

FAQs re Early Years Budget 2018 changes.

Q. What changes were announced for the ECCE programme in Budget 2018?

A. Full two programme years for all eligible children from September 18.

Q. When will the Budget 2018 changes to free pre-school take effect?

A. The Budget 2018 changes to free pre-school apply from September 2018.

- The proposed change will only commence in September 2018. So those parents who were expecting to start their children in ECCE in January and April 2018 will still be able to do so.
- Those who would have benefitted from April 2019, and who will now only benefit from September 2019, are children born between January and March 2016, i.e. children who are now 1.5 years old. The 12 extra weeks of free pre-school that this small group received following the Budget 2016 expansion was an anomaly that has now been addressed with this refinement which will ensure that all eligible children can avail of an equal amount of free pre-school. While some of this group may feel they are facing a cut in eligibility, our experience from this year suggests that possibly only 55% of the cohort would be likely to take up the April 2019 entry. In addition, the group is being given more than 1.5 years' notice, which seems to be reasonable, particularly as the change will only serve to reduce their total ECCE eligibility to the same duration as other children. They will still be able to avail of a full 2 years ECCE. There is a strong argument for this measure on the basis of equity (giving 76 weeks to all), as well as quality (through enabling service providers to plan more effectively and to offer staff better terms and conditions in their contracts).

Q. If I don't want my child to go to pre-school for five days per week, can they still benefit from free pre-school?

A. Yes. Your child doesn't have to attend for five days per week in order to avail of free preschool. However, your pre-school provider must agree to take your child on a part-time basis. Bear in mind that if a parent, for example, enrolls a child for three days per week, the pre-school provider will only be paid by Government for the days the child attends. A provider may not be able to find a child to take the place for the other two days a week, so this arrangement may not be financially viable for pre-school providers. A provider may prefer to keep the place for a child who attends pre-school five days a week.

Q. How will the new measures announced under Budget 2018 affect ECCE eligibility?

A. All children born between September and December will have increased eligibility (76 weeks rather than 61 weeks). This will benefit more than 20,000 children each year.

- In addition, all children taking part in the ECCE scheme will benefit from quality improvements that result from the ability of providers to plan more effectively as a result of having a single intake each year. Such quality improvements will benefit all of the approx. 114,000 children who are expected to take part in the programme in 2018-2019.
- There will be no change in eligibility for children born between April and August, who already have 76 weeks eligibility.
- For children born between January and March, in principle there will be reduced eligibility - from 88 weeks to 76 weeks. This new measure will address the inconsistencies that led to a wide range in the number of free preschool weeks a child could avail of – between 61 and 88 weeks – and will ensure a programme that is equitable for all children.
- The change will also have the benefit of equity, ensuring that all children - regardless of their month of birth - will be eligible for the same duration of ECCE.

Q. My child will not be aged two years and eight months by 1st September 2018. Can they start in free pre-school during the 2018/19 programme year?

A. No. In order for a child to be eligible to be enrolled for free pre-school on 1st September 2018 they must have been born between 1st January 2014 and 31st December 2015. Please refer to Table 1 below for further details. Parents who choose to send their child earlier will have to pay childcare providers for this service. They should consider other child care supports that they may be eligible for.

The following table sets out relevant eligibility dates by year of birth:

Birth date between	Eligible Enrolment date(s)	ECCE end date
1 January 2014 – 31 August 2014	1 September 2017 & 1 September 2018	June 2019
1 September 2014 – 31 December 2014	1 January 2018 & 1 September 2018	June 2019
1 January 2015 – 31 March 2015	1 April 2018 & 1 September 2018 & 1 September 2019	June 2020
1 April 2015 – 31 December 2015	1 September 2018 & 1 September 2019	June 2020
1 January 2016 – 31 December 2016	1 September 2019 & 1 September 2020	June 2021
1 January 2017 – 31 December 2017	1 September 2020 & 1 September 2021	June 2022
1 January 2018 – 31 December 2018	1 September 2021 & 1 September 2022	June 2023

Q. Why are there no longer three separate entry points?

A. The measure to reduce the number of entry points to one refines the development introduced in 2017, whereby three intake dates were adopted. This was a recommendation of the 'Right from the Start' report. Further funding has now been made available to give every child access to a full two

programme years of free pre-school. One enrolment period at the start of the pre-school year will help streamline the administration process and will make it easier for childcare providers to operate and budget for the programme year. This will also make it simpler for parents to secure places on the ECCE programme for their children.

Q. How many free pre-school weeks will my child be eligible for?

A. Under the Budget 2018 changes, a child will be eligible for a potential duration of 76 weeks (two programme years) of free pre-school from September 2018. Parents may decide to use less than this for various reasons including for example, depending on their child's date of birth, their wish to send their child to school at 4 rather than 5 years of age.

Q. Why are these changes only coming into effect from September 2018?

A. In Budget 2018 it is being announced that, from September 2018, children will be eligible to start free preschool when they turn age 2 years and 8 months, and can continue in free pre-school until they start primary school (once the child is not older than 5 years and 6 months at the end of the relevant pre-school year i.e. end June). This refinement of the free pre-school programme will build on the expansion of this programme as announced under Budget 2016. It would be impractical to introduce these changes in the middle of a programme year as to do so would be disruptive for parents and childcare providers alike. However, we hope that you will appreciate that this extended provision, when introduced, will ensure that from the age of two years and 8 months, all children in Ireland will be able to access free education, either in pre-school or in primary school. This is a significant step forward for children and families.