

# Childcare

Coming to university is a time of change no matter what your circumstances. This is particularly true of students who are also parents. This guide is designed to help you plan your childcare and think through what you need to organise. Every parent's situation is different – and of course every student is different. Some will have timetables that change on a regular basis, some will have course related placements and others will have a fairly static schedule. This guide contains information on the different types of childcare that are available, particularly if you are not familiar with childcare in the U.K., as well as the questions you will need to ask yourself about how the arrangements may or may not fit in around your studies.

## **Childminders**

A registered childminder is someone who can look after your child from their own home. To gain registration the childminder's home is inspected by the government to ensure that it is a safe environment for children. In addition childminders have to provide references, prove that they are healthy, trained and are checked by the police. Subsequent government inspections are held on a regular basis.

Childminders can look after children of any age although the regulations on registration only apply when they are looking after children under the age of eight. The government also stipulates that childminders can look after up to six children under the age of eight. Of those six, no more than three of those can be under the age of five and of those no more than one should be under the age of one therefore it is essential that you ask who else a childminder is looking after, how often and what their ages are.

## **Advantages for student parents**

- Childminders are registered, as are their homes, and are fully trained.
- You can often find one near to where you live and will probably find that they are able to be a lot more flexible than a day nursery.
- Your child will be in a small home environment normally with other children.
- Childminders can often help with after school care or school pick up and drop off's for older siblings meaning that you can keep your children together.
- Your child will be looked after by the same person.

## **Disadvantages for student parents**

- If the childminder is also a parent or has other caring responsibilities they may want to organise their routine accordingly rather than to your specific needs.
- Your child may not be comfortable with older children.
- They will be unlikely to look after your child if the child is unwell.

## **How much will it cost?**

It will be up to you to negotiate a contract with your childminder. This will have to include working hours, arrangements for pick up and drop off of your child, holidays and overtime.

In London you can expect to pay around £6 per hour, but prices do vary. Do remember that childminders are self employed and as such can set their own fees.

### **How do I choose a childminder?**

You will obviously want to know about his/her qualifications, registration and home environment. You may also want to ask questions about their flexibility in terms of your timetable – especially if it is likely to change during the year due to placements.

If you are on a clinical or teaching placement during the year that requires you to need childcare earlier than 8am, for parts of the year, ask if the childminder can accommodate this.

Personal chemistry with a childminder is also important. He/she will, after all, be looking after your child for a good deal of their day. Ask them how they will deal with discipline issues, how they will encourage your child to settle with them, who else will be in the house and under what circumstances would they try to get into contact with your whilst you were at university or working in the library.

For information on what to expect from a Childminder you can visit the website of the National Childminding Association. For information on day nurseries near to where you live as well as the university visit Direct Gov's Childcare Finder (see end).

### **Day Care Provision**

A day nursery can look after children, up to the age of five, for all or part of a day and is usually open from 8am through to 7pm. Children are normally grouped with others of a similar age and are cared for by qualified staff, some of whom have to have a teaching qualification. All day nurseries have to be registered with the government and are subject to regular quality inspections. Day nurseries follow the government's 'Early Years Curriculum' which helps to prepare children for School.

#### **Advantages for student parents**

- If you know your timetable, day nurseries can sometimes offer a part time place that is flexible enough to fit with your academic work.
- You will have the reassurance that the day nursery is approved and regularly inspected against a prescribed set of criteria.
- Your child will be looked after by experienced and qualified staff.
- Your child will be with others their own age in a safe, educational and fun setting.

#### **Disadvantages for student parents**

- There are sometimes long waiting lists for nurseries so students often have to make temporary childcare arrangements until a suitable place becomes available.
- Day nurseries can be expensive and will not be able to look after your child if they are unwell.
- Nurseries may not be able to offer you a flexible contract if your timetable changes or you have to take up a placement as part of your course.
- Most day nurseries only offer 50 week contracts which for undergraduate students is often too long. If you are considering taking your child out of a day nursery for the summer vacation check first to find out if your child's place will be held for the following September.

#### **How much will it cost?**

In London you can expect to pay from £100 to £200 per week on childcare provided by a day nursery. You may also be required to provide food and snacks.

#### **How do I choose day care provision?**

Over and above the normal questions you will want to ask about the provision and quality of the actual nursery you will also need to ask:

- Do you want to have your child looked after near to where you live or near to where you study?
- Can the nursery offer you a 39 week contract if you are an undergraduate?
- Will your timetable change during the year and can this be accommodated by the nursery?
- For information on day nurseries near to where you live as well as the university visit Direct Gov's Childcare Finder (see end).

## **Nursery Schools**

If your child is between the ages of 3-5 then you may want to consider sending them either to a nursery class, normally attached to a primary school or a nursery school. The latter is a self contained school with its own head teacher and staff.

Both nursery schools and nursery classes can be run by the government or be independent (private). Both have to be approved and inspected by the government and would almost certainly follow the government 'Early Years Curriculum'.

The ratio of staff to children is much greater in this setting which may or may not suit your child. The guidelines allow for between 20 – 26 children to be looked after by 2 adults one of who has to be a qualified teacher, the other a trained nursery nurse or classroom assistant.

### **Advantages of Day Nurseries for student parents**

- Your child would be looked after in a safe and regulated environment.
- Your child would be in an educational setting with their peers.
- Children in state nursery classes will normally be able to then join the reception class of the School they are already in meaning less change for them.

### **Disadvantages of Day Nurseries for student parents**

- Many nursery places are only for half a day meaning that you will have to arrange other forms of childcare to manage your needs.
- Nursery classes normally only run on the school academic year which will be different to that of the university.
- You often have to live within a certain catchment area and there is sometimes a waiting list.
- There may be fees to pay although some children may be entitled to a free early years place.

### **How much will it cost?**

Pre School nursery places are normally free unless the provision is a community pre school – in which case the cost can be around £3.50 per session.

If you are choosing an independent pre school place you can expect to pay up to £1000 per term in London although you may be eligible for a free part time place. For a list of your local nurseries visit Direct Gov's Childcare Finder (see end).

### **How do I choose a Nursery?**

You will want to check that the facility is registered and if they are following the governments 'Early Years Curriculum'. It would not be unreasonable to ask to visit the school or facility and meet the staff.

It would also be important for you to be clear on the nursery timetable and how this will fit in with your university timetable. If you are arranging other childcare, such as a childminder or a relative, to collect your child from the nursery you will have to give written permission.

## **Before and After School Care**

Although your child may be old enough to be in school it is likely that you may still need some additional childcare for times when your academic timetable will not run parallel to that of your child's.

### **Childminders**

Some childminders will be able to provide before and after school care for your child or children. This usually means that you would be able to drop your child off before school. The childminder would take your child to school and pick them up at the end of the day. This can be a very flexible and useful arrangement for students – particularly if you have placements you need to travel to early in the morning or your timetable can be variable. You would have to negotiate terms and conditions as well as cost with your childminder for this extended service.

## **Breakfast and After School Clubs**

Many schools now have Breakfast or After School Clubs for children whose parents work or study. There is a charge for these facilities but the advantage is that, normally, children are in the same location all day. After School clubs can include homework clubs or additional craft, sport or music lessons.

Breakfast clubs cost on average £1 per day and After School clubs cost on average £3 – 5 per day depending on the activities your child chooses to do.

## **Holiday Schemes**

Although the King's timetable runs on a standard academic year, not all courses have a reading week or 'half term' therefore do not assume that you will be free to look after your child or children during their half term. Even if your course does have a reading week it may not coincide exactly with your child's term dates and you may be required to attend university for tutorials.

Holiday Schemes are run by local authorities who employ qualified and vetted staff and can be booked on a daily or weekly basis and vary in cost. Details on schemes can be found via your local education authority. 4Children also provides information on holiday schemes for children (see end).

## **FAQs**

### **1. How will I pay for my childcare?**

The Childcare Grant is available to full-time home students and EU migrant workers, in low- income households. To qualify, you must have a dependent child or children in registered or approved childcare. If you qualify, you can receive up to 85 per cent of your actual childcare costs. You do not have to repay this help. How much you get will depend on:

- your level of income and the income of your household
- how many children you have in childcare
- your actual childcare costs

The childcare grant is paid as part of your student funding package and covers all forms of childcare including school clubs provided it is registered and approved. Please note, to qualify your partner must not already be receiving the childcare element of Working Tax credit.

All other students are required to pay for their childcare through their own income or student funding/ scholarship. In some circumstances you may be eligible for benefits and if you suffer financial hardship the university may be able to provide some limited assistance. Speak to the Advice & Guidance Team as soon as possible if you are struggling to pay your childcare or you have identified a future problem.

### **2. Is there any childcare provision on campus?**

No, there is no childcare on any of the main university sites. There is limited provision for some staff and students in an NHS trust Nursery at the Denmark Hill Campus and Guys Campus.

### **3. My childcare plans have fallen through - what do I do?**

Please use our useful links to find alternative childcare provision. If you are unable to attend university it is essential that you contact your school as soon as possible to let them know and that new childcare arrangements are made as soon as possible.

### **4. Where can I get help and advice on funding my childcare?**

The Advice & Guidance Team are based on the three main campuses and they are available by phone, e-mail and in person to advise student parents. This includes advice on funding your childcare. They can also advise prospective students.

### **5. Can I bring my child to university?**

Children should not be brought routinely to university. If however you need to briefly pop into university then yes – you can bring your child with you. However, they must be supervised by you at all times and not left on their own in the library, food outlets or anywhere else on campus.

## 6. Can I bring my dependent children to the UK?

If you are studying a course at any level which lasts for more than 6 months you can choose to bring your dependants (spouse/children) to the UK with you. If your course lasts less than 6 months there is no provision to bring your dependants with you – but they can visit for short periods as a tourist.

If you are applying for a dependant's visa read the regulations carefully and consult UKCISA or the Advice & Guidance Team for advice.

<https://www.ukcisa.org.uk/Information--Advice/Visas-and-Immigration/Dependants>

### Further information

If you require further information, advice or guidance please consult further information on our website or contact us.

Telephone: 020 7848 1234  
Email: [advice@kcl.ac.uk](mailto:advice@kcl.ac.uk)  
Web: [kcl.ac.uk/advice](http://kcl.ac.uk/advice)

### Weblinks

#### Student Services

Student letters and appointments for face-to-face advice and guidance.

[www.kcl.ac.uk/advice](http://www.kcl.ac.uk/advice)

#### Childcare Finder

Search engine to find local family services.

<https://www.gov.uk/get-childcare>

#### Family and Childcare Trust

An organisation dedicated to ensuring high standards in childcare provision.

<https://www.familyandchildcaretrust.org>

#### Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years

An organisation promoting good standards in childminding.

<https://www.pacey.org.uk>

#### Action for Children

Work with various stake holders to ensure joined up support for children and young people.

<https://www.actionforchildren.org.uk/support-for-parents/>

#### BBC Parenting

A comprehensive website covering many aspects of parenting including juggling parenting with other commitments.

<http://www.bbc.co.uk/parenting/>

#### Direct Gov Parents

A government site that provides information to parents. This site has particularly useful information on schooling.

<https://www.gov.uk/browse/childcare-parenting>

#### Parent Line Plus

A national charity set up to support parents of children of all ages.

<http://www.parentlineplus.org.uk/default.aspx>