

Information for Parents/ Carers on Free Early Education Entitlement

for 2, 3 and 4 year olds in Northumberland



Introduction

Research suggests that consistent high quality early years care and education can have long lasting positive benefits on a child's overall social, physical and cognitive development. Children's experience in the earliest years can lay firm foundations for their future. As a result, the government wants all 3 and 4 year old children to have access to high quality early years education; helping to support their development and prepare them for school.

To demonstrate their commitment, a national scheme was designed entitling all 3 and 4 year old children to free early education, extended recently to some eligible 2 year olds. Whilst these national schemes are slightly different, they are designed to complement one another and enable a seamless transition.

It is extremely important that parents/carers feel confident in the quality of provision they choose. This guide has therefore been designed to help you make an informed choice about your child's early education entitlement, to explain the funding process and what to expect in Northumberland.

What is free early education entitlement for 2 year olds?

Qualifying parents/carers who meet a range of criteria are entitled to free high quality early education for 15 hours per week (570 hours per year) taken over no fewer than 38 weeks.

Parents/carers can take up as much or as little of their entitlement as they wish.



What criteria do I need to meet?

2 year olds in England are eligible for free early education if you are in receipt of one of the following:

- Child Tax Credit and have an annual income not over £16,190
- Working Tax credits and have annual gross earnings of no more than £16,190 per year
- Income Support
- Income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- Income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- The Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- Guaranteed element of State Pension Credit

Children will also be eligible if any of the following apply:

- They have a current Statement of Special Educational Needs or an Education, Health and Care plan
- They attract Disability Living Allowance
- They are looked after by a Local Authority
- They have left care through special guardianship or an adoption or residence order.

What is free early education entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds?

In England ALL 3 and 4 year olds are entitled to free high quality early education 15 hours per week (570 hours per year) taken over no fewer than 38 weeks (irrespective of income), until they either start reception class in a maintained nursery school or reach compulsory school age, which is the term after their 5th birthday.

Eligibility dates

All funding starts from the term following a child's 2nd and 3rd birthday, eligibility dates are as follows:

| Children born in the period | Eligible from the start of the Term on/following |
|------------------------------------|---|
| 1st April – 31st August | 1st September |
| 1st Sept – 31st December | 1st January |
| 1st January – 31st March | 1st April |

Where can I take my child's free entitlement?

Free early education can be delivered by a range of providers as long as they deliver the Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) in full and are listed as an approved provider by the Local Authority. The EYFS is a statutory framework which sets the standards that all early years providers must meet up to the age of 5 years old. Providers delivering the EYFS are regulated and inspected by OfSTED for the quality of their early year's provision. Such providers can include:

- Childminders
- Nurseries on school sites
- Nursery classes in schools and academies
- Nursery based in a Children's Centre
- Private Day Nurseries
- Playgroups and Pre-schools

You can obtain a copy of an OfSTED inspection report from either the provider themselves, OfSTED or Northumberland Families Information Service (FIS).

For further information, on the range of quality educational provision available in Northumberland or how to access a providers OfSTED report please contact Northumberland Families Information Service (FIS) on freephone 0800 023 4440 or telephone: 01670 624889 or email: fis@northumberland.gov.uk.
Website: <http://fis.northumberland.gov.uk>

How can I take my child's free entitlement?

Where reasonably practicable, children are able to take up their full entitlement to early education at times that best support their learning, and at times which fit with the needs of parents/carers.

Providers delivering the free early education entitlement can offer the following flexible packages within the set limits below:

- No session longer than 10 hours
- No session shorter than 2.5 hours
- Not before 7am or after 7pm
- Maximum of two different providers at any one time

Once you have decided on the provider of your choice and are happy with the quality of provision they offer you need to let the provider know:

- that you would like to claim your free 15 hours entitlement
- how many hours of entitlement each week that you would like to take up
- whether your child is attending another early years provision
- whether you would like the funding to be split and the number of hours you want to claim (*see below)
- any other services that you require in addition to your free entitlement (see page 8)

**Funding can be split between two providers except where a child is attending a maintained nursery, in which case the funding will be allocated by the Local Authority to the school.*

Can I take my child's free entitlement during school holidays?

Yes, some providers may offer a 'stretched entitlement'. This allows parents/carers to take up patterns of hours which stretch their child's entitlement by taking fewer hours per week over more weeks in the year up to a maximum of 570 hours in total. Each provider is different and not all providers delivering the free education entitlement are able to offer a stretched entitlement.

Will I have to pay for anything?

Your child's 15 hours entitlement is FREE. Providers must not charge for the free entitlement or any top up fees, for example registration fees, or uniform.

Charging parents/carers a deposit, administration or registration fee is also not permitted, nor is charging parents/carers in advance of the provider receiving funding from the Local Authority for your child's place.



Additional services

Providers can offer additional services; however, they must ensure that parents/carers are clearly made aware of any additional service charges that apply prior to taking up their free place.

If parents/carers take more than their free 15 hours over 38 weeks then providers can charge for these additional hours.

Parents/carers should be clearly billed so they can easily understand:

- the free entitlement hours taken up and
- any additional hours or services chargeable

Providers must offer parents/carers a choice of providing a packed lunch for their child, where the provider offers and charges for lunch. A place should not be offered on the grounds that you have to pay for any additional hours or services.

Maintained nursery schools should provide Free School Meals for children who attend early years provision both before and after lunch and whose parents/carers are in receipt of specified benefits.

What if a provider offers a staggered intake/induction period?

Where providers offer a staggered intake/induction period they should ask for written parental agreement in advance of the start of the term before depriving a child of part of their free education entitlement. In cases where parents/carers agree to a staggered intake, but would be financially disadvantaged by having to pay for childcare, the provider must reimburse the parent for those childcare costs. Parents/carers should inform the provider of the costs incurred during the period of time they should have been receiving their entitlement.

As a Northumberland resident can I take my entitlement at a provider in another Local Authority?

The 3 and 4 year old entitlement can be taken in any Local Authority and your chosen provider will be able to give you further details on how/or if the funding for 2 year olds can be claimed in their Local Authority.

If I have just moved to England and my child is not a British Citizen, will my child be eligible for the free early education entitlement?

2, 3 and 4 year old children moving to England from another country can access a place on the same basis as any other child in the Local Authority area, provided they meet the relevant eligibility criteria for their age.

When will my child go into a reception class?

In accordance with the School Admissions Code, parents/carers would normally take up a full time place for their child in a school reception class in the September following their child's 4th birthday. Parents/carers can retain the right to defer their child's entry to reception school until the term after their 5th birthday; these children will continue to be able to access their free entitlement at their chosen provision, until compulsory school age.

Special educational needs

Providers have a responsibility to ensure all children have full access to the EYFS. They must offer support for children accessing their provision with a disability or identified special educational need. To ensure the needs of your child are fully met, we encourage you to discuss your child's needs or any initial concerns with your provider.

What should I do if I have a concern regarding my child's free entitlement?

A parent/carer with a concern regarding the free entitlement, or the provider's pricing policy in relation to the free entitlement, should initially raise their concern with the provider. The provider should then investigate the concern in accordance with their complaints policy. If the parent/carer feels that the concern has not been resolved according to the terms of the free entitlement then the parent/carer can inform the Local Authority of their concern in writing. The Local Authority will investigate the complaint and if the provider is not acting in accordance with Northumberland's Local Code of Practice then they will be asked to take the appropriate action to comply.

Parents/carers remaining dissatisfied may wish to lodge an appeal with the Local Authority via FIS on 0800 023 4440 or 01670 624889.

In the event that a parent/carer is not satisfied with the way in which their appeal has been conducted or believes that the Local Authority has acted unreasonably, they may make a complaint to the Local Authority Ombudsman. An appellant may wish to put forward their case in person. The hearing will be as informal as possible.

For information on dispute resolution, please contact

Linda Vernon,
Early Years and School Organisation Manager,
Wellbeing and Community Health Services,
County Hall, Morpeth,
NE61 2EF.
Telephone: 01670 623564.
Email: linda.vernon@northumberland.gov.uk.

What should I do if I have a concern about the quality of a provider?

Whilst many parents/carers are happy with the quality of provision their child receives, the quality of early years provision can vary. If you have any concerns regarding the quality of care your child receives, it is recommended that you raise these with your provider in the first instance. In most cases problems are often dealt with and resolved quickly when handled informally.

However, if you are not happy with the response or feel that your concern was not brought to a satisfactory conclusion, you can address your concern formally in writing to the relevant manager in charge; this can be done following the individual providers complaints procedure.

You can complain direct to OfSTED who have some powers to investigate, although OfSTED will not usually consider a complaint if you have not followed the provider or Local Authority's complaints procedure.

**If you wish to refer your concerns to OfSTED and require further advice on the procedure please contact Northumberland FIS on freephone 0800 023 4440
or telephone: 01670 624889
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