

AIM Level 7 Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ)

1. What has changed with the AIM Level 7 application process?

The AIM Level 7 application process has been redesigned to make it simpler for service providers to apply. The new approach replaces the previous system of multiple applications with a single, streamlined process, reducing administrative workload and introducing standardised steps.

While the new L7 application form is not yet available and service providers are not required to complete a separate AIM Level 7 application form for the 2026/2027 programme. Instead, you can express your interest in AIM Level 7 support as part of your AIM Level 4 application. On the final page of the AIM Level 4 application, select the tick box: 'Would you like to create an AIM Level 7 application?'. This step is required if you wish to be considered for AIM Level 7 support and a Level 7 application must be submitted once the new form becomes available.

If you did not tick the box to create an AIM Level 7 application but wish to be considered for AIM Level 7 support, please submit a request via the Early Years Hive. Please note: It is important not to select the 'AIM Level 7 2025' option in the dropdown of AIM level 7 applications if you wish to apply for the 2026/2027 programme call. This option relates to the 2025/2026 programme call and will not be eligible for consideration in the 2026/2027 programme call. Has the Application form for AIM Level 7 changed?

Yes, the AIM Level 7 application form has been updated and redesigned to make it simpler for service providers to apply. This new approach replaces the previous system of multiple applications with a single, streamlined application, reducing administrative workload and introducing standardised steps.

Guidance materials and training resources to support the new application process will be made available on the Early Years Hive in due course.

2. Why is the AIM Level 7 application form for the 2026/2027 programme call not available on Early Years Hive?

Currently, service providers are not required to complete a separate AIM Level 7 application form for the 2026/2027 programme. Instead, you can express your interest in AIM Level 7 support as part of your AIM Level 4 application. On the final page of the AIM Level 4 application, select the tick box: 'Would you like to create an AIM Level 7 application?'. This step is required if you wish to be considered for AIM Level 7 support and a Level 7 application must be submitted once the new form becomes available.

Further information will be issued via the Early Years Hive once the updated application form is available for service providers who have expressed an interest in AIM Level 7 support through the submission of an AIM Level 4 application.

Please note: It is important not to select the 'AIM Level 7 2025' option in the dropdown of AIM level 7 applications if you wish to apply for the 2026/2027 programme call. This option relates to the 2025/2026 programme call and will not be eligible for consideration in the 2026/2027 programme call.

3. When do we need to submit an AIM Level 7 application?

Service Providers in partnership with a child's parent(s)/ legal guardian(s)/ carer are advised to apply at least 3 months before the child's planned start date in order to ensure that the application can be processed in a timely manner. Please note that AIM Level 4 applications may take up to 4 weeks to process.

Currently, service providers are not required to complete a separate AIM Level 7 application form for the 2026/2027 programme. Instead, you can express your interest in AIM Level 7 support as part of your AIM Level 4 application. On the final page of the AIM Level 4 application, select the tick box: 'Would you like to create an AIM Level 7 application?'. This step is required if you wish to avail of AIM Level 7 support.

Once the updated application form is available, further communications will be shared via the Early Years Hive to all service providers who have expressed an interest in AIM Level 7 support through the submission of an AIM Level 4 application.

4. When will the redesigned AIM Level 7 application form be available on the Early Years Hive?

The planned redesign of the AIM Level 7 application form is currently ongoing.

Once the updated applications form is available, service providers will be informed through a communication issued via the Early Years Hive.

5. Will the redesigned AIM Level 7 application change eligibility criteria or levels of support?

The Level 7 support awarded to a child will be determined following the submission of an AIM level 4 application and an initial review of the child's needs has been completed by Better Start.

6. Has the timeframe for decisions changed for AIM level 4 and 7?

At this time, the same 12-week KPI remains in place for processing of AIM Level 4 and 7 applications. Please note, once the redesigned application is available, service providers will be notified through a communication published on Early Years Hive.

7. Should I wait until the AIM Level 7 application becomes available before taking any action?

No. Service providers should not delay engagement where support may be required. Service Providers in partnership with the child's parent(s)/legal guardian(s)/ carers should submit an AIM Level 4 application as soon as possible for the 2026/2027 programme call. This will

enable the Early Years Specialist to work collaboratively with you to plan for the child's transition into Preschool.

Currently, for the 2026/2027 programme, service providers are not required to complete a separate AIM Level 7 application at the initial stage. Instead, the service in partnership with the child's parent(s)/legal guardian(s)/ carer(s) can express your interest in AIM Level 7 support as part of the AIM Level 4 application.

To do this, on the final page of the AIM Level 4 application, select the tick box: 'Would you like to create an AIM Level 7 application?'. This step is required if you wish to be considered for AIM Level 7 support and a Level 7 application must be submitted once the new form becomes available. If you did not tick the box to create an AIM Level 7 application but wish to be considered for AIM Level 7 support, please submit a request via the Early Years Hive.

It is important to not select the 'AIM Level 7 2025' option in the dropdown of AIM level 7 applications if you wish to apply for the 2026/2027 programme call. This option relates to the 2025/2026 programme call and will not be eligible for consideration in the 2026/2027 programme call.

8. Does submitting an AIM Level 4 application guarantee AIM Level 7 support for 2026/2027?

No. Submitting an AIM Level 4 application does not guarantee AIM Level 7 support. The AIM Level 4 application allows service providers to express interest in AIM Level 7 support and ensures they will be informed when the redesigned AIM Level 7 application process is available.

All AIM Level 7 supports will continue to be subject to eligibility criteria and will be reviewed through the formal AIM Level 4 application process. There is currently no review functionality available for 2026/2027 applications. Please continue to monitor the Early Years Hive over the coming weeks for further updates.

9. I have submitted an AIM Level 4 application but have not yet been contacted. What should I do?

Once an AIM Level 4 application is submitted, it will be reviewed in line with standard processes. An Early Years Specialist will make contact by phone as part of this process. Service providers are asked to allow sufficient time for this contact to occur. There is no additional action required unless you are contacted by the Early Years Specialist or receive further communication via the Early Years Hive.

10. What happens after an AIM Level 4 application is submitted for Level 7 support?

Once an AIM Level 4 application, including a request for Level 7 support, has been submitted, it is reviewed by an Early Years Specialist. Following this review, a decision is issued via the Early Years Hive. The outcome may be

- **Individual ECCE / Shared NCS:** awarded where it has been determined that the child needs individual support during the ECCE programme, and shared support (up to a maximum of three children) for any additional hours availed of under NCS.
- Where a sessional service receives an 'Individual ECCE / Shared NCS' decision for a child, individual support applies for the full duration of the ECCE programme. If the child avails of hours beyond ECCE for the upcoming programme call, shared support has already been determined for those hours.
- **Shared ECCE / Shared NCS:** awarded where it has been determined that the child needs shared support (up to a maximum of three children) during both the ECCE programme and any hours availed of under NCS.
- **Not Approved:** indicates no AIM Level 7 support has been awarded.

11. How is the decision made about the level of support allocated to a child?

The level of support allocated to a child is determined once their AIM Level 4 application has been submitted and an initial review of the child's needs has been completed by Better Start. The allocated level of support will apply for the full duration of the AIM Level 4 application. Service Providers can expect to receive a preliminary decision of the level of support determined at the AIM Level 4 application stage in July.

12. Will I need to apply for AIM Level 7 once the new application form becomes available?

Yes. When the redesigned AIM Level 7 application form is available, service providers who wish to avail of AIM Level 7 support will be required to engage in the formal application process.

Further guidance will be provided at that time through communications issued via the Early Years Hive.

13. A child in my service is currently in receipt of AIM Level 7 support and is eligible for a further year of support. What do I need to do?

Where a child is eligible for a second year of AIM Level 7 support, no action is required at this time. If any action becomes necessary, service providers will be notified through a communication issued via the Early Years Hive. Service providers are asked not to withdraw these applications in advance of the 2026/2027 programme call and can expect preliminary decisions to be issued from early July.

Where a child is eligible for a third (Overage exemption) year of AIM Level 7 support you must raise a Hive request to notify of the child's details and overage exemption code.

14. Who is responsible for completing the AIM Level 4 and 7 applications?

The AIM Level 4 and 7 applications should be completed through a joint partnership between the Service Provider and the parent(s)/legal guardian(s)/carer(s). This collaborative

approach supports the timely submission of the application to ensure that support can be put in place when required.

While the process is a shared responsibility, the service provider leads the application process to ensure the timely submission and coordination of supports. This includes maintaining regular communication with parent(s)/legal guardian(s)/carer(s), such as informing them when an Early Years Specialist (EYS) to visit the setting has been arranged.

The service provider is also responsible for notifying both Pobal and the parent(s)/legal guardian(s)/carer(s) of any delays including issues with scheduling the EYS visit or in the recruitment of the AIM Level 7 additional staff member.

Timely communication and collaboration are essential to ensure that appropriate supports are in place to meet the child's needs.

15. Will I hire staff before the decision has been issued to the service provider?

All recruitment decisions are the responsibility of the service provider as the employer. Pobal does not provide guidance or direction on the hiring of staff. Preliminary decisions regarding AIM Level 7 supports are expected to be issued in July 2026. As such, we are not in a position to advise on recruiting or hiring staff in advance of these decisions.

16. Does a child require a formal diagnosis to access AIM Level 7?

No. A formal diagnosis is not required to access support under AIM Level 7.

17. What is the ratio eligibility for AIM Level 7?

The level of support allocated to each children's application will be communicated to Service Providers via the Early Years Hive.

Once the level of support has been awarded, the onus is on the Service Provider to allocate AIM Level 7 support appropriately across the service. Service providers must ensure that any support awarded to a child is consistently in place at all times the child is in attendance.

When planning the use of these allocations, providers should avoid grouping all children receiving AIM Level 7 support in one room, as this can lead to an uneven distribution of resources.

As a guideline, no more than 2–3 additional adults should be assigned to a single room, depending on the number of children present and their individual needs.

18. What if we miss the communication about the new process going Live?

Further information will be shared via the Early Years Hive once the updated application form is available to service providers who have expressed an interest in AIM Level 7 support through the submission of an AIM Level 4 application. Please ensure to monitor the Early Years Hive regularly.

19. What should I tell parents who are concerned about delays in AIM Level 7 for 2026/2027?

The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) Level 7 application process is currently being redesigned to simplify processes, reduce administrative burdens and streamline the application journey.

AIM Level 7 expression of interest will now be incorporated into the AIM Level 4 application. Service Providers will continue submitting AIM Level 4 applications in collaboration with the child's parent(s)/legal guardian(s)/carer(s).

Parent(s)/legal guardian(s)/ carer(s) can be reassured that AIM Level 7 supports will continue to be available, and the current redesign process is related to the AIM Level 7 application process only.

The role of the Early Years Specialist continues to involve working in partnership with the service provider, parents/legal guardians/carers, and other professionals to develop an inclusive learning environment that supports a child in the Early Learning and Care setting. Please note, as part of the AIM Level 4 application process, an Early Years Specialist may contact a child's parents/legal guardians/carers to discuss the information submitted in the application form as usual.

Please note a letter for parents/legal guardians/carers was shared within a communication published on the Early Years Hive on Wednesday 13 May 2026.

20. I am a new service provider and unfamiliar with AIM. What should I do if I think a child may need Level 7 support?

New service providers should follow the same process as all others. If you believe a child in your service may require AIM Level 7 support for the 2026/2027 programme call in collaboration with the child's parent(s)/legal guardian(s)/carer, you should submit an AIM Level 4 application. As part of the AIM Level 4 process an Early Years Specialist will contact you by phone please indicate your interest in AIM Level 7 support during this call.

21. What does it mean if my child has been approved for AIM Level 7?

Approval for AIM Level 7 means your child has been identified as needing additional support within their early learning and care setting. The type of support provided depends on the support level awarded.

22. What types of AIM Level 7 support are available?

There are different support levels available under AIM Level 7:

Shared ECCE / Shared NCS

- Your child is allocated funding for a shared support during the ECCE programme.
- This support may be shared with up to three children in the setting who have similar needs.

- If your child has a confirmed NCS claim, they may also receive support outside ECCE hours. During NCS-funded hours, where applicable, this support may be shared with up to three other children in the setting.

Individual ECCE / Shared NCS

- Your child is allocated funding for individual support during the ECCE programme.
- If your child has a confirmed NCS claim, they may also receive support outside ECCE hours. During NCS-funded hours, where applicable, this support may be shared with up to three other children in the setting.

Not approved

- The child has not met the criteria for Level 7 support. As a result, no Level 7 capitation funding will be allocated in respect of any applications submitted.

23. What is the difference between 'Individual' and 'Shared' support?

The difference between 'Individual' and 'Shared' support is 'Individual' support is assigned to a specific child and 'Shared' support is allocated across multiple children up to a maximum of three children.

24. Will the support type influence how many AIM Level 7 additional staff member(s) are required in my service?

The support types will influence how many AIM Level 7 additional staff members are required to be compliant under the AIM programme.

If the support type has 'Individual' in the support label one AIM Level 7 additional staff member has been awarded for that child.

If the support type has 'Shared' in the support label one AIM Level 7 additional staff member has been awarded for up to a maximum of 3 children.

Example:

- In a group of 6 children:
 - 2 children receive Individual ECCE/Shared NCS
 - 4 children receive Shared ECCE/Shared NCS
- This may result in:
 - 4 AIM Level 7 additional staff members for ECCE
 - 2 AIM Level 7 additional staff members for NCS

Please note – this example will only be relevant where all 6 children are in the same ECCE and NCS sessions.

25. What if the AIM Level 7 Children are in different sessions?

If you have been awarded multiple AIM Level 7 supports, please check the award level. If the support type has 'Individual' in the support label one AIM Level 7 additional staff member has been awarded for that child.

If the support type has 'Shared' in the support label one AIM Level 7 additional staff member has been awarded for up to a maximum of 3 children.

However, if children with a 'shared' support level are in different AM and PM ECCE sessions, The funding capitations will recognise this, and separate funding allocations will be made.

There is currently no review functionality available for 2026/2027 applications. Please continue to monitor the Early Years Hive over the coming weeks for further updates.

26. How do attendance patterns affect AIM staffing assumptions?

Children's attendance patterns play a key role in determining AIM additional AIM Level 7 additional staff member staffing.

- The child who attends for the highest number of hours in a given week determines the capitation level for that week.
- Staffing must reflect when children are attending, not just the total number of children enrolled.

27. Why is the timing of attendance important for staffing?

The timing of attendance is important because AIM additional AIM Level 7 additional staff members must be present during the sessions when children attend.

- If children attend at different times (e.g. morning and afternoon sessions), staffing must ensure coverage across those time periods.
- Staffing cannot be based solely on total numbers; session distribution must be considered.

28. Do different sessions require additional AIM Level 7 additional staff members?

Yes, different sessions may require separate or additional AIM Level 7 additional staff members.

- Where attendance is spread across different sessions, providers may need multiple staff to cover non-overlapping time periods This ensures that all children receive appropriate support during their registered attendance.
- In situations where AIM Level 7 capitation is shared between children whose attendance is spread across different sessions, providers should consider whether the existing staffing arrangement continues to meet the children's needs. In some cases, adjustments may be required to ensure adequate support is in place and can be done through submitting a review.

- There is currently no review functionality available for 2026/2027 applications. Please continue to monitor the Early Years Hive over the coming weeks for further updates.

29. How is staffing determined when all children attend the same session?

If all children attend the same session, staffing can typically be shared across that session.

Example:

A provider has received 3 Shared ECCE/Shared NCS awards, and all 3 children attend ECCE PM.

Staffing assumption:

- 1 AIM Level 7 additional staff member for ECCE
- 1 AIM Level 7 additional staff member for NCS

All children attend at the same time, allowing a single AIM Level 7 additional staff member to support them within that session as per the awarded support level.

30. How is staffing determined when children attend different sessions?

Staffing requirements are based on whether children attend the same session or different programme sessions (e.g. AM and PM).

- If children attend different sessions at the same time, additional staffing may be required to ensure appropriate support is in place for each session. If the attendance pattern impacts staffing requirements a review may need to be submitted (Please note: There is currently no review functionality available for 2026/2027 applications. Please continue to monitor the Early Years Hive over the coming weeks for further updates.
- If children attend the same session, they may share available support staff under the Shared Support mode.

Example:

A provider has received 3 Shared ECCE/Shared NCS awards:

- 1 child attends ECCE AM
- 2 children attend ECCE PM

Staffing assumption:

- 2 AIM Level 7 additional staff members for ECCE
- 2 AIM Level 7 additional staff members for NCS

Separate sessions require staffing presence in both time periods. If a child has been awarded a 'shared' support level and is the only supported child in a session, they are still considered part of Shared Support. If another child with Shared Support attends the same session, both children are expected to share the available support staff.

31. How are AIM Level 7 additional staff members allocated when children attend different hours?

AIM staffing is based on the child who attends for the highest number of hours in a given week. This child determines the capitation level, and staffing is allocated in line with this requirement.

This means that even if multiple children attend, the allocation may reflect the highest individual need rather than the total combined hours.

Example:

A provider has received 4 Shared ECCE/Shared NCS awards:

4 children attend

- Child A - 15 hours
- Child B - 12 hours
- Child C - 9 hours
- Child D – 9 hours

Staffing assumption:

- 1 AIM Level 7 additional staff member, based on the 15-hour registration.
- 1 AIM Level 7 additional staff member, based on the 12-hour registration.

Child A who is attending 15 hours sets the first capitation level, and Child B who is attending 12 hours sets the second capitation level so staffing is aligned with this level rather than combining the hours of all children.

Staffing is based on the highest attendance hours, not the total combined hours of all children.

32. How do I record what sessions the children attend?

With the redesign of the AIM Level 7 application process, service providers are no longer required to submit room or session-level details, nor individual daily hours.

Service providers are expected to use AIM Level 7 support allocations in a balanced and inclusive manner across their service.

33. Do I need to create AIM Level 7 sessions for 2026/2027?

No. Currently, service providers do not need to create AIM Level 7 sessions for the 2026/2027 programme call.

34. Has the redesign impacted on the amount of funding capitation my services receive?

The redesign has not impacted on the capitation levels for Level 7. However, the Frequency and timing of payments have changed. Payment is now aligned with NCS and are issued one week in arrears of the claim date to allow confirmation of the NCS claim.

A capitation rate of up to €540 per week is available to support services in enhancing staffing provision.

This funding supports up to a Max of 30 hours of additional staffing per week.

- Up to 15 hours AIM support per week during ECCE term time.
- Up to 15 hours NCS support per week during ECCE term time.
- Up to 30 hours NCS support per week during non-term time.

The Level 7 capitation is based on a child attending the ECCE programme for 3 hours per day and additional funding for non-ECCE hours is available where a confirmed NCS claim is in place. Capitation amount is based on the highest individual child's attendance hours, not the combined hours of all children.

35. What is a Capitation?

Capitation is the amount of funding provided to a service to support additional staffing such as AIM Level 7 additional staff members. The capitation amount is determined by the attendance hours of the individual child/children with the highest level of need, rather than the combined hours of all children. The capitation amount paid weekly is based on a child's attendance pattern (e.g. hours per week).

36. Can applications be amended following submission?

No, if major amendments are required, the application must be resubmitted or submitted for review, as appropriate. Once submitted, applications cannot be amended or referred back for changes.

Where changes are necessary, the original Level 7 application must first be cancelled or withdrawn.

37. Can the decision be reviewed?

Yes. If the service provider believes the decision does not meet the needs of the child:

- A review can be requested.
- Any proposed changes must be submitted for review.
- Approval must be obtained from Pobal before any changes can be implemented.

Please note: There is currently no review functionality available for 2026/2027 applications. Please continue to monitor the Early Years Hive over the coming weeks for further updates.

38. Where can we access guidance or training?

Support is available through AIM guidance materials available on the Early Years Hive and the Early Years Provider Centre.

39. What is ECCE and NCS?

- ECCE (Early Childhood Care and Education): The ECCE Programme is a universal free programme available to all children within the eligible age range.
- NCS (National Childcare Scheme): A scheme providing financial support towards childcare costs outside of the ECCE session.

40. Does Level 7 support apply to hours beyond the ECCE programme?

Yes, if your child is ECCE age eligible and has a confirmed NCS claim, the child will be allocated funding for Level 7 support for outside the ECCE hours (15 hours max during term time per week and 30 hours max for non-term per week).

The capitation amount is based on the highest individual child's attendance hours, not the combined hours of all children.

41. I have been awarded Level 7 Support. Can this be used for maintenance of reduced ratio?

At present, Level 7 additional assistance cannot be used for the maintenance of reduced ratios through the application system.

Once the relevant functionality becomes available, requests of this nature will need to be submitted as a review.

Currently, there is no review functionality available for 2026/2027 applications.

In the meantime, you should continue to monitor the Early Years Hive for updates over the coming weeks.

42. What does a 'Preliminary Decision' mean?

Under the AIM Level 7 redesign, the level of support is determined following the submission of an AIM Level 4 application and the completion of Better Start's review of the child's needs. Preliminary decisions issued from July onwards reflect the outcome of this review and provide an indication of the level of support awarded to the child.

This outcome is referred to as a 'Preliminary Decision' as service providers must still confirm that they wish to proceed with the request for AIM Level 7 support by submitting the redesigned AIM Level 7 application form, once available. The final approval of AIM Level 7 support is also dependent on an active ECCE and/or NCS registration being identified for the child.

43. Where can I see my 'Preliminary Decision'?

Upon the completion of Better Start's review of the AIM Level 4 application, a notification will be issued to service providers advising of the level of support awarded to the child. This part of the notification advises service providers which support level has been allocated to the child:

AIM Level 7 - Application Outcome

Dear Service Provider

We are writing to confirm that the AIM Level 4 application in respect of the child [Unique Child ID] has been received and reviewed. As part of this process, consideration was also given to the request for AIM Level 7 support.

Outcome of Application

Support Award Type:

- **Level 7 - Shared/Individual/Not Approved (as applicable)**

This part of the notification provides additional information on what each level of support means. However, only one level will apply to a child as identified in the text box above.

- **Shared ECCE / Shared NCS:**

The child has been approved for shared Level 7 support for ECCE and where applicable NCS. The Level 7 capitation may be shared with up to a maximum of three children who have been approved for shared support within the setting. If the child has a confirmed NCS claim, they may also be eligible for AIM Level 7 support outside of ECCE attendance.

- **Individual ECCE / Shared NCS:**

The child has been approved for individual Level 7 support for ECCE and where applicable shared Level 7 support for NCS. If the child has a confirmed NCS claim, they may also be eligible for AIM Level 7 support outside of ECCE attendance.

- **Not Approved:**

The child has not met the criteria for Level 7 support. As a result, no Level 7 capitation funding will be allocated in respect of any applications submitted.

The service will receive AIM Level 4 educational advice and mentoring from the Early Years Specialist. Please note, the service provider can request a review of this decision if it does not meet the needs of the child or the service. Any request to amend this arrangement must be submitted for review and must receive approval from Pobal before any change can be implemented.