

Early Years Government Funding

Artificial Break guidance

The local authority is responsible for encouraging all childcare providers to deliver flexible packages of funded hours within the parameters set out in the statutory guidance [Early education and childcare \(applies from 1 April 2024\) - GOV.UK \(www.gov.uk\)](#) and p33 of the Operational Guidance, link here [Early years entitlements: operational guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)

Where it is reasonably practicable children should be able to take up their funded hours in continuous blocks and providers should avoid artificial breaks being created throughout the day, for example, over the lunch period. Providers should allow a parent to choose an alternative to the paid for meal such as bring their own food, so that they can take up their funded entitlement without having to purchase any additional services.

Providers should publish their admissions criteria and ensure that providers work with parents so that 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.

Where parents choose to purchase additional hours of provision, consumables, or additional activities, this is a private matter between the provider and the parent. However, providers must offer alternative options for parents. This could include, for example, allowing a parent to bring in their own consumables or a packed lunch, where the meal offered is not suitable for children with specific dietary needs or the parent prefers a lower cost option. Providers should be mindful of the impact of additional charges on the most disadvantaged parents. Providers may wish to offer additional hours around the free provision hours.

The local authority 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.

If the local authority is contacted by a parent, or this is found during an audit, the provider must prove that they have considered and have good reasons why they have been unable to offer parents an alternative option to an artificial break and have had regard to the statutory guidance. Further details on delivery models can be found here [Early years entitlements: operational guidance \(publishing.service.gov.uk\)](#)