

# **Free Early Education for 2, 3 and 4 year olds**

## **Processes for Claiming Funding**

## Introduction

This document containing guidelines and requirements is designed to assist providers to understand the Kent County Council (KCC) administrative process around the payment of the Free Early Education (FEE) for 2, 3 and 4 year olds.

The provision of the FEE has been set under the Department for Education (DfE) Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on the Delivery of Free Early Education for Two, Three and Four Year Olds and the Kent Provider Agreement. KCC is responsible for the way public money is spent and is subject to audit requirements imposed by District Auditors.

Within Kent there are nearly 1500 settings varying in size, type, accommodation, opening weeks, facilities and experience. Currently KCC is responsible for processing the 2, 3 and 4 year old Free Early Education funding for up to 30,000 children in each period of entitlement. The practices to administer these numbers are as flexible as possible but it is recognised that some providers will find conflict in the way the scheme is administered in contrast to the way they run their businesses. Whilst KCC sympathise with this they are unable to accommodate different processes for different providers.

# KELSI

KELSI is an online resource for education professionals provided by Kent County Council. On this website Management Information publish all their documents which they need to supply to providers of the Free Early Education.

<https://www.kelsi.org.uk/early-years/sufficiency-and-sustainability/free-early-education>

Here you will find information relating to:

- Free For 2 Funding
  - Eligibility Criteria
  - Free for Two Payment Schedule (detailing the dates claims should be received by and when payments are made)
  - Kent Provider Agreement
  - Parental Declaration Form
  - Synergy FIS Provider Portal Guidance Notes for submitting 2 year old FEE claims
  
- 3 & 4 Year Old Funding
  - Kent Provider Agreement
  - Parental Declaration Form
  - Fees for 3 and 4 year old Universal Funding Errors
  - Synergy FIS Provider Portal Guidance Notes for submitting 3 and 4 year old FEE claims
  - PVI Calendar
  - 30 hours of Free Childcare Eligibility Checker
  - Privacy Notices/GDPR
  
- Early Years Pupil Premium and Disability Access Fund

## Funding

**Management Information** is the team within KCC that is responsible for collecting the information required to process the payments for the Free Early Education for 2, 3 and 4 year olds.

**Free For 2 funding** is available to eligible families for a maximum of 570 hours per child for their funding year. When a child can access a place is dependent on their date of birth and can be identified using the chart below.

Children Born in Period	Child First Becomes Eligible for Free For 2 Funding	Terms Included in the Child's Funding Year
1 <sup>st</sup> April to 31 <sup>st</sup> August	The start of term 1 following their second birthday (after Summer holidays)	Autumn, Spring & Summer
1 <sup>st</sup> September to 31 <sup>st</sup> December	The start of term 3 following their second birthday (after Christmas / New Year holiday)	Spring, Summer & Autumn
1 <sup>st</sup> January to 31 <sup>st</sup> March	The start of term 5 following their second birthday (after Spring holiday)	Summer, Autumn & Spring

**3 and 4 year old funding** is available to all children who meet the age criteria, for a maximum of 570 hours per child for their funding year, known as universal entitlement/funding.

**30 Hours of Free Childcare** for 3 and 4 year olds is available to eligible working families and is the 570 universal entitlement plus an additional 570 hours, totaling 1140 hours per child for their funding year, known as extended entitlement/funding.

When a child's first year of funding starts is dependent on their date of birth and can be identified using the chart below.

Children Born in Period	Child First Becomes Eligible for 3 & 4 Funding	Terms Included in the Child's Funding Year
1 <sup>st</sup> April to 31 <sup>st</sup> August	The start of term 1 following their third birthday (after Summer holidays)	Autumn, Spring & Summer
1 <sup>st</sup> September to 31 <sup>st</sup> December	The start of term 3 following their third birthday (after Christmas / New Year holiday)	Spring, Summer & Autumn
1 <sup>st</sup> January to 31 <sup>st</sup> March	The start of term 5 following their third birthday (after Spring holiday)	Summer, Autumn & Spring

Providers should be aware that fees may be charged for incorrect 3 and 4 year old **universal** funding claims, more information about this can be found on KELSI.

Free Early Education is administered over three academic terms, Autumn, Spring and Summer.

Providers can offer the funding between 38 and up to 52 weeks of the year (provided they are open to children for 52 weeks a year). However, Providers can only claim on the Synergy system in one of the following options:

- Over 38 weeks at a maximum of 15 hours per week known as 'term time' funding or;
- Over 48 weeks at a maximum of 12 hours per week known as 'stretched' funding.

If Providers offer parents funding over more than 48 weeks per year, they should claim the funding over either 38 or 48 weeks and stretch the funding themselves by tracking the hours the child attends to ensure that all funded hours claimed have been offered to the child. Trackers to assist with this are available on KELSI.

If Providers claim the maximum 12 hours per week over 48 weeks, the total hours claimed for the child would be 576. Therefore, in the last term of a child's funding year, KCC will calculate when the maximum 570 hours has been reached and the payment will be capped. This will leave the parent/guardian responsible for payment of the remaining 6 hours if they wish their child to attend or to remove the child for the 6 non funded hours.

## Synergy FIS Provider Portal

Free Early Education funding claims should be submitted to Management Information via the Synergy FIS Provider Portal. Management Information will contact providers by email to advise when the portal is open for data collections and a date by which the submissions must be made.

The link for the Synergy FIS Provider Portal is:

<https://kent.cloud.servelec-synergy.com/Synergy/Providers>

Guidance on how to use the portal and submit claims is available on KELSI.

## Parental Declaration

Every child claiming the Free Early Education funding must have a Parental Declaration form completed and signed by the parent/guardian. These forms are retained by the setting but may be requested by KCC.

All the sections of the form must be completed prior to the submission of a funding claim.

At the beginning of the next academic term, if the child wishes to remain and continue claiming at the setting, the continuation section can be used to record the details and signature for the continued claim.

A setting can decide whether to collect:

- a separate declaration form for each term  
or
- one form that is used to record up to the six academic terms that makes up to two years of funding

If the continuation section is to be used, the relevant section must be signed no more than 6 weeks prior to the end of the previous claim period. If a Parental Declaration form is signed but the child does not return for the new term, the form is then void.

## Privacy Notices

Settings should ensure all parents/carers of children eligible for the FEE receive a Privacy Notice. The revised Early Years Setting Privacy Notice template is available on KELSI.

## 30 Hours Free Childcare Eligibility Checker

Providers must validate the 11 digit 30 hour code provided by parents prior to submitting a headcount or adjustment claim via the Synergy FIS Provider Portal. The link to the 30 Hour Eligibility Checker can be found on KELSI.

## Payment Schedules – 2 year old funding

Every year Management Information produces a payment schedule for the FF2 funding payments. This is an information sheet containing dates regarding payment collection periods and payment dates.

## PVI Calendar – 3 and 4 year old funding

Every year Management Information produces a PVI Calendar. This is an information sheet containing useful dates regarding payment periods, funded weeks, headcount weeks and payment dates. It also shows the date of birth range for each term in the current academic year.

## Early Years Census

In January each year every setting registered with KCC **must** submit a census return to Management Information regardless of whether they are claiming for any children at that time. The census is a data collection that will include information that is sent to the Department for Education (DfE) to enable KCC to receive the funding to pay providers.

## Free for Two Application Process

Providers can complete a Free for Two (FF2) online application form at [www.kent.gov.uk/freefor2](http://www.kent.gov.uk/freefor2) for each family with a child in the correct dob range that enquires about a FF2 place. Alternatively, the parent can complete the online application themselves.

Upon submission of the application, there is a facility to download a PDF of the eligibility result. A child cannot be accepted under the terms of the funding scheme until a copy of this PDF has been seen by the provider. A child cannot be funded if eligibility has not been confirmed. If a child is not eligible, an email explaining why is sent and parents should be informed.

## Free for Two Funding – Actuals and Adjustments

There are three/four payment runs (depending on the term being claimed for) for Free for Two funding and claims are made via the Synergy Provider Portal. If Providers are submitting their claim in time for the first payment run, this is submitted as an “Actual” on the provider portal. For all other payment runs that term, they are submitted as an “Adjustment.” Guidance on how to use the Provider Portal to submit claims can be found on KELSI. The FF2 Payment Schedule outlining the deadlines that claims need to be submitted by and payment dates can also be found on KELSI. **Please note Free for Two funding does not require an estimate claim.**

## Three and Four Year Old Funding - Estimate Claim

The first payment for universal and extended funding in a term is called an **estimate claim**. Towards the end of each term Management Information will contact all registered Providers, via the email address that has been provided by the setting, to invite them to complete an estimate claim on the Synergy FIS Provider Portal for the next term (i.e. in November Providers would enter the estimate information on Synergy for the following Spring term). This is non-mandatory so it is up to the provider whether they choose to complete this data collection. The estimate will collect the following information regarding the forthcoming term:

1. The number of weeks the setting is offering funding
2. The total number of hours being claimed for the term. (For example if you have 2 children claiming 30 hours per week (the universal and extended entitlement) then the answer to this question would be 60).

Based on the estimated information provided, Management Information will then make a payment at the beginning of the new term. This is called the **Interim Payment** and is calculated for half the term to provide cash flow until the balancing payment is made.

Please be aware that if an estimate claim is submitted for the term and subsequently there are not any eligible 3&4 year olds claiming in the headcount week of that term; the estimate payment made will have to be repaid to Kent County Council.

## Three and Four Year Old Funding - Headcount Claim (Actuals)

The second payment for universal and extended funding is based upon a mandatory data collection which occurs three times a year, a few weeks after the start of each term known as **headcount week**. This will collect the details of the children who are attending each setting and who wish to claim the 3 and 4 year old funding for the current term.

Prior to headcount week all registered Providers will be contacted by Management Information, via the email address that has been provided by the setting, to request that a headcount claim is completed. This is a compulsory collection of information for any children who wish to claim the 3 and 4 year old funding.

A funding claim can only be made for a child who:

- attends the setting during headcount week
- is within the date of birth range
- is eligible for the extended entitlement (where applicable)
- whose parent/carer has completed a Parental Declaration Form

The funding information must be input via the Synergy FIS Provider Portal. Even if the child was included in an estimate submission or claimed for in a previous term you must ensure that their details are on your headcount claim.

Using the information from the headcount claim a payment will be calculated for the whole term, if an interim payment was made this will be deducted and the **balancing payment** is made at the start of the second half of the term.

## Three and Four Year Old Funding - Overallocations

If a universal and/or extended funding claim is received by Management Information for the same child from two or more settings and the hours total more than 15 per week, either universal and/or extended, this results in an overallocation claim for the child. In these instances, payment for the child will be withheld from both settings' balancing payments.

Overallocation forms are then sent to all settings involved for the parent to complete to clarify their claim. These forms should then be returned to Management Information and as long as the new claim is for a maximum of 15 hours or less (universal and/or extended entitlement), payment will be made before the end of the academic term.

If both settings have signed parental declaration forms and have evidence of attendance for the child during headcount week then they are both entitled to claim funding for the entire term. However, if no agreement can be reached to make the claims total 15 hours (universal and/or extended entitlement) or less then Management Information will apportion the funding based on the attendance during headcount week.

## Three and Four Year Old Funding – Capping

A child's funded year starts in the term they become eligible for 3&4 year old funding, even if they do not take a funded place straight away. Before a headcount payment is processed Management Information will identify those children who have come to the end of their funded year and calculate the total number of funded hours received. If this exceeds 570, the additional hours will be capped and deducted from the headcount payment. Providers are informed via email which children have been capped and for how many hours.

## Three and Four Year Old Funding - Adjustments

### **Late Joiner Adjustments:**

Any child who joins a setting after headcount week can claim the 3 and 4 year old funding for the remainder of the term provided they meet one of the following criteria:

- they have not claimed anywhere else in Kent in the current academic term
- they have moved from a setting which has closed
- they are a Local Authority Looked After Child

Late Joiner applications should be made via the Adjustments tab on the Synergy FIS Provider Portal. Guidance notes can be found on Kelsi.

If a parent/guardian wishes to claim funding at a new setting after headcount week but their child does not meet the criteria above they should be advised to contact the Children and Families Information Service on 03000 412323.

### **Incorrect Headcount Adjustments:**

Adjustment claims can be made for incorrect headcounts for example where a child has mistakenly been left off the headcount or an incorrect number of hours have been claimed for. Please note a fee will be charged for incorrect universal adjustments.

### **Extended Entitlement Adjustments:**

30 hours of Free Childcare is an in-work benefit and therefore the extended hours are intended to be used for childcare. Management Information will consider adjustments made to amend or increase extended hours, where parents have increased or have changed their working hours after headcount week. An increase to universal hours cannot be claimed after Headcount week.

## Early Years Pupil Premium

Funded 3 and 4 year old children who meet additional criteria may be eligible for extra funding known as the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP). Details regarding these criteria can be found on KELS. Providers will need to discuss with parents if their child would be eligible for the EYPP and complete the relevant part of the Parental Declaration form. Providers can then complete the online application form.

## Disability Access Fund

Funded 3 and 4 year old children who are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) may be eligible for a lump sum payment once a year known as the Disability Access Fund. Details regarding this can be found on KELS. Providers will need to discuss with parents if their child is in receipt of DLA and complete a Disability Access Fund form if applicable.



## Contact Us

Management Information can be contacted by telephone from 8:30am to 5:00pm Monday to Friday.

Telephone No:           03000 422828                               03000 413700  
Email:                    [eyfe@kent.gov.uk](mailto:eyfe@kent.gov.uk)                               [Eyfreefor2@kent.gov.uk](mailto:Eyfreefor2@kent.gov.uk)  
Post:                     Management Information (CYPE)  
                              Kent County Council,  
                              2<sup>nd</sup> Floor,  
                              Invicta House,  
                              Maidstone,  
                              Kent,  
                              ME14 1XX

Please contact Management Information in writing by email or letter if there are any changes to the following:

- Ofsted Registration Number
- Setting Name
- Setting Address
- Contact Person
- Email Address
- Bank Details – please complete the form which can be downloaded from KELSI