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<http://www.madeformums.com/news-and-gossip/30-hours-of-free-childcare---will-my-child-get-it/38143.html>

The doubling of free childcare to 30 hours is being rolled out by the Government across England this year and you can now pre-register. Find out if you're eligible and how to apply, plus why free may not mean entirely free...

### **So what is the free childcare deal?**

In a nutshell, many working parents of 3 to 4-year-olds in England will be eligible for 30 hours of free childcare - rather than the current 15 hours.

But the first thing you need to know is that this is 30 hours free for only **38 weeks** per year - not 52 weeks of the year. It's basically equivalent to school term times - and totals 1140 free hours across the year.

In theory, you may be able to spread the free childcare out over further weeks, but this will mean you'll get fewer than 30 hours free childcare each week.

It will be available at the following participating childcare options:

- Nurseries and nursery classes
- Playgroups and pre-school
- Childminders
- Sure Start Children's Centres

### **Will my child get it?**

Not necessarily as not everyone is eligible. But everyone **will** still receive the 15 hours free childcare that is currently available.

### **Eligibility rules for 30 hours free childcare:**

- Your child will be aged 3 or 4 when the scheme starts in your area
- Both parents must be working - or the sole parent is working in a lone parent family
- Each parent earns, on average, a weekly minimum equivalent to 16 hours at National Minimum Wage or National Living Wage ([see how much this is](#) below)
- Each parent must have an annual income of less than £100,000
- You live in England

### **When will it start?**

The scheme is scheduled to roll out nationwide in September 2017.

### **How do you apply for the 30 hours free childcare?**

You can now pre-register for the 30-hour scheme on the [Gov.UK website](#). You'll need to confirm you live in England and will be asked to provide your email address and your child's date of birth. You'll then be emailed with information about when the scheme will be available and how to apply. You can also find out more on a new [Childcare Choices website](#) set up by HMRC. This also gives information about the new [Tax-Free Childcare scheme](#) and includes a [childcare calculator](#) so you can compare your different options.

### **To get 30 hours free childcare, you'll need to do the following:**

- Apply online through the childcare service. You can do this on The Childcare Choices Website
- If you're [eligible](#), you'll receive a code – this will allow you to arrange your childcare place ahead of September 2017
- Take your code to your childcare provider or local council (if it's council-provided childcare), along with your National Insurance number and your child's date of birth
- Your childcare provider or council will check the code is authentic and allocate your child a free childcare place

### **To be eligible, I've got to earn the equivalent of 16 hours at National Minimum Wage. How much is that?**

It depends on your age. For this scheme, the minimum amount will always reflect the lowest hourly rate that a person of your age can legally be paid. Therefore, currently for a parent aged 21-24, you'd need to earn a weekly average of at least £111.20. For a parent aged 25+, you'd need to earn a weekly average of at least £115.20.

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

This is basically a scheme to help working parents, so families where one parent doesn't work, or both parents don't work, will usually not be eligible for these additional 15 hours.

However, if one parent isn't working because they're an official carer (eg receiving benefits relating to being a carer) or they are receiving disability benefits, and the other parent is working, then the Government has stated it "intends to make provision" to support these families.

There is also additional entitlement if the parent normally works but is temporarily away from the workplace, for example on statutory sick pay.

### **What if you are self-employed or on a zero hours contract?**

You will be eligible if you (or both of you in a couple) earn at least the equivalent of 16 hours at the National Minimum Wage.

### **What if one parent loses their job?**

There will be a short "grace period" - although this hasn't yet been defined - allowing parents to have a chance to find new employment.

### **Will all nurseries offer this?**

Most will - but some nurseries may not be able to offer the flexible 30 hours free childcare.

There has been a lot of concern within the nursery industry that the grant supplied by the Government is not enough to cover the costs of the current scheme.

According to educational charity the [Pre-school Learning Alliance](#), the true cost to provide the childcare is typically £4.53 per hour. For the pilot schemes, the Government is allocating £4 an hour - an underfunding of 17%. (Initially, the Government had offered to pay £3.88 but this was increased after nursery providers in York battled for more funding).

## **Why free childcare doesn't necessarily mean free**

As the first trials are rolling out, there's concern that free childcare won't be quite as free as first appears. Basically, if the money isn't coming from the Government, then the shortfall is likely to be paid for by us, the parents.

### **Charging for extras...**

While nurseries can't charge for the 30 hours, they can charge for other 'extras' or ask for contributions. One nursery in York (one of the pilot areas) will be adding a new charge for food, whereas previously this had been included in the overall cost.

"I'm introducing a charge, which is something that was never there beforehand," one nursery owner in York told Radio 4's Today programme. "I'm now going to introduce a funded hours charge, which includes the meals which we've been providing, in a lot of cases totally for free."

Another York nursery is asking parents to pay £5 per day as a voluntary contribution.

### **Higher charges for babies and toddlers**

Others may charge more for babies and under 2s, to subsidise the cost of the free childcare for the older children.

### **Term-by-term booking**

Parents who are getting completely free childcare may find that they can only secure a nursery place on a term-by-term basis. This means they may need to re-apply each term and may not be guaranteed the same days or place allocation each term. This lack of certainty could prove a headache for the majority of parents who don't have flexible work hours.

## **Will every eligible child get 30 hours free childcare from September?**

It seems possibly not to start with. There has been growing concern from councils and nurseries that there won't be enough registered childcare places to meet the demand when the scheme is rolled out in September 2017.

A survey by the Family and Childcare Trust found that more than half of English councils are unsure if they will be able to provide enough childcare and only a third of the English councils are confident they'll have enough places.

Indeed, the Government conceded in papers released for the Budget that, "It seems likely that the supply of places will rise more slowly over the first two years than originally assumed."

## **So will the Government increase the funding?**

In November 2015, the then-Chancellor George Osborne announced in his Autumn Statement that the Government was going to invest a further £300m in early years providers, increasing the hourly rate to an average of £4.88 from 2017. He also announced that nurseries will be given £50m in capital investment to provide more places.

There was a cautiously positive response from the nursery industry.

The Chief Executive of National Day Nurseries Association, Purnima Tanuku OBE, said, "We are pleased the Government has listened to our campaigning for better levels of funding. Despite the tough fiscal climate, the childcare sector is receiving more money. This is a welcome step.

"The sector is now looking carefully at the details to establish whether the increase is sufficient to support the Government's ambitious promise of 30 hours free childcare to working parents. The Government must work to make sure that every penny secured for early years goes straight to the frontline of childcare."

No doubt, the pilot areas will be monitored carefully as the Government makes further decisions around funding.

### **You probably know everything about the current childcare entitlement but just in case...**

Currently, 3 and 4-year-old children are eligible for 570 hours of free childcare a year – which is usually broken down to 15 hours each week over 38 weeks of the year . This covers:

- Nurseries and nursery classes
- Playgroups and pre-school
- Childminders
- Sure Start Children's Centres

Depending on income levels, some 2-year-olds in England can get free early education and childcare. In order to get claim, you must be getting one of the following:

- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Support through part 6 of the Immigration and Asylum Act
- Child Tax Credit and/or Working Tax Credit and have an annual income under £16,190
- The guaranteed element of State Pension Credit
- The Working Tax Credit 4-week run on (the payment you get when you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit)
- Universal Credit