

# Petitions Briefing:

## Free Childcare

Y Pwyllgor Deisebau | 9 Hydref 2023  
Petitions Committee | 9 October 2023

Reference: SR236196-4

**Petition Number:** P-06-1359

**Petition title:** Offer Welsh working parents the same financial support for childcare as England

**Text of petition:** In England from April 24 all working parents of 2 year olds get 15 hours free childcare. From September 24 this will be extended to parents of 9 months old+. From September 25 the free hours will be extended to 30.

In comparison Wales will take until September 25 to provide 12.5 hours to all 2 year olds. With no plan in place for 9 months + or increasing the hours to 15 or 30.

We're in a cost of living crisis where the Welsh Gov have the ability to support working parents but aren't.



# 1. Summary

There are different offers of free childcare in England and Wales which in summary are that:

- In Wales, **eligible 3 and 4 year olds of working parents** can receive the Childcare Offer for Wales of 30 hours a week for 48 weeks a year. The entitlement in England is for 30 hours a week for 38 weeks a year. In Wales, entitlement has recently been expanded to some parents in education and training.
- Both countries have some provision for certain groups of **two year olds**, but this provision is delivered in different ways. There are also plans for expansion of provision for two year olds in both countries. (detailed later in this brief).
- In the Spring Budget 2023, the Government announced its intention for the 30 hours entitlement to be extended in stages in England to children of working parents **aged nine months to up to three years from September 2025**. The intention is for the staged roll-out to include that from April 2024, working parents of 2 year-olds will be able to access 15 hours of free childcare per week. From September 2024, the intention is to then extend this 15 hours to working parents of children aged 9 month to 2 year-olds. Then finally from September 2025, all eligible working parents of children aged 9 months up to 3 years should be able to access 30 free hours per week.

In response to this Petition, the Deputy Minister for Social Services has said:

The Childcare Offer is available to eligible families of 3- to 4-year-old children and provides support for 48 weeks per year, compared to England's 38 week Offer, whilst this does include a minimum of 10 hours for early education during term time, 30 hours childcare is available each week for 9 of the holiday weeks.

The Deputy Minister also said:

You will be aware of the written statement which the First Minister issued in August, about the significant pressures Welsh Government is currently facing, consequently we are not currently in a position to confirm any new developments to childcare and how we will support families with childcare costs in the future.

## 2. Context

There are a range of ways that free childcare is provided, depending on the exact age of the child, the employment circumstances of the parents, and in the case of Flying Start in Wales, the exact geographical location where the child lives. England and Wales have different provision, registration and inspection processes for childcare in each country.

In addition to free childcare for some children, there are some other UK wide benefits such as [Tax-Free Childcare](#), other UK Government [financial help for parents](#). Parents can use Tax-Free Childcare at the same time as using 15 or 30 hours free childcare. Further advice for parents can be found on this website: [Help with childcare costs](#) | [MoneyHelper](#)

## 3. Wales

In summary:

- [Childcare Offer for Wales](#): 3 and 4 year olds of eligible parents are entitled to 30 hours a week free childcare for up to 48 weeks of the year. The 30 hours of childcare entitlement is made up of 20 hours of childcare and 10 hours per week of early years education. A [Co-operation Agreement](#) commitment has led to the expansion of the eligibility criteria in accessing childcare to also include parents of 3 and 4-year-olds, who are enrolled in further or higher education courses of at least 10 weeks in length.
- **3 and 4-year-old children of all parents** are entitled to a minimum of 10 hours a week early years education (also known as Foundation Phase Nursery provision). Local authorities are required to offer at least 10 hours a week from the term after their third birthday until they enter education full-time. In practice, some local authorities offer more. For those parents eligible for the Childcare Offer, these minimum hours are included within the 30 hours free provision.
- **All 2 and 3-year-old** children living in [Flying Start areas](#) are entitled to free childcare for 2.5 hours per day, 5 days a week for 39 weeks per year. At least 15 sessions of childcare provision must be made available during school holidays. Flying Start is a Welsh Government early years programme, in place since 2007 and delivered by local authorities. There is a [Programme for Government](#) commitment to “Deliver a phased expansion of early years provision to include all two year olds, with a particular emphasis on strengthening Welsh medium provision”. Welsh

Government says that more than 3,100 additional children have benefitted to date and that it is focused on the next phase of expansion.

## 4. England

In summary:

- **3 and 4 year olds of eligible parents** are entitled to [30 hours a week free childcare in England](#), for 38 weeks of the year (during school term time).
- **3 and 4-year-old children of all parents** are entitled to 570 hours of free early education or childcare a year. This is often taken as 15 hours each week for 38 weeks of the year.
- **2-year-olds of eligible parents on low incomes** are entitled to 15 hours a week for 38 weeks a year. From April 2024, the aim is for 15 hours of childcare to be extended to working parents of children aged two years old in England.
- In the Spring Budget 2023, the Government announced the 30 hours entitlement will be extended in stages to children aged nine months to up to three years from September 2025. The intention is that from April 2024, working parents of 2 year-olds will be able to access 15 hours of free childcare per week. From September 2024, the intention is to extend this to working parents of children aged 9 month to 2 year-olds. Then finally, from September 2025, all eligible working parents of children aged 9 months up to 3 years should be able to access 30 free hours per week.

Further information can be found here:

- [Research Briefings House of Commons Library](#)
- [Help with childcare costs in England: House of Commons Library](#)

## 5. Senedd Scrutiny

In 2021, the Equality and Social Justice Committee published a report [Childcare and parental employment: the pandemic and beyond](#).

In respect of this Petition, in March 2023, the First Minister was asked about the announced expansion plans in England and the comparison with the position in Wales. He said:

[...] what we see is an attempt in England to catch up with services that are already available here in Wales. It's quite certainly not the other way

around.[....]. For three and four-year-olds, here in Wales, families get 30 hours of childcare for 48 weeks of the year. In England, that's 38 weeks of the year; 10 weeks fewer in England than you get in Wales. Here in Wales, just last year, in our co-operation agreement with Plaid Cymru, we have extended the reach of the childcare offer for three and four-year-olds to people who are on the cusp of employment, and 3,000 more parents are able to take advantage of that childcare offer here in Wales just on that one aspect. My understanding is that the Chancellor says that 60,000 more people will enter the workforce as a result of his investment in childcare. We've already got 3,000 as a result of what we did for three and four-year-olds alone last year, and our record of expanding childcare for two-year-olds is something that is simply an aspiration in England.

Every effort is made to ensure that the information contained in this briefing is correct at the time of publication. Readers should be aware that these briefings are not necessarily updated or amended to reflect subsequent changes.