

# Early Learning and Childcare: Information for Parents



The term 'Early Learning and Childcare' is used in the Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014. This term has been used in place of Pre-School Education in recognition of this. The abbreviation 'ELC' (Early Learning and Childcare) will be used throughout this document. Throughout this guidance, the word 'parent' should be interpreted as including the child's carer or legal guardian.

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# Introduction

Argyll and Bute Early Years would like to welcome you and your child as you take your first steps into Early Learning and Childcare (ELC).

The provision of a good quality Early Learning and Childcare experience builds on the valuable learning that takes place in and around the home before children start Primary School. It develops learning and skills that they will rely on in later life.

This booklet is intended to help you and your child get the most out of the ELC experience by answering the most frequently asked questions we receive. Full details on the Council's policy on early learning and childcare are contained in the Education Management Circular available to view on the Council's website.

## Funded ELC Entitlement

All eligible children are entitled to receive 1140 hours of funded ELC (pro rata), over a minimum of 38 weeks within the school year.

The increase to 1140 hours of ELC is intended to support child development, help close the attainment gap and provide high quality service/support to parents, enabling them to return to work, training or study. The design of the increase of ELC hours is based upon four key principals (*as outlined within A Blueprint for 2020: The Expansion of Early Learning and Childcare in Scotland*)

Quality Flexibility Accessibility Affordability

As a parent you will have a variety of needs that shape your preference for how the funded hours are provided. The Early Years Team works closely with partner provider nurseries and local childminders, to try to ensure funded hours can be accessed in the way that best meets family's varying needs. This means that some settings offer a different pattern of provision that uses less hours a week, but across more weeks of the year.

# ELC Settings

There are a range of ELC settings across Argyll & Bute. As well as local authority managed nurseries, we work in partnership with a number of childminders and providers in the private, voluntary & independent sectors to increase the choice of high quality ELC options available to parents.

- 52 local authority settings based in primary schools, including 5 offering Gaelic provision.
- 4 standalone local authority settings
- 1 local authority outdoor nursery
- 21 partner provider settings, including 3 outdoor nurseries
- 22 partner childminders for eligible 2 year olds
- 17 partner childminders for eligible 3 and 4 year olds

All settings we work in partnership with meet the essential criteria as detailed in *A Blueprint for 2020 Funding Follows the Child and the National Standards for ELC Providers: Principles and Practice*:

<https://www.gov.scot/publications/funding-follows-child-national-standard-early-learning-childcare-providers-principles-practice/pages/2>

A full list of ELC settings can be found at: <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/education-and-learning/early-learning-and-childcare/childcare-providers>

Where possible we have included details of hours and days that each ELC setting offers funded ELC, to allow you to find the best setting to meet your needs.



# Eligibility

If your child's 3rd birthday is between 1<sup>st</sup> March and 11<sup>th</sup> August (so they are 3 by the first in-service day of the new school term), they will be eligible from the start of the August term in 2024.

If they turn 3 between 12<sup>th</sup> August and 28<sup>th</sup> February, they will be eligible to start the Monday after their 3rd birthday.

## ELC Space Application Process

Registration week for ELC takes place online in January. Please visit: <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/education-and-learning/early-learning-and-childcare/registering-your-child-early-learning-and>

Exact dates of registration week will be advertised via:

- Social networking sites
- Posters displayed in, libraries, community education offices, primary and secondary schools, private, voluntary and independent ELC settings

On the application form you will be asked to identify your first choice ELC setting. If you are choosing to access your funded hours across more than one ELC setting, there will be an option to choose a blended placement. Every effort will be made to meet your first preference but this will depend on the number of places available and on the admission priority of your application. If you do not gain a place at your first choice, we will be in contact by the end of March to ask for your second choice.

Please note that late applications (received the Monday after registration week onwards) will receive lower priority should your chosen setting be oversubscribed. If an application is incomplete (required documents aren't provided) this may also be classed as a late application, so:

**Please remember that you will need your child's birth certificate, as well as a proof of address letter (in your name)!**

# Outcome of Application

If you wish to change the ELC setting you applied to after registration week, please note this will be classed as a late application at the new ELC setting (meaning lowest priority if the ELC setting was oversubscribed).

If there are not enough places at your chosen ELC setting a ballot will be held using the new application admission priorities of that setting (see Appendix 2 for local authority setting priorities). If you are unsuccessful in the ballot for your preferred setting, Early Years will ask you for your 2<sup>nd</sup> choice or 3<sup>rd</sup> choice to ensure you are offered an ELC place (see Appendix 3 for ballot procedure).

Your chosen ELC setting will likely get in touch for further application details such as health information, over the course of Term 2.

However, official confirmation of your child's ELC placement will be sent by letter directly by Early Years. This is typically by the end of May, due to a number of processes that follow registration week. We must ensure there is sufficient capacity at the setting you have applied for and that staffing levels are correct as per Care Inspectorate standards.

## Additional Year of ELC

Parents of children still aged 4 at the start of the school year (school commencement date) have the right for them to start primary school the following year instead, when they're 5. These children, with birth dates between the second day of term in August and the end of February, will automatically receive an additional year of funded ELC. For birth dates between March and the first day of term in August, an additional year of ELC will only be granted in cases warranting this at the discretion of Early Years.

For more information on an additional year of ELC, please visit the Useful Documents page on our website. You notify us of this request in your P1 registration week application – you still need to submit this.

If you are unsure about this decision your ELC setting will be able to help. Alternatively if you still have questions please contact Early Years.

# Changing your ELC placement

Continuity is always seen as an important part of high quality ELC, therefore careful consideration should be given when changing your child's ELC placement.

If you are on the waiting list for a local authority ELC setting, you will be contacted throughout the year if a space becomes available. ELC settings begin the space allocation process for the following academic year in December (see Appendix 1), so you may be contacted then if a space will be available from the following August.

Anyone wishing to take up a waiting list space, or make any change to their child's ELC placement must provide 4 weeks' notice to their current ELC setting in writing (e.g. via email). You must first check that the setting you wish to move to can accommodate your child. *Regardless of when you wish this change to take place, the online registration form intended for new applications must not be used.*

4 weeks' notice can only be provided when both ELC settings are open. 4 weeks' notice cannot be given in February or March, due to the registration process of new applications. Notice can resume from 1<sup>st</sup> April or the last day of Term 2, whichever falls soonest. *Please note changes can still occur in February & March where notice was given by 31<sup>st</sup> January.*

A change to an ELC placement includes:

- Change of ELC setting
- Increasing hours
- Decreasing hours
- Changing days
- Beginning or ending a blended placement

Where there are extenuating circumstances requests can be made to Early Years to waive the 4 weeks' notice or to provide 4 weeks' notice during February & March.





# Funded ELC for 2 year olds

## Eligibility

Parents who meet the below criteria can enrol their 2 year old child for an ELC funded space:

### Currently on one of these benefits:

- Income support
- Job seekers allowance (income based)
- Any income related element of employment and support allowance
- Incapacity benefit or severe disablement allowance
- Pension credit
- Universal credit - where household earned income is £726 or less per month
- Child Tax Credit (CTC), but not Working Tax Credit, and your income is less than £18,725
- Maximum Child Tax Credit & maximum Working Tax Credit & income under £8,717
- Support under Part VI of the Immigration and Asylum Act 1999.

### Care experienced

- Parent who has experience of care
- Child with a parent-appointed guardian
- Child who has at any point since turning 2 been looked after by a local authority or subject of a kinship order.

## Start date

2 year old children become eligible for funded ELC dependent on their month of birth as outlined below:

1 <sup>st</sup> March – 31 <sup>st</sup> August	August term*
1 <sup>st</sup> September – 31 <sup>st</sup> December	January term
1 <sup>st</sup> January – 28/29 <sup>th</sup> February	April term

\* Children whose birthday falls after the first day of term in August (including in-service days) will start in the October term following their 2nd birthday.

## Application Process

Applications can only be made when your child has turned 2.

1. Parent contacts Early Years and requests an application form.
2. Parent chooses preferred ELC setting and contacts them to check whether there are available spaces.
3. Parent send application form to chosen ELC setting (remembering to provide birth certificate & proof of address letter).
4. Setting provides evidence to Early Years who will confirm if you are eligible.

If you require support to fill out the forms please contact Early Years, speak to your Health Visitor or Jobcentre Plus.

### Existing 2 year old ELC placements & 3 Year Old ELC registration week

Children currently accessing a 2 year old funded ELC space, who intend to remain at the same ELC setting for their 3 year old funded ELC, should **not** apply during registration week. Your ELC setting will be in touch to confirm your wishes in December.

Children currently accessing a 2 year old funded ELC space, who wish to change ELC settings for their 3 year old funded ELC, should apply during registration week according to advertised timescales.

# Frequently Asked Questions

**Please see below some common FAQs. More in depth FAQs, particularly on the registration process, can be found here: <https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/education-and-learning/early-learning-and-childcare/early-learning-childcare-etc-frequently-asked>**

## What do I need to know if my child accesses a place at a Partner Provider of ELC?

A Partner Provider nursery, playgroup or childminder is commissioned by the local authority to provide Early Learning and Childcare. You may be asked to sign a form at your setting confirming your child's placement to ensure the nursery receives their funding for ELC.

## Can my child access their funded ELC in a different local authority to where I live?

Yes, if you live in Argyll & Bute you can request a Cross Boundary placement with an ELC setting in a different local authority. You should contact them directly, they will then correspond with Argyll & Bute Council to seek approval. You are entitled to this through funding follows the child - this level of flexibility and choice can help meet childcare and family requirements.

Similarly if you are resident outside of Argyll & Bute you can request a Cross Boundary placement at one of our ELC settings by applying online during registration week.

## Do I have to use all the funded hours?

No, the hours are an entitlement, not a requirement, so you can choose to take all or some of the hours available to you.

## What do I do if I have a complaint?

If you have a complaint about your child's ELC talk it over with the Head Teacher or Manager. If the matter is not resolved to your satisfaction then contact the Early Years Team on 01369 708503 and they will discuss the matter with you, advise you on your options and if appropriate, where you should direct your complaint.

## Is my child entitled to a funded lunch/meal?

If your child attends their setting for more than 4 hours over a day, and are in over a meal period, they will be entitled to a funded meal.

### Is transport provided for ELC?

ELC provision has no entitlement to transport, unless in exceptional circumstances. Please read our transport leaflet found on the Useful Documents page on our website.

### Can my child attend more than one Early Learning and Childcare setting (known as a blended placement)?

“The aim is that children experience consistent high quality early learning and childcare. This means consistency of relationships with staff and other children; and consistency of experiences”. Children and Young People (Scotland) Act 2014 Early Learning and Childcare, Statutory Guidance.

However, a range of settings can also be beneficial for children and parents. Argyll and Bute Council will accommodate shared placements across 2 different ELC settings more widely across the week, where this meets the needs of the child and parents.

The local authority has a strong expectation that ELC settings will share information on attendance patterns and anything else that might have an impact on a child's wellbeing, development and learning. This could be through visits, telephone contact, email or any other suitable means of regular communication.

Parents can expect to be kept informed of how ELC settings are sharing progress and working together to ensure continuity in learning and care for their child and, through their own active engagement, will have an important role to play in this.

### What proof of address document can I provide?

To apply for ELC you must have a letter showing you are resident at the address included in your application. This can be a utility bill, council tax/benefits letter or bank statement where this matches exactly the name of the applicant. This must be no more than 3 months old and screenshots of digital letters can be accepted.

# Appendix One: ELC Spaces Allocation

## ELC Spaces Allocation

**This guide details how spaces are allocated within local authority ELC settings. The process of ELC space allocation for the following academic year, begins in December.**

*ELC partner settings may use their own admission policy, please contact them directly for information.*

**1**

Children already accessing funded ELC, staying at the same ELC setting.

*This includes eligible 2 year olds, and those approved for an additional year of funded ELC, where the application was received by 31<sup>st</sup> January.*

**2**

Children already accessing funded ELC (either at the same ELC setting or elsewhere), who as of 1<sup>st</sup> December are on the setting's waiting list for any/or additional sessions (prioritised in order of place on waiting list).

**3**

Equal priority will be given between:

- Children approved for an additional year of ELC at a different ELC setting, where the application was received by 31<sup>st</sup> January.
- Children already accessing 3 year old funded ELC whose parent/carer advises by 31<sup>st</sup> January, that they wish to change settings.
  - *The registration week application form should not be used.*
  - *This does not include those who were on the waiting list as in Priority 2.*
  - *Notice for changes to existing ELC placements (including changing days, changing settings, and increasing hours) will not be accepted during February & March, due to the registration process of new applications, and can resume from April – see priority 5. Requests during this time may be made to Early Years where there are extenuating circumstances. Changes can still take place in February & March where notice was given by 31<sup>st</sup> January.*
  - *This excludes eligible 2 year olds changing setting, who should apply to the new setting during registration week.*

**4**

New applications received from registration week to 31<sup>st</sup> March (or the 2<sup>nd</sup> from last day of term 2 - whichever falls soonest) – categorised as per new application admission priorities.

**5**

Equal priority will be given, in order of the date of the request, between:

- Children already accessing funded ELC who provide notice from 1<sup>st</sup> April onwards (or the last day of Term 2 – whichever falls soonest), to change their ELC placement (including changing days, changing settings, and increasing hours).
- New applications received from 1<sup>st</sup> April onwards (or the last day of Term 2 – whichever falls soonest).

# Appendix Two: New Application Admission Priorities

The below details how new applications for ELC are categorised:

- Priorities 1-4 apply to applications at the first choice ELC setting.
- Priorities 1-5 apply only to complete ELC applications that are received during registration week (*in order to count as complete, applications must include legible birth certificate copy and proof of address letter*).
- Applications received after registration week are late applications, priority 6. These will be offered a space or added to waiting lists only when all on time applications have been placed (whether this be the on time applications 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup> or 3<sup>rd</sup> choice setting). Where there are numerous late applications, these will be placed in order of the date of the request.
- Any significant changes (e.g. setting change) to an on time application received after registration week, will move the application to Priority 6 (late application).

## Priority 1

Equal priority will be given between:

- Children on the child protection register or identified from child protection procedures.
- Referral from social work department where the child is deemed to be in need where:
  - The placement would help the child remain within the family environment rather than be looked after by the local authority.
  - The child is subject of a statutory order.
  - The placement would support the child's return to the family.
- Children where there are:
  - Supporting statements from professionals (voluntary sector or health agency, social work, education establishment or psychology service) relating to concerns about the development of the child, parent or family.
  - *This refers to children who require support as a result of circumstances which are placing the child, parent or family at an education, social or health disadvantage. This includes children who are adversely affected by the disability of any other person in the family, or it may include children with English as an additional language where a high level of support is needed.*

## Priority 2

Applications where there is a child who lives in the same household attending the ELC setting or school.

## Priority 3

Applications with an address in Argyll & Bute, not meeting priority 1 or 2.

## Priority 4

Applications with an address outside Argyll & Bute (cross boundary applications).

*Note: These are subject to different timescales due to approval being required from resident Local Authority, which typically takes place in June.*

## Priority 5

Applications to an ELC setting where this is their 2<sup>nd</sup> choice, due to 1<sup>st</sup> choice setting being oversubscribed/applicant unsuccessful at ballot.

## Priority 6

Late applications: all applications received from the Monday after registration week to 31st March, or the last day of term 2 - whichever falls soonest. (*Applications received after this date fall into Space Allocation 5*).

## Appendix Three: Ballot Procedure

**In February ELC settings collate new applications received during the registration period. Where there are more requests than places available, and therefore they are oversubscribed for the following August, the below ballot procedure is initiated at local authority settings:**

1. All applications are categorised as per New Application Admission Priorities (See Appendix 2).
2. Ballot date and witnessing procedure is agreed (*Early Years will witness all ballots for an ELC space, 2<sup>nd</sup> ELC setting staff member will witness ballots that are only for a waiting list place*).
3. Space allocation begins, starting with Priority 1, to establish which applicants will be in the ballot.
4. Applicants affected are advised that ELC setting does have enough space for all applications and their application will be included in a ballot.
5. Ballot takes place following witnessing procedure agreed:
  - a. ELC setting works their way through each category of applications (in priority order), picking names to establish the order of applications within each priority category. When ELC spaces run out this continues until the end of Priority 5 applicants, to establish the waiting list order.
6. When all on time applications are allocated either an ELC space or waiting list place, Priority 6 (late applications) are allocated in the order that applications were received (earliest first).
7. ELC setting advises parents of outcome of the ballot, including where they are on the waiting list where applicable.
8. Early Years confirms next choice of setting with applicants, if this ELC setting is also full this process repeats until applicant is offered an ELC space.

# Contact Information

Argyll and Bute Council, Education Service, Early Years

Argyll House, Alexandra Parade, Dunoon, PA23 8AJ

*(For mail only, please note this is not a Customer Service Point)*

Early Years Helpline:

01369 708503 Monday to Friday 9am - 5pm

[earlyyears@argyll-bute.gov.uk](mailto:earlyyears@argyll-bute.gov.uk)

<https://www.argyll-bute.gov.uk/education-and-learning/early-learning-and-childcare>



*This information leaflet can be supplied in other languages and formats. Please contact the Early Years helpline.*