

Sponsored Nursery Priority Scheme Allocation of Spaces Policy

1. Introduction

This policy sets out the Department's approach to managing its Sponsored Nursery Priority Scheme places. It provides guidance on how these priority places will be promoted and the process for submitting applications.

This policy is not contractual, and the Department may amend it at any time.

2. Background

The University operates several nurseries in Oxford and holds additional places at other nurseries in and around the city. Demand for these places is extremely high, and they are reserved for university students and staff.

The University also offers the Sponsored Priority Scheme, which allows departments to purchase priority places on the nursery waiting list. **Please note that participation in this scheme does not guarantee a nursery place.**

A limited number of priority places are available for each two-year cycle. The current cycle runs from 1 October 2025 to 30 September 2027.

Once a cycle has started, no additional places can be purchased. Consequently, DPIR will not be able to request extra places once our allocation has been fully used. The scheme is open to all university departments and colleges, so demand for places is very high.

2.1 Priority Order for Nursery Places

Places are allocated according to the following order:

Category	Priority Criteria
1	Parents or children with a disability
2	Lone parents
3	Families with a sibling already attending a university nursery
4	Applicants nominated under the "sponsored priority" scheme (including those sponsored by DPIR)
5	Parents who are Oxford University students (except those also employed by the University)
6	All other applicants

Within each category, priority is given to applicants who have been on the waiting list the longest.

Note: The “sponsored priority” scheme moves an applicant from category 6 to category 4 on the waiting list. It does **not** guarantee a nursery place, and recipients must pay the standard nursery fees. Parents in categories 1–3 and 5 should apply directly to the University rather than through the priority scheme.

3. DPIR Sponsored Nursery Priority Places

The Department has two sponsored priority allocations for the 2025–2027 cycle, with one place available per academic year (2025–26 and 2026–27).

- If no applications are received for 2025–26, that place will roll over to 2026–27.
- If no places are allocated by the end of the cycle, remaining allocations will expire and cannot be carried forward.

Important notes:

1. A sponsored priority **does not** guarantee a place at a university nursery.
2. Parents are responsible for all nursery fees if a place is offered.

Additional guidelines:

1. Sponsored priority places are generally **not offered** to students unless they are also University employees. Student parents are already prioritised under university criteria.
2. If a sponsored priority holder leaves DPIR employment, they must inform University Childcare Services; the priority will then be returned to the Department for reallocation.
3. Applications may be submitted once an individual knows they (or their partner) are pregnant or upon confirmation of a legal adoption, provided they have already applied to Childcare Services.
4. Sponsored priorities are tied to the applicant’s position on the waiting list, not a specific nursery.
5. Once allocated, a sponsored priority usually remains with a child until they leave the University nursery system (up to four years).
6. An individual may hold sponsored priority for only one child at any given time.

4. Promotion of the Scheme

The Department will publicise the scheme via all its communications channels including the website, intranet, all staff email bulletins, and direct information to staff who are expecting a child or adopting.

5. How to apply

Applications must be submitted using the designated form.

- Applications will normally be held until the closing date for each academic year, after which the panel will review them.
- Employees must notify the Department if they no longer wish to be considered.

Closing dates for applications:

- 2025–26 academic year: **Friday 14th November 2025**
- 2026–27 academic year: **Friday 23rd October 2026**

Should no applications be received by the closing date, the panel may consider applications submitted later in the academic year, on a case-by-case basis provided a sponsored priority place is available.

6. Eligibility

To apply, you must meet both of the following conditions specified by Childcare Services:

- You are a DPIR employee with a signed employment contract, and your employment has already started before submitting an application.
- You are registered with Oxford University Childcare Services for access to University nursery provision and have applied to them for a nursery place.

Factors that may increase the likelihood of being offered a DPIR-sponsored priority:

1. Child has already been born.
2. The other parent is also a DPIR employee and lacks access to another nursery scheme.
3. Significant other caring responsibilities (e.g., elderly relatives).
4. Personal circumstances make returning to work difficult without a nursery place.
5. Extenuating circumstances prevented early registration on the nursery waiting list (e.g., new arrivals to Oxford, bereavement).
6. Length of time on the University nursery waiting list.
7. The employee is on the waiting list for one or more University nurseries: Bradmore Road, Jack Straws Lane, Mansion House, Woodstock Road, or The Triangle.
8. Alternative options for sponsored or subsidised nursery provision have been explored unsuccessfully.

Alternative Options

- Applicants are encouraged to explore all available avenues for obtaining a sponsored or subsidised nursery place including support from the other parent's employer before applying.

Other Factors the Department May Consider

The department reserves the right to consider other factors when assessing applications, including (but not limited to):

1. The applicant already qualifies for prioritisation under other established University criteria (see the 'Background' section).

2. The employee holds a joint appointment between DPIR and another University department or college that provides a sponsored priority or workplace nursery scheme.
3. The child's other parent is employed by the University of Oxford (outside DPIR) in a department or college offering a sponsored priority place or workplace nursery scheme.
4. The child's other parent is employed outside the University but has access to a workplace nursery scheme through their own employer.

Applicants are encouraged to include any other relevant circumstances not listed above in their application for consideration.

7. Decision-Making

Applications are reviewed by the DPIR Sponsored Nursery Priority Places Panel:

- Head of Department
- Head of Administration and Finance
- Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion Officer
- Human Resources Manager

Decisions of the panel are final; there is **no right of appeal**.

Unsuccessful applications may be retained for reallocation or carried over to the next academic year.

8. Changes of circumstance

If your circumstances change and you no longer require a sponsored priority, you must inform both DPIR and University Childcare Services. The Department may reallocate the priority as appropriate.

Governance	Detail
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