



Free education for 3 & 4 year olds

Who is the entitlement for?

It is for 3 & 4 year old children, regardless of citizenship, and attend a registered childcare provider offering the entitlement.

When is my child eligible to receive free entitlement?

Your child can receive the entitlement from the term after their 3rd birthday until he/she starts school - see below:

Children who are 3 between	Eligible from the following
1 April and 31 August	September
1 September and 31 December	January
1 January and 31 March	April

Many childcare providers have waiting lists so it is a good idea to start looking for a free place for your child before they reach the eligible age.

What are the benefits for my child?

Early learning gives your child the best possible start in life. Children can learn through play, experience new activities, build independence, get a good start to education, make new friends and have fun.

How many free hours of education entitlement will my child receive?

Your child can receive up to 15 hours a week over 38 weeks usually during term time i.e. 570 hours in total (15 hours x 38 weeks = 570 hours). Please note however, that many childcare providers are often open for 39 weeks as they match the school terms. Therefore one of the weeks that the childcare provider is open for may not be funded.

In addition to this some childcare providers (e.g. day nurseries) may stretch the 15 hours across the full year resulting in fewer hours offered per week over more weeks per year (e.g. 570 hours ÷ 51 weeks = 11.17 hours).

How may I take the free hours?

Some childcare providers can deliver the 15 hours flexibly; others offer a particular 'model of delivery'. A model of delivery is an agreed time period set by the provider of how the entitlement will be offered in their setting and could be time and day specific e.g. 9am-12pm Monday to Friday or 1pm-6pm three set days a week.

Whatever model is offered, if a child is only attending on 2 days over 38 weeks, they can only access up to 12½ hours of the entitlement. This is because the full 15 hours can only be offered over a minimum of 3 days – unless the entitlement is being offered over more than 38 weeks.

Please speak directly to the childcare provider for details of their model/s of delivery.



What type of childcare provider offers the Early Education Entitlement?

The majority of pre-school playgroups, private day nurseries or independent school nurseries in the borough. Alternatively, there are some accredited childminders who are part of the Children Come First Network that are able to offer the entitlement.

Please be aware that demand for places in many areas is high, so unfortunately there is no guarantee that you will get your child into your first choice of childcare provider.

NB You do not have to be a resident in Hounslow to access the entitlement. Childcare providers in the London Borough of Hounslow are funded by the local authority regardless of where the child lives, as long as the provider you choose is offering the entitlement. You can use a childcare provider outside of your local borough to access the entitlement for your child should you prefer.



How can my child access the free entitlement?

If you are already using a childcare provider, speak to them directly about accessing the entitlement. If not, contact your local childcare providers to ask about availability of completely free places. The Family Information Service can provide a list of providers on request.

Will I have to pay additional fees?

If you have been offered a completely free place then no additional fees will be charged. However, some childcare providers are offering a limited amount of completely free places. For that reason, if your chosen provider has filled all their completely free places, you may prefer to look elsewhere. Alternatively you may still access the entitlement at this childcare provider if you are happy to pay for additional hours.

What happens if I need my child to attend childcare beyond the free 15 hours?

Any hours required in addition to the free entitlement hours will be chargeable and rates can vary from provider to provider.

What help can I get to pay additional costs?

If you are working and on a low income, tax credits can be used to pay for some of the additional charges. This credit is claimed by the parent/carer from the childcare element of working tax credit and can be worth up to £175 per week for one child and £300 per week for two or more children. A maximum of 70% of eligible childcare costs can be claimed by parents who are eligible to receive this credit.

If you are unsure as to whether you are eligible to claim working tax credit, please check by visiting www.direct.gov.uk/taxcredits or call the tax credit helpline on 0845 300 3900.

Another form of help available towards the cost of childcare is employer-supported childcare vouchers. You can use up to £55 a week to pay for childcare from your salary that is free from Tax and National Insurance contributions. Please contact FIS for a detailed guide on childcare vouchers.

Can I use more than one provider?

It is beneficial for your child if he/she is able to receive the entitlement at one childcare provider. However, if this is not possible the hours can be split between no more than two childcare providers. The maximum number of hours that will be funded is still 15. This applies to whether the providers are in the same or different local authority areas.

What happens when my child starts attending a school nursery or reception class?

Once your child starts attending a maintained nursery or reception class they are considered to be using their full funded entitlement. If your child continues to attend a childcare provider in addition to the school nursery class for the other half of the day, you will be required to pay for the care your child receives at the childcare provider.