

free  early learning
Royal Greenwich

Free learning for your child, free childcare for you.

Childcare Choices

Top things parents need to know about the new offers: Tax-Free Childcare and 30 hours free childcare



Childcare Choices

You can find out more about the full government early learning and childcare offer on www.childcarechoices.gov.uk

You can use the quick Childcare Calculator www.gov.uk/childcare-calculator to give you an indicator of your best options and then apply for Tax-Free Childcare and/or 30 hours via Childcare Choices website.

This guide contains all you need to know including posters to remind you, step by step process, income criteria and what happens when your circumstances change.

The 30 hours offer – what does it mean for my family?

Up to 1,140 hours of free entitlement - which is 30 hours per week over 38 weeks in term time (less hours over fewer weeks may be stretched over the year)

- This is made up of 570 hours of universal free entitlement – 15 hours per week, term time only (but it may be stretched over the year) which you do not need to apply for and is available to all 3 and 4 year old children
- The new offer is an extra 570 hours per year which is 15 hours a week on top of your universal entitlement, if you are a working parent and you meet the income criteria
- You do not have to take the full 30 hours - you can work with your provider to take up 16 to 30 hours

You can find out **now** if you are eligible for a 30 hours place next term, check

www.childcarechoices.gov.uk

Eligibility

1. Your child will be eligible for 30 hours at the beginning of the term after they have turned 3
2. You and your partner (where applicable) must meet the income criteria *
3. You must have a valid eligibility code ready before the end of this term
4. Your child has not yet reached statutory school age (the term after they turn 5) nor attends reception class in school



When will Tax-Free Early Childcare be available?

The online service launched in April 2017 and is being rolled out gradually, based on the age of a family's youngest child. You can find out which age groups the service is currently available to, Childcare Choices. You can also sign-up to receive an email alert to notify you when your youngest child becomes eligible for Tax-Free Childcare.

You can apply for all your children at the same time, as soon as your youngest child is eligible.

When will 30 hours be available?

The term after your child turns 3. If you're eligible, you can apply now via Childcare Choices.

Am I eligible for Tax-Free Childcare/30 hours?

You will be eligible for Tax-Free Childcare and 30 hours if:

- Your child is under 12 years old, or your child is disabled and under 17 years old for Tax-Free Childcare.
- You may be able to claim 30 hours if your child lives with you – you don't have to be their parent.
- You live and work in the UK, unless you're a Crown servant or member of the HM Armed Forces posted overseas.
- You, and any partner, are working, and each earning at least the National Minimum Wage or Living Wage for 16 hours a week – this is £120 if you're over 25 – but less than £100,000 a year each.
- If you're under 25 or an apprentice, you should expect to earn the equivalent of 16 hours at the National Minimum Wage or Living Wage which applies to you.

You can still apply for Tax-Free Childcare and 30 hours if you're on:

- paid sick leave
- paid ordinary or additional maternity, paternity or adoption leave, or getting Maternity Allowance, for another child
- paid shared parental leave
- paid annual leave

You can also apply if you're not working now but expect to start a new job in the next 14 days.

You can't get Tax-Free Childcare and tax credits, Universal Credit or Childcare vouchers at the same time. However, you can apply for 30 hours only, and still receive tax credits, Universal Credit or childcare vouchers.

The full eligibility criteria for 30 hours can be found on

www.gov.uk/help-with-early-learning-and-childcare-costs/free-early-learning-and-childcare-and-education-for-2-to-4-year-olds

Is there a difference between the existing 15 hours universal entitlement and the extended 15 hours?

Yes - 30 hours is for working parents and you need to apply.

You do not need to apply for 15 hours universal entitlement – only the extra 15 hours.

However, both the 15 hours and 30 hours must follow the Early Years' Foundations Stage and will be subject to Ofsted inspection framework

I'm on childcare vouchers. How do I switch to Tax-Free Childcare?

First, you can find out which scheme best suits you by completing the Childcare Calculator

If you wish to switch from childcare vouchers to Tax-Free Childcare, you need to notify your employer, and send HMRC confirmation that you've stopped your vouchers within three months of successfully applying for Tax-Free Childcare. The email you send your employer telling them you wish to stop using childcare vouchers can be used as confirmation.

A quick summary of the parent's income eligibility for 30 hours

You can find out if you are eligible for a 30 hours place by checking and applying on www.childcarechoices.gov.uk



You can use the quick Childcare Calculator www.gov.uk/childcare-calculator to give you an indicator of your best options before applying

| Eligible | Not eligible |
|--|---|
| Parents both working (or sole parent in one parent family) | Only one parent working (if two parent family)* <i>unless in receipt of benefits relating to caring responsibilities, or have a disability and the other parent is working</i> |
| Each expecting to earn at least 16 hours equivalent on the National Living Wage/National Minimum Wage per week and less than £100,000 per year. If you are <ul style="list-style-type: none"> aged 25 and over, you must earn at least £120 per week / £6240 p.a. aged 16 - 24 you must earn at least £64.80 - £112.80 per week on an apprenticeship you must earn at least £56 per week | Either parent earning less than 16 hours equivalent or earning £100,000 and more |
| Self-employed parents and zero hours contracts who meet criteria | Parents who are studying or are in training and do not meet income criteria |
| One or both parents on maternity, paternity, adoption or statutory sick leave | Either parent is a non-EEA national subject to immigration control with no recourse to public funds |
| New job or changing hours at work to meet income criteria, you may still apply and declare that you expect to earn at least the minimum amount on average over the next three months | |

Please note - your child must also meet age eligibility. Your child is eligible from the start of the term after their 3rd birthday.

Applying

When can I apply for 30 hours?

You can apply for 30 hours up to 16 weeks before your child turns 3. We recommend that you apply as soon as you are able to – don't leave it to the last minute. To ensure you get a code for the term after your child turns 3, you must have applied by the end of the previous term.

| Your child's date of birth (when they turn 3) | When you can check your eligibility and get your code | When your child can take up universal and extended entitlement place |
|---|---|--|
| 1 April – 31 August | 1 April – 31 August | 1 September – 31 December |
| 1 September – 31 December | 1 September – 31 December | 1 January – 31 March |
| 1 January – 31 March | 1 January – 31 March | 1 April – 31 August |

How do I apply for Tax-Free Childcare/30 hours?

You can apply via Childcare Choices.

You, and your partner if you have one, will need your:

- National Insurance number(s)
- Details of one or more of the following – your UK Passport, tax credits, P60 or a recent payslip.

In most cases, you'll be told straight away if your application is successful. In some cases, HMRC may need to do some additional checks to confirm whether you're eligible, so it's important to apply in good time. If you're found not to be eligible HMRC will tell you why.

I don't have access to the internet. How do I apply?

If you need assistance or do not have access to the internet, you can call the Childcare Service helpline on **0300 123 4097** and apply over the phone.

I applied for 30 hours/Tax-Free Childcare and I am not eligible. What other help can I get with my early learning and childcare costs?

All 3 and 4 year olds are eligible for the universal 15 hours a week of free early learning. Childcare Choices has Childcare Calculator where you can learn more about which government offers might be best for you, whether you are likely to be eligible and how to apply.

If you think you may be eligible for a 30 hours place in new term, take these steps in the term before you wish to take up the place

Step 1

- You will need to apply online through www.childcarechoices.gov.uk or call 0300 123 4097
- Before you start, you will need your National Insurance number (and your partner's NI number) and Passport
- Information about income - P60, payslips or any relevant benefits

Step 2

- Register for Government Gateway account and confirm your identity
- Enter your income details as requested including any expected income over the next 3 months

Step 3

- HMRC will check your eligibility and confirm, ask for more information or state not eligible at present
- HMRC confirms your eligibility for 30 hours (and Tax Free Childcare)
- Issues voucher with 11 digit eligibility code (starts with 5000 or 11)

Step 4

- Take your eligibility code, your National Insurance number and evidence of your child's date of birth to your early years setting, nursery, school or childminder
- You will need to decide where you take 15 hours universal entitlement and 15 hours extended entitlement if you are using more than one provider
- The provider will ask you for consent to share your information with Royal Greenwich so that your code can be verified **before** the provider can offer you a place
- If your child is not eligible until the following term, and you would like to reserve a place earlier or take up and pay for an early place, your provider may be able support this

Step 5

- You will agree a start date with your provider and sign a Parental Declaration and agreement
- You will need to reconfirm your eligibility every 3 months and give your provider the eligibility code again
- Royal Greenwich will check eligibility 6 times a year and inform your provider by email if your status changes.
- Your provider will inform you when your funded place is due to end.

Using 30 hours

What do I do once I've opened my childcare account?

Once you open your childcare account you'll see a screen called 'Your childcare service account'. From here you can:

- Find your 30 hours code, by clicking on the link '30 hours childcare'. Codes usually start '500'.
- Use the 'Your Tax-Free Childcare account' link to pay money into your account, add a provider, pay your provider or set up regular payments.

Check your messages by clicking on the 'Secure messages' link. Your eligibility response will be in here, as will your Tax-Free Childcare payment reference number. You need to give this to your provider, to help them match your payments to your child.

When can my child access a 30 hours place?

You can claim 30 hours from the term after:

- your child turns 3, and
- the date you receive your eligibility code from HMRC. Whichever date is later.

How do I take up a 30 hours place with my provider?

Once you have an eligibility code you should take it to your provider to be checked and to reserve your place in good time. Your provider must check your code before you take up your 30 hours place.

What can I expect to pay for using 30 hours?

Just like at school, your provider can charge for additional services, for example, lunch, trips or music classes. These charges cannot be a condition of accessing your 30 hours place and alternative arrangements should be made available. Any charges should be clear, transparent and itemised and cannot be a supplementary 'top-up'. You should also only be asked to pay a refundable deposit for any free entitlement hours. Your provider should be clear with you before you take up your place about any additional charges.

If you would like more advice, please contact Families Information Service on 020 8921 6921 or email on fis@royalgreenwich.gov.uk

My provider isn't offering the full 30 hours - can I take up the remaining hours with another provider?

Yes, you can split the free entitlement between multiple providers. However, you cannot use more than two sites in one day as we believe continuity of care is important for a child's learning, development and wellbeing. You will need to ensure you complete the Parental Declaration form with each provider.

Do I have to use all the 30 hours per week?

No, you can take up any amount of hours from 16 up to a maximum of 30 hours per week over 38 weeks.

Like the existing 15 hours, eligible parents are entitled to 30 hours a week in each of the 38 weeks of the academic year. However, you can stretch this offer up to 45 weeks of the year and then you can take 25 hours a week.

How do I know which providers in my area are offering 30 hours?

Families Information Service will be able to provide details of providers in your area that are offering 30 hours places.

You can look online www.royalgreenwich.gov.uk/fis or call 020 8921 6921

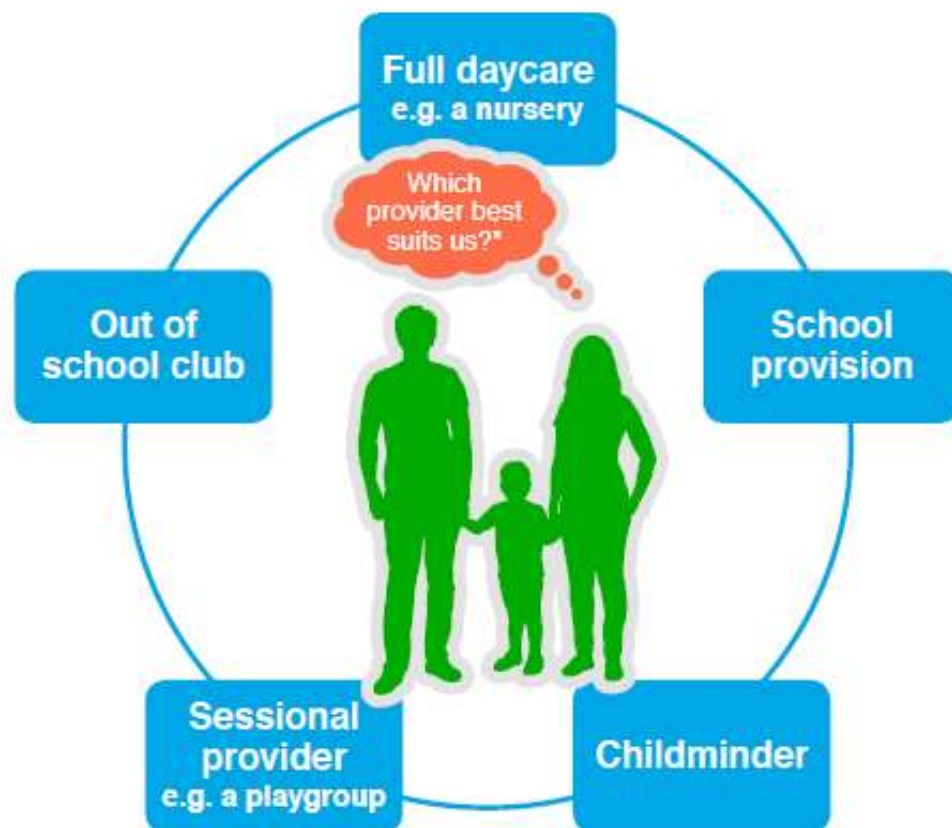
There is a link to Family Service Directory which details of opening times, number of vacancies, fees and charges, specialist support

www.greenwichcommunitydirectory.org.uk/kb5/greenwich/fsd/family.page?familychannel=1

Can I use Tax-Free Childcare at the same time as 30 hours?

Yes, you can get Tax-Free Childcare and 30 hours at the same time. You can't get Tax-Free Childcare at the same time as tax credits, childcare vouchers or Universal Credit. You can also get 30 hours alongside these schemes.

Tips on using my 30 hours free childcare



*You can only take up 30 hours at an approved provider, this means they need to be a school, registered by Ofsted or a Childminding Agency.

Different childcare arrangements work for different families. When deciding, you might want to consider the following:

- You can take up your 30 hours between 6am-8pm, but no session can be more than 10 hours.
- You don't have to use all 30 hours, just those that meet your needs.
- Providers have a choice whether to offer the hours, some may not offer the full 30 hours.
- You can split your hours between providers.
- Splitting is limited to a maximum of two sites per day. Remember to get your 30 hours code checked by all the providers you use.
- 30 hours is available for 38 weeks of the year (just like the existing 15 hours scheme). Some providers will allow you to 'stretch' your 30 hours entitlement over 52 weeks of the year meaning fewer hours per week (e.g. you could take 22 hours a week for 52 weeks).

Speak to your provider about whether they offer 30 hours or contact your local authority for further information about accessing the right childcare for you.

Using Tax-Free Childcare

How do I pay my provider using Tax-Free Childcare?

Your provider, including schools, need to sign up before you can pay them using Tax-Free Childcare.

They can go to www.childcarechoices.gov.uk/providers to find out more and sign up. Once they've signed up, you can add them to your childcare account by clicking on the 'Your Tax-Free childcare account' link on your account homepage. You can pay them directly through your childcare account, and can also set up a regular payment on a chosen day each month.

When you pay money in, it will take 24 hours to clear before you can pay your provider. Payments to providers will take three days to arrive in their account. When you apply for Tax-Free Childcare, you'll be given a unique reference number for your child. You need to give this number to your provider so that they can match your payments to your child. You can find this in your welcome pack by clicking the 'Secure messages' link on your account homepage.

How do I find out if my early learning and childcare provider is signed up for Tax-Free Childcare?

Most providers have already signed up. You can search for your provider in the 'Your Tax-Free childcare account' section of the account homepage. If your provider is registered as sensitive with their regulator – perhaps because they're a childminder working from their home address – you'll need to search for them using their regulator ID and postcode.

Reconfirming your eligibility



To keep your 30 hours free childcare place **you** need to check your details are up to date every 3 months. Go to gov.uk/childcareaccount

How often do I have to reconfirm my eligibility?

You will need to reconfirm you are still eligible for 30 hours and Tax-Free Early Childcare every 3 months, using your childcare service account, even if you have not yet taken up your place. It's easy to do; if your details have not changed you just tick a box to confirm this. You'll be reminded 4 weeks before the reconfirmation deadline. It's important you let HMRC know if your circumstances have changed, as they will be checked against other systems.

If you miss the reconfirmation deadline, you will receive a message telling you that your eligibility has lapsed. You should go into your childcare account and reconfirm. You will need to take your code with new dates to your provider for verification.

If you reconfirm and you're no longer eligible, or do not reconfirm, you may be able to continue your 30 hours place for a short period known as the grace period.

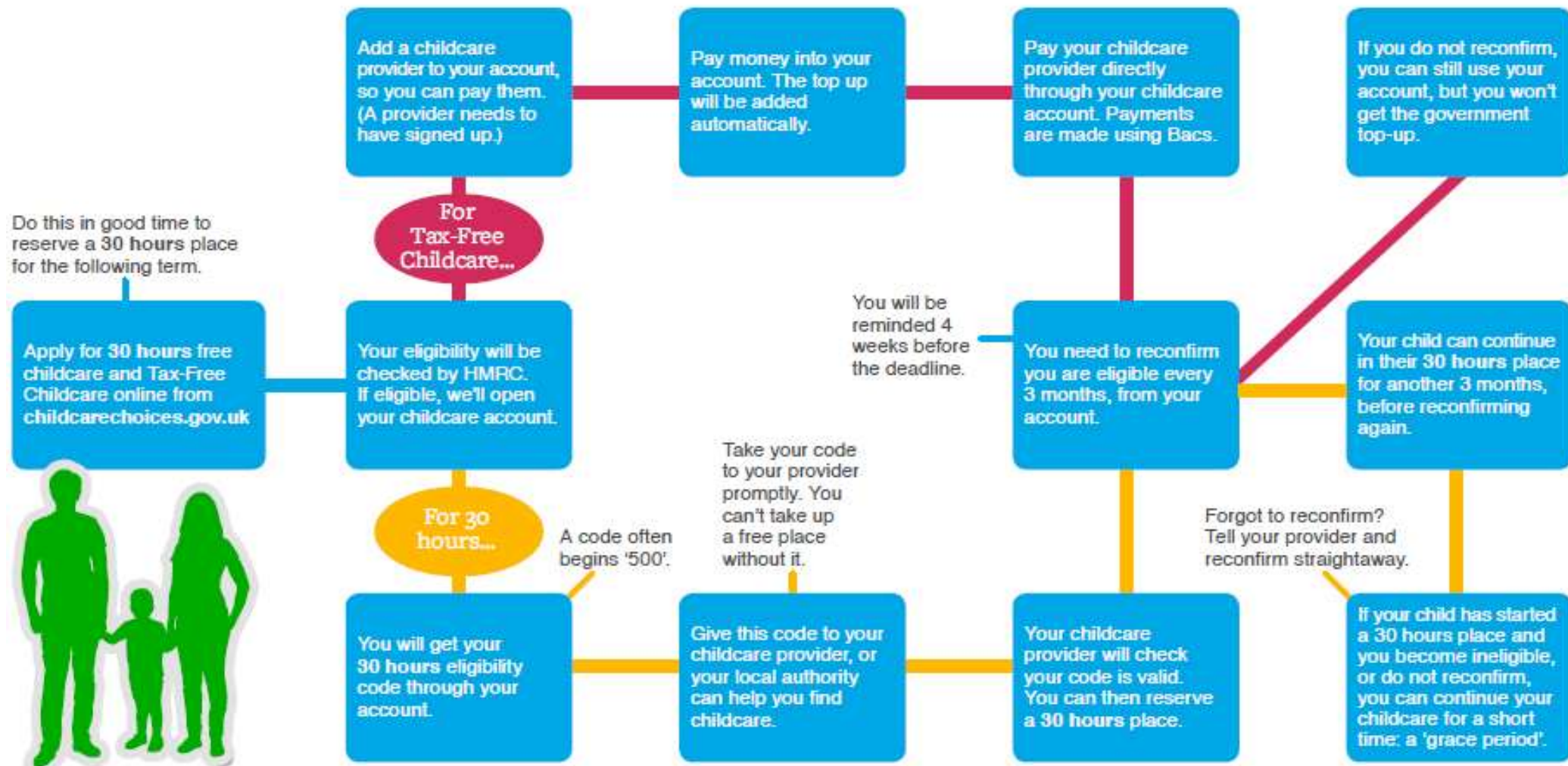
What happens if I reconfirm and I am not eligible?

If you are no longer eligible for 30 hours, you will enter a grace period where you may be able to keep your 30 hours place for a short period of time. You should check your grace period arrangements with your provider but please see guide below. Your child will continue to be eligible for 15 hours universal entitlement up until they become eligible for a school place.

| Date the parent receives an ineligible decision | Grace period end date |
|---|-----------------------|
| 1 January – 10 February | 31 March |
| 11 February – 31 March | 31 August |
| 1 April – 26 May | 31 August |
| 27 May – 31 August | 31 December |
| 1 September – 21 October | 31 December |
| 22 October – 31 December | 31 March |

If you are no longer eligible for Tax-Free Early Childcare, you can still use the money in your account (including the top-up you accrued while you were eligible) to pay your provider. You can also continue to use your account to pay your provider in future, but you won't get the government top-up.

Your new childcare account



Check your childcare options at childcarechoices.gov.uk



Important Notice for Parents:

30 hours Reconfirmation and Eligibility Checks

- For a place in January 2018, you must check and/or confirm your eligibility **from 2 October 2017** onwards and no later than 31 December 2017
- You are advised to complete your checks before **15 December 2017** to ensure your application and reconfirmation with www.childcarechoice.gov.uk is not delayed by Christmas holidays reduced staffing levels at the HMRC
- Please check in good time to help us plan and ensure that we have a place available for Spring 2018
- Your child must have turned 3 before 31 December 2017
- The local authority must verify with HMRC that your code is valid before your child can take up a place
- If your code is returned as not eligible, you must contact HMRC directly on **0300 123 4097**
- You must **re-confirm your eligibility every 3 months** so if you made your original application before 2 October 2017, you must reconfirm before the end of term to continue the place in January.
- If your circumstances change and you are no longer eligible for a 30 hours place, you must notify us. Your child will keep their 30 hours place until the end of term on 31 December 2017. They will still continue to be eligible for universal 15 hours place as usual.



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HM Government



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