

Learner Fund Graduate Bursary – 2026

Application Rules

In 2026, the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE) will open the Learner Fund Graduate Bursary to Early Learning and Care educators who are new graduates of a Qualification Advisory Board approved Early Childhood Education and Care degree programme.

Local City/County Childcare Committees (CCC) will process Learner Fund Graduate Bursary applications, before appraisal from DCDE.

Particular attention is drawn to the Rules below, which align the Learner Fund eligibility and selection criteria in line with those of the Nurturing Skills Learner Fund and ensures equity in assessment of application in both schemes.

1. The scheme applies to those Early Years Educators who have completed a Qualifications Advisory Board (QAB) approved ELC Level 7 or 8 qualification in the academic years 2024, 2025 and 2026.
2. The bursary amount will be €1,000.
3. The qualification must be completed in full. The bursary will not be paid in respect of partially completed awards.
4. The qualification for which the bursary is paid must be that which qualifies the person to work in the Early Learning and Care sector and is at least level 7 and is on the QAB List of approved courses. The list of QAB approved courses can be viewed at the attached link [20260409 List of Approved Programmes for Adherence to the Professional Award Criteria and Guideline...](#)
5. Applicants may only apply once and cannot be granted the Learner Fund Bursary for a second time if they have already received it before.
6. The applicant cannot have received any public funding in support of their completing the award relating to this application.
7. Applicants must, at time of application, be working in a Tusla registered Early Learning & Care Service.
8. Staff working in standalone School Age Childcare services are not eligible to apply.
9. Applicants may apply with a full transcript of the completed degree in lieu of a graduating certificate. A full transcript can be obtained from the educational institution where you studied and must show clearly that the student has been awarded the full degree.
10. Applicants must provide a Copy of Fees Statement from their Higher Education Institution for the final year of study.
11. Applicants should apply with the name used in the certificate or transcript.
12. Photographic identification must be provided along with any supporting documents.
13. Late or incomplete applications will not be accepted.

14. DCDE Decision is final and cannot be appealed.

15. If demand for Learner Fund Graduate Bursary funding exceeds the available funding for 2026, then the selection of Applicants will be based on the following criteria in the following prioritisation order (with I being the highest level of priority and IV being the lowest level of priority):

- I. the number of graduates in the applicant's service, with priority for applicants from services with no graduates
- II. Equal Start Priority Index, with priority for applicants from services supporting the most disadvantaged children (i.e. index 1 = first 9% of most disadvantaged services, 2 = second 9% of most disadvantages service and then all remaining services),
- III. the applicant is in a core funded partner service.
- IV. if, after the above prioritisation has been applied and has not been decisive, random selection will be applied.

Timeline for applications:

Applications will open on Monday 14th September and close at 5pm on Friday 9th October 2026.

Link to List of QAB approved courses can be found at the following link -

[20260409 List of Approved Programmes for Adherence to the Professional Award Criteria and Guideline...](#)