

## Financial support for the childcare sector during COVID19: Information briefing 3.0 – 31 July 2020

This information briefing follows those previously issued on Friday 26 June and Friday 10 July. It provides an update on the opening of the Childcare Recovery Support Package to applications.

### Childcare Recovery Support Package (July and August 2020)

The Childcare Recovery Support Package is a £10.5 million funding package for the childcare sector, which opened for applications on Monday 27 July. The scheme is designed to assist in the recovery of the childcare sector, building capacity so parents can access the vital childcare they need at this time. It is intended to:

- Make funding available for childcare providers to assist them to operate in line with the Executive's childcare recovery plan and Department of Health guidance
- Ensure as many providers as possible can open to assist parents returning to work, supporting broader economic and societal recovery
- Allow for the continuation of the bespoke Approved Home Childcarer Scheme aimed at enabling eligible families to have their childcare needs met in their own homes.

### Who is eligible for support?

This scheme applies to registered childcare – day care and school age childcare settings, playgroups and childminders – who re-open, or remain open, in the period 1 July to 31 August 2020.

### How will funds be allocated?

Childcare settings will be eligible for different levels of flat rate funding based on the type of setting, the number of pre-COVID registered places and when they re-open. This will support day care providers, stand-alone school age childcare providers and playgroups.

Eligible childminders will also receive a flat rate grant as a contribution towards the additional costs associated with operating to the Department of Health guidelines on infection control within their own home.

The rates of funding are available [here](#). Settings that have re-opened on or before 7 August will be entitled to more support than those which re-open after 7 August but before 31 August.

In relation to bespoke COVID19 Approved Home Childcare, arrangements established under the previous childcare scheme will continue to enable childcare workers, who normally provide childcare to children in daycare and school age childcare facilities, to be matched to parents in order to care for children in their own homes.

### How can childcare providers apply?

The Scheme is being administered by [Early Years – the organisation for young children](#), on behalf of the Department of Education. Applications can be made through a **user friendly, online application system**. Each application should take less than ten minutes to complete.

An email has been issued to all eligible providers with an individualised link to the fund. If a provider thinks they are eligible, and has not received this link, they should complete an [online form](#) to provide their details to Early Years. Providers are encouraged to submit their application as soon as possible to enable efficient processing of funds.

Early Years aims to process all applications within ten working days.

### Where can childcare providers get further information?

Full details are available on the Early Years [website](#) where there are also a number of dedicated email addresses if a childcare provider has a query about a particular application stream. Providers can also continue to contact the membership or support organisations relevant to them (details at the end of this document).

## COVID19 Childcare Support Scheme (April to June 2020)

Over 2,700 applications were received under the original COVID19 Childcare Support Scheme. While many applications have resulted in payments being made, others continue to be processed by BSO who have confirmed:

- **Childminders:** All remaining applications will be assessed and paid by 31 July (excluding queries)
- **Closed settings:** All remaining applications will be assessed and paid by 31 July (excluding queries)
- **Open settings:** All remaining applications will be assessed and outstanding payments made in early August, subject to the swift resolution of any queries.
- **Bespoke Approved Home Childcare:** A small number of applications are still to be processed, these will be assessed and outstanding payments made in early August, subject to any queries.

## Easing of restrictions

The Department of Health has confirmed that, as of Saturday 1 August, the following restrictions on childcare providers are being lifted:

- The requirement in group settings to have pods of no more than 12 children – this will revert to pre-COVID19 registration limits instead, though children and adults should remain in consistently constituted groups and the mixing of groups must continue to be prevented
- The requirement that childminders can provide care to children from no more than four families at any one time – the Minimum Standards limits on numbers of children will continue to apply.

There will still, however, be significant infection control guidance in place which must be adhered to by all childcare providers, and providers will have to go through the re-opening process with their Health and Social Care Trust. You will find the full guidance on the [Family Support NI website](#). This development will, however, assist childcare providers in building their capacity, and support parents in accessing the childcare they need.

## Looking ahead

Members of the Childcare Reference Group are aware that while these support schemes are an important step in building the capacity of the childcare sector, very real challenges remain both for childcare providers, struggling with capacity and sustainability, and for parents who may be faced with additional childcare costs come September or the logistical difficulties of managing childcare, a phased return to school for some children, and a return to the workplace. These are issues that are being considered by the group. In the meantime, if any parents would like information in relation to finding and accessing childcare, or about the financial support they may be entitled to, they can contact Parentline (in relation to access to childcare) or Employers For Childcare's Family Benefits Advice Service (in relation to financial support). Details are below.

## Increasing access to childcare

With the endorsement of the Early Years Teams in the Health and Social Care Trusts, many more settings – group settings and childminders - have either re-opened or begun the process of re-opening in recent weeks, meaning that many more parents will be able to access the childcare they need. If any parents are looking for childcare they can use the [Family Support NI childcare search](#) function to find settings, filtering by postcode and type of provider – there are almost 3,000 providers currently listed as open.

## Advice and information

**Family Support NI:** [www.familysupportni.org](http://www.familysupportni.org) hosts an information hub on childcare during the pandemic, including guidance for settings on reopening and details of financial support available to the sector. This guidance is updated on a result basis as feedback from settings is incorporated, and to reflect broader developments. The most recent versions are available [here](#). The website includes a 'search' function which allows parents to find childcare in their local area. Childcare providers should ensure their details are kept up to date on this portal.

**Employers For Childcare:** Freephone: 0800 028 3008 or email: [hello@employersforchildcare.org](mailto:hello@employersforchildcare.org). Their Family Benefits Advice Service provides advice and guidance on a wide range of childcare and work-related issues to

parents, employers and childcare providers. They can carry out personalised 'better off' calculations and advise parents and childcare providers on financial support available.

**Early Years Organisation:** Telephone: 028 9066 2825 or email: [support@early-years.org](mailto:support@early-years.org). Early Years is the largest organisation in Northern Ireland working with and for young children. They are a non-profit making organisation, working since 1965 to promote high quality childcare and early education for children aged 0-18 and their families. Currently Early Years provides information and training for parents, providers, employers and local authorities.

**PlayBoard NI:** Telephone: 028 9080 3380 or email: [info@playboard.org](mailto:info@playboard.org). PlayBoard NI is the lead organisation for the development and promotion of children and young people's play in Northern Ireland. A membership organisation, PlayBoard offers support, guidance, and advice to School Age Childcare providers.

**NICMA:** Telephone 028 9181 1015/ Email: [info@nicma.org](mailto:info@nicma.org). NICMA is a membership organisation and professional body working to support and develop quality home-based childcare and learning for the benefit of children, families & communities. We have and will continue to help and support all childminders throughout this difficult time of this pandemic.

**Parentline NI:** Call FREE on: 0808 8020 400 Chat online or Email: [parentline@ci-ni.org.uk](mailto:parentline@ci-ni.org.uk) Parentline NI offers an impartial, non-judgemental listening ear. For advice on something specific or general support and guidance for anyone caring for or concerned about a child or young person. Parentline NI is open 9am to 9pm Monday to Thursday, 9-5pm Friday and 9am to 1pm on Saturday.

**Altram: guth na luathbhlianta lán-Ghaeilge/voice of Irish medium early years** Call 028 9033 2517 or Email: [eolas@altram.org](mailto:eolas@altram.org) Altram is the regional support group for Irish-medium early years projects and was set up to support Irish-medium early years providers, promote high quality early years provision through the medium of Irish and promote the importance of the early years in Irish medium education. Altram works closely with sectoral groups supporting both existing and emerging naíonraí.