

3. Procedure for Enrolment and Further Information

3.1(a) Which children qualify for pre-school education?

The target age group is those children who are in their final pre-school year who were born between 2 July 2008 and 1 July 2009 (inclusive). If there are still places available children born between 2 July 2009 and 1 July 2010 MAY also be admitted – but free places for these children are only available in nursery schools or nursery units. Playgroups normally accept children from three years of age but only those born between 2 July 2008 and 1 July 2009 will be eligible for a funded place. The target age groups are outlined in the statutory criteria for each pre-school setting.

3.1(b) Where are Pre-School places available and how do I obtain further information?

This booklet provides information on pre-school places.

- Nursery Schools
- Primary Schools with Nursery Classes (Nursery Units) in the Board's area.
- Funded Pre-School Education Provision in the Voluntary and Private Sectors in the Board's area.

At the time of going to press the book gives details of presently approved pre-school providers. It should be noted however that providers can withdraw from the scheme. The Department of Education has indicated that in order to qualify for funded places a provider must have enrolled at least 8 children in their immediate pre-school year. Parents should be aware therefore that providers can be required to withdraw, or may withdraw voluntarily, from the scheme at any time.

Funded pre-school places in the voluntary and private sector only applies to part-time provision (normally 5 sessions per week, each lasting at least 2 ½ hours per day during the school year). In nursery schools and primary schools with nursery units, attendance takes the form of full time (4 ½ hours per day) or part-time (2 ½ hours per day, either morning or afternoon sessions). A few schools have both full-time and part-time sessions. Information on the duration of classes/sessions is listed in this booklet under the detail for each provider. Where this is not shown parents should contact the providers directly for current details.

A child is only entitled to one free place in a school/unit or private/voluntary provider e.g. a child may not have a free place in a playgroup in the morning and attend a nursery school in the afternoon.

While there is no guarantee that every child will receive a funded pre-school place, it would be the Board's wish to match provision to parental preference. However, it is recognised that a number of parents will not be able to access a funded place in their preferred setting.

Paying Places

Many private/voluntary providers may also have fee-paying places available. The arrangements for admission, as described in this booklet, do not apply to fee-paying places. Parents who are interested in securing a fee-paying place should contact the providers directly.

Reception Class Provision

In addition to the pre-school providers listed in this booklet some primary schools have reception classes for children who have reached their 4th birthday but are under compulsory school age (i.e. born after 1 July 2008). Arrangements for admissions to these 'reception classes' are entirely different to those relating to 'nursery' classes. Parents may apply to both using separate application form for nursery and reception. Information on reception classes is contained in the Primary School Admissions Information Booklets. The booklet and application forms can be obtained from the primary school in which you are interested or the BELB's website www.belb.org.uk

3.1(c) Must my child go to Pre-School?

No. Pre-school education is not compulsory, however good quality pre-school education has important benefits. Parents make application for a funded place on the understanding that their child will attend for 5 days per week. This will enable your child to benefit fully from a quality pre-school experience.

ONLY SCHOOL BASED PROVIDERS CAN CONSIDER APPLICATIONS FOR CHILDREN BORN AFTER 1 JULY 2009 i.e. under-age children.

3.2 How do I apply?

There is a **single** application form for parents to list all their preferences in order. (a sample of the application form is set out on pages 6 & 7 of this booklet). Parents can obtain an application form from any "provider" (preferably their first preference provider) or download from the BELB's website www.belb.org.uk. The form must be completed and returned with the child's birth certificate to be received by YOUR FIRST PREFERENCE PROVIDER by 12.00 noon on 11 January 2012. Applications received after that time will be "late" and will be treated in accordance with the procedures set out (see 3.6).

When stating your preferences please use the name of the providers given in the booklets. Open Enrolment Branch may not be able to identify local 'known as' names.

3.3(a) Completion of the Application Form.

If your child is born between 2 July 2008 and 1 July 2009 you can name "school/unit" and "other" providers on the one form. Younger children can not receive "funded" places with voluntary and private providers so you should only name school based providers if your child is born after 1 July 2009.

ONLY ONE APPLICATION FORM CAN BE SUBMITTED FOR A CHILD and on it should be listed all the providers where you would be willing to accept a place (continue on separate sheet if more than 6 preferences).

SUBMITTING MORE THAN ONE APPLICATION FORM CAN INVALIDATE ALL PRE-SCHOOL APPLICATIONS FOR THE CHILD.

Section A

This section asks for details of your child, name, date of birth (as recorded on Birth Certificate), home address and parent/guardian's contact details.

Section B

This section allows you to list up to 6 preferences, and to give reasons for your preferences. If a school has more applications than it has places it must select children for admission by applying the admissions criteria (see 3.5 below for details). It is vitally important that you give the provider all the information which is relevant to either the statutory criteria or the schools admission criteria (which are supplementary to the statutory criteria). Examples of relevant information are given on the form – these are only examples, after the statutory criteria, it is the information relevant to each individual provider’s sub-criteria which will decide which children are selected for admission. If a school has a criterion which gives preference to children whose older brother/sister attended and you do not put this on the form, then the school cannot give your child priority under this criterion. Similarly if your child is the first/only child, this is often relevant to the criteria and you should record this on the form. You should examine the criteria of those providers that you are listing as preferences, consider how your child meets these and list this under each of your preferences.

Only list providers that are included in the Boards booklets as these are the only providers with funded places available.

The legislation recognizes up to two applications to a provider where ‘full-time’ and ‘part time’ places are available. This means if you would prefer a full-time place for your child at a ‘school’ but would be willing to accept as a lower preference a part-time place at that ‘school’ you should name the ‘school’ twice on the form. This can be consecutively but this is not necessarily the case e.g. you can name –

Preference 1	Provider A	full-time place
Preference 2	Provider B	full-time place
Preference 3	Provider A	part-time place

Parents should note that the independent appeal tribunal only has power to consider appeals against the allocation of full-time and part-time places. It does not have the power to distinguish between a morning part-time and an afternoon part-time place.

Section C

The statutory criteria [see 3.5(a)] require providers to give preference to children from socially disadvantaged circumstances in their final pre-school year. This is defined by the Department of Education as a child whose parent is in receipt of income support or income-based jobseeker’s allowance. When parents apply for places for their child on this basis they must have their application form stamped by the Social Security Agency to confirm they are in receipt of Income Support or income based Jobseeker’s Allowance. **The onus is on parents to ensure that the form is stamped and submitted to the first preference setting by 12 noon on Wednesday 11 January 2012.**

Section D

Read the declarations, sign and date the form. If you are in any doubt or there are points which you wish to clarify attach an explanatory note. If a parent gives false or misleading information (e.g. date of birth, home address) and because of this the child obtains a place, the place will be withdrawn. If you are in doubt you should check with the first preference principal/leader and/or obtain advice from the Education and Library Board.

Verifying Documents

Parents are requested to read carefully the Department of Education's "prefatory letter" which is at the front of this booklet before the 'contents page'.

Some providers request verification documents with the application form. Others indicate that they may contact parents if they require further documentation. ***Please read the admissions criteria carefully, not just for your first preference provider but for all the providers named on your application form.***

Where documents are requested during the procedures, acceptance is conditional on documents being supplied. It is important that they are submitted within the timescale requested by the school.

All original documents will be returned to you by the provider where your child is placed. The board will return all documents to those who have been unsuccessful in securing a pre-school place on Friday 1 June 2012.

The provision of false or incorrect information or the failure to provide verifying documents according to the required deadline may result in either the withdrawal of a place or the inability of a school to offer a place.

3.3(b) Can I indicate a preference for a non-funded place on the form?

No. The open enrolment procedure only relates to the provision of funded places and the education and library boards are not involved in the allocation of non-funded places. If you are interested in a "paying" place at a voluntary or private provider you should contact the provider directly. If you do name a 'paying' place on the application form, the board will not process this preference but will proceed to the next preference (if any) listed which has funded places.

3.3(c) Can I submit more than one application?

NO. If you submit more than one application form you will have made a false declaration and a place if awarded may be withdrawn by any or all of the providers concerned.

3.3(d) Can I indicate preferences for settings in different board areas on the same form?

Yes. All boards operate the same "clearing house" system.

3.4 Do I need to complete a new application form if my child is already attending a Nursery School/Unit?

Yes. There is no automatic entitlement to a second year's pre-school education.

3.5 Admissions Procedure

The admissions procedure is in two stages:

Stage 1 of the procedure (Wednesday 11 January – Friday 30 March 2012) deals only with children in their final pre-school year.

Stage 2 of the procedure (Monday 2 April – Friday 1 June 2012) deals with those final pre-school year children who did not secure a place in Stage 1 and children not yet in their final pre-school year i.e. under-age.

3.5 (a) How do Pre-School Providers decide who to accept?

If a pre-school provider has sufficient places all eligible children will be accepted. If a provider has more applications than funded places it will be required by law to give priority to:

- children in their final pre-school year who are from socially disadvantaged circumstances (whose parents receive Income Support or income-based Jobseekers' Allowance); and
- 4 year olds with July and August birthdays.

Pre-school providers will implement this legal requirement through application of the statutory criteria listed below. If there are more applications meeting a particular statutory criterion than there are places available then the provider will select between these applicants by applying their published sub-criteria.

Statutory Criteria

i Children from socially disadvantaged circumstances who will be aged 4 before 1 September in their final pre-school year, i.e. born between 2 July 2008 – 31 August 2009;

ii Children from socially disadvantaged circumstances who will be aged 3 before 1 September in their final pre-school year i.e. born between 1 September 2008 – 1 July 2009;

iii Children not falling within i or ii who will be aged 4 before 1 September in their final pre-school year i.e. born between 2 July 2008 – 31 August 2009;

iv Children not falling within i or ii who will be aged 3 before 1 September in their final pre-school year i.e. born between 1 September 2008 – 1 July 2009;

AND *who at the beginning of their proposed admission will not have a pre-school education place, whether full-time or part-time, at another school or any other premises.*

Children resident in Northern Ireland at the time of their proposed admission to the school will be selected for admission before any child not so resident [The Education (NI) Order 1998 Article 32 (4)].

Where a provider becomes oversubscribed on the application of a statutory criterion, the provider's sub-criteria will be applied to select children for admission. This also applies where a provider has places available after the application of the statutory criteria.

Where a nursery school or unit has provision for both full-time and part-time places the published criteria shall apply to both full-time and part-time places unless otherwise stated. Places will be allocated to those who best meet the full-time criteria and then to those who best meet the part-time criteria (unless otherwise indicated). Unless otherwise stated the same criteria shall also be applied in the case where places become available after the beginning of the school year.

3.5 (b) Application of the criteria/procedure

Stage One (11 January 2012–30 March 2012)

At stage one only applications for children in their **final pre-school year** will be considered.

- If there are more places available than there are such applications, then the provider will “provisionally” accept all these applications by returning the appropriate details to the Open Enrolment Branch in the Education and Library Board, which is responsible for operating a “clearing house” system.
- If there are more applications than places available, then the “provider” must select children for admission by applying the statutory criteria in order.
- If there are more applications meeting a particular statutory criterion than there are places available then the provider will select between these applicants by applying the sub-criteria published.
- When the provider has made decisions regarding those “provisionally selected” and those “not selected” the Education and Library Board is advised and the forms of those not selected are returned to the Board.
- These are forwarded by the Board to the Provider named at second preference.
- The second preference provider will consider these new applications in accordance with the procedure indicated above.

Pre-School Providers may in their admissions sub-criteria give preference to those applicants who have named them as a higher preference. The Statutory criteria however take precedence over the sub-criteria.

The “clearing house” continues until:-

- The child is selected by a provider named on the form.
- All preferences named have “not selected” the child.
- The time allowed for Stage 1 has elapsed.

Changes of Preferences in exceptional circumstances/New Applications/Additional information

Apart from those necessitated by exceptional circumstances, no changes of preference will be processed. If you wish to change your preference you must withdraw the original application and then submit a new application. If this occurs after 12 noon, 11 January 2012, your “new” application will be treated as “late”. (Refer to section 3.6). Additional information/new applications/changes of preferences necessitated by exceptional circumstances e.g. change of town (which must be verified), will be processed up to Friday 16 March 2012. After that date new applications/additional information/changes of preferences necessitated by exceptional circumstances cannot be processed until stage 2.

Recalling children within Stage 1

If any places subsequently become available in an oversubscribed setting (between 2 April 2012 – 1 June 2012), these places should be allocated immediately to any children refused admission in Stage 1 and according to their place in the rank order at the end of Stage 1.

Stage Two (2 April 2012- 1 June 2012)

Pre-school settings who allocated all their available places in Stage 1 will not be involved in Stage 2 (unless a place subsequently becomes available in that setting).

- At this stage school based providers with places available consider applications received for children in their penultimate pre-school year along with applications received for children in their final pre-school year who were unplaced at the end of stage 1 and who have now nominated further preferences.
- Voluntary and private providers with places available will consider applications for children in their final pre-school year who were unplaced at the end of stage 1 and who have nominated further preferences.
- Children will be provisionally selected **who best meet the statutory/providers criteria** at the time applications are considered and a “clearing house system” similar to that described for stage one will operate.

Additional information/new applications/changes of preferences in exceptional circumstances

Additional information/new applications/changes of preferences necessitated by exceptional circumstances e.g. change of town (which must be verified), will be processed up to Friday 25 April 2012. After that date new applications/additional information/ changes of preferences necessitated by exceptional circumstances should be communicated directly to the provider of your choice for consideration after 1 June 2012.

Except in relation to the appeal procedure (see 3.8 below) the “Open Enrolment” clearing house system ends on **Friday 1 June 2012**.

If a vacancy occurs after 1 June 2012 all previous unsuccessful applicants (including ‘late’ applications)/new applications/new information will be considered and the place(s) allocated to the applicant who best meets the admissions criteria.

3.6 “Late Applications”

Stage 1 – Wednesday 11 January 2012 – Friday 30 March 2012

Consideration of final pre-school age applicants only (i.e. children born between 2.07.08 – 1.07.09)

If your application is received after 12 noon on the 11 January 2012 your application will be considered ‘late’ and your child cannot receive a place until after all punctual final pre-school year applications have been placed in a setting i.e. if a named setting has less applications than available places your child could be offered a place.

Late applicants should note that due to the restrictions of the timetable it might not be possible for Boards to process all the preferences listed on an application form by 30 March 2012.

NOTE: If your application is received after 16 March 2012 it will not be considered until Stage 2 of the procedure.

Stage 2 – Monday 2 April 2012 – Friday 1 June 2012

Consideration of new applications/additional preferences for final pre-school applicants and underage applicants

Unplaced final pre-school year children whose application was 'late' in Stage 1 can now be treated on an equal basis with all other applications in Stage 2.

Additional information/new applications/additional preferences received after the 13 April 2012 will be considered as 'late' in Stage 2 and will not be considered until all punctual final pre-school year applicants are considered.

Late applicants should note that due to the restrictions of the timetable it might not be possible for Boards to process all the preferences listed on an application form by 1 June 2012.

Under-age applicants

If your application is received after 12 noon on the 11 January 2012 it is 'late' and will only be considered in Stage 2 of the process if the settings listed have places available after all children in their final pre-school year and all punctual underage applicants have been placed.

3.7 When do I know if my child has a place?

There are two dates for notification:

Stage 1

On Friday 30 March 2012, providers will issue letters advising the parents of those final pre-school year children they are accepting. On the same day the Board will advise parents of final pre-school year children not selected by any provider and will include information regarding places available.

Stage 2

Friday 1 June 2012, providers will issue letters advising the parents of those children they are accepting. On the same day the Board will advise parents of children not selected by any provider and will include information regarding places available.

3.8 Can I appeal against a decision not to admit my child?

Only in the case of applications made to a nursery school or nursery unit can you appeal to an Independent Appeal Tribunal. The Tribunal's powers are limited. An appeal can only be brought on the grounds that the school's criteria were not applied or were not correctly applied in deciding to refuse a child admission to the school. The Tribunal does not have the power to amend the criteria themselves. An appeal can only be upheld if the Tribunal finds that the criteria as published were not applied or not correctly applied AND had the criteria been correctly applied your child would have gained admission to the school/unit. The Tribunal has no power to amend the arrangements with regard to priority for 'punctual' over 'late' applications as set out in section 3.6 above.

There is no right of appeal to the Independent Appeal Tribunal against a decision by a private or voluntary provider or where a parent has indicated a 'preference' for a morning part-time place and an afternoon part-time place is offered (or vice versa).

An Appeal Tribunal can only consider information available to the Board of Governors at the time it made its decision. New evidence cannot be considered.

There is no right of appeal to the Independent Appeal Tribunal against a decision by any of the private or voluntary providers named in this booklet.

3.9 How do I appeal?

You must **write** to the Clerk of the:

Appeal Tribunal (Nursery)
Belfast Education and Library Board
40 Academy Street
BELFAST
BT1 2NQ indicating your intention to appeal and this must be received
by **4pm on Wednesday 13 June 2012.**

Appeal forms and details of the appeal procedure will be issued so it is not necessary to give details of your case in the letter. You must however clearly indicate your child's name, date of birth and the school based provider/s that you wish to appeal against.