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Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth



Core Funding Programme Year 2 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

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Contents

Introduction	4
1. Core Funding Allocation Model for Programme Year 2	4
1.1. How much has the allocation model increased by?	4
1.2. What are the main changes to the Core Funding allocation model in year 2?	4
1.3. What are the new base rates for year 2 of Core Funding?	5
1.4. What are the changes to the Graduate Premiums in year 2 of Core Funding?.....	6
1.5. What is the flat rate allocation?.....	6
1.6. How will the flat rate allocation work?	7
1.7. What is the minimum base rate allocation?	8
1.8. Why is the minimum base rate allocation being introduced?.....	8
1.9. How does the minimum base rate allocation work?	8
1.10. How do the base rate minimum and flat rate allocation interact with each other for Sessional Services?.....	9
1.11. What is the maximum base rate allocation?	11
1.12. Why is the maximum base rate allocation being introduced?	11
1.13. How does the maximum base rate allocation work?	11
1.14. Can registered childminders access Core Funding for year 2?	12
2. Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement	12
2.1. What are the terms and conditions for Core Funding programme year 2?	12
2.2. What is the structure of the Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement?.....	12
2.3. Are there be any changes to Fee Management?.....	14
2.4. What are the existing Fee Management rules?.....	15
2.5. Who is eligible for Core Funding?	15
2.6. Do exemptions from pre-existing schemes exempt services from the condition to be in contract for NCS and/or ECCE?	15
2.7. Where can Partner Services get further information about the Funding Agreement?.....	15
3. The Core Funding Application Process	16
3.1. I am already in Core Funding, how do I reapply for Core Funding for Programme Year 2023/2024?	16
3.2. How do I join Core Funding for the first time as a new applicant for Programme Year 2023/2024?	17
3.3. Does a service need to complete the AEYSP to apply for Core Funding?.....	17
3.4. Does the AEYSP affect a service's Core Funding allocation?	17
3.5. When will applications for Programme Year 2 open?	17
3.6. Is there a deadline to apply for Core Funding Programme Year 2023/2024?	18
3.7. When should I update my Service Profile and application module throughout the year?	18

3.8. What is meant by a “typical week”?	18
3.9. What constitutes a material or significant change?	18
3.10. What happens if I don’t complete the Review and Confirm requirements in Core Funding Programme Year 2023/2024?	19
3.11. Does a service need to complete their Core Funding Partner Service Parent Statement to receive their Core Funding payment?	19
3.12. When will I know what my Core Funding grant value is?	19
3.13. Can my Core Funding base rate increase during the programme year?	20
3.14. Can my Core Funding base rate decrease during the programme year?	20
3.15. Can my Core Funding Graduate Premium Value increase during the programme year? ...	20
3.16. Can my Core Funding Graduate Premium value decrease during the programme year? ...	20
3.17. Can I attract a flat rate allocation during the programme year?	20
3.18. Will staff vacancies affect Core Funding allocations?	21
3.19. How will Core Funding be paid?	21
3.20. Where can I find more information and support on the completion of my Core Funding application?	21

Introduction

In September 2022, Minister O’Gorman launched Together for Better, the new funding model for early learning and childcare. Together for Better brings together three major programmes, the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, including the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) and the new Core Funding scheme.

Core Funding is a grant to Early Learning and Care (ELC) and/or School Age Childcare (SAC) providers towards their operating costs. It is designed to deliver:

- Affordability for parents through ensuring no increases in fees and offering NCS and ECCE to all eligible children;
- Quality in services, including through better terms and conditions for staff and supporting graduate leadership in services; and
- Sustainability for providers through substantially increased funding to the sector, paid on a consistent and equitable basis.

Core Funding will operate Programme Year 2 from 1 September 2023 to 31 August 2024. This FAQ aims to support providers in understanding the allocation model, Funding Agreement and Programme Readiness for the Core Funding scheme in year 2.

1. Core Funding Allocation Model for Programme Year 2

1.1. How much has the allocation model increased by?

The original allocation for year 1 of Core Funding in Budget 2022 was €207 million. In early 2022 in response to cost pressures, the Minister increased this to €221 million. This was followed by a further increase September 2022 to €259 million based on significant growth in the sector.

The Minister secured additional funding of €28 million (11% increase) in the Core Funding budget for year two of operation (September 2023-August 2024). This brings full year budget of Core Funding year 2 to €287 million.

This substantial increase in the Core Funding budget has allowed for important changes in the Core Funding allocation model, in order to further the objectives of the scheme. The full allocation for year 2 allows for the continued success of the Core Funding scheme as the mechanism to provide public funding directly to early learning and childcare services to support increased quality, affordability, availability, and sustainability for the sector.

The new allocation model was determined by evidence and analysis emerging from year one of the operation of the scheme.

1.2. What are the main changes to the Core Funding allocation model in year 2?

The additional €28 million of the Core Funding for year 2 is as follows:

- €8.47m is allocated towards funding the natural growth of the sector. This additional funding will support an increase in Partner Services; and also more staff working in the sector, more rooms and places, and more graduate lead educators and managers.
- €6.11m is allocated for non-staff overheads. This additional funding is a contribution towards non-staff overheads in recognition of the increase in non-staff costs faced by all

services throughout the sector. This enhanced level of funding is aimed at increasing the sustainability of Partner Services, while continuing the Fee Management process that began in Year 1, which will further improve affordability for parents.

- €2.2m is allocated for administrative staff time. This additional funding is a contribution towards administration in recognition of the fact that the number of children supported through funding schemes is anticipated to continue to grow in 2023/2024. Non-contact/administration time is also factored into the base rate through the staff costs component.
- €4m is allocated to remove the year 3 experience requirement for the Graduates Premiums, underpinned by EROs.
- €7.22m is allocated for new targeted measures which are aimed at improving the sustainability of smaller and sessional Partner Services.

1.3. What are the new base rates for year 2 of Core Funding?

The majority of Core Funding will still be distributed to services via the base rate, based on a service's staffed capacity - the operating hours, opening weeks and the age group of children for whom services are provided as well as number of places available.

The base rate in Core Funding has been developed using the various components associated with the cost of delivery of service provision such as; staff pay and conditions, including contact and non-contact time, holiday pay, sick pay and other employer costs; administrative staff/time and non-staff overhead costs.

Although, the cost of delivery components have been used to derive the base rates the eligible areas of expenditure of the Core Funding grant are much broader. Partner Services can choose how to spend their Core Funding grant in accordance with the approved areas of expenditure outlined in the Funding Agreement.

Approved areas of Expenditure

- Costs relating to staffing of Partner Services in the provision of Early Learning and Care and/or School Aged Childcare (ELC/SAC), which may include non-contact time in preparation and review of ELC/SAC provision.
- Costs of participation in Continuing Professional Development relating to ELC/SAC including cost of cover for absence due to such participation.
- Costs relating to the administration of the service including the administration of schemes funded by Department.
- Overheads pertaining to running of the ELC/SAC service including rent, rates, utilities and insurance.
- Any other operational costs, excluding capital costs, which may reasonably be asserted to enhance the quality of ELC/SAC service provision.

Core Funding's base rates for year 2 will see in an increase in allocation per child place across all age groups.

Core Funding base rates for Programme Year 2

Age of child	Base Rate Year 1	Base Rate Year 2
Full-time (5+ hours per day) and Part-time (3.5 hours – 5 hours per day)		
0-1 year of age	€1.66	€1.69
1-2 years of age	€1.07	€1.10
2-3 years of age	€0.92	€0.95
3-6 years of age	€0.68	€0.71
Sessional (up to 3.5 hours per day)		
0-1 year of age	€1.66	€1.69
1-2.5 years of age	€1.07	€1.10
2.5-6 years of age	€0.65	€0.68
School-age		
Any age	€0.55	€0.57

1.4. What are the changes to the Graduate Premiums in year 2 of Core Funding?

There will continue to be an allocation to contribute to support graduates to be Lead Educators across ELC and to support graduates as Managers in ELC or combined ELC and SAC services. The ELC Graduate Premium is calculated based on the number of ELC graduate Lead Educators in ELC rooms in the service; and if the ELC or combined ELC and SAC service has an ELC graduate as the manager. Both the Graduate Lead Educator Premium and Graduate Manager Premium rate will remain at €4.44 per hour.

As per the Employment Regulation Orders (ERO) that assigns a higher minimum pay to graduate lead educators and managers, in year 1 of Core Funding, to qualify their Partner Service for the Graduate Premiums under Core Funding a graduate Lead Educator or Manager had to have 3 or more years' experience.

The Minister has allocated additional funding to support the removal of this 3-year experience rule for graduates in year 2. However, this will only be implemented if an equivalent change is made to the relevant ERO.

1.5. What is the flat rate allocation?

A flat rate allocation of €4,075¹ will be given to all services registered on the Tusla Register of Early Years Services as sessional only. This additional measure is only available to services with no other Tusla registration including School Age Registration on the Tusla School Age Register. This allocation

¹ The €4,075 is a full programme year amount, Partner Service that are in Core Funding for less than a full programme year will be allocated the appropriate number of weekly payments.

is in addition to the services base rate and Graduate Premium. This allocation will be made to sessional-only services regardless of the level of Core Funding they receive. This measure will benefit approximately 1,700 sessional-only Partner Services.

Sessional services often attract less Core Funding in total because of their business model, which operates for shorter hours than most other service types. However, sessional provision is a key part of the overall early learning and childcare model in Ireland. Funding for sessional services increased on average in 2022/23, but less so than for other service types.

The independent review of sessional services has not been completed yet and emerging findings are not conclusive. Nonetheless, a targeted measure is considered in the best interests of all stakeholders and in acknowledging that sessional only provision as an important part of the early learning and childcare delivery model.

1.6. How will the flat rate allocation work?

The flat rate allocation will be paid in addition to the Core Funding base rate and Graduate Premium. It will mean that that all services with only a sessional service type registration with Tusla will be given an additional payment of €4,075 regardless of the level of Core Funding they receive.

The allocation will be divided into weekly amounts and aggregated into monthly payments alongside the rest of Core Funding. Services that are not in Core funding for the whole year will receive the appropriate number of weekly payments.

The allocation is equivalent to a 23% increase on the average allocation for a sessional service in year 1 of Core Funding of €17,793. This is before any other changes occur to the allocation model or make up of the service.

The example below demonstrates how the flat rate allocation works and how it will improve the sustainability of sessional services.

Example: Flat rate allocation for average sessional service

	Sessional Service Core Funding 2022/23 Programme Year (no flat rate allocation)	Sessional Service Core Funding 2023/24 Programme Year (with flat rate allocation)
Base Rate	€13,957	€14,601
Flat Top up Rate	N/A	€4,075
Graduate Premium	€3,386	€3,386
Total Core Funding	€17,793	€22,062

1.7. What is the minimum base rate allocation?

The minimum base rate allocation will be set at €8,150 for all Partner Services except childminders. This is the minimum amount of funding a centre-based Partner Service will receive from their Core Funding base rate and the flat rate allocation for sessional services where applicable. All Partner Services delivering centre-based provision, regardless of the size of their service, will receive at least this minimum base rate allocation². All sessional services will receive at least €8,150, from their base rate and flat rate allocation combined (if they are in Core Funding for the whole year). This minimum base rate is not affected by the Graduate Premiums, which are applied on top of it and which will continue to operate as in year 1 (noting the removal of this 3-year experience rule subject to ERO).

The minimum base rate allocation applies to centre-based services only, i.e. not childminders.

1.8. Why is the minimum base rate allocation being introduced?

The Minimum Base Rate Allocation continues the successful practice of establishing safeguards to ensure there are no unintended outcomes of Core Funding. Having a minimum allocation will mean that all Partner Services have a minimum financial contribution through Core Funding. Those who are most likely to benefit will be small, part time services and SAC services.

1.9. How does the minimum base rate allocation work?

The base rate will be generated based on a services staffed capacity (places and hours), with the flat rate allocation added where applicable. The system then splits this into 52 equal weekly allocations for payments. The minimum base rate allocation will be applied to this weekly allocation.

A service whose weekly allocation for the base rate (and flat rate allocation where applicable) is less than €156.73 will see the balance added to their weekly allocation. For example, if a part-time service has an annual base rate allocation of €3,000, this will be split into weekly allocations of €57.69. An additional €99.04 will be paid per week on top of this allocation to reach the minimum base rate allocation of €156.73.

As a services base rate allocation will be capped following the first review and confirm window, a service which starts the 2023/2024 programme year receiving the minimum base rate allocation will remain at this minimum for the entire programme year, i.e. if they remain in contract for the full 52 weeks of the programme year the service will receive €8,150 for the programme year (exclusive of Graduate Premiums).

Services can, however, begin the programme year with an allocation above the minimum allocation, and fall in and out of this during the programme year as their capacity changes. At any point in the programme year, no centre-based service will receive a weekly allocation of less than €156.73.

Services that are not in Core Funding for the whole year will receive the appropriate number of weekly payments, including top-ups to their base rate to meet the minimum where appropriate.

Please see an example of how the base rate minimum applies to three sample services below.

² The €8,150 is a full programme year amount, Partner Service that are in Core Funding for less than a full programme year will be allocated the appropriate number of weekly payments.

Example: Base rate minimum allocation for three sample services

Examples	Service A (Part Time)	Service B (School Age)	Service C (Sessional)
Base Rate	€7,230	€ 3,899	€8,527
Does the Service Qualify for Base Rate Minimum	Yes	Yes	No
Base Rate after the Base Rate Minimum Allocation	€8,150	€8,150	€8,527
Graduate Premium	€3,037	€N/A	€2,531
Total Core Funding	€11,187	€8,150	€11,058

Because Partner Services A and B received less than €8,150 from their base rate, they qualified for the minimum base rate allocation. This brought their allocation from their base rate up to €8,150. Partner Service C received more €8,150 from their base rate and therefore did not qualify. After the minimum base rate allocation was applied, their Graduate Premiums were added, giving the services their total Core Funding for the programme year.

1.10. How do the base rate minimum and flat rate allocation interact with each other for Sessional Services?

When receiving Core Funding, Partner Services will first receive their base rate allocation. All sessional-only Partner Services will then be allocated an additional €4,075 through the flat rate allocation, regardless of the amount they were allocated for their base rate. If, for any sessional-only service, the combination of their base rate and flat rate allocation is less than €8,150 for the full year, or €156.73 per week, they will qualify for the base rate minimum allocation and their combined annual allocation from their base rate and flat rate allocation will be brought up to €8,150. Sessional-only services may then receive additional funding from their Graduate Premiums. The example below illustrates how this base rate minimum works for sessional-only services.

Example: Minimum base rate allocation on two sample sessional services

	Service A (Sessional Service)	Service B (Sessional Service)
Base Rate	€3,000	€6,000
Flat Top up Rate	€4,075	€4,075
Base Rate and Flat Top up combined	€7,075	€10,075
Does the Service Qualify for the Base Rate Minimum	Yes	No
Base Rate and Flat Top up combined, after the Base Rate Minimum	€8,150	€10,075
Graduate Premium	€1,000	€1,000
Total Core Funding	€9,150	€11,075

The example above serves to demonstrate how the base rate minimum interacts with the flat rate allocation for sessional services.

Service A's base rate is €3,000 and Service B's base rate is €6,000. Both services base rates are below €8,150. Both services, however, receive the additional €4,075 from the flat rate allocation

Service A has a combined allocation from their base rate and flat rate allocation of €7,075. This is below €8,150, and therefore for their combined allocation from their base rate and flat rate allocation is brought up to €8,150.

Service B, however, has a combined allocation from their base rate and flat rate allocation of €10,075, which is above €8,150. Therefore, Service B does not qualify for the base rate minimum allocation.

In the case above, even though both services started off with a base rate below €8,150, the flat rate allocation brought Service B above this amount and therefore they did not receive the minimum base rate allocation, while Service A's allocation remained below the floor and therefore they qualified for the base rate minimum allocation.

Both services received an additional €1,000 from their Graduate Premiums. The Graduate Premiums are always applied in addition to the base rates, flat rate allocation and the minimum base rate allocation. Therefore, Service A received €9,150 in total from Core Funding, €1,075 more than they would have had there not been a base rate minimum. Service B received €11,075, and was not affected by this base rate minimum.

1.11. What is the maximum base rate allocation?

There will be a new maximum base rate allocation of €600,000. Partner Services will not receive base rate funding beyond this maximum value. This measure will affect only a very small number of services, if any: no Partner Service is currently receiving above this maximum base rate and only six services are receiving more than €400,000. This maximum does not apply to the Graduate Premiums, which may still increase a Partner Service's total allocation beyond this maximum base rate allocation.

1.12. Why is the maximum base rate allocation being introduced?

The Maximum Base Rate Allocation is being introduced to control the Core Funding budget for year 2 of the programme. This cap will be set at €600,000 (€11,538.46 weekly), thus providing ample room for all current Partner Services to increase their funded capacity under Core Funding. An additional €8.47m is being allocated for growth in the sector, and increasing capacity and places remains a key objective of the Core Funding scheme. However, in year 2, a maximum base rate allocation is being introduced to best spread a limited budget across the entire sector rather than increasing funded capacity for the very largest services. Only a very small amount of services, those who already receive the highest amounts of Core Funding, may be affected by this cap. Even those services will be able to see an increase in their Core Funding base rate, up to a maximum of €600,000. According to the Department's estimates, the increased base rates alone will not bring any service into the maximum base rate allocation.

1.13. How does the maximum base rate allocation work?

The example below demonstrates how the maximum base rate allocation might affect large services.

Example: Maximum base rate allocation on three sample services

	Service A	Service B	Service C
Base Rate	€560,000	€615,000	€590,000
Is the Partner Service effected by the Maximum Base Rate Allocation	No	Yes	No
Base Rate after Maximum Base Rate Allocation	€560,000	€600,000	€590,00
Graduate Premiums	€20,000	€30,000	€25,000
Total Core Funding	€580,000	€630,000	€615,000

In the example above, there are three large Partner Services.

Service A, receives a base rate less than €600,000, and therefore is not affected by the maximum base rate.

Service B, has a base rate of €615,000 and is therefore effected by the maximum base rate. The maximum base rate means that this service's base rate is brought down to €600,000. It is important to note that the maximum base rate has no effect on the Graduate Premiums. For this service, they receive €30,000 from their Graduate Premiums, which would bring their total Core Funding up to €630,000. As this example demonstrates, a service is able to receive over €600,000 in total Core Funding for year 2, but they are not able to receive over €600,000 from their Core Funding base rate.

Service C, has a base rate of €590,000 and is therefore not effected by the maximum base rate. The service has an additional €25,000 in Graduate Premiums, which brings their total Core Funding €615,000. Similar to service B, their total Core Funding is allowed to surpass €600,000. Indeed, even though this service has a total amount of funding of €615,000, they are in no way affected by the maximum base rate. So long as their base rate was below €600,000, they are not affected by this new measure.

1.14. Can registered childminders access Core Funding for year 2?

Yes, registered childminders can continue to access Core Funding for Programme Year 2023/2024. All Core Funding measures will apply to childminders, except for the minimum base rate allocation.

In line with the approach to Core Funding recommended by the Expert Group report, Partnership for the Public Good, the new funding model can, in principle, apply to registered childminders and centre-based provision, but there is a need to take into account differences in costs of delivery and other operational differences between childminding and centre-based provision. Given these differences, it is not deemed appropriate to apply the minimum base rate allocation for registered childminders in year 2.

The future funding approach for registered childminders is being considered for Programme Year 2024/2025 and will be informed by the continued operation of the Core Funding pilot for childminders during year 2 and taking account of the commitments in the National Action Plan for Childminding (2021-2028).

2. Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement

2.1. What are the terms and conditions for Core Funding programme year 2?

The full terms and conditions for Core Funding programme year 2 are outlined in detail in the Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement, published today. Services interested in becoming Partner Services are encouraged to consider the Funding Agreement in full.

2.2. What is the structure of the Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement?

The Funding Agreement contains 15 Sections and 7 Appendices. Each section has a heading where the relevant different clauses are grouped under. The Appendices contain more detailed aspects of some of the major elements of the scheme such as the Parent Statement, Quality Action Plan, etc..

- Section 1 on Interpretation provides definitions and interpretations for important terminology used throughout the Funding Agreement. The definition of “Partner Service” has been expanded to clarify that it includes the service in its entirety, including all rooms, sessions and Service Types within that service.
- Section 2 on Pre-Payment Conditions outlines a number of requirements Partner Services need to meet before Core Funding can flow.
- Section 3 on the Funding Agreement and Grant details when the Grant will apply and some conditions of the Grant.
- Section 4 on Legal Framework and Statutory Guidance sets out the different legal Frameworks which a Partner Service must comply with. The Funding Agreement now states that any reference to a statute, enactment, order, regulation or other legislative instrument should be understood as this statute, enactment, order, regulation or other legislative instrument as amended.
- Section 5 on Operation of the Scheme sets out the conditions on Fee Management, Calculation of Grant Value, including the new targeted measures and updated clause on the Funding Guarantee, publishing requirements, as well as other important conditions on the operation of the Grant.
- Section 6 on Reporting provides the different reports that Partner Services must complete and return, including a new clause on the TALIS survey, as well as the other important reporting conditions.
- Section 7 on Payment Terms sets out some of the conditions on the payment and recoupment of the Grant.
- Section 8 on Right of Verification provides the records which Partner Services must retain, including records relating to Fee Management, and the conditions around how these records might be verified.
- Section 9 on Term and Termination sets out the circumstance under which the Funding Agreement may be terminated, including on how failing to complete the Review and Confirm process before the next Review and Confirm process begins may result in the termination of the Funding Agreement.
- Section 10 on Insurance and Indemnity details the conditions on insurance, liability and indemnity in the Funding Agreement.
- Section 11 on Force Majeure provides conditions on Force Majeure in the Funding Agreement.
- Section 12 on Non-assignment/Sub-contracting lays out the conditions on Partner Services sub-contracting the Funding Agreement to other parties.

- Section 13 on Data Protection provides the terms and conditions on data protection each party must adhere to within the Funding Agreement.
- Section 14 on Freedom of Information sets out the terms and conditions on Freedom of Information within the Funding Agreement.
- Section 15 entitled General, lays out some of the general terms of the conditions of the Funding Agreement.
- Appendix 1 on Approved areas of Expenditure sets out the areas of expenditure which a Partner Service may use the Grant for.
- Appendix 2 on Base Rates, provides the new base rate values for each age range for Year 2 of Core Funding.
- Appendix 3 on Graduate Lead Educator Premium and Graduate Manager Premium Rates provides the Graduate Premium values.
- Appendix 4 on the Parent Statement sets out an outline of the information Partner Services will be required to provide in their Parent Statement.
- Appendix 5 on the Quality Action Plan provides an outline of Quality Action Plan Partner Services will need to complete in year 2 of Core Funding.
- Appendix 6 on Recoupment of Core Funding on foot of non-compliance lays an outline of the where Partner Services can find the conditions under which Partner Service's funding can be withdrawn and the calculation for this payment being withheld.
- Appendix 7 on Framework for Sharing of Personal Data provides the principles and procedures which the parties will adhere to and the responsibilities the parties owe to each other regarding the sharing of Personal Data.

2.3. Are there be any changes to Fee Management?

There is no substantive change to the approach to Fee Management in Core Funding year 2. This is guided by the recommendations of the Expert Group, as approved by Government, to ensure that the introduction of Fee Management to the sector is done in a sustainable and considered manner.

As outlined in Partnership for the Public Good, the new system of Fee Management should focus first on limiting increases in fee rates. The Fee Management system can only evolve based on an analysis of provider income and cost data, which will be gathered through financial returns in October 2023 to underpin developments in Fee Management for year 3.

The fee freeze was deemed by the Expert Group as the most appropriate way to introduce Fee Management accepting that each individual service determined their own fee policy in September 2021.

2.4. What are the existing Fee Management rules?

Partner Services must uphold their contractual obligations regarding Fee Management. Core Funding requires services not to increase the fees charged to parents from those charged on 30 September 2021. An increased charge of any kind for an existing and unchanged Service Type will be in breach of Core Funding rules.

Parents or Guardians of children attending a service in contract for Core Funding may seek to have issues examined and a conclusion reached through the Core Funding Fee Review process operated through City/County Childcare Committees (CCCs), Pobal and the DCEDIY.

To support services, parents/guardians and the CCC's, the Department has published guidelines on Fee Management and an overview of the fee review process. These documents provide examples to assist with understanding of the new Fee Management conditions and review process.

<https://first5fundingmodel.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/05/Together-for-Better-Guidelines-on-Fee-Management.pdf>

Any parent or person with concerns or questions about fees should contact their local CCC for support and guidance, contact details available here: <https://myccc.ie/where-is-my-nearest-ccc>.

2.5. Who is eligible for Core Funding?

To be eligible for Core Funding you must be an early learning and childcare provider or a registered childminder who meets the following criteria:

- Completed their Annual Early Years Sector Profile (AEYSP);
- Registered with Tusla, the Child and Family Agency;
- Contracted with DCEDIY to deliver ECCE and/or NCS, as appropriate:
 - A service offering sessional care to the ECCE-eligible age range must offer ECCE
 - A service offering care to any other age ranges must offer NCS
 - A service offering care to both must offer both programmes
- Not a pre-school service in a drop-in centre or a drop-in only school age service.

2.6. Do exemptions from pre-existing schemes exempt services from the condition to be in contract for NCS and/or ECCE?

No, participation in DCEDIY schemes other than ECCE and NCS do not contribute towards your eligibility for Core Funding. A service with a CCSP contract will have to activate an NCS or ECCE contract to come into Core Funding, as CCSP contracts do not meet the eligibility criteria.

2.7. Where can Partner Services get further information about the Funding Agreement?

The summary of the changes to the Funding Agreement above, are not to be taken as a comprehensive list of conditions in the Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement. All Partner Services are encouraged to consult the Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement for a full understanding. The Funding Agreement is publicly available here:

<https://first5fundingmodel.gov.ie/wp-content/uploads/2023/06/Core-Funding-Partner-Service-Funding-Agreement-23.24-1.pdf>

3. The Core Funding Application Process

3.1. I am already in Core Funding, how do I reapply for Core Funding for Programme Year 2023/2024?

Step 1: Pre Application Survey

Completion of the Annual Early Years Sector Profile (AEYSP) survey is a pre-requisite for application to Core Funding. The initial data collection window for the AEYSP opened in May and will close mid-June, however for services that could not complete the survey over this period, this will not prevent them from entering into Core Funding. The AEYSP reopens so that services can complete the AEYSP and apply for Core Funding throughout the whole programme year.

Step 2: June Review and Confirm (2nd – 12th of June)

Partner Services that complete the June Review and Confirm for Programme Year 2022/2023 will ensure that their Core Funding application data is as up to date as possible. Those Partner Services whose June 2023 Review and Confirm is approved, or subsequent approved application change, can avail of the option to auto-populate their Application Module for Programme Year 2023/2024, significantly reducing administrative burden. The option to complete a new application still remains to all Partner Services. Those who fail to complete this Review and Confirm will have to start their application for the next programme year anew.

Step 3: Service Profile, Application Module and Contracting

This stage will open in late June. Applicants will define and update their services profile if necessary and input their application data. Immediately on completion of the application, applicants will be shown key information on their grant value such as their funding allocation as per the Core Funding formula, broken down by week, month and year. This grant value displayed will be provisional and dependent on your application passing all relevant validations. This displayed grant value will not include the new targeted measures for 2023/2024, which your service may be eligible for. The Core Funding summary page will outline the targeted measures that may apply³, see questions 1.5, 1.7 and 1.11.

Once the application has been completed the service will be able to electronically sign the Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement for Programme Year 2023/2024, by doing so agreeing to operate their Partner Service in accordance with the terms and conditions outlined in the Funding Agreement in return for receiving Core Funding.

³ Please note that this only outlines the targeted measures that may be available for your service and do not indicate that your service is eligible for these measures.

Step 4: Parent Statement

Partner Services will also be required to complete their Parent Statements online through the Early Years Platform. This functionality will become available in August, at the same time as the Review and Confirm window, but it is important to note that this is a distinct step.

Step 5: August Review and Confirm

Unlike last year, a new Review and Confirm window will take place in August 2023. For this programme year, Core Funding applications must be validated and approved prior to payments being made to Partner Services. Partner Services will also be required to complete their Parent Statements online through the Early Years Platform.

Core Funding payments to your service will begin once your application has passed all relevant validations, your August Review and Confirm process is complete and approved, and your parents statement is received.

3.2. How do I join Core Funding for the first time as a new applicant for Programme Year 2023/2024?

There are a number of scenarios where services may be applying for Core Funding for the first time in Programme Year 2023/2024. Requirements will differ slightly depending on the timing of a services application.

In general, new applicants for Core Funding in Programme Year 2 will be required to undertake steps 1, 3, 4 and 5 outlined in 3.1 to complete their application. Applicants who join after August will not need to complete step 5 but will need to complete subsequent Review and Confirms as they arise.

Services are encouraged to contact Pobal/CCCs for support in completing their Core Funding applications.

3.3. Does a service need to complete the AEYSP to apply for Core Funding?

Yes, completing the AEYSP is a necessary requirement in order to access the Core Funding Application Module. The AEYSP will capture essential information to provide a baseline to assess the impact of Core Funding at a sector-wide level. As in previous years, the data collected in the AEYSP provides vital insight to track and monitor trends and identify key issues in the sector.

CCCs are available to assist with completing the AEYSP if necessary.

3.4. Does the AEYSP affect a service's Core Funding allocation?

No, the information provided in the AEYSP will not be used in assessing eligibility for Core Funding or in generating funding allocations.

3.5. When will applications for Programme Year 2 open?

Applications for Core Funding Programme Year 2023/2024 will open in late June 2023.

3.6. Is there a deadline to apply for Core Funding Programme Year 2023/2024?

Applications for Core Funding Programme Year 2023/2024 will open in late June 2023, and will remain available for applicants to complete until 28th of June 2024.

Partner Services will only be eligible for funding from their contract date until the end of the programme year on the 31st August.

3.7 When should I update my Service Profile and application module throughout the year?

Partner Services are expected to review, make changes and confirm the details of their application, including wage related data, are up to date several times throughout the programme year – Review and Confirm (R&C). The system has been built to allow Partner Services to make changes to their Service Profile and Application Module throughout the programme year outside of the R&C periods.

There is no expectation on Partner Services to record every change of staff that occurs within a service.

Core Funding allocations are based on staffed capacity and Graduate Premiums. Once the staffed capacity as declared on the Core Funding Application is maintained and absences of staff that attract premiums are replaced with equivalently qualified staff there is no requirement to record short term temporary changes (less than 4 weeks).

The Department understands that Early Learning and Childcare services have to be dynamic and flexible in their day to day staffing arrangements.

Consequently, it is the Department's expectation that Partner Services input data relating to a typical week and only update their Service Profile and Application Form when a significant or material change occurs. Further information on what the Department means by a typical week, material or significant change and what this means for Partner Services is outlined below.

3.8. What is meant by a "typical week"?

The Department's definition of a typical week is a period of time that is representative of an average operating week where the more usual staff rostering is evident.

The Department recommends that Partner Services identify and keep a record of such a typical week, with a view to using these as a reference point for each of the Review and Confirm windows.

Examples of an atypical week would be an instance where a room is temporarily closed, a number of staff members are out sick for a couple of days in the week and/or the week of bank holiday.

3.9. What constitutes a material or significant change?

Within the context of Core Funding, the Department defines a material or significant change as one which affects the typical week for a period of time greater than four weeks.

This is under the assumption that the staffed capacity of the typical week as declared on the Core Funding Application Module is maintained and absences of staff that attract premiums are replaced with equally suitably qualified staff. If this is the case, there is no requirement to record these changes unless they are going to continue for a period greater than 4 weeks.

3.10. What happens if I don't complete the Review and Confirm requirements in Core Funding Programme Year 2023/2024?

The Review and Confirm processes that occur throughout the programme year are an important mechanism to ensure the correct funding is provided to services and good governance of the scheme is maintained.

If a Partner Service does not complete each of the Review and Confirm processes within the required timeframe, Core Funding payments will be placed on hold until such a time as the process is completed. This must be in advance of the next Review and Confirm window. Failure to complete within this timeframe will result in the application being declined from the date of the first missed Review and Confirm window and contract being terminated.

The Review and Confirm windows for the Core Funding Programme Year 2023/2024 will take place on the following dates:

- 01/08/2023 to 11/08/2023;
- 01/11/2023 to 10/11/2023;
- 01/02/2024 to 12/02/2024;
- 01/05/2024 to 10/05/2024.

3.11. Does a service need to complete their Core Funding Partner Service Parent Statement to receive their Core Funding payment?

Yes, Partner Services are required to complete their Parent Statements on the Early Years Platform before Core Funding payments can issue.

3.12. When will I know what my Core Funding grant value is?

Once you have completed your application, the summary page will display your provisional Core Funding grant value which is dependent on your application passing all relevant validations. This grant value will not include the targeted measures (flat rate allocation, minimum base rate allocation, or maximum base rate allocation) outlined above, which your service may be eligible for.

Applicants will be required to confirm that their initial application data is correct and accurate in a pre-programme year Review and Confirm window which will take place in August 2023. At this point Partner Services will also be required to complete their Parent Statement on the Early Years Platform.

During this window, the system and or scheme administrator will validate the data provided by the applicant prior to payments being made.

Upon your application passing all relevant validations, any targeted measures your service is eligible for will be applied to your allocation in due course.

Once these have been applied, your Core Funding grant value will be finalised.

3.13. Can my Core Funding base rate increase during the programme year?

The Partner Service's base rate on the date of approval of their August Review and Confirm or the date of approval of their application, whichever is the later, will be used as their highest value base rate for the programme year.

The Partner Service's base rate may fluctuate throughout the programme year, but no Partner Service will be able to increase their base rate funding allocations above this highest value amount.

3.14. Can my Core Funding base rate decrease during the programme year?

Yes, the base rate can decrease if staffed capacity is reduced during the programme year. It can also be restored back up to the original base rate level approved if staffed capacity is restored.

Capacity is lost when a room is closed; a staff member (graduate or non-graduate) leaves and is not replaced within four weeks so staff: child ratios cannot be maintained.

However, Partner Services, except childminders, cannot fall below the minimum base rate allocation of €8,150.

3.15. Can my Core Funding Graduate Premium Value increase during the programme year?

Yes, your Core Funding Graduate Premium value can increase.

If you hire a new a new staff member who is eligible to attract a Graduate Premium, if a staff member (including manager) who was not eligible for the Graduate Premium is replaced by one who is; or the existing staff member becomes eligible (i.e. completes a L7+ qualification and already has 3 years' experience; or already had a L7+ qualification and reaches 3 years' experience). The rule around 3 years' of experience may not be required, subject to changes to the relevant ERO.

3.16. Can my Core Funding Graduate Premium value decrease during the programme year?

Yes, your Core Funding Graduate Premium value can decrease if a Graduate Lead Educator/Manager leaves and is replaced by a non-graduate or not replaced by a Graduate Lead Educator/Manager within 4 weeks.

3.17. Can I attract a flat rate allocation during the programme year?

If, at any stage in the programme year you become registered on the Tusla Register of Early Years Services as sessional only you will become entitled to the flat rate allocation of €4,075. This allocation will be made to sessional services regardless of the level of Core Funding they receive.

Please see Questions 1.6, 1.7, and 1.8 for further information on how the flat rate allocation may impact upon your allocation.

3.18. Will staff vacancies affect Core Funding allocations?

Your grant value will not initially be affected by staff vacancies. However, if you have not updated your Service Profile and Core Funding Application Module to either fill the vacancy or reduce your capacity within 4 weeks, your Core Funding allocation will be placed on hold.

3.19. How will Core Funding be paid?

Core Funding allocations are calculated based on a weekly basis. These weekly allocations are aggregated to monthly instalments which are paid in advance, spread across the entire programme year.

Core Funding will be paid into the bank account listed for each service on the Hive, through the same processes as other DCEDIY Funding Schemes.

3.20. Where can I find more information and support on the completion of my Core Funding application?

Further guidance documents will issue closer to the date that the application process opens. This will include detailed applicant guidelines.

In addition, queries relating to technical support, accessing and using the Early Years Hive and / or questions regarding Sector/Service Profile or Core Funding Application Module queries please raise a 'Service Request' on the Early Years Hive, email eypc@pobal.ie or call 01 5117222. The Early Years Provider Centre is open Monday, Tuesday, Thursday and Friday, and 9.00am – 5.00pm Wednesday 10.00am to 5.00pm.

The CCCs are also available to support early learning and childcare providers with queries associated with Core Funding. Questions relating to specific Service Profile requirements or the Core Funding Application Module should be directed to your local CCC in the first instance.