

Free Early Education Entitlement



Financial Assistance Series 3 Factsheet 3

All children are entitled to a free early education place starting the term after their 3rd birthday. Parents have a choice of the type of childcare their children can attend in order to receive their free entitlement. They are as follows:

- Private Day Nursery (some are based in Children's Centres)
- Pre-School/Playgroup or Independent School
- Some Childminders
- Maintained Nursery Unit operated by a Cheshire East School or a Maintained Nursery School.

The entitlement is 15 hours of free early learning and care per week, provided over a minimum of 38 weeks of the year.

The 15 hours will be available on a flexible basis, and the following will apply:

- The minimum time your child can attend a day is 2.5 hours and the maximum is 10 hours.
- If accessed over 38 weeks (term time only), the 15 hours must be taken over a minimum of 2 days a week.
- Sessions will normally be available in half hour units.
- The entitlement is available between 7am – 7pm, even if the childcare provider is open before or after this.
- The entitlement may include lunchtime. Please check with your provider.
- The entitlement may be accessed 38 weeks per year (term time only) and can be accessed up to 52 weeks. If the entitlement is accessed over more than 38 weeks, the number of hours per week will be reduced.

The Local Authority will pay the entitlement directly to your childcare provider. The funded places are free, and you will not be required to pay towards these sessions. You will be charged for any additional

childcare your child has over and above the free entitlement.

When can my child start receiving the entitlement?

Your child can start receiving the entitlement shortly after their 3rd birthday. The start date depends on their date of birth.

- Children born between **1st January** and **31st March** can start in April (**Summer Term**)
- Children born between **1st April** and **31st August** can start in September (**Autumn Term**)
- Children born between **1st September** and **31st December** can start in January (**Spring Term**)

For example, if your child is 3 on the 3rd April they can start in the autumn term. Once you start claiming the entitlement your child can continue until they start full time education.

However, not all childcare providers are registered for this entitlement. To find out if a childcare provider is registered for the entitlement, request a list of providers in your area or to obtain information about what each childcare provider offers, **call Cheshire East's Family Information Service on 0300 123 5033.**



What do I do next?

1. Find a place for your child

As a parent/carer you can decide where you would like your child to go (subject to availability). For more information about what is available in your area, or help to find a place **call Cheshire East's Family Information Service on 0300 123 5033**. You should contact the provider of your choice as soon as possible in case they have a waiting list for places.

2. Discuss the free entitlement with your setting

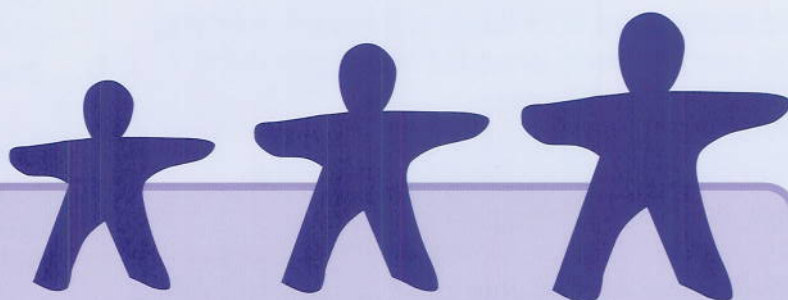
Each term you will be asked to sign a parental declaration, setting out agreed hours and patterns of access to the free entitlement. The entitlement maybe split between a maximum of 2 providers. If you decide to access the free entitlement at more than one setting, you will be required to complete a parental declaration form for both settings.

Things to consider

The requirement of flexibility is that every parent is able to access the free entitlement at such times as will meet their reasonable needs. This means that within each area a fully flexible free entitlement should be available. However, not every setting will be required to offer full flexibility. Also, flexibility does not mean that parents/carers can access the entitlement against different patterns each week or change the arrangements at short notice.

Stretching the free entitlement

It is possible for parents to 'stretch' the free provision by accessing fewer hours across more weeks of the year. For example, just over 11 hours a week for 50 weeks of the year or just under 11 hours for 52 weeks of the year. Discuss this option with your childcare provider and remember to call **Cheshire East's Family Information Service on 0300 123 5033** with any feedback.



Frequently Asked Questions:

If I want to move my child to a different provider, what do I do?

Signing a parental declaration form commits parents and the childcare provider to a termly contract. It is not possible to change provider or the hours your child attends part way through the term without the permission of the provider and the Council. Permission will only be given in exceptional circumstances, therefore preparation for changes should be made before a new term starts.

When my child turns 4, what will happen to my free entitlement?

Your child's entitlement starts the term after their 3rd birthday and will run until the term before they start in reception class, usually the following September. For more information relating to starting school in Cheshire East, go to www.cheshireeast.gov.uk/fis/helpfulinformation/educationandchildcare or call the School Admissions and Transfer Team on 0300 123 5012.

Do I have to use all 15 hours?

No, your child can attend from 2.5 hours to 15 hours per week.

All articles in this factsheet are correct at the time of printing.

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This factsheet has been produced by:
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Other factsheets in this series are:
Factsheet 1 - Childcare Vouchers
Factsheet 2 - Tax Credits
Factsheet 4 - Maternity and Paternity Pay