

Free Childcare Entitlements for Working Parents - Frequently Asked Questions

Applying for the working parent childcare entitlements for summer term (April - August 2024)

Quick version: [How to claim 15 hours free childcare including how to get your code](#)

Currently, eligible working parents of 3- and 4-year-old can apply for 30 hours free childcare.

Applications are now open for eligible working parents of 2-year-olds to receive 15 hours free childcare, starting from April 2024.

It's the first step in our promise to expand the [30 hours free childcare scheme](#) for eligible working parents from the term after their child turns nine months until they start school.

From **April 2024**, eligible working parents of 2-year-olds will be able to access 15 hours childcare support.

From **September 2024**, 15 hours childcare support will be extended to eligible working parents with a child from 9-months-old.

From **September 2025**, this will be extended to 30 hours for eligible working parents with a child from 9-months-old up to school age.

We're making the [biggest investment](#) by a UK government into childcare in history, doubling the amount we expect to spend over the next few years from around £4 billion to around £8 billion each year.

1. How do I apply?

You need to meet our [eligibility criteria](#) before you can claim 15 or 30 hours free childcare.

You apply online here on [Gov.uk](#).

You'll need to make sure you have the following information to hand before starting the application:

- your national insurance number (or unique taxpayer reference if you are self-employed).

- the date you started or are due to start work.
- details of any government support or benefits you receive.
- the UK birth certificate reference number (if you have one) for your child.

You may find out if you're eligible straight away, but it can take up to 7 days.

Once your application has been approved, you'll get a code for free childcare to give to your childcare provider.

Applications to claim 15 or 30 hours of childcare from April 2024 are open from now until 31 March. If you miss the deadline you won't be able to start using the entitlements from 1 April. We encourage all parents to apply as soon as possible once they have received their code.

Eligible parents are also able to access Tax-Free Childcare through the same application system. However, you don't need to apply for Tax-Free Childcare to be eligible to apply for a free childcare code.

2. What happens once I receive my code?

You'll need to take the code to your childcare provider, along with your National Insurance Number and your child's date of birth.

Your childcare provider will check the code and then allocate your child a place if available.

We recommend parents speak with their chosen provider about when they will be able to offer them a place.

We know that some providers are able to amend invoices if they have issued them before a parent has received their code, so we recommend you speak to your provider if you are in this situation.

If your chosen provider doesn't have a place available, we advise that you explore other providers in your local area.

Your local authority can provide support for finding a free place in your area.

3. What if I'm already registered for Tax-Free Childcare and I want to take up the new entitlement for 2 year olds from April? *[for parents who already receive Tax-Free Childcare]*

Parents must reconfirm that they are still eligible for Tax-Free Childcare (TFC) every 3 months.

As applications are now open for the new working parent entitlement, when eligible parents reconfirm they will receive a code which will also enable them to access the new offer.

To provide reassurance to parents with reconfirmation windows in late February and March, we're taking additional steps to ensure every parent is able to give their code to their provider in good time.

If your reconfirmation window for your two-year-old's Tax-Free Childcare opens on or after the 15 February 2024 (and before 1 April 2024), HMRC will now have sent you a letter with a temporary code, which will start with 11.

The letter will also explain how to use your code to claim your free place in April. Where possible, please wait for your letter to arrive. If you haven't received your letter by 15 February, you should contact HMRC. Please make sure that all your contact details on your childcare account are up to date, so that we can contact you if we need to about your childcare.

Please remember that once your reconfirmation window opens, you will still need to reconfirm your eligibility through your Childcare Account and share the digital code you will receive at that time (beginning with 50) with your provider.

Before your letter arrives, you can speak to your provider and use your eligibility for Tax-Free Childcare to demonstrate your eligibility for the new working parent entitlement, as anyone who is eligible for TFC will also be eligible for the new entitlement (although parents don't have to apply for TFC to be eligible for the entitlement).

You can do this by showing your provider:

- Proof of your Tax-Free Childcare eligibility (this can be a screenshot from your [childcare account](#), or simply showing your account to your provider)
- When your reconfirmation window is (you can get this from your [childcare account](#))
- Your National Insurance number, and
- Proof of your child's date of birth, for example your child's birth certificate, to show they turn 2 on or before 31 March 2024.

However, you must wait for your code (either via letter or through your regular childcare account) to formally confirm your free place.

4. I have received two codes, one from the letter and one from the website. Which one am I supposed to use? [for parents who already receive Tax-Free Childcare]

If you have two codes, one from your letter beginning with 11 and one from the website beginning with 50, please give your provider the code from the website beginning with 50, as this is your permanent digital code for your child.

If you only have one code (beginning with 11) then you can use this code to start using your entitlements. Please remember that once your reconfirmation window opens, you will still need to reconfirm your eligibility through your Childcare Account

and share the digital code you will receive at that time (beginning with 50) with your provider.

5. My reconfirmation window for Tax-Free Childcare is now open. How will I get my code for my 2-year-old? *[for parents who already receive Tax-Free Childcare]*

When you reconfirm your eligibility for Tax-Free Childcare through the Childcare Service you will be given access to the 15 hours of childcare if your child is the right age. You will find your code for this within your secure messages, on your Childcare Service account.

6. What happens if my reconfirmation window is after 1 April? Do I get a code I can use for the summer term? *[for parents who already receive Tax-Free Childcare]*

Reconfirmation of eligibility occurs every 3 months, and you are able to reconfirm 28 days prior to your code's eligibility end date. Those with a reconfirmation window which opens in April should also have had a reconfirmation window opening in January. If you were eligible at this point you should have received a code then. Please remember to check your secure messages on your account to find your code after you have had a reconfirmed your Tax-Free Childcare. HMRC have only sent a letter to those with reconfirmation windows which open on or after 15th February and before 1 April.

7. How do I reconfirm my code?

To confirm your details are up to date and that you remain eligible for Tax-Free Childcare and/or the childcare entitlements, you will need to log into your childcare account every 3 months.

In most cases reconfirmation should only take a few minutes.

You need to log into your childcare account using your Government Gateway ID to reconfirm: [Sign in to your childcare account – GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](https://www.gov.uk/sign-in-to-your-childcare-account).

The dates between which you should reconfirm will be displayed when you log in.

Even if you have received a letter from HMRC with a temporary code (for those with reconfirmation windows that open on or after the 15th February 2024 and before 1st April 2024), then you still need to reconfirm through your childcare account when your reconfirmation window opens and give this digital code to your provider. However you do not need to wait until this point to confirm your place with your provider, which you can do with the temporary code.

8. Do I need to apply for new entitlements if I already claim Tax-Free Childcare or 30 hours for my older child?

If you get Tax-Free Childcare or 30 hours for another child (i.e. not your 2-year-old) then you will need to add your 2-year-old to the account and apply for the new entitlement. This is the same process if wish to apply for 30 hours for another child if you have an existing Tax-Free Childcare account.

A parent who is already using the childcare service for another child can add a new child to their account at any time.

Your reconfirmation cycle for your current Tax-Free Childcare will not affect this.

9. What happens if I miss the reconfirmation deadline?

You will stop being eligible for Tax-Free Childcare and/or your childcare entitlements if you miss the reconfirmation deadline.

If you do miss it, and your child is attending a childcare provider, a grace period for your free childcare will apply.

This means your child can continue in their place for the time being, but you need to submit another application as soon as you can to keep getting Tax-Free Childcare and/or the childcare entitlements.

You can submit such an application any time you meet the eligibility criteria for childcare entitlements or Tax-Free Childcare.

You must then present your code to your provider to confirm your place can continue.

10. Can I get a rebate (if you're not eligible but would have been if it had been rolled out earlier)?

This is not something we are able to offer, as you would have received the support that was available to you at that time. However, if you are eligible but were unable to receive a code and take up a place in time due to a technical issue, [you may be eligible for compensation](#).

Eligibility

11. How do I know if I'm eligible for free childcare?

You need to meet our [eligibility criteria](#) before you can claim 15 or 30 hours free childcare.

Working parents in England who each earn more than the equivalent of 16 hours at the National Minimum Wage (currently that is £8,670, or at least £167 per week), but less than £100,000 [adjusted net income](#) per year, will be eligible.

The £100,000 [adjusted net income](#) level was chosen to correspond with income tax thresholds. The universal 15 hours of free childcare offer remains in place for all parents of 3- and 4-year-olds, regardless of parental circumstances, including those who earn over £100,000.

Eligibility for the entitlements is calculated on an individual basis rather than by household. This is because tax is calculated on an individual basis rather than a household basis. This means if you have a partner, you must both individually earn between these two amounts.

If you, or your partner, are on maternity, paternity, or adoption leave, or one of you is unable to work because you are disabled or have caring responsibilities, you could still be eligible.

You (and your partner if you have one) must have a national insurance number, and at least one parent (the one who is making the application) must have at least one of the following:

- British or Irish citizenship
- [settled or pre-settled status](#), or you have applied and you're waiting for a decision.
- permission to access public funds - your UK residence card will tell you if you can't do this.

Parents already receiving [some additional forms of government support](#), such as Universal Credit, working tax credits or child tax credits, could also receive 15 hours of fully funded early education for 2-year-olds, separate from the new entitlement for working parents.

12. I'm a student. Why can I not access the entitlements?

Students who work in addition to studying are eligible for this entitlement if they meet the income requirements. Students who do not work are not eligible, but we recognise the value of parents continuing in education and provide a range of support for those in further or higher education. If you're a full-time student, you may be eligible for a [grant to help with your childcare costs](#).

13. Am I eligible if I'm on maternity leave?

If your partner works and meets the eligibility criteria, and you are on maternity leave, paternity leave, or adoption leave, you may still be eligible. Please see [this article](#) for more information.

Parents can also apply for a code for an older sibling whilst they are on maternity leave, but cannot apply for the child that is the subject of the maternity leave until 31 days before returning to work.

14. My child turns two after 1 April. Why am I not entitled to free childcare?

You can apply for the first phase of the new working parent entitlement for 2-year-olds if your child is already 2 years old or will have had their 2nd birthday on or before 31 March 2024.

This is because children become eligible for a free childcare place at different points in the year, depending on when they were born. They may have to wait until the next academic term before they are eligible. These terms start on 1 January, 1 April and 1 September each year.

Parents are only able to claim the entitlements from the term after their child reaches the relevant age because this gives local authorities and childcare providers enough time to prepare.

In September 2024, the relevant age will change from 2 years old to 9 months old. That means, if you meet the [eligibility criteria](#) and your child is at least 9 months old on or before 31 August 2024 (that is, your child was born on or before 30 November 2023) you will be able to claim 15 hours of childcare from 1 September 2024. This includes any children of eligible parents who are older than 9 months (for example, if your child turns 2 in May 2024).

Eligible parents of a child born between 1 December 2023 and 31 March 2024, (that is, they turn 9 months old between 1 September 2024 and 31 December 2024) will be able to claim the entitlements from 1 January 2025.

15. My child is 3 before 1 April 2024. What am I eligible for?

If your child turns 3 on or before 31 March, you can apply through the childcare service for a 30 hours code and, if eligible, you can claim 30 hours from 1 April.

16. What about children turning 3 between April and September 2024?

If your child is already 2 years old, you will be able to claim the 15 hours entitlement from 1 April 2024 so long as you meet the [eligibility criteria](#). If your child then turns 3 between 1 April 2024 and 31 August 2024, you will be able to claim the 30 hours entitlement for 3-and-4-year-olds from 1 September 2024. If you fall out of eligibility, you will still have access to the universal 15 hours for 3- and 4-year-olds and will have a grace period until the 31 December, if your child is in a childcare provider place. Claiming the 15 hours for 2-year-olds will not affect your eligibility to claim the 30 hours for 3- and 4-year-olds in the following term.

17. How will I know when to reconfirm my eligibility?

You will receive a reminder:

- when your reconfirmation window opens
- a week before your reconfirmation deadline
- on your reconfirmation deadline.

You will not be able to reconfirm your eligibility before your reconfirmation window begins.

18. I'm eligible for Universal Credit, can I apply for a free childcare code?

Whilst you cannot claim Universal Credit and Tax-Free Childcare at the same time, those on Universal Credit can apply for the 15/30 hours entitlements for working parents, as long as they meet our [eligibility criteria](#).

This will not affect your ability to claim Universal Credit. If you are taking up childcare over and above your free entitlement, you can claim Universal Credit Childcare, which can support you with up to 85% of the cost of any additional childcare you pay for. Please see [the Universal Credit childcare costs page](#) for more information.

Alternatively, there is a separate entitlement which means that parents of 2-year-olds who are already receiving [some additional forms of government support](#), such as Universal Credit or tax credits, can receive 15 hours of funded early education, including childcare. This is separate from the new entitlement for working parents. All parents regardless of employment status or income levels are eligible for the universal 15 hours for 3- and 4-year-olds.

19. I claim Carer's Allowance, can I apply for free childcare?

You may still be eligible if your partner is working, and you get Carer's Allowance, Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance, Limited Capability for Work Benefit, contribution-based Employment and Support Allowance or the limited ability to work element of Universal Credit.

However, if you are a single parent on one of these benefits you will also need to be working and meet the income requirements to be eligible for this entitlement.

Alternatively, parents already receiving [some additional forms of government support](#), such as Universal Credit or tax credits, can receive 15 hours of funded early education, including childcare, for 2-year-olds, separate from the new entitlement for working parents of 2-year-olds. All parents regardless of employment status or income levels are eligible for the universal 15 hours for 3- and 4-year-olds.

20. Can I access the entitlements if I claim Personal Independence Payments (PIP)?

Claiming Disability Living Allowance or Personal Independence Payments for yourself or your child does not automatically grant you eligibility to use this entitlement. You would still need to be working and meet the [income requirements](#) in order to claim it.

However, parents who are already receiving [some additional forms of government support](#), can receive 15 hours of funded early education, including childcare, for 2-year-olds. This is separate from the new entitlement for working parents and is available to parents whose child is entitled to Disability Living Allowance. All parents regardless of employment status or income levels are eligible for the universal 15 hours for 3- and 4-year-olds.

21. What do I do if my local authority or provider tells me I'm not eligible for 15 hours free childcare for my 2-year-old?

There are now two 15 hour entitlements for 2-year-olds:

1. **Parents who are receiving some [additional forms of government support](#) may be eligible for 15 hours of early education.** Applications for this 15 hour entitlement are usually made through local authorities or providers, not through the HMRC childcare service accessed via gov.uk.
2. **Parents can apply for 15 hours free childcare for working parents of 2-year-olds**, if they meet the [eligibility criteria](#). You apply for this through the HMRC Childcare Service and will be told by HMRC if you are eligible or not.

If you are told that you are not eligible for one of these entitlements, you should check whether you're eligible for the other one (using [Childcare Choices](#)). Although there will be some parents who are not eligible for either entitlement.

Using your entitlements

22. When can I use my hours?

The 15 hours entitlement is for a total of 570 hours, which works out as 15 hours a week over 38 weeks of the year. The 30 hours entitlement is for a total of 1140 hours, often taken as 30 hours over 38 weeks of the year.

However, your provider may agree to 'stretch' your entitlement by using fewer hours over more than 38 weeks per year. It is not possible to 'condense' your hours and use more than 15/30 hours in a week, but you don't have to use your full entitlement if you don't want to.

23. Can I use the entitlements for a nanny?

You are not able to use the hours covered under the entitlements for a nanny or a home carer.

However, many nannies choose to register on the Voluntary part of the General Childcare Register. If your nanny has done this, then they are classed as eligible childcare providers for the purposes of Tax-Free Childcare, though you cannot use the 15/30 hours funding for nannies.

24. Can you use the Tax-Free Childcare to pay for your remaining bill, after the 15/30 hours comes off?

Tax-Free Childcare can be used to help pay for any additional hours above the hours you are claiming through your entitlements. It can also be used to pay for certain additional services that are charged by your provider. You pay into the account, and HMRC will top up this amount by 20%, up to a value of £2,000 per year. This increases to a value of up to £4,000 per year if your child is disabled.

25. My child turns 2 in February, but I ideally want them to start in September. Do I have to apply now or will I lose my access to the entitlements if I leave it until closer to September?

If you wish to start using the entitlements from 1 September rather than 1 April, then you can apply closer to that time; provided you still meet the [eligibility criteria](#) at that time, you will not lose your ability to apply.

26. Do you have any further information about the next stage of the rollout in September?

We are currently working to prepare for the expansion of the entitlements for eligible working parents of children aged from 9 months and above, which will come into force in September 2024. We will provide further updates in due course.