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This guide aims to answer the most common questions asked about the Free Entitlements Funding. It is written for parents and carers and explains how the funding is delivered in Kent by Childcare Providers.

Why do I need to sign a Parental Declaration Form?

You must sign a parental declaration form with each provider your child attends for their funded entitlement. This helps make sure the funding is paid correctly and fairly to each provider.

You should take a photo of each parental declaration form you sign, including any later changes, so you have a copy for your records.

How many funded hours can my child receive and over how many weeks of the year?

It depends on your child's age and your circumstances:

- **2-year-olds (EL2):** up to 15 hours per week if eligible
- **3- and 4-year-olds:** up to 15 hours per week (for all children)
- **9 months – 4 years old - working parents entitlement:** up to 30 hours per week if eligible

Parents should be aware that the eligibility to a free entitlement place does not offer a guarantee of a place at any one provider or a particular pattern of provision.

Each childcare provider has their own pattern of delivery which should be made available to you before you agree to take a funded place at that provision. The provider should make clear which hours will be funded and which hours (if any) will be chargeable.

Providers can offer funded hours across 38 weeks of the year for a maximum of 15/30 hours per week depending on the entitlement. Providers may 'stretch' the entitlement up to 52 weeks if they are open all year. However if the entitlement is stretched over more weeks, the number of hours each week will be lower, but the total funded hours over the year will still equal 570 or 1140 hours.

If a provider is open for fewer than 38 weeks, you may not be able to access the full 570 or 1140 hours, as the weekly funded hours cannot be increased to make up the difference. Hours also cannot be saved up to use at a later date.

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How many providers can I use to access the funded hours?

Your child can attend a maximum of two providers in a single day. If your child attends more than one provider, you must make sure the weekly funded hours do not go above the weekly entitlement.

If one or more of your providers is stretching the entitlement, you must make sure you do not exceed the total funded hours available. You can speak to your provider about this.

You must show on each parental declaration form how many funded hours your child is taking at each provider.

If more than the funded hours available are claimed across multiple providers, the local authority will adjust the funding, and you may be charged for any hours that are not funded.

If your child splits their funded entitlement across more than one provider, you will be asked to nominate a main provider. This helps if your eligibility changes or if the local authority needs to reallocate funding because of an overclaim.

Can I increase my child's funded hours after signing the parental declaration form?

You can increase your child's funded hours up to the designated census week each term. Please speak to your provider about the relevant dates.

You will need to sign a new parental declaration form showing the revised hours before your child starts the additional funded hours.

After the designated census week, funded hours for the Universal and Working Parent Entitlements cannot be changed or increased. The exception is the Early Learning for 2 Year Olds funded hours, which can be increased during the term due to the flexibility needed to support these children.

What happens to my funding if I move my child to a new provider during the term?

If you move your child to a new provider **before** designated census week, the local authority will fund the complete weeks attended at the first provider/s and the remaining funded weeks at the new provider.

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If you move your child to a new provider **before** or during the designated census week, but your new provider does not submit a claim in time by the local authority's deadline, then funding cannot be moved. You can ask your old provider to transfer any remaining funding. This is entirely at your old provider's discretion, and the local authority will not get involved. If the funding is not transferred, you will need to pay the new provider for the remainder of the term.

If you move your child to a new provider **during** the designated census week, the local authority will fund each provider for the term based on the hours attended at each provision.

If you move your child **after** census week, the funding will remain with the provider/s that have already claimed the funding, but you can ask your old provider to transfer any remaining funding. This is entirely at your old provider's discretion, and the local authority will not get involved. If the funding is not transferred, you will need to pay the new provider for the remainder of the term.

Can my provider charge for meals, consumables, additional hours or extra services?

Government funding is intended to provide 15 or 30 hours a week of free, high-quality, flexible early education and care. These funded hours must be available free of charge to parents, which means there must be no mandatory charges linked to the funded hours.

Government funding does not cover the cost of meals, snacks, consumables, additional hours, or extra services. Providers can charge for these items, but only if they are optional and not a condition of accessing the funded place.

Your provider must clearly itemise any additional costs on the parental declaration form.

You should review these charges and agree them with the provider before your child takes up their funded place.

By signing the parental declaration form, you are agreeing to any optional extras listed alongside the funded hours and the charges connected to them. You can discuss alternatives with your provider if needed.

If your circumstances change, a new declaration form must be completed so that your child's funded hours and any optional extras are recorded correctly. To minimise unnecessary printing, it is acceptable for your provider to print only the page containing the amendment, update the information, have you the parent sign and date the revised section, and then attach this to your original document.

What is free – and what might I be charged for?

- ✓ Always free
 - Your funded childcare hours
- ✗ Optional services (you can say no)
 - Meals and snacks
 - Nappies or consumables
 - Trips or special activities

You **do not** have to agree to access optional services to take up your funded childcare hours, however, should you choose to access additional services on top of your funded hours then you will be expected to pay for these.

? Chargeable

- Extra hours outside of your funded childcare hours (known as wraparound hours) are chargeable at the providers business rate.

What do I do if I'm unhappy with my childcare provider?

- Start by raising concerns directly with the provider
- If this does not resolve the issue, you can contact:
Kent Children and Families Information Service (KCFIS)
☎ 03000 41 23 23 Email: kentcfis@theeducationpeople.org
They can offer advice, including how to make a formal complaint.

Where can I access more information on the Free Entitlements?

- <https://beststartinlife.gov.uk/> - the government's website explaining the entitlements and the criteria for each one.
- <https://www.kent.gov.uk/about-the-council/contact-us/help-with-childcare-and-free-childcare-places> - Kent County Council's website for finding childcare, checking funding information, applying for Early Learning for 2 Year Old Funding, and leaving feedback or complaints.
- Kent Children and Families Information Service (KCFIS) ☎ 03000 41 23 23 – Email: kentcfis@theeducationpeople.org – Kent CFIS have advisors that parents can speak to regarding their childcare provider, how the funding is delivered in Kent or how their funding has been claimed.

This FAQ is intended as clear guidance for parents/carers. Your childcare provider can explain how funding works for your child's individual circumstances.