

Free Entitlement - Information for childcare providers about scheme administration and how to claim



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The Online Provider Portal www.westsussex.gov.uk/ecspportal is the only method of data collection. If you are signed up to offer Free Entitlement (FE), you will have been sent your login details. Please contact us as soon as possible if you require these to be re-sent or re-set for you.

Please take into account where a child is attending more than one setting or if a child's yearly allowance is close to be used up in their third or sixth funding period. Please remember the yearly allowance can be different for each child and is determined by when the child becomes of eligible age.

We recommend you retain a record of the child level hours (per week and number of weeks) that you used to calculate an estimate, which will assist you later when you are required to submit actuals.

Please note that if a child has taken up a school place, even on a part-time basis, they are no longer eligible to claim FE.

Late returns will jeopardise prompt payment. Returns received after the deadline will be actioned when all payments for prompt returns have been completed.

Estimates

If you choose to submit an **estimate** claim, we pay 70% of the estimate up front and at the beginning of the term. This is followed by a reconciled balance paid based on the actuals headcount (child-level) return. Please take this into account in your cash flow forecast and planning of expenditure throughout each term.

To claim an estimate, you submit the **total number of FE hours expected to be claimed in Headcount week only**. Our system will automatically calculate the estimated total number of FE hours for the term. You must ensure that this figure is as accurate as possible and this only applies to children who will be eligible for FE.

Estimate payments are based/paid on the school terms, which are:

- Spring and Summer terms: 12 weeks and
- Autumn term: 14 weeks.

If you are open for more weeks **do not** amend the number of weeks at estimate stage. You will have the opportunity to amend when submitting actuals (child-level) data. Instead, calculate the correct figure to submit by using this method:

Number of FE hours used in a week x number of weeks open in the term ÷ standard term length = figure to submit

For example, you will be claiming 100 hours a week for 15 weeks in the summer term.

100 hours x 15 weeks = 1500 hours

1500 ÷ 12 weeks of the standard summer term = 125 hours to submit as the estimate claim

You will need to submit separate estimates for your eligible 2 year olds who have already been awarded funding and your eligible 3 and 4 year olds (Universal and Extended FE). You will see how to do this on the portal.

Actuals (child-level)

This is where you submit your child-level actuals data. You are able to view all children on your headcount that have been taken from the previous term's headcount and only includes those children who are still of eligible age to claim FE.

You must ensure that all details are correct for each child and complete all details and weeks/hours as appropriate. **All hours will be shown as 0 to enable you to do this and minimise the risk of incorrect claims.** The School Admissions team use this data for children about to start school. The ethnicity information and number of unfunded hours per week is particularly important for the Department for Education Early Years Census. **You must remove any children who have left your setting**, whether to go to school or for other reasons. We will follow this up and re-claim funding made for any false claims.

If you do not have any eligible children to claim FE for this term, please email free.entitlement@westsussex.gov.uk stating you have no eligible children at present.

Please note that you will only be able to enter actuals data on-line for children who are attending your setting on headcount day. If you wish to request funding for children who start after this date, please contact the Specialist Team through the Family Information Service (FIS) on 01243 777807 to obtain a Post Headcount/Exceptional Payment Request form.

Ways to claim

There are three different ways you can claim FE:

Standard claim over 38 weeks or less

Funding will be paid over the standard number of weeks as set out below. This usually follows the [West Sussex School Term Dates](#), but please be aware that the school term dates are for 39 weeks of the year, whereas FE is over 38 weeks of the year, so they may not always marry up. If a child's claim differs from this, for example if you are open for less weeks or if a child does not have enough entitlement remaining, you must also change the 'Weeks attended in term' field for all children.

Term	Number of weeks	Term Dates
Summer 2023	12	17/04/23 - 21/07/23
Autumn 2023	14	04/09/23 - 15/12/23
Spring 2024	12	02/01/24 - 29/03/24
Summer 2024	12	15/04/24 - 23/07/24

Stretched funding over more than 38 weeks

If you are stretching the funding using the reduced weekly hours method, you must ensure that the 'Weeks attended in term' field is accurate for all children. If you do not change this we will have no option but to assume you are making a claim over the standard number of weeks according to 'Standard' above.

Stretched claims are subject to the termly limits set out below:

Term	Stretched Claims – maximum number of weeks available	Term Dates
Summer 2023	20 (includes half term and Summer Holidays)	17/04/23 – 01/09/23
Autumn 2023	17 (includes half term and Christmas Holidays)	04/09/23 – 29/12/23
Spring 2024	15 (includes half term and Easter Holidays)	02/01/24 – 12/04/24
Summer 2024	20 (includes half term and Summer Holidays)	15/04/24 – 30/08/24

Self-stretched funding over more than 38 weeks

If you are stretching the funding according to an arrangement between yourself and the parent, please complete the headcount form using the instructions for a 38-week setting as per 'Standard' above. If we need further details, we will request a copy of the Parent Declaration.

Key Dates

Submission deadlines, headcount date and Help guides on how to submit both **estimate** and **actuals** FE claims (including EYPP and DAF) www.westsussex.gov.uk/ecSPORTAL

Please ensure you are also receiving the weekly Early Years and Childcare Setting Update bulletin which prompt you to claim.

Parent Declarations

A copy of the current Parent Declaration form can be downloaded from the Scheme Documentation web page www.westsussex.gov.uk/ecsfreenentitlement.

This must always be up to date and any changes, including alterations to hours, must be confirmed by completing a new copy of the Parent Declaration form. This is especially important where the child is claiming FE at more than one setting.

Please retain copies of the declaration form at your setting for the current financial year (April to March), plus 2 years from completion date.

If we have any issues when processing claims, we will request that you send in a copy, there is no need to send us a copy without us requesting it first.