



## Free Early Learning

This factsheet is designed to help you understand the Free Early Learning for three and four year olds.

### What is the Free Early Learning?

The government gives funding to Local Authorities to provide free early education places for children aged three and four. This is called Free Early Learning (in the past this has been called the nursery voucher scheme, the nursery education grant/funding or the early years free entitlement.)

Children moving to England from another country are entitled to free nursery education on the same basis as any other child, regardless of whether they have British citizenship.

### When is my child eligible to claim the free early learning?

Your child is eligible to claim this from the beginning of the term after their third birthday up until they reach Statutory School age.

#### Children born on or between:

**1 April to 31 August** will be eligible to claim from the Autumn term (1 September – 31 December)

**1 September – 31 December** will be eligible to claim from the Spring term (1 January – 31 March)

**1 January – 31 March** will be eligible to claim from the Summer term (1 April – 31 August)

### What is my child entitled to claim?

The entitlement to free early learning is 15 hours per week for 38 weeks of the year. However, not all providers will be in a position to offer these hours, so it may not be possible to take up your full entitlement with the provider of your choice. In this case it is possible to take up the additional hours with another provider.

The free early learning is designed to give parents more flexibility as to how they use these hours, for instance taking the hours in 3 blocks of 5 hours, or any other combination of hours. A child's entitlement must be used over a minimum of 3 days per week. Again, not all providers will be in a position to offer this flexibility and parents should discuss their needs with the individual provider.

### Who can offer free early learning places?

Places are available at settings that have been included in the Local Authority's Directory of Eligible Providers. First Point at Howden House can provide a list of these. Parents can choose which setting they would like their child to go to as long as there are places available.

Visit First Point 8.30am to 5.30pm or ring us on 275 6699

8am to 6pm Monday to Friday.

First Point is in the city centre at Howden House, Union Street - close to the Peace Gardens.

[www.sheffield.gov.uk/firstpoint](http://www.sheffield.gov.uk/firstpoint) [www.asksid.net](http://www.asksid.net)



Places can be at:

**Local Authority Providers:**

- Nursery schools
- Nursery classes attached to schools
- Children's Centres

**Private and Voluntary Sector Providers:**

- Day nurseries
- Pre-schools and playgroups
- Independent schools and special schools
- Registered childminders who are part of approved networks
- Parents can choose to use other providers who are not currently on the list, but these providers must seek to be included in the Local Authority's Directory of Eligible Providers before the funding can be claimed.

**What does 'eligible provider' mean?**

This means that the setting has agreed to work towards early learning goals for nursery education. Settings are inspected by Ofsted both for the education they provide and their childcare provision.

**What is OFSTED?**

OFSTED is the Office for Standards in Education. OFSTED inspect schools and early education settings for the standard of education they provide, and also regulate by registering and inspecting all childminding and day care services for children under 8. OFSTED provide Sheffield Information Link with information about registered childcare settings. For more information on OFSTED please ask for our factsheet, 'A guide to registration and OFSTED'.

**Choosing a place**

Before you decide to enrol your child, visit the pre-school, playgroup, nursery, childminder or school, while other children are there. Try to imagine how you would feel if you were 3 or 4 years old. Research has shown that fun, food and friends are the three key things which affect how much young children enjoy settings. Early years education should provide a combination of care, play and education, enthusiastic early years workers, good resources and equipment and an approach that will meet the needs of your child. If you can visit more than once and ask questions, it will help you make a decision. You may find some of our other factsheets useful in helping you choose a place for your child.

**What happens if my provider does not offer the full entitlement?**

Early education providers in Sheffield are not required to offer the full entitlement. Some may not be open every day of the week and some do not offer 38 weeks a year. If you choose a provider that does not offer the full entitlement, the provider will let you know what that means in writing. If you choose a provider that offers less than 38 weeks, you are entitled to claim the remaining weeks at another setting.

**Do the free early learning sessions have a monetary value?**

No, it is the guarantee of a free place. It is not a voucher or parental subsidy. You cannot be charged for any part of the free entitlement and the place should be free at the point of delivery.

## **What can I be charged for?**

Providers can charge you for any extra time in the day or weeks in the year that you choose to take up over and above the free 15 hours. However, you should not be required to take up additional services in order to access a free place. Parents who choose to take up additional services cannot be charged any more for those services than parents of children who are not accessing a free place. Arrangements for charging should be clear to understand and transparent.

## **How do I claim?**

You do not claim the funding directly. All you have to do is find a place in a setting that is registered as an eligible provider and the provider will claim the funding on your behalf.

## **Will the provider need anything from me?**

You will be asked to fill in a Parental/Carer Declaration form at the start of every term, which will ask for information about your child. Your provider cannot claim any funding unless you fill this in and return it to them before the deadline. You will also be asked to provide your child's birth certificate or passport as proof of identity. The form helps Local Authority auditors to see that providers have claimed what you have asked for.

## **Can I book my child into more than one setting?**

Yes, but you will only be able to claim for a total of 15 hours per week. These may be shared between a maximum of 2 settings as long as both settings are informed.

If your child has a place in a school nursery class it is usual, but not obligatory, to use your full entitlement at this setting. Parents can choose to split the hours between Local Authority full day nurseries or Children's Centres and other private/voluntary settings.

## **Do I have to use a setting within Sheffield?**

No. The free early learning is available for all 3 and 4 year olds regardless of where they live. This means that if you live in Sheffield you can choose to use a setting outside of Sheffield, or if you live outside Sheffield you can use a setting within Sheffield.

## **What if I need to move setting in the middle of a term?**

Places are normally allocated on a termly basis. Unless you have specified at the beginning of the term that you will be moving to another setting after half term, you will only be able to obtain a free place at another setting from the start of the next term. In exceptional circumstances and in consultation with the Local Authority settings may be able to offer a free place after the start of term.

## **How long is the funding available for?**

The funding is available from the term after your child's 3<sup>rd</sup> birthday until your child starts school. When your child starts school is usually dependent on their birth date, however from September 2011, there is the choice for all children to start school from the September after their **fourth** birthday. This is completely up to parents and those wanting to wait can do so and can still claim the free early learning places at their chosen setting. For more information on this see SILs factsheet called a Guide to Starting School.

## **Does my child have to take up the free early learning place?**

It is up to parents to decide what kind of early education, if any, is right for their child. By law, children are not required to attend any educational setting until the term after their fifth birthday.

## **Is your child disabled?**

Sheffield Information Link provides a specialist information service for families with children who are disabled or have special needs. It can provide information on services, support and specific conditions and disabilities. This service is called SIGN and has an information line. For details see 'Useful contacts' section below.

## **Useful contacts and information**

### **Sheffield Information Link**

Tel: 0114 249 8271 (out of hours answerphone)

9 Leopold Street, Sheffield, S1 2GY

Email: [info@sheffinfoolink.org.uk](mailto:info@sheffinfoolink.org.uk)

Website: [www.sheffinfoolink.org.uk](http://www.sheffinfoolink.org.uk)

*Sheffield's Family Information Service. Additional support for families requiring childcare and other services for children and young people in Sheffield.*

### **SIGN (Sheffield Information Giving Network)**

Tel: 0114 266 9476 (out of hours answerphone)

Ryegate Children's Centre, Tapton Crescent Road, Sheffield, S10 5DD

Email: [sign@sheffinfoolink.org.uk](mailto:sign@sheffinfoolink.org.uk)

Monday – Friday 10.00am – 3.00pm, drop in and phone service

*Free information for parents and carers with children or young people with special needs or disabilities.*

### **Department for Education**

Tel: 0370 000 2288

Castle View House, East Lane, Runcorn, Cheshire, WA7 2GJ

Website: [www.education.gov.uk/](http://www.education.gov.uk/)

*The Department for Education is responsible for education and children's services.*

### **OFSTED**

Tel: 0300 123 1231 - Helpline

Tel: 0300 123 4666 – Complaints and Concerns

Website: [www.ofsted.gov.uk](http://www.ofsted.gov.uk)

Email: [enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk](mailto:enquiries@ofsted.gov.uk)

*Access to inspection reports and publications*

***The information on this factsheet is developed and maintained by  
Sheffield Information Link  
© Sheffield Information Link 2011***