

30 Hours Free Childcare For Working Parents of 3 and 4-year-olds

Frequently Asked Questions

From 1 September 2017, the Government will be extending the free childcare entitlement for working parents of 3 and 4-year-olds, to 30 hours per week for 38 weeks of the year. This is being introduced alongside a new scheme to help working families with the cost of childcare called **Tax-Free Childcare**.



Eligibility Criteria

The eligibility criteria for accessing the extended free entitlement are:

- both parents are working (or the sole parent is working in a lone parent family) and each parent earns, on average, a weekly minimum equivalent to 16 hours at national minimum/living wage and less than £100,000 per year. Working will include self-employed persons. Parents do not necessarily need to actually work 16 hours a week, but rather their earnings must reflect at least 16 hours of work at minimum wage or at the national living wage. This includes parents on zero hour's contracts who meet the criteria.
- both parents are employed but one or both parents is temporarily away from the workplace on parental, maternity, paternity leave, adoption leave, or statutory sick pay
- one parent is employed and one parent has substantial caring responsibilities based on specific benefits received for caring or
- one parent is employed and one parent is disabled or incapacitated based on receipt of specific benefits.

1. How many hours are free?

The current **universal entitlement** for **all** 3 and 4 year-olds will continue. Every 3 and 4-year-old will still be entitled to 15 hours free childcare per week for 38 weeks of the year – a total of 570 hours per year

However, the Government is going to increase this entitlement for eligible working parents of 3 and 4-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. (See Q23 Can I claim my free hours all year round? Which describes the 'standard' and 'stretched' offers.)

2. Will my child qualify?

In order to qualify, both parents must be working or the sole parent must be working in a lone parent family. There are some exceptions though. See Q5. 'Are there any exceptions to the eligibility criteria' and the [Government website](#) information.

3. Can I claim the 30 free hours for my foster child?

No. Foster carers cannot claim the 30 free hours for children they foster.

4. Can I claim the 30 free hours for my adopted child?

Yes, as long as you (and your partner if you have one) meet the eligibility criteria.

5. Are there any exceptions to the eligibility criteria?

Yes, there are some exceptions to the criteria that both parents must be working, or the sole parent must be working in a lone parent family.

You could still qualify for the 30 hours free childcare if:

- one or both parents are temporarily away from work because of maternity, paternity, parental or adoption leave
- one or both parents are in receipt of statutory sick pay
- one or both parents are on specific carers' benefits
- one or both parents are on specific disability benefits.

6. Will my child qualify if I am living with a new partner or have remarried?

If you have remarried or are living with a new partner, you and your new partner **must both be working** in order for your child to be eligible, along with meeting the economic criteria as described in Q7 below.

7. Is there a minimum or a maximum amount that each parent must earn?

Eligibility is based on income earned, not hours worked.

- Each parent over the age of 25 must earn **at least** £115.20 a week or more. This is the equivalent of 16 hours at the National Living Wage
- If you are aged 16 - 24 you must earn **at least** £61.82 - £84.90 the equivalent of 16 hours at the National Minimum Wage for your age.
- If you are on an apprenticeship you must earn **at least** £52.80 a week. This applies for apprentice parents under the age of 19, or older apprentice parents *in the first year of an apprenticeship*. This is the equivalent of 16 hours at the National Apprentice Rate.

The **upper limit** that **each parent** can earn is £100,000.

8. Will my child qualify if my partner or I are on a zero hours' contract?

Providing you work on average two weeks out of every three and when you are working you earn the equivalent of **at least** 16 hours at the National Living Wage or National Minimum Wage (depending on your age), your child will be eligible for the 30 hours free childcare. Her Majesty's Customs and Revenue (HMRC) will confirm your eligibility based on the information you provide them.

9. Will my child qualify if my partner or I are self-employed?

As long as you earn **at least** the minimum amount (see '**Is there a minimum or a maximum amount that each parent must earn?**' above) but less than the upper threshold of £100,000 each, your child will be eligible for the 30 hours free childcare. Her Majesty's Customs and Revenue (HMRC) will confirm your eligibility based on the information you provide them.

10. Will my child qualify if I've just started a new job?

If you expect to earn **at least** the minimum amount (see '**Is there a minimum or a maximum amount that each parent must earn?**' above) on average, over the next three months, your child will be eligible for the 30 hours free childcare.

Her Majesty's Customs and Revenue (HMRC) will confirm your eligibility based on the information you provide them.

11. What happens if my income drops below the minimum amount? Or I lose my job?

Her Majesty's Customs and Revenue (HMRC) will request you to confirm your eligibility at specific time periods. There is a 'grace period' (set by the Government) to give you time to find a new job and start earning at least the minimum amount again. If you do not find a new job within the grace period, your child will stop being eligible to receive the 30 hours free childcare.

12. If my partner and I become eligible part way through a term, can we get the 30 free hours straight-away?

The government has stated that eligibility for 30 hours starts when both these conditions have been met: the term following the child's third birthday **and** the term following receipt of their eligibility code from HMRC (**whichever is the later**).

You must have your eligibility confirmed by the HMRC for the extended 15 hour entitlement prior to: 1 September, 1 January or 1 April. Therefore successful applications can claim as follows:

A valid successful extended 15 hour application made between:	Earliest date extended 15 hour entitlement can be claimed:
1 January - 31 March	1 April
1 April - 31 August	1 September
1 September - 31 December	1 January

When eligibility is confirmed you will also be notified of the dates that the eligibility runs from and to. In order to retain eligibility and have a valid application, you need to reconfirm every 3 months.

13. Will my child be eligible from their 3rd birthday?

Your child will be eligible to claim the 30 free hours from the beginning of the term **after** their 3rd birthday. Terms starts on 1 January, 1 April or 1 September.

For example, if your child turns 3 on the 23rd June, they will be eligible from the 1 September, subject to having already received a successful application for the 30 hours confirmed by the HMRC as indicated in question 12.

In order for your child to qualify for the 30 free hours from 1 September 2017, they must have been born after 1 September 2013.

14. Who makes the decision whether my partner and I are eligible?

Once you have applied using the online childcare, Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) will check your eligibility and give you an Eligibility Reference

Number. You will need to pass this to your chosen childcare provider, they will request additional information to confirm your eligibility in order to claim the 30 free hours.

15. I'm not sure that I am eligible for 30 Hours Childcare but I do need help with my childcare costs, what can I do?

Parents apply for the free 30 hours using the Government's online childcare service: <https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk/>. Details of other schemes to help with childcare costs can be found on this site along with the [Childcare Calculator](#) to work out which scheme is best for individual circumstances.

Apply for 30 Hours Childcare

16. How do I apply for the 30 free hours?

Parents must apply for the free 30 hours using the Government's online childcare service: <https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk/>. (See also Q14 regarding Eligibility Reference Number). If you have any problems with making the online application or have questions contact the Government helpline: **0300 123 4097**.

17. How long can my child receive the 30 free hours for?

Your child can receive the 30 free hours until they reach statutory school age *or* attend school in Reception class (Year R). Parents need to still meet the eligibility criteria and re-confirm their details when requested by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC).

18. Can I claim the 30 hours free childcare to pay a private nanny or a relative to provide childcare?

No, because they are not approved to deliver the entitlement.

Types of childcare and availability

19. What types of childcare provider can offer the 30 free hours?

All Ofsted-registered approved childcare providers in Hampshire can offer the 30 hours free childcare. This includes childminders, nursery schools, day nurseries and pre-schools. However it is up to each childcare provider to confirm if they are offering the extended entitlement of 30 hours (See Q19).

Ofsted-registered childcare providers in Hampshire are listed on the online **Family Information Directory**: <https://fid.hants.gov.uk/>. Details of which childcare providers offer the extended entitlement will be added when available.

20. Will all childcare providers in Hampshire offer the 30 free hours?

It is **optional** for approved childcare providers in Hampshire to offer the 30 free hours. Please speak to your chosen childcare provider regarding their intention. Please note that childcare providers who opt **not** to provide the 30 free hours might still offer the universal 15 free hours for 3 & 4-year-olds.

21. My current childcare provider doesn't look like they will offer the 30 free hours. What can I do?

You could:

- move your child to another childcare provider who will offer the 30 free hours
- stay with your existing provider if they will offer the universal 15 free hours but also use **another** childcare provider who **is** going to offer the 30 free hours, for the additional 15 hours per week.

22. Can I use more than one childcare provider to claim the 30 free hours?

Yes. You can use more than one childcare provider, **but you cannot claim more than the maximum of 1,140 hours for each child's eligible year.**

Also, you cannot use more than two childcare providers on one day to claim the 30 free hours.

How to use 30 hours childcare

23. Do I have to use all 30 free hours each week?

No, you can use anything from 16-30 hours - it is up to you.

However, not all childcare providers may be able to offer the exact amount of free hours that you require.

Providers can claim the 30 free hours' entitlement from their Local Authority using the following criteria:

- 10 hours maximum per day
- No minimum amount of hours per day
- Hours between 6am – 8pm each day

If your childcare provider cannot offer the exact amount of free hours that you require, you could split your 30 free hours across more than one childcare provider.

24. Can I claim my free hours all year round?

The extended offer of 30 hours free childcare consists of:

'Universal' offer of up to 570 hours for each child's eligible year (15 hours x 38 weeks)

'Extended' offer of up to 570 hours for each child's eligible year (15 hours x 38 weeks)

Total possible free hours = 1,140

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.

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

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