

Tax-Free Childcare: Guidance

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Tax-Free Childcare

Tax-Free Childcare offers working families support towards qualifying childcare costs. The scheme is delivered by HM Revenue and Customs (HMRC)

It replaces the Employer Supported Childcare Scheme, also known as the Childcare Voucher Scheme.

It is available to parents who are:

- full-time employees
- self-employed including those starting their own business
- working part time
- on paid and unpaid maternity, paternity or adoption leave
- on paid sick leave
- unable to work due to disability or caring responsibilities

The scheme is available in England, Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland.

How does Tax-Free Childcare work?

Parents can open an online account through GOV.UK.

They use the account to pay for childcare costs whilst working.

The government will top-up the account to a maximum amount (for details of the amounts see [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk)).

The childcare must be obtained from a registered or approved childcare provider.

The online childcare account is provided by National Savings & Investments (NS&I) in partnership with HMRC.

Other people can pay into the account (for example, grandparents, other family members or employers).

Eligibility for Tax-Free Childcare

For the parent or their partner (if they have one) to be eligible for a Tax-Free Childcare account, all of the following must apply. They:

- must be over 16 years old
- live and work in the UK (special rules apply if they live or work in another country)
- do not receive Universal Credit or childcare vouchers (Child Benefit, Child Maintenance payments and free childcare for 2-4 year olds are unaffected)
- are working either employed or self-employed (If they are part of a couple, both must be working, or if one partner is working and the other partner is in receipt of Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance, Carer's Allowance or Carer Support Payment (Scotland), or Employment and Support Allowance and they are due to restart work within the next 31 days)
- earn at least the National Minimum Wage or National Living Wage for 16 hours a week on average
- do not expect to earn £100,000 or more each in the current tax year
- are responsible for a child under 12 or under 17 (if in receipt of Disability Living Allowance or Child Disability Payment (CDP) in Scotland or Personal Independence Payment (PIP), Adult Disability Payment (ADP) or certified as severely sight impaired or blind by a consultant ophthalmologist)

Further information can be found on:

- www.gov.uk/tax-free-childcare
- www.childcarechoices.gov.uk

Universal Credit and Tax-Free Childcare

Claimants won't be eligible to open a Tax-Free Childcare account if they are receiving or have any outstanding claim to receive any element of Universal Credit.

Claimants can move between tax-free childcare and Universal Credit as their circumstances change, provided they meet the eligibility conditions.

If there are no changes of circumstances, a claimant will be limited to the number of times they can switch between the schemes.

After claiming Universal Credit, claimants with a Tax-Free Childcare account:

- must notify HMRC when a claim for Universal Credit is made
- will remain entitled to the tax-free top-up payments until the end of the quarterly entitlement period in which they claim Universal Credit
- must not reconfirm eligibility for Tax-Free Childcare when they receive the HMRC reminder
- will have their Tax-Free Childcare account become 'pay only'
- must withdraw or use any remaining money in their Tax-Free Childcare account within two years of claiming Universal Credit

If a claimant needs help using the Tax-Free Childcare account, they can call the HMRC childcare service helpline on 0300 123 4097.

Claimants should not end their Universal Credit until they know which offers are available and how much they could get. This is to make sure that they will not be worse off going on to Tax-Free Childcare from Universal Credit.

In a limited number of cases, some claimants moving to Universal Credit from Tax-Free Childcare will temporarily receive 105% of their childcare costs in support from the two schemes, 85% from Universal Credit and 20% from Tax-Free Childcare.

Parents in receipt of Universal Credit will be able to use any money in their online tax-free childcare account for up to two years after they cease to qualify for the top-up payments.

Childcare calculator

Parents need to consider which is the best route for them and must be signposted to the childcare calculator on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk) The calculator can be used to see what help is available with childcare costs.

The claimant should also be directed to the [Childcare choices website](https://www.childcarechoices.gov.uk).