

Local Government Association response to the DfE consultation 'Eligibility for the free early years entitlement for two-year-olds under Universal Credit'

15 January 2018



About the Local Government Association (LGA)

The Local Government Association (LGA) is the national voice of local government. We work with councils to support, promote and improve local government.

We are a politically-led, cross party organisation which works on behalf of councils to ensure local government has a strong, credible voice with national government. We aim to influence and set the political agenda on the issues that matter to councils so they are able to deliver local solutions to national problems.

The LGA welcomes the opportunity to comment on this [consultation](#).

1. The Local Government Association supports the provision of free early education for disadvantaged two-year-olds, in addition to the wider offer for all families.
2. With regard to the specific questions within the consultation, we agree with the proposed net earnings threshold, and we do not feel that the proposal will adversely affect any children who share one of more of the relevant protected characteristics outlined in the Equality Act 2010.
3. The offer for families is currently complex due to the range of different schemes available and their varied policy aims and eligibility criteria (for example, free childcare for disadvantaged two-year-olds to improve their social mobility, and 30 hours childcare for children aged 3 and 4 of working parents to encourage take-up of employment). We would welcome the opportunity to work with the Department to ensure that the different elements of the early years offer work together coherently for the benefit of children and families.
4. While we welcome the suggestion that an additional 8,000 children would take up the entitlement under the new eligibility criteria, we are concerned about the availability of high quality early years places to enable this to happen.

Our members have raised significant concerns about the level of funding available for nursery and childminder provision following the introduction of 30 hours free childcare for children of working parents.

As providers work to ensure enough spaces are available for those who wish to take up the entitlement, there is concern that quality of provision could be impacted if less qualified (and therefore cheaper) staff are employed, support for special educational needs is reduced or other support is scaled back.

Submission

We would urge the Department to monitor closely the impact of this new policy, alongside existing policies and funding, on both the quality and quantity of provision to ensure that the offer can deliver on its stated aims to improve social mobility.

5. The amount of early years funding that councils are able to retain is being reduced under the new early years funding formula, limiting the ability of councils to support improvement in early years provision, or to provide support and advice to families. If more children are to be eligible for free early education, councils will need to be resourced to provide support and training as required.
6. We are aware that the Department has advised councils to postpone eligibility checking until after implementation of the new eligibility criteria. It must be clear to councils, providers and parents exactly what entitlements are and how these will be applied as soon as the changes come into effect.