



Department  
for Education

# **30 hours free childcare: Spring term 2018**

**Technical note**

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# 1. Background

All 3 and 4-year-olds in England are entitled to 15 hours a week of free early education. From September 2017 this entitlement was extended to 30 hours free childcare for families where both parents are working (or the sole parent is working in a lone parent family), and each parent earns a weekly minimum equivalent to 16 hours at national minimum wage or living wage, and less than £100,000 per year.

Parents apply and have their eligibility checked for 30 hours free childcare via the Childcare Service. If a parent is found to be eligible, they will be given a 30 hours eligibility code which they take to their chosen childcare provider. Childcare providers or local authorities will then validate these codes via the Eligibility Checking System (ECS). A parent must have generated a code and this code must be validated to enable a child to access a 30 hours place.

Earlier figures for 30 hours codes issued and codes validated for the spring term 2018 are available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/30-hours-free-childcare-eligibility-codes-issued-and-validated>

This publication provides updated figures and also includes estimates of the number children in a 30 hours place for the spring term. While headcount data, where supplied by LAs, is based on the same census date as both the January 2018 early years census and schools census, we do not expect the figure to align exactly. We are aware many LAs were still in the process of finalising and refining their figures and the headcount data in this publication should therefore be treated as indicative. In summer 2018, the 'Education provision: children under 5 years of age, January 2018' national statistics publication will be released, which will give a definitive picture of the number of children in a 30 hours place in January 2018.

The data sources for this publication are the early years census, the school census and the school level annual school census. All schools, and all private, voluntary, and independent (PVI) providers receiving government funding, are required to make (through their local authority) a child-level return. These data collections are on a statutory basis through legislation, which helps ensure complete and accurate information being returned.

## 2. Data Sources

The data sources for this publication are:

- Children in a 30 hours place – voluntary data returns made by local authorities in February 2018.
- Eligibility codes issued and validated – the Department for Education's Eligibility Checking System.

## 3. Children in a 30 hours place

During February 2018 all local authorities in England were requested to provide the number of 3 and 4-year-olds in their local authority in a funded early education place for more than 15 hours for the spring term i.e. a 30 hours place and were asked to note whether the figure provided was an actual or estimate. Returns were received from 150 local authorities with 61% returning actual figures, 38% estimates.

An estimate was calculated for the final two (1%) of local authorities where no information was supplied. In these instances the headcount had been estimated based on a percentage derived from the total headcount from local authorities where supplied divided by the total validated codes.

$$estimate\ headcount = \frac{\text{Total headcount all LAs submitted}}{\text{Total validated codes all LAs submitted}} * \text{validated codes for LA unsubmitted}$$

The national total has been rounded to the nearest 1,000 to reflect the uncertainty of the estimate and the totals for the two affected regions have been rounded to the nearest 100.

## 4. Codes issued and validated

Parents apply and have their eligibility checked for 30 hours free childcare via the Childcare Service, the online application for Tax-Free Childcare and 30 hours free childcare. A code is generated, for any child in the appropriate age range, as part of the application process regardless of whether they intend to take up 30 hours, therefore some parents will receive a code even if they only want Tax-Free Childcare.

If a parent is found to be eligible, they will be given a 30 hours eligibility code. A parent should take this code along with their national insurance number and their child's date of birth to their chosen childcare provider. The provider will either directly, or via their local authority use the Department for Education's ECS to confirm the validity of the code. Once the 30 hours code has been validated, the parent will be able to take up their 30 hours place. The local authority the check is made in and the date of the check are recorded by in the ECS

The department has previously released figures on the number of eligibility codes issued to parents and validated by providers in the spring term, initially in the December 2018 statistical first release '30 hours free childcare: autumn term', and subsequently updated through monthly management information releases, the last of which was published on 8<sup>th</sup> February 2018. The cut off date for spring applications was the 31 December 2017. However, in an attempt to reflect the fact that we know some local authorities have used their discretion and enabled children to take up places even if their code was issued after the 31st December, the spring demand figure (eligibility codes issued) in this publication includes all digital codes, manual codes<sup>1</sup> and late reconfirmations issued up to Friday 19<sup>th</sup> January. This is the date that a child was required to be in a place for the local authority to be able to include them on their census return. Additionally data cleansing has been applied to identify and remove duplicate codes relating to the same child.

### 4.1. Methodology

#### Codes issued

An eligibility code is assumed to relate to the spring term under the following conditions;

- The child had turned 3 on or before the 31<sup>st</sup> December 2017; and
- a. The code was issued on or before the 19<sup>th</sup> January 2018; and
- b. The code validity end date is within or after the spring term; or

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<sup>1</sup> Manual codes were issued to parents who encountered problems when trying to register for 30 hours child care using the Childcare Service and then contacted the Childcare Service Helpline. If a parent met the eligibility criteria, then they were issued a manual code (also referred to as a temporary code) which they could take to their provider.

- c. The code validity end date is in the second half of the autumn term meaning the child could be in their grace period during the spring term if they were in a place in autumn. This excludes codes where the child was too young to be in a 30 hours place during the autumn term as they are not eligible, since you cannot start a 30 hours place in a grace period.

Information on the child's age, the code validity start date and the code validity end date is available from the ECS.

Where identifiable, duplicates are removed from the data when multiple codes were issued to the same child. For example, where a manual code was initially provided and the parent later received a permanent code via the Childcare Service application. Codes are identified as relating to the same child if they share the same national insurance number of the parent making the application and the same first name of the child.

Most children who had turned 4 by 31st August will be in a reception place in the autumn term, however, a small number of parents of 4-year-olds may choose to defer their child's entry into reception and in these circumstances, they would still be able to claim 30 hours free childcare until the term following their fifth birthday. Only children who were 3 at 31st August and additionally those who turned 3 by 31st December are included in the codes issued and validated figures for the spring term because it is not possible to identify whether a code was issued to a parent of a 4-year-old applying for Tax-Free Childcare only. Figures for 4-year-olds are included in footnotes.

Figures are broken down by local authority based on the local authority in which the child is resident.

## Codes validated

Codes validated are the subset of codes issued for the spring term that have been checked by a provider or local authority by 7th March 2018.

Figures are broken down by local authority based on the local authority who issued the code and the local authority who completed the last check; this may be a different local authority to where the code was issued. Where a code has been checked by more than one local authority, it is recorded against the local authority who most recently checked that code.

## 5. Summer codes issued and validated

Initial estimates are also provided of the number of codes issued and validated for the summer term as of 7th March 2018. An eligibility code is assumed to relate to the summer term under the following conditions;

- a. The child had turned 3 on or before the 31st March 2018.
- b. The code was issued on or before 7th March 2018 (codes issued up to 31st March 2018 will be eligible for the summer term and therefore these numbers are expected to increase).
- c. The code validity end date is after 31st March 2018 or the code is within the grace period (a child who becomes ineligible during the first half of a funding block should be funded until the end of that funding block. A child who becomes ineligible in the latter half of the funding block should be funded until the end of the following funding block.).

Codes validated are the subset of codes issued for the summer term that have been checked by a provider or local authority since the 15<sup>th</sup> January and by the 7<sup>th</sup> March 2018. Local authorities began carrying out their early years census and schools census on the week commencing the 15<sup>th</sup> January, therefore checks made before this data are less likely to relate to the summer term.

These figures will be updated through monthly management information releases available here: <https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/30-hours-free-childcare-eligibility-codes-issued-and-validated>. An update is due to be published in April 2018.



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