

COVID-19 - FINANCIAL ASSISTANCE FOR CHILDCARE PROVIDERS

This paper sets out a range of financial support measures which are being put in place by the Departments of Health and Education in Northern Ireland for the purpose of:

1. Ensuring that parents who are key workers and vulnerable children can continue to access childcare during the period of the COVID-19 Pandemic; and
2. Sustaining those daycare providers who have had to close during the period of the COVID-19 Pandemic so that they will be able to open for business again in the future.

In this document, the period of the COVID-19 Pandemic means the period between 1 April 2020 and 30 June 2020. This will be subject to ongoing monitoring and review.

All offers of financial assistance under this package of measures will be considered against other receipts of funding specific to childcare and against other COVID-19 Pandemic financial reliefs to individuals and businesses.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR CHILDMINDERS

Those who continue to provide childminding services to keyworkers and vulnerable children during the period of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Some operating restrictions are being placed on childminders during the pandemic period. For example, childminders are being prevented from caring for more than two families. This is likely to result in childminders being only able to provide childcare to smaller numbers of children. They are also being expected to observe strict infection control practices in accordance with published guidance¹. As a result, for the duration of the COVID-19 Pandemic period, in addition to fees paid by parents, childminders who provide care to vulnerable children and the children of keyworkers will be paid an additional sum of:

- £125 per place filled per month up to a maximum payment of £500 per childminder per month.

Those who cease providing childminding services to keyworkers and vulnerable children during the period of the COVID-19 Pandemic

- It is anticipated that childminders who are not working during the period of the COVID-19 Pandemic will avail of the UK Government support package for self-employed individuals. Further information is available at: <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-a-grant-through-the-coronavirus-covid-19-self-employment-income-support-scheme>.

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR DAYCARE PROVIDERS

Those who continue to provide daycare services to keyworkers and vulnerable children during the period of the COVID-19 Pandemic

Like childminders, operating restrictions will be placed on daycare settings during the period of the COVID-19 Pandemic. Providers who remain open are asked to restrict the numbers of children being cared for in their setting. The numbers will be determined by their ability to provide safe care and will also be informed by the number of rooms available to separate children. It is likely that some providers may be only able to take 25% of their usual number of their normal published capacity at this time. HSC Trust Early Years will oversee the operating arrangements in each daycare setting and will provide advice on the issue of safe numbers and will seek public health advice if required.

This will impact on the economic viability of settings and, subject to where they are located and the numbers of keyworkers and vulnerable children in their areas, not all will not be able to attract children in sufficient numbers and will require them to close.

HSC Trust Early Years Teams will work with providers who are continuing to provide services at this time to assist them to, as far as possible, maximise capacity. Given the rate of closures to date, it is likely to mean that some providers will be asked to reopen to meet the demand for childcare in their area during the period of the COVID-19 Pandemic period. Decisions about re-opening must be made in conjunction with HSC Trust Early Years Teams. If any daycare provider would like to reopen, they should first make contact with their local HSC Trust Early Years Team.

As a result, for the duration of the COVID-19 Pandemic period, daycare providers who can remain viably open or agree to reopen to meet demand in their area should continue to charge parents who use their services their normal fee. Subject to other financial receipts specific to childcare and to other financial relief measures available, daycare providers will also receive payments which:

- Meet their monthly costs in full (both core costs and staffing costsⁱⁱ), less the fees collected from parents.
- Provide a temporary uplift in the salaries of staff of 1.2 times their normal rate of pay.ⁱⁱⁱ

Those who cease providing daycare services to keyworkers and vulnerable children during the period of the COVID-19 Pandemic

It is intended to make a specific childcare financial sustainability package available to daycare providers who have had to close during the period of the COVID-19 Pandemic period. Daycare providers who have closed are asked to support their keyworker parents by engaging in the revised Approved Home Childcare Scheme. The details of the sustainability package are being finalised and further information will be made available soon. It will take account of other financial reliefs made to small businesses for COVID-19 purposes, including the Coronavirus Job Retention Scheme (information available at <https://www.gov.uk/guidance/claim-for-wage-costs-through-the-coronavirus-job-retention-scheme>).

FINANCIAL SUPPORT FOR THE BESPOKE APPROVED HOME CHILDCARER SCHEME

The Department of Health put in place a Bespoke Approved Home Childcarer Scheme, which will operate for the duration of the COVID-19 Pandemic. It is intended to enable children to be cared for in their own homes by childcarers who work in the daycare setting the child normally attends. A fast track approval process has been put in place and under the scheme childcarers will continue to be employed by daycare providers. It will require carers to work flexibly with parents to meet their childcare needs during the period of the COVID-19 Pandemic and will require employers to manage the arrangement, including making another carer available in the event of illness, for example.

As a result, for the duration of the COVID-19 Pandemic period, payments to support the operation of the Scheme will be made as follows:

- Approved home childcarers will receive 1.5 times their normal hourly rate of pay^{iv};
- Employers who agree to continue to employ approved home childcarers and manage the employment arrangement will receive a management fee of 10% of each approved home childcarer's pay.

Parents will continue to pay their current fees at exactly the same rate to their daycare setting. Any additional costs associated with the payments to approved home childcarers and employer management arrangements will be met by government.

WHEN AND HOW WILL PAYMENTS BE MADE?

Mechanisms to make and receive payments are being developed and further information on those will be made available to providers as soon as possible.

INDEMNIFICATION

In addition to the measures outlined above, indemnification will be provided by the Department of Health to daycare providers, childminders and approved home childcarers for incidents relating to COVID-19.

ⁱ Infection control guidance - <https://www.publichealth.hscni.net/news/covid-19-coronavirus>

ⁱⁱ This will not apply to the costs associated with any member of staff furloughed under the COVID-19 Job Retention Scheme during the period for which they are furloughed.

ⁱⁱⁱ This will not apply to any member of staff furloughed under the COVID-19 Job Retention Scheme during the period for which they are furloughed. Normal rates of pay will be subject to examination before revised rates are agreed.

^{iv} Normal rates of pay will be subject to examination before revised rates are agreed.