



Funded early years childcare overseas / Overseas Nursery Authority (ONA)

Frequently asked questions (FAQs)

FAQs for families that have not applied for yet

- [General information](#) 2
- [Eligibility criteria](#) 4
- [Providers](#) 7
- [Application](#) 9

FAQs for families that have already applied

- [Paying for DCS provision](#) 10
- [Making an ONA claim](#) 11
- [Reconfirmation of eligibility](#) 14
- [Moving back to the UK](#) 15
- [Useful links and information](#) 16

General information

Throughout this document 2024DIN01-085-Funded childcare entitlements and processes for overseas Service personnel and UK Based Civil Servants (UKBCs) with accompanying pre-school aged children is referenced. This can be accessed on [defnet](#) or [Defence Connect](#).

What early years childcare funding is available overseas?

In overseas locations, the Ministry of Defence (MOD) provides services (or access to services) that, so far as is reasonably practicable, conform in type, scope and standard to that required by legislation in England.

The MOD delivers this entitlement through places at Defence Children Services (DCS) schools and settings (known as DCS providers) or through access to the MOD Overseas Nursery Authority, (ONA).

What is Overseas Nursery Authority (ONA)?

ONA is funding for eligible Defence personnel which replicates the early years funding available in England. ONA can only be used in overseas locations outside of the UK where there are no Defence Children Services (DCS) provided settings, or when DCS settings are unable to meet the requirements of the family.

What can parents claim?

This differs depending on the age of the child and the working status of the parents.

- All families are eligible for the Universal entitlement of 15 hours for their 3–4-year-old children from the term following their third birthday.
- 2-year-olds who have an education, health and care plan or get Disability Living Allowance, are also entitled to the 15 hours of free education.
- Eligible working families are currently entitled to up to 15 hours funded childcare for their 9-months to 3-year-old children, from the term after they turn 9-months-old, and for up to 30 hours funded childcare for their 3–4-year-old children from the term following their third birthday.
- **From September 2025** eligible working families can claim up to 30 hours of free childcare for children aged 9 months old to school age.

General information

Is it compulsory to claim early years childcare funding?

It is not compulsory to claim early years childcare funding. The funding is in place to offer eligible Defence personnel assigned overseas the same entitlement to early years childcare funding as is in place in England.

What is the difference between funded universal childcare and working families entitlement?

Universally funded childcare is available to all families with children aged 3 and 4 and can be used from the term following your child's third birthday. Additional funding is available to families where both parents (or a sole parent in a lone parent family) are working.

Please see the question 'Who is eligible to claim funding?' on page [4](#).

Can we claim 15/30 hours every week for the whole year, or term time only?

Early years childcare funding and ONA are capped at 38 weeks per year. However, instead of using 15 or 30 hours per week for 38 weeks, you can choose to stretch your entitlement over the whole year (if your provider can accommodate this).

15 hours per week is 570 hours over a 12-month period.

30 hours per week is 1140 over a 12-month period.

Eligibility criteria

Who is eligible to claim funding?

To be eligible to claim the universal funding the following eligibility criteria must be met:

- One parent is Regular Service or Full Time Reserve Service (Full Commitment) (FTRS FC) personnel, a UK Based Civil Servant posted overseas, or is Specially Recruited for Overseas Service
- Assigned overseas and accompanied by children of eligible age (as set out on [p2](#) 'what can parents claim?'), for whom they have parental responsibility or for whom they have a special guardianship order.

To be eligible to claim the funding for working families the following eligibility criteria must **also** be met:

- Both parents (or a sole parent in a lone parent family) must be in paid employment, or starting work within the next 31 days, and earning the equivalent of 16 hours per week at the UK National Minimum or Living Wage.
- Adjusted net income is no more than £100,000.00 per annum, per parent.

What is the UK National Minimum or Living Wage?

The UK National Minimum or Living Wage changes each year in April. For current rates visit [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

The equivalent of 16 hours per week is measured for eligibility purposes, on average over a period of three months (13 weeks; in line with HMRC guidelines,) on a reasonable expectation basis.

My partner is self-employed, are we eligible?

A self-employed parent who is the spouse/partner of a Defence person must be able to provide on request at least 3 months official business accounts (including receipts/invoices showing earnings).

My partner is newly self-employed, and they do not yet have 3 months of earnings at the minimum threshold. Are we still entitled to 30 hours ONA?

A self-employed parent with a newly registered business (less than 12 months) will have to provide proof of earnings prior to becoming eligible for the working families' entitlement, but they do not need to meet the minimum earnings threshold. This proof should be presented along with the funded childcare application form to the Chain of Command, Commanding Officer or Head of Location.

Eligibility criteria

My partner is in receipt of benefits, what are we entitled to?

If your partner is not currently working, you may still be eligible for entitlements available to working families if you are working, and your partner is on carer's leave or if they get Incapacity Benefit, Severe Disablement Allowance, Carer's Allowance, Limited Capability for Work Benefit or contribution-based Employment and Support Allowance.

Do working parents remain eligible when on leave?

Families will usually remain eligible if the parent(s) are on annual leave or in receipt of Statutory Sick Pay (SSP), Statutory Maternity Pay (SMP), Statutory Shared Parental Pay (ShPP), Statutory Paternity Pay, Statutory Adoption Pay (SAP). If parents are on adoption leave for an eligible child, they must return to work within 31 days of the date they first apply for the working families funded childcare for that child.

Wages are low in our location, and it is hard to reach the lower minimum earnings threshold. Why is the English minimum threshold used when it does not reflect earnings here?

There are a couple of reasons why the minimum income threshold set by HMRC of equivalent to 16 hours at National Minimum/Living Wage per week has been adopted for this policy:

- 1) HMRC has imposed this threshold for the equivalent scheme in England. As Service families are located overseas on a temporary basis only, and are not domicile in the host nation, English statutory guidance is applied and therefore UK minimum wage is applied, not that of the host nation;
- 2) All families will get 15 hours free childcare for their 3- and 4-year-olds, or 15 hours for their 2-year-old if they have an education, health and care plan or get Disability Living Allowance, and partners do not have to be employed or reach the income threshold above.

Eligibility criteria

What happens if I or my partner take unpaid leave, or my partner stops working?

At the time of application/reconfirmation you are declaring that you expect to both be earning at least the minimum earnings threshold for the next 3 months. You will retain eligibility for the next 3 months.

If, when the time comes to reconfirm again,

- **you anticipate you or your partner taking unpaid leave or stopping working, but restarting again within 31 days**, earning the minimum threshold, you may continue claiming uninterrupted.
- **you anticipate you or your partner taking unpaid leave or stopping working, and not restarting again within 31 days**, you will need to work out if you/they will earn enough in the weeks before stopping working to reach the minimum threshold of 13 weeks x 16 hours at the UK minimum wage.
- **either you or your partner are taking unpaid leave (e.g. Statutory Maternity Pay has stopped, and you/they are now on unpaid Maternity Leave), or have stopped working, and do not expect to restart work, earning the minimum threshold, within 31 days**, your eligibility will stop from that point onwards and you will enter a grace period. The grace period means that you can carry on claiming until the end of the current 'full' term. This will allow parents to re-enter employment / earn the minimum threshold whilst preserving the entitlement to the working families funding. Once the grace period has ended, the child/ren will no longer be eligible for the working families' entitlement but may continue to be eligible for the universal entitlement if they are 3 or 4 years old. Parents should reapply if their circumstances change, and they become eligible again.

Providers

There is a Defence Children Services (DCS) setting at my location, do I have to use this setting?

In locations with a DCS provider, parents must use this provider to be entitled to the childcare/early learning offer. Further information is available at [Education overseas for service children - GOV.UK](#) (scroll to 'DCS schools and settings' and 'DCS schools and early years settings by location').

Only in exceptional circumstances can you choose a different setting and claim ONA instead. Exceptional circumstances include, but are not limited to:

- a. The DCS setting cannot accommodate the individual needs of the child (eg it cannot accommodate developmental issues or a disability);
- b. The DCS setting has no spaces available;
- c. The DCS setting is too far to travel;
- d. The DCS setting is too far to travel in relation to a sibling's school;
- e. The child is already settled within another setting;
- f. The timings are not compatible with the shift patterns of the parent.

This list is not exhaustive, and the Chain of Command, Commanding Officer or Head of Location may decide at their discretion whether a case fits the description 'exceptional circumstances'.

There is no DCS setting at my location, how do I choose a provider?

It is important to obtain the best possible advice on the childcare options available. Useful information may be obtained from staff in situ at the receiving unit or from the [International HIVE](#). It is the responsibility of the parent(s) to choose the provider and satisfy themselves that it is suitable, however, ONA can only be applied for when using childcare providers, or childminders, that have been registered, regulated and inspected by the host nation. Parents are responsible for ensuring that their chosen provider meets these criteria if they want to claim ONA.

Can I use a nanny?

Childcare provided by nannies is not supported under ONA.

Is there a capped rate for ONA that I need to bear in mind when choosing a provider?

There is no capped rate when claiming ONA. However, where there is more than one suitable childcare provider available, parents should choose the setting that offers hours closest to the funded hours entitlement (see page [8](#) for further details).

Providers

My non-DCS provider does not give the option of just using 15/30 hours. Can I claim ONA above entitlement to cover the extra hours I am obliged to pay for?

Yes, as long as no suitable provider exists which allows the option of using 15/30 hours a week. It is recognised that in certain countries settings may not provide the option of using 15 hours/30 hours a week and may require children to attend more hours or even full-time to secure a place. In these circumstances, Annex D of 2024DIN01-085 must be completed to provide evidence of the minimum provision available.

My child's provider is open for more than 38 weeks of the year, and I am obliged to pay for a placement for the full year to keep the spot. Can I use Annex D to claim extra weeks?

Yes, as long as no suitable provider exists which allows the option of using 38 weeks a year. It is recognised that in certain countries settings may not provide the option of using only 38 weeks a year and may require children to attend more weeks to secure a place. In these circumstances, Annex D of 2024DIN01-085 must be completed to provide evidence of the minimum provision available.

My child has started school, but they do shorter hours here than in England. Can I use ONA to pay for wraparound care?

The purpose of Overseas Nursery Authority (ONA) is to mirror the Early Years childcare provision in England. Wraparound childcare is not Early Years provision, and ONA can therefore not be claimed in this case. There is currently no MOD scheme which funds wraparound childcare overseas.

Application

How do I apply for the funded universal childcare entitlement at a DCS provider?

Funded **universal childcare entitlements** will be managed locally by the DCS provider. This means that for parents whose eligible child(ren) are to attend a DCS provider for their universally eligible 15 funded hours for 3- and 4-year-olds, or 2-year olds who have an education, health and care plan or get Disability Living Allowance, the Funded Childcare Application Form **does not** need to be completed.

How do I apply for the additional funded hours at a DCS provider?

In the case of a working family whose child(ren) qualify for **additional funded hours** (totalling 30 hours for their 3- and 4-year-olds and 15 hours for their 2-year-olds, and, from September 2024, for their 9–23-month-old children), parents must complete the Funded Childcare Application Form at Annex C to 2024DIN01-085 and forward it to the Head Teacher / Early Years Manager of the DCS provider. Application forms must be retained by the parent for two years in case of audit.

How do I apply for ONA for a non-DCS provider?

Whether you are entitled to only the universal allowance or the additional working families allowances, you must complete the Funded Childcare Application Form at Annex C to 2024DIN01-085. You should forward the completed application form to your Chain of Command, Commanding Officer or Head of Location, and await a response before enrolling your child(ren) with the provider.

Where a DCS provider exists, but the parent is not able to make use of it, the applicant must provide sufficient information to support their alternative choice of provider. Approved application forms must be retained for two years after the last claim has been submitted in case of audit.

How do I apply for ONA above-entitlement?

If parents are applying to claim over and above their eligible funded entitlement of either 15 or 30 hours per week for a child, they must complete the Application for Extra Funded Childcare Hours form at Annex D in addition to the Funded Childcare Application Form (at Annex C to 2024DIN01-085).

Do I need to reconfirm every 3 months, like in England?

Parents from working families must confirm their ongoing eligibility for additional childcare entitlements either every three months, or at the start of each term, depending on the process implemented by Unit Admin (for non-DCS providers) or DCS Early Years Advisors (for DCS providers). A Reconfirmation of Eligibility Form is provided at Annex E of 2024DIN01-085 for this purpose. Local processes may differ, so approach your Unit Admin/DCS Early Years Advisors to find out more.

Paying for DCS provision

Do I need to pay for DCS setting and reclaim?

No, you do not need to pay up front for childcare at a DCS setting.

Funded universal childcare entitlements will be managed locally by the DCS provider. This means that for parents whose eligible child(ren) are to attend a DCS provider for their universally eligible 15 funded hours for 3- and 4-year-olds, or for 2-year-olds in receipt of certain government allowances, the Funded Childcare Application Form does not need to be completed.

In the case of a working family whose child(ren) qualify for additional funded hours (totalling 30 hours for their 3- and 4-year-olds, and from September 2024 15 hours for their 2-year-olds and 15 hours for their 9- to 23-month-olds), parents must complete the Funded Childcare Application Form at Annex C and forward it to the Head Teacher / Early Years Manager of the DCS provider. Application forms must be retained by the parent for two years in case of audit.

Making an ONA Claim

How do I claim ONA?

Once your Funded Childcare Application Form (Annex C to 2024DIN01-085), and if appropriate, your Application for Extra Funded Childcare Hours (Annex D to 2024DIN01-085), has been completed and signed off by Chain of Command, Commanding Officer or Head of Location, you may begin claiming ONA via JPA's i-Expense (Overseas Child Expenses). Instructions on how to submit an ONA claim via JPA can be accessed at [IN506031.pdf \(sharepoint.com\)](#).

Reimbursement will be made according to the payment option chosen on the completed Annex C. Claims for annual reimbursement cannot be processed. In line with JSP 752 claims must be made within 90 days of expenditure. If you don't have access to JPA please see the next question.

I don't have access to JPA, how do I claim ONA?

You will need to speak to your overseas administration unit and arrange for refunds to be paid under local arrangement. UIN A5591Q and RAC NHB001 should be used when undertaking local payment action, but only once eligibility has been confirmed.

I need to pay in advance to secure a place, can I put a claim in before my child has started / before my child reaches eligible age?

As ONA falls under JSP 752, claims must be made within 90 days of expenditure. Some childcare providers require payment in advance to secure a place, so long as your CoC is satisfied that you will be in post for the period you are claiming for, ONA claims may be submitted as soon as childcare invoices have been paid.

Can I claim ONA up front, before paying the childcare provider?

No. Like all expenses, ONA can only be claimed as a refund on expenditure already incurred.

In my location children start school earlier than in England. Can I use ONA to fund a placement at a private school?

If a host nation requires a child to begin education before the term after their 3rd birthday ONA may be claimed where no suitable state school exists

Making an ONA Claim

In my location children start school later than in England. Can I use early years childcare funding/ONA until my child starts school locally?

In locations where there are no DCS schools ONA may be extended until such time children enter full-time education locally.

If a DCS school is available at your location, you would not be able to claim ONA beyond English reception age as DCS schools follow English school entry guidance and Service children could attend the DCS school.

In my location children start school later than in England. I am claiming extended ONA to cover childcare, but my child would be eligible for free school meals in England. Can I use ONA to cover meals?

No, ONA only covers meals that are part of the tuition fees or included as compulsory on the invoice. Universal Infant Free School Meals (UIFSM) are covered by a separate policy. [Defence Instructions and Notices - Home \(sharepoint.com\)](#) refers (search for 2024DIN01-068: Universal Infant Free School Meals).

Can I claim for other costs/fees that aren't childcare?

The following are permissible items to claim via ONA:

- registration/enrolment fees
- processing fees
- insurance fees
- material fees for items required for learning such as books etc. (material fees for items such as nappies and suncream cannot be claimed for).

The following items are **not** permissible:

- Activity fees (including holiday clubs or any other optional activities)
- clothing (e.g. uniform, PE kits)
- school photographs
- security deposits
- waiting list fees
- late payment fees

Meals will only be refunded if they are part of the tuition fees or included as compulsory on the invoice.

Making an ONA Claim

We receive a childcare subsidy/childcare funding from the government in-country. Can I still claim ONA?

ONA mirrors the entitlement for 3- and 4-year-olds in England where parents have no statutory entitlement to access host nation provision, so that Service personnel posted abroad are not disadvantaged. If, you receive any subsidy/funding from the local government then you would not be eligible for ONA unless that subsidy/funding covers fewer childcare hours than you would be entitled to in England. In which case you could claim ONA for the number of hours needed to bring you in line with the English entitlement.

Reconfirmation of Eligibility

Do working families have to reconfirm eligibility every 3 months like in England?

Yes. Parents from working families must confirm their ongoing eligibility for additional childcare entitlements either every three months, or at the start of each term, depending on the process implemented by Unit Admin (for non-DCS providers) or DCS Early Years Advisors (for DCS providers). A Reconfirmation of Eligibility Form is provided at Annex E of 2024DIN01-085.

Unit Admin/DCS Early Years Advisors may adopt their own local processes. Parents should check what these are.

Parents from working families are responsible for returning the completed form promptly to their Unit Admin/DCS Early Years Advisors (for DCS providers), in order to avoid interruption to entitlement.

What happens if I forget to reconfirm or am late reconfirming?

It is essential that parents reconfirm ongoing eligibility to avoid interruption to entitlement to funded hours or delays to approvals of ONA

What should I do if my partner is working at the time of reconfirmation, but we know they will stop working within the next 3 months?

Please see 'What happens if I or my partner takes unpaid leave, or my partner stops working?' on Page [6](#).

It is time to reconfirm but my partner has stopped work / is due to stop work / will no longer meet the minimum earnings threshold. Does our entitlement stop straight away?

Please see 'What happens if I or my partner takes unpaid leave, or my partner stops working?' on Page [6](#).

When we last reconfirmed, we expected my partner to earn the minimum earnings threshold, but they didn't. Do we need to pay anything back?

No, you do not need to pay anything back. You will now enter a grace period, please see 'What happens if I or my partner takes unpaid leave, or my partner stops working?' on Page [6](#) for further information about the grace period (in the final paragraph)

Moving back to the UK

We are returning to England

Parents are unable to apply for their additional funded childcare entitlement online whilst posted outside of England. To allow parents to not lose out on this entitlement, a manual process is in place to ensure parents can access a free childcare code. This enables parents to plan for their return.

Parents who are due to return to England, after a term deadline, but are aware of this move prior to a term deadline, can apply for a free childcare code for their return. Parents must call the Childcare Service helpline on 0300 123 4097 and request a manual application. Information on term deadlines and when to apply can be found in 2024DIN01-085.

We are returning to Scotland

Funded early learning and childcare is free to all parents, funded by the Scottish Government. You can get up to 1,140 hours of funded early learning and childcare a year (around 30 hours a week in term time) if your child is 3 or 4 years old. Some 2-year-olds are also eligible. Please visit Scottish government pages for the latest information.

[Help paying for childcare - mygov.scot](https://mygov.scot)

We are returning to Wales

Wales provides 30 hours a week of free early education and childcare for working parents of children aged 3 and 4 years for 48 weeks of the year. Applications are dealt with directly by each Local Authority's Family Information Service (FIS) where the parents reside.

<https://gov.wales/find-your-local-family-information-service>

We are returning to Northern Ireland

Parents of children aged 3 and 4 years can apply to receive 12.5 hours per week of free, also known as funded, preschool education. This allocation can only be taken over 2.5 hours per day, 5 days a week, during term time. Places are provided by nursery schools, primary schools with nursery units and some voluntary and private providers. The places cannot be provided by childminders. Please visit

<https://www.nidirect.gov.uk/information-and-services/parenting-and-childcare/childcare>

Useful links and information

Where can I find more information?

The Defence Childcare Information Page on [defnet](#) and [Defence Connect](#) is where Service personnel can access all the information about funded early years childcare overseas and Overseas Nursery Authority (ONA), including 2024DIN01-085-Funded childcare entitlements and processes for overseas Service personnel and UK Based Civil Servants (UKBCs) with accompanying pre-school aged children.

Those without access to defnet and Defence Connect, including non-Serving partners, can find information by searching 'Overseas Nursery Authority' on [Discover My Benefits](#). Or for more general information about childcare in overseas locations contact the [International HIVE](#)

Please visit the [Childcare Choices](#) (GOV.UK) website to find out what government childcare schemes are available for your child.

Any further questions can be sent to people-affs-child-expenses@mod.gov.uk