

Essex County Council

A Guide for Parents

**Funded Early Education Entitlement (FEEE)
for:**

- **Nine months up to two-year-olds**
- **Two-year-olds**
- **Three- and Four-year olds**

April 2025

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1. Introduction

Finding good quality childcare can be hard for parents. There are lots of things to look out for and to remember to ask when you visit a childcare provider.

This guide gives you points to consider so you understand how you can access the funded early education entitlement for your child and what you should know before you sign up with a nursery, preschool or childminder. We will use the word 'childcare provider' throughout the rest of this guide to stand for nursery, preschool or childminder.

What is the Funded Early Education Entitlement (FEEE)?

FEEE is funding provided by the UK Government for all eligible children because they want children to have a good nursery education so that they have the best start in life.

- Nine-month-old children of eligible working parents can get funded entitlement hours the term after they turn 9 months old (**FEEE1W**). Children will get up to 570 funded entitlement hours over the year. This is for 15 hours per week for 38 weeks if parents meet the eligibility criteria. This will increase to 30 hours per week for 38 weeks from September 2025.
- Two-year-old children of eligible working parents can get funded entitlement hours the term after they turn two (**FEEE2W**). Children will get up to 570 funded entitlement hours over the year. This is for 15 hours per week for 38 weeks if the parents meet the eligibility criteria. This will increase to 30 hours per week for 38 weeks from September 2025.
- Some two-year-olds can get funded hours if their parents are on certain benefits, economic criteria or the child meets certain non-economic criteria (**FEEE2**). Children will get up to 570 funded entitlement hours over the year. This is for 15 hours per week for 38 weeks if the parents meet the eligibility criteria.
- All three- and four-year-olds can get funded entitlement hours from the term after they turn three up until they go to school, this is called the universal funded entitlement (**FEEE3&4**). Children will get up to 570 funded entitlement hours over the year. This is for 15 hours per week for 38 weeks.
- Three- and four-year-olds of eligible working parents can get the extended funded entitlement (**EFE**), which is another 15 hours in addition to the universal 15 funded hours, this is often called the "30-hour offer". This is because children can have up to 30 hours a week for 38 weeks which is a total of 1140 hours of funded entitlement a year.
- The 38 weeks (or 570/1140 hours) start at the beginning of April and finish at the end of March in the following year and are divided into three terms in line with school terms. The terms are as follows:
 - Summer term - April to July
 - Autumn term – September to December
 - Spring term - January to March

2. Choosing the right childcare for you and your child

To find out more information on different types of childcare, please click on the following link [Family and Childcare trust five-steps-choosing-childcare](#) which includes a list of useful questions to consider when looking for childcare or please visit: [Find a childcare provider: Types of childcare - Essex County Council](#).

You can find information about all government childcare support and how to apply on [Childcare Choices](#) website. There is also information for parents on the Family Information Service (FIS) webpage on the main ECC website [Family Information Service - Essex County Council](#)

You can search for a childcare provider in Essex by clicking on this link [Find a Childcare Provider \(essex.gov.uk\)](#)

Or you can contact the Family Information Service by email at fis@essex.gov.uk

Or you can visit a Family Hub, you can find your nearest by clicking on this link <https://essexfamilywellbeing.co.uk/hubs/> or speak to your allocated social worker.

All early years providers have a duty to support children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) and will be able to provide you with information about how they will do this. If your child has SEND and you need extra help to find the right setting for your child, please email early.years@essex.gov.uk and someone will support you with your childcare search.

Childcare providers can claim FEEE if they:

- are registered with Ofsted as an early years provider, or are a school nursery in which case they will be registered as part of the school
- have an Ofsted judgement of Good, Outstanding or Requires Improvement to offer the funded entitlement for three- and four-year-olds and all of the working parent entitlements
- have an Ofsted judgement Good or Outstanding, to offer the funded entitlement to two-year-olds who are eligible under the economic and non-economic criteria FEEE2
- have a FEEE contract with Essex County Council

If a childminder is part of a Childminder Agency, they can still claim FEEE if the Agency or the Childminder has a funding contract with Essex.

Newly registered childcare providers can offer the FEEE before their first Ofsted inspection. But, if they don't get a Good or Outstanding judgement at their first Ofsted inspection, they won't be able to offer FEEE to two-year-olds who are eligible under the economic and non-economic criteria FEEE2

Essex County Council must make sure that all childcare providers who claim FEEE hours:

- deliver the full Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) curriculum

- keep records about children receiving the FEEE and make the information available to the Local Authority, and Ofsted if they ask to see it

Please note that Nannies are not able to claim FEEE or have a FEEE contract with Essex as they are not registered with Ofsted as an early years provider.

3. Eligibility

Nine-month-old children of eligible working parents - FEEE1W

You may be able to get FEEE1W for your child the term after they are nine months old if you meet the eligibility criteria.

If 9 months old between

1 April – 31 August
1 September - 31 December
1 January – 31 March

They get FEEE1W

1 September after they are 9 months old
1 January after they are 9 months old
1 April after they are 9 months old

You will be able to check your eligibility online at <https://www.gov.uk/check-eligible-free-childcare-if-youre-working> and complete an online application. Before you sign up for the entitlement, you need to look at all the options to make sure you choose the best package for you. It is possible that the childcare element of Working Tax Credit could be affected as you would likely be paying for less childcare.

If eligible you need to make sure you apply for FEEE1W before the beginning of the term that you want the funding to start. **Please note:** If you apply for your code after the beginning of the term that you want funding to start, your provider will not be able to claim the funding. You will need to pay private fees for that term.

When you have finished your application and set up an account you will get an eligibility code to take to your childcare provider who will check the code on the early years portal. If the code clears all the checks, you can then book your funded hours. You will also need to show your child's birth certificate.

You will be required to renew your eligibility code with Childcare Choices every 3 months. Your renewal date will be given to you when your application is approved. Please keep note of this date and ensure you renew to continue claiming the funded hours.

Two-year-old children of eligible working parents - Funded Early Education Entitlement (FEEE2W)

You may be able to get FEEE2W for your child the term after they are two years old if you meet the eligibility criteria.

If their birthday is between

1 April – 31 August
1 September - 31 December

They get FEEE2W

1 September after their 2nd birthday
1 January after their 2nd birthday

1 January – 31 March

1 April after their 2nd birthday

You will be able to check your eligibility online at <https://www.gov.uk/check-eligible-free-childcare-if-youre-working> and complete an online application. Before you sign up for the entitlement, you need to look at all the options to make sure you choose the best package for you. It is possible that the childcare element of Working Tax Credit could be affected as you would likely be paying for less childcare.

If eligible you need to make sure you apply for FEEE2W before the beginning of the term that you want the funding to start. **Please note:** If you apply for your code after the beginning of the term that you want funding to start, your provider will not be able to claim the funding. You will need to pay private fees for that term.

When you have finished your application and set up an account you will get an eligibility code to take to your childcare provider who will check the code on the early years portal. If the code clears all the checks, you can then book your funded hours. You will also need to show your child's birth certificate.

You will be required to renew your eligibility code with Childcare Choices every 3 months. Your renewal date will be given to you when your application is approved. Please keep note of this date and ensure you renew to continue claiming the funded hours.

Two-Year-Old Funded Early Education Entitlement (FEEE2)

You may be able to get FEEE2 for your two-year-old if you claim certain benefits or meet additional criteria.

For further information please click on the following link [Help with childcare cost for 2-year-olds](#)

Essex County Council use the Department for Education's Eligibility Checking Service (ECS) to check that children meet the eligibility criteria based on benefits their parents receive (including Universal Credit).

Eligible two-year-olds can access their FEEE the school term after they turn two, see below:

If their birthday is between

1 April – 31 August

1 September - 31 December

1 January – 31 March

They get FEEE2

1 September after their 2nd birthday

1 January after their 2nd birthday

1 April after their 2nd birthday

If you are eligible and you want to talk this through with someone, you can contact the Essex Child and Family Well-being service Family Hub for your district. Details of your local Family Hub can be found here <https://essexfamilywellbeing.co.uk/hubs/>

To register for 2-year-old funding, you need to apply online, and you will need:

- your National Insurance number or National Asylum Seekers Service number
- to go to [Essex Education Portal - Logon](#) and login using your email address and password. If you are accessing the Portal for the first time, please click Register and follow the guidance provided

If you don't have internet access or need support completing the online form, you can get support from the following:

- Family Hub – see above for details of how to contact them
- email Early.Years@essex.gov.uk
- speak to your childcare provider, Health Visitor or Social Worker

When you have filled in the online form, and the eligibility checks have been passed you will receive a reference number which you can then take to your childcare provider to get your funded 15 hours. You will need to show the provider your child's birth certificate, your National Insurance number and other evidence if eligible due to the additional criteria.

Three- and Four-Year-Old FEEE – Universal 15 hours per week (FEEE3&4)

All 3- and 4-year-olds are entitled to receive the universal funded 15 hours per week funding for 38 week per year (term time), from the term after they have their third birthday, see below:

If their birthday is between	They get FEEE3&4
1 April – 31 August	1 September after their 3 rd birthday
1 September - 31 December	1 January after their 3 rd birthday
1 January – 31 March	1 April after their 3 rd birthday

These dates have been fixed by the Department for Education and cannot be changed.

If your child is already going to a childcare provider, they may be able to claim FEEE so check with them to see how your child can access the funded entitlement hours.

If your child is not going to a childcare provider, you will need to find one that offers FEEE entitlement places and register your child with them.

Three- and Four-Year-Old FEEE – Extended Funded Entitlement (EFE)

Some children will be eligible for the EFE which is an additional 15 hours per week for 38 weeks per year. You will be able to check your eligibility using the online [Childcare calculator - GOV.UK](#) and complete an online application. Before you sign up for the extended entitlement, you need to look at all the options to make sure you choose the best package for you. It is possible that the childcare element of Working Tax Credit could be affected as you would likely be paying for less childcare.

If eligible you need to make sure you apply for EFE before the beginning of the term that you want the funding to start. **Please note:** If you apply for your code after the beginning of the term that you want funding to start, your provider will not be able to claim the EFE. You will only be able to get the universal 15 hours per week entitlement that term.

When you have finished your application and set up an account you will get an eligibility code to take to your childcare provider who will check the code on the early years portal. If the code clears all the checks, you can then book your extended hours. You will also need to show your child's birth certificate.

You will be required to renew your eligibility code with Childcare Choices every 3 months. Your renewal date will be given to you when your application is approved. Please keep note of this date and ensure you renew to continue claiming the extended hours.

Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP)

All eligible children who are in receipt of FEEE could be eligible for EYPP.

The EYPP gives the childcare provider additional funding, which they can use to provide resources that will support your child.

So that they can claim this extra funding, your childcare provider will ask you to fill in the section on the Parent/Carer Agreement form.

Your childcare provider will talk to you about what your child needs to help them learn. They can then use the extra funding to make sure they get the support they need.

Disability Access Fund (DAF)

If your child qualifies for Disability Living Allowance, a provider will be able to apply for DAF each financial year. You will need to provide evidence of the DLA. This additional funding can be spent on equipment, resources or making reasonable adjustments to the setting. If your child splits their funded hours across two Providers, you should nominate the main setting which will receive the DAF for your child, the DAF is paid to one setting only.

4. Funding FEEE places

To claim funding the childcare provider puts your child's details on an online form at set times each term, this is called a headcount. They add the number of hours that they are claiming for each child in their care onto the form, and this information is used by the council to work out the amount of funding that the childcare provider will be paid for the term.

570 or 1140 hours of FEEE can be claimed for 38 weeks in a financial year. Some providers allow the funding to be used over more than 38 weeks of the year, which can be useful if you need childcare all year round. If the childcare provider is stretching your funded entitlement over longer than 38 weeks, they will be able to claim the full number of hours allowed each term. If you are getting your full entitlement over 50 weeks your provider will note on your parent/carer agreement form that they are claiming for 15 or 30 hours a week for the number of weeks allowable each term, this adds up to 570 or 1140 hours over a full year.

FEEE funding is paid if:

- your child is on the headcount form and registered at the childcare provider on the day of the headcount.
- or if your child is included in the headcount but ill or away in that week but will go back to the childcare provider when they are better.

If your child starts after the headcount date, they can make a late claim for your child if they have not received the funded entitlement hours at any other Essex Childcare Provider during the term.

All childcare providers are paid a set hourly rate for each of the entitlements. Rates are not published as there is no monetary value to parents as the funded hours should be free at point of delivery.

Providers might also get an extra 10p, 20p or 30p per hour for 3- & 4-year-old children that live in an area that has low-cost housing.

If your child has additional needs the childcare provider can apply for Special Educational Needs Inclusion Funding (SENIF) as a contribution towards helping them meet any extra needs that your child has. The provider should get help from their Inclusion Partner if they need assistance with preparing the documents to submit for the funding request to be considered.

5. Points to consider

The funded entitlement can be taken up in different ways, the maximum number of funded hours which can be used in one day is 10 hours. Childcare providers can:

- set the period each day that they offer the FEEE hours, such as 9am to 12pm
- accept a maximum of 10 funded hours per day, there is no minimum number of hours
- set a limit to the number of funded hours that can be accessed in one day. For example, the opening hours are 7.00am – 7.00pm but funded hours can only be accessed for 8 hours, The 8 hours should be with no artificial breaks. Parents then must have the option to pay private fess for the remaining 4 hours.
- apply a voluntary charge for meals/snacks, consumables (for examples nappies and sun cream) and additional voluntary services/curricula activities (for example, trips, forest school sessions or foreign language lessons) but these charges must not be a condition of accessing the funded hours.
- offer funded hours term time only or as a stretched offer covering the holiday periods

It is important to understand that different childcare providers will have different funded entitlement offers so you need to find a place that suits your needs. Most childcare providers will offer the FEEE hours the same weeks as school term times, but they don't have to, and some will offer it over more weeks.

FEEE hours can cover a lunch time where lunch times are used to help children learn new things and develop new skills. Government funding is not intended to cover the costs of meals. Providers can charge parents for meals and snacks consumed by your child, but these charges must be voluntary. A provider must offer a reasonable alternative option to paying for meals and snacks.

Any costs that you need to pay should be made clear on the Parent/Carer information and you should agree to them before your child starts at the setting and you sign to accept the childcare place. The childcare provider must not attach any conditions to a funded place which means you must buy extra hours or pay for meals/snacks, consumables, voluntary additional activities, registration fee or a uniform to receive them.

You can take the funding for fewer than 38 weeks at a childcare provider of your choice; however, they should offer the funding for at least 33 weeks.

If you choose to use a childcare provider that is open for less than 38 weeks, you can't use the rest of the weeks anywhere else. If you need all the 38 weeks, it is best to choose a childcare provider that can offer this.

Some childcare providers have what is called a 'Stretched Offer', where the funding is stretched to cover the holiday periods. But you need to understand that the maximum hours per term you can claim for does not change. The total number of hours that can be claimed in a year is 570/1140. If your provider does offer funding over for example 50 weeks of the year, you will get less hours over more weeks but the number of hours you are entitled to will stay the same,

The childcare provider must complete a Parent/Carer Agreement form with you which puts in writing the hours and days of FEEE hours your child is getting each term. This must not be for more hours than your child attends. You do not have to claim all the hours if you do not want your child to attend for the full 15 or 30 hours.

If you decide to increase the hours after headcount day, the childcare provider can't claim for the extra hours. This means they will ask you to pay for the extra hours until the end of the term. **It is important that you are aware of all the details and read the information on the Parent/Carer Agreement form and guidance before you sign. Make sure that you know about any extra costs, what they are for, and you agree to them before your child starts.**

Check that the childcare provider will guarantee the funded hours each term and that the offer does not change dependent upon the age of the child or if the extended hours are needed.

If you move your child to another provider part way through the term, after the headcount has taken place, your new provider will not be able to claim FEEE hours from Essex County Council. So, you might have to pay fees for the rest of the term at the new provider.

In these cases, Essex County Council may ask the original provider to pass on the unused funding for the term to the new provider, but this is not part of their contractual agreement, and we are unable to insist that they pass on the funding.

Also, your original provider will have a notice period and might charge a fee if you didn't give them the required notice that your child was leaving, please check this out before making your decision.

Any invoices you get should be clearly itemised and show:

- you have received your child's funded hours completely free, there should be no monetary value attached to the funded hours.
- a breakdown of extra hours/sessions/days you have been charged for in addition to the funded hours, The provider must tell you about these before you take up the place as you will be agreeing to them by signing the Parent/Carer Agreement form.
- a breakdown of any additional voluntary charges that you have agreed to pay

Please also be aware that:

- the rates that a childcare provider charges for extra hours outside of FEEE hours are a private matter between you and them. Local Authorities cannot get involved in providers' private business.
- if your child is only attending for their FEEE hours you do not need an invoice. But the

provider must tell you they have applied for funding and make sure you complete a Parent/Carer Agreement form.

- from January 2026 providers must list their voluntary charges for meals/snacks, consumables and additional activities on your invoice.

Childcare providers can charge a deposit to reserve a FEEE place for all of the working parent entitlements and three- and four-year-olds universal entitlement. Please see the table on page 13 for details of how and when the deposit can be applied.

The provider can claim FEEE for one day each term when they are open without any children so that they can carry out staff training. They should make sure you know that you will lose a day of funded entitlement per term before you sign your Parent/Carer Agreement form. You should also be given 6 weeks' notice of any planned closures.

If your child attends on a day which is a bank holiday the provider should let you know before you sign the Parent/Carer Agreement form if they are closed on bank holidays. Your child will not get their full entitlement where there are bank holidays in the funded weeks. Providers should not charge for consumables on bank holidays.

The childcare provider will still get the funding if a child is away for a short period, if you take holiday or a child is sick during the term.

The working parent entitlements and the three- and four-year-old funding can be used with two or more childcare providers if it meets your needs. But you can only go to two providers in one day. Some childcare providers will have a sole provider policy where you must take all your entitlement with them and will not allow split funding.

If you are splitting the funding, you will need to put this on the Parent/Carer Agreement form you sign at the start of each term, putting the number of hours you will take at each childcare provider. You can't claim for more than your entitlement between both providers.

The childcare provider gives ECC the details of the hours your child is with them and ECC will check to stop any over claims. If they do over claim, you will have to pay for any hours that are not covered by the funded entitlement.

If your child is in receipt of FEEE2, they can only use the 2-year-old funding at one early years provider.

You can't split the funding between a childcare provider and a reception class in a school. This is because when a child goes into reception class all the funding for their early education is paid into the school budget and the childcare provider won't be able to claim it.

If your child is due to start in a reception class, you won't be able to have any funded entitlement hours for the days or weeks at the beginning of the autumn term before they start.

Schools are not allowed to say you must attend their nursery if you want a place at the school. If you are told this, we would appreciate you letting ECC know so we can act.

If your childcare provider must close during a term and you need to find another one, please contact the Family Information Service by email at fis@essex.gov.uk. Once you have found another provider, they may be able to put in a late claim for your child's funded entitlement for the rest of the term.

If you move to Essex from another Local Authority during the term, we will allow a childcare provider to claim for any child that isn't already getting their funded entitlement in Essex. They would be able to make a 'late claim' for the FEEE hours for the remaining weeks of the term.

Providers are required to submit termly development progress data for children accessing FEEE2 and FEEE2W funding on the Provider Portal using the Better Start tab. If you do not want the provider to submit development progress data for your child, please email 2yearold@essex.gov.uk to inform Essex of your decision.

6. Table of Fees and Charges

	Child accessing FEEE2 hours only	Child accessing FEEE2 hours and paying for additional hours	Child accessing FEEE3&4, FEEE2W and FEEE1W hours only	Child accessing FEEE3&4, FEEE2W and FEEE1W hours and paying for additional hours
*Registration / Admin Fee	Must not charge	Could be charged for private hours only	Must not charge	Could be charged for private hours only
Deposit – refundable	Must not charge - (Essex requirement, based on financial criteria. Could be a barrier to parents accessing funding).	Could be charged	Could be charged	Could be charged
Voluntary charge for meals and snacks	Could be applied but must not be a condition of accessing the funded hours. An alternative suitable option or solution must be available if a parent is not willing to pay. Providers must set their own policy on a suitable alternative option within their information for parents.			
Voluntary charge for consumables (e.g. nappies, wipes, sun cream)	Could be applied but must not be a condition of accessing the funded hours. An alternative option or solution must be available if a parent is not willing to pay. Providers must set their own policy on a suitable alternative option within their information for parents.			
Voluntary charge for additional activities (e.g. trips, forest school sessions, foreign language lessons)	Could be applied but must not be a condition of accessing the funded hours. An alternative option or solution must be available if a parent is not willing to pay. Providers must set their own policy on a suitable alternative option within their information for parents.			

*If a child attends an early years provider before being eligible for the funded hours a registration/admin fee can be charged.