

# Frequently asked questions for early years providers

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## Expanding childcare and early education

### **Q: How are you expanding the availability and affordability of childcare in England?**

It is our ambition that all families have access to high-quality, affordable, and flexible early education and care, improving the life chances for every child and the work choices for every parent.

We are rolling out expansions to early education and childcare entitlements. Most recently, from September 2024, eligible working parents have been entitled to 15 hours a week of early education and childcare from the term after their child turns 9 months. From September 2025, this will be further extended to 30 hours of government-funded childcare.

This marks the beginning of long-term reform to create an integrated early years and childcare system that works for parents and gives every child the best start in life.

As announced at Budget, we expect to provide over £8 billion for the early years entitlements in 2025-26 – a more than 30% increase compared to 2024-25, as we continue to deliver the expansion to eligible working parents of children aged from nine months

**Q: When are these changes happening?**

The current early years entitlements are:

- 15-hour entitlement for eligible working parents of children aged from 9 months. Eligible working parents of 2-year-olds have been able to access 15 hours of early education and childcare since April 2024
- 15-hour entitlement for families of 2-year-olds receiving additional forms of support.
- universal 15 hours entitlement for all 3 and 4-year-olds
- an additional 15 hours for eligible working parents of 3 and 4-year-olds (commonly known as '30 hours')

From September 2025 eligible working parents of children aged from 9 months will be able to access 30 hours of government funded childcare per week.

**Q: Will there be additional funding to help providers scale up provisions?**

£100m in capital funding was provided to local authorities in 2023-24 to support the expansion of childcare places for eligible working parents and to increase the supply of wraparound care for primary school-aged children. This funding can be used to increase the physical capacity of early years and wraparound provision in local areas where demand is likely to exceed existing supply. We have also announced a new £75 million expansion revenue grant to support the sector to deliver the 35,000 additional staff and 70,000 places required to meet demand for next September and will provide more details on this as soon as possible.

**Q: When can parents start to apply?**

Eligible parents can access 15 hours of government-funded childcare (over 38 weeks a year) from the term following their child turning 9 months.

Local authorities will continue to receive funding which they will distribute to providers offering the entitlements, and HMRC will continue to determine eligibility via the Childcare Service. The process for parents claiming the entitlements will be the same as under the current system, with eligibility checks processed through HMRC. Parents will remain able to check what childcare support they are entitled to via the Childcare Choices website.

**Q: Can parents apply for a code whilst on maternity, paternity, shared parental, or adoption leave?**

If you are applying for childcare for an older child, who is not the subject of the parental leave, you can apply online on [Gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk). You can also apply for the child that is the subject of the parental leave, though when you return to work will affect when you can take up the childcare.

The below dates apply:

<b>Date of returning to work</b>	<b>When you can apply</b>	<b>When you can access your entitlements from</b>
1 October to 31 January	1 September to 31 December	1 January
1 February to 30 April	1 January to 31 March	1 April
1 May to 30 September	1 April to 31 August	1 September

**Q: How do the entitlements work with shared parental leave?**

If one parent is starting or returning to work within one month of the start of term (that is, 30 September, 31 January, or 30 April), while the other parent remains on parental leave until a later date, then you would be eligible to apply.

## **Readiness for September 2025 expansion of entitlements**

**Q: Will parents be able to find places that suit their needs and support them back to work?**

- The government is committed to rolling out the expanded childcare entitlements, working hand in hand with the early years sector.
- The planned September 2025 childcare rollout of 30 funded hours per week will go ahead, but there are challenges including providers securing enough staff and places to meet demand, with the capacity needed varying across the country.
- This means some parents in parts of the country may not be able to find a place at their chosen provider, or their preferred hours. We are working closely with local authorities to do everything we can to support them to ensure there are sufficiency places and workforce ahead of September 2025.

**Q: What is the government doing to support the sector to increase the number of workforce and places so significantly?**

- We are committed to rolling out childcare entitlements, working hand in hand with the early years sector. The planned September 2025 childcare rollout of 30 funded hours per week will go ahead, but there are challenges including a shortage of staff and places, with the capacity needed varying across the country.
- We are working closely with local areas and the early years sector to ensure there are enough places for this September and will continue to do everything we can to bridge local gaps ahead of September 2025.
- From 2025-26, we expect to be spending in excess of £8 billion per annum *overall* on early education entitlements.

- The department has regular contact with every local authority in England about their sufficiency of childcare and any issues they are facing, including providing them with support through our childcare delivery support contract where appropriate.
- We have also committed to utilising unused space in primary schools to create much needed places in 3,000 nurseries, working in partnership with all parts of the sector and local authorities.
- There are also a range of key interventions underway to support the sector to increase the number of workers, including a national recruitment campaign ‘Do something BIG. Work with small children,’ a trial of financial incentives of up to £1,000 in early years to boost recruitment, Skills Bootcamps for the early years which lead to an accelerated apprenticeship, and a Childminder Start-up Grant scheme.
- We have implemented new flexibilities for childminders that will support them to join and stay in the profession, giving them the flexibility to work with more people and spend more time working from non-domestic premises.

**Q: How are you supporting local authorities to deliver the expansion?**

We have been working closely with local authorities as they have rolled out the first two stages of the early entitlement expansion, and we continue to engage with them regularly as they prepare for September 2025. Currently no local authorities are reporting that eligible children are unable to access early years places

We have a delivery support contractor, Childcare Works, in place to support local authorities and providers to deliver the early years expansion. Childcare Works provide one-to-one targeted support for local authorities who need it, alongside a wider package of support for all local authorities to support them to deliver the childcare expansion programme. This wider support includes regional and national events, the production of materials to help local authorities deliver the expansion, and an online platform to facilitate best practice-sharing between local authorities. In addition to this, Childcare Works provide support for providers to help them expand their places for the early years rollout.

**Funding system**

- Rates vary between local authorities reflecting the different communities that local authorities serve.
- In 2025-26, all local authorities will receive:
  - at least £5.71 per hour up to £9.23 for their 3- and 4-year-old rate,
  - at least £7.23 per hour up to £12.43 for their 2-year-old rate,
  - and at least £9.76 per hour up to £17.44 for their 9 months to 2-year-old rate.
- Alongside core hourly funding rates, eligible children can also attract additional funding through the early years pupil premium (EYPP) and the disability access fund

(DAF). These rates will be the same for all age groups.

- We are delivering the largest ever uplift to the early years pupil premium, increasing EYPP rates by over 45% from 68p per hour in 2024-25 to £1 per hour in 2025-26, equivalent to up to £570 per eligible child per year.
- To support providers to make reasonable adjustments within their provision to support eligible children with a disability, we are increasing funding for the Disability Access Fund (DAF) by 3% to £938 per eligible child per year (up from £910/year in 2024-25).
- Additional supplementary funding is provided to local authorities for maintained nursery schools. In 2025-26:
  - The budget for maintained nursery school supplementary funding is £92.6m.
  - National average hourly rate for MNS supplementary funding will increase from £5.27 in 2024-25 to £5.90 in 2025-26 – the majority of which reflects increased funding in respect of the September 2024 teacher pay award.

### **Q: What are you doing for 3- and 4-year-olds?**

- As usual, the hourly funding rates will vary between local authorities reflecting the different communities that local authorities serve, but for 2025-26 the national average 3- and 4-year-old hourly funding rate of local authorities is increasing by 4.1%.
- On top of this, eligible children can also attract additional funding through the early years pupil premium.
- Early education gives all children – and especially disadvantaged children – the best start in life. That's why we are delivering the largest ever uplift to the EYPP, increasing the rate by over 45% from 68p per hour in 2024-25 to £1 per hour in 2025-26, equivalent to up to £570 per eligible child per year.

### **Q: What is the expansion grant?**

- On top of over £8 billion through the core funding rates, we are providing an additional £75 million 'expansion' grant for 2025-26 to support the sector in this pivotal year to grow the places and the workforce needed to deliver the final phase of expanded childcare entitlements from September 2025.
- Local authorities and providers have worked brilliantly to deliver the latest expansion of 15 hours of government funded childcare and early education to eligible working parents of children from 9 months old.
- For the expansion to 30 hours next September, we know that around 70,000 additional places and 35,000 early years educators will still be needed. Our projections show that around half of local areas need to increase their capacity by between 10% and 20% to meet demand for September 2025 – with the highest uplift in some of the most disadvantaged areas.

- We know how important details of funding arrangements are to LAs and providers and so we will provide further details on this grant as soon as possible.

## Wraparound childcare

### **Q: What is wraparound childcare?**

- Wraparound childcare is childcare that ‘wraps around’ the conventional school day. We want all parents with primary-aged children, who need it, to be able to access childcare at either end of the school day through before and after school clubs, and we will go further by delivering free breakfast clubs in every primary school.
- By ensuring families have the support they need, we can provide every child a firm foundation that sets them up for life and break down the barriers for parents wanting to work more hours or take on new jobs – helping families to get on not just get by.

### **Q: Will wraparound childcare be free to parents?**

This programme aims to increase the availability of childcare rather than subsidise it, therefore parents will still be expected to pay to access provision, but support with costs will be available to eligible parents through Universal Credit and Tax-Free Childcare.

### **Q: How did you allocate the funding which is going to local authorities and how will local authorities allocate the funding?**

Funding is being distributed to all local authorities on the basis of anticipated need, plugging gaps in the existing market. Local authorities will be able to decide how best to use the funding to set up or expand wraparound childcare in their area to meet the needs of their local community.

### **Q: How will breakfast clubs work alongside this wraparound programme?**

- The wraparound programme looks at both before and after school childcare. This government aims to ensure that all parents with primary-aged children, who need it, will be able access childcare at either end of the school day, through breakfast clubs and after school clubs.
- To support parents, particularly those from disadvantaged backgrounds, the government has confirmed it will triple its investment in breakfast clubs to over £30 million in FY25-26 to help ensure children are ready to learn at the start of the school day. This funding will support up to 750 early adopters of the new breakfast clubs from April 2025 to March 2026, as well as enabling us to continue to support the ~2,700 schools currently on the national schools breakfast programme.

## Workforce

### **Q: What is your longer-term plan for the workforce? Recruiting 35,000 additional staff this a huge ask, especially as so many are leaving the profession?**

- The government sees the early years as more than just childcare, it is central to our Opportunity to give every child the best start in life. We are determined to create change in the approach to early years, focusing on high quality early education, celebrating early years careers and embedding the sector into the wider education system.
- We are supporting the sector to attract talented staff and childminders to join the workforce by creating conditions for improved recruitment. Our national recruitment campaign is urging the public to 'Do something BIG' and start a career working with small children. The campaign has a dedicated website which helps people find out more about gaining qualifications and search for existing job vacancies. Alongside this we are testing whether financial incentives and a Childminder Start-up Grant in early years boost recruitment.
- We are delivering new routes into the workforce through Skills Bootcamps for the early years, which lead to an accelerated apprenticeship. We are funding Early Years Initial Teacher Training as a route for new and existing staff to gain Early Years Teacher Status. To support childminders to join and stay in the profession we have implemented new flexibility to work with more people and spend more time working from non-domestic premises.
- We are introducing two new routes to entering and progressing within an early years career: the experience-based route for early years staff, and the Early Years Teacher Degree Apprenticeship. Through the experience-based route, providers will be able to maximise the potential of staff who have the right skills and experience but do not hold an approved qualification, while the Early Years Teacher Degree Apprenticeship will increase the graduate workforce by providing a new undergraduate route to gaining Early Years Teacher Status.

### **Q: What is the department doing to support childminders?**

- Childminders are a key part of the early years workforce, they offer flexible and high-quality early education and care. Attracting childminders to join the workforce and retaining them is of vital importance.
- Our national recruitment campaign urges the public to 'Do something BIG' and consider working with small children in early years settings, including as childminders. Our dedicated campaign website has a section dedicated to promoting childminding as a career option and helping users understand their registration options.

- The Childminder Start-up Grant scheme which provides eligible new childminders registered on or after 15 March 2023 with a one-off payment to help with the costs of setting up their business. To qualify for a grant, new childminders must have completed their childminder registration by 31 March 2025. Find out more here [Apply for a childminder start-up grant - GOV.UK](#)
- From November 2024 the Levelling Up and Regeneration Act (LURA) provides new flexibilities to help childminders join and stay in the profession. These include enabling childminders to work from non-domestic premises all of the time and increasing the number of childminders that can work together – improving access for the children to new experiences out of the home and encourage socialisation. [Find out more about the increased flexibilities for childminders](#)

**Q: What is the experience-based route for early years staff?**

- The experience-based route is a process that will allow suitable and experienced early years staff without an approved qualification to be included in the staff:child ratios at level 3 following successful completion of a period of supervised practice in an early years setting.
- This route recognises that staff members without a full and relevant qualification but with the right level of experience and knowledge can offer a great deal to the care and education of young children.
- We are introducing this measure now to support the recruitment and retention of staff in early years settings. Eligible staff will be able to access this route at eligible early years providers from the 3 March 2025 and, if successful, are expected to be able to begin working in the staff:child ratios at level 3 from September 2025 at the earliest.
- For more information on how the experience-based route works in practice – including details on decision-making, eligibility and process requirements – guidance can be found here: [Experience-based route for early years staff - GOV.UK](#).

## Quality practice

**Q: What support is the government providing to support settings with the quality of their provision?**

- We are committed to ensuring that every child in an early years setting, regardless of their background or any additional needs they may have, receives high quality education and care.
- We have a number of services and resources to support settings with the quality of their provision. This includes



- ‘Help for early years providers,’ an online service featuring resources for early years educators, including childminders
- ‘Foundation years,’ a service providing the latest news, guidance, and resources, funded by DfE delivered by Begin Bright
- a range of non-statutory guidance to support effective curriculum and assessment, including ‘Development Matters’
- [Early Years online child development training](#) via an online training programme to help early years educators build and strengthen their knowledge and understanding of child development
- The [Education Endowment Foundation’s Early Years Evidence Store](#) which is updated with more evidence-based research and activities to engage with children’s learning and development
- We have also extended funding of the Stronger Practice Hubs until March 2025 to continue support for early years educators to improve practice – supporting our mission to break down barriers to opportunity by giving children the best start in life.

**Q: What are Stronger Practice Hubs?**

- The [Stronger Practice Hubs](#) Programme launched in 2022 to address the COVID-19 pandemic’s impact on the youngest children, with a focus on the most disadvantaged areas. The Hubs support early years settings and childminders by sharing effective practice, learning from the best available evidence, and building lasting local networks.
- The Stronger Practice Hubs programme has been extended until at least 31 March 2025. There are 18 hubs in total distributed across England (2 Hubs per region).
- Hubs are well-established early years settings that support others in their area to adopt evidence-based practice improvements and build trusted local networks for sharing effective practice. Stronger Practice Hubs predominantly target settings and children most in need due to the pandemic, with a focus on supporting children from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

**Q: Do high ratios affect the quality of care and teaching?**

- The safety and quality of learning of all children in early education remains a priority for the Department for Education.
- The Department for Education sets the standards and statutory requirements that all early years providers in England must meet. Ofsted and Childminder agencies are responsible for assessing how providers meet and deliver the EYFS framework and report on the quality and standards of provision.
- The staff:child ratio requirements, set out in the Early Years Foundation Stage Statutory Framework, are there to make sure that early years providers have sufficient and appropriately qualified staff to meet the needs of and to safeguard all

children in their care. The ratios require a greater number of staff for the youngest children and allow settings the flexibility to decide how to staff their settings above the minimum requirements to best meet the needs of all their children and staff.

- Setting managers are the ones who know their children and their staff best, and the Government fully trusts and supports their judgement to work at the ratios that are right for the individual needs of their staff and children. Staff:child ratio requirements are statutory minimum requirements, and early years providers can operate at tighter ratios if that is considered best for their children and staff. England has some of the highest quality provision in the world, with 97% of early years settings rated by Ofsted as good or outstanding as of December 2023 – up from 74% in 2012.

**Q: What is the relationship between the EYFS and the introduction of the new Early Years Qualification Requirements and Standards document?**

[The EYFS statutory framework](#) sets out the requirements for staff:child ratios in settings delivering the EYFS and the qualification levels early years professionals must hold to be included within those requirements. The new statutory qualifications document defines the minimum qualifications that professionals must hold to be recognised as level 2, level 3, or level 6 members of staff for the purpose of working within the EYFS staff:child ratios. The two documents should be read alongside each other, as they both form part of the overall EYFS.

**Q: What is the Early Years Teacher Degree Apprenticeship?**

The Early Years Teacher Degree Apprenticeship (EYTDA) standard was published by the Institute for Apprenticeships and Technical Education (IfATE) in January 2025, offering a new undergraduate route to achieving Early Years Teacher Status. Introducing this apprenticeship will support the Department's biggest investment in childcare to date and give more children the best start in life. Having more members of staff with EYTS in the workforce will not only improve quality, but also help providers to operate in higher staff:child ratios for 3 and 4 year olds (1:13). Training providers are expected to be ready to offer EYTDA apprenticeships from September 2026, although some may be ready earlier.

**Q: What is the inspection process for provision for children under 5?**

All early years providers are inspected under the Education Inspection Framework against the [Early Years Foundation Stage Framework](#), which sets the standards for learning and care for children from birth to 5.

**Q: When will you be doing something about single headline grades in early years?**

The government is committed to replacing single headline grades in all the remits that Ofsted inspects in time. The government and Ofsted will work in partnership with the

sector to develop alternative reporting arrangements. New arrangements will take account of the unique characteristics of early years but will broadly reflect the report card approach that is being taken for schools.

**Q: How will this change affect provision at a childminder or Private, Voluntary and Independent Provider?**

At this time, childminder or Private, Voluntary and Independent Providers will continue to receive a single headline grade of overall effectiveness alongside the sub judgements. The government and Ofsted will work in partnership with the sector over the next year to develop alternative reporting arrangements. New arrangements will take account of the unique characteristics of the sector but will broadly reflect the report card approach that is being taken for schools. It should be stressed that the government is committed to replacing single headline grades in all the remits that Ofsted inspects.

## **Children with special educational needs and disabilities**

**Funding rates for 2024-25:**

- Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) in 2024-25 has increased by 2p to 68p per hour, equivalent of up to £388 per eligible child per year
- Disability Access Fund (DAF) in 2024-25 has increased to £910 per year per eligible child
- these rates are the same for all age groups and EYPP and DAF were extended to under 2s from April 2024

**Q: How are children with SEND supported in early years settings?**

- There are various funding arrangements in place to support early years children with SEND who are accessing the entitlements. This includes Disability Access Funding, Special Educational Needs Inclusion Funding and through the High Needs Budget.
- All early years providers have duties under the Equality Act 2010. When early years settings plan and review special educational provision and make decisions about children with SEND, they should consider at the same time, the reasonable adjustments and access arrangements required for the same child or young person under the Equality Act.
- The Early Years Foundation Stage statutory framework sets the standards and requirements that all early years providers must follow to ensure every child has the best start in life, including those with SEND. It stipulates that providers must have arrangements in place to support children with SEND. Maintained schools, maintained nursery schools and all providers who are funded by the local authority to deliver early education places must have regard for the SEND Code of Practice.

- Where a provider identifies a child as having SEND, they must work in partnership with parents to establish the support the child needs. Maintained schools and maintained nursery schools must identify a member of staff to act as Special Educational Needs Coordinator (SENCO), to facilitate this, and to support educators when applying for additional funding, Education, Health and Care plans or accessing third party support. Other providers (in group provision) are expected to identify a SENCO. Childminders are encouraged to identify a person to act as a SENCO and childminders who are registered with a childminder agency or who are part of a network may wish to share the role between them.

**Q: What are the latest resources that have been published?**

- The free [Early Years online child development training](#) was launched in 2022 and is designed to help early years educators build and strengthen their knowledge and understanding of child development, so that they can best support children in early education settings.
- Identifying children’s developmental differences and needs is crucial to ensuring all children are able to learn, develop and thrive. The new module ‘Supporting individual differences and needs’ aims to strengthen educators’ understanding of how to identify developmental differences and needs and consider different factors affecting children’s development when they access the learning and curriculum on offer in the settings.
- The new [Early Years SEND assessment guidance and resources](#), available now on Help for Early Years Providers, have been created to support a child-centred, strengths-based approach to assessing children’s needs. The guidance aligns with Early Years Foundation Stage assessment policy and with best practice and evidence-based practice for children with SEND. It consists of practical advice alongside tools and resources to support early years educators assess what children with SEND can do, capture their voice, and set targets for progress and learning.

## School-based nurseries

**Lines for queries on school-based nurseries (which is capital funding related – not early years entitlements funding):**

- In September 2024 the Secretary of State for Education [announced](#) that state funded primary phase schools could apply for up to £150,000 of £15 million capital funding to create or expand on-site nurseries.
- Schools could apply between 17 October and 19 December 2024; they will be notified of the outcome in Spring 2025.
- During the bidding window, schools were able to express an interest for potential future phases of the programme. This will help assess demand in different parts of

the country. We will use insights from phase 1 to help shape future plans to ensure the programme is delivered in a way that will benefit parents and children.

**Q: Why focus on school-based nurseries?**

- High-quality, school-based nursery provision is popular with parents, especially families with children of varying ages. It can help schools utilise spare space whilst also providing early support to children and families, supporting their transition into primary school.
- School-based nursery settings have proportionally higher qualified staff and see lower staff turnover providing more consistency of care for children.
- Proportionally, school-based nurseries also look after more children with SEND compared to private providers and offer a higher proportion of places in the most deprived areas.

**Q: Will you let private providers run nurseries in schools?**

- Yes. We want to work with schools and the early years sector together to deliver the childcare places families need.
- Schools will need to apply for the funding, but the nurseries can be run by private and voluntary early years and childcare providers from the school site, as is currently the case.
- Considerations for schools when collaborating with PVI's can be found in our guidance documents [School-Based Nursery Capital Grant - GOV.UK](#)

**Q: How will you ensure new school-based nurseries are high quality?**

- High-quality early education and childcare is a crucial opportunity to transform life chances. We will continue to implement robust quality assurance mechanisms for new and existing provision.
- As part of the application, schools were asked to demonstrate how they propose to deliver high-quality early years learning, in line with the Early Years Foundation Stage framework. A school's existing performance will also be considered, including Ofsted judgements where available, with regard to quality of education, leadership and management and early years provision key judgements, which should be good or outstanding. For schools operating provision run by PVI or childminder partners, any performance data related to the relevant PVI or childminder organisation will also be considered.
- Our [Establishing a school-based nursery guidance](#) provides schools with further information on how to provide a high-quality learning environment and details on Ofsted or Childminder Agency registration. This supports the statutory Early Years Foundation Stage framework, which sets the standards for learning, development, and care for children from birth to five years old. We are also exploring what further

support can be provided to successful applicants who may be new to early years provision.

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