

[News story: UK families will soon see bills cut as date announced for the launch of Tax-Free Childcare](#)

Millions of parents can pre-register from today for the government's new childcare offers, with the launch of a new Childcare Choices government [website](#).

The introduction of the government's Tax-Free Childcare scheme will begin on 28 April, for parents of the youngest children. It will be gradually rolled out over 2017 – cutting childcare costs for working families across the UK by up to £2,000 per child per year, or £4,000 for disabled children.

On top of this, from September this year parents of three and four year old children living in England will be able to apply for a new 30 hours free childcare offer, worth around £5,000 per child.

The Childcare Choices website includes a [Childcare Calculator](#) for parents to compare all the government's childcare offers and check what works best for their families.

Through the site parents can also pre-register for email alerts that will notify them when they can apply, as well as providing details of existing government childcare offers.

Chief Secretary to the Treasury, David Gauke, said:

This Government is on the side of working families and our childcare support will cut thousands of pounds off bills for millions of households, as well as supporting parents to return to or remain in work.

The new Childcare Choices website provides busy families with options that suit their needs, so they can clearly see which childcare offer works best for them. For the first time, we have brought all the childcare options together to make the process easier and simpler for families and childcare providers.

Education Secretary, Justine Greening, said:

Affordable childcare and early years education are a vital part of how we can get our children on the right path, whilst also helping parents to be back at work, if that is what they want. Many parents are struggling to balance the cost of childcare against the benefits of being in work and this government wants to help.

From today, parents can use the Childcare Choices website to find out what support is available for their family. Whether that's our 30 hour free childcare offer, Tax-Free Childcare or Universal Credit, the website is a quick and easy way for parents to choose the offer that's best for them and their children.

Two million working families will be eligible for Tax-Free Childcare. It will be gradually rolled out, with parents of children under two invited to enter the scheme first. By the end of the year, all eligible parents will be able to receive government top-ups of £2 for every £8 that a parent pays into their Tax-Free Childcare account. This will be open to all working parents across the UK with children under 12, or under 17 if disabled.

The new 30 hours free childcare offer for working parents of three and four year olds in England doubles the current 15 hours of free childcare currently available, saving eligible working families up to £5,000 a year.

Parents will be able to apply for Tax-Free Childcare and the 30 hours offer in one go through the government's new digital childcare service. Eligible parents can benefit from both Tax-free Childcare and 30 hours free childcare at the same time.

Both of these new offers have been run as trials over recent months, to test the new digital services.

More than 4,000 parents are already benefiting from the 30 hours offer in eight 'early implementer' councils, with thousands more set to follow suit, as four new areas launch the 30 hours offer in April. And over 2,000 parents are cutting their childcare costs with the Tax-Free Childcare trial.

These offers build on the childcare support already available to thousands of families, including:

- 15 hours free childcare for all three and four year olds
- 15 hours for disadvantaged two year olds
- enhanced childcare support through Universal Credit
- childcare vouchers.

How Tax-Free Childcare works

Working parents will be able to apply, through the childcare service, to open an online childcare account. For every £8 that families or friends pay in, the Government will make a top-up payment of an additional £2, up to a maximum of £2,000 per child per year (or £4,000 for disabled children). This top up is added instantly and parents can then send electronic payments directly to their childcare providers.

All registered childcare providers – whether nannies, nurseries or after school clubs – can sign up online now to receive parents' payments through Tax-Free Childcare. Once childcare providers have signed up they will appear on the [Childcare Provider Checker](#). This allows parents to check whether childcare providers have already signed up for Tax-Free Childcare.

How 30 hours free childcare works

Eligible parents will be able to apply online through the childcare service. They will receive a code – this will allow parents to arrange their childcare place ahead of September 2017. Parents can take their code to their provider or council, along with their National Insurance Number and child's date of birth. Their provider or council will check the code is authentic and allocate them a free childcare place.

[News story: System launched to help tackle harms from new psychoactive substances](#)

Last year, according to the 2015 to 2016 Crime Survey for England and Wales, one in 40 (2.5%) young adults aged 16 to 24 took a new psychoactive substance and there is evidence of widespread use among vulnerable adults such as prisoners and homeless people. Whilst specialist services are responding, these harms are often poorly understood in frontline healthcare services and there is little guidance available to them.

Public Health England (PHE) in collaboration with the Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA) is piloting a national system to help better monitor the negative effects of NPS and share best treatment practice across a variety of settings, including A&E, sexual health clinics, mental health services, prison health services, drug treatment services and GP surgeries.

The UK-wide, easy to use Report Illicit Drug Reaction (RIDR) system will be accessible to all front line health staff. Information about the drug and its effects will be recorded anonymously using an online portal. Data from the tool will be analysed by experts to identify patterns of symptoms and harms. This will be used to inform treatment guidance and help staff deal more quickly with unknown substances, and improve patient safety.

Rosanna O'Connor, Director of Alcohol, Drugs and Tobacco at PHE, said:

The contents of NPS frequently change and their effects can be dangerous and unpredictable. These substances can cause serious problems to both mental and physical health.

Last year's ban has helped reduce their easy availability, but we are still seeing the most vulnerable groups, particularly, the homeless, prisoners and some young people, suffering the greatest harm from these substances.

The new RIDR system will help health staff better deal with the emerging challenges we are seeing. We want to encourage all frontline staff in settings such as A&E, sexual health clinics, prisons, drug and mental health services, to use the system, which over time will greatly increase our knowledge of these new substances and ultimately improve patient care.

Dr Sarah Elise Finlay, Emergency Medicine Consultant, Imperial College Healthcare NHS Trust, said:

The information and advice provided by this new system will ultimately ease some of the burden and stress of managing those tricky overdose and poisoning cases in the early hours over the weekend in emergency settings.

Emergency services are facing significant pressure, which is why we've made the RIDR system as easy as possible for health staff. It's great to know that, in future, help will be at hand for health staff dealing with the harms of these often unknown new drugs.

More information, including on how to register, is available on the [RIDR website](#).

[News story: Almost half of UK financial services staff now covered by ground breaking Women in Finance Charter](#)

33,000 extra staff in the UK now covered by the plan to tackle gender inequality in financial services.

The news comes on the first anniversary of the charter, with 122 firms, employing over half a million people in the UK and covering almost 50% of the financial services sector, now signed up.

The [Women in Finance Charter](#), launched a year ago today, asks financial firms to commit to four industry actions to build the female talent pipeline for leadership positions. The Charter's innovative approach has been an unprecedented success with some of the UK's biggest and most well established firms signing up.

The latest signatories include retail banks such as CYBG, payment firms such

as VocaLink, global banks such as the Royal Bank of Canada, insurers like Ageas UK, and other firms including Pinsent Masons LLP and NS&I, while Bank of America Merrill Lynch is the latest firm with headquarters in the US to sign up.

Since the Charter launched, 77 financial services firms have committed to have at least 30% women in senior roles by 2021 and 23 firms have committed to a 50/50 gender split in senior roles by 2021. New signatories will announce their targets in June.

The Commercial Secretary, Baroness Neville-Rolfe, said:

I know how difficult it can be for a woman to get the recognition she deserves and achieve her potential. And in financial services particularly, women progress too slowly or they leave the sector completely.

We have made a strong start – the first anniversary of the [Women in Finance Charter](#) sees 122 firms seizing the competitive advantage by tackling sex inequality head on.

But this is just the beginning. The financial industry is famed for its ability to identify opportunities to improve productivity. The [Women in Finance Charter](#) is one of those opportunities. It offers the chance to increase diversity of thought and for the financial services sector to better reflect the society it serves. This is why I encourage firms across the UK to step up and sign the Charter.

Jayne-Anne Gadhia, CEO of Virgin Money and the government's Women in Finance Champion, said:

I am delighted with the strong and ongoing momentum of the Women in Finance Charter. A truly diverse financial services sector will drive productivity and underpin the UK's position as a strong and competitive economy. There is still further to go and I urge more businesses to commit to the charter so that they can play their part in building an economy that works for everyone.

Bank of America Merrill Lynch is the latest firm with headquarters in the US to sign up, joining the likes of Morgan Stanley, BNY Mellon, BlackRock, Circle and Thomson Reuters. This proves that there are no barriers for international firms to show their commitment to gender parity by signing the Charter.

Alex Wilmot-Sitwell, President, EMEA at Bank of America Merrill Lynch, said:

Bank of America Merrill Lynch has a long history of supporting

women's leadership and economic empowerment, but there is clearly more to be done.

Increasing the number of senior women and addressing gender balance is crucial for our long-term success. This means supporting and engaging women at all levels, to ensure a strong pipeline of talent.

We are wholly supportive of the Women in Finance Charter and the positive impact it will have on our industry.

FinTechs have also responded to the government's call to action with nine signing up including Nutmeg, RateSetter, Starling, Monzo, Zerado, Azimo, and FINTECH Circle.

The [Gadhia review](#) looked at the issue of unequal gender representation in financial services and found that in UK financial services female representation was around 23% on boards, but only 14% on executive committees. It is estimated that equalising the role of men and women in the labour market could increase GDP by 10% by 2030.

On 29th June, HM Treasury, in partnership with [GrowthBusiness.co.uk](#), What Investment magazine and Virgin Money, will launch the inaugural [Women in Finance Awards](#) at The Savoy in London.

These awards will celebrate the individuals and organisations who are leading change by driving the gender diversity agenda in financial services.

[News story: Additional hand luggage restrictions on some flights to the UK](#)

On Tuesday 21 March the government announced [new aviation security measures](#) on all inbound direct flights to the UK from the following countries:

- Turkey
- Lebanon
- Jordan
- Egypt
- Tunisia
- Saudi Arabia

Under the new arrangements, passengers boarding flights from these countries to the UK will not be allowed to take phones, laptops and tablets which are larger than:

- length: 16.0cm

- width: 9.3cm
- depth: 1.5cm

into the cabin of the plane. Passengers with these devices should check with their airlines for more details on transporting these items.

The additional security measures may cause some disruption for passengers and flights, and we understand the frustration that will cause, but our top priority will always be to maintain the safety of British nationals.

Direct flights to the UK from these destinations can continue to operate to the UK subject to these new measures being in place. Travellers are advised to keep up-to-date with the latest [FCO travel advice](#) and to check online with their chosen carrier for further information.

Which devices are not allowed in the cabin?

- large phones
- all laptops
- all tablets and e-readers

Which flights and routes will this apply to?

These new measures will apply on all inbound direct flights travelling to the UK from the following countries:

- Turkey
- Lebanon
- Jordan
- Egypt
- Tunisia
- Saudi Arabia

Passengers travelling on these flights should check online with their carrier if they require further information.

Should I cancel my trip? Is it still safe to go to these countries?

These new measures are concerned with flights into the UK. The UK is not stopping direct flights to and from those countries. Those with imminent travel should contact their airline for further information. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office also publishes [travel advice](#).

What's a 'normal sized mobile phone'?

Most smart phones will be allowed in the cabin, including many common popular handsets such as:

- iPhone 7 Plus
- Samsung Galaxy 7 Edge
- Samsung Galaxy Note 3
- LG G3
- Sony Xperia Z2

The new UK measures will mean that phones, laptops and tablets larger than:

- length: 16.0cm
- width: 9.3cm
- depth: 1.5cm

will not be allowed in the cabin.

Can I take items purchased from duty free on board?

Any phones, laptops or tablets larger than the above dimensions will not be allowed in the cabin, regardless of whether they were purchased in duty free.

Why are these measures not in place for flights travelling from the UK?

This applies to inbound flights. The UK has some of the most robust aviation security measures in the world but we keep this under constant review based on assessment of risk.

More about [hand luggage restrictions on electronic devices and items at UK airports](#).

What about any costs incurred as a result of this? And what if I want to cancel my flight can I get compensation?

This is matter for the airlines. We encourage them to take a customer focused approach.

How long will these measures be in place?

The UK has some of the most robust aviation security measures in the world and we will continue to take all the steps we believe are necessary to put in place security measures we believe will be effective and proportionate. We keep our aviation security measures under constant review.

Is this in response to a specific threat?

It is long standing government policy not to comment on intelligence matters.

Why isn't the UK following the US and banning all personal electronic devices from the cabin, why only phones, laptops and tablets?

We are confident these measures are proportionate and effective.

What happens to passengers travelling from countries unaffected by the measures who are transferring to an affected flight?

Transfer passengers who board a flight on a route affected will be subject to the measures.

[Press release: Ruthless fly-tipper jailed](#)

A fly-tipper who left a trail of waste across the Devon countryside was finally brought to justice today when he was sentenced to 20 months in prison.

Martin McDonagh, 23, failed to turn up at Plymouth Crown Court and was made the subject of a European Arrest Warrant following the sentencing hearing. Judge Ian Lawrie described him as a 'persistent offender who showed a ruthless determination to dump waste wherever it suited.'

McDonagh, who is believed to have fled to the Republic of Ireland, was also ordered to pay a total of £7,000 costs for illegally depositing commercial and household waste at numerous sites in South and West Devon. The court also issued a Criminal Behaviour Order that prohibits McDonagh from being involved in any business enterprise involving the collection, carrying or transport of waste.

The van used during his crime spree was seized and destroyed by the Environment Agency. It is the first time, in the South West, that the agency has ordered the destruction of a vehicle used to commit waste crimes.

The defendant was caught following a joint investigation led by the Environment Agency, with support from Teignbridge District Council, Plymouth City Council, West Devon District Council, South Hams District Council and Devon and Cornwall Police.

Adrian Evans, senior environment crime officer for the Devon and Cornwall area, said:

This case serves as a reminder for people to be vigilant when transferring waste for disposal. Any person who collects and disposes of commercial or household waste must be a registered waste carrier, authorised by the Environment Agency.

Everyone has a duty of care to ensure their waste is disposed of safely and doesn't harm the environment. You should ask to see an operator's waste carrier licence and whether your waste is being taken to an authorised site. Do not let your waste be removed if you are in any doubt. These simple steps can stop rogue fly-tippers in their tracks.

The illegal disposal of waste in the countryside and local beauty spots causes annoyance and upset to local people and visitors. The serial fly-tipper in this case was caught as a result of agencies working closely together, sharing intelligence and resources to protect our environment.

McDonagh cold-called people across Devon offering to take waste away for cash. He told them the waste would be taken to a local tip, but instead he dumped it in the surrounding countryside, including local beauty spots.

Several witnesses said they felt pressured into giving him their waste. One woman, who was at home with a sick child, described the defendant as 'extremely pushy' and said she felt 'increasingly uneasy'. She only agreed to pay for him to take her waste to 'get rid of him'.

Another householder, in Exeter, became suspicious and told McDonagh she didn't want him to fly-tip her waste. McDonagh laughed and replied, 'of course not.'

Sometimes the defendant would ask for more cash after he'd loaded waste onto his van. One woman paid him £75. He returned after she had done some more clearing and tidying of her property and asked for £125 to take the rest of the waste claiming he was 'out of pocket' for the first lot he'd taken to the tip.

Victims of his scam were traced using documents and paperwork found in the fly-tipped waste. Most said they'd been approached by a man driving a 'tatty' blue van.

Up to 40 bags of mixed household waste were deposited at a time at numerous locations. Teignbridge sites included a car park on Little Haldon, a council gravel store off Greenway Lane in Ashcombe, a compound at Teignmouth Golf Club, a bus stop on the A381 near Ware Farm, an unclassified road near Shaldon and beside a road junction in Newton Abbot.

McDonagh also dumped waste at Cold Harbour Cross in the South Hams, a car park on the A386 near Clearbrook and at Calisham Cross in West Devon. The offences were committed over a 12-month period from July 2015.

The defendant was paid between £50 and £400 to remove waste – always in cash.

He also offered other services including roofing, decking and power washing.

In August 2015, McDonagh was seen transferring concrete rubble from his Ford Transit van to a similar van parked nearby in Lower Brimley Road, Teignmouth. Teignbridge District Council decided to remove the second vehicle after it was found to have been abandoned.

However, a contractor hired to remove the van was unable to take the vehicle away after he saw what he believed to be asbestos in the back, along with other waste. Police closed Lower Brimley Road for a day while specialist contractors decontaminated the abandoned van. Subsequent analysis of the waste confirmed the presence of asbestos. The vehicle was later destroyed.

Councillor Roger Croad, Devon County Council's Cabinet Member for the Environment, said:

The high level of co-operation between the different agencies and councils involved in this investigation was critical in bringing this offender to justice. The Devon and Somerset Trading Standards Service will continue to do all it can to protect residents and legitimate local businesses from such illegal trading activities.

Councillor Sylvia Russell, Executive Member for Health and Wellbeing at Teignbridge District Council, said:

This is a great outcome for taxpayers and involved a tremendous amount of effort by investigating officers. Tackling the scourge of fly-tipping is a top priority for Teignbridge Council, which works hard to protect the environment. Dealing with fly-tipping is costly, time consuming, frustrating for law-abiding citizens and wholly avoidable. We will continue to work with the Environment Agency and our partners to find out who is responsible so we can prosecute.

Councillor Rufus Gilbert, South Hams District Council's Portfolio Holder for Commercial Services, said:

We are taking a very robust line on fly-tipping in the South Hams and have issued 13 fixed penalty notices against offenders. We are delighted that these cases are now coming to court. I assure you, we will continue whenever possible to prosecute future offenders.

Councillor Robert Sampson, West Devon Borough Council's Lead Member for Commercial Services, said:

It is crucial fly-tippers are traced and prosecuted for the damage they do to our countryside. This case shows what can be achieved by

working closely with our partners.

At an earlier hearing, McDonagh, of Pemros Road, St Budeaux, Plymouth, pleaded guilty to 2 offences under the Environmental Protection Act 1990, of illegally depositing controlled waste at various sites across Devon. He also pleaded guilty to an offence under the Control of Pollution (Amendment) Act 1989, of transporting controlled waste without being registered as a waste carrier.

The second offence under the Environmental Protection Act was for depositing building waste (including asbestos) at Lower Brimley Road, Teignmouth on 9 July, 2016 in a manner likely to cause pollution or harm to human health.

Judge Lawrie said McDonagh would have faced a 2-year prison sentence had he not submitted a guilty plea. Upon issuing the arrest warrant Judge Lawrie said, 'bring him back before the court.'

Members of the public can report waste crime by calling the Environment Agency's free 24-hour hotline 0800 80 70 60 or Crimestoppers on 0800 555 111. [Find further information on waste collection.](#)