

Funded childcare for Children in Foster Care

Children aged from 9 months to 5 years (or until they start in a school Reception Class) who are cared for by foster carers or connected carers **may** be eligible for up to 30 hours per week funded childcare, if the carers meet the eligibility criteria.

N.B. If foster carers wish to apply for **their birth (or adopted)** children, they **MUST** make an application via Best Start in Life: [Best Start in Life - Best Start in Life](#)

Children in foster care **may** be eligible for funded childcare if the following criteria are met:

- accessing the funded hours is consistent with the child's care plan; **and**
- where there is a single foster parent family, the foster parent must be engaged in paid work outside of their fostering role; **or**
- where there are two foster parents in the same fostering household, both are engaged in paid work outside of their fostering roles.

However, if there are two people in the household, and one is not a foster carer, the foster carer must be in paid work outside of their fostering role, while their partner must be in qualifying paid work **and** earn at least the equivalent to 16 hours a week at a National Minimum or National Living Wage, but no more than £100,000 p.a.

Please note: There is no minimum earnings limit for foster carers working outside of their fostering role, but they cannot earn more than £100,000 p.a.

Key considerations

Foster carers and social workers should consider the following when deciding whether funded childcare is right for a foster family:

- There is no expectation or requirement for foster carers to work outside of their fostering role unless they choose to do so, and this decision is supported by the fostering service.
- Foster carers will only be eligible if this is consistent with the child's care plan.
- Accessing funded childcare will not be appropriate for every cared for child.
- There is no requirement for the child to take up their full entitlement.
- There is no requirement on the type of work (which includes self-employment), or number of hours worked in order to access funded childcare and there is no minimum earnings limit, although they must be engaging in paid work. Evidence of this must be provided with the application.
- Cared for children aged 3 or 4 will continue to qualify for the universal 15 hours regardless of the working status of their foster carers, i.e. if the foster parents no longer meet the eligibility criteria and are not able to reverify their eligibility.

The social worker should ensure the completed application forms are signed by the relevant Service Manager and then be submitted to FIS@togetherforchildren.org.uk. Once the application is validated and accepted by the Families Information Service (FIS) Team, a code will then be issued which will enable the family to inform the childcare provider of their eligibility.

N.B. These codes **must be** reverified every 3 months in order to retain eligibility.

Applications for children who are placed with prospective adoptive parent(s) must make their own application through the Childcare Service (Best Start in Life) even if the formal adoption order has not yet been granted by the courts, as the parent(s) are no longer considered to be the child's foster parents.

Timescales for applications

Foster carers can claim funded childcare from the term **after** the child turns 9 months. Applications can be made up to 16 weeks before the child reaches the relevant age but please be aware codes need to be reverified every 3 months and could run out before the start of the relevant term if applied for too early. Also, places cannot commence part way through a term.

Please see table below:

Child turns 9 months by:	Child can take up a place from the term starting after:
31 st December	1 st January (Spring term)
31 st March	1 st April (Summer term)
31 st August	1 st September (Autumn term)

Applications need to be submitted in a timely manner which allows the FIS Team to verify the application and process the eligibility code. All codes need to be issued by FIS **before** the following deadlines: Please ensure you allow time for the team to receive and process the applications.

Term	Code to be issued by:
Autumn	31 st August
Spring	31 st December
Summer	31 st March

Please note that the summer term deadline does **NOT** take into account that Easter moves each year, and the summer term start dates fluctuate from year to year. It does not matter when the summer term starts, the deadline date **always** remains 31st March.

N.B. The FIS team have no leeway or flexibility around these deadlines. Deadlines are set by HMRC. If the deadline is missed, then access to the funded hours will not be available for that term.

Reconfirmation

Like all other parents, foster carers accessing funded childcare are required to reconfirm their eligibility every three months.

The social worker will work with the family to ensure that the revalidation process is carried out in accordance with the relevant deadlines. If a code is not revalidated by the relevant deadline date, it could mean that the funded childcare entitlement may cease.

As part of the revalidation process, the social worker should be satisfied that:

- the nursery place is on-going
- accessing the funded childcare is still consistent with the child's care plan, and
- the foster parents are still meeting the eligibility criteria around engaging in paid work outside of their fostering role.

Application Process

1. Application forms are available to download from <https://www.togetherforchildren.org.uk/childcare>
2. An application can be completed up to 16 weeks before their foster child turns 9 months.
3. The completed application form, with evidence of paid work should be provided to the child's social worker. Suitable evidence can be a pay slip or evidence of self-employment, such as a tax return.
4. The social worker will ensure the Service Manager agrees the application is consistent with the child's care plan. They will then sign the application for the social worker to submit, along with all the relevant evidence to the FIS Team at fis@togetherforchildren.org.uk.
5. Once received, an eligibility code will be generated by the FIS Team and will be provided directly to the foster carer and confirmed with the social worker.
6. This process will take no longer than 4 weeks from the date of application.
7. The foster carer will provide the eligibility code to an Ofsted registered childcare provider who will validate the code with Together for Children. Once validated, the child will be able to take up their place subject to nursery availability and funding deadlines.
8. Foster carers will need to reconfirm their eligibility every 3 months. Evidence should be sent to the FIS Team by email: fis@togetherforchildren.org.uk. Evidence should show that there is no change in the employment of the foster carer family and confirm that the child is still living with them. This will be confirmed with the child's social worker.
9. If the foster carer is no longer entitled, the funded hours may cease, however a child will still be entitled to continue with their 15 universal hours per week, if they have turned 3 during the previous term.

10. If a child is cared for by Together for Children Sunderland, but takes up a place in a neighbouring authority, Together for Children have responsibility for processing the application and generating the eligibility code. The Local Authority where the child is taking up the funded hours place will use the code to provide the funding for the place.
11. If a child is placed with a foster carer in the Sunderland area but they are 'cared for' by a different local authority, i.e. South Tyneside, Durham etc., then it is the child's 'home' authority that would carry out the application process and issue the eligibility code.
12. All information relating to the child's application and attendance with a childcare provider will be held securely in accordance with Together for Children's Data Protection and Privacy policies.
13. If a funded childcare application is refused by the social worker or the Service Manager, the foster carer can appeal by raising a complaint through Together for Children's complaints procedure. For more information visit:
<https://www.togetherforchildren.org.uk/aboutus/complaints>

If you have any questions about the process, please contact the child's social worker or FIS Team Tel: 0191 5611446 or 0191 561 3126.