

30 Hours of Free Childcare – Provider Questions and Answers:

Q: What legislation applies to the 30 Hours (extended entitlement)?

A: The government is introducing the 30 Hours of Free Childcare as part of the [Childcare Act 2016](#). The aim is to help working families and allow more parents to work if they want to.

From 1 September 2017, free childcare will be available for up to 30 hours a week (for up to 38 weeks a year) for working parents of three and four year olds.

[Early education and childcare statutory guidance for local authorities March 2017](#)

To find out more visit - <https://childcare-support.tax.service.gov.uk/>

Q: Are all children aged three and four entitled to 30 Hours of Free Childcare:

A: No, for more details use the following link www.childcarechoices.gov.uk

Q: Who is eligible for the 30 Hours offer?

A: To qualify for the full 30 Hours of Free Childcare, each parent (or the sole parent in a single parent family) will need to earn, on average, the equivalent of 16 hours on the national minimum wage per week and no more than £100,000 per year. A family with an annual household income of £199,999 would be eligible if each parent earns just under £100,000. Self-employed parents and parents on zero-hours contracts will be eligible if they meet the average earnings threshold.

The additional funded hours will also be available where one parent is employed but the other has substantial caring responsibilities or is disabled.

Q: What if the child is with a foster parent?

A: Foster carers cannot claim the 30 Hours of Free Childcare for children they foster. The child can still access their 15 hours of funded childcare for three and four year olds up until they start school.

Q: What age can a child qualify?

A: The child will be eligible to claim the 30 Hours of Free Childcare from the beginning of the term after their 3rd birthday. Terms start in January, April or September.

For example, if a child turns three on the 6 July, they will be eligible from the September that year. In order for a child to qualify for the 30 Hours of Free Childcare from September 2017, they must have turned three years old on or before the 31 August 2017.

Q: If a parent works less than 16 hours a week, can they still be eligible?

A: Yes. Eligibility is based on income earned, not hours worked, so if a parent works for less than 16 hours, but in that time, earns more than the equivalent of 16 hours per week at national living wage (or minimum wage for under 25s), they will still be eligible for the 30 Hours offer.

In order for children aged three and four to qualify, both parents must be working or the sole parent must be working in a lone parent family.

An adopted child qualifies as long as the parents meet the eligibility criteria.

Parents can use 30 Hours of Free Childcare if they're already getting Universal Credit or tax credits, and they can still apply for 30 Hours of Free Childcare if they:

- are taking paid time off work, such as maternity leave, paternity leave or sick leave
- are temporarily away from England for a period of up to 6 months, such as if they're in the military (on duty)

They can also still apply for 30 Hours of Free Childcare if either of them are employed or self-employed and one of them gets one or more of the following benefits:

- Contribution-based Employment and Support Allowance
- Carer's Allowance
- Incapacity Benefit or long-term Incapacity Benefit
- Severe Disablement Allowance
- National Insurance credits because of incapacity or limited capability for work
- Or, if you have been assessed as having limited capability for work for Universal Credit purposes

They are **not** eligible if they are:

- in receipt of a childcare grant
- a full-time student/an intern
- not entitled to receive public funds

For further information visit:

<https://childcare-support.tax.service.gov.uk/moreinfo/2>

All 3 and 4 year olds and eligible 2 year olds will remain entitled to 15 hours of early education per week during term time, regardless of the employment status of their parent(s).

Q: Do both parents have to be in employment?

A: Yes, both parents (in a dual parent family) must be in employment unless one is on leave, has caring responsibilities or receives disability benefits. For lone parent families, the lone parent must be in employment. Parents who are studying or in training will **not** be eligible unless this is combined with paid work which meets the minimum average earnings threshold.

Q: What if one or both parents are self-employed?

A: As long as they earn at least the minimum amount, but less than the upper threshold of £100,000 each, they will be eligible for the 30 hours free childcare

Q: What happens if parents/carers are on zero hour contracts?

A: Providing they work on average two weeks out of every three and when they are working they earn the equivalent of at least 25 hours at the national living wage or national minimum wage (depending on their age), their child will be eligible for the 30 Hours of Free Childcare.

Q: Do childcare providers have to deliver the 30 Hours?

A: No. The extended free entitlement offer is optional for providers.

Q: If the childcare provider chooses not to offer 30 Hours, will they still provide the universal 15 hour free entitlement?

A: Yes, providers are free to opt not to deliver the 30 Hour scheme but continue to deliver the existing universal 15 hours.

Q: What do I do if the childcare provider is not able to offer the full 30 Hours?

A: We would hope that as many childcare providers will offer the total 30 Hours to give parents/carers their preferred choice. This might not be possible e.g. they are not open all day or the provider has chosen not to provide the 30 Hours. It might be possible to consider a **shared** childcare model with another childcare provider or childminder. How this might work requires some thinking and planning. The intention is to look at the different options to meet different childcare needs.

Q: Can parents/carers use more than one childcare provider for their 30 Hours?

A: There will be no limitation on the number of providers. However, the 30 Hours will be limited to two locations in a single day to avoid the potential negative impact on children of multiple transitions between locations.

Q: What if parents/carers want to access a childcare provider but there are no places?

A: It will be for them to decide if they wish to go on a waiting list or consider another provider.

Q: What types of childcare providers can offer 30 Hours?

A: All OFSTED registered approved childcare providers who currently offer grant funded early education can choose to offer the 30 Hours of Free Childcare. This includes childminders, nursery schools/classes, day nurseries, pre-schools and those Out of School settings who register for this.

Q: How many hours are free?

A: The current universal entitlement of 15 hours for all 3 and 4 year olds will continue. Every three and four year old will still be entitled to 15 Hours of Free Childcare per week for 38 weeks of the year - a total of 570 hours per year.

In addition to this the Government is going to increase this entitlement for eligible working parents of three and four year olds from 1 September 2017. Working parents will be entitled to an additional 15 Hours of Free Childcare a week to make a total of 30 hours. This will be offered for 38 weeks of the year - a total of 1,140 hours per year.

It is the childcare provider's choice if they offer the 30 Hours. Parents should speak to their current provider or any provider they are thinking of using.

Q: If a parent/carer wants more than 15 but less than 30 hours, will these hours be free?

A: Yes, if the parent is eligible for the additional hours, these will be free with a 30 Hours registered provider, even if they don't take up the full 30.

Q: What funding is Kent County Council receiving?

A: Kent County Council (KCC) is receiving £4.48 per hour from 1 April 2017 and it is a Government requirement that no more than 7% can be retained by KCC for the 2017-18 financial year, reducing to 5% for the 2018-19 financial year. KCC is fully compliant with the 2017-18 limit which is that we pay our providers at least £4.17 per hour.

We are paying our providers a base rate of **£3.91** from the 1 April 2017, increasing to **£3.96 from 1 September 2017**. In addition to the base rate, we will be paying our providers a number of supplements which are dependent on eligibility. These supplements, on average, equate to a further £0.26 per hour which is in addition to the base rate.

So from 1 April 2017 we will be paying an average rate to providers of £4.17 per hour (£3.91+ £0.26) which will increase to £4.22 per hour (£3.96 + £0.26) from 1 September 2017.

We are planning to be fully compliant in 2018-19 with the lower 5% limit.

Q: Are there any additional costs parents/carers might have to pay for?

A: Government funding is intended to deliver 15 or 30 Hours a week of free, high quality, flexible childcare. It is not intended to cover the costs of meals, other consumables, additional childcare hours or any additional services offered by the childcare settings.

Childcare settings may therefore charge for meals and snacks as part of the free entitlement place and they may also charge for consumables such as nappies and sun cream and for services such as trips but they cannot make these charges a condition of accessing the free place.

Q: Can providers spread the cost through the year?

A: The new 30 Free Hours entitlement should be flexible. The phrase '30 Free Hours a week' is based on a childcare provider only being open for the 38 weeks during the year (term-time only). However, childcare providers will have the option to offer the same total number of hours (1,140 per year) over more than 38 weeks.

For example, if a childcare provider is open 48 weeks of the year, then they could offer 23.75 funded hours per week all year round. Or if a provider is open 51 weeks of the year, then they could offer 22.25 funded hours per week all year round. This is known as a stretched offer.

However, not all childcare providers may be able to offer the stretched offer. Providers can claim the 30 Free Hours entitlement from their local authority using the following criteria (as of March 2017):

- No sessions to be longer than 10 hours
- No minimum session length (subject to the requirements of registration on the [Ofsted](#) Early Years Register)
- Hours - not before 6.00am or after 8.00pm
- A maximum of two sites in a single day

No childcare provider can offer more than 30 free hours per week over fewer than 38 weeks.

If a child attends a childcare provider for more than the free hours available in a claim period, parents will be responsible for these fees. Parents should also check whether there are any other additional charges such as for meals and snacks.

Q: What happens if parent/carers are no longer eligible part way through the year?

A: They will receive a 'grace period' – this means they will be able to keep their childcare for a short period. The grace period is set:

Date Parent receives ineligible decision on reconfirmation:	Grace Period End date:
1 Jan – 10 Feb	31 March
11 Feb – 31 March	31 August
1 April – 26 May	31 August
27 May – 31 August	31 December
1 September – 21 October	31 December
2 October – 31 December	31 March

Q: What if there is a change in income or parents lose their jobs?

A: If either parent starts earning less than the minimum income threshold or stops working altogether, you will be given a short '**grace period**' (this is set by the Government) to give you time to find a new job and start earning at least the minimum amount again.

Q: What if parents/carers are separated?

A: In cases where parents are separated, eligibility applies to the parent with whom the child 'normally lives'.

Q: What are the changes in Tax credits and vouchers?

A: Parents/carers claiming childcare tax credits would need to check how these will be affected by childcare vouchers before signing up

Q: What if we decide we cannot/do not want to offer 30 Hours?

A: Providers can decide at any time to opt out.

Q: Who is responsible for determining who is eligible for the 30 Hour offer?

A: Parents will be able to apply for both the 30 Hours scheme and the tax-free childcare scheme through a joint online application being developed by HMRC, which will include an eligibility checking system and confirm the grace period.

Parents who provide false information about their eligibility can be fined between £300 and £3000.

If you have specific questions not covered in this document then we would ask that you speak to your Childcare Sufficiency Officer who will be visiting you during April and May.

