



An Roinn Leanaí
agus Gnóthaí Óige
Department of Children
and Youth Affairs

Reopening Funding Package for Childcare Services

FAQ Version 1

12/06/2020

Abbreviations

<i>Title of Organisation and Scheme</i>	<i>Abbreviation</i>
Office of the Revenue Commissioners (Revenue) Temporary COVID-19 Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS)	Revenue operated TWSS
Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) Temporary COVID-19 Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme (TWSCS)	DCYA operated TWSCS
Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection (DEASP) Pandemic Unemployment Payment (PUP)	DEASP operated PUP

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Introduction

On 10 June 2020, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs announced a major funding package to facilitate the reopening of early learning and care (ELC) and school-age childcare (SAC) services. In accordance with the Government Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business, and guided by the expert advice of the Health Protection Surveillance Centre (HSPC), ELC and SAC services can begin to resume from 29 June. In recognition of the important role that the ELC and SAC sector plays in the economic and societal infrastructure of the country, Government is providing a €75m package of funding for reopening.

In developing the funding package, the Minister recognises that a reduced number of children are likely to attend ELC and SAC services in the initial weeks of reopening. This necessitates a tailored model, which will allow providers to operate with potentially less parental income. It will also ensure that ELC and SAC providers will not have to charge higher fees than they did pre-COVID-19, even though the costs of providing ELC and SAC may increase in some circumstances. This will benefit parents and children returning to services.

While many of the 4,500 ELC and SAC in the State usually close for July and August, approximately 1,800 services operate for 48 weeks or more each year, and the Minister is hoping that services can reopen this summer with the assistance of the financial package available.

A key policy priority for the DCYA is the sustainability of the ELC and SAC sector and hence it has and continues to work intensively to support services to re-open after COVID-19. The reopening funding aims to support providers to reopen, staff to remain in the sector, parents to resume work, and children to benefit from quality ELC and SAC. The following FAQs set out some information on the significant actions that have been taken in this regard.

DCYA encourages all providers to read this material and to engage proactively with the various Government supports available. DCYA urges any service, which is struggling to engage with its local City/County Childcare Committee.

These FAQs aim to be informative but may be added to and/or amended as more information becomes available. In the event that any further corrections need to be made, these changes will be highlighted in future versions.

1. Funding Package Summary

The new funding package contains four significant elements:

1. A once-off reopening support payment for DCYA-funded providers opening between 29 June and early September.
2. A once-off COVID-19 capital grant for DCYA-funded providers opening between 29 June and early September.
3. Continued access for eligible providers to the Revenue-operated Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS)
4. Resumption of DCYA ELC and SAC programmes. NCS, CCSP and TEC will be available again for children attending ELC and SAC services from 29 June.

Further information about these funding measures is available in this document.

1.1. What time period will this Funding Package cover?

This suite of funding measures will run from 29 June to 23 August 2020. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs will review the operation of these measures in July and will use this information to inform the funding model from 24 August onwards when it is expected that ECCE Programme and AIM will resume; all remaining services will reopen; and higher demand is expected for full and part-time ELC and SAC.

2. COVID-19 Reopening Support Payment for the provision of Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare

2.1. What is the purpose of the Reopening Support Payment?

A Reopening Support Payment (RSP) will be available to ELC and SAC providers to support them in meeting the reopening guidelines, to support children to remain in 'play pods' to reduce the potential for COVID-19 to spread, and to meet additional staffing needs during the reopening period.

The RSP is provided in recognition of the fact that a reduced number of children are likely to attend ELC and SAC services in the initial weeks of reopening.

Allowable expenditure includes:

- additional staffing costs, such as staff in reception to manage staggered drop off and pick up times, and additional cleaning to ensure that hygiene standards are met, also intensive staff training pre-opening
- additional learning resources and toys so that each play pod has their own ring-fenced resources which are not shared with other play pods,
- hygiene supplies/consumables, such as sanitiser, soap, and paper towels,
- cleaning consumables

2.2. How will the Reopening Support Payment be calculated?

The amount of the grant for each individual provider will be based on the number of children on Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) schemes in the service as of 12 March 2020.

Services which open on a fulltime basis and are open for 6 of the 8 weeks between 29 June and 23 August 2020 will be eligible to receive a higher grant than services operating part-time hours or which reopen in late August or September. See Table 1 below for details of the expected value of the reopening grant.

The payment level will be dependent on three key factors:

- Size of the ELC/SAC Service
- Date of reopening
- Operational hours of the service

Table 1: Amounts of funding available as Reopening Grants.

Number of children registered on DCYA programmes per service at 12 March 2020	Enhanced RSP	Standard RSP
1-11	€2,000	€1,000
12-40	€4,000	€2,000
41-100	€7,000	€3,500
100+	€10,000	€5,000

2.3. Who is eligible for the Reopening Support Payment (enhanced and standard)?

ELC and SAC service providers will be eligible to apply for the Enhanced RSP or the Standard RSP, not both

Eligibility for the **Enhanced RSP** will be as follows:

- That the Service is currently signed up to an agreement for a DCYA ELC and SAC programme

Providers will also be required to meet the following ongoing conditions to retain the enhanced RSP funding:

- That the ELC/SAC Service is open for at least 6 of the 8 weeks between 29 June and 23 August.
- That there is at least one child registered for a DCYA ELC and SAC programme and attending regularly between 29 June and 23 August.

- That the Service is open full-time where the definition of full-time is greater than 5 hours per day, 5 days per week, in accordance with their Tusla registration.

Eligibility for the **Standard RSP** will be as follows:

- That the Service is at the time of application signed up to an agreement for a DCYA ELC and SAC Programme

Providers will also be required to meet the following ongoing conditions to retain the funding:

- The Service has not received an Enhanced RSP
- The Service is open for 6 of the 16 weeks between 29 June and 16 October 2020
- That there is at least one child registered for a DCYA ELC and SAC programme and attending regularly between 29 June and 16 October 2020

2.4. What terms and conditions will attach to the Reopening Support Payment?

The Terms and Conditions of the reopening support payment will be set out in the Funding Agreement that will be made available for all services to consider in advance of signature.

Of particular note is the condition that services undertake not to raise parental fees from pre-COVID-19 levels for the duration of the temporary funding model (29 June to 23 August).

Further information on the terms and conditions of the reopening grant will be made available as soon as possible.

2.5. Is the Reopening Support Payment mandatory?

No, services may choose not to sign-up for the reopening support payment or any of the other funding streams. Once services meet necessary regulatory requirements, follow public health advice, and any other mandatory measures, there is no obligation to operate DCYA ELC and SAC programmes, the Revenue TWSS, or sign-up for the reopening or capital grants.

2.6. Can I use the Reopening Support Payment to cover overheads and/or staff costs?

The central purpose of the funding is to help services to meet additional costs. In addition to the RSP, ELC and SAC services may access other funding streams such as TWSS if eligible, DCYA ELC and SAC programme subsidies for children attending, parental co-payments, and the COVID-19 capital grant.

ELC and SAC services will be required to verify that the reopening support payment has been used to cover additional costs. For example, if an existing staff member is diverted to an activity which is additional to normal (pre-COVID-19) activities arising from reopening then the expenditure may be assigned to the Reopening Support Payment. Similarly, any overheads that are additional costs associated with reopening can be assigned to this purpose.

Providers will need to track this expenditure and be in a position to confirm that it has been made for its given purpose, should such confirmation be sought.

Staff costs and overheads for non-additional activities can be covered from other funding streams as appropriate.

2.7. Can an ELC and SAC service receive both a Reopening Support Payment from DCYA and a COVID-19 Restart Grant from their Local Authority?

The Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation has made grants available to businesses to assist with the costs of reopening, which can be applied for through the Local Authorities. These Restart Grants are available only to small businesses, which pay rates and employ fewer than 50 people.

Providers who apply for the Reopening Support Payment cannot apply for the COVID-19 Restart Grant.

Providers who have already received the COVID-19 Restart Grant or are due to receive it must declare the amount of the COVID-19 Restart Grant in the application form and this will be offset against the Reopening Support Payment.

2.8. How do I identify the amount of the COVID-19 Restart Grant if I haven't yet received it?

The DCYA understands that the COVID-19 Restart Grant will be the amount of your rates demand in respect of calendar year 2019 only, subject to a minimum of €2,000 and a maximum of €10,000. In the event that your rates demand was reduced on appeal, the appeal rate will apply to an amount of the grant if the grant is over €2,000. Please refer to your local authority website for further information.

2.9. How do I apply for the Reopening Support Payment?

An application form and funding agreement will be made available in the coming weeks. Providers will need to sign and return the agreement to enable payment be made. The application process will be very straightforward.

2.10. What reopening supports are available for Childminders?

A once-off Childminding Reopening Grant totalling €375,000 will be available for childminders who are not in receipt of either the RSP or the COVID-19 capital grant. An individual grant of €500 per childminder will be made to assist with the additional costs of reopening. This grant is available exclusively to childminders who:

- Were providing a childminding service carried out in the childminder's home on 12 March 2020;
- Have completed the Children First e-learning programme;
- Have Garda Vetting in place;
- Are tax compliant;
- Have appropriate insurance in place for their childminding business;
- Commit to operate for a minimum of one year following receipt of the grant;
- Were not in contract to provide DCYA ELC and SAC programmes on 12 March 2020.

Childminders who were in contract to provide DCYA ELC and SAC programmes on 12 March 2020 may eligible for the RSP and the COVID-19 capital grant.

Full guidance documents on how and when to apply for the childminder reopening grant will be made available soon.

3. COVID-19 Capital Grant

3.1. What is the COVID-19 Capital Grant?

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, DCYA has decided to use the funding that was allocated for this year's ELC and SAC Capital Programme to provide grants to assist with the costs of supporting ELC and SAC services to reopen and adhere to public health requirements. This grant can be used by services to help them to adhere to the reopening guidelines by improving hygiene facilities and outdoor play areas. This will reduce the risk posed by COVID-19. Allowable expenditure will include:

- Outdoor play equipment;
- Outdoor shade and shelter to enable outdoor play as much as possible;
- Additional handwashing and toilet facilities;
- Purchase of partitions or room dividers to enable play pods to remain separate in larger rooms; and
- Installation of screens in reception areas.

The capital grant will be allocated as follows:

Number of children registered on DCYA ELC and SAC programmes per service (on 12 March 2020)	Grant value €
1-11	1000
12-40	2500
41-100	4500
101 +	6000

3.2. How does an ELC/SAC service apply for the COVID-19 Capital Grant?

There will be a simplified application process for this funding including,

- Using their DCYA reference number the applicant can access the online application form from the "go-live" date.
- The system will generate an application form for their service which will have some pre-filled information including the amount of the grant which they will qualify for.

- The applicant completes a short series of questions and confirms their acceptance of the terms and conditions, and submits their application form.

Full guidance documents on how and when to apply for the capital grant will be made available soon.

3.3. When will applications for the COVID-19 Capital Grant open and close?

The online application process will open on 22 June 2020. The system will automatically close on 28 August 2020. Any applications in draft at the closing date and time will not be accepted.

The application process will be a rolling one whereby:

- a. Applications approved by mid-day on 24 June 2020 will be processed for payment and the grant will be paid to these services bank accounts on 26 June 2020.
- b. Thereafter applications submitted by each Wednesday will be paid by the Friday of the following week. A payment schedule will be included in the applicant guidelines.

3.4. What Services are Eligible for the COVID-19 Capital Grant?

Applicants must meet the following eligibility criteria:

- Have a DCYA reference number for the service for which they are applying for
- Be registered with Tusla
- Must have been contracted with the DCYA to provide DCYA ELC and SAC Programmes on the 12 March 2020 (as per DCYA ELC and SAC programmes outlined above)

3.5. What expenditure is eligible under the COVID-19 Capital Grant?

There will be flexibility in the items that may be purchased, as long as they are capital or equipment items that the applicant can demonstrate are necessary to support compliance with the Public Health Advice and COVID-19 Infection Prevention and Control Guidance for ELC and SAC services. A high level of flexibility is being allowed for in recognition of the fact that services will have very different needs depending on factors such as what they already have, what age groups they cater to, and the physical layout of their premises. All items purchased

must have a minimum projected lifespan of 12 months to be eligible; short of this, an item is considered consumable rather than capital and may be funded under the Reopening Grant.

A list of eligible categories follows, with examples of types of purchase that might fall under each category. These examples are illustrative only; they are neither prescribed nor exhaustive:

Arrival spaces

- Reception screens for staff

Transitional spaces

- Canopies
- Perspex screens/roofing

Outdoor space

- Items that provide shelter or shade
- External handwashing facilities
- Additional outdoor equipment (extra sand pit etc.)

Health and hygiene

- Sanitiser stations
- Washing machines/dishwashers
- Sinks

Indoor Space:

- Partitions/room dividers (where it is practical to divide a room while adhering to other regulations such as fire safety)

Equipment

- Appropriate ELC and SAC play and ancillary equipment
- Fire Safety Equipment

Sleep/Rest

- Indoors – Additional cots, bedding, storage space for individual bedding.
- Outdoors – rest mats/hammocks

Part-funding is acceptable under this capital grant. If a service chooses to spend some of the grant funding on a more expensive piece of equipment or refurbishment and fund the balance through their own resources, this is allowed.

It is important to note that any purchases funded by the COVID-19 Capital Grant must comply with public procurement guidelines. Services must retain all quotations, invoices and receipts for a minimum of 3 years from date of payment of the grant and for inspection by Pobal/DCYA or as requested as part of a financial return, should they be selected to make a financial return in respect of this grant. Services must also return any unspent monies to Pobal and or return any grant associated with ineligible expenditure as a result of a verification, audit or compliance visit.

Full guidance documents will be provided soon.

3.6. When can ELC and SAC services make purchases to be covered by the COVID-19 Capital Grant?

Any expenditure on capital items between 13 March and 15 October can be covered by the COVID-19 Capital Grant, provided that it falls under the eligible categories noted above.

Providers are required to complete their modifications/adaptations or purchase their equipment between 13 March 2020 and the 15 October 2020. Any unspent grant funding by 15 October 2020 must be returned to Pobal.

ELC and SAC services which have applied for ELC and SAC Capital grants in previous years may be accustomed to waiting until their grant is approved before expending money. This will not be necessary for these grants.

4. TWSS and other Government Schemes

4.1. Will the Revenue Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS) operate in July/August?

The Government has announced that the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme will continue until the end of August 2020. No decisions for the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme after that point have been made by Government.

Many providers (approximately 85%) had signed up for these supports in the initial closure period. The Department encourages ELC and SAC services that reopen on June 29 to continue to avail of all Government supports for which they are eligible during this reopening period.

4.2. How will TWSS operate for July/August?

There is a variety of conditions relating to the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme. Revenue update their guidance frequently and it is essential that providers participating in TWSS are alert to these materials.

In general, the DCYA understand that where a service continues to meet the eligibility criteria for the Revenue operated TWSS, and continues to make payments in line with the requirements of that scheme, they can continue to avail of the wage subsidy under that scheme. This applies whether a service is open or closed in July/August.

There are some key features DCYA would highlight to services operating TWSS including:

- The reference period for the 25% decrease in turnover/customer orders remains Q2 2020. Changes that emerge in turnover in Q3 2020 will not affect ELC and SAC providers' eligibility to participate in the TWSS from 29 June to 23 August
- DCYA supports for reopening ELC and SAC services will not affect qualification for the TWSS from 29 June to 23 August.
- Only staff who were on the payroll on 29 February are eligible for payment under the TWSS.
- In general, payments to employees cannot exceed the Average Revenue Net Weekly Pay (ARNWP), which is calculated based on pay in January and February, without the wage subsidy being tapered off. However, in cases where an employee has an ARNWP of less than €350, employers may top-up to €350 without the Revenue subsidy being tapered. This may assist providers who wish to extend the working hours of some staff over the summer.

Information on each employee's Maximum Weekly Wage Subsidy and Maximum Weekly Employer Payment before tapering is available from Revenue's Online Services.

Further information is available at www.revenue.ie

4.3. Can an employee who is normally laid off over the summer avail of the Pandemic Unemployment Payment?

There is a variety of conditions relating to the Pandemic Unemployment Payment and questions on eligibility, status, etc. should best be directed to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

In general, the DCYA understand that it is a condition for the award of PUP that an individual must have lost their employment due to COVID-19. Where an individual is laid off in the ordinary course of business, Jobseekers Benefit or other supports are provided through the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Further information is available from the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

Further information is available from www.citizensinformation.ie

4.4. What supports are available to sole traders?

Services run by sole traders can apply for the full range of DCYA supports outlined in this document, including the capital grant and the reopening grant, as well as operating the DCYA ELC and SAC programmes.

If such a service has employees, they may also be eligible to continue to participate in the Revenue operated TWSS, which has been extended to the end of August, to assist in meeting wage costs.

Sole traders who remain closed as a result of COVID-19 may continue to receive the PUP as an income support, provided that they continue to meet the eligibility requirements for the scheme.

5. Reactivation of DCYA ELC and SAC programmes

5.1. Will DCYA ELC and SAC programmes resume?

Yes, from 29 June 2020, all DCYA ELC and SAC programmes will resume. These include the NCS and CCSP/TEC, where children were on CCSP/TEC as 'savers'. Please note that ECCE and AIM will not operate over the summer months.

5.2. When will payments under the DCYA ELC and SAC programmes restart?

Payments for all ELC and SAC programmes, the NCS, CCSP and TEC, will be made to cover 29 June onwards for any services reopening during the time with eligible, registered children attending.

5.3. Will we need to re-register children?

It will be necessary to re-register children who will attend the service over the summer months. An announcement on the opening of the registration systems will be made shortly.

5.4. Will Savers hold their status?

CCSP and TEC Savers will retain their status once they remain eligible but providers and parents are encouraged to examine the NCS to assess whether this would be of more benefit.

5.5. How and when will payments be made?

Payment cycles will be as per business as usual. CCSP and TEC will be 2 weeks in advance and NCS will be one week in arrears. A payment schedule will be released before 19 June.

5.6. What do providers have to do to get the payments?

Conditions for payments are as set out in the respective funding agreements. Funding is for children who are attending your service within the attendance parameters set out within the respective schemes.

It should be noted that attendance tracking is set to "week 1" for all schemes. For example, on NCS any attendance fluctuation taking place in March will not be taken into account with regard to monitoring attendance patterns in June. Providers should refer to the specific scheme rules for the management of attendance.

5.7. What about the ECCE Programme?

The 19/20 ECCE Programme is closed. No further payments will issue in respect of this Programme. Details of the 20/21 ECCE Programme will be released in the coming weeks.

5.8. What about the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)?

From the end of August, the ECCE programme is expected to recommence. The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) is designed specifically to support children with disabilities to access and participate in the ECCE programme, and so AIM will recommence at the same time as the ECCE Programme.

Pobal has already opened the application system for AIM supports for the 2020/21 programme year, ensuring no delays to applications for supports in the new ECCE programme term due to restart from late August.

Further information on plans for the ECCE programme and AIM will be provided in the coming weeks.

5.9. Can children with disabilities attend ELC and SAC settings over the summer?

Services are encouraged to facilitate the participation of children with disabilities. Whereas the Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business stated that services would only be open to children of essential workers from 29 June, this has been widened. Services may prioritise children who attended their settings pre-COVID-19, including children with disabilities.

Where the demand for places in a service exceeds the places available, services are encouraged to prioritise a number of priority groups, including the children of essential or frontline workers. The priority groups also include children with disabilities who previously attended on a part or full-time basis, including those preparing to start school in September.

5.10. Will additional supports be available over the summer for children with disabilities?

Better Start's team of Early Years Specialists is available to provide supports to any service who may have children with disabilities attending their service over the summer, through offering advice on strategies to support children's inclusion.

During the closure period, the DCYA acknowledges parents and guardians of children with disabilities are facing more challenging times and the DCYA has also endeavoured to provide supports to these families through the Let's Play Ireland initiative and a specific parent's page on the First 5 website. The Department is also launching a campaign –

www.gov.ie/letsgetready – to support young children and their parents plan for returning to ELC services or transitioning to pre-school or primary school for the first time. The campaign webpage includes a dedicated section for children with additional needs.

5.11. When we will know about the 2020/21 programme year?

The current focus is on ensuring that the reactivation process is as seamless and as timely as possible. Once the ELC and SAC sector is reopened from 29 June, we will be providing further information on the 2020/21 programme year. The “programme readiness” business cycle will be available in the coming weeks. This will be unavoidably later than previous years, but will be in place to support your 2020/21 activities.

5.12. Can I increase fees?

One of the conditions of the Reopening Support Payment is a commitment not to increase fees charged to parents from pre-COVID-19 levels, as recorded on the registered fees list for each provider on 12 March 2020. This applies for the duration of the reopening period (29 June to 23 August 2020.)

This condition is to ensure that fees for parents are not raised during this period, and to ensure that the Department’s aims of affordable ELC and SAC continue to be met. The other supports from the Department will assist providers in meeting their costs, including those costs which might increase as a result of the pandemic (such as cleaning or capital projects).

This condition is limited to the summer months from 29 June until 23 August. The Department anticipates that most services would not have changed their fees for this period in normal times. Services that choose not to sign-up for the reopening grant may choose to change parental fees in accordance with scheme rules.

5.13. Can a service provider charge a fee to parents to hold places not used over the summer months?

The Department is aware that some parents may defer their return and not take up their place. Given the various Government funding streams available providers are strongly encouraged to support parents as best they can throughout their reengagement with ELC and SAC services. Where possible, services are requested to avoid charging fees, deposits or other measures to hold places as these might create a strain for families in difficult circumstances. If these measures are required, then they should be as minimal as possible.

5.14. What supports are available for services that do not reopen?

All services reopening by the beginning of September can avail of the once-off reopening and capital grant elements of the funding package.

As occurs in all other years, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs does not fund closed services during the summer months. Services that are not open over the summer months may continue to avail of the Revenue operated TWSS or other Government supports, including many staff on seasonal contracts relying on supports available through the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection.

5.15. Why is the DCYA Temporary Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme ending?

The DCYA Temporary Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme was introduced as a temporary and time-limited emergency measure to support the sector during the closure period required by the COVID-19 crisis. The Minister suspended the DCYA ELC and SAC funding programmes for the closure period and replaced these with the Temporary Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme as a sustainability measure designed to support the sector at that time.

Now that the sector is reopening in line with the Government Roadmap for Reopening Society and Business and the public health guidelines, it is necessary to cease the DCYA Temporary Wage Subsidy Childcare Scheme so that Exchequer funding can be redirected towards supporting services to reopen for children and families. The reinstatement of DCYA ELC and SAC programme subsidies links funding to attendance, so that services can maximise capacity in the best interests of children and to support the re-opening of the economy.

The Department acknowledges that this is not a normal return to business, however, and the reopening funding package recognises the need to support the sector through this difficult time through the new Capital Programme and the Reopening Grant as well as other supports from across Government, and the need to support staff retention through the TWSS, and to support parents through ensuring no increases in fees.