

[www.omc.gov.ie](http://www.omc.gov.ie)

or telephone the Childcare  
Directorate at Lo Call  
1890 20 90 30

[www.pobal.ie](http://www.pobal.ie)

or telephone Pobal  
(formerly known as ADM)  
at 01 240 0727



Office of the Minister for Children  
Oifig an Aire do Leanai



DEPARTMENT  
OF HEALTH AND  
CHILDREN  
AN ROINN  
SLÁINTE AGUS LEANAI

# National Childcare Investment Programme

**2006 – 2010**

**Scope and Outline**

**2006**

## Introduction

Recent years has seen childcare gaining prominence in the Government's list of priorities to the point where it has become a central pillar in many Government strategies aimed at strengthening society and the economy as a whole. While it has been recognised that the issue is both complex and evolving a great opportunity now presents itself to radically transform childcare in the Irish context.

On 7 December 2005 the Minister for Finance announced the introduction of the National Childcare Investment Programme. The new Programme, which succeeds the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme and runs from 2006 to 2010.

The new Programme aims to provide a proactive response to the development of quality childcare supports and services which will be planned for and developed locally and centred on the needs of the child and the family.

Both the Childcare Programme 2006-2010 and the EOCP will be managed by the Childcare Directorate. Pobal (formerly known as ADM Ltd) will continue to implement the day to day operation of the EOCP as well as taking on this role under the Childcare Programme 2006 - 2010.

### **Summary of new Programme Funding**

**Developing the Childcare infrastructure, enhancing and increasing the supply of quality childcare.**

Private Sector Capital Funding	Community/Not for Profit Sector Capital Funding
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A new capital grant scheme for private sector childcare providers.</li> <li>• Applicants may apply for grant assistance of up to €100,000, towards the capital cost of developing a childcare service facility in a catchment area where there is a demonstrated childcare need.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An expanded capital grant scheme for community/not for profit sector childcare providers.</li> <li>• Groups may apply for grant assistance based on a demonstrated childcare need in the area.</li> <li>• The level of funding granted will be determined by the number of places which the group proposes to provide.</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• An applicant may apply for more than one grant under this scheme, provided the subsequent childcare facilities are in different catchment areas and subject to an overall ceiling of €500,000 per applicant.</li> <li>• In each case, an applicant must provide at least 25% of the total funding required for the project.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The maximum grant payable per project is not expected to exceed €1,000,000.</li> <li>• Capital grant applications from community/not for profit groups will take account of the sustainability of a project.</li> </ul>
---	--

**Other Capital:** Arrangements are being made for the introduction of an improved capital grant scheme to assist Childminding services and a new capital grant scheme to assist Parent and Toddler Groups.

**Expression of interest forms for the new Programme funding lines are expected to be available shortly.**

#### **Supporting the community based sector to develop sustainable quality childcare**

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Applicants may apply for grant assistance towards the staffing costs of their childcare services, where the projects demonstrate a need for support for either of the following.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding in the initial start up / support phase for community not for profit services where there is a demonstrated level of disadvantage.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Funding to support families and communities to break the cycle of poverty and disadvantage.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Services whose client base represents a cross section of society will be expected to become sustainable over the short to medium term.</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The level of poverty and disadvantage will be determined by a number of factors including, in particular, the geographic location (e.g. RAPID and CLAR areas) as well as taking account of factors specific to the service</li> </ul>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• All services will be required to operate a tiered system of charges, based on parental ability to pay</li> </ul>

## **Guiding Principles**

A number of guiding principles have been elaborated to inform the development of the new Programme. These are set out below under four separate themes below:-

### ***Child Centred***

For many years the way in which we conceptualised childhood, from an official perspective, saw children as passive and dependent and, while policies impacted greatly on children's lives, policy makers were not always sensitive to the needs and voices of children themselves. In 2000 the National Children's Strategy set out, for the first time, a vision for children living in Ireland which recognises the valuable contribution they can make to their own communities and wider society.

#### **Child Centred**

All children should be respected, cherished and supported by their families and the wider community

### ***Access to Services***

Childcare patterns in Ireland are both complex and diverse involving networks of relatives, friends and professional providers. Parents frequently avail of more than one form of care for their children. Progress under the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme has significantly impacted on the choices available to families.

Building on this success sees the addition of a new set of policy objectives, in terms of addressing service gaps for children in the 3 to 4 years age range and of school going age, emerging in Ireland.

#### **Access to Services**

To build on the achievements of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme by increasing the supply of quality centre based childcare in both private and community facilities

To improve the supply of early childhood care and education services for 3 to 4 year olds.

### ***Affordability for all Families***

The unfolding of the knowledge based society is placing a growing premium on the quality of early childhood experiences and education. Childhood poverty can have profound consequences for children in terms of their future educational attainment, health and wellbeing. The failure to properly confront these problems has, in the past, only perpetuated cycles of disadvantage across generations. Improving educational outcomes is acknowledged as an important mechanism for escaping the poverty trap.

The National Anti-Poverty Strategy has been an important vehicle for change in Irish social policy. A key to the success of the Strategy has been its strong emphasis on access to quality public services for families and the lead role of the public sector in eliminating social. In the broader context, the development of childcare capacity through grant support for both private and community facilities will provide a wider range of options for parents and create a more competitive market environment.

#### **Affordability for Families**

Supporting families and breaking the cycle of disadvantage.

### **Quality Childcare Services**

Local structures are increasingly being used to co-ordinate public services and implement national policy in a more integrated fashion. These types of structures provide a valuable feedback mechanism on national and local developments in relation to regulation and best practice. This very process has been one of the hallmarks of the Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme which established City and County Childcare Committees in 33 separate local administrative areas.

The coming years are expected to herald in important reforms of the structural and institutional arrangements, in terms of the regulation and content of services, across the sector. Coupled with this the trend towards increased professionalisation in the sector represent a significant challenge to the development of childcare services.

#### **Quality Childcare Services**

To further develop the structures for co-ordination between statutory and non-statutory actors in the sector, to deliver quality early childhood care and educational services centred on the needs of the child

### **Objectives of the New Programme**

The National Childcare Investment Programme will be an important element in a multitude of high level policy objectives ranging from the removal of barriers to employment, education or training to tackling educational disadvantage. In this regard ambitious targets have been set for the Programme which are set out below :-

- The creation of an additional 50,000 new childcare places, of which approximately 22,000 will be in the private sector and 28,000 in the community and voluntary sector.
- Approximately 20% of these new places will be for the 3 to 4 years age group and will provide an early childhood care and education focus.
- An additional 10% of places will be for children of school going age outside of usual school times.

- The Programme is also expected to indirectly lead to the creation of an additional 8,000 new jobs for people working directly with children and a further 1,200 for people employed in ancillary roles.

Perhaps the most important next step in planning for the Programme and its delivery will be the division of these national targets into specific targets for each of the city and county administrative areas.

### **Eligibility for Funding under the New Programme**

Eligibility under the new Programme is to be assessed taking account of a range of factors. No single factor should determine eligibility and proposed projects should be able to demonstrate that they possess many of the factors, as appropriate to the nature of the project (e.g. Private or Community based childcare), outlined below :-

#### ***Socio/Economic Profile of the location of the Service***

- The proposed childcare service should be located in an area where the local demographic, such as population, age profile and labour market projections would suggest that a local need exists for a service which matches the type of the childcare services being proposed.
- The project should be assessed as to the extent to which the service will increase the number of childcare places available locally and only projects which include the provision of at least five additional places (with the exception of childminders) will be eligible for funding under the new Programme.
- The project should be assessed as to the extent to which the service will provide affordable childcare places to disadvantaged families. Additional factors which should be considered in this regard would include, but would not be limited to the following:-
  - If the service is located in an area which has been designated as disadvantaged (e.g. located in a RAPID or CLAR area).
  - If the service is to be located in an area which serves families of recipients of medical cards, lone parent families, families occupying local authority or social housing and families with above average numbers of dependents.
  - If the fee structure for the service (e.g. tiered fee structures) facilitates access by families which are economically disadvantaged.

- If the ethos or origin of the service is such that the service caters for a specific target group which is economically disadvantaged (e.g. persons with disabilities, persons from ethnic minorities and the Traveller community, persons who are unemployed or in receipt of State benefits etc.).
- If the admissions policy for the service is such that places are set aside for referrals from the Health Services Executive, participants from State funded back to education, training or employment initiatives or other such schemes.
- If the proposer can otherwise demonstrate that the focus of the service is on disadvantage (e.g. written policies and procedures of the service).

#### ***Quality/Nature of the Services being Provided***

- Special consideration should be given to projects which offer services which provide places for babies, full day care places, part time places, school age childcare places and are open for 48 weeks or more per year.
- Special consideration should be given to applicants who are offering pre-school places aimed at 3 to 4 year olds and wrap around childcare places for school age children.
- Services which will cater for more than 20 childcare places such services will be expected to contribute a proportion of such places (usually in excess of 20%) for the purpose of early childhood care and education in line with both EU targets and the Governments policy on access to pre-school services for children aged 3 to 4 years.
- The extent to which the service is focused on the needs and development of the child will be a key consideration. In this regard the staff training and qualifications, the adult to child ratios and the richness of the physical environment and programmes are all particularly pertinent.
- The proposed project should comply with all relevant regulatory and other legal obligations, particularly in relation to children, health and safety, planning, taxation and social insurance

#### ***The Cost/Value for Money of the Projects***

- The overall cost of the project should be in proportion to the numbers of places being created and the nature of the services being provided with particular reference to operating hours. In particular:-

- The maximum grant available for capital works under the new Programme will, other than in exceptional circumstances, be restricted by reference to €20,000 per new place (€15,000 in the case of 'Private Sector Providers' allowing for the minimum 25% private contribution).
- The maximum grant for private sector childcare providers will be €100,000 per facility. Individual providers may be considered for multiple grants, subject to an overall limit of €500,000 in grant aid per individual, where the proposed services are located in different catchment areas.
- The maximum grant for capital works for the community/not for profit strand of the Programme will, not normally, exceed €1 million.
- In general priority should be given to projects which can demonstrate that they expect to be sustainable, without additional funding under the Programme, in the medium to long term (i.e. usually more than five years) either as private sector or community based services. In particular:-
  - All projects eligible for staffing subsidies will be required to develop a mixed usage policy for their service (i.e. to operate on the basis of cross subsidisation within the service and tiered fee structure).
  - Those projects whose sustainability depends on the provision of long term staffing subsidies (i.e. usually more than two years) have to demonstrate a significant focus on disadvantage and will usually be located in designated areas.

#### ***Integration and Co-ordination with other Services***

- The proposed childcare service should be assessed as to the potential consequences for overlap, duplication or displacement of other services or personnel in the locality.
- The proposed childcare service should be assessed as to the potential for integration or linkage with other complementary services or programmes in the locality. In particular, with reference to school age childcare services integration/linkage with local schools should be considered.
- The proposer should be able to demonstrate an awareness of important Government policies and initiatives in the sphere of childcare.