



The Grace Period

(When a parent loses eligibility for the 30 hour Extended Entitlement)

The grace period enables parents to retain their childcare place for a short period if they become ineligible for 30 hours. The updated statutory guidance (which came into force in September 2017) outlines the specific grace period cut-off dates.

Parents reconfirm their eligibility around every three months depending on when they first applied for 30 hours. There will be three dates attached to each code (only the local authority and provider sees these dates).

The 'validity start date' is the date on which the parent has applied and been issued at code. The 'validity end date' is the parent's 'deadline' for reconfirming. Their 'grace period' date is the last date on which they should receive their 30 hours place.

The ECS will automatically assign grace period end dates to every eligibility code. When local authorities undertake their audits (see next section), they will inform providers which children are in their grace period (and for how long).

Example:

- Child turns three on 3rd March; parent successfully applies for 30 hours on 15th March (can take up a place from 1st April). Parent is issued a code with a validity start date of 15th March and end date of 15th June.
- Parent is able to reconfirm their eligibility for 30 hours up to four weeks before their validity end date (i.e. from 15th May). The parent reconfirms on this date but their circumstances have changed (e.g. job loss) and they are no longer eligible. Therefore, the parent's eligibility ends on 15th June.
- The grace period will apply from 16th June until 31st December.

A grace period will not continue beyond the age that a child has achieved compulsory school age (the term following their fifth birthday).

Using the ECS to determine the Grace Period

Local authorities should complete an audit of eligibility codes at a minimum of six fixed points in the year, both at half-term and at the end of term across the year (specific dates are listed in Table 1)

Local authorities will be expected to undertake a batch check of all eligibility codes on or around 22nd October. Those local authorities using the ECS web browser will be able to upload a spreadsheet of all eligibility codes check to the ECS. The ECS will return which codes are still eligible and those that are no longer eligible, as well as the grace period end date, for all specified codes. Local authorities will need to keep a record of codes check and remove codes for children who have become ineligible to receive the 30 hours free childcare.

Table 1 – Grace period dates

Validity end date:	LA audit date:	Grace Period End date:
1 Jan – 10 February	11 February	31 March
11 Feb – 31 March	1 April	31 August
1 April – 26 May	27 May	31 August
27 May – 31 August	1 September	31 December
1 September – 21 October	22 October	31 December
22 October – 31 December	1 January	31 March

For each individual code, those local authorities who have a local system (a web services interface) will be able to run an automatic check against all known eligibility codes and again, see which codes are still eligible and those that are no longer eligible; and see the grace period end date. They may choose to audit more frequently in order to provide the most up to date picture of eligibility to providers.

Further information on the ECS

The ECS Service desk will supply a copy of the ECS Implementer’s Toolkit on request. This includes the following documentation:

- The ECS User Guide describes the process for local authorities to gain access to the ECS and a complete description of the services provided by the ECS web browser interface and user’s responsibilities.
- The ECS Reference Guide provides answers to a wide range of frequently asked questions regarding the use of the ECS for eligibility checking.