



## Free early education + childcare

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# Free early education + childcare

If you have a child aged 2, 3 or 4 years old, you may be entitled to a free childcare place



**The Free Early Education Entitlement is a Central Government scheme funded through Local Authorities, which provides up to 15 or 30 hours per week of free childcare for children aged two, three and four years old (subject to some eligibility criteria) until they reach compulsory school age.**

Early education benefits children's social, physical and mental development while also helping them to prepare for school. Evidence shows that regular, good quality early education has lasting benefits for all children.

Free early education is available through day nurseries, pre schools or playgroups, independent schools, maintained nursery schools and classes and childminders, however the free entitlement does not offer a guarantee of a place at your preferred provider.

All providers of free early education must meet the following criteria:

- Be a maintained school in the local authority or registered by the Office for Standards in Education, Children's Services and Skills (Ofsted) and inspected for the childcare and education they provide on a regular basis;
- All staff are checked by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS);
- Meet the learning and development and welfare requirements of the statutory Early Years Foundation Stage.

You can view the Ofsted inspection report of an early education provider on Ofsted's website at:

[www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk/reports)

# There are three entitlements that are available to children aged 2, 3 and 4 years old in Southwark:



## Universal Free Early Education Entitlement for 3 + 4 Year Olds

Every child aged three and four years old is entitled to receive a maximum of 15 hours of free early education per week, until they reach compulsory school age (the term following their fifth birthday). Parents do not need to apply for this entitlement and there are no eligibility criteria.

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## Two Year Old Free Early Education Entitlement

Some two year olds are entitled to receive a maximum of 15 hours of free early education per week until the term after their third birthday. Parents will need to meet specific eligibility criteria to qualify for this entitlement.

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## Free Early Education Extended Entitlement for 3 + 4 Year Olds

Since September 2017, the Government increased the universal free entitlement for children aged 3 and 4 years old to 30 hours per week for working families. Parents will need to meet specific eligibility criteria to qualify for this entitlement.

This will provide an additional 15 hours per week on top of the universal entitlement of 15 hours per week for all 3 and 4 year olds. This new scheme is also being referred to as the 'additional 15 hours' or '30 hours free childcare'.

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# Universal Free Early Education Entitlement for 3 + 4 Year Olds

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

Each child is entitled to receive a maximum of 15 hours per week, over no fewer than 38 weeks per year (totalling 570 hours per year). The entitlement can be taken over no more than ten hours per day, between the hours of 6am and 8pm.

### How do I apply for the universal free early education entitlement?

Your early education provider can apply for the universal free entitlement on your behalf directly from the Local Authority. A list of participating providers is available on the Southwark Council website at [www.southwark.gov.uk/freearlylearning](http://www.southwark.gov.uk/freearlylearning)

If your preferred provider is not on this list, please speak with them to find out if they are offering the entitlement.

### When will my child become eligible for the free entitlement?

The table below shows when your child will become eligible:

If your child is born between:	They become eligible for a free place from:
1 April and 31 August	The first September following their third birthday until statutory school age
1 September and 31 December	The first January following their third birthday until statutory school age
1 January and 31 March	The first April following their third birthday until statutory school age



### When can my child access their free place?

You should secure your free place with the provider of your choice before the start of the term you would like your child to start; otherwise your child may not be able to start at the time you want them to.

#### For example: if you want your child to start at:

- beginning of September, you should secure your free place between April and August.
- beginning of January, you should secure your free place between September and December.
- beginning of April, you should secure your free place between January and March.

You should discuss with the provider of your choice the hours they can offer and when you can access them.

### Who pays for the free early education entitlement?

Participating providers claim the cost of the entitlement directly from Southwark Council. There is no money passed to parents/carers.

### Will parents be charged for the free early education entitlement?

Providers cannot charge parents for any part of the 15 hours free entitlement, but they may charge you a refundable deposit to secure your childcare place.

If you use your provider for more than 15 hours per week, you will be responsible for paying the cost of these additional hours. You will also need to check with your provider if they charge for any additional extras, such as snacks, meals or outings etc.

### Can I use more than one early education provider?

It is possible to split your place between two providers (except for schools) as long as the total number of free hours does not exceed the entitlement. However, this option is only available if the provider is able to accommodate you in this way. You will also need to inform both providers of where you have taken up a split place.

### I live in Southwark; can my child go to a provider in another borough?

Yes. If you live in Southwark, but want your child to go to a setting in another borough, your chosen provider will be responsible for claiming the cost of your free place from their own local authority. You should speak with the childcare provider of your choice to check if they are offering the free entitlement.

### Can my child access the free entitlement if they have just moved to England from another country?

Children moving to England from other countries are entitled to access the free early education entitlement on the same basis as any other child, regardless of whether they have British citizenship.





# Two Year Old Free Early Education Entitlement

## What is the two year old free entitlement?

Each eligible child is entitled to receive a maximum of 15 hours of free early learning per week over no fewer than 38 weeks per year (totalling 570 hours per year) until the term after they turn three years old. Then like all children, they will become eligible for the universal free entitlement for three and four year olds. The entitlement can be taken over no more than ten hours per day, between the hours of 6am and 8pm.

### Is the two year old free entitlement available to all two year olds?

No. The two year old free entitlement is only available to two year olds whose parents/carers meet specific eligibility criteria.

### Who is eligible for the two year old free entitlement?

The two year old entitlement is available to two year old children whose parents/carers receive one or more of the following:

- Income Support
- Income based Job Seekers' Allowance
- Income related Employment and Support Allowance
- Support under part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999
- The guaranteed element of State Pension Credit
- Universal Credit
- Child Tax Credit (with an annual gross income of no more than £16,190)
- Working Tax Credits (with an annual gross earnings of no more than £16,190)

Or, children who are either:

- Looked after by the local authority
- Have a current statement of SEN or an Education, Health and Care Plan
- Are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance
- Have left care through special guardianship or an adoption or residence order.

### How do I apply for the entitlement?

You will need to apply online at [www.emsonline.southwark.gov.uk/CitizenPortal\\_LIVE](http://www.emsonline.southwark.gov.uk/CitizenPortal_LIVE) to check if you are eligible.

If you are eligible, you will need to take a copy of your email confirmation with your reference number to the participating provider of your choice.

A list of participating providers is available on the Southwark Council website at [www.southwark.gov.uk/freeearlylearning](http://www.southwark.gov.uk/freeearlylearning)

If your preferred provider is not on this list, please speak with them to find out if they are offering the entitlement.

### When will my child become eligible for the free entitlement?

The table below shows when your child will become eligible:

If your child is born between:	They become eligible for a free place from:
1 April and 31 August	The first September following their third birthday until statutory school age
1 September and 31 December	The first January following their third birthday until statutory school age
1 January and 31 March	The first April following their third birthday until statutory school age

### When can my child access their free place?

You should secure your free place with the provider of your choice before the start of the term you would like your child to start; otherwise your child may not be able to start at the time you want them to.

For example: if you want your child to start at:

- beginning of September, you should secure your free place between April and August.
- beginning of January, you should secure your free place between September and December.
- beginning of April, you should secure your free place between January and March.

You should discuss with the participating provider of your choice the hours they can offer and when you can access them.

### Can I lose my eligibility?

No. If your circumstances change, your child can continue to receive their two year old free place until the term after they turn three years old.

### Who pays for the free early education entitlement?

Participating providers claim the cost of the entitlement directly from Southwark Council. There is no money passed to parents/carers.

### Will parents be charged for the two year old free entitlement?

Providers cannot charge parents for any part of the 15 hours free entitlement but they may charge you a refundable deposit to secure your childcare place.

If you use your provider for more than 15 hours per week, you will be responsible for paying the cost of these additional hours. You will also need to check with your provider if they charge for any additional extras, such as snacks, meals or outings etc.

### Can I use more than one early education provider?

It is possible to split your place between two providers (except for schools) as long as the total number of free hours does not exceed the entitlement. However, this option is only available if the provider is able to accommodate you in this way. You will also need to inform both providers of where you have taken up a split place.

### I live in Southwark; can my child go to a provider in another borough?

Yes. If you live in Southwark, but want your child to go to a setting in another borough, your chosen provider will be responsible for claiming the cost of your free place from their own local authority. You should speak with the childcare provider of your choice to check if they are offering the free entitlement



3+4

# Free Early Education Extended Entitlement for 3 and 4 Year Olds

## What is the Free Early Education Extended Entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds?

Every child aged three and four years old is entitled to receive a maximum of 15 hours of free early education per week, until they reach compulsory school age (the term following their fifth birthday).

Since September 2017, the Government increased this free entitlement to 30 hours per week for working families subject to qualifying criteria. This provides an additional 15 hours per week in addition to the universal entitlement of 15 hours per week for all 3 and 4 year olds.

Each eligible child is entitled to receive up to 30 hours of free early learning per week. The entitlement can be taken over no more than 10 hours per day, between the hours of 6am – 8pm, over no fewer than 38 weeks per year (maximum 1,140 hours per year).

This new scheme is also being referred to as the 'additional 15 hours' or '30 hours free childcare'.

### Is the Extended Entitlement available to all 3 and 4 year olds?

No. The Extended Entitlement is only available to 3 and 4 year olds whose parents/carers meet specific eligibility criteria.

### Who is eligible for the Extended Entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds?

The Extended Entitlement is available to working parents of children age three and four years old (or a sole parent in a lone-parent family).

#### Each parent must either:

- expect to earn at least £120 a week or work more than 16 hours at the National Living Wage (unless you became self-employed less than 12 months ago);
- or
- expect to earn at least £112.80 a week or work more than 16 hours at the National Minimum Wage (unless you became self-employed less than 12 months ago);
- or
- expect to earn at least £64.80 a week if you're under 18, £89.60 a week if you're aged 18-20 or £56.00 a week if you're an apprentice (either under 19 or in the first year of your apprenticeship)

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#### Both parents must:

- live in England
- expect to have income of less than £100,000 each a year

#### Additional Information

- You do not need to actually work 16 hours per week, but your earnings must equal at least 16 hours work at minimum wage/national living wage.
- Parent means a person who has parental responsibility for the child. In cases where a parent has remarried or is living with a partner, the step-parent or partner must also meet the earning threshold.
- If you are a foster carer, you are only eligible for the extended entitlement for your own children if you meet the criteria. You are not eligible for children that you foster.
- If you and your partner are unemployed, you and your partner must become employed within 14 days of applying.

#### You may still be eligible if:

- You are already getting Universal Credit or tax credits;

#### and if you or your partner:

- are taking paid time off work, such as maternity leave, paternity leave or sick leave
- are temporarily away from England for a period of up to 6 months, such as if you're in the military (on duty)

#### You can also still apply for the Extended Entitlement if either you or your partner is employed or self-employed and one of you gets one or more of the following benefits:

- contribution-based Employment and Support Allowance
- Carer's Allowance
- Incapacity Benefit or long-term Incapacity Benefit
- Severe Disablement Allowance

- National Insurance credits because of incapacity or limited capability for work
- you've been assessed as having limited capability for work for Universal Credit purposes

#### You will not be able to apply for the Extended Entitlement if:

- either parent has an income of more than £100,000
- you are in receipt of a childcare grant
- you are a full-time student/an intern
- either parent is a non-EEA national and subject to immigration control (and has no recourse to public funds).

#### How do I apply for the Extended Entitlement?

- You will need to apply for the entitlement online at [www.childcare-support.tax.service.gov.uk](http://www.childcare-support.tax.service.gov.uk). You will also be able to apply for Tax Free Childcare at the same time.
- If you are eligible, you will receive a 30 hours eligibility code, which will be your unique 11-digit reference number. This code is important as you will need it to claim your free childcare.
- Once you have found a participating provider that you are happy with, they will check your eligibility code with the local authority to confirm your eligibility.

A list of participating providers is available on the Southwark Council website at [www.southwark.gov.uk/freearlylearning](http://www.southwark.gov.uk/freearlylearning)

If your preferred provider is not on this list, please speak with them to find out if they are offering the entitlement.

- If your child is already attending a school reception class, you will not be able to use your code to get free childcare.
- If you don't have access to the internet or you need help with completing your online application, please call the HMRC Childcare Service Customer Interaction Centre on **0300 123 4097**.

Continued over

### When will my child become eligible for an Extended Entitlement place?

The table below shows when your child will meet the age range to become eligible:

If your child is born between:	They can access a free place from:
1 April and 31 August	First September following their third birthday until statutory school age
1 September and 31 December	First January following their third birthday until statutory school age
1 January and 31 March	First April following their third birthday until statutory school age

### When should I apply for the Extended Entitlement?

You should apply for your extended entitlement before the start of the term you'd like your child to start. Otherwise your child will not be able to access their extended entitlement place until the following term.

#### For example: if you want your child to start:

- beginning of September, you must apply for your extended entitlement before 31 August
- beginning of January, you must apply for your extended entitlement before 31 December
- beginning of April, you must apply for your extended entitlement before 31 March

### When can my child access their free place?

You should secure your free place with the provider of your choice **before the start of the term** you would like your child to start; otherwise your child may not be able to start at the time you want them to.



#### For example: if you want your child to start at:

- beginning of September, you should secure your free place between April and August.
- beginning of January, you should secure your free place between September and December.
- beginning of April, you should secure your free place between January and March.

You should discuss with the participating provider of your choice the hours they can offer and when you can access them.

### Can I lose my eligibility?

Yes – if your circumstances change.

Every three months, you will need to reconfirm with HMRC that you are still eligible for the Extended Entitlement. During this time, your child will be able to keep their free place. The HMRC will also remind you to reconfirm that you are still eligible 4 weeks before the deadline.

If you do not reconfirm your eligibility, your childcare provider and local authority will be told that you no longer meet the requirements for a free childcare place.

If you become ineligible you may still be able to access your free childcare place for a short period, known as a 'Grace Period'. You can check what your grace period arrangements are with your childcare provider.

If you are no longer eligible for the Extended Entitlement, you can still access the universal 15 hours free entitlement for 3 and 4 year olds. However, you may not be able to access this at the same provider so you will need to speak with them about availability.

### Who pays for the Extended Entitlement?

Participating providers claim the cost of the entitlement directly from Southwark Council. There is no money passed to parents/carers.

### Will parents be charged for the Extended Entitlement?

Providers cannot charge parents for any part of the 30 hours free entitlement but they may charge you a refundable deposit to secure your childcare place. If you use your provider for more than 30 hours per week, you will be responsible for paying the cost of these additional hours. You will also need to check with your provider if they charge for any additional extras, such as snacks, meals or outings etc.

### Can I use more than one early education provider?

It is possible to split your place between two providers as long as the total number of free hours does not exceed the entitlement. However, this option is only available if the provider is able to accommodate you in this way. You will also need to inform both providers of where you have taken up a split place.

### I live in Southwark; can my child go to a provider in another borough?

Yes. If you live in Southwark, but want your child to go to a setting in another borough, your chosen provider will be responsible for claiming the cost of your free place from their own local authority. You should speak with the childcare provider of your choice to check if they are offering the free entitlement.

## Contact us

If you are not happy with the way your child has received their free entitlement you can contact us for advice. You should raise any concerns with your early education provider in the first instance, however if you are still not happy, please contact us at:

[earlylearninginfo@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:earlylearninginfo@southwark.gov.uk)

## Other Childcare Support

You can also check whether you could be eligible for a range of other childcare benefits such as tax free childcare and childcare vouchers by visiting the Governments Childcare Choices website at:

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





### **Free Early Learning Team**

Telephone

**0800 013 0639**

Email

**[earlylearninginfo@southwark.gov.uk](mailto:earlylearninginfo@southwark.gov.uk)**

Website

**[www.southwark.gov.uk/freeearlylearning](http://www.southwark.gov.uk/freeearlylearning)**

### **30 Hours Free Childcare**

**[www.childcare-support.tax.service.gov.uk](http://www.childcare-support.tax.service.gov.uk)**

HMRC Childcare Service Customer Interaction Centre

**0300 123 4097**

Website

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

### **Two Year Old Free Early Learning**

**[www.emsonline.southwark.gov.uk/CitizenPortal\\_LIVE](http://www.emsonline.southwark.gov.uk/CitizenPortal_LIVE)**

