

ARE YOU READY?

The Childcare Act is now law, and from September 2017, 3- and 4-year-olds of working parents in England will be eligible for 30 hours of government-funded childcare per week over 38 weeks of the year.

Who will be eligible for the 30-hour free childcare extended entitlement?

This new entitlement is available to 3- and 4-year-olds of working parents. To qualify, each parent (or the sole parent in a single parent family) will need to earn, on average, approximately £115.20 per week, and no more than £100,000 per year. Self-employed parents and parents on zero-hours contracts will be eligible if they meet the average earnings criteria.

Families where one parent is not in paid employment (or neither parent works) will usually not be eligible for the additional hours. There are exceptions for parents who are on parental, maternity, paternity, adoption or sick leave. 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.

However, parents will be eligible where one parent is in receipt of benefits relating to caring responsibilities or has a disability and the other parent is working. Single parents who are disabled or have substantial caring responsibilities will not be eligible.

If you do not qualify for the 30 hours, you will still be entitled to the current 15 hours of government funded childcare.

How do I apply for the extended hours?

Parents will apply for both the extended entitlement and the Tax-Free Childcare scheme through a joint online system being developed by HMRC, as the eligibility requirements for both schemes are the same. Parents will have to declare that they expect their earnings to fall within the required threshold either over the next quarter or the current tax year. Parents who make inaccurate or dishonest declarations can be fined between £300 and £3000.

What will happen if I suddenly become ineligible – will I lose my childcare place immediately?

No. There will be a grace period to enable parents to retain their childcare place for a short period if they have become ineligible for the extended entitlement. The Government is currently consulting on how this grace period will work in practice

Which providers can deliver the extended entitlement?

Any provider on the Ofsted Early Years Register can choose to register with their local authority to deliver the extended entitlement, including childminders, day nurseries, playgroups, pre-schools and nursery schools.

The Government is consulting on proposals to allow parents to take up their funded hours with up to three different providers.

What other support will be available to families to help with childcare costs?

Working parents who are eligible for the 30 hours of free childcare will additionally receive support with childcare costs of up to £2000 per child through the Tax-Free Childcare scheme, which will be rolled-out gradually from February 2017.

Parents on low incomes will get up to 85% of their childcare costs reimbursed through the childcare element of Universal Credit, which is gradually being rolled out across the country over the next two years.

This is a simplified version of the proposed introduction of the extended hours government funding. For a more detailed account please visit,

Surrey County Council website, Family Information Service and search for extra free childcare for 3 and 4 year olds – for working parents.