

# England: Concern over further 30-hours confusion in Government<sup>[1]</sup>

The early years sector has raised alarm over apparent further Government confusion on the 30 hours policy.

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## AVAILABILITY

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## EXCERPTS

In a letter sent to Suffolk providers by Dr Therese Coffey, MP for Suffolk coastal, following a meeting with the children and families minister Robert Goodwill and Department for Education officials about the 30 hours, she states that, 'funding of the policy is largely based on the premise that the 30 hours' equivalent is split into 15 hours of educational provision and 15 hours of general childcare without a specific educational focus'.

However, this is at odds with the model agreement and the Department for Education's own guidance, which states there is no difference between the first and second 15 hours.

In a response from the DfE to a query from a Suffolk childcare provider seeking clarification on the matter, which was posted on the Champagne Nurseries, Lemonade Funding (CNLF) Facebook page, Teresa Culmer from the DfE says, 'Providers delivering both the first and second 15 hours are required to follow the EYFS. Ofsted will not differentiate their inspections between the first and second 15 hours, and we expect local authorities to fund providers at the same rate for both the first and second 15 hours.'

In light of the confusion, the Pre-school Learning Alliance has written a letter to Ms Coffey, who previously held responsibility for rural childcare, to voice its concern, with Alliance chief executive Neil Leitch calling on the MP to seek clarity on the issue as a matter of priority.

In a further comment, Mr Leitch said, 'It beggars belief that at this stage of the policy process, there's still confusion over what the 30 hours actually is. While the policy may have been developed with the aim of encouraging parents to get back to work, both the DfE and Ofsted have been very clear that there should be no difference in the way that the universal 15 hours and the extended 15 hours are delivered in practice.

'For a minister – especially one with a former childcare brief – to make such an assertion, therefore, is incredibly concerning. Is the suggestion that after a child has used up their first 15 hours, all learning stops? That providers down tools and simply babysit them until their parents arrive?

'If, as stated in the letter, the 30 hours scheme has been funded on the basis of providers delivering a two-tier service, then this policy is even more flawed than we've feared. We urge the Department for Education to provide clarity on this issue as a matter of urgency, and to ensure that all providers delivering the extended scheme are being funded to deliver 30 full hours of quality education and care across the board, and nothing less.'

It follows criticism of the children and families minister Robert Goodwill by nursery owners earlier in the month who claimed that comments he made to providers after a meeting in Westminster showed a 'lack of knowledge and understanding' of 30-hours funding.

A DfE spokesperson said, 'The department has been clear in correspondence and in guidance for providers that all funded provision must meet the requirements of the Early Years Foundation Stage Framework - whether this is through the universal 15 hour offer or extended 30 hour entitlements.

'We are investing a record £6bn in childcare, including the increased rates paid to councils under our funding formula to deliver 30 hours – which is already being successfully delivered to thousands of parents around the country.'

-reprinted from Nursery World

**Region:** Europe<sup>[3]</sup>

**Tags:** social policy<sup>[4]</sup>

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<https://www.nurseryworld.co.uk/news/article/concern-over-further-30-hours-confusion-in-government> [3]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/region/europe> [4] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/social-policy> [5]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/entitlement> [6] <https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/legislation-and-regulation> [7]

<https://childcarecanada.org/category/tags/funding>