

AfC Early Education Funding Charging Policy

AfC will provide regular training sessions on compliance with statutory guidance including charging policies. It is recommended that providers attend this training before establishing their funding policy and model. Dates for training will be published on the AfC early years website and newsletters

Government funding is intended to cover the cost to deliver 15 or 30 hours a week of free, high quality, flexible childcare. It is not intended to cover the cost of meals, consumables, additional hours or additional services.

The provider can charge for meals and snacks as part of a free entitlement place and they can also charge for consumables such as nappies or sun cream and for services such as trips and musical tuition. Parents should therefore expect to pay for these, although these charges must be voluntary for the parent. Where parents are unable or unwilling to pay for meals and consumables, providers who choose to offer the free entitlements are responsible for setting their own policy on how to respond, with options including waiving or reducing the cost of meals and snacks or allowing parents to supply their own meals. Providers should be particularly mindful of the impact of additional charges on the most disadvantaged parents.

The provider should deliver the free entitlements consistently so that all children accessing any of the free entitlements will receive the same quality and access to provision, regardless of whether they opt to pay for optional hours, services, meals or consumables.

AfC will not intervene where parents choose to purchase additional hours of provision or additional services, providing that this does not affect the parent's ability to take up their child's free place. The provider should be completely transparent about any additional charges.

The provider should publish their admissions criteria and ensure parents understand which hours/sessions can be taken as free provision. Not all providers will be able to offer fully flexible places, but providers should work with parents to ensure that as far as possible the pattern of hours are convenient for parents' working hours.

The provider can charge parents a deposit to secure their child's free place but should refund the deposit in full to parents within a reasonable time scale.

The provider cannot charge parents "top-up" fees (any difference between a provider's normal charge to parents and the funding they receive from the local authority to deliver free places) or require parents to pay a registration fee as a condition of taking up their child's free place.

The provider should ensure their invoices and receipts are clear, transparent and itemised, allowing parents to see that they have received their free entitlement completely free of charge and understand fees paid for additional hours. The provider will also ensure that receipts contain their full details so that they can be identified as coming from a specific provider.

Any queries on charging should be emailed to the early years team
early.years@achievingforchildren.org.uk