Early Years Childcare Funding – 15 hours for 9 months+ or 30 hours for 3-4 year olds

Guidance for Social Workers/Fostering Team & Foster Carers

The application to access free funding for childcare must be consistent with the child’s care plan, ensuring they are at the centre of the process.

* New - Free 15 hours for 9 month olds from September 2024 (Working Foster Carers)
* Existing - Free 15 hours for 2 Year Olds (Vulnerable/disadvantaged – children in care)
* Existing - Free 15 hours for 3-4 Year Olds (Universal)
* Existing - Free 30 hours for 3-4 Year Olds (Working Foster Carers)

\*Funding is effective the term after a child turns the required age

Terms:

Autumn term begins 1st September

Spring term begins 1st January

Summer term begins 1st April

**Am I eligible for funding? – 15 hours for 9 months+ or 30 hours for 3-4 year old**

**Is the child in care the required age for the funding?**

**(9 months+ or 3-4 years before the end of term)**

No

Not eligible for funding

Complete application form and return with proof of employment

Yes

Single Carer?

Yes

No

Do both Carers have other employment outside of fostering, **or** is one employed and the other in receipt of a benefit?\*

Employed outside of fostering?

Yes

No

No

Not eligible for funding

Not eligible for funding

Complete application form and return with proof of employment

Yes

*\*Eligible benefits* ***(already in receipt of):*** *Universal Credit (assessed as having limited capability for work); National Insurance credits because of incapacity or limited capability for work; Carer’s Allowance; Employment and Support Allowance; Incapacity Benefit; Severe Disablement Allowance*

**Application Process**

Virtual School to send **one** reminder email to Social Workers/Fostering team with an application form and guidance for eligible carers at the start of each term (September/January/April).

Carers to complete, sign and return to the Social Worker/Fostering team **within 10 working days with proof of income to be checked.**

Social Worker/Carer to return signed form and proof to [Jacqueline.evans@halton.gov.uk](mailto:Jacqueline.evans@halton.gov.uk)

Principal Fostering Manager will check and sign to confirm eligibility has been met. Completed form then passed to the Virtual School.

Information shared with the Local Authority Early Years Team for an 11-digit eligibility code to be generated. Social Worker/Fostering Team will be informed of this code to share with Carers along with the reconfirmation date.

The code will need reconfirming each term (every 12 weeks), following the process above.

**Please note:**

* The DfE deadlines to access the funding are; 31st March, 31st August, 31st December. Applications need to be submitted in advance of this date to ensure eligibility can be checked, and to enable the Early Years Officer to generate the code.
* If the application is not received within the timescales outlined in the process, a code would not be generated, funding would not be granted, and the Foster Carer may be liable for fees.
* Eligibility codes must be obtained the term before the child starts childcare. A child cannot start to claim funded hours in the same term that the eligibility code is issued.
* Childcare funding is not intended to cover the costs of meals, other consumables (such as nappies or sun cream), additional hours or additional activities (such as trips). Providers may charge a fee for these additions. If you choose to pay for these it is an arrangement between you and the childcare provider.
* Childcare Funding is a DfE scheme, not a Virtual School/Local Authority scheme.

For any queries, please contact: [virtual.school@halton.gov.uk](mailto:virtual.school@halton.gov.uk)