

[News story: Views sought on early years education for disadvantaged children](#)

Thousands more disadvantaged two-year-olds will become eligible to receive the government's free 15 hour childcare entitlement, under new proposals outlined today.

In light of the national roll out of Universal Credit, the Department for Education has launched a [consultation](#) today (Monday 4 December) asking for views on how the government should continue to offer early years education to the families who should be receiving the 15 hours of free childcare for two-year-olds from disadvantaged families.

The government wants to expand the offer to ensure that around 8,000 more disadvantaged children will benefit from high quality early education, once Universal Credit is fully rolled out.

As of January 2017 around 160,000 two-year-olds are already taking up the free offer. Under the proposals, all children who are taking up the offer will continue to have access, and the entitlement will be targeted to ensure it reaches those most in need in the future, seeing thousands more families benefit as a result.

Minister for Children and Families Robert Goodwill said:

Expanding access to high-quality early education is essential if we are to give every child the best start in life, which is why we are investing a record amount in childcare – £6 billion by 2020.

Our proposals not only ensure that no two-year-old who is already benefitting from the free 15 hour offer loses it, but will give thousands more the chance to benefit, supporting their early development.

This is an important issue and it is important that we get this right. We want to hear from families, early years' professionals and other experts throughout this consultation so we can identify those children who need our support most.

The introduction of Universal Credit lies at the heart of the government's commitment to help people improve their lives and raise their incomes. This consultation will make sure the two-year-old entitlement continues to be targeted where it is needed most.

This is part of the government's total childcare offer which is backed by a record investment of around £6 billion per year by 2020. The proposals

outlined in the consultation include introducing a net earnings income threshold of £15,400 per year for those in receipt of Universal Credit – typically equivalent to between £24,000 and £32,000 in total household income.

No child will lose access to the free hours once they are already in receipt of the offer, regardless of the introduction of the new earnings threshold. We are not proposing any other changes to the two-year-old eligibility criteria.

Universal Credit is replacing a number of qualifying benefits for the two-year-old entitlement, including Jobseeker's Allowance, Employment and Support Allowance, Child Tax Credit, Working Tax Credit and Income Support.