

# 30 HOURS FREE CHILDCARE



## A Parents' Guide

[www.lancashire.gov.uk](http://www.lancashire.gov.uk)

# Parents' Guide

**All 3 and 4 year old children are able to access up to 15 hours free childcare each week. As part of the government's childcare offer, from September 2017 eligible families will be able to access an additional 15 hours free childcare, that's 30 hours in total.**

Visit [www.childcarechoices.gov.uk](http://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk) to find out more information about the government's childcare offer, including; free childcare for eligible 2 year olds, 30 hours free childcare for 3 and 4 year olds, Tax Free Childcare and how to check if you're eligible.

## **Eligibility criteria for the additional hours**

Parents of three and four year olds will need to meet the following criteria in order to be eligible for 30 hours free childcare:

- They earn or expect to earn the equivalent to 16 hours at National Minimum or Living Wage over the coming three months.
- This equates to £120 a week (or £6,000 a year) for each parent over 25 years old or
- £112.80 a week (or £5,800 a year) for each parent between 21 and 24 years old.
- This applies whether you are in paid employment, self-employed or on zero hour's contract.
- The parent (and their partner where applicable) should be seeking the free childcare to enable them to work.
- Where one or both parents are on maternity, paternity, shared parental or adoption leave, or if they are on statutory sick leave.
- Where one parent meets the income criteria and the other is unable to work because they are disabled, have caring responsibilities or have been assessed as having limited capability to work.
- Where a parent is in a 'start-up period' (i.e. they are newly self-employed) they do not
- need to demonstrate that they meet the income criteria for 12 months.

### Confirm your eligibility for 30 hours – Don't miss out!

To start accessing 30 hours free childcare as soon as your child is age eligible you must ensure you have received your 11 digit code before the start of the term they will be eligible. Please see the table below for the term dates:

Parents must confirm eligibility and have received 11 digit code by:

To start accessing 30 hours free childcare from:

31st August  
31st December  
31st March

1st September  
1st January  
1st April

If you have not received your 11 digit code by the date listed above, you will not be able to access your additional free hours until the start of the next term.



# Steps to claiming your 30 hours free childcare

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## STEP 1

Visit [www.childcarechoices.gov.uk](http://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk) scroll down to '30 hours free childcare' and click on apply now.

- You can apply up to 14 weeks before your child becomes age eligible
- Alternatively if you are planning in advance you can sign up for a reminder service to let you know when you can apply.

## STEP 2

Read through the supporting information about 30 hours then click on the green box, 'start now' to begin the eligibility confirmation process.

## STEP 3

You will need to create a 'government gateway account' if you have not already done so. To do this you will need your National Insurance number, access to telephone or mobile and details of one or more of the following - your UK Passport, tax credits, P60 or a recent pay slip.

- As part of this process you will need to confirm your identity, then you can complete the application process
- This information will help HMRC decide whether you and your child are eligible for 30 hours.
- If you encounter any problems contact HMRC on 0300 123 4097

## STEP 4

Eligible parents will receive an 11 digit eligibility code that is valid for 3 months.

- The code will have a start date and an end date. If you do not re-confirm your eligibility, you will no longer be eligible to access the additional hours (you will continue to be able to access the universal 15 hours of free childcare until your child starts school)
- If you fall out of eligibility you will enter what is known as the grace period – this is a set period of time to support parents to continue accessing free childcare to allow time to look for other employment should they choose to do so.

**STEP 5**

**Decide if you want to create a Tax Free Childcare (TFC) account to pay your childcare provider if you choose to access additional hours (check out childcare choices for more information on TFC).**

- To help you understand if this is for you, check out the childcare calculator at <https://www.gov.uk/childcare-calculator>

**STEP 6**

**Take your 11 digit code to your childcare provider and sign the parental agreement to claim your free place. The parental agreement is your opportunity to agree which hours, days and weeks that you would like to access your free childcare and to specify any additional hours or services you would like to pay for.**

- Your childcare provider will need to confirm that your code is valid by checking it with Lancashire County Council before they can offer you a free place.

**STEP 7**

**You will need to re-confirm your eligibility every 3 months by logging into your government gateway account.**

- Don't worry you will get a reminder via text message or email to let you know when you need to do this.
- If for any reason you are no longer eligible for 30 hours you should speak to your childcare provider about the grace period.

# How can I access my free hours?



The total hours that you can access across a year are shown below. You should speak to your childcare provider about how they offer the free hours and think about what works for you.

**15 hours free childcare**  
(all 3 and 4 year olds)

570 hours per year  
15 hours per week over 38 weeks  
12 hours per week over 47.5 weeks  
11.17 hours per week over 51 weeks

**30 hours free childcare** (15 hours free plus  
additional 15 hours for eligible families)

1,140 hours per year  
30 hours a week over 38 weeks  
24 hours a week over 47.5 weeks  
22.35 hours over 51 weeks

Don't forget you can choose to access your free childcare with different providers – this will help you to find a childcare solution that works for you. Settings that only operate term time will often work in partnership with settings operating all year round so you can split the free hours between different providers across a day, week or year to meet your needs.

Speak to your childcare provider to find out how you can take up the free hours and if/how they work in partnership with other settings, if the provider is unable to meet your specific childcare requirements.

If you need help finding childcare check out our website [www.lancashire.gov.uk/childcare](http://www.lancashire.gov.uk/childcare)

## The hours should be free to access

Both the 15 hours and 30 hours should be free to access. That means that if you only want to access the free hours you should not have to pay for any additional services or hours that you don't want or need. This is often described as conditions. Providers are not allowed to place conditions on parents who only want to access a free place.

### **EXAMPLE 1 – meals and snacks**

If a childcare provider offers meals and snacks as part of the free place they have the right to charge for these. You should however be given the choice to make an alternative arrangement if you do not want to pay for this as it is an additional service. In most cases this would mean your child taking a packed lunch instead of paying for lunch. This would avoid any additional charge and allow a parent to access their 30 hours without incurring any additional costs to access their place.

### **EXAMPLE 2 - paying for additional hours**

Childcare providers are not allowed to place a condition on parents to make them pay for additional hours if they do not want to access them. If you just want to access 30 hours a week, there should be no requirement for you to purchase additional hours at the setting if you do not need them. This means there should be no extra cost to accessing the free hours that you want to access.

### **EXAMPLE 3 – lunchtimes and artificial breaks**

Parents who are eligible and want to access the 30 hours should not be required to pay for a lunch time session if they are not able to collect their child in between the morning and afternoon sessions. Care over the lunch time period should be included in the free hours, as it is difficult for working parents to manage this time.

Charged sessions should be at the start or end of the day to give greater flexibility to parents managing their childcare arrangements around working hours and other commitments.

**Talk to your childcare provider about how they can offer the hours flexibly to meet your needs**

# Useful contacts

[www.childcarechoices.gov.uk](http://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk)

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