log into your Childcare Service account in order to re-validate your code. You will also be sent a reminder 2 weeks before.

If you fail to reconfirm your eligibility you are at risk of losing your childcare at the end of your grace period.

What if I miss the reconfirmation deadline?

You **must** reconfirm your eligibility every three months (from your eligibility end date) via the HMRC website. If you miss your eligibility end date, you should reconfirm as soon as you can. As long as this is within your grace period, your childcare place should continue. You should discuss this with your childcare provider.

You need to be aware that if you reconfirm late, it may impact on your eligibility for a place and you might have to reconfirm again within a short time. You need to check your dates carefully.