

## E-Bulletin March Edition



### Welcome to your Early Years e-bulletin.

The Government is always seeking opportunities to further strengthen our early learning and childcare sector, and support workforce development. Last year, I published 'Nurturing Skills: the Workforce Plan for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare 2022-2028', and just last month, I announced that Ireland will take part in the OECD Starting Strong Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS Starting Strong).

TALIS Starting Strong is an international survey – the first of its kind - that provides early years educators and managers with an opportunity to share insights on their professional development; pedagogical beliefs and practices; and working conditions, as well as various other leadership, management and workplace issues.

The survey seeks to identify strengths of, and improvement opportunities for, early learning and care environments. Ireland, along with 16 other countries, is taking part in the survey. The Central Statistics Office has been appointed to undertake the






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survey here in Ireland. Participation and engagement by settings and staff approached to participate in the field trial currently underway is strongly encouraged

Another recent development which I would encourage you to engage with is the consultation on new Draft Principles for Engaging with the Arts in Early Learning and Childcare. I know that, as early years educators and school-age childcare practitioners, you skilfully listen to and engage children, encouraging them to explore, take risks and develop as creative thinkers. The draft principles are intended to support this important work. I ask that you share your knowledge and expertise to ensure the principles are as robust and comprehensive as possible, so that collectively we can continue to nurture creativity and support the wellbeing of babies and young children.

All the best,



Roderic O'Gorman T.D.

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

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An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,  
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige  
Department of Children, Equality,  
Disability, Integration and Youth



## National Childcare Scheme (NCS) – Attendance Rules

There has been recent discussion around the rules governing attendance, and we are aware that some parents and providers have been concerned that, by children being collected early on occasion or through non-attendance owing to illness, they will lose their subsidy. We want to issue a reminder of the rules of the National Childcare Scheme governing under-attendance and link to where you can get support.

In summary, parents can occasionally pick their children up early without any impact on their subsidy. The same is true for non-attendance owing to illness. It is important that providers are aware of this and have the correct information should they be discussing the matter with parents.

To give further context, when families apply for a CHICK they will be given an award that includes the maximum number of hours (45 or 20) which may be subsidised. At that point, parents and providers work together to agree the hours needed within the maximum NCS hours awarded, based on a combination of what a parent needs and what a provider can reasonably offer, and the hours set up on the system should reflect this. If parents need different hours at different points in the year, for example longer hours during mid-term breaks, then this can be accommodated. The NCS subsidy is then applied to these hours.

The Scheme has been designed with flexibility to reflect the reality of family life:

### 1. Rounding of hours:

When reporting the weekly hours of attendance on the Hive, providers can round up part hours of daily attendance to the next whole hour. For example, if a child attends 4 hours and 1 minute or more, it is recorded as 5 hours of attendance for that day.

### 2. 12 week under-attendance window:

In line with Tusla requirements, providers must maintain daily attendance records for each child, but it is not required to log this information on the Hive. As part of their weekly returns on the Hive, providers must report if a child has been attending less than their registered hours for each of the previous eight weeks in a row. At this point, a warning notification will issue to a parent alerting them to the situation. The subsidy is not changed at this stage, and as long as the under-attendance is broken by one full week of attendance of the agreed hours, the subsidy will remain unchanged.



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However, if the under-attendance continues for a further consecutive four weeks (e.g. 12 consecutive weeks of under-attendance), the number of subsidised hours awarded under the Scheme will be revised to reflect the average number of hours that were actually attended by the child over the previous twelve week period. The subsidy amount will not be effected before this.

It is important to note that neither parent nor provider will be required to refund the subsidy for hours they have not used during this initial 12 week period: however their hours awarded will be reduced to reflect the average hours they do use **going forward**.

This means if a parent is caught in traffic, a child has an appointment, or a grandparent is available to collect them early, the family will not be penalised. No change to subsidy will incur until the child persistently under attends for the full 12 weeks.

### **3. Exemptions:**

The Scheme also provides for particular exemptions to the attendance rules under certain circumstances to allow for extended absences in [exceptional circumstances](#).

Providers can find detailed guidance on NCS attendance rules and examples of under-attendance reporting [here](#).

### **4. Compliance**

It is a requirement that providers report on under-attendance at the eight-week point. If it is determined that an overpayment of a subsidy has occurred, where under-attendance has occurred beyond this 12 week period and not been reported by the provider, then a provider will be found as non-compliant. In this instance, over claims will be recouped from the provider by Pobal.

If you require further clarification on the rules please contact the Early Years Provider Centre (EYPC). The quickest way of contacting the EYPC is by submitting a Request on the Early Years Hive. You can also contact the EYPC by calling 01 511 7222 or by email at [EYPC@pobal.ie](mailto:EYPC@pobal.ie).

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Department of Children, Equality,  
Disability, Integration and Youth

## National Childcare Scheme (NCS) – Administration Group

The Department recently concluded a series of meetings with a subgroup of the Early Learning and Childcare Stakeholder Forum (ELCSF). The subgroup, which was largely comprised of provider representatives, was convened to identify potential enhancements to assist providers with the increased administration arising from the January 2023 NCS rate change. We would like to take the opportunity to thank those who participated in the subgroup for their valuable time and contributions.

As a result, Pobal deployed a semi-automated Parental Agreement tool on 15 December 2022. This new tool aims to reduce the administrative burden associated with rate changes by automatically including all co-payment weekly amounts and relevant information about the child and claim. The new Parental Agreement is available on the NCS Claims section on the [Registrations page](#), and an accompanying how-to guide is available on the Early Years Hive.

Following the January uplift, the ELCSF subgroup concluded with a discussion on which items identified by providers could be further prioritised by the Department and Pobal in 2023. These include:

- Exploring a Parental Agreement that is not fee-specific and hence removes the need for an updated parental signature where the co-payment changes;
- Examining solutions to improve attendance tracking requirements for providers;
- Refining communications with parents around issues such as renewals to reduce the risk of awards being cancelled in error.

Workshops will be established within the coming months to progress provision of more detailed remittance information and review commercial attendance tracking solutions used by providers.

As a reminder, the Early Years Provider Centre (EYPC) remains available to assist providers where difficulties arise in operating the Scheme. The quickest way of contacting the EYPC is by submitting a Request on the Early Years Hive. You can also contact the EYPC by calling 01 511 7222 or by email at [EYPC@pobal.ie](mailto:EYPC@pobal.ie).

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### Appointment of Programme Board to Oversee Planning for New Early Learning and Childcare Agency

In March 2022, Minister O’Gorman published a report that signalled major reform to the operating model for early learning and childcare. The independent [Review of the Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare Operating Model in Ireland](#) concluded that a dedicated state agency is the optimal operating model for the early learning and childcare sector for the years ahead. A dedicated state agency will support the delivery of accessible, affordable and high-quality early learning and childcare services for children and their families and the significant reform agenda committed to by Government.

On 21 February, Minister O’Gorman announced the appointment of a Programme Board to oversee the planning for the new early learning and childcare agency. The Programme Board, comprising external experts and representatives from a number of Government Departments, will oversee a period of detailed analysis, planning, engagement and consultation in respect of this programme of reform.

The Programme Board, which will be in place throughout 2023 and 2024, comprises the following members:

- Mr Kevin McCarthy (Chair), Secretary General of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth
- Ms Sylva Langford, former Director General of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs

- Mr Michael Kelly, Former Chair of the Higher Education Authority and Former Secretary General of the Department of Health

- Professor Eva Lloyd OBE, Professor of Early Childhood in the School of Education University of East London

- Mr Pat McLoughlin, former CEO of the Alzheimer Society of Ireland

- Representatives from several Government Departments.

2023 will consist of an information gathering and research phase for the programme. The Department will be seeking the views of a wide range of stakeholders over the coming months as part of this phase. We look forward to working with stakeholders to ensure the views of all are included in the design process as we work to create a new operating model for the benefit the sector, the State, and most importantly children and their families. Regular updates on progress will be made available to stakeholders.



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### STEM Education Implementation Plan

On 1 March Minister O’Gorman and Minister Foley launched the joint **STEM Education Implementation Plan to 2026** for early learning and care settings, primary and post-primary schools. The plan represents the second phase in the implementation of the **STEM Education Policy Statement 2017–2026** which was published by the Department of Education in November 2017.

STEM (Science, technology, engineering, and mathematics) concepts are first introduced through play and hands-on experience at home and in early learning and care settings, and these early experiences lay the foundation for all future learning. The **STEM Education Implementation Plan to 2026** sets out important actions and timelines for delivery. These actions include but are not limited to the development and delivery of a CPD programme in STEM and the Arts for early years educators, and the development of resources for families with young children on STEM in the home learning environment.

Full details of the STEM Education Implementation Plan to 2026 can be found [here](#):

### Core Funding

Core Funding Partner Services are reminded that the next Review and Confirm window will be open between 31 March and 7 April inclusive. It is important the Review and Confirm process is completed within the required timeframe as Core Funding payments will be placed on hold until such a time as the process is completed. Core Funding Partner Services are able to update their Core Funding application any time throughout the programme year, and are encouraged to do so – do not wait until the next Review and Confirm window. If a Core Funding application is up to date, all a Partner Service needs to do at the next Review and Confirm window is confirm that this is the case. For help deciding if a change is required, please contact your local CCC for additional information on updating your service profile and application module.

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An Roinn Oideachais  
Department of Education

## Early Years Education Inspection (EYEI)

The Department of Education Inspectorate resumed inspection activity in Early Learning and Care settings on 12 September 2022. Circular 0061/2022 was published to detail the inspection plans for the academic year 2022/2023. This can be accessed online here:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/30118-arrangements-for-inspection-of-early-learning-and-care-elc-settings-september-2022-june-2023/>

## Guide to Early Years Education Inspection: Birth to Six

'The Guide to Early Years Education Inspection: Birth to Six' was published on 2 September 2022. This document provides details of how the Department of Education Inspectorate carries out Early Years Education Inspection in early learning and care settings. It replaces the previous Guide to EYEI (2018) and is the culmination of two years of research and consultation with all stakeholders. The Guide can be accessed here: [gov.ie - Guide to Early Years Education Inspections \(www.gov.ie\)](https://www.gov.ie/en/publication-detail/guide-to-early-years-education-inspections-2022)



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government supporting communities

### Early Years Hive: Essential Maintenance

#### Reminding all providers!

The Early Years Hive and the National Childcare Scheme website will be unavailable from:

**7am on Friday 3 March 2023 until 9pm on Sunday 5 March**

This is due to essential maintenance. During this time:

- you will be unable to log into your portal
- there will be no impact to your weekly payments on 3 March 2023
- after this maintenance, you may need to refresh your web browser to access the Early Years Hive portal again.

**We are sorry but the National Childcare Scheme website is currently unavailable due to scheduled maintenance.**

**Ár leithscéal, ach níl láithreán gréasáin na Scéime Náisiúnta Cúraim Leanaí ar fáil faoi láthair de bharr go bhfuil cothabháil sceidealaithe ar siúl.**



You can contact the National Childcare Scheme Parent Support Centre Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm on 01 906 8530.

Is féidir leat teagmháil a dhéanamh leis an Ionad Tacaíochta do Thuismitheoirí ar 01 906 8530 idir 9 r.n. agus 5 i.n ó Luan go hAoine.

We apologise for any inconvenience this may cause and thank you for your cooperation!

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### Payment dates

Here are the payment dates for March:

<b>Friday 3 March</b>	AIM L7 NCS ECCE/AIM Level 1 (Payment until 31 March 2023)
<b>Friday 10 March</b>	AIM L7 NCS CCSP
<b>Thursday 16 March</b>	AIM L7 NCS
<b>Friday 24 March</b>	AIM L7 NCS CCSP
<b>Friday 31 March</b>	AIM L7 NCS Core Funding (Payment until 3 May 2023) ECCE/AIM Level 1 (Payment until 12 May 2023)

### Core Funding - Review and Confirm

#### Review and Confirm Window

The next 'Review and Confirm' window will open at the end of March. All services who are contracted to Core Funding must complete this.

It is essential that:

- your 'Service Profile' and 'Core Funding Application Module' is kept up to date before this window opening, and
- you inform us of any changes to your service through the application changes functionality.

Applications must be at an approved status before you can complete the Review and Confirm.

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### Annual Early Years Sector Profile

The new Annual Early Years Sector Profile is due to be launched in the coming months.

Services will have a 4-week period to complete this once the window is opened. It is mandatory that all services contracted into Core Funding complete March's Review and Confirm before they start the Annual Early Years Sector Profile.

### Review and confirm training videos:

You can access the training videos for review and confirm [here](#)

## Better Start



Forbairt Cáilíocht  
Luathbhlianta Náisiúnta  
National Early Years  
Quality Development

### Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) Project

March is the month we celebrate the Irish language during Seachtain na Gaeilge. The Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL) offers flexibility and opportunities for a more focused approach to target language (Irish in this instance) learning and teaching in English-medium settings.

To access CLIL resources you can [click here](#).

The Aistear Síolta Practice Guide is available in Irish by clicking Gaeilge on the website, this will bring you [here](#).

### Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)

Better Start has developed a new Sensory Play Tip Sheet. Sensory Play is important for children's development and the tip sheet gives examples of sensory materials and play experiences.

See how a sensory environment includes designated spaces which can optimise children's active learning and participation. When designing a sensory space, how to ensure it is flexible and adaptable to children's differing needs.

To access this Tip Sheet [click here](#).



*Sensory Play with jelly stimulates the sensory system and supports the development of fine motor skills.*

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### Quality Development Service

'Play is a biological and social need, a right, and one of the most beneficial activities for a child's overall health.' Dr Margaret Rogers and Laura Cleere reflect on the power of play in times of crisis.

[This article](#) explores the importance of play in the lives of children experiencing adversity, particularly forced migration due to war, conflict, or disaster. The authors draw on recent literature in this area as well as first-hand experience of facilitating an open access play.

You can access this article in Ireland's Education Year Book 2022 [if you click here](#).

To find out more about Better Start's approach to quality development and the range options available to you [here](#).

### Learning and Development

Hanen 'Teacher Talk' A 'Encouraging Language Development in Early Childhood Settings' will be available online from April to June. Courses will be advertised on Better Start's website under Training and Events.

- To find out more about the Hanen approach and access resources, visit their website [here](#)

Lámh 'Module One' continues to be offered online. Upcoming courses will be advertised on Better Start's website under Training and Events.

- To find out more about Lámh, visit their website [here](#)
- You can access Better Start's website [here](#)

To access e-learning and in-person courses offered by Better Start's Learning Gateway, providers can register staff via an access link under 'resources' on the Early Years Hive. If you are an existing account holder, for example you have completed training with us in the last 3 years, you will find advice on how to access the Learning Gateway.






## **EARLY YEARS INSPECTORATE – March 2023**

### ***Early Years Inspectorate e-learning courses***

We have just published a new eLearning course on the **Change in Circumstance** process. The course guides you through the requirements and timeframes for submitting a request to change your registration and details all of the necessary documentation. You can access the course through our [Early Years Provider e-learning webpage](#)



On the same page, you can access a number of other eLearning course including Corrective and Preventive Actions, Feedback and Concerns and Registration Renewal

 <p><b>Corrective Actions and Preventive Actions (CAPA)</b></p> <p>Lessons: 8      Time: 00m</p> <p>0%      Start →</p>	 <p><b>Feedback and Concerns</b></p> <p>Lessons: 7      Time: 00m</p> <p>0%      Start →</p>	 <p><b>Registration renewal</b></p> <p>Lessons: 9      Time: 00m</p> <p>0%      Start →</p>
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A reminder too that our [QRF e-learning course](#) is available for anyone involved in the sector including students and parents. The course now has more than **12,000 users** across the sector.



### Certificates of Registration



We have now issued more than 6,000 certificates of registration to services across the country and will complete the requirement to issue a certificate to all services by February 2023. Remember that once you receive your certificate, you must display it prominently in the service.

A reminder that it will take up to **six weeks** from the time one of the approved processes ([see note on our website for details](#)) has been completed and approved, to the time when the certificate is received. Please don't contact us in relation to your certificate until this time period has elapsed. Once you receive your certificate, you will need to display it.