

News story: Benefits of 30 hours confirmed as free childcare places soar

Extra money in the bank and more flexible working lives – these are just some of the benefits of access to 30 hours free childcare, an independent evaluation has found.

Making his first visit to a nursery delivering 30 hours yesterday, Monday 17 July, Children's Minister Robert Goodwill confirmed the findings of the government's Early Implementer programme, which has seen thousands of parents access a free childcare place.

He also announced that the number of parents now accessing a 30 hours place has tripled since April, with nearly 15,000 places being delivered – an increase of over 9,000 in just two months thanks to the successful roll out in four new council areas.

Minister for Children and Families Robert Goodwill said:

In just a few short weeks as Children's Minister I have already heard time and time again of how 30 hours is improving the lives of families in these areas, many of whom had previously found the cost or availability of childcare a real worry.

I'm delighted with the success of our Early Implementer programme, which is now not only anecdotal but confirmed in this independent evaluation. From cutting household costs to increasing the quality time working parents can spend with their children, access to 30 hours is giving families a real boost.

The hard work of all the professionals involved in early roll out has been vital, and I'm determined to continue working with them to drive momentum ahead of the national launch in September.

The Early Implementer [evaluation](#), carried out by Frontier Economics, surveyed providers and parents in the eight councils who began delivering 30 hours last September.

The key findings include:

- Parents – nearly a quarter of mothers (23%) and one in 10 (9%) fathers – reported they had increased their working hours as a result of access to 30 hours, particularly those with lower incomes;
- More than three quarters (78%) of parents reported greater flexibility in their working life as a result of 30 hours;
- The vast majority of parents reported improved finances as a result of

30 hours: 84% reported they had slightly or much more money to spend; and

- Providers were willing and able to offer 30 hours and there was no evidence of funding being a substantial barrier to its delivery.

Researchers also carried out in-depth interviews with parents, who told them 30 hours had resulted in considerable financial savings while also reducing the burden they had previously felt while struggling to make ends meet. They reported having more money to spend on activities and trips with their children, to go on holiday, or even to contribute to a deposit on new homes.

Demand from parents for childcare places in the first eight Early Implementer areas – Hertfordshire, Newham, Northumberland, Portsmouth, Staffordshire, Swindon, Wigan and York – saw the programme exceed initial targets of 5,000 places.

Now the next four councils to launch the offer – Dorset, Leicestershire, North Yorkshire and Tower Hamlets – have seen more than 9,300 parents successfully apply for 30 hours since 1 April. This includes nearly 1,600 in Dorset, where parents have been applying via the government's online Childcare Service.

The Department for Education also confirmed, based on learnings from the four subsequent areas of early roll out which are testing specific elements of 30 hours delivery, that it has provided further information on charging to support childcare providers get ready for the national go-live in September.

Updated [operational guidance](#) sets out the expectation that parents taking up the offer of a free childcare place should pay for meals, while making clear that there must be an opt-out for parents who cannot or do not want to pay.

Alongside this, a series of [case studies](#) has also been published, demonstrating good practice from councils and providers preparing for 30 hours delivery in September, as well as an updated FAQs document.

The 30 hours offer, which will be available for working parents of three and four-year-olds in England from September, could save families around £5,000 per year on the cost of childcare, helping them to balance their jobs and family lives.

Evaluation of the four additional early roll out areas is currently being carried out. Taken together with today's publication, these will give a robust analysis of the programme to date, although there are limitations for generalising all findings to national roll out.