

Information and Tips for Darwin College families

Welcome to Darwin College!

Cambridge is a fantastic place to have a family, but being a student parent isn't always easy. To help you, we have compiled this short guide of information you might find useful. And remember that the families society is full of other student parents who probably have experienced the same challenges as you - don't hesitate to reach out and ask if you need any help.

The University, Darwin College and families

Your families are welcome to come and enjoy Darwin College with you. Obviously your children need to be under supervision (watch out for the steps to the river - we have had the odd shoe fall in before), but feel free to bring them into any of the shared spaces (as far as allowed by pandemic restrictions). There are children's books in the library and we are working towards making more spaces family-friendly. The servery has a special 'families' card which entitles your family to College discounts on food and drinks, even when you're not there. You can ask for one by contacting the servery:

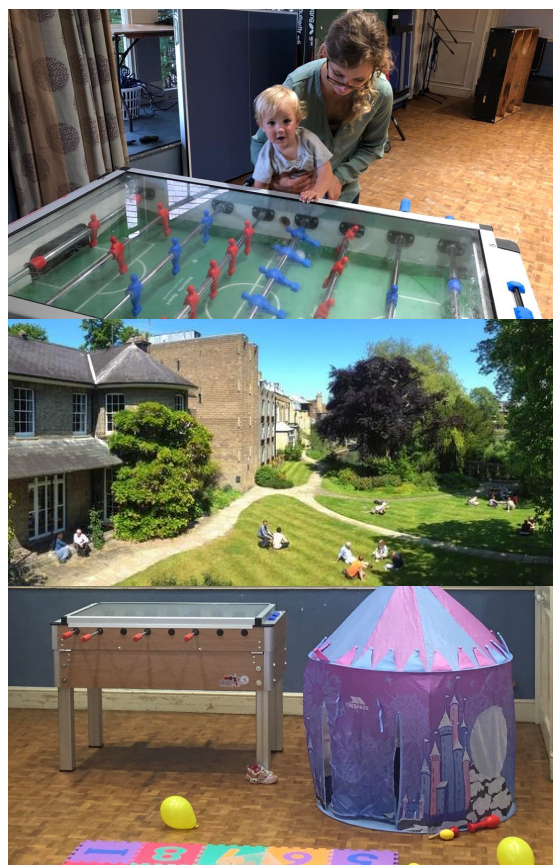
catering.manager@darwin.cam.ac.uk and it requires a £10 deposit.

The families society organises events especially for families. If you haven't been added to our mailing list, feel free to join [here](#). You can also contact Soizic, the president, at: dcsa_families@darwin.cam.ac.uk. We also have a [Facebook group](#) which you are welcome to join, and a channel in the Darwin College team in Microsoft Teams, which you should

have access to - please ask if you need help accessing it.

Finally, the University has a newsletter for student parents, run by the Childcare Office. If you're not automatically subscribed, you can ask them to join by emailing them:

childcare@admin.cam.ac.uk



Key links

The University of Cambridge childcare office:

<https://www.childcare.admin.cam.ac.uk>

The University of Cambridge Supporting Parents and Carers at Cambridge (SPACE):

<https://www.space.admin.cam.ac.uk/>

Government support:

<https://www.gov.uk/browse/benefits/families>

Cambridgeshire county council children and families page:

<https://www.cambridgeshire.gov.uk/identities/children-and-families>

Cambridge city council children and families page:

<https://www.cambridge.gov.uk/children-and-young-people>

Things to do

Cambridge has a large number of parks, activities and museums that are great for children. The council has an [interactive map](#) of playgrounds and nature reserves. The University also has a number of [museums](#) which children might enjoy. There are also websites which can give you ideas of things to do, for example [Cambridge with Kids](#), [Trip Advisor](#), [Cambridge News](#) and [Day Out with the Kids](#). You can also check out the RSPB, the National Trust, English Heritage and the Wildlife Trust for maps of nature reserves and managed estates further afield. They also sometimes organise events like the Christmas lights at Anglesey Abbey, the Milton Country Park Autumn Festival or the Cambourne to Be Wild Music Festival. The [city council](#) also offers activities for children and scrapstores where you can get cheap resources. And of course, Cambridge has a number of [public libraries](#) where you can borrow books for free as well as go to rhyme time or story time sessions - we find the children's area in the central library

(in the Grand Arcade) a great place to let our son loose on a rainy day.

Obviously many of these places have had to adapt their offer for the pandemic, but it might still be worth checking out the websites. The University [SPACE website](#) for parents also has a list of online activities which might be of interest.

There is also a book - [Hidden Tales, the Riddle of the White Sphinx](#) - which takes you on a treasure hunt around the museums of Cambridge (obviously best done in instalments) to solve a riddle. For children aged 8+ (and their parents).

Childcare in Cambridge

The childcare office

The University has a [childcare office](#) which "oversees the facilities and assistance offered to University staff and students with children".

They have three subsidised nurseries (places are limited), a holiday playscheme and a bursary scheme to help with childcare costs. There is a different application process for [home students](#) and [for EU and overseas students](#). The bursaries are income-assessed, taking into account any income from your partner if applicable and any expenses you might have incurred through relocating. The bursaries are allocated yearly until the pot of money runs out - so it's best to get in as early as you can.

They are also currently providing financial support if you've had [childcare costs associated with the pandemic](#).

The childcare office has a lot of information on their website about schools and childcare, but below is our own take on some of it.

Childcare for young children

Childcare is quite expensive in England and particularly so in

Cambridge. The University nurseries are subsidised and slightly more affordable, but otherwise you should expect to pay £60-£70 per day for full-time childcare. You essentially have a choice of a nursery, a childminder or a nanny. A nursery is a setting specialising in childcare; some nurseries look after babies as well as young children, but some only look after children above a certain age. They are usually private, though there are also some council-run nurseries. A childminder is a self-employed person who looks after children in their own house, and usually children come from different households. Nannies are employed by a family (or a number of families who have come together) and look only after those children, in the family's own home. Because you are the employer, you need to fulfil some legal obligations and nannies are usually more expensive, but you also tend to have greater flexibility. For example, it's usual that in a nursery or with a childminder, if your child is ill they cannot come into the setting, and if they have been sick (i.e. vomiting or diarrhoea) you have to wait 48 hours before they can come back. Places for nurseries can be hard to come by in Cambridge, with some having long waiting lists. It's usually advised to apply a year in advance. Childminders tend to have spaces available on a shorter term, but it might take quite a lot of looking to find one that has availability. If going the childminder route, the general advice is that's best to choose one who is registered with the local authority and/or with Ofsted (the inspection body for childcare settings and schools). You can find Ofsted reports for childminders and nurseries online. PACEY is also an organisation that accredits childminders and provides general guidance, so it's also a good quality mark to watch out for. There are also statutory rules regarding the number of children of different ages childminders can look

after, and the adult:child ratio in nurseries.

The childcare office has compiled a list of links for finding childcare [here](#).

Schools in Cambridge

In England, the compulsory school age is 5 to 16. You can find a description of the different key stages [here](#).

There are many good state-funded schools in Cambridge and you can find a list in the [local council's directory](#), though GoogleMap might be easier to find your nearest school. Schools tend to have catchment areas - that is to say preference is given to children living in a specific area. You can find out which catchment area you're in [here](#) and [this page](#) has more details about the application process.

In England, state-funded schools can be under the responsibility of the local authority (this includes both non-denominational and religious schools, which also have input from a religious body), or that of Trusts (academies and free schools). The former have to follow the national curriculum and a number of other statutory requirements that academies are exempt from (e.g. teacher's pay and qualifications), but all types of state-funded schools require students to take national tests and exams and are subject to the same inspection framework by Ofsted (the inspection body).

There are also a large number of fee-paying private/ independent schools (often called, annoyingly, 'public schools'). All schools, whether state-run or private, are inspected in some form. In England, you are also allowed to home-educate your children, though you are encouraged to let the local authority know and to report on their education. If you want more information, the childcare office also has [useful descriptions](#) of the different kinds of schools.

In England, the school day tends to run from 9am until 3.30pm, though individual schools vary in the exact timings, and most schools run

breakfast clubs and after-school clubs for a fee. Some also run holiday clubs. Most state-funded schools follow [similar school holidays](#), though there can be some variation as schools have a bit of flexibility. Independent schools might have very different holidays.

Financial support

There is not a lot of financial support available to student parents. As mentioned above, the childcare office runs a bursary scheme, so be sure to check it out if you're eligible. The government provides limited support for student parents, and you need to be a UK resident. There is a list [here](#) of government support for families and carers. If you are considered 'employed' (as some PhD students are, e.g. medical students) and/or if you have a partner in employment, you may be eligible for additional support. As a general rule, if you are not considered as 'in employment', you will only be eligible for [Child Benefit](#), and your partner will not be eligible for the 20% tax rebate ("[Tax-Free Childcare](#)"). If your children are over the age of 3, they will be entitled to [15 hours of funded childcare](#), and up to 30 hours if you (and any partner) are considered as employed. From the September following their 4th birthday, your child can go to school.

Good to know

Support for parents

The local council runs [Child and Family Centres](#) which are a place to get information, support and can be somewhere to meet local families. The Graduate Union (the former postgrad union for the University) also used to run a parent and toddler coffee morning on Fridays, though this has stopped during the pandemic - it might be worth keeping an eye out for something similar in the Cambridge Students' Union [What's On pages](#). There are also a number of 'stay and play' sessions, where you can go with

your child to play and meet other families. Some are organised by the childcare office (check out the newsletter for more information), but there will also probably be parent and toddler groups in your local area. There are also private (fee-paying) services for parents, such as [Mother's Little Helpers](#), which can help with cleaning, babysitting and nappy laundering.

Second-hand toys and clothes

If you've just moved to Cambridge, you may not have been able to bring much with you. Fortunately, Cambridge has a large number of families and so it is full of opportunities to buy cheap second-hand items. Facebook marketplace and Gumtree tend to be our first port of call. Mill Road and Burleigh Street (near the Grafton Centre) have lots of charity shops where you can get second-hand bargains. Some NCT groups organise '[nearly new](#)' sales, which are advertised on Facebook, and there are also [toy libraries](#) where you can borrow toys for a small fee. Some of these might not be running during the pandemic but it will be worth checking them for updates.

