

# **Free Early Education for 9 months to 4 year olds**

## **Processes for Claiming Funding**

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## Introduction

This document containing guidelines and requirements is designed to assist providers to understand the Kent County Council (KCC) administrative process around the payment of the Free Early Education (FEE) for 9 months to 4 year olds.

The provision of the FEE has been set under the Department for Education (DfE) Statutory Guidance for Local Authorities on the Delivery of Free Early Education from 9 months up to 4 year olds. KCC is responsible for the way public money is spent and is subject to audit requirements imposed by District Auditors.

Within Kent there are nearly 1500 Early Years Providers varying in size, type, accommodation, opening weeks, facilities and experience. Currently KCC is responsible for processing the 9 months to 4 year olds Free Early Education funding for up to 50,000 children in each period of entitlement. The practices to administer these numbers are as flexible as possible but it is recognised that some providers will find conflict in the way the scheme is administered in contrast to the way they run their businesses. Whilst KCC sympathise with this they are unable to accommodate different processes for different providers.

# KELSI

KELSI is an online resource for education professionals provided by Kent County Council. On this website Management Information publish all their documents which they need to supply to providers of the Free Early Education.

Visit the [Kelsi website](#).

Here you will find information relating to:

- Kent Provider Agreement
- Parental Declaration Form
- Eligibility Criteria
- Payment schedules
- Synergy FIS Provider Portal Guidance Notes
- WPE Free Childcare Eligibility Checker
- Privacy Notices/GDPR

There are also pages that provide information for:

- Early Years Pupil Premium and Disability Access Fund

## Funding Types

**Management Information** is the team within KCC that is responsible for collecting the information required to process the payments for the Free Early Education for 9 months to 4 year olds.

**Free For 2 funding** is available to eligible families for a maximum of 570 hours per child for their funding year.

**3 and 4 year old funding** is available to all children who meet the age criteria, for a maximum of 570 hours per child for their funding year, known as universal entitlement/funding.

**Working Parents entitlement** for 9 months to 4 years old is available to eligible working families for a maximum of 570 hours per child for their funding year for 9 months to 2 year olds and an additional 570 hours for the 3&4 year olds, totalling 1140 hours per child for their funding year, (previously known as extended entitlement/funding).

When a child's first year of funding starts is dependent on their date of birth and can be identified using the charts found on [KELSI](#).

Free Early Education (FEE) is administered over three academic terms, Autumn, Spring and Summer.

Providers can offer the funding between 38 and up to 52 weeks of the year (provided they are open to children for 52 weeks a year). However, Providers can only claim on the Synergy system in one of the following options:

- Over 38 weeks at a maximum of 15 hours per week known as 'term time' funding or;
- Over 48 weeks at a maximum of 12 hours per week known as 'stretched' funding.

If Providers offer parents funding over more than 48 weeks per year, they should claim the funding over either 38 or 48 weeks and stretch the funding themselves by tracking the hours the child

attends to ensure that all funded hours claimed have been offered to the child. Trackers to assist with this are available on KELSI.

If Providers claim the maximum 12 hours per week over 48 weeks, the total hours claimed for the child would be 576. Therefore, in the last term of a child's funding year, KCC will calculate when the maximum 570 hours has been reached and the payment will be capped. This will leave the parent/guardian responsible for payment of the remaining 6 hours if they wish their child to attend or to remove the child for the 6 non funded hours. This is referred to as 'Capping'.

## Synergy FIS Provider Portal

Free Early Education funding claims should be submitted to Management Information via the Synergy FIS Provider Portal. Management Information will contact providers by email to advise when the portal is open for data collections and a date by which the submissions must be made.

Visit the [Synergy FIS Provider Portal website](#).

Guidance on how to use the portal and submit claims is available on the [KELSI website](#).

## Parental Declaration

Every child claiming the Free Early Education funding must have a Parental Declaration form completed and signed by the parent/guardian. These forms are retained by the provider but may be requested by KCC.

All the sections of the form must be completed prior to the submission of a funding claim.

At the beginning of the next academic term, if the child wishes to remain and continue claiming at the provider, the continuation section can be used to record the details and signature for the continued claim.

A setting can decide whether to collect:

- a separate declaration form for each term  
or
- one form that is used to record up to the six academic terms that makes up to two years of funding

If the continuation section is to be used, the relevant section must be signed no more than 6 weeks prior to the end of the previous claim period. If a Parental Declaration form is signed but the child does not return for the new term, the form is then void.

## Payment Schedules – 9 months to 4 year old funding

Previously Management Information produced a payment schedule for the FF2 funding payments and a PVI calendar for the 3 and 4 year old headcount every year. From September 2024 a payment schedule that covers all funding from 9 months to 4 years old was introduced. This is an information sheet containing useful dates regarding payment period, funded weeks, headcount weeks and payment dates. It also shows the date of birth range for each term in the current academic year.

## Early Years Census

In January each year every setting registered with KCC **must** submit a census return to Management Information regardless of whether they are claiming for any children at that time. The census is a data collection that will include information that is sent to the Department for Education (DfE) to enable KCC to receive the funding to pay providers.

## Privacy Notices

Providers should ensure all parents/carers of children eligible for the FEE receive a Privacy Notice. The revised Early Years Setting Privacy Notice template is available on KELSI.

## FF2 Eligibility Application Process

Parents can apply when their child is 1 year 10 months and will now be required to create an account, using an email address. Once the parent/ carer has created an account, there is a four-step process to complete a FF2 Application - [visit the Kent Free Childcare page](#).

EY Providers will no longer be able to 'apply' on behalf of a parent\carer using the setting email address. The parent/carers must create an account using their own email address as the portal is shared with the school admissions team. Parents/Carers will use the same account to complete their school admissions applications. Please use the guidance document when supporting parents/carers to complete an application. Once the parent/carers submit the application, they will receive an immediate email informing them of the result. If the parent does not have access to an email, please contact Management Information directly.

## Working Parents Entitlement Childcare Eligibility Checker

Providers must validate the 11 digit Working Parent Entitlement code provided by parents prior to submitting an actual, headcount or adjustment claim via the Synergy FIS Provider Portal. The link to the Working Parents Eligibility Checker can be found on KELSI.

## Estimate Claim

The first payment for funding in a term is called an **estimate claim**. Towards the end of each term Management Information will contact all registered Providers, via the email address that has been provided by the setting, to invite them to complete an estimate claim on the Synergy FIS Provider Portal for the next term (i.e. in November Providers would enter the estimate information on Synergy for the following Spring term). Providers are invited to submit an estimate claim for each funding stream they are offering for all children aged 9 months – 4 years old. This is non-mandatory, so it is up to the provider whether they choose to complete this data collection. The estimate will collect the following information regarding the forthcoming term:

1. The number of weeks the setting is offering funding
2. The total number of weekly hours being claimed during the term. (For example if you have 2 children claiming 15 hours per week (the universal and extended entitlement) then the answer to this question would be 30).

Based on the estimated information provided, Management Information will calculate a payment for half of the term and make a payment at the beginning of the new term. This is called the **Interim Payment** and is to provide cash flow until the balancing payment is made.

Settings will receive a 50% interim payment and Childminders will receive two 25% interim payments the first two months of the new term.

Please be aware that if an estimate claim is submitted for the term and subsequently there are not any eligible children claiming that term; the estimate payment made will have to be repaid to Kent County Council.

## Actuals/ Headcount Claim

The second payment for funding is based upon a **mandatory data collection** which occurs three times a year, a few weeks after the start of each term. This will collect the details of the children who are in attendance and who wish to claim the 9 months + Working Parent Entitlement, the 2 year old Working Parent Entitlement, Free For Two Funding, the 3 and 4 year old Universal entitlement and 3 and 4 year old Working Parent Entitlement funding for the current term.

Free For Two Funding for the term is based on actual attendance from the start of term and where eligibility has been confirmed. The Universal 3&4 year old funding and the Working Parent Entitlement for 9 months - 4 years old is based on attendance during the **designated headcount week**. Dates can be found on the funding calendar on Kelsi.

Prior to headcount week all registered Providers will be contacted by Management Information, via the email address that has been provided, to request that an actuals/headcount claim is completed.

A funding claim can only be made for a child:

- whose parent/carer has completed a Parental Declaration Form
- is within the date of birth range
- is eligible for Free For Two funding and started in a funded place (where applicable)
- is eligible for the working parent entitlement (where applicable)
- attends the provision during the designated headcount week (universal 3&4 year olds and 9 months – 4 years old working parent entitlement)

The funding information must be input via the Synergy FIS Provider Portal. Even if the child was included in an estimate submission or claimed for in a previous term you must ensure that their details are on your actuals/headcount claim.

Using the information from the actuals/headcount claim, a payment will be calculated for the whole term, if an interim payment was made this will be deducted and the **balancing payment** will be made at the start of the second half of the term. Settings will receive a 50% balancing payment and Childminders will receive two 25% balancing payments.

## Overallocations

If a funding claim is received by Management Information for the same child from two or more providers and the hours total more than 15 per week, this results in an overallocation claim for the child. In these instances, payment for the child will be withheld from both providers' balancing payments.

Overallocation forms are then sent via email to all providers involved for the parent to clarify their claim, these forms should then be returned to Management Information via email to resolve the overallocation. If the new claim is for a maximum of 15 hours or less, payment will be made before the end of the term.

If both providers have signed parental declaration forms and have evidence of attendance for the child during headcount week then they are both entitled to claim funding for the entire term. However, if no agreement can be reached to make the claims total 15 hours or less then Management Information will apportion the funding based on the attendance during headcount week.

## Capping

A child's funded year starts in the term they become eligible for the relevant funding they are accessing, even if they do not take a funded place straight away. Before a payment is processed Management Information will identify those children who have come to the end of their funded year and calculate the total number of funded hours received. If this exceeds 570, the additional hours will be capped and deducted from the headcount payment. Providers are informed via email which children have been capped and for how many hours.

## Adjustment Claims

### Free For Two Funding

Any child who is confirmed as eligible for Free For Two Funding can take up a funded place at any point during the term. If a child starts after the actuals claim period has closed, a claim can still be submitted via the Adjustments tab in the Synergy FIS Provider Portal. Guidance notes can be found on Kelsi.

### Universal 3&4 Year Olds and Working Parent Entitlement For 9 Months – 4 Years Old:

Any child who starts in a funded place after headcount week can claim the funding for the remainder of the term provided they meet one of the following criteria:

- they have not claimed anywhere else in Kent in the current academic term
- they have moved from a setting which has closed

Late Joiner applications should be made via the Adjustments tab on the Synergy FIS Provider Portal. Guidance notes can be found on Kelsi.

If a parent/guardian wishes to claim funding at a new setting after headcount week but their child does not meet the criteria above, they should be advised to contact the Children and Families Information Service on 03000 412323.

### Incorrect Headcount Adjustments:

Adjustment claims can be made for incorrect headcounts for example where a child has mistakenly been left off the actuals/headcount claim or an incorrect number of hours have been claimed for. Please note a fee will be charged for incorrect adjustments, with the exception of Free For Two funded children.

## Early Years Pupil Premium

Funded 9 months to 4 year old children who meet additional criteria may be eligible for extra funding known as the Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP).

Early Years Pupil Premium (EYPP) is based on up to 15 funded hours a child is receiving for the term across all the entitlements (EYPP is not payable on the additional 15 hours entitlement for 3&4 year-old children of working parents). Parents must meet additional criteria to be eligible for extra funding, details regarding this criteria can be found on KELSI.



Providers can claim EYPP by adding the parent details from the Parental Declaration Form onto the child's funding claim in the provider portal and tick the EYPP consent box, if eligible EYPP will then be added to the child's claim for the term.

## **Disability Access Fund**

Funded 9 months to 4 year old children who are in receipt of Disability Living Allowance (DLA) may be eligible for a lump sum payment once a year known as the Disability Access Fund. Details regarding this can be found on KELSI. Providers will need to discuss with parents if their child is in receipt of DLA and complete a Disability Access Fund form if applicable.

## Contact Us

Management Information can be contacted by telephone from 8:00am to 5:00pm Monday to Friday.

Telephone No: 03000 421612

Email: [miearlyyears@kent.gov.uk](mailto:miearlyyears@kent.gov.uk)

Please contact Management Information by emailing our mailbox if there are any changes to the following:

- Ofsted Registration Number
- Setting Name
- Setting Address
- Contact Person
- Email Address
- Bank Details – please complete the form which can be downloaded from KELS!