

# Free childcare offers to continue during coronavirus closures

Funding for the government's early years entitlements will continue during any periods of nursery, preschool or childminder closures, or where children cannot attend due to coronavirus (COVID-19).

The Chancellor has today (Tuesday 17 March) confirmed the Government will continue to pay funding to local authorities for the free entitlements for two, three and four-year-olds, providing reassurance for early years settings in light of coronavirus.

The Department for Education has set out its expectation that local authorities should follow its position and continue to pass on the government funding it receives for these entitlements to providers, in the event that any are advised to close by Public Health England or children are not able to attend due to coronavirus, to minimise short-term disruption.

To provide maximum clarity and stability to the early years sector during this time of rapidly changing circumstances, the government has also confirmed today that there will be no rise in the fees paid by early years and childcare providers to register with Ofsted in 2020-21. This follows a recent consultation with the sector, which took on responses on fees for the Early Years Register.

Education Secretary Gavin Williamson said:

Millions of parents rely on childcare and the vital service provided by nurseries, childminders and preschools. Making sure that young children can be cared for safely so that their parents are able to work where required is of the utmost importance now more than ever.

In recognition of this, we will continue to pay for all free early years entitlements places, even in the event that settings are closed on the advice of Public Health England, or children are not able to attend due to coronavirus, and we will not be asking for funding back from local authorities.

The advice from Public Health England continues to be that all educational settings, including nurseries, preschools and childminders, should remain open unless advised otherwise. The Department for Education is providing daily updates to local authorities and early years sector organisations.

Children and Families Minister Vicky Ford said:

I want to thank all the early years practitioners who day-in and

day-out do such an excellent job. I know these must be difficult times and I hope these announcements show that we are listening to their concerns and taking urgent action. I particularly want to thank the Early Years Alliance, the National Day Nurseries Association, and the Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years for their engagement at this critical time.

The Department for Education also [confirmed](#) today that Ofsted is to temporarily suspend routine inspections of schools, colleges, early years settings, children's social care providers and local authorities to reduce the burden on staff who are providing vital services to the nation in response to coronavirus.

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## **Temporary release of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe: Foreign Secretary statement**

Following the temporary release of Nazanin Zaghari-Ratcliffe, Foreign Secretary Dominic Raab said:

I am relieved that Mrs Zaghari-Ratcliffe was today temporarily released into the care of her family in Iran. We urge the regime to ensure she receives any necessary medical care.

While this is a welcome step, we urge the government now to release all UK dual nationals arbitrarily detained in Iran, and enable them to return to their families in the UK.

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## **The redundancy payment services (RPS) telephone helpline has reopened.**

P0 Box 16685  
Birmingham  
B2 2LX

The Redundancy Payments helpline is open 9am to 1pm and 2pm to 5pm Monday to Thursday, and 9am to 1pm on Friday. Contact about claims for redundancy, loss of notice pay, holiday pay, arrears of wages, protective award payments and lost pension contributions.

## [New government structures to coordinate response to coronavirus](#)

Four new implementation committees focusing on health, public sector preparedness, economy and international response, will feed into a new daily C-19 meeting, which will be chaired by the Prime Minister.

The Prime Minister will continue to chair regular UK COBR meetings to take strategic decisions and review overall progress in the campaign to contain, delay and mitigate coronavirus. The additional daily C-19 meeting of key ministers and officials will monitor progress and refine the measures agreed by COBR. The chairs of the implementation committees – the Chancellor, the Health Secretary, Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster and the Foreign Secretary – will attend the daily C-19 meeting.

The Prime Minister has been clear that countering this pandemic will require significant national effort from government, businesses, charities, communities and citizens across the UK. The implementation committees will regularly meet with key representatives from relevant sectors to inform their decision making.

Recognising coronavirus presents unique challenges economically, internationally and across a wide range of sectors, the four implementation committees are:

- **Healthcare:** chaired by the Health Secretary to focus on the preparedness of the NHS, notably ensuring capacity in the critical care system for those worst affected, the medical and social package of support for those to whom we will be providing the new shielding regime
- **General Public Sector:** chaired by the Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster to look at preparedness across the rest of the public and critical national infrastructure, excluding the NHS
- **Economic and Business:** chaired by the Chancellor, with the Business Secretary as deputy chair, to consider economic and business impact and response, including supply chain resilience. It will also coordinate roundtables with key sectors to be chaired by relevant Secretaries of State
- **International:** chaired by the Foreign Secretary, to consider our international response to the crisis through the G7, G20 and other mechanisms, including like-minded groups, and the UK five-point plan

Civil servants and the UK's leading experts will continue to support the government's efforts and contribute to our approach, which is led by the best scientific advice.

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## Ofsted suspends all routine inspections

Urgent inspections where specific concerns have been raised can still go ahead. This will allow us to prioritise the immediate safety of children where necessary.

As far as we are able, we will continue to undertake our important regulatory work to help maintain social care provision for the most vulnerable children, and the registration of vital childcare services. We will operate as a proportionate and responsible regulator, in what we know are challenging times, focused on children's safeguarding and well being.

All of our Ofsted Inspectors – those serving headteachers who undertake inspections on our behalf – have returned to their schools. We are in daily contact with the Department for Education to discuss the COVID-19 outbreak and its impact across education and social care.

Amanda Spielman, HMCI, said:

I'm grateful for the Secretary of State's permission to suspend routine inspections. It's clearly the right thing to do when teachers and social workers are under pressure as a result of the coronavirus outbreak. We all need to support them in their work.

We will monitor what's happening across education and social care and we will reserve the right to inspect where we believe the safety of children could be at risk, or we have other serious concerns. We will also continue to register and regulate social care providers, childminders and nurseries, so that these vital services can continue to support children and their families.