

Financial support for the childcare sector during COVID19: Information briefing 2.0 – 10 July 2020

This information briefing follows one previously issued on Friday 26 June. It provides an update on the provision of funding through the COVID19 Childcare Support Scheme, and the announcement of £10.5 million allocated for a further re-opening and recovery fund during July and August.

£10.5 million to assist re-opening and recovery (July and August 2020)

On 30 June, Finance Minister Conor Murphy announced a £10.5 million allocation of funds for childcare over July and August. This will assist settings to re-open and continue to support the recovery of those who have already done so. It will apply to day nurseries, school age childcare settings and childminders.

The details of how this second fund will be administered are now being finalised and a commitment made to publishing scheme details as soon as possible. The Education Minister has already stated that the scheme will open for applications in July, and it has been confirmed that payments, where eligible, will be backdated to 1 July.

The development of the Childcare Recovery Support Fund for the period 1 July to 31 August will incorporate the learning from the previous COVID19 Childcare Support Scheme in terms of design and implementation to ensure it is simpler, more streamlined, and money flows out more quickly to where it is most needed on the frontline of the childcare sector.

We know that some settings that would be keen to re-open may feel anxious about doing so in the absence of further detail on how much financial support they may be entitled to, when the scheme will open and how the application process will work. This is understandable, but we hope that this information will provide some reassurance and will assist providers in planning for their re-opening.

COVID19 Childcare Support Scheme (April to June 2020)

A £12 million funding package – the COVID19 Childcare Support Scheme - was announced by the Health and Education Ministers in April. To date there have been fewer applications to the fund than anticipated with a smaller allocation of funds than was projected – just over £1.1million as of Friday 3 July. There are a number of reasons for this, one of which is that some childcare providers, mainly day nurseries, benefited from other forms of Government support, such as the £10,000 small business grant.

The volume of applications is expected to increase with a significant number of additional applications expected in July from settings that were open or re-opened in June. This will increase the allocation of funds, as will the processing of the remaining applications for April and May. To date, over 2,400 applications have been received, of which 64% have been processed to completion, with the others in progress. There have been particular delays in processing applications for some open settings, which have tended to be more complex, but additional staff have been deployed to ensure more of the outstanding applications will be processed.

The Childcare Reference Group has emphasised that all applications from open and closed settings need to be processed as soon as possible to ensure that settings receive these essential funds. The Departments of Health and Education have provided assurance that this is a priority and have committed to ensuring applications are processed urgently going forward.

We are now urging any providers who were open in June to apply for financial support through the existing COVID19 Childcare Support Scheme as soon as possible and no later than Friday 17 July.

For assistance, contact NICMA (childminders), PlayBoard NI (school age childcare), Early Years Organisation (day nurseries and playgroups) or Employers For Childcare (Approved Home Childcare applications). 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 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. Research with childminders has shown that, with the increase in the number of families from whom children can be cared for at any one time, many are returning to capacity. 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 over 2,800 providers currently listed as open.

Guidance for parents and the childcare sector

Further guidance has also been published on the [Family Support NI](#) website to assist childcare settings and childminders who are currently providing childcare, or are planning to re-open, and to reassure parents as they send their children back to childcare. This guidance is kept under continual review as there are further developments and in response to feedback from the sector.

Training

Since the beginning of the pandemic the Childcare Partnership Team have developed a range of free resources and on line training in relation to COVID19 Infection Control, paediatric First Aid and safeguarding in addition to a range of other CPD courses. There has been great uptake from providers and early years practitioners with 2,140 places allocated since the beginning of April. Further detail is available [here](#).

Advice and information

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 regular 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. 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. 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. 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. 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 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 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.