

The Pathway Fund 2027/28 & 2028/29

The Pathway Fund – Stream A & Stream B

The Pathway Fund will operate over a two-year period for 2027/28 and 2028/29.

The Pathway Fund budget will be subject to the availability of DE funding in 2027/28 and 2028/29



Department of Education
www.education-ni.gov.uk

Outcomes

The outcomes of the Pathway Fund are:

- Improved development of children who are at risk of not reaching their full educational potential; and
- An enhanced, more sustainable Early Years sector.

The Pathway Fund will be open to registered providers or facilitators of Early Years education and learning provision focused on children 0-4 such as:

- **Registered Sessional Day Care Settings (Out of Schools, Summer Schemes, Playgroups, Crèches)**
- **Registered Full Day Care Settings (Day Nurseries)**
- **Registered Childminders / Approved Home Childcarers**

The Pathway Fund will be administered over three Streams and applicants can only apply to one stream. Only one application per organisation will be accepted. See separate guidance notes and flyer for Stream C information which is tailored for application by Registered Childminders and Approved Home Childcarers.

Stream A

A competitive funding application process open to all registered providers or facilitators with the following conditions in place:

- Awards will be made from £20,001 up to £40,000.
- No duplication or displacement of existing provision.
- Confirmation of project need and the funding requested.
- Proposed projects will be assessed against the 6 Fund criteria.

Stream B

A competitive funding application process open to all registered providers or facilitators with the following conditions in place:

- Awards will be made up to £20,000.
- No duplication or displacement of existing provision.
- Confirmation of project need and the funding requested.
- Proposed projects will be assessed against the 4 Priority Fund criteria.

Eligibility and Assessment Criteria

Applicants will be required to demonstrate that they meet a range of eligibility criteria, including that they are not in receipt of any alternative funding or income to provide the project outlined in the application. Only applicants deemed eligible will be assessed. The Pathway Fund provides a contribution towards the overall cost of the proposed project.

Settings will be evaluated to determine to what extent they meet set criteria as follows:

The criteria in bold are most heavily weighted;

	Stream A	**Stream B**
i. Providing quality education and learning services in areas of social disadvantage to address both educational and social disadvantage.	✓	✓
ii. Ensuring children with additional needs receive quality Early Years support.	✓	✓
iii. Provision of quality services/ support to children at risk of harm.	✓	✓
iv. Provision of quality early years services in rural and other areas where there is little or no provision.	✓	✓
v. Improving the integration and building of community relations from an early age.	✓	
vi. Enhancement of existing services through improving quality, staff development, partnerships, parental engagement, management and governance.	✓	

Overall scores will be calculated and funding awarded to eligible applicants listed in rank order in both Streams A and B.

The principles of the Code of Practice for Reducing Bureaucracy in Grant Funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector 2015 will be applied in the allocation and verification of funding.

Stream A applications open on Monday 23rd November 2026 and closes on Friday 18th December 2026 at 4:00pm.

Stream B applications open on Monday 23rd November 2026 and **closes on Friday 18th December 2026 at 4:00pm**.

To access the on-line application and guidance notes please go to our website www.early-years.org/the-pathway-fund

Applications will be assessed using deprivation data for the area served, based on the NI Multiple Deprivation Measure 2017 and the Education Skills and Training Deprivation ranking 2017.

To check your postcodes in Super Output Areas please Visit Here

[2]The principles of the Code of Practice for Reducing Bureaucracy in Grant Funding to the Voluntary and Community Sector 2015 are available click here

For further information please contact **The Pathway Fund team:**

Tel: 028 9066 2825 (option 2)

Email: thepathwayfund@early-years.org

Information Sessions

Please register to attend one of the following information sessions, via https://www.early-years.org/the-pathway-fund

Date	Time
Monday 16th November 2026	4:00pm - 6:00pm, **The Junction**,12 Beechvalley Way, Dungannon BT70 1BS
Tuesday 17th November 2026	10.00am - 12.00pm, Microsoft Teams, 3:00pm - 5:00pm, **NICVA**, 61 Duncairn Gardens, Belfast BT15 2GB
Wednesday 18th November 2026	12.00pm - 2.00pm, Microsoft Teams, 6.00pm - 8.00pm, Microsoft Teams, 4.30pm - 6.30pm, **The Lodge Hotel**, Lodge Rd, Roundabout, Coleraine, BT52 1NF
Thursday 19th November 2026	10.00am - 12.00pm, Microsoft Teams,
Monday 23rd November 2026	12.00pm - 2.00pm, Microsoft Teams, 2.00pm - 4.00pm, Microsoft Teams, 6.00pm - 8.00pm - ***Strabane Enterprise Agency,*** Orchard Road Industrial Estate, Orchard Road, Strabane, Co.Tyrone, BT82 9FR
Tuesday 24th November 2026	2.00pm - 4.00pm, Microsoft Teams,
Wednesday 25th November 2026	10.00am - 12.00pm - Microsoft Teams, 6.00pm - 8.00pm - **Armagh City Hotel,** 2 Friary Road Armagh BT60 4FR
Monday 30th November 2026	2.00pm - 4.00pm, Microsoft Teams,
Wednesday 2nd December 2026	10.00am - 12.00pm - Microsoft Teams,