

[Home](#) ▾ [Parenting, childcare and children's services](#) ▾ [Childcare and early years](#)
▾ [Local authorities and early years](#) ▾ [Holiday activities and food programme](#)



[Department
for Education](#)

Guidance

Holiday activities and food programme 2025

Updated 10 March 2025

Applies to England

Contents

[Introduction](#)

[Programme Overview](#)

[Background](#)

[Who the programme is for](#)

[Aims of the programme](#)

[The core offer](#)

[Standards for holiday provision](#)

[Safeguarding](#)

[Tailoring your provision](#)

[Local coordination by authorities](#)

[Support for local authorities](#)

[Funding](#)

[Payments and reporting](#)

Introduction

The holiday activities and food (HAF) programme provides healthy meals, enriching activities, and free childcare places to children from low-income families, benefiting their health, wellbeing and learning.

Since 2022, the HAF programme has provided 15.6 million HAF days to children and young people in this country. Across the 2023 to 2024 academic year, almost 5 million HAF days were provided during winter, Easter, and summer delivery.

The programme, though aimed at children in receipt of benefits related free school meals (FSMs) is not exclusively for them and as set out in this guidance. We encourage local authorities to use up to 15% of their funding to provide free or subsidised holiday club places for children who are not in receipt of benefits related FSMs but who the local authority believe could benefit from HAF.

Programme Overview

This document provides information for local authorities delivering the holiday activities and food programme for the financial year 2025 to 2026. The document should be read alongside the [grant determination letter](#).

The funding for each local authority for the HAF programme is confirmed in the published HAF grant determination letter on an annual basis.

This funding is for the 153 upper tier local authorities to coordinate and provide free holiday provision, including healthy food and enriching activities. The programme will again be available to children in every local authority in England. The holiday periods that we expect local authorities to cover are set out in [the core offer](#) section.

Background

Since 2018, the HAF programme has provided support to children in receipt of free school meals through holiday periods.

Following successful pilots between 2018 and 2020 on 27 October 2021, the government announced a 3 year funding settlement of over £200 million each year for the HAF programme. The final year of this funding settlement is the financial year 2025 to 2026.

Research has shown that the school holidays can be pressure points for some families. For some children that can lead to a holiday experience gap. Children from low income households are:

- less likely to access organised out-of-school activities
- more likely to experience 'unhealthy holidays' in terms of nutrition and physical health
- more likely to experience social isolation

The HAF programme is a response to this issue. Evidence shows that free holiday clubs can have a positive impact on children and young people. They work best when they:

- provide consistent and easily accessible enrichment activities
- cover more than just breakfast or lunch
- involve children and parents in food preparation
- use local partnerships and connections, particularly with the VCSO sector

Who the programme is for

The HAF programme funding is primarily for school aged children from reception to year 11 (inclusive) who receive benefits related FSMs.

Benefits related FSMs are available to pupils if their parents are in receipt of one of the qualifying benefits and have a claim verified by their school or local authority.

For further information on eligibility, visit [apply for free school meals](#).

Local authorities are asked to ensure that the offer of free holiday club provision is available for all children in receipt of benefits related free school meals in their area. Though this does not mean we expect all to attend, as the provision is voluntary.

Other children and families

As in previous years, local authorities have discretion to use up to 15% of their funding to provide free or subsidised holiday club places for children who are not in receipt of benefits related FSMs but who the local authority believe could benefit from HAF.

In deciding which children should benefit from the 15% flexible funding, local authorities should ensure that these places are aligned to their local priorities.

Local authorities are not required to seek written approval from the Department for Education (DfE) for the use of this 15% flexibility. They are expected to continue to monitor and report on this element of their expenditure and ensure it remains within the limit.

Universal infant free school meals

All children in reception, year 1 and year 2 in England's state funded schools receive a free meal under the universal infant free school meals (UIFSM) policy.

Infant pupils who receive a free meal under UIFSM must also be eligible for benefits related FSMs to be able to access a place on the HAF programme.

Checking eligibility

It is expected that all local authorities should have a robust system in place to ensure that the programme in their area is supporting the children and families that it is intended to support.

Examples of robust systems may include:

- a booking system that includes an automatic eligibility checking feature that establishes FSM status
- a voucher or code system, whereby eligible children and their families are issued with a unique code allowing them to book places on the programme
- a direct referral of children to the local authority or the direct booking on to the programme by a school
- a referral from another trusted public body, agency or from elsewhere within the

local authority

- direct cross checking with the Eligibility Checking System

This list is not exhaustive and is not intended to be prescriptive. Local authorities are responsible for ensuring their system is adequate and robust and ensuring that HAF funding is expended in accordance with the eligibility requirements and funding conditions of the programme.

Allowing parents and families to “self-declare” their eligibility is not sufficiently robust if the local authority does not also have additional checks in place to ensure that the self-declaration is accurate.

Booking systems

We know that the majority of local authorities now have an online system or mechanism in place that allows parents and families to book places on to the HAF programme. There are many organisations who provide bespoke booking systems to local authorities.

This section of the guidance is intended to support local authorities when considering the procurement or development of a booking system.

It is expected that the booking system that a local authority operates should, as a minimum, include the following features:

- it should be in a fully accessible format so that users with additional needs or disabilities are able to easily and effectively navigate and use the system
- it should be available in alternative languages so that users whose first language is not English are able to easily and effectively navigate and use the system
- it should include an offline option so that those who cannot or do not want to use an online booking system are still able to book, for example through a dedicated email or telephone number
- an eligibility checking disclaimer, so that parents and families can provide their consent for the booking system and the provider or the local authority can conduct eligibility checks to ensure the programme reaches its intended recipients

Features of a booking system may also include:

- a mechanism to prevent “double-bookings”, multiple or same day bookings, so a

single child cannot take up places with different providers on the same day or time

- reminders and prompts so that families receive notifications about their bookings, which can help to minimise non-attendance
- availability as an app
- real-time tracking of bookings, allowing the local authority (LA) and provider to focus their marketing and promotion

Targeting children with low school attendance rates

A number of local authorities have targeted and supported children who have, or are at risk of having, low school attendance rates. The HAF programme can offer these children stability, structure and support alongside fun, food and physical activity during the longer school holidays and could contribute to them feeling more able to return to school and attend more regularly.

Example

At one school in Stoke on Trent, the leadership team worked with the local authority and The Hubb Foundation to target pupils with low attendance rates and offer them places on the summer HAF programme. After tracking attendance rates after the summer school holiday, they saw significant improvements to attendance rates of targeted pupils, including:

- a year 5 pupil (FSMs recipient and a Looked After Child) improved their school attendance rate by 11% when compared with the previous year
- 2 siblings, who were both recipients of FSMs, were specifically targeted to attend HAF - 1 child reduced their unauthorised absence rate by 23.2% with the sibling improving their attendance rate by 28.7%

Aims of the programme

There are many benefits for children who attend the HAF programme. We want to encourage all HAF providers to ensure a high-quality experience that will result in children:

- receiving healthy and nutritious meals
- maintaining a healthy level of physical activity
- being happy, having fun and meeting new friends
- developing a greater understanding of food, nutrition and other health related issues
- taking part in fun and engaging activities that support their development and well-being
- feeling safe and secure
- getting access to the right support services
- returning to school feeling engaged and ready to learn

Families can also benefit, when HAF providers include their needs in planning and delivering their programme. This could be through:

- providing opportunities to get involved in sessions, for example cookery classes
- ensuring they are signposted towards other sources of information and support, such as health services or employment and education opportunities

The core offer

Overall, local authorities are expected to offer the equivalent of 6 weeks' HAF provision to eligible children during the Easter, summer and Christmas school holidays.

The dates that HAF provision can take place during those holiday periods are not set out in this guidance and it is for local authorities to decide, taking into account the school holiday periods in their area.

Over Easter:

We expect that all participating children should benefit from face-to-face provision during the Easter school holidays, which should be for a minimum of 4 days.

Over summer:

- for local authorities that have a summer holiday that spans 6 full calendar weeks, participating children should be offered face-to-face provision during the summer

school holidays, which should be for a minimum of 16 days

- for local authorities that have a summer holiday that is less than 6 full calendar weeks, participating children should be offered face-to-face provision, which should be for a minimum of 12 days
- if only 3 weeks are offered at summer, then these local authorities are expected to offer an additional 4 days during another half-term holiday period (February, May or October)

Over Christmas:

We expect that all participating children should benefit from face-to-face provision during the Christmas school holidays, which should be for a minimum of 4 days.

Flexibility in the Christmas school holidays

We know that the HAF programme offers a wide range of support for families that goes well beyond the delivery of food and activities: it's a point of contact for children and families during holiday periods that can be vital for them in accessing support and services. We also know that children benefit from being together, being sociable, engaging in activities with friends and having fun and that families may need support with childcare during the Christmas holiday period.

We however understand that there are many factors that can impact upon the capacity of HAF providers over the Christmas school holidays. There are also many children and families across the country from cultures that do not celebrate Christmas and local authorities should endeavour to ensure that the needs of all eligible children and families from across their community are fully met.

We want local authorities to have the freedom to act flexibly to ensure that the high-quality support and contact provided by the HAF programme is still delivered at Christmas.

While our expectation remains that participating children should benefit from at least 4 days of face-to-face provision, we recognise that over the Christmas school holidays, this may not always be possible. Where this is the case, we recommend that participating children are offered at least 2 days of face-to-face provision complimented by at least 2 days of HAF support which can be provided in the form of high-quality food hampers and activity packs.

The provision of vouchers or cash payments to children and families using HAF funding is not permitted.

Where local authorities are unable to deliver 4 days of face-to-face provision, an alternative approach is 2 days of face-to-face provision. This could be similar to the HAF provision delivered at Easter and in the summer.

It could also be, for example, a Christmas festival or fayre where children and their families are invited along to take part in activities together, prepare a festive meal together and socialise. At these events, we expect that those attending should eat high quality, healthy food and take part in some fun activities.

It could also involve day trips or other experiences, providing that this includes a healthy meal as well as an element of physical activity, for example, a walk.

Alongside this, we would expect that children who attend the above face-to-face provision also receive the equivalent of a minimum of 2 further days of support in the form of high quality food hampers and activity packs.

Length of HAF sessions

Our expectation is that, in HAF funded holiday weeks, local authorities should endeavour to offer all eligible children the equivalent of at least 4 hours a day, 4 days a week though we recognise that this is not always practical or possible.

We strongly encourage HAF coordinators to work with their providers to consider opportunities to offer paid for places alongside HAF funded places and ensure the HAF programme, where possible, supports the provision of childcare during the holidays. In doing this, local authorities and providers can be flexible about the length of the sessions that they offer.

We know that local authorities and providers want the flexibility to offer longer or shorter sessions, and this is something we encourage, particularly when considering the needs of older children and children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND) or additional needs.

Example

To meet the needs of secondary aged children in the summer, a provider could offer 6 weeks of provision consisting of shorter sessions, which included food

and activities for 2 to 3 hours and for 3 to 4 days per week.

This could be complemented with opportunities for children to undertake voluntary work, building new skills or trips and experiences.

In planning their HAF programme, local authorities are expected to make sure that eligible children can access a level of provision that meets their needs. They should bear in mind that the overall HAF offer to the child does not need to be from a single provider but can be delivered through a range of providers with a blend of offers available.

Other holiday periods

Funding for this programme is available for the Easter, summer, and Christmas school holidays.

An exception to this is for those local authorities with a shorter summer holiday period (less than 6 full calendar weeks). These authorities have the flexibility to limit their summer provision to 3 weeks and provide an additional week (a minimum of 4 days) in one of the longer half-term holiday periods.

Beyond this, we know that many local authorities have secured funding from other sources to be able to run HAF during the half term holidays.

Following successful trials in February 2025 half term, local authorities will be able to seek approval from DfE for permission to use projected underspends (post summer delivery and taking into account Christmas delivery) to fund additional provision during the October and February half term holiday periods in 2025 to 26. This will be subject to local authorities being able to provide a programme that is in line with the guidance set out in [The core offer](#) and [Flexibility in the Christmas school holidays](#) sections.

Local authorities will need to follow the process for approval set out by DfE, which will be communicated in due course. The department reserves the right to approve or reject these requests.

Wraparound childcare

The national wraparound programme compliments HAF, with the ambition that by 2026, all parents and carers of primary school-aged children who need it will be able to access term time childcare in their local area from 8am to 6pm, so that parents can access employment and improve labour market participation.

Local authorities will work with primary schools and providers (including childminders) to set up or expand before and after school childcare in their area.

The wraparound programme aims to ensure that all parents or carers of primary school-aged children accessing wraparound and who are eligible for Universal Credit childcare or Tax-Free Childcare can use this financial support to help pay for wraparound. Local authorities should promote the use of [Tax-Free Childcare](#) and [Universal Credit childcare](#) and encourage providers to sign up to accept both.

Our expectation is that HAF coordinators in local authorities actively engage with the wraparound leads in the local authority in order to explore and support opportunities to make connections between the 2 programmes whether that be around:

- school engagement
- promoting the opportunity to private providers who may want to extend or expand in the term time and take advantage of the new programme
- sharing intelligence about the wider holiday wraparound market

We strongly encourage HAF coordinators to work with their providers to consider opportunities to offer paid for places alongside HAF and ensure the HAF programme, where possible, supports the provision of childcare during the holidays.

Full details can be found in the [national wraparound childcare programme handbook](#).

A holistic approach to holiday provision

Whilst the HAF programme is primarily focussed on providing support to disadvantaged families, there are many benefits to local authorities, providers and communities in expanding their holiday care offer to include paid for provision alongside HAF funded places.

Local authorities are bound by the childcare sufficiency duty, with section 6 of the Childcare Act 2006 placing a duty on local authorities in England to secure, so far as is reasonably practicable, sufficient childcare for working parents in their area and

parents making the transition to work, including during school holidays. Encouraging an expanded offer can support local authorities in meeting this duty and securing sufficient levels of provision for all families throughout holiday periods, as well as positively impacting outcomes of children and young people in the area.

We strongly encourage local authorities to ensure the clubs and providers they fund are open to all children, not just to those who received a place funded by the HAF programme.

Local authorities should work with providers to help raise awareness of Tax-Free Childcare and Universal Credit support directly with the families who use their provision. Materials to help providers to raise awareness of support available can be found in the [Childcare Choices: Parent communications toolkit](#).

Standards for holiday provision

We have developed a framework of standards to provide a benchmark of what we expect from those delivering the HAF programme.

One of the key roles of the local authority is to:

- improve the quality of provision across the local area
- ensure that providers deliver the HAF programme in compliance with high-level framework of standards

Framework of standards

This section sets out the standards we expect for HAF funded providers. We expect local authorities to make best use of the variety of local and national organisations who are available to support them and their providers in the delivery of these aspects of the HAF programme.

It is the local authority's role to ensure standards are met across the programme and to support local providers who do not meet them to ensure they are adequately supported through training, support, and partnerships.

Not all providers have to deliver all aspects of the programme, but our clear

expectation is that where possible, all participating children should benefit from all aspects of the programme. This might mean that local authorities adopt a blended approach to ensuring children can access different aspects of the programme through different providers.

Food provision

All providers must provide at least 1 meal a day (breakfast, lunch or an evening meal) and all food provided at HAF clubs (including snacks) must meet [school food standards](#).

For some children, the opportunity to enjoy a hot meal at a HAF club is important and our aspiration is that providers should, where possible, try to offer hot meals to children attending HAF clubs. However, we acknowledge that this is not always possible and that alternatives to hot meals can sometimes be more suitable.

To ensure that all children receive a high quality and stigma free experience, if a provider is open to both HAF-funded and non-HAF-funded places, it is vital that all of the children attending are provided with an identical food offer and that HAF funded children are treated equally.

If children on non-HAF-funded places are given the option to bring a packed lunch, then we expect the local authority and the provider to work together to ensure that children attending through HAF have the same choice. This could be fulfilled through the provider and the local authority making arrangements to provide packed lunches for HAF children. All packed lunches must meet the school food standards.

Alternatively, for providers who provide meals on-site, they could consider making the same healthy food available to all children, but with an additional charge for those non-HAF funded places.

All food provided as part of the HAF programme must:

- comply with regulations on food preparation
- take into account allergies and dietary requirements (see the [allergy guidance for schools](#))
- take into account any religious or cultural requirements for food

There is flexibility in the design of the food provision which should always be tailored

to ensure that all food meets the dietary needs of the children and families who attend. The food served should also be appropriate for the nature of the session, for example, offering cold packed lunches for parks or outdoor venues or for day trips.

While there can be benefits to using a central food service to provide meals to HAF clubs, we expect local authorities to carefully consider whether using a central food service is the right approach for providing high quality, attractive and tailored meals for those attending the HAF programme.

Providing food on site can provide an opportunity to engage children and families in food preparation and nutrition. Providers have reported that when children are involved in designing menus and the preparation of food, they are more engaged and more willing to try new and healthier food.

We recommend that local authorities carefully consider the provision of the food element of the HAF programme, in particular, in making sure that providers and children are involved in the planning and preparation of food. Such a developmental approach can be key to effecting long term change in engagement with food and nutrition.

There are also environmental factors to consider when planning the food provision. Local authorities should consider whether clubs preparing food on their own premises would produce less food and packaging waste and result in fewer food miles than off-site, centralised provision.

Food providers

Local authorities should ensure that the providers they work with are, where applicable, registered as a food business. This provides reassurance to all of those involved that food safety standards are being met.

A food business is defined as anyone doing the following with food:

- preparing
- cooking
- storing
- handling
- distributing

- supplying
- selling

We expect that this will apply to the vast majority of HAF providers and local authorities will need to carefully consider any HAF providers who are claiming an exemption to registration as a food business. Further information is available on [food business registration](#).

Local authorities are responsible for enforcing food hygiene laws and can inspect any registered food business at any point in the food production and distribution process. We recommend that HAF coordinators within each local authority are in regular contact with their food safety inspectors to ensure that HAF providers are fully compliant.

Food information regulations - Natasha's Law

From 1 October 2021, changes to the Food Information Regulations 2014 came into effect, adding new labelling requirements for food that is pre-packed for direct sale (PPDS).

Local authorities should read the [guidance on the Food Standards Agency website](#) and ensure that all food provision for the HAF programme meets these requirements.

Enrichment activities

All HAF-funded provision must provide fun and enriching activities that allow children to:

- develop new skills or knowledge
- consolidate existing skills and knowledge
- try out new experiences
- have fun and socialise

This could include but is not limited to:

- physical activities, for example, football, swimming, table tennis or cricket
- creative activities, for example, putting on a play, junk modelling or drumming workshops
- experiences, for example, a nature walk or visiting a city farm
- free play, for example, fun and freedom to relax and enjoy themselves

We expect all HAF providers to provide a balanced programme. For providers whose primary focus is set around a specific activity or sport, we expect them to ensure that children attending their provision benefit from a holistic and varied experience.

Physical activities

Holiday clubs must provide activities that meet the [physical activity guidelines](#) on a daily basis.

In line with those guidelines, we expect:

- all children and young people participating in the HAF programme should engage in moderate-to-vigorous physical activity for an average of at least 60 minutes per day
- children and young people participating in the HAF programme should engage in a variety of types and intensities of physical activity to develop movement skills, muscular fitness, and bone strength
- children and young people should aim to minimise the amount of time spent being sedentary, and when physically possible should break up long periods of not moving with at least light physical activity

Meeting the physical activity requirement does not have to be in the form of a structured and focussed physical activity session, but might include active travel, free play and sports.

Increasing awareness of healthy eating, healthy lifestyles, and positive behaviours

We expect providers to incorporate helping children to understand more about the benefits of healthy eating and nutrition into their programme. These do not need to be formal learning activities. This could include:

- getting children involved in food preparation and cooking
- growing fruit and vegetables
- taste tests
- discussing food and healthy eating during mealtimes
- including food and nutrition in other activities

Offering positive learning and development through HAF activities creates stigma free opportunities to support children and young people in learning about healthy lifestyles and exercise. This could cover, for example, the use of vapes, cigarettes, drugs, and how this can lead to issues including:

- economic
- social
- personal safety
- exploitation
- criminality

Signposting and referrals and supporting families

HAF providers should be able to offer information, signposting or referrals to other services and support, that would benefit the children who attend their provision and their families. Other services and support could include:

- Citizens Advice
- school nurses, dentists, or other healthcare practitioners
- family support services or children's services
- housing support officers
- Jobcentre Plus
- organisations providing financial education
- early years and childcare, including help to pay for childcare (for example, [Tax-](#)

There are many ways that providers can meet this element of the programme, for example, through trained and knowledgeable staff engaging with families during drop-off and pick-up times.

We know that many HAF providers have worked to provide weekly training and advice sessions for parents, carers or other family members. We encourage providers who want to do so to continue to offer those sessions.

These sessions could provide advice on how to source, prepare and cook nutritious and low-cost food. This could be combined with the increasing awareness and understanding of healthy eating aspect of the programme, for example, by inviting children and their families to prepare and eat a meal together at a HAF session.

There are alternative ways of delivering this, for example, by providing participating children with ingredients and recipes to take away and try at home with their families.

Example

In Lambeth and Southwark, they worked with the Kitchen Social programme to incorporate the 'take and make' into their Summer of Food and Fun HAF programme. Participating children received a box of ingredients and recipe cards to take home so that families could cook and eat healthy meals together at home.

The boxes, which were designed with nutritionists:

- met school food standards
- were low cost
- took under 30 minutes to make
- were 'low cook', which aimed to ease financial constraints and build families confidence in cooking

The boxes also included healthy eating and physical activity challenges and information to support children learning and being active at home.

Policies and procedures

There are a wide variety of organisations and individuals involved in the delivery of the holiday, activities and food programme including:

- schools
- colleges
- nurseries
- private providers
- charities
- youth clubs
- community groups

All organisations delivering the HAF programme must be able to demonstrate that they have in place relevant and appropriate policies and procedures for:

- safeguarding, including the recruitment of staff and volunteers
- food safety
- health and safety
- relevant insurance policies
- accessibility and inclusiveness

Quality assurance - ensuring providers meet the programme standards

Local authorities should have in place a system to monitor the HAF providers they fund so that they can be assured that they meet the expected standards for the programme and are providing a high quality and fun experience for children. Having a quality assurance process in place will provide reassurance to all involved.

Local authorities will also need to ensure that robust due diligence checks are carried out on each provider they fund through the HAF programme, prior to the provider commencing work.

Our expectation is that local authorities will carry out visits to every provider they fund in order to be satisfied that the provision is suitable, and that the provider has everything in place to deliver a high quality programme.

We recognise that each local authority will develop an individual approach and a proportionate system to monitor their HAF providers and that it may not be necessary or proportionate to visit every provider during every holiday period and there are many ways that local authorities can keep in regular contact with providers.

As a minimum, it is expected that an assurance visit should be made to all HAF funded providers at least once per year.

We expect all providers who are funded through the programme to meet our framework of standards and we expect that assurance visits are focussed on ensuring this is the case.

Below are a number of areas that local authorities may want to cover as part of their quality assurance visits. The list is intended as a guide and is not prescriptive.

Food provision

Check:

- that the provider is registered as a food business or if they are claiming an exemption, that the exemption applies
- what plans the provider has in place to provide high quality and nutritious food
- how will they ensure that the food served will meet the school food standards
- if they have talked to children and families about the food they will serve
- if they have a robust system in place to ensure the food they serve considers dietary, religious or cultural requirements
- if they have a robust system in place to manage allergies
- if they are open to both HAF-funded and non-HAF-funded children, and how they ensure that all children get the same experience

Awareness and understanding of healthy eating

Check:

- if the provider will run specific sessions on healthy eating
- what activities or sessions the provider has planned that support children in making good decisions about food
- how they plan to incorporate the theme of healthy eating and healthy lifestyles into their HAF provision

Signposting and referrals

Check:

- how the provider engages with the families of the children who attend their provision
- what the provider has in place to guide and advise children and their families to ensure they are aware of and, where appropriate, referred to other services and agencies

Enriching activities

Check:

- what enrichment activities will be on offer
- why the provider has chosen them
- if the activities on offer are age appropriate

Accessibility and inclusiveness

Check:

- if the provider has a bespoke offer for children with SEND that is clearly highlighted
- how the provider will ensure that the needs of children with SEND are identified
- how the provider will ensure that all staff are appropriately trained to deliver high quality, accessible and inclusive provision

Safeguarding

Check:

- if all staff have received safeguarding training
- if all staff been checked and vetted by the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS), where appropriate
- what policies the provider has in place to ensure safeguarding incidents are dealt with robustly and rapidly

Health and safety policies and procedures

Check what health and safety procedures and policies the provider has in place.

Insurance policies and procedures

Check if the provider has up to date and appropriate insurance policies in place.

Safeguarding

Safeguarding and promoting the welfare of children is everyone's responsibility. We want every HAF club to be a safe and happy place for children, and for parents, carers and families to feel confident that their child is well looked after and that robust safeguarding arrangements are in place.

Local authorities are statutorily responsible for safeguarding in relation to children in need, under statute 17 of the Children Act 1989, and looked after children under statute 20 of the Children Act 1989.

We encourage all local authorities to work closely with their local safeguarding children partnership to:

- make them aware of the HAF programme and what it can offer
- ensure that they can support the programme to put safeguarding arrangements in place

As set out in [working together to safeguard children](#), safeguarding is defined for the purposes of this guidance as:

- protecting children from maltreatment
- preventing impairment of children's mental and physical health or development
- ensuring that children grow up in circumstances consistent with the provision of safe and effective care
- taking action if you identify children to be at risk of harm

Local authorities should ensure that their local safeguarding partners understand the holiday, activities and food programme and those working on the delivery of the programme are familiar with the [working together to safeguard children](#) guidance.

There are a number of accredited organisations who can provide safeguarding and child protection training courses for those involved in working with children. We expect local authorities to be able to demonstrate that those involved in the delivery of the holiday, activities and food programme in their area are competent and have received adequate training and support.

We expect every local authority to produce and maintain a central register of all the providers they fund through their HAF programme and to put in place a system for inspecting each provider and ensuring all adhere to the standards set out in this

guidance.

Holiday clubs in school settings

We know that schools are safe places and have safeguarding arrangements in place.

Where activities are provided by the governing body or proprietor of a school, under the direct supervision or management of their school staff the school's child protection policy will apply.

Where the activities are provided separately in the school but by another body, the governing body or proprietor should seek assurance that the body concerned has appropriate safeguarding and child protection policies and procedure in place.

We recommend that anyone involved in the delivery of a holiday club in school settings is familiar with part 1 of [keeping children safe in education](#).

Holiday clubs in out of school settings

By out-of-school settings we mean organisations or individuals that provide tuition, training, instruction or activities to children in England without their parents' or carers' supervision, but are not:

- schools
- colleges
- education settings providing alternative provision
- 16 to 19 academies
- providers caring for children that are registered with Ofsted or a childminder agency

These settings generally provide tuition, training, instruction or activities outside normal school hours (for example, evenings, weekends, school holidays), although some settings are run part-time during school hours to help meet the needs of those in home education.

The guidance for providers running out-of-school settings on [keeping children safe during community activities, after-school clubs, and tuition](#) covers advice on what policies and procedures providers should have in place for:

- health and safety
- safeguarding and child protection
- staff suitability
- governance

Volunteers and DBS checking

We know that in some settings, volunteers can play an important role in the delivery of holiday clubs.

Under no circumstances should a volunteer in respect of whom no checks have been obtained be left unsupervised or allowed to work in regulated activity.

For some of the voluntary staff involved in the delivery of the holiday, activities and food programme in holiday clubs, this work will be done regularly and considered to be regulated activity. This means they will be subject to an enhanced DBS check with barred list information.

There may be a very small number of volunteers who do not regularly carry out this role, and so it may not be considered as regulated activity. This means they may not be required to have an enhanced DBS check.

The guidance on [regulated activity in relation to children](#) contains definitions of what we mean by regular and regulated activity.

Example

A guest speaker or presenter visits a holiday, activities and food programme club to deliver a talk on nature.

The guest is escorted by staff at the club (who are DBS checked) while on the premises and is not left unsupervised with children at any time. In these circumstances, we would not expect a DBS check to be carried out.

To provide reassurance to parents, families and carers, we strongly recommend that all volunteers who are involved in the delivery of the holiday, activities and food programme in holiday clubs should have an [enhanced DBS check](#) (which, where applicable, should include children's barred list information).

We do not recommend holiday clubs using volunteers that are not DBS checked, but if this occurs, it is the responsibility of the local authority to ensure that volunteers are not at any point left alone and unsupervised with children in holiday clubs.

Other workers

All staff who are employed by holiday club providers funded through the holiday, activities and food programme should be subject to an enhanced DBS check with barred list information.

Part 3 of [keeping children safe in education](#) sets out a clear process for safe recruitment. We recommend local authorities and holiday clubs providers follow this best practice when recruiting volunteers.

Ofsted registration

Holiday clubs may need to legally register with Ofsted depending on the provision they offer, they may also be eligible to register with Ofsted on the voluntary register or they may be [exempt from registration](#) entirely. Both clubs and providers that would require registration with Ofsted, and those that are exempt, can participate in the HAF programme.

To support the raising of quality and to better meet the safeguarding needs of children and young people, certain providers can choose to [register with Ofsted](#) even if they do not have to.

One of the direct benefits to children and families of providers being Ofsted registered is that families may be eligible for tax free childcare or the childcare costs element of Universal Credit. Through this families may be able to [claim back up to 85% of their childcare costs](#) if they are attending and paying for extra childcare at Ofsted registered settings.

It is the responsibility of individual HAF providers to understand whether they are

required by law to be Ofsted registered and to continue to review their status as and when the provision they are offering changes.

We expect local authorities to check with all their HAF providers that they are appropriately registered, particularly those providers who may have amended their childcare offer during the holidays because of the HAF programme.

Tailoring your provision

Local authorities and their providers will have flexibility about how they deliver provision to best serve the needs of children and families in their area. We encourage all local authorities to have a rich mix of provision catering for children with different interests and of different ages.

There should also be good geographical spread across the local authority but with increased supply in areas with higher levels of FSMs families in order to maximise attendance levels.

Equality Act 2010

When assessing the requirements of children of children with SEND or additional needs, local authorities should ensure that the provision they fund through the HAF programme is fully compliant with the Equality Act 2010. This will include making sure that they, and the providers they work with, put in place any reasonable adjustments which are required to ensure that children with a disability are not subject to discrimination.

Working with children with SEND or additional needs

There is flexibility in how the programme can be delivered to children with SEND or additional needs who are in receipt of FSMs. Some of the key points for local authorities to consider when designing and implementing provision for children with SEND or additional needs include:

- identifying the most vulnerable children, young people and families

- making decisions and, where appropriate, delegating responsibility for decision making to different levels of the system to enable responsive support
- speaking to families regularly to understand how their needs may have changed and may have continued to change
- being flexible in supporting families
- ensuring staff are trained, supported and provided with appropriate equipment in order to provide flexible and responsive care in line with government guidance
- maintaining a positive level of trust in staff from a parent perspective
- ensuring staff receive the right level of training from a provider perspective

Risk assessments are an important part of this provision and should be used as an enabler to provide support rather than a barrier.

A good risk assessment which supports effective risk management and creative thinking will lead to different approaches to face-to-face support rather than support being withdrawn particularly for children, young people and families who are particularly vulnerable or at high risk.

There are many local and national organisations including special schools with expertise in working with children with SEND or additional needs and we recommend that local authorities engage with them.

Working with the secondary school age range

We know from previous years that providing a HAF programme that is appealing and has high engagement levels with the secondary school age range can be challenging. Provision for this age range will often look different to that aimed at the primary age range and local authorities should make specific plans for this.

There should be flexibility in the programme you offer to older children with careful consideration being given to a different model of food and activity provision.

This could include considering the location of provision, such as, pop up parks or urban areas. Some areas have reported a reduction in anti-social behaviour around those areas with a focussed HAF provision. Others have reported increases to the levels of assurance among parents and families that their children and young people are safe and secure when attending a HAF programme.

You might also consider the role that older children can have in supporting, designing and leading sessions for their peers or for younger children – to help them to socialise and develop leadership skills which can be crucial for those in year 9 to 11.

Based on previous years of the HAF programme, we know that there are several factors that local authorities should think about when designing a programme for the secondary age range, such as:

- running focus groups with older children in your area to better understand their needs
- the costs of running focussed provision - the costs of provision for this age range can be higher than for the primary age range
- the food and activity offer
- a different operating model, for example, offering afternoon or evening sessions - some areas have reported success running twilight sessions with an evening meal being the focus and others have operated a 'street food' style offer
- the choice of venue is often critical in building an attractive offer for this age range - some areas have reported that school venues can be less popular but pop-up provision in parks and city centres can be highly effective
- travel costs - local authorities should try and ensure provision is local and accessible and may wish to work with local transport providers to offer free or discounted travel to offer greater freedom and mobility during the holidays

There are many local and national organisations with expertise in delivery to the secondary age range and we recommend that local authorities engage with them. Working through trusted and established organisations is one way of achieving effective reach and delivery.

Environment and sustainability

DfE is committed to sustainable development practices and believes it is important for local authorities to consider these and their impact on the environment. We strongly encourage local authorities to make their own judgements on how sustainable development can be reflected in their ethos, day-to-day operations and throughout the delivery of their HAF programmes.

Some practices that local authorities may wish to consider are:

- minimising the use of single-use plastics
- where possible using locally sourced food and ingredients
- making use of food surplus organisations
- ensuring there is a wide range of recycling and compost facilities for waste
- growing fruit and vegetables and showing how they can be used and cooked
- encouraging uniform banks and exchange schemes

This list is not exhaustive and local authorities are encouraged to reflect on their settings and consider ways that their programmes can be more environmentally friendly and sustainable.

Example

As part of the HAF programme in Leeds in 2021, Zero Waste Leeds ran a school uniform exchange scheme. The aim of this was to make it easy to share good quality, used school uniform and preventing it from going to landfill.

With clothing production having a sizeable carbon impact, Zero Waste Leeds found that they could reduce their environmental footprint by sharing uniform so that it is worn for longer and demand is reduced for new uniforms. Schemes such as this can also assist those families who might need help with the cost of new uniforms.

Local coordination by authorities

Some local authorities may coordinate the HAF programme themselves, and others may choose to work with another organisation to coordinate the provision on their behalf.

It is a requirement that every local authority will appoint or have in place a HAF coordinator who takes responsibility within the local authority for the delivery of the programme. This will be alongside having sufficient staff who are dedicated to working on HAF all year round.

The level of resource in each local authority will be determined locally but should be proportionate to the level of funding received.

Local authorities have responsibility for the coordination and implementation of the HAF programme in their area, which involves several important aspects.

Mapping provision, demand, and creating a local plan

We expect each local authority to have carried out mapping of the available holiday provision in your area to ensure that sufficient levels of holiday provision exist. This mapping should be considered alongside data showing the location of FSMs eligible children.

The local authority can then ensure that their provision is targeted at the right areas and continues to support those of greatest need. Local authorities should ensure that when mapping provision, they distinguish between the different age ranges and types of provision that are available and ensure all needs are met across their area.

This mapping will allow you to develop a local plan for provision including any commissioning activity, based on what you know about local supply and demand.

Steering group

All local authorities will have established a steering group whose role it is to support the delivery of the programme and ensure that the right partners continue to be engaged with and supportive of your programme.

We know that the HAF programme works best when it is a cross-cutting and collaborative effort and we recommend that your steering group should include representatives from a wide range of local bodies, including:

- local public health officials
- school leaders
- youth services and young people
- social services and safeguarding leads
- charities and the voluntary sector
- local police and other uniform services

Complementing your programme with other support

Partnership working has far-reaching benefits for HAF providers, ensuring resources go further and best practice is shared. Building and sustaining effective partnerships with a range of local organisations can support areas in successful delivery.

In many areas, local authorities have been successful in drawing in wider support to enhance their local programme. For example, this could be through direct commissioning, or by bringing in funding or support in kind from other sources such as:

- philanthropists
- sponsors
- supermarkets
- sports organisations
- local businesses

We would encourage you to actively consider any partnership arrangements and opportunities and to share case studies of any strong examples of partnership working you have developed in order for us to further support local authorities in this area.

Putting in place provision for children with SEND or additional needs

It is vital that every local authority ensures that sufficient, high-quality provision is available across your area for children with SEND or additional needs who are in receipt of FSMs.

This could be through making sure that your providers plan how they will accommodate children with SEND or additional needs or making sure that those with more complex needs are able to access suitable provision, for example, by working with special schools in your area.

Awarding funding to providers

We recognise and greatly value the important role that community and voluntary organisations will play in the HAF programme. We encourage all local authorities to work with a wide range of partners in the delivery of this programme.

Effective mapping, alongside building an understanding of the sorts of enriching activities that children of different ages want to engage in will support an effective commissioning strategy.

Ensuring providers meet the HAF programme standards and driving up the quality

A key element of the local authority's role is supporting all providers to meet our programme standards, which are set out in full in the [framework of standards](#).

Local authorities should also have a system in place to monitor the provision they are funding and ensuring that they support providers to comply with or improve the quality of their provision, for example, through arranging bespoke training or qualifications.

Promoting your programme

Our HAF communications toolkit will be updated and made available to local authorities to help them to:

- focus and target provision towards families who are eligible for free school meals
- prompt parents and carers to explore activities and provisions available for children in their area and book a place for their child
- provide off-the-shelf communication materials (including for social media) that can be easily utilised to effectively promote the scheme, which credit and note DfE's central funding of the programme

Local authorities should ensure that when promoting and advertising their

programme, great care is taken to ensure that the children and families who could benefit from the HAF programme do not feel stigmatised and that the language used is celebratory, aspirational and focuses on the positives.

Local authorities must make it clear in their communications that the HAF programme is government funded, and a logo is available and should be used for this purpose.

We will again use #HAF2025. We encourage all local authorities and their providers to use this across their social media channels.

Sharing best practice and cross boundary working

We encourage all local authorities to build local partnerships and networks to share learning and to participate in events and on platforms that share best practice on a local or national level.

We also encourage local authorities to work closely with neighbouring local authorities and to establish clear cross border working protocols. This will help to ensure that adequate provision and support is offered to children that live close to boundaries.

Support for local authorities

Since April 2021 DfE has worked with the organisations Mott MacDonald and Hemsall's, jointly known as Childcare Works, to provide support, advisory and performance monitoring services to assist local authorities with HAF provision.

Each local authority has been allocated a named Childcare Works HAF adviser who they can contact with queries and requests for support. As part of the package of support, group meetings, regular communications and training sessions will continue to be promoted and facilitated.

The DfE team is still in place, working with Childcare Works, and will continue to send out regular communications and oversee the grant arrangements. The DfE team will also deal with all LA enquiries.

Alongside the responsibilities set out in the coordination section of this guidance, we expect each HAF coordinator to engage with the support offer provided by DfE. As a minimum, we expect HAF coordinators to:

- attend the majority of cluster meetings to support knowledge sharing across local authorities
- attend sessions with their appointed delivery adviser as requested
- collaborate with their appointed delivery adviser on developing and implementing improvement plans where required
- cooperate with DfE's management information collection requirements and any requests for involvement in research

All other support is optional but strongly encouraged to drive continuous improvement of this programme nationally and locally.

Funding

Local authorities will receive grant funding to deliver the holiday, activities and food programme in their area.

Our grant funding is calculated based on the numbers of children eligible for and in receipt of free school meals in each area.

We anticipate that the cost of provision within a local authority area may vary to take account of the variety of needs, for example provision which specialises in specialist activities, expert tuition or input supporting those with SEND may have a higher unit cost.

Administrative costs

2025 to 2026 will be the fifth year that local authorities have been running the HAF programme in their area. The initial costs associated with setting up and establishing the programme should now be minimal, but there are still administrative costs associated running the holiday activities and food programme. Local authorities will continue to be able to use up to 10% of their total allocation to cover such costs.

Purchasing equipment

Programme funding can also be used to purchase equipment for the programme, for example, to improve the catering or sports equipment at an individual club. Where this expenditure meets our capital expenditure criteria, the amount you spend on this should be limited to a maximum of 2% of your overall programme expenditure.

Capital expenditure is classed as:

- individual assets worth over £2,500
- grouped assets, that is assets of a similar nature that are purchased at the same time, which cost £2,500 or more overall
- bulked assets, for example, a bulk purchase of equipment where the value of the individual item is below the set value, which cost £2,500 or more overall

Any equipment that does not meet these criteria, will not be classed as capital expenditure or be subject to the 2% cap.

Awarding funding to providers and other delivery organisations

In awarding funding to other organisations, whether through the awarding of grants or through a larger scale tendering process, we encourage local authorities to adopt a flexible approach. This will help ensure their programme makes the most of the broad range of organisations available to them, in particular, those smaller community organisations who hold existing relationships with children and families.

Where local authorities work with community and voluntary organisations whether as a coordinator or as a delivery partner, we expect this to be done on a cost-recovery basis. This is so that these organisations are fully funded for the work they undertake.

There is no requirement for local authorities to limit funding to single holiday periods. We know that many local authorities have successfully adopted a model of recruiting and funding providers for multiple holiday periods.

Payments and reporting

Local authorities will be responsible for gathering management information from the providers and clubs they fund about the children and families they are supporting. Following each holiday period (Easter, summer, and Christmas) we will ask local authorities to report on their activity.

The requirements for local authorities are set out in the [grant determination letter](#) which we will use to monitor performance at a high level.

Local authorities can set other performances indicators to measure their own performance or that of partners.

Payment schedule for 2025 to 2026

April 2025

The department will pay the full 2025 to 2026 allocation to local authorities in April 2025. This provides more flexibility to local authorities to manage their budget across the full financial year and reduces the administration associated with the previous payment process.

Recovering unspent funds

As in previous years, local authorities will have to produce a completed Certificate of Expenditure and Statement of Grant Usage for the 2025 to 2026 financial year and any unspent funding identified by the Department through these reports must be paid back by the local authority.

Reporting schedule for 2025 to 2026

As with previous years, after each holiday period, including the optional additional half term period for those local authorities with a summer holiday of 6 weeks or less, we will require a data return from each local authority that will set out what the cost of the programme has been for the financial year to date.

We will ask a number of core questions in every report. Local authorities should

ensure that they and the providers and clubs they work with are able to accurately collect and verify this information.

This will include but is not limited to:

- the overall number of unique children who participated in the programme
- the overall number of unique children in receipt of FSMs who participated in your programme
- the number and proportion of children who are in the primary school age range, the secondary school age range, and any children outside of those age ranges who attended the programme
- the number of children with SEND or additional needs who have participated in your programme

Where necessary, DfE may also ask local authorities to provide additional information on their plans for specific holiday periods.

All of the data and information collected by the holiday clubs and providers should all be collected in strict adherence to the [General Data Protection Regulation \(GDPR\)](#).

Additional data collection

Our intention for HAF 2025 to 2026 is to ask a small number of local authorities to collect additional data on the children that attend their HAF programme. This will allow DfE to cross match the data with our National Pupil Database, which contains a variety of information on pupil characteristics, education and family set-up.

This will help us to understand more about those who the HAF programme is reaching and also allow us to monitor any long-term impacts on children who attend the programme. Having more information in these areas will help us to ensure that the HAF programme is set-up in a way that is most beneficial to eligible families, as well as strengthening the evidence base for HAF more broadly.

If we select your local authority to participate in this additional data collection, we will notify you by 30 April 2025 (or earlier where possible) and will provide you and your providers with additional support (including data collection teach-ins), templates and guidance.

In annex C of the grant determination letter, we have set out DfE's standard GDPR

clauses and how personal data will be collected, processed and stored by local authorities. This annex applies only to local authorities who will participate in this additional data collection. The annex also contains a list of variables for data collection.

Annual report

In addition to the reporting requirements, we require each local authority to produce an annual report on their HAF programme which should include:

- the overall funding you have spent on the HAF programme
- the proportion of the funding that was spent on administration and a breakdown of how this was spent
- how many unique children you have reached in each holiday period
- the proportion of primary age and secondary age children who have participated in your programme
- the number of children with SEND or additional needs who have participated in your programme
- information on the families and carers they have engaged with through the food education, signposting and referrals aspect of their programme
- which organisations are represented on their steering group
- which organisations you have worked with in delivering the programme

You may also include:

- feedback from participants, their families or carers
- results of any surveys
- case studies or particular highlights
- how you have promoted the programme and celebrated it through the media and social media

The report for the 2025 to 2026 HAF programme should be submitted to DfE by 30 June 2026. As with last year, we will allow local authorities flexibility in how they format and present their annual report, but we will make a template available to local authorities in early 2026.

The 2025 to 2026 HAF programme report must be placed on the local authority's HAF website.

Local authority HAF website

We know that the majority of local authorities now have a dedicated HAF website or a section on their local authority website dedicated to the HAF programme. We know that these are a valuable source of information for parents, families, schools and providers who are interesting in the programme.

Since April 2023, all local authorities have been required to have a HAF website or dedicated pages on their website for their HAF programme.

It should include:

- your [annual report](#) for the HAF programme
- an explanation of who is eligible for a place on the programme
- up-to-date information on what HAF provision is available in your area for every holiday period, including links to booking systems or portals
- information about the standards that providers are expected to adhere to in delivering the programme
- information for parents and families on what other help is available to support them, for example, information about tax-free childcare
- information for schools about programme and details about how they can get involved and support the programme

Certificate of expenditure

We will also require a certificate of expenditure (or statement of grant usage) which should be completed after the end of the 2025 to 2026 financial year and be submitted to DfE by 1 May 2026. We will provide you with a template and guidance for this document before the end of the reporting period.

This certificate of expenditure will report on the activities funded by DfE and confirm that the grant outputs that have been delivered as part of the HAF programme:

- have been delivered to a satisfactory standard
- the expected benefits have accrued or will accrue

These reports will support the regularity assurance statement for the National Audit Office and your statement will need to be signed off by your chief financial officer or chief internal auditor.

Once the statements have been returned to DfE, we will carry out a sample check of up to 10% of the statements. The local authorities selected will be required to submit additional evidence to demonstrate that the information declared in the statement of expenditure is accurate.

Those local authorities selected for this sample check will be notified by 14 May 2025 and will be provided with further instructions on the process.

As part of the statement of expenditure assessment process, those local authorities who have an underspend on their programme will be contacted about the process of recovering any unspent funding.

[↑ Back to top](#)

Help us improve GOV.UK

To help us improve GOV.UK, we'd like to know more about your visit today. [Please fill in this survey \(opens in a new tab\)](#).

Services and information

[Benefits](#)

[Births, death, marriages and care](#)

Government activity

[Departments](#)

[Business and self-employed](#)

[News](#)

[Childcare and parenting](#)

[Guidance and regulation](#)

[Citizenship and living in the UK](#)

[Research and statistics](#)

[Crime, justice and the law](#)

[Policy papers and consultations](#)

[Disabled people](#)

[Transparency](#)

[Driving and transport](#)

[How government works](#)

[Education and learning](#)

[Get involved](#)

[Employing people](#)

[Environment and countryside](#)

[Housing and local services](#)

[Money and tax](#)

[Passports, travel and living abroad](#)

[Visas and immigration](#)

[Working, jobs and pensions](#)

[Help](#) [Privacy](#) [Cookies](#) [Accessibility statement](#) [Contact](#)

[Terms and conditions](#) [Rhestr o Wasanaethau Cymraeg](#)

[Government Digital Service](#)

OGL

All content is available under the [Open Government Licence v3.0](#), except where otherwise stated



© Crown copyright