

Information for Parents & Carers

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Funding is available to all eligible children from the term after their 9-month, 2nd or 3rd birthday.

When your child's funding begins

Children born between: (2,3& 4-Year-Old Funding)

- 1 April and 31 August will receive their funded entitlement from September
- 1 September and 31 December will receive their funded entitlement from January
- 1 January and 31 March will receive their funded entitlement from April

Children born on or between: (9month+ Funding)

1 April and 30 June, will receive their funded entitlement from April

1 July and 30 November will receive their funded entitlement from September

1 December and 31 March will receive their funded entitlement from January

2-year funding (for families receiving additional forms of Government support) - up to 15 hours per week

To claim, families must meet one of the following criteria:

- Income Support
- Income based Jobseeker's allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support allowance
- Support under part 6 of the immigration and asylum act
- Guaranteed element of the state pension credit
- Child tax credit with an annual gross household income of no more than £16,190
- Working Tax Credits and earn no more than £16,190
- Working Tax Credit 4-week run-on (paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for working tax credit)
- Universal Credit – and earn no more than £15,400.

Or the child is:

- looked after by the local authority
- adopted from care
- Has left care through adoption, residence order or special guardianship
- Has as an Education, Health and Care plan
- Is in receipt of disability living allowance.

Apply online at www.eastsussex.gov.uk/childcare

You will receive a 6-character voucher code to show to the Early Years Provider. Once awarded the funding does not get removed, even if your circumstances change. Families are not required to re-confirm eligibility.

Parents must

- complete a parental declaration and
- provide a copy of their child's birth certificate or passport.

If you're a non-EEA citizen who cannot claim benefits

Your 2-year-old may get free childcare if you are getting support under the Immigration and Asylum Act and have either:

- claimed asylum in the UK and are waiting for a decision (known as 'part 6')
- been refused asylum in the UK (known as 'section 4')

A 2-year-old you care for may also get free childcare if your household income is £15,400 a year or less after tax, and you have either:

- leave to remain with 'no recourse to public funds' on family or private life grounds
- the right to live in the UK because you're the main carer of a British citizen (known as a 'Zambrano Carer')

Check with your local council if you're unsure if you can get free childcare.

2-year funding (working families) - up to 30 hours per week

For families where both parents are working (or the sole parent is working in a lone parent family):

You, and any partner, must each expect to earn the equivalent of 16-hours a week at the national minimum wage.

If you are on maternity, paternity or adoption leave you may still be eligible. If you are unable to work due to a disability or having caring responsibilities, you may also be eligible.

If either you or your partner expect to earn £100,000 or more, you will not be able to receive the expanded hours.

Foster Carers (subject to approval from child's social worker)

Parents apply to HMRC via Best Start in Life

Parents must apply for the working families code before the start of a new funding period. For example:

To start claiming from:

- January you must apply for the code by 31 December
- April you must apply for the code by 31 March
- September you must apply for the code by 31 August

If application is successful, you will receive an 11-digit voucher code. You must take the voucher code to your Early Years Provider, who will confirm the code.

Parents must re-confirm their code when prompted by HMRC. This is normally every 3-months

3- and 4-year-old funding (Universal Offer) - 15 Hours per week

All children can claim up to 15 hours per week from the term after their 3rd birthday (see page 1) 15 hours per week term-time only (38 weeks per year)

Parents must complete a parental declaration.

Parents must provide a copy of the child's birth certificate/passport.

3- and 4-year-old funding (Extended Offer) - 30 Hours per week*

For families where both parents are working (or the sole parent is working in a lone parent family):

You, and any partner, must each expect to earn the equivalent of 16-hours a week at the national minimum wage.

If you are on maternity, paternity or adoption leave you may still be eligible. If you are unable to work due to a disability or having caring responsibilities, you may also be eligible.

If either you or your partner expect to earn £100,000 or more, you will not be able to receive 30 hours free childcare.

Foster Carers (subject to approval from child's social worker)

Parents apply to HMRC via [Best Start in Life](#)

Parents must apply for the 30-hour code before the start of a new funding period. For example:

To start claiming 30 hours from:

- January you must apply for the code by 31 December
- April you must apply for the code by 31 March

- September you must apply for the code by 31 August

If application is successful, you will receive an 11-digit voucher code. You must take the voucher code to your Early Years Provider, who will confirm the code.

[Search for providers who offer the 30 hours.](#)

Parents must:

- complete a parental declaration and
- provide a copy of the child's birth certificate/passport

Parents must re-confirm their code when prompted by HMRC. This is normally every 3-months

About the funding

Where you can claim the funding

To find an early year's provider in your area, you can search on www.escis.org.uk

The hours for a funded place are free

Your provider may charge for meals and snacks. The provider can also charge for consumables such as nappies or sun cream and for services such as a trip or forest school. You will need to discuss these options with your provider. These charges must be voluntary, and if you wish to opt out of the services your provider will be able to offer you an alternative option.

Your provider should let you know what hours in their operating day are free. These may not be for the whole day the provider is open. For example, a provider may open from 8am to 3pm. The free hours are available from 9am to 3pm. If you want your child to start at 8am, you will be charged for this hour. If you don't want to start at 8am, your free hours will be from 9am to 3pm.

There should be no artificial break in the funded hours that you access. For example, a provider should not offer 10am to midday and 1pm to 3pm as the free hours and offer only private hours in between.

You must complete a Parental Declaration Form and provide a copy of your child's birth certificate or passport. This proves your child is age eligible.

You can [get a copy of a birth certificate](#), if you need to from GOV.uk.

You will need to check with your provider the times and days when the funded hours are available. Every provider will have a different offer to their families. Tell your provider if you only want the funded hours.

Early Years providers:

- must not charge "top-up" fees This is the difference between a provider's normal fee and the funding they receive.

- must not require parents to pay a registration fee as a condition of taking up their child's funded place.
- can charge a deposit to secure a funded place. They must refund the deposit in full once the child starts claiming their funding.
- must ensure that their invoices are clear, transparent, and itemised.

30-hour funding

You must apply and receive their 11-digit voucher codes before the start of the term. Terms start in January, April, and September.

Give the voucher code to the Early Years Provider. The provider will confirm the code before they can start claiming funding.

You must reconfirm your eligibility with HMRC approximately every 3 months. If you forget to reconfirm, this may affect the extended funded hours. But this does not affect your entitlement to the universal 15-hour offer.

East Sussex will notify Early Years Providers when a voucher code is due to expire.

What is “Headcount Day”?

East Sussex collect information on children claiming funding 3 times a year. This is “Headcount Day”. Children must attend a provider before the headcount day to allow them to claim funding. For example:

- For the autumn term children must be registered with a provider by 18 September 2025
- For the spring term children must be registered with a provider by 15 January 2026
- For the summer term children must be registered with a provider by 23 April 2026

If you register your child in time your provider can claim the greatest number of weeks of funding.

If you miss ‘Headcount Day’ your provider will submit a late claim. Your funding will be reduced to the number of weeks left in the funding period.

Claiming your funded hours

You can claim up to 15 hours per week (Universal Offer) or up to 30 hours per week (Extended Offer).

You do not have to take the full 15 or 30 hours. You can choose any combination of hours that are available with your provider.

You can only increase the funded hours at the start of a funding period, not mid-term. If your circumstances change mid-term and you want to increase your child hours your provider will

charge their normal hourly rate. At the start of the next funding period, you will be able increase your funded hours.

You can claim at more than one provider. You can also claim funding from more than one Local Authority. But you cannot claim more than 15 or 30 hours per week. Local authorities check funding. If you over claim you will have to repay the cost.

You can claim no more than 10 hours in one day. You can take your funded hours Monday to Sunday but not before 6am or after 8pm. You may attend no more than two providers in a single day.

Starting school

Some schools have a staggered start in September. If your child's start date to reception class is later than the set term dates you cannot claim. If the staggered start causes a childcare problem, you will need to discuss this with the school.

Funding is available to families who have deferred their child's school place. This is available until the child reaches statutory school age.

Children who access a funded place in a school nursery do not get guaranteed admission to the school. You must apply for a place at the school if you want your child to transfer to the reception class.

Changing childcare providers

Once your child is included on a headcount claim, you can move to another provider in East Sussex. You must ensure that you follow the terms and conditions set by your existing provider. For example, you must pay any outstanding fees.

Check with your provider how many weeks' notice you must give. The maximum notice for funded hours is 6 weeks.

Funding may not transfer to a new provider if you do not give notice to your existing provider. The expected notice period is 4 weeks, some providers will need 6 weeks.

Your new provider cannot claim more hours than the original claim. You may need to pay for any extra hours you choose to take up with your new provider.

A 'stretched' childcare

Providers who are open for more than 38 weeks a year can offer the funding for the weeks they are open. You will receive less funded hours a week, but your funding will cover the school holidays. For example:

Weeks open per year	Hours per week	Total Hours across the year
38	15 or 30	570 or 1140
48	11.75 or 23.75	570 or 1140
51	11 or 22.25	570 or 1140

It is possible to stretch any of the funded hours. Your funding claim must not exceed 15 or 30 hours per week or 570 or 1140 hours per year.

For example, if you wish to claim 20 hours per week because you are eligible for the extended offer, this can be claimed as below:

20 hours per week x 51 weeks per year = 1,020 hours. Your provider will submit a claim based on 38 weeks, therefore will claim 26.75 hours each funding period. You will have 120 hours left that could be claimed with another provider, but this will equate to approx. 3 hours per week x 38 weeks a year.

Extra funding for providers

Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP)

Early Years providers can claim up to an extra £570.00 per year to support children in their setting. They can claim for all eligible children whose parent receives at least one of the following:

- Income Support
- Income based Jobseeker's allowance
- Income-related Employment and Support allowance
- Support under part 6 of the immigration and asylum act
- Guaranteed element of the state pension credit
- Child tax credit and earn no more than £16,190 (provided not also entitled to Working Tax Credit)
- Working Tax Credit 4-week run-on (paid for 4 weeks after you stop qualifying for working tax credit)
- Universal Credit – and earn no more than £7,400.

Or the child is:

- looked after by the local authority
- adopted from care
- left care through adoption, residence order or special guardianship

Parents must complete the EYPP section on the parental declaration. If eligible, this will last for a year.

Childcare settings must show Ofsted how they have used the funds to improve your child's education.

Disability Access Fund (DAF)

This is an annual one-off payment to the Early Years Provider for an eligible child who:

- receives Disability Living Allowance (DLA).

DAF can only be claimed with one provider.

Parents must:

- complete the Disability Access Fund section on the parental declaration
- provide evidence to the Early Years Provider that the child is in receipt of DLA.

Tax-Free Childcare

This is available for

- working families, including the self-employed, in the UK
- with children under 12 (or under 17 if disabled)

For every £8 you pay in, the government will add an extra £2, up to £2,000 per child - that's up to £500 every three months.

Working parents open an online account to pay for registered childcare.

Parents can only make payments from their Tax-Free childcare accounts to Early Years providers who have signed up to the scheme.

HMRC deliver the scheme. For further details visit [Best Start in Life](#)

All Early Years providers who are registered for the funding will have a unique offer to parents. You will need to discuss with the early years provider how you can claim your funded hours with them.

Data Protection

All information submitted to the Early Years Funding Team is held in compliance with the Data Protection Act. The information requested on the Parental Declaration is necessary in completing the Headcount claim at your child's Early Years provider and for the claim of Early Years Funding from the Department for Education (DfE). Any information that you supply may be shared with other departments within ESCC, DfE and local NHS agencies. This form will be retained by your provider, for the current academic year (September - August), plus 2 years from completion date and made available at the request of East Sussex County Council auditors. Once the retention period is over your provider will destroy this information .

Complaints Procedure

You can complain to East Sussex County Council if you are not satisfied, that

- your child has received their free entitlement place or
- with any aspect in the way that they have received the funded place

Early Years Funding Team
B Floor, West Block
County Hall,
St Anne's Crescent
Lewes
East Sussex

BN7 1UE

Further information

For general enquiries about the free entitlement, please contact Customer Relations on

Tel No. 0345 60 80 192 - The line is open Monday to Friday from 10am to 3pm.

General childcare information

For HMRC childcare enquiries see Best Start in Life or call the helpline on

0300 123 4097