



Financial support and guidance for the childcare sector during COVID19: Information briefing 4.0 – 6 November 2020

The majority of the childcare sector in Northern Ireland has now been able to re-open, although the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic continues to be felt. For some settings occupancy levels are down, while 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 – are impacting on income and sustainability.

It was positive that, when the most recent restrictions were introduced on 22 September 2020, these permitted the continuation of both formal and informal childcare provision. However, due to recent school closures during the extended half-term break, some providers based on a school premises closed at short notice.

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. It is important to highlight that childcare settings remain safe places for children. The Department of Health continues to issue infection prevention and control guidance to all childcare providers. This guidance covers issues such as:

- Need for group childcare providers (eg daycare) to care for children in separate, consistently constituted groups
- Need for effective ventilation and the use of outdoor space where possible
- PPE
- Testing, Tracking and Tracing
- Dealing with children who display COVID-19 symptoms
- Self-isolation in the event that any child or staff member tests COVID-19 positive.

All guidance is available on the [Family Support NI](#) website, along with a letter from the Chief Medical Officer to parents providing reassurance as to the safety of childcare settings, and offering advice on Covid-19 symptoms and testing. Most recently the guidance for group settings was amended to incorporate temporary easements which may be permitted, in exceptional circumstances, to the minimum standards and implementation guidance.

Further financial support confirmed for the childcare sector (September to December 2020)

On 29 October 2020 the Minister of Finance confirmed further funding to support the childcare sector had been approved, with [£11.3 million allocated for two schemes](#):

- £8.5 million for ongoing sustainability/recovery funding
- £2.8 million for a short-term closure support fund.

The Department of Education is now working on the detail of how this funding will be allocated and administered and further information will be published as soon as it is available. The Department, informed by the Childcare Reference Group, understands the urgency in getting these schemes up and running, and in ensuring that claims processes are straightforward and efficient. It is likely the sustainability funding will be available initially and it is hoped that this funding scheme will be open at the beginning of December. 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.

Update on the Childcare Recovery Support Fund (July and August 2020)

The Childcare Recovery Support Fund, designed to support the re-opening and recovery of childcare in July and August, opened for applications on Monday 27 July and closed in September. Having received close to 3,000 applications, almost £9.5 million in payments have been made to the sector. During the implementation of this fund, payments for childminders were increased as a result of a joint submission from NICMA and Unite.

Covid-19 indemnity for childcare providers

On 30 October, the Education Minister wrote to childcare providers to extend Covid-19 related indemnity from 1 November 2020 to 31 March 2021.

Other updates in relation to financial support

Alongside specific support for the childcare sector, UK wide developments in relation to financial support for employers and for the self-employed may be of benefit to childcare providers. Further information on these schemes is available [here](#) with a summary below:

- **Furlough:** On 5 November, the Chancellor announced a further extension to the furlough scheme, to the end of March 2021. The scheme can now be used by employers and employees who had not previously used it. This could benefit providers who employ staff and have been affected by the pandemic eg where they are required to close a room or pod temporarily.
- **Self-Employment Income Support Scheme:** The Chancellor also announced a further increase in the amount of support for the self-employed, with the amount of profits covered by the next grant – covering November to January – increasing to 80% of average trading profits in the previous year, up to a maximum of £7,500. This could benefit childminders who have been affected by the pandemic, including those who have continued to work. The claims window is expected to open at the end of November.

Specific to Northern Ireland, the Economy Minister has also announced support will be made available for the newly self-employed who did not qualify for the UK Government's self-employment support scheme. We are awaiting further details, but this could benefit newer childminders who did not qualify for the UK wide scheme.

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.