**Case study: Delivering the new extended free entitlement (EFE) with children’s centres (CC) and other child and family support services integrated into the partnership**

**The benefits of a partnership that includes CCs and other service providers**

The 30 Hours Mixed Model Partnership project (the project) demonstrated that a wider approach to partnership that included CCs and other service providers was beneficial in more than one respect:

* Often providers of early education and other services for children and their families were located in close proximity were not aware of each other’s offer and joint planning discussions brought new knowledge of services available in localities
* Schools were not consistently engaged with local CCs and, therefore, lacked knowledge of the support services and staff that children and their families could access; joint working across the sector brought a new awareness amongst senior school staff of how and to which services they could refer parents and children
* New relationships between schools, providers and CCs could improve the CCs contact with families in their reach area
* It was possible to identify strategies for encouraging take-up of the offer and increase the number of children who will be entitled
* Inclusion of all local partners also assisted with the identification of available local space that could be used for delivery of EFE and other services e.g. the two year old offer to mitigate against the possible knock on effect of the new three and four year old offer on sufficiency of two year old free early education entitlement places
* The participation of specialist providers for children with special education needs and/or disabilities (SEND) and their families integrated planning for delivery of the offer to children with additional needs and provided the opportunity to assist parents in preparing for the new EFE
* Working across the whole local sector could ensure that parents of two year olds, including those accessing the free early education entitlement for that age group, were included in support work to plan for the new offer.

**Three and four year old entitlement issues**

The new three and four year old EFE[[1]](#footnote-1) from September 2017 will principally be available to children whose parents are working 16 hours or more per week and earn at least an average of 16 times the national minimum wage (NMW) or national living wage (NLW). At the current rate, this means that a parents must earn a minimum equivalent of £115.20 for over 25 year olds and around £107 for a 21 year old. The upper limit is £100,000. In two-parent households, both parents will have to be working and meet the criteria individually. For more information about the eligibility criteria please refer to the [**FAQs**](http://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org/sites/default/files/FAQs%2030%20Hours%20Free%20Early%20Education%20Entitlement.docx) section of the toolkit.

Currently 94% of three year olds and 99% of four year olds nationally are using some or all of the current free early education entitlement (the universal offer)[[2]](#footnote-2), although there is some variation locally, with lower uptake in more deprived areas. National data also shows that children with SEND are less likely to take up their offer; 25% of children with SEND do not access the offer compared to 4% of all three and four year old children with no special need or disability[[3]](#footnote-3).

The Department of Education (DfE) estimates that up to 42% of those children (390,000) whose parents take up the current universal offer will be eligible for the extension to new entitlement.

Importantly, these projected take-up figures do not include parents who do not meet the criteria at the moment but for whom; the additional hours may make an increase in working hours or entry to the labour market possible.

This means that the following children will **NOT** be entitled to the new offer (although they will continue to be able to access the universal offer of 570 hours a year):

* Children whose parents work but earn less than the minimum average income
* Children who live in a two parent household but where only one parent works
* Children whose parents each earn more than upper income limit
* Children who live in workless households

The entitlement gives rise to three issues that could be tackled through partnership working that includes CC services as part of the package on offer to parents.

The first issue is that that parents of children with SEND are less likely to be in paid employment than their counterparts who do not have children with additional needs[[4]](#footnote-4) and, in two-parent households, there is a greater probability that only one parent is working[[5]](#footnote-5).

The stated intention of the offer is that it should be inclusive of children with SEND and the consultation document on the proposed new Early Years National Funding Formula[[6]](#footnote-6) sets out plans to pay supplements through the formula and the Disability Access Fund to ensure that entitled children’s additional needs can be met in settings.

Nevertheless, there remains a probability that fewer children with SEND will qualify for the additional hours because of the employment status of their parents.

In respect of two year olds, of the children who are entitled to early education offer for that age group, a significant group are from workless households and, unless their parental employment status changes, they will be excluded from the new entitlement.

Until now, all three and four year olds have been entitled to the same offer and the employment status of their family has been of no significance. The introduction of a two-tiered offer brings a new dynamic into play and is one that risks a level of exclusion being experienced by children of workless families.

**Positively tackling risks and increasing entitlement through CC and other child and family support services**

The project partnerships that included CCs and other child and family support services identified the following ways in which, by working together, take-up and entitlement risks could be mitigated:

* CC Family Support staff and providers can promote the offer to parents whose children attend all the settings in the locality through joint planning and working together; by beginning promotion at this early stage, it enables parents to plan for the longer offer, including increasing their working hours or entering employment
* Children whose parents do not meet the criteria for the new offer can be identified across the settings, informed of the offer and supported to transition to meeting the criteria in order that their children become entitled by September 2017
* CCs can assist parents who wish to enter employment in the future through employability support, including English as a second language (ESOL) classes
* The settings that deliver the two year old early education offer can specifically target workless parents whose children access the offer to promote the new entitlement and refer them to CCs or other services who can support a pathway into work
* Specialist services such as those that work with children with SEND and/or their families or teenage parents can offer the same assistance to access employability support; the additional hours may make paid employment possible for the first time for parents of children with SEND
* CCs often have contact with networks of childminders and, therefore, can include them in the delivery of the offer, especially for children for whom a longer day in a group setting may prove challenging
* Private, voluntary and independent (PVI) providers can inform local schools about entitled children who will transition to their nursery classes to facilitate planning.

1. The new entitlement will be 1,140 hours per annum of free early education for three and four year old children whose parents are working i.e. 30 hours over 38 weeks (Term-time Only – TTO) or c23 hours per week if extended over the year. The start date will be the term after the child’s third birthday [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. The current entitlement (the universal offer) is 570 hours per annum of free early education for **all** children commencing the term after their third birthday. [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. Contact a Family et al (2014) Levelling the playing field: Equal access to childcare for disabled children, One year update [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. Working Families (2012) Finding Flexibility: parents of disabled children and paid work: 27% of the parents who responded to the 2012 Working Families Survey reported that they were not in paid employment) [↑](#footnote-ref-4)
5. Contact a Family: Only 16 per cent of mothers with disabled children work, compared to 61 per cent of other mothers. [↑](#footnote-ref-5)
6. The details of the proposals can be found at: https://consult.education.gov.uk/early-years-funding/eynff [↑](#footnote-ref-6)