



Financial support and guidance for the childcare sector during COVID19: Information briefing 5.0 – 9 December 2020

The impact of the Covid-19 pandemic continues to be felt by the childcare sector with occupancy levels down, and Covid-19 health and safety requirements – including self-isolation of staff who are ‘close contacts’ with someone in the community or closure of a pod or setting due to a positive case of Covid-19 – impacting on income and sustainability. In the run up to Christmas, while the Education Minister has committed that schools will not be asked to close before the scheduled end of term, some parents and providers may be concerned about what the next few weeks will bring. It is vital that childcare remains at the heart of decision making in relation to Covid-19 restrictions for the benefit of children, parents and the economy as a whole. In that context, two developments in relation to financial support have been welcomed by the sector.

Childcare Sustainability Support Fund opens for applications

The new £8.5 million Childcare Sustainability Support Fund opened for applications on **Friday 4 December 2020** and will close on Friday 5 February 2021 at 5pm. The Fund is designed to further support the sustainability of the childcare sector in Northern Ireland, building on previous financial recovery schemes.

This scheme will help childcare providers that have opened – or remained open – in the period 1 September to 31 December 2020. Subject to eligibility, the fund applies to all forms of registered childcare – day care and school age childcare settings, registered childminders, eligible playgroups and crèches. A grant payment will be made according to the type and size of the provider.

Applications will be backdated to the start of September, or to the date on which a setting was authorised by the Health and Social Care (HSC) Trusts to re-open (if after 1 September).

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. Eligible childcare providers should have received an email from Family Support NI inviting them to apply. If they have not received a link, and think they are eligible, they can fill out a contact form on the Early Years website, or email sustainability@early-years.org.

Short-term closure support fund

£2.8 million has also been allocated for a short-term closure support fund, to assist those providers who have had to close temporarily due to Covid-19 during the period September to December, for example, because of a case within a setting. Details of how this fund will be administered are still to be published. In the meantime, we would encourage providers to keep clear records of all relevant information relating to a temporary closure.

Newly Self-Employed Support Scheme (NSESS)

The Newly Self-Employed Support Scheme (NSESS), with a budget of £10 million, opened for applications at 6pm on Thursday 3 December and will close to applications at 6pm on 7 January 2021. This scheme may benefit more recently established self-employed childminders (between 6 April 2019 and 5 April 2020) who were not eligible for the UK wide Self-Employment Income Support Scheme.

Those who are eligible will receive a one-off, taxable grant of £3,500 and it is anticipated that approximately 2,900 newly self-employed individuals in Northern Ireland will be eligible.

Newly self-employed means those who commenced trading as self-employed between 6 April 2019 and 5 April 2020, and who have been adversely impacted by Covid-19. Additionally, trading profits for 2019/20 must be below £50,000, and over 50% of income must have come from self-employment.

Further information is available on the [NI Business Info website](#).

As a taxable grant, this payment may impact on Universal Credit and Tax Credit entitlement.

Advice and information

Altram: guth na luathbhlianta lán-Ghaeilge/voice of Irish medium early years Call 028 9033 2517 or email: 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.

Early Years—the organisation for young children: Tel: 028 9066 2825 / email: 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.

Employers For Childcare: Freephone: 0800 028 3008 / email: 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.

Family Support NI: 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 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.

NICMA: Telephone 028 9181 1015/ Email: 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 the difficult time of this pandemic.

Parentline NI: Call FREE on: 0808 8020 400 Chat online or Email: 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.

PlayBoard NI: Telephone: 028 9080 3380 or email: 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.