

Free Early Education and Childcare Frequently asked questions for parents

What is Free Early Education and Childcare?

All 3 and 4 year olds are entitled to 570 hours of free early education per year, which is equal to up to 15 hours per week for 38 weeks of the year. If you are in receipt of certain benefits, you may also be entitled to 570 hours free early education per year when your child turns 2 years old.

From September 2017, some 3 and 4 year olds may be entitled to an additional 570 hours of childcare per year, which is equal to 30 hours a week for 38 weeks a year (1140 hours per year). The 30 hour free childcare entitlement is available to working families who meet the eligibility criteria.

Where is Free Early Education and Childcare offered?

Early Education and Childcare is available at a range of registered providers including private, voluntary and independent (PVI) providers such as childminders, pre-schools and some other types of childcare and also at Hertfordshire nursery schools and classes.

What is the difference between a nursery school/class and a PVI early education provider?

A nursery school class or academy is one that is either based on school premises or linked to a school. A private, voluntary or independent (PVI) provider is not linked directly to a school. Both schools and PVI's:

- deliver the early years foundation stage (EYFS) curriculum and offer the same learning opportunities for children
- are inspected by Ofsted
- can provide flexible provision and opportunities for wraparound and extended care.

Is my child the right age for free early education and childcare?

The date a child is entitled to free early education and childcare depends on their date of birth. The table below indicates when two, three and four year olds can access their free early education and or free childcare entitlement.

Child's birthday	When you can claim
1 January to 31 March	The beginning of term on or after 1 April
1 April to 31 August	The beginning of term on or after 1 September
1 September to 31 December	The beginning of term on or after 1 January

A helpful date of birth checker is available at www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/parents

My child is 'summerborn'. Is my child still entitled to free early education and childcare even though he/she is statutory school age?

Yes. All children are entitled to 570 hours of free early education until they start full time education, the term after they are five.

Children do not have to be in full-time education until the term after their fifth birthday and can remain in free early education until that time.

Summer born children are those children born between 1 April and 31 August.

How do I find out if my two year old is entitled to free early education?

Your 2 year old can get free early education if you get one of the following:

- Income Support
- income-based Jobseeker's Allowance (JSA)
- income-related Employment and Support Allowance (ESA)
- Universal Credit
- tax credits and you have an annual income of under £16,190 before tax
- the guaranteed element of State Pension Credit
- support through part 6 of the Immigration and Asylum Act
- the Working Tax Credit 4-week run on (the payment you get when you stop qualifying for Working Tax Credit)

A child can also get free early education if any of the following apply:

- they are looked after by a local council
- they have a current statement of special educational needs (SEN) or an education, health and care (EHC) plan
- they get Disability Living Allowance
- they have left care under a special guardianship order, child arrangements order or adoption order

You can check your child's eligibility using the 'Can I get free early education and childcare?' link at www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/parents

How do I find out if my three/four year old is entitled to 30 hours free childcare?

You, and any partner, must each expect to earn (on average) at least £120 a week (equal to 16 hours at the National Minimum or Living Wage). If you, or your partner, are on maternity, paternity or adoption leave, or you're unable to work because you are disabled or have caring responsibilities, you could still be eligible.

You can't get 30 hours free childcare if you, or your partner, expect to earn £100,000 or more.

You will be able to check your eligibility at www.childcarechoices.gov.uk

Can my child start as soon as they are entitled?

You will be entitled to the free early education and childcare hours the term after your child turns three as stated above.

However, it is important to understand that not all providers will offer free early education and childcare and not all will allow children to start as soon as they are entitled, so you are advised to check what is on offer and potential start dates with the provider(s) you are interested in.

Information about the free early education and childcare options available at each provider may also be available on individual websites.

How do I apply for a free early education and childcare place?

You must make your application direct to each provider.

Contact and website details for all registered providers in Hertfordshire can be found at www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/parents

When do I need to apply?

The application process is determined by each provider. However, in most cases you will be able to apply at any time.

Contact and website details for all registered providers in Hertfordshire can be found at www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/parents

Will I receive any information about free early education and childcare?

Yes. Information will be posted directly to parents of Hertfordshire children born between 01/09/2014 and 31/08/2015 in October/November 2017.

Information will also be available on the Hertfordshire County Council website and social media forums. You may also wish to sign up to Hertfordshire's 'Update Me' email newsletter which you can do at www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/updateme

When will places be offered?

The offers of places will also be determined by each individual provider. Please visit provider websites or contact them direct for further information.

Why has the application process changed for nursery schools and classes?

Over the last few years, the flexibility and range of free early education and childcare choices available to parents mean that the previous application and offer process cannot be used as an overall county process.

Therefore, Hertfordshire County Council will not be providing a school nursery application system for the 2018/19 academic year. All applications must be made direct to individual early years providers.

Where can I get further information?

Hertfordshire County Council will provide up to date information about early education and childcare at www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/parents

If you would like to find information on childcare providers in Hertfordshire, you can also visit www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/parents

If you think your child will be eligible for 30 hours free childcare from September 2017 and you want to check your eligibility, you can do so at www.childcarechoices.gov.uk