**Working Parent Early Years Entitlements for Children in Foster Care**



**Information for Social Workers & Foster Parents**

**Introduction**

Children in foster care are already eligible for 15 hours of early years provision per week (for the equivalent of 38 weeks per year) from:

* The term after they turn 2 years old (qualify due to them being a Looked After Child)
* The term after they turn 3 years old until they start in full time school (a national, universal entitlement)

Some 3 & 4 year olds are also eligible for an additional 15 hours (so 30 hours of early years provision per week for the equivalent of 38 weeks per year) under a working parent early years entitlement.

From September 2024, children in foster care could be eligible for 15 hours of early years provision per week from the term after they turn 9 months old, as part of the new working parent entitlements. This will extend to 30 hours per week for all children accessing early years entitlements, from September 2025, for working parents.

This note helps social workers and foster parents understand the background to working parents early years entitlements and how it will work for children in foster care.

**Contents**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Topic** | **Page Number** |
| Eligibility | 2 |
| When to Apply | 3 |
| Key Considerations | 4 |
| Nottingham City Application Process | 6 |
| Nottingham City Assessment Process  | 8 |
| Process for Checking Eligibility | 9 |
| Unsuccessful Applications and Appeals | 10 |
| Eligible Applications | 10 |
| Issuing an Eligibility Code | 10 |
| Finding a Childcare Place | 10 |
| Provider Checking and Payment | 11 |
| Reconfirmation | 11 |
| Nottingham City Contact Information  | 13 |

**Eligibility**

Children in foster care may be able to receive up to 30 hours early years provision under the currently available working parent entitlements detailed on page 1 if the following criteria are met:

* That accessing the hours is consistent with the child’s care plan, placing the child at the centre of the process and decision making; and
* That, in single foster parent families, the foster parent engages in paid work outside their role as a foster parent; or
* In two parent foster families, both parents engage in paid work outside their role as a foster parent. If one partner is not a foster parent then they must be in qualifying paid work and earn a minimum of the equivalent of 16 hours at national minimum/national living wage.
* 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 working parent early years entitlement and there is no minimum earnings limit (although they must be engaging in paid work);
* Both foster parents earn under £100,000 each in this tax year (April to March);
* Between you and your partner, you may still be eligible for the working parent early years entitlement, if one of you holds additional employment outside being a foster carer and one of you;
	+ Receives National Insurance credits because of incapacity or limited capability for work
	+ Receives a Carer’s Allowance
	+ Receives an Employment and Support Allowance
	+ Receives Incapacity Benefit
	+ Receives a Severe Disablement Allowance
* Connected Persons Carers/Kinship Carers are also eligible to apply for the specific children that they foster if they meet the eligibility criteria above.

**When to Apply**

Foster parents and the child’s social worker should start discussions as the child approaches their relevant 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 working parent early years entitlement hours should be recorded and the care plan for the child should be updated as appropriate.

Foster parents can apply for working parent early years entitlement up to 16 weeks before their foster child turns the relevant age.

Foster parents can claim working parent early years entitlement hours the term after their foster child turns the relevant age (1st September, 1st January or 1st April) and they have received the eligibility code from the local authority through the application process.

As an example, if a child turns 3 years of age in July, they are eligible for working parent early years entitlement place from 1st September so they should submit their application form in good time for a code to be issued and validated by 31st August. If the application is late and the code not issued and validated by 31st August, the child will have to wait until the start of the following term (1st January) before being able to access a working parent early years entitlement place.

If foster parents wish to apply for the working parent early years entitlement hours for their own children, they need to apply through the Childcare Service at [www.gov.uk/help-with-childcare-costs](http://www.gov.uk/help-with-childcare-costs)

A Nottingham City Foster Child will have a Nottingham City Child’s Social Worker and a Nottingham City Supervising Social Worker. As such, Nottingham City is the ‘Corporate Parent’ and any foster family looking after a Nottingham City Foster Child, will apply to Nottingham City Local Authority for the working parent early years entitlement, regardless of which Local Authority the foster family reside in.

Equally, if you are a foster family living in Nottingham City, but your foster child is from another Local Authority, you should contact the Local Authority who is the ‘Corporate Parent’ for their application form for the working parent early years entitlement and apply directly to them.

**Key Considerations**

Foster parents and social workers should consider the following when deciding whether working parent early years entitlement is right for a foster family:

* No expectation or requirement for 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 working parent early years entitlements 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 entitlement hours.
* Children aged 3 and 4 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 the working parent early years entitlement, the responsible local authority should assess the child’s needs for early years as part of the care plan.

**Nottingham City Application Process**

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Foster Parent** | Parent books placeParents receive Red responseParent takes code to providerParents receive codeComplete Application Form |
| **Child’s Social Worker** | Informs Social WorkerConversation regarding childcare |
| **Designated****Person** **(Foster Parents Supervising Social Worker)** | Approve Form & send to ECS AdministratorNotEligibleEligible |
| **ECS Foster Care Administrator** | Code generatedEnter family details into ECS Web PortalGenerate eligibility period |
| **Provider** | Receive bookingConfirm place to parentsReceive & verify code |
| **Funding LA** | Receive Headcount |
|  | From this point, the process is the same as for any childFoster Children will receive ‘400’ codes |

Use Application Form from Social Worker for Nottingham City LA

**Nottingham City Assessment Process**

Nottingham City Council are responsible for establishing whether a foster parent is engaging in paid work outside their role as a foster parent and ensuring that accessing working parent early years entitlement is consistent with the child’s care plan.

The Designated Person to assess application forms from foster parents in Nottingham City is the Foster Parent’s Supervising Social Worker.

In approving an Application Form, the Designated Person should be satisfied that;

* The placement is on-going
* Accessing working parent early years entitlement is consistent with the child’s care plan, otherwise the child will not be able to take up a working parent early years entitlement place and no code should be issued
* The foster parents are engaging in paid work outside their role as a foster parent.
* Eligibility criteria are met and supporting evidence submitted with the application form

If the Designated Person is content that accessing working parent early years entitlement is consistent with the child’s care plan, they should use the following *‘Process for Checking Eligibility’* flowchart to establish if the child is eligible or not.

The Designated Person should respond to any application within 4 weeks of receipt.



Following assessment by the Designated Person, the Designated Person will forward all applications to the Eligibility Checking Service (ECS) Foster Care Administrator (Early Years Funding Team) for processing.

**Unsuccessful Applications / Appeals Process**

For unsuccessful application forms, the ECS Foster Care Administrator will contact the foster parent and the child’s Social Worker to inform them over the outcome and stating the reason given by the Designated Person on the application form. If the foster parent is unhappy about the decision the LA makes, they should contact the Independent Reviewing Officer in writing in the first instance, followed by the LA complaints procedure if they are still not satisfied with the response.

**Eligible Applications**

For eligible application forms, the ECS Foster Care Administrator will enter the family’s details onto the ECS Web Portal to generate an eligibility code and inform the parents and the child’s Social Worker.

**Issuing an Eligibility Code**

Upon receipt of an approved, eligible application form from the Designated Person, the ECS Foster Care Administrator (Early Years Funding Team) will create a record for the foster child and enter the details onto the ECS Web Portal to generate an 11 digit eligibility code.

Once generated, the code will be sent by the ECS Foster Care Administrator to the foster parents via email, also informing their social worker, with details on how they contact to a childcare provider to access a place.

**Finding a Working Parent Early Years Entitlement** **Place**

Once the foster parent has received the code, the foster parent is responsible for contacting a childcare provider to agree a working parent early years entitlement place. They will need to show the provider the email with the code from the local authority to confirm their place. Information on local childcare providers can be obtained from the Families Information Service on 0800 458 4114 or by visiting [www.asklion.co.uk](http://www.asklion.co.uk)

**Provider Checking and Payment**

When the foster carer presents their 11 digit code to their chosen childcare provider, they will check the eligibility of the code with the Early Years Team in the usual way on the portal.

**Reconfirmation**

Foster parents, like all other parents accessing the working parent early years entitlements, are required to reconfirm their eligibility every three months. Exact dates and intervals for children in foster care are set by the ECS when the child’s record is created when they first apply.

Failure to reconfirm could mean that a foster child is no longer eligible for working parent early years entitlement place.

The ‘Reconfirmation Process’ flowchart can be found on the following page;

Each month, the ECS Foster Care Administrator will use the new ECS Report to identify which of the foster parent eligibility codes are due for reconfirmation

At least 4 weeks before the end-date, the ECS Foster Care Administrator will initiate the reconfirmation process and email the foster parent to inform them that they are to reconfirm

If there has been a change in circumstances since the Application Form was approved the foster parent needs to inform the Designated Person so the child’s eligibility can be re-assessed

If there are no changes to the details on the original Application Form, the foster parent can reconfirm they are still eligible for a working parent early years entitlement place with the Designated Person

Designated Person will carry out any required checks to ensure:

* They are satisfied the placement is still on-going
* Accessing the working parent early years entitlement is still consistent with the child’s care plan
* The foster parents are still engaging in paid work outside their role as a foster parent
* Eligibility criteria are still being met

If the change in circumstances mean the child is no longer eligible, they will enter the ‘grace period’

If the change in circumstances mean the child is still eligible…

Designated Person to inform ECS Foster Care Administrator that foster parent is no longer eligible.

Designated Person to reconfirm to the ECS Foster Care Administrator when this re-check has taken place and update the child’s care plan

ECS Foster Care Administrator to update child’s ECS record when foster parents reconfirm

ECS Foster Care Administrator to update child’s record and email foster parent and childcare provider that foster child has entered the grace period and the date of which the working parent early years entitlement place will cease

**Nottingham City Contact Information**

* **Ask Lion - Information on Childcare Providers**

[www.asklion.co.uk](http://www.asklion.co.uk)

* **Designated Person**

Foster Parent’s Supervising Social Worker

* **ECS Foster Care Administrator**

Early Years Funding Team

0115 87 64693 earlyyears@nottinghamcity.gov.uk