



This document is to provide parents with information about the 30 hours free childcare scheme (Updated 19/02/2018)

From September 2017 new government legislation means that working parents with a 3 or 4 year old, who meet the eligibility criteria, will be entitled to an additional 15 hours of free early education and childcare on top of the 15 hours currently offered.

This new legislation will enable parents to have extra childcare hours whilst they work which will help them manage their childcare costs, which is potentially worth around £5,000 per child per year. The 30 Hours free childcare can support parents into work, to work successfully, or to work more hours should they wish to do so. There are also obvious benefits for children who extend their early education which includes a child being more likely to build up confidence, social skills, resilience, respect and teamwork skills.

The government Childcare Choices website provides eligibility information and a childcare calculator which helps parents compare all of the governments childcare offers. It also has a link to the application form:

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

**Telephone:** 0300 123 4097 if you need assistance to apply or are experiencing problems with the online application process

Doncaster Councils Families Information Service website provides a childcare/school search for 30 hour providers

**Website:** [www.doncaster.gov.uk/fis](http://www.doncaster.gov.uk/fis)

**Please Note:** the term 'provider' will be used throughout this document and it refers to school nurseries and Ofsted registered childcare providers who are included on Doncaster Councils Directory of Providers (this is a list of childcare providers who are able to deliver free entitlement places for 2, 3 & 4 year olds)

## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS

### What are the free childcare entitlements for 3 and 4 year olds?

**15 hours free early education and childcare** per week, for 38 weeks of the year (term time), which equates to up to 570 hours over a year.

This is a universal entitlement for ALL 3 and 4 year olds.

**30 hours free early education and childcare** per week for 38 weeks of the year (term time), which equates to up to 1140 hours over a year (from September 2017).

This is for working families that meet the eligibility criteria. The 30 hours entitlement is the 15 hours universal entitlement which will be extended by an additional 15 free hours. The additional 15 free hours will be known as the 'extended entitlement'

### What are the eligibility criteria for the 30 hours free childcare?

Working parents includes: employed, self-employed and workers on a zero hour's contract.

To take up the 30 hours of free childcare families need to meet all the following criteria:

- Each parent earns less than £100,000 per year
- Both parents are working and in a lone parent family the sole parent must work
- Each parent works a minimum of 16 hours a week or earns on average a weekly minimum amount that is equivalent to 16 hours a week at either the National Minimum Wage or National Living Wage, for example, £120 a week based on National Living Wage

There are exceptions to both parents having to work. Families where one parent does not work (or neither parent works) will not usually be entitled to the 15 hours extended entitlement; however, they will be eligible where:



- both parents are employed but one (or both parents) is temporarily away from the workplace on: parental, maternity or paternity leave; adoption leave; or on statutory sick pay
- one parent is employed and one parent:
  - has substantial caring responsibilities based on specific benefits received for caring
  - is disabled or incapacitated based on receipt of specific benefits

### **Do you have any other information for parents who are self-employed or on a zero hour's contract?**

Although the criteria are based on earning the equivalent of 16 hours a week, there is no requirement to work any particular number of hours or to earn any particular amount each week. Parents need only to expect to earn the stated amount on average over a 3 month period (which will be £120 a week based on National Living Wage). HMRC will request information through the application process which may include previous earnings.

**New self-employed parents:** it is recognised that many small businesses struggle to generate a regular income when they first start up. Therefore to support newly self-employed parents they do not have to meet the minimum income rule in their first year of trading. This 'start up' period should remove the pressure on parents to predict future income in the earliest months of their business.

### **How do I apply?**

Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) are managing the 30 hours process and the online application form can be accessed through a link on the governments Childcare Choices **website:** [www.childcarechoices.gov.uk](http://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk) If a parent needs assistance to apply or are experiencing problems with the online application process **Telephone:** 0300 123 4097 for the customer interaction centre.

A child's eligibility will be determined by HMRC and if the parent disagrees with the eligibility outcome there is a review and appeals process which is managed by HMRC.

Eligibility codes will be valid for approximately a 3 month period and parents are required to reconfirm their details.

When a parent first applies to HMRC the validity period is unlikely to be exactly 3 months long and there are various reasons for this:

- The system will randomly set a 'Validity End Date' between the 7th and 22nd of the month
- Parents currently on childcare vouchers who agree to come off them get an extra month
- There are some exceptional circumstances that can extend and shorten the initial validity period, for example, siblings will have their 'Validity End Dates' aligned to allow a single validity period for all children

**Please Note:** When a parent reconfirms their eligibility the extension to the validity period will be **exactly** three months long.

### **How do I re-confirm every 3 months?**

Parents will be prompted every 3 months to reconfirm their eligibility and they should receive two reminders to which will be approximately 4 weeks and 2 weeks before their reconfirmation deadline. Reconfirming is a simple process which requires a parent to log into their HMRC childcare account and amend any details if necessary, or to confirm that their details have not changed. On reconfirmation, if their child is already in a 30 hours place and the parent is no longer eligible for 30 hours they will enter a grace period where they can continue their childcare for a short period of time. A child who becomes ineligible during the first half of a funding block should be funded until the end of that funding block. A child who becomes ineligible in the latter half of the funding block should be funded until the end of the following funding block.

If a parent misses the reconfirmation deadline, they will receive a message telling them that they are no longer eligible for the 30 hours entitlement, however they will fall into a grace period (as described above). This will give the parent time to reconfirm their eligibility even if they have missed their reconfirmation deadline.

### **Where is my eligibility code?**

If your online application was successful the eligibility code will have been put into your HMRC childcare account. At the end of the application process the website/customer centre says it will email the eligibility code to you. Parents sometimes mistakenly think it will be emailed to their own personal email address, however it is sent directly to your



online HMRC childcare account. If you have forgotten how to access your childcare account see the 'Parents Guide to Access Code – August 2017' which is on the Families Information Service website: [www.doncaster.gov.uk/fis](http://www.doncaster.gov.uk/fis)

**If I apply early and receive an eligibility code, what happens if my child falls out of eligibility BEFORE they have actually started?**

In some circumstances parents may apply for 30 hours free childcare or receive their eligibility code more than three months before the start of a term. Providers can reserve a place for the parent on the assumption they will remain eligible. If the parent does fall out of eligibility during the reconfirmation process, the provider will be informed by the local authority before the start of the term. This would mean the child is no longer eligible to take up the 15 hours extended entitlement from the beginning of the term, however they would be entitled to receive the 15 hours universal entitlement.

**When can my child take up their 30 hour free place?**

A parent can start claiming their 30 hours place when both of the following conditions are satisfied:

- It is the term after the child's third birthday
- It is the term after the 'Validity Start Date' (the 'Validity Start Date' is when HMRC confirm a parent's eligibility)

Children are eligible for 30 hours free childcare from the term after they turn three until they reach compulsory school age, which is the term following the child's 5<sup>th</sup> birthday. Codes cannot be used to get 30 hours free childcare once a child has taken up a reception place in a state funded school, however, a small number of parents of four year olds may choose to defer their child's entry into reception and in these circumstances they would still be able to claim 30 hours free childcare.

Validity Start Date and child is three years old on or before the following date	Date from when a child can take up their 15 hour extended entitlement place
31 <sup>st</sup> August	1 <sup>st</sup> September
31 <sup>st</sup> December	1 <sup>st</sup> January
31 <sup>st</sup> March	1 <sup>st</sup> April

Your child must have taken up a place by 'Headcount Date'. This is which a provider sends information to the Council on the children attending a free place in order for them to be paid the funding for that place. The Headcount Dates are: 19<sup>th</sup> January (Spring Term); 18<sup>th</sup> May (Summer Term); 5<sup>th</sup> October (Autumn Term).

A parent can reserve a place for their child with their provider prior to the eligibility code being checked, but the code **must** be verified by the provider before the child can take up their place.

**My child is eligible for a 30 hour place, what do I do next?**

- You will be given an 11 digit eligibility code starting with '5000...' and this code is for a parent and child combination, therefore multiple birth siblings will each have their own code.
- *Please Note:* There may be a small number of parents who are issued with a temporary 11 digit eligibility code which will start with '11....' This will expire approximately 3 months after it was issued and parents will need to complete the full online application via the childcare service to continue to access a 30 hours place and at this point they will receive a permanent code.
- You need to find out which providers offer 30 hours places and if they have any vacancies.
- When you have found a provider that you want your child to attend you need to follow their admission arrangements and administration process to secure a place. This will include completing a Parent Declaration Form and providing the code along with your national insurance number and your child's date of birth
- The provider will use the Department for Education's Eligibility Checking System (ECS) to confirm the validity of the code.
- Once the 30 hours code has been validated via the ECS, your child's place can be confirmed and a start date agreed.



### What is a Parent Declaration Form?

This is a form given to the parent by the provider the child will go to. The parent needs to complete and sign a Parent Declaration Form for each child who will take up a free entitlement place. This form will give your consent and provide information to the provider for them to undertake a validation check on your 30 hours eligibility code. If the child attends more than one provider for their 30 free hours, a form must be completed for each provider. Section 4 in the form is where you will enter all the providers that will claim free entitlement funding on behalf of your child. This will help each provider understand what hours you are claiming with each of them so they can make sure the total hours claimed does not exceed your child's entitlement.

### What happens if my circumstances have changed and I am no longer eligible?

If a child has started their place and the parent's circumstances change and they fall out of eligibility, a grace period will apply so the child can continue with their free place for a period of time. After the grace period end date the child will no longer be able to receive the 15 hours extended entitlement however they will continue to receive the 15 hours universal entitlement.

Date parent receives 'not eligible' decision on reconfirmation	Grace Period end date
1 <sup>st</sup> January to 10 <sup>th</sup> February	31 <sup>st</sup> March
11 <sup>th</sup> February to 31 <sup>st</sup> March	31 <sup>st</sup> August
1 <sup>st</sup> April to 26 <sup>th</sup> May	31 <sup>st</sup> August
27 <sup>th</sup> May to 31 <sup>st</sup> August	31 <sup>st</sup> December
1 <sup>st</sup> September to 21 <sup>st</sup> October	31 <sup>st</sup> December
22 <sup>nd</sup> October to 31 <sup>st</sup> December	31 <sup>st</sup> March

If a parent's circumstances change again at a later date or whilst they are in the grace period, they may reapply to HMRC and become eligible again. The eligibility code for a parent / child combination will not change over time even if its validity lapses and a new application is submitted.

### Do I have a choice of how my child takes up the free hours?

The entitlement is for 30 hours free childcare per week for 38 weeks of the year (term time), which equates to 1140 hours over a year. There is no requirement that free places must be taken on or delivered on particular days of the week or at particular times of the day. Therefore you need to ask your preferred provider what service they offer in order for you to determine if it meets your needs.

Where a school nursery provides 30 hour places the majority of schools will deliver this across 5 days a week term time only.

Some providers offer the free places 'flexibly' which means you may be able to choose from a range of options and hours to suit your needs, for example a choice of full and half days or different start times or the opportunity to 'stretch' the hours across more than 38 weeks of the year. An example of a stretched offer would be 24 hours a week for 47.5 weeks of the year.

### Does my child need to take up the full 30 hours?

No, a parent can decide the number of free hours they wish to take up that would suit them and their child. The number of hours you wish to take needs to be discussed and arranged with the provider.

### Where can my child take up their free childcare place?

It is a school or childcare provider's choice whether or not they will deliver the 30 hours. The entitlement to a free place does not offer a guarantee of a place at a specific school/childcare provision or a particular pattern of provision. Parents should look around to find the appropriate provision to meet their needs.

A 30 hours free place can be taken at a school with a nursery or with a childcare provider who is registered on Doncaster Councils Directory of Funded Providers to deliver 3 and 4 year old free entitlement places.

These include: independent schools, day nurseries, childminders or sessional providers (for example, a playgroup or pre-school).



To find contact details and information for schools and childcare providers who offer 30 hours places, visit the Families Information Service website which has a search facility

**Website:** [www.doncaster.gov.uk/fis](http://www.doncaster.gov.uk/fis) or if you need assistance **telephone:** 01302 862136

### **Can I use more than one provider for the 30 hours?**

Yes, you can take your 30 hours with more than one provider. There is no limit on the number of providers you can use, however you will be limited to no more than two sites in a single day.

### **My child is 4 years old can I still apply for the 30 hours?**

You would **not** be eligible for the 30 hours free childcare if your child is attending a reception class in a state funded school. You would be able to apply if your child will not be attending a state school until the term following their fifth birthday and you wish to access a place at a private, voluntary or independent school or childcare provider.

### **My school nursery offers 30 hours places, how do I apply?**

**15 hour extended entitlement places:** The parent should contact the school directly and they will tell you what their admission arrangements are for the extended entitlement places. All providers of free entitlement places are required to publish clear and transparent admissions arrangements. This will include how to apply and the process for allocating places.

**15 hours universal entitlement nursery places:** The allocation of nursery places will still be undertaken by the Council for the majority of schools. The parent will submit an application form to the Council, who will then write to the parent informing them which school nursery their child will have a place at for their 15 hours universal entitlement. The admission arrangements for which sessions the child will attend will then be agreed directly with the school.

### **Will I have to pay anything for my child's 30 hour place?**

No, the actual 30 hours place will be delivered free to the parent. Government funding for a free place is intended to deliver 30 hours a week of free, high quality, flexible childcare. It is not intended to cover the cost of meals, optional services or additional hours (hours that are taken over and above the free entitlement hours). Therefore providers will charge for additional hours, meals, trips out and consumables such as nappies, wipes, sun cream etc.

It is the parents' choice whether or not to take up any of the additional/optional services and it must not be a condition on taking up any part of the 30 hours free place that a parent has to pay a fee. The 30 hour place must be delivered completely free of charge or conditions. The parent is likely to be given the option to supply any consumables or a meal / snack for their child.

Before a child starts their free hours, a parent should expect the provider to be completely clear about charges for additional hours and optional services. Parents should also expect their invoice, receipt or any other documentation in respect of the 30 hours to be clear and itemised, so a parent can see they have received their free entitlement place completely free of charge and understand the breakdown of any fees charged for additional hours or service.

Parents should **not** be required to pay a registration fee as a condition of taking up their child's free place.

A childcare provider can request a deposit where a place is secured in advance. The deposit will then be refunded in full to the parent within a reasonable timescale when the child takes up the place.

### **What is the complaints procedure?**

If you are not satisfied that your child is receiving their free entitlement place in the correct way, as set out in the Councils published information, please contact your school or childcare provider and follow their complaints procedure. Hopefully by raising your concerns any issues will be resolved and you will be satisfied with the outcome.

If following a discussion with the school or childcare provider you are still not satisfied your child has received their free entitlement in the correct way then you can access the Councils complaint procedure.

To submit a complaint to the Council complete the online complaints form which can be found at: <http://www.doncaster.gov.uk/services/get-in-touch/complaints-and-compliments>

Or alternatively put the complaint in writing and clearly mark it as a 'Complaint' and send to: Doncaster Council, c/o Education, Returns & Collections Team, Civic Building, Floor 3, Waterdale, Doncaster, DN1 3BU



Doncaster  
Council

# Parents Information Sheet

## **Tax Free Childcare**

Tax Free Childcare is a new Government scheme to help working families with their childcare costs. Parents will be able to open online childcare accounts to pay their provider directly. For every £8 that parents, family or friends pay in, the Government will make a top up payment of an additional £2 up to a maximum of £2,000 per child per year, or £4,000 for each disabled child. This will be open to all working parents in the UK with children under 12 years old or under 17 years old if they have a disability. Parents can't use Tax Free Childcare at the same time as childcare vouchers. To support parents to decide which childcare offer will best suit their family, the governments new Childcare Choices website will provide all the information a parent needs to understand what is available to them: <https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk>

*If you have any questions about the content of this fact sheet or would like further information please contact:*

**Sandra Hammond**      **Telephone:** 01302 862118      **Email:** [sandra.hammond@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:sandra.hammond@doncaster.gov.uk)

*You can contact the Families Information Service:*

**Website:** [www.doncaster.gov.uk/FIS](http://www.doncaster.gov.uk/FIS) to carry out an online search for Funded Providers or school nurseries

**Telephone:** 01302 862136 or free phone 0800 138 4568      **Email:** [fis@doncaster.gov.uk](mailto:fis@doncaster.gov.uk)