



## Extending 30 hours to Children in Foster Care – Information for Social Workers and Foster Parents

### Introduction

From September 2018, children in foster care will be entitled to 30 hours free childcare giving foster families the same support as other families. This note helps social workers and foster parents understand the background to 30 hours free childcare and how it will work for children in foster care.

A customer journey for foster parents and frequently asked questions are available on the [Childcare Works website](#). You may also find it helpful to refer to the following information:

- [Tips for Parents on using 30 hours](#)
- [Early years entitlements: Operational Guidance](#)

Working parents of 3 and 4 years old in England may be entitled to up to 30 hours of childcare for 38 weeks of the year. This is an additional 15 hours of childcare to support working families and is on top of the 15 hours universal entitlement for all 3 and 4 year olds in England. Children in foster care are already entitled to the universal 15 hours.

Children in foster care who are aged 3 or 4 years old will be able to receive 30 hours free childcare, if the following criteria are met:

- Accessing the extended hours is consistent with the child's care plan; and
- Where there is a single foster parent family, the foster parent is engaging in paid work outside their role as a foster parent; or
- Where there are two foster parents in the same fostering household, both are engaging in paid work outside their role as a foster parent.

A flowchart is at Annex A to help check eligibility.

Applications for birth children are made through The Childcare Service. Foster parents applying for 30 hours for their birth children should continue to use the Childcare Service.



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## Key Considerations

Foster parents and social workers should consider the following when deciding whether 30 hours is right for a foster family:

- We are not expecting or requiring foster parents to work outside fostering unless they choose to do so and this decision is supported by the fostering service.
- Foster parents will only be eligible if this is consistent with a child's care plan.
- Accessing 30 hours will **not** be appropriate for every child in foster care. This change is to enable those foster parents who are engaging in paid work outside their role as a foster parent to access this support where it is right for the child.
- The foster parent does **not** have to take up the full 30 hours. There is no requirement on the type of work (which includes self-employment) or number of hours that a foster parent must work in order to access the 30 hours and there is no minimum earnings limit (although they must be engaging in paid work).
- Children in foster care **will** continue to qualify for the universal 15 hours regardless of the working status of their foster parents.
- If circumstances change and a child in foster care ceases to be eligible for 30 hours, the responsible local authority should assess the child's needs for early years as part of the care plan.

If a foster child is already in a 30 hours place and the foster parent(s) are not eligible for 30 hours (or circumstances change and foster parents fall out of eligibility), the child will enter a grace period and will be able to retain their place for a short period. Early Years teams can advise on grace periods.

## Process

Responsible local authorities are expected to establish whether a foster parent is engaging in paid work outside their role as a foster parent and ensure that accessing 30 hours is consistent with the child's care plan. Local authorities will set their own local policies and processes on how they will do this. These should be clear and accessible and made available to all foster parents.

Social Workers and foster parents should read their local policy before beginning the application process:

### The Foster Parent(s) apply

Foster parents and social workers start discussions as the child approaches their 3rd birthday, or when a foster parent decides to take up additional work. We expect these discussions to happen as part of the usual supervision meetings and review process. Agreement that the foster parents can take up the extended hours should be recorded and the care plan for the child should be updated as appropriate.



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Foster parents complete an application form, which is available from the responsible local authority. The application must be counter-signed by a designated person in the responsible authority to confirm eligibility. Applications should be dealt with in a timely way and the designated person should respond no later than 4 weeks from receipt of application. Local policies should clearly identify the designated person and this information should be made available to foster parents. The designated person could include the child social worker, supervising social worker or Independent Reviewing Officer. The local policy will also set out what evidence the foster parent will need to supply alongside their application form to show they are in paid work outside of their role as a foster parent.

### Responsible LA issues a code to Parents

Foster parents should send signed application forms to the responsible authority. The Early Years team will generate an 11 digit code, which they will send to the foster parents. Details on where to send the signed application form should be included in the local policy or application form. Early Years teams should inform the child social worker when the code is issued.

### Provider Checking and Payment

Once the foster parent has received the code, they contact a childcare provider to agree a 30 hour place. They will need to show the provider the letter or the email with the code from the local authority to confirm their place. The provider will check the eligibility of the code with the Early Years team.

### Reconfirmation

Foster parents, like all other parents accessing 30 hours, are required to reconfirm their eligibility every three months. Local authorities will determine the process and evidence required and this information should be available to all foster parents.

As a minimum, the responsible authority should be satisfied that the placement is on-going, that accessing the 30 hours is still consistent with the child's care plan and the foster parents are still engaging in paid work outside their role as a foster parent. Social Workers and foster parents should ensure they are familiar with the local policy for reconfirmations at the start of the application process to ensure reconfirmations are undertaken at the appropriate time. Failure to reconfirm could mean that a foster child is no longer eligible for 30 hours childcare.

### Timescales for applications

Foster parents can claim 30 hours the term after their foster child turns three and they have received the eligibility code from the local authority. Three-and-four-year-olds can start in a 30 hours place from the 1<sup>st</sup> September, 1<sup>st</sup> January or 1<sup>st</sup> April. Foster parents can apply up to 16 weeks before their foster child turns three. **To ensure a September 2018 start, signed applications should be sent to the responsible local authority by 31 August.**



### Annex A: Checking Eligibility

The diagram below sets out when foster parents will be eligible for 30 hours for their children in foster care.

