Core Funding Programme 2024/2025
for
Early Learning and Childcare Services

Applicant Guidelines

June 2024

Version 1

Contents

About Core Funding

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

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 programme year three operates from 1 September 2024 to 31 August 2025. This document aims to assist prospective Core Funding Partner Services in their applications for the Programme Year 2024/2025.

Key Changes for 2024/2025

There are a number of key changes to the Service Profile, Core Funding Application Module and Employment Regulation Order (ERO) for 2024/2025.

Updates to the Service Profile:

There have additional updates to the Service Profile for the Core Funding 2024/2025 Programme Year:

- Session start and end times will be captured in 5-minute intervals instead of the previous 1-minute intervals
- Operating Weeks Per Year will be defined as the number of weeks the service is open and available to children. Please see below table which outlines what constitutes an open or closed week under Core Funding:

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	
Open	Open	Open	Closed	Closed	
PH	Open	Open	Closed	Closed	✅ Payable Week
PH	PH	Open	Open	Closed	

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	
Open	Open	Closed	Closed	Closed	
PH	Open	Closed	Closed	Closed	❌ Non payable Week
PH	PH	Open	Closed	Closed	

Please refer to the Service Profile Guidance Document for more information on the questions asked in each step of the Service Profile, further information can also be found in 'Part A- Complete the Service Profile' on page 11.

Core Funding Application Module changes:

The Core Funding Application Module has been redesigned and enhanced for Year 3. The new Core Funding application process will be a more user-friendly and streamlined process. These changes include:

- A reduction in the number of steps from 8 steps to 4 steps.
- Information captured has been changed from session level to room level.
- Staff allocation will now be captured at a room level instead of session level.
- Multiple Lead Educators and ELC sessions can be assigned to a room at the same time, making the application more flexible for providers. The Graduate Premiums will continue to be limited to one person in a room at any one time.
- Graduate Lead Educator Premiums are no longer available to view at 'Staff Member' level, and are now displayed at 'Room' level.

Further information is in 'Part B - Complete the Core Funding Application Module on page 13.

Employment Regulation Order (ERO) Change:

From 24 June 2024, due to the removal of the three years' experience requirement, Core Funding Partner Services will now have the opportunity to attract a Graduate Lead Educator/Manager premium for a staff member(s), who meets the following criteria:

Graduate Lead Educator for ELC sessions

- Must be assigned to role of Lead Educator in a room while eligible ELC session(s) are in place and be reflected as such in the Core Funding Application.
- Must hold an eligible qualification as per the Department's list of approved Qualifications, QQI Level 7 or above.

Please note though multiple Lead Educators can be assigned to a single room at any one time, the Graduate Lead Educator Premium is payable for one eligible staff member only at any one time within a room.

Graduate Manager Premium

- Must be a Manager working in an ELC or combined ELC/SAC service.
- Must hold an eligible qualification as per the Department's list of approved Qualifications, Level 7 or above.

Please note, a Graduate Manager Premium and a Graduate Lead Educator Premium cannot both be attracted by one individual. SAC Only Services and Childminders are not eligible for the Graduate Manager Premium.

Timeline

The timeline below outlines the Core Funding process for the Programme Year 2024/2025.

Service Profile
Annual Early Years Sector Profile 2023/2024
Core Funding Application Module 2024
Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement 2024
Appraisals will commence (as required)
Fees Table and Parent Statement for Partner Services
QAP Report 2023/2024
August Review and Confirm
Application Changes available
Payments commence
Programme Year commences on the 1 September 2024
Quality Action Plan 2024/2025
Review and Confirm x 3

Note: New services wishing to join Core Funding are required to complete/update the Service Profile prior to beginning the Core Funding Application Module for the Programme Year 2024/2025.

Existing Partner Service are required to review/update the Service Profile prior to beginning the Core Funding Application Module for the Programme Year 2024/2025.

Who can apply?

Community and privately owned Early Learning and Childcare Services who offer Full Time, Part Time or Sessional childcare registered with Tusla in the Republic of Ireland.

Only those Childminders who, in 2024, were registered with Tusla under the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 and the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Registration of School Age Services) Regulations 2018 continue to be eligible to apply for Core Funding for this programme year 2024/2025.

A Pre-School Service in a Drop-in Centre and SAC services that operate Drop-in care only, are not eligible for Core Funding.

Please note: The Core Funding application process is only available through the Early Years Hive. To onboard to the Early Years Hive please review the guidance document HERE.

What must Service Providers do in advance of submitting the Core Funding Application Module?

1. Ensure all **Tusla Registration** Certificates assigned to their service are captured on the Early Years Hive under the My Account section. If Partner Services are registered as an ELC and an SAC service, both Tusla registration numbers must be reflected on the Early Years Hive – see guidance HERE.

2. All facilities/locations operated by a service must have an individual **Service Reference Number** and children must attend the facility/location in which they are registered. A Service Provider must log onto the Early Years HIVE with all the relevant details in order to request a new or additional Service Reference Number.

3. Complete the **Annual Early Years Sector Profile (AEYSP) 2023/2024**
    Completion of the Annual Early Years Sector Profile (AEYSP) survey is a pre-requisite for applying for Core Funding. The initial data collection window for the AEYSP opened 8ᵗʰ May and closed 7ᵗʰ June however for services that could not complete the survey over this period, this does not prevent them from entering into Core Funding. The AEYSP reopened on 13ᵗʰ June so that services can complete the AEYSP and apply for Core Funding throughout the whole programme year.

4. Complete the **Service Profile**
    A service must have completed their Service Profile in order to apply for Core Funding. As a part of this process, a service must;

-   Fill in Service Level details, including information about their operating hours per week, opening weeks per year, and facility information, among other details;
-   Input information about the Rooms and Sessions within their Service;
-   Input information about the Staff who work within their Service, including information on their qualifications and wages they are paid, among other details.
-   They must attach evidence of Qualifications for Staff Members, including Deputy Managers, in ratio working with ELC children and for Graduate Premiums. A service may also need to attach evidence of qualifications for Managers.

Partner Services are required to keep their Service Profile and information up to date throughout the programme year. Changes after signing the Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement relating to staff vacancies, staff qualifications and level of service offered may affect the initial Core Funding allocation. Failure to update the information may result in their Core Funding allocation being placed on hold or terminated.

It is the responsibility of the Partner Service to ensure that all information on the Service Profile e.g. staff wages is kept up to date throughout the programme year as per the Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement 2024/2025 and Core Funding Rules Document.

How is Tusla Registration information linked to the Core Funding Application Module?

The Early Years Hive validates the Core Funding Application Module by cross checking information from the Tusla Register (including registered service type and capacity). This enables the Early Years Hive system to validate information about each service during an application process.

If Partner Services believe there are discrepancies in their Tusla Registration data, they are given the opportunity to attach evidence to support the correct registration information in the Early Years Hive during a Core Funding Application. For example, if a Partner Service was recently given permission to increase their capacity by Tusla, but this is not reflected in the Core Funding Application Module validations, they will be able to submit evidence of a change in capacity. The required evidence is a Tusla Certificate/Tusla letter dated no earlier than 3 months prior to the application submission date as part of Step 2 (Service Type) and Step 3 (Tusla Capacity) of the Core Funding Application Module process.

NB: Partner Services are not required to upload any evidence of a change in Tusla Registration details if there is no discrepancy in their Tusla registration data.

The Early Years Hive calculates and allocates the Flat Rate for Sessional Services only who have current and accurate Partner Services Tusla registration.

Childminders will only have one Tusla registration number, even if they provide care to both ELC & SAC.

How is Core Funding Calculated?

Core Funding allocations are calculated on a weekly basis. These weekly allocations are aggregated into monthly instalments which are paid in advance, spread across the entire programme year. Core Funding grant values will be calculated as follows, based on information provided by Partner Services in the Core Funding Application Module:

1. Base Rate
A base rate per session consisting of the number of staffed child places in each age range multiplied by Value that applies to each age range (see Table 1) multiplied by Hours of operation per week multiplied by Weeks open per year. The value for all sessions is added together to produce the base rate for the Partner Service.

A new Core Funding Allocation Model for Programme Year 2023/2024 was announced which saw the introduction of targeted measures. These targeted measures will continue for the Core Funding Allocation Model for Programme Year 2024/2025, which includes targeted measures outlined below which are aimed at improving the sustainability of smaller and sessional Partner Services.

➢ **Sessional Only Services** -A flat rate allocation of €5000 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.

The €5000 is a full programme year amount, Partner Services that are in Core Funding for less than a full programme year will be allocated the appropriate number of weekly payments. The flat rate allocation will be paid in addition to the Core Funding base rate and Graduate Premium.

Note: If, at any stage in the programme year a Partner Service change their registered Service Type with Tusla, they will become entitled to the flat rate allocation of €5000 for the appropriate number of weekly payments. Services are required to submit an application change as soon as their Tusla service type updates in order to trigger the flat rate payment. This allocation will be made to sessional only services regardless of the level of Core Funding they receive.

If a Partner Service entered into Core Funding during the Programme Year as a sessional only service and, therefore attracted the flat rate allocation, and then changed Tusla Service Type during the year they would retain the flat rate allocation for the duration of the Programme Year. If a service attracts the flat rate allocation at any point of the programme year they will continue to attract it for the rest of that programme year.

Services who are eligible for the flat rate will see the field "Flat Rate Grant" populated on step 4 - the summary page.

Example: Flat rate allocation for average sessional service

	Sessional Service Core Funding 2022/23 Programme Year (no flat rate allocation)	Sessional Service Core Funding 2024/25 Programme Year (with flat rate allocation)
Base Rate	€13,957	€13,000
Flat Top up Rate	N/A	€5,000
Graduate Premium	€3,386	€3,386
Total Core Funding	€17,793	€21,386

The Partner Service's base rate on the date of approval of their August Review and Confirm or the date of approval of their original Core Funding Application Module, 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 receive payments based on increases to their 'Base Rate Grant' above this highest approved capped 'Base Rate Grant' value.

The base rate can decrease if staffed capacity is reduced during the programme year. It can also be restored back up to the highest approved capped base rate value if staffed capacity is restored.

Capacity is lost when a room is closed or 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 €14000

Please note:
➢ **For Partner Services who submitted their 2024 Core Funding Application Module on or before the 31 August, their base rate will cap at their approved August Review and Confirm.**

- **For Partner Services who submitted their Core Funding application Module from the 1 September onwards, they will not be required to complete the August Review and Confirm window, and their base rate value will cap on the approval of their Original Core Funding Application Module.**

- **Further detail on the allocation model is outlined in the Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement and Core Funding Rules Document 24/25.**

    - **Minimum Base rate allocation-**The minimum base rate allocation will be set at €14,000 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 allocation. The €14,000 is a full programme year amount, Partner Services 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	€9,527
Does the Service Qualify for Base Rate Minimum	**Yes**	**Yes**	**No**
Base Rate after the Base Rate Minimum Allocation	€14,000	€14,000	€9,527
Flat Rate	N/A	N/A	€5,000
Graduate Premium	€3,037	N/A	€2,531
Total Core Funding	€17,037	€14,000	€17,058

Because Partner Services A and B received less than €14,000 from their base rate, they qualified for the minimum base rate allocation. This brought their allocation from their base rate up to €14,000. Partner Service C received more €14,000 from their base rate and flat rate allocation combined 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.

- **Maximum Base rate allocation-** There will be a new maximum base rate allocation of €500,000. Partner Services will not receive base rate funding beyond this maximum value. 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.

A Partner Service's base rate may fluctuate throughout the programme year, but no Partner Service will receive payments based on increases to their 'Base Rate Grant' above this highest approved capped 'Base Rate Grant' value.

Please refer to the Core Funding Programme Rules Document here on HIVE for further information.

2. Graduate Lead Educator Premium
Graduate Lead Educator Premium is calculated for the hours worked by an eligible Lead Educator staff member in the room where an eligible ELC session operates. Though multiple Lead Educators can be assigned to a single room at any one time, the Graduate Lead Educator Premium is payable for one eligible staff member only at any one time within a room.

Deputy Managers are eligible for the Graduate Lead Educator Premium if they are assigned as a Lead Educator in an ELC session and hold an eligible qualification as per the Department's list of approved Qualifications, QQI Level 7 or above.

The Graduate Lead Educator Premium is calculated as; number of weekly room hours (where an eligible ELC session operates with a eligible Graduate Lead Educator in it) multiplied by the room operating weeks per year (based on Room Offering) multiplied by Graduate Lead Educator premium rate of €4.44, with a maximum of one Graduate Lead Educator premium per ELC room.

A Graduate Lead Educator must hold an eligible qualification as per the Department's list of approved Qualifications, QQI Level 7 or above.

The Graduate Lead Educator Premium is only paid out on eligible sessions. ELC Session Types are eligible for the Graduate Premium. SAC Only sessions are not eligible for the Graduate Premium.

Staff members in SAC only sessions are not eligible for the graduate premium. i.e. in a service offering a mix of Early Years and School Age sessions, staff in the school age sessions will not be eligible, even if they hold a level 7 qualification (or Letter of Qualification Recognition) and are Lead Educator.

Session types of Both ELC/SAC will be eligible for the Graduate Premium if an ELC Age Range has capacity in the session and the staff member assigned holds a level 7 qualification (or Letter of Qualification Recognition) and assigned the role of Lead Educator in the Core Funding application.

Session types of both ELC/SAC Session Types would not be eligible for the Graduate Premium if capacity is only linked to an SAC Age Range in the session.

Childminders are eligible for the Graduate Lead Educator Premium.

From 24 June 2024 graduates will no longer be required to have 3 years' experience in order to be eligible for the Graduate Lead Educator Premium.

3. Graduate Manager Premium
Number of service operating hours per week that the Graduate Manager is working multiplied by Weeks per year the service operates where the Graduate Manager is working multiplied by Graduate Manager Premium rate of €4.44, with a maximum of one Graduate Manager Premium per service.

Note: The ELC Graduate Manager Premium is calculated on the basis of the hours in which the Manager is working, and the service is open and available to children. In practice this means the operating hours of the service or the working hours of the Manager, whichever is the lower.

A Graduate Manager must hold an eligible qualification as per the Department's list of approved Qualifications, Level 7 or above. A Graduate Manager Premium and a Graduate Lead Educator Premium cannot both be attracted by one individual.

From 24 June 2024 graduates will no longer be required to have 3 years experience in order to be eligible for the Graduate Manager Premium.

SAC Only Services and Childminders are not eligible for the Graduate Manager Premium.

Table 1: Core Funding Base Rates

Age of child	Value Core of Funding per place per hour
Full Time and Part Time	
0-1 year of age	€1.86
1-2 years of age	€1.23
2-3 years of age	€1.06
3-6 years of age	€0.76
Sessional	
0-1 year of age	€1.86
1-2.5 years of age	€1.23
2.5-6 years of age	€0.72
School-age AM/ School-age PM	
4-15 years	€0.59
Graduate premium rates per hour	
Graduate Lead Educators in ELC	€4.44
Graduate Managers in ELC or combined ELC and SAC	€4.44

The Core Funding Application Process 2024/2025

The Core Funding Application process consists of two parts, Part A and Part B.

Part A – Complete the Service Profile

1. Go to the My Account menu and select **Service Profile**.

2. Select the **Edit Service Profile** button to begin the Service Profile.

Please refer to the Service Profile Guidance Document for more information on the questions asked in each step of the Service Profile, including further information regarding the below changes:

New Facility Section

On 3 May 2024, a new section was added to the Service Profile to capture and update information about service provider's facilities. This new section contains updated mandatory questions, as well as questions originally included in the Annual Early Years Sector Profile (AEYSP).

Therefore, where possible questions in the facility section are pre-populated with information that was captured when a service completed the 2022/2023 Annual Early Years Sector Profile. All other questions will be blank and are mandatory for services to complete.

For any service that did not complete the 2022/2023 Annual Early Years Sector Profile, all facility questions will be blank and mandatory to complete.

Updated Staff Section

Deputy Manager. There is a new option for Partner Services in Programme Year 3 (2024/2025) under staff type for services to capture Deputy Manager role(s) within their service.

Where a Partner Service previously captured Deputy Manager role(s) under the 'Out of Ratio' staff type option, these will need review in Year 3 and if necessary, a new Deputy Manager staff type is applied. Once the Partner Service applies the Deputy Manager staff type to individual role(s) in their Service Profile, the 'Out of Ratio' staff option will list the Job Title as blank in a staff members record on the Early Years Hive. Partner Services should deactivate these records only when the Deputy Manager staff type is applied as an update to any appropriate staff members affected by this Service Profile enhancement.

Services should also review their existing staff included on their Service Profile and where a Deputy Manager is listed currently as an In Ratio staff member, they should change them accordingly to reflect their correct staff type of Deputy Manager where applicable.

Staff Information

There are a number of questions relating to staff, originally included and captured in the Annual Early Years Sector Profile that are captured in the Service Profile. As the questions are mandatory, Partner Services are required to review and update existing staff members and complete for new staff members that are created for the coming programme year.

Please note it is the responsibility of the Partner Service to ensure the Service Profile is accurate and kept up to date.

Privacy Statement

New applicants completing the Service Profile for the first time are required to accept a declaration on the Staff Members section of the Service Profile.

New and existing Partner Services are required to review and share the Privacy Statement with all staff.

Please review the Privacy Statement HERE.

Part B – Complete the Core Funding Application Module

- Go to the Programme menu and select Core Funding Applicant Guidelines 2024/2025
- Select **Start New Application**

Start Application
- Read the introductory notes and select the correct Programme Year.
- Select **Next** to continue.

Step 1 of 4 - Service Information
- Please check that Service Level information displayed is correct.
- Select **Next** to continue.

Step 2 of 4 - Rooms
- This step displays the full list of rooms that you had previously submitted as part of your Service Profile. By default, all rooms are listed as active.
- Select the yellow arrow beside each room for:
    - View Room Information
    - Step 1 – Manage Capacity and Sessions
    - Step 2 – Manage Staff Allocation
    - Deactivate Room
- Step 1 – Manage Capacity and Sessions
    - To add capacity and session information, select 'Add'.
    - To edit existing capacity and session information, select 'Edit Capacity and Session' from the drop-down menu item to the right of the capacity and session information.
    - To remove existing capacity and session information, select 'Remove Capacity and Session' from the drop-down menu item to the right of the capacity and session information.
- Step 2 – Manage Staff Allocation
    - The 'Capacity and Session' information provided details the minimum number of staff required for each session.
    - To add a staff member, select 'Add'.
    - To edit a staff members information, select 'Edit Staff Member' from the drop-down menu item to the right of the staff member name.
    - To remove a staff member, select 'Edit Staff Member' from the drop-down menu item to the right of the staff member name.
- Select **Next** to continue.

Step 3 of 4 - Validations

- This step displays information included as part of the Service Profile and Step 2 of the Application at 'Service Level', 'Room Level' and 'Session Level'.
- The 'Max ELC Capacity' and 'Max SAC Capacity' is the maximum staffed capacity for each Child Age Range across all Room/Sessions as noted in Step 2 of this application.
- If 'No' is displayed for any of the below questions, please refer to the information message that appears for guidance.
- Select **Next** to continue.

Table 2: Step 3 Validations

Validation Questions	Why 'No' was Triggered	Resolution
Are the operating hours in line with the maximum session hours?	The operating hours validation will be triggered when the Operating Hours Per Week (as noted in the Service Profile) exceed the maximum weekly hours of the session(s) assigned to a room(s) at step 2 of the application.	Partner Services can resolve this validation by either reviewing the operating hours per week, noted in the Service Profile. Or, if the operating hours per week are correct, review the session start and end times as part of Step 2 of the application.
Is the Capacity entered in Step 2 in accordance with the Tusla Capacity?	The Tusla Capacity validation is triggered when the capacity entered as part of Step 2 of the application, exceeds the Tusla Registration Capacity noted on step 1 of the application. To identify which Tusla Registration capacity has been exceeded, please review the Max ELC and Max SAC fields. The exceeded capacity value(s) will be highlighted in red.	If a discrepancy exists regarding the Tusla Registration Capacity, Partner Services will be required to attach supporting evidence on Step 2 of the application. Partner Services are only required to attach evidence if there is a discrepancy in their Tusla registration data. If no discrepancy exists in the Tusla Registration Capacity, Partner Services will need to review the 'Capacity and Sessions' section on step 2 of the application.
Are the square meters sufficient for the age range(s) and capacity offered?	The Room Floor Space validation is based on the capacity entered in Step 2, therefore is triggered when the available floor space included for a room(s) in the Service Profile has been exceeded. To identify the room where the floor space has been exceeded, review the rooms and. where the floor space has been exceeded, this will be highlighted in red.	Under 'Rooms' on the Service Profile, Partner Services can review the square meters of a room to ensure the information is correct. If the square meters entered for each room is correct, Partner Services should then review the capacity entered for a room(s) on step 2 of the application.
Are there sufficient staff for the age range(s) and capacity offered?	The Staff to Child ratio validation triggers when the number of allocated staff is insufficient for the number of child places offered, either in a single session or during a period of overlap of multiple sessions. To identify which room(s) and session(s) has insufficient staff, the minimum required and allocated staff, both for	Partner Services can review the 'Staff Allocation' on Step 2 for each session, to ensure the correct Start and End Times and the correct days per week have been selected. Overlapping sessions should also be reviewed to ensure that the correct number of staff have been allocated, if there is an increase in capacity

	term and out of term offerings should be reviewed. The incorrect value will be highlighted in red. The session(s) will also be highlighted in red, to flag which session(s) additional staff members need to be added to.	requiring an increase in staff ratio, during the period of overlap.

Step 4 of 4 - Summary

1. The final screen contains the Core Funding Application Module Summary.
2. The summary page details key information on your Core Funding grant values. The calculations displayed reflect the full Core Funding Programme Year (1 September - 31 August). The 'Weekly Grant' value is the 'Annual Grant' value divided by 52 weeks.
3. The Summary - Room section shows a summary for each room. The 'View Details' from the drop-down menu item to the right for each room provides further information on the capacity, session, staff and grant values for each room.
   - Note: Graduate Lead Educator Premiums are no longer available to view at 'Staff Member' level, and are now displayed at 'Room' level.
4. A declaration is available at the bottom of the summary page. Partner Services are required to read this declaration in full, then tick the declaration box to confirm if they agree to the declaration.
5. Upon selecting the **Submit** button, Partner Services will be prompted with a confirmation box confirming they have read and understood all of the information on the summary page including the 'Base Rate Capping Rules'.
6. Select **Confirm** to complete submitting the application.

Important: Upon submission of the Core Funding application, the application information is locked and no further changes can be made at this time until the application is 'Approved' and application changes functionality is available. Application changes can also be made as part of the August Review and Confirm process.

Parent Statement for Partner Services

The online Parent Statement for Partner Services for Programme Year 2024/2025 became available for completion online in June.

Partner Services are required to complete a Parent Statement for Partner Services 2024/25 via the online form which can be accessed on HIVE under "My Account" or via the link within the Service Profile.

Services must publish and distribute their completed Parent Statement to all service users and always display the Parent Statement in an area accessible to parents/guardians as well as on any online platform maintained by the service for the purpose of advertising or providing information to parents/guardians.

If you withdraw from Core Funding during the programme year you will need to re-issue your Parent Statement so that an updated Approved Provider Parent Statement is generated, i.e., no longer a Partner Service.

If you are a Partner Service, the Early Years Hive generates a Parent Statement for Partner Services for the programme year 3 in 2024/25. 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 2024, this check will also occur at every other Review and Confirm Window throughout the year. Otherwise

the system will check at point of contracting that a service has completed a Parent Statement for Partner Services.

Steps for a Partner Service up until 31 August 2024:

Until 31 August 2024, a Service Provider has the option to self-declare their service status and which version of the Parent Statement they wish to create. A service should create and submit your Fees Table and select Partner Service if you are a service who has/intends to have an active Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement with the Minister and agrees to operate fee management and quality improvements for the programme year to which this Fee Table applies.

Steps for a Partner Service from 01 September 2024:

From 01 September 2024, if Partner Services or Approved Providers have yet to begin, or not submitted a Core Funding Application Module for 2024/2025, the steps below must be followed in order:

1. Submit your Core Funding Application Module
2. Create and submit your Fees Table
3. Create and submit your Parent Statement for Partner Services 2024/25
4. Activate your Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement 2024

The Core Funding Application is flagged under an Early Years Hive system status so that the Parent Statement for Partner Services 2024/25 can be generated:

- Submitted
- Contracted
- Under Appraisal
- Referred Back
- Approved

For an Approved Provider it is important to note that if signing up to Core Funding after 31 August requires providers to re-issue a Parent Statement so that an updated Parent Statement for Partner Services 2024/25 is generated. Please read through the Core Funding Rules document for further details on the Parent Statement for Partner Services.

If a service does not join Core Funding until after creating at least one Parent Statement for Approved Providers 2024/25, but joins at a later date, they will still need to retain any Parent Statement(s) for Approved Providers they created.

Quality Action Plan (QAP)

Quality Action Plan Report 2023/24

All Partner Services must complete and submit an end of year Quality Action Plan Report 2023/2024. Partner Services who submit an original Core Funding Application Module prior to the end of the August Review and Confirm window are required to complete the Quality Action Plan Report prior to commencing the August Review and Confirm. Failure to submit a Quality Action Plan Report will see Partner Services

unable to complete the Review and Confirm process and could result in payments being put on hold and/or applications being declined.

Partner Services who submit an original Core Funding Application Module after the end of the August Review and Confirm window are required to complete the Quality Action Plan Report prior to accepting the Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement 2024/2025. Failure to submit a Quality Action Plan Report may mean that Partner Services are unable to accept the Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement 2024/2025. Failure to complete the Quality Action Plan may result in the cancellation of a Core Funding Application Module and a new application submission may then be required.

Quality Action Plan 2024/25:

The Early Years Hive requires that all Partner Services complete and submit a Quality Action Plan 2024/2025 prior to the November Review and Confirm and all subsequent Review and Confirm windows. Failure to submit a Quality Action Plan may mean Partner Services are unable to complete Review and Confirm processes and could result in payments being put on hold and/or applications being declined.

For further information and support relating to QAP, Partner Services can contact their local CCC (County Childcare Committee).

A QAP training video and technical guide on how to upload a Quality Action Plan to your Service Profile can be viewed on Early Years Hive.

Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement

The Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement for Programme Year 2024/2025 is the contract for Core Funding.

Partner services will be required to accept the terms and conditions of Core Funding through signing the Core Funding Agreement for Partner Services. Partner Services have 21 days from the submission date of the original Core Funding Application Module to activate the Funding Agreement. Once 21 days passes, the Core Funding Application Module will be cancelled if the Funding Agreement is not activated. If the 21 days passes without accepting the Funding agreement, Partner Service are then required to start a new application submission on the Early Years Hive.

Full information and details on the Funding Agreement is available HERE.

Additional information can also be found in the Core Funding Programme Rules 2024/2025 HERE.

The Funding Agreement shall commence on the date of acceptance by the Partner Service, or 1 September 2024, whichever is later and will expire on 31 August 2025 (Term) unless otherwise terminated by the Minister.

Please note: Core Funding allocations will be representative of an entitlement from the first Monday after which the Programme Year begins, or the Monday of the week the Funding Agreement is accepted, whichever is later. Partner Service that are in Core Funding for less than a full programme year will be allocated the appropriate number of weekly payments.

The Funding Agreement will only become available on the Early Years Hive once the original Core Funding Application Module for Programme Year 2024/2025 is at **Submitted**.

To activate the Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement, log into the Early Years Hive portal follow the below steps:

- Go to All Programme Applications under the heading Programme
- Select Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement from Available Programme Applications and select Start
- Review Programme Details and select Next
- Confirm your Primary Authorised User (PAU) and select Next
- Confirm your Organisation and select Next
- Confirm your Bank Account and select Next
- Confirm your Service Provider and select Next
- Confirm your Tusla Registration and select Next
- Read and accept the Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement
- Select Submit

Pre-requisites for signing the Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement

On the Early Years Hive, prior to activating the Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement, Partner Services are contracted into the relevant Funding Programme(s) based on Tusla Registration types. Partner Services are contracted to the NCS in the 2024/2025 programme year before opening a Core Funding Application is permitted, unless the service is registered on the Tulsa Register of Early Years Services, as a Pre-school Sessional Service only.

Partner Services are required only to contract to the ECCE programme in the 2024/2025 programme year, unless the service is registered on the Tulsa Register of School Age Services as School Aged only, or the services do not offer care to any eligible age range for the ECCE programme.

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 2024. At this point Partner Services will also be required to complete their Parent Statement on the Early Years Platform.

Appraisal of submitted applications

The appraisal process will consist of a review of the supporting documentation submitted to support the qualification of the Lead Educator and/or Manager and/or updated Tusla information.

As part of the appraisal process, applications may be referred back to the applicant if the supporting evidence provided is not acceptable or to request further information. Once all supporting information submitted has been appraised and approved, the Core Funding Application status will be set to approved.

If a staff member who is generating a Graduate Lead Educator or Manager premium has previously been appraised and approved, they will not require re-appraisal.

As part of the appraisal process, applications may be referred back to the applicant if the supporting evidence provided is not acceptable or to request further information.

Once all supporting information submitted has been appraised and approved, the Core Funding Application Module status will be set to 'Approved'.

Appraisals should be processed within 6 weeks of submission of the application form.

If the Original Core Funding Application Module is in a referred back cycle and has never been approved, Partner Services will not receive a Core Funding Payment.

If a Partner Service has an approved application they will receive a Core Funding payment based on this approved value, subject to allocations rules such as base rate capping. If the service submits an Application Change, they will continue to receive their pre-existing approved Core Funding allocation, while awaiting approval of the Application Change.

Referred Back applications:

As part of the appraisals process, a Core Funding Application Module can be referred-back to a Partner Service for additional information when necessary. A notification, and subsequent reminders, will be issued outlining the reason(s) for refer-back and the updates/actions required by the Partner Service in order to progress their application towards approval.

If the Original Core Funding Application Module is in a referred back cycle and has never been approved, Partner Services will not receive a Core Funding Payment. Once approved, allocations will generate from the first Monday after which the Programme Year begins, or the Monday of the week the Funding Agreement is accepted, whichever is later.

When an application is referred-back, Partner Service must edit their Core Funding Application Module/Application Change to address the reason(s) for refer-back. Examples of the reasons for, and the solutions to, referred back applications are outlined below:

Update required to Tusla information:

Applications referred back due to Capacity and/or Service Type changes, are required to provide evidence of a Tusla Certificate/Tusla letter/Tusla email dated no earlier than 3 months prior to the submission date of the first referred back application and no later than the submission date of the referred back application.

Where a Partner Service have indicated that they had higher capacity on their original Core Funding application, than on the Tulsa register, and have provided insufficient supporting evidence of Tulsa approval for this increased capacity declared, these applications will be "Referred Back".

- If a Partner service edits their Core Funding Application Module/Application Change and attaches insufficient supporting evidence again, this will result in their Core Funding payments being placed on hold.
- The Partner Service will have two further attempts to submit the correct documentation of Tulsa approval for their increased capacity declared or correct their application and reduce their capacity to that registered with Tulsa.

Note: If the corrective action is not taken this may result in their Core Funding Application being declined.

Update required to a Staff Qualification:

Please note from the 24 June 2024, there is no longer a requirement for staff to have three years' experience when Partner Services assign a premium rate to a staff member in a room.

- ➢ Attach the eligible document to the staff member on the Service Profile-
- ➢ Where additional documents are required (as per comment) please ensure the first submitted document is retained and subsequent document is added.
- ➢ When the eligibility pertaining to the staff qualification has increased (i.e., from non- graduate to graduate).
- ➢ If the name doesn't agree to the Qualification, please amend the name field on the staff record in the Service Profile.
- ➢ In the event of duplicated staff, please ensure the relevant staff member is deactivated on the Service Profile in line with the comment.
- ➢ **Submit an application change** by updating the Staff Member and/or Capacity Change effective date with the current date. Partner Services do not need to make any further updates to the Core Funding Application Module at this time.
- ➢ If a Partner service edits their Core Funding Application Module/Application Change and is required to be referred back again three times, this will result in their Core Funding payments being placed on hold.

Note: If the incorrect information is submitted three further times, this may result in their Core Funding Application being declined.

A Partner Service should make changes relating to the reason(s) for refer-back <u>only.</u> Any additional changes must be submitted as a separate application change once the initial application has been approved.

Core Funding Application Changes

'Application Changes' functionality for Core Funding 2024/2025 in the Early Years Hive will be available as part of the August Review and Confirm process and will remain open from that point.

Prior to the August Review and Confirm, once a Core Funding Application Module 2024/25 is submitted, Partner Services cannot edit the application until the changes functionality is available for programme year 2024/2025.

Further information will be communicated once available. Details about the rules for making application changes can be found in the Core Funding Rules Document 2024/2025 for Programme Year 3.

Employment Regulation Order Changes

The Employment Regulation Order (ERO) is removed from the 24 June 2024 onwards for the Core Funding Programme Year 3 2024/2025. This means that Partner Services are required to submit an 'Application Change' whilst the Programme Year 2 2023/2024 is still operating to prepare for these changes.

When the programme Year 3 2024/2025 opens, Partner Services are required to take care to review the staff information after the 24 June 2024 to ensure that the appropriate premium rates are applied to any staff member who is affected by the removal of the Employment Regulation Order.

If Partner Services are aware that there is any discrepancy, an 'Application Change' is required to update and correct any information for Programme Year 3 as part of the Core Funding Application Module for the 2024/2025 Programme Year 3, once 'Application Changes' functionality is available.

Further details about the sectoral communication to Early Years' service providers from the Scheme Administrator can be found at this link.

Tusla Registration updates

Tusla registration updates are required only if Partner Services have an approved Tusla change in circumstances.

On the Early Years Hive under the 'My Account' section, all Tusla Registration Certificates assigned to the service are captured. If Partner Services are registered as an ELC and an SAC service, both Tusla registration numbers are reflected on the Early Years Hive – see guidance here.

When a change in circumstances is approved by Tusla, it can take time for the Tusla register to be updated, therefore Partner Services may be required to attach evidence on step 2/step 3 of previously approved Tusla data. The required evidence is a Tusla Certificate/Tusla letter dated no earlier than 3 months prior to the application change submission date.

Update Due Date

An Update Due Date on the Early Years Hive is set on a Core Funding Application/change for the below reasons:

- Partner Services have added a Vacancy in the Service Profile and Core Funding Application Module.
- Partner Services have end dated a Staff member in the Service Profile.

When Service Manager's Employment End date is included in the Service Profile, the Update Due Date is set to the following week day after the employment end date. However, if the Original Application submission date is later than the Update Due Date, the system will set the Update Due Date to the original application submission date.

Once changes are available as part of the August Review and Confirm, Partner Services will have to submit an application change to reflect a replacement staff member or reduction in capacity. Otherwise the full Core Funding payment will be placed on hold.

As payments are issued monthly in advance, allocations dated after the Update Due Date will not be eligible for payment until an application change to reflect a replacement staff member or reduction in capacity is approved. In some cases, this will lead to a reduced payment during the four-week period. If required, catch-up payments can be made once an application change has been approved.

Note: Partners Services need to ensure to <u>remove the end dated staff member</u> from the application when replacing a staff member or reducing capacity.

Sessional Service Type Staff Members:

Reminder for Partner Services with a Sessional Service Type

Staff members **should not be end dated** if they will be returning the following programme year. Staff members should only be end-dated if they are ceasing employment and are **not returning**. If you have included an end date for a staff member who is returning the following programme year, the end date for the staff member in the Service Profile should be removed in the Service Profile.

Please review the most recently submitted Core Funding Application/Application Change and confirm that the Update Due Date has been removed.

Staff who are on long term leave i.e., Maternity leave/sick leave will continue to be included in funding for a maximum period of 4 weeks or the date on which they are replaced, whichever is the earliest. These staff members should not be end-dated in the Service Profile. An Application Change should be submitted to include a replacement staff member or reduce the capacity prior to the end of the four week period.

Vacancy for In Ratio staff members and Deputy Manager

Vacancies can be included as part of the Core Funding Original Application Module submission and the August Review and Confirm submission until the point the Review and Confirm form is approved or the August Review and Confirm window closes, whichever is earlier.

New Applicants submitting a new Core Funding Application Module after the August Review and Confirm can add vacancies for In Ratio staff members or Deputy Managers as part of the Core Funding Original Application Module submission only.

Assigning a vacancy to a Core Funding application is treated in the same way as a named person is, i.e., the vacancy is included in the staff ratios as part of the staffed capacity of the service.

Adding a vacancy to the application will set an Update Due Date for the later of the Programme Call Start Date plus four weeks or the Application submission date plus four weeks, whichever is later.

Partner Services will have until the Update Due Date to submit an application change, once changes are available, to reflect a replacement staff member or reduction in capacity, otherwise the full Core Funding payment will be placed on hold.

End dating a Departing In ratio staff or Deputy Manager

A Partner Service can submit an Employment End date at any time during the year, but this end date cannot be any further than 12 weeks in the future.

Staff members should not be end dated if they will be returning the following programme year. They should only be end-dated if they are leaving the service and will not be returning.

Further information will be provided once changes are available as part of the August Review and Confirm.

Update Due Date Managers

Partner Services must have a designated person in charge (termed the 'Manager') who is responsible for the daily running of the service and – unless deputised by a named person – must be on the premises at all times when the service is operating.

When a Service Manager ceases employment there is no four-week allowance.

The Service Provider must end date the Service Manager in the Service Profile by completing the "Employment End date".
Once changes are available as part of the August Review and Confirm:

- De-activate the Service Manager
- Enter the replacement Manger into the Service Profile
- Submit an Application Change, once changes functionality are available, reflecting the change in Service Manager

Capacity

For Partner Services who submit a 2024 Core Funding Application Module on or before the 31 August, their base rate will cap at the approved August Review and Confirm.

For Partner Services who submit their Core Funding application Module from the 1 September onwards, there is no requirement to complete the August Review and Confirm window, and the base rate value will cap on the approval of the Original Core Funding Application Module.

A Partner Service's base rate may fluctuate throughout the programme year, but no Partner Service will receive payments based on increases to the 'Base Rate Grant' above this highest approved capped 'Base Rate Grant' value.

Partner Service should still record an increase via an application change but this will not impact base rate (capacity) funding allocations. Graduate Premiums can be increased throughout the programme year.

The base rate can reduce during the programme year. It can also be restored back up to the highest value base rate (as noted above) if staffed capacity is restored.

Withdrawals

A Partner Service should only withdraw if leaving the Core Funding Programme.

Clause 8 of the Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement 24/25 stipulates Termination and Withdrawal Terms and Conditions.

All Partner Services must fully read and fully understand the Funding Agreement to adhere to the requirements, and all other contractual requirements under the Funding Agreement until the date of its termination. Partner Services are thereby required to give 12 weeks notice in advance of the notification date on which they intend to terminate their Funding Agreement, by submitting a Service Request on the Early Years Hive.

How to Withdraw from Core Funding

If a Partner Services wishes to withdraw from the Core Funding Programme, they can do so by submitting a Service Request on the Early Years Hive outlining the withdrawal date and the reason for the withdrawal. Please see the below option when creating a Service Request:

- Programme – Core Funding
- Request Type – Withdrawal

Outstanding Review and Confirm processes must be completed prior to withdrawing from the Core Funding Programme.

When the withdrawal process is completed, the most recent Core Funding Application/Application Change record will display the 'Withdrawn' status only.

Withdrawal requests are processed on or after the withdrawal date to allow amendments to be made or address outstanding actions. Once the withdrawal request is processed, no further changes can be submitted. Failure to give advance notification of the termination date will result in the recoupment off all overpayments.

The below information/criteria needs to be provided/met by the Partner Service:

➢ Partner Services must outline the withdrawal date and the reason for the withdrawal.
➢ Partner Services must provide a minimum of 12 weeks written notice when withdrawing from Core Funding as per clause 8 of the Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement, found here.
➢ Pending Review and Confirm forms must be completed prior to withdrawing from the Core Funding Programme. The withdrawal cannot be processed until the Review and Confirm is actioned.
➢ Pending Update Due Dates prior to the withdrawal date must be completed prior to withdrawing from the Core Funding Programme. The withdrawal cannot be processed until the Update Due Date is actioned.

Partner Services cannot re-apply prior to the Withdrawal Date and payments between the withdrawal date and the contracting date of the new application will not be backdated in the case of a gap in weeks.

Please note: A Partner Service may re-apply after a withdrawal however they cannot increase their Base Rate on the new application.

Review & Confirm

Information on the Review and Confirm process for the programme year 2024/2025 will be made available in due course.

Summary Page

The summary page of the Core Funding Application Module displays a breakdown of each room including the staff, capacity and premiums relating to each room as outlined in the application.

The grant values displayed on this page are calculated using the information provided in this application and is reflective of a full Core Funding Programme year (1 September - 31 August). Partner Services actual Core Funding allocations are representative of the entitlement from the Monday on which the programme year begins, or the Monday of the week on which Funding Agreement is accepted, whichever is later.

The 'Annual Grant' and 'Weekly Grant' values displayed are representative of the 'Base Rate Grant', 'Flat Rate' (if applicable), 'Graduate Lead Educator Premium' (if applicable) and 'Graduate Manager Premium' (if applicable). The 'Annual Grant' and 'Weekly Grant' do no not include the minimum and maximum targeted measures which may impact your service.

If the 'Base Rate Grant' value outlined is less than the minimum value or exceeding the maximum value, this will be displayed in the 'Min Base Rate' or 'Max Base Rate' field and your allocations will be adjusted accordingly, which will be reflected through your Core Funding payments.

The actual Core Funding allocations will be dependent on 'Base Rate Grant' capping rules.

For further details on the rules for 'Base Rate Capping', please see section 3.2 of the Core Funding Rules Document 2024/2025.

Payments and Allocations

The Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement commences on the 1 September 2024 for the Core Funding 2024/25 Programme Year, or the date of acceptance by the Partner Service, whichever is the later date. The Funding Agreement will expire on 31 August 2025, unless the Minister terminates the Funding Agreement or the Partner Service withdraws from the Funding Agreement.

Core Funding allocations will be representative of an entitlement from the first Monday after which the Programme Year begins, or the Monday of the week the Funding Agreement is accepted, whichever is later. Partner Service that are in Core Funding for less than a full programme year will be allocated the appropriate number of weekly payments.

If a Partner Service has an approved application they will receive a Core Funding payment based on this approved value, subject to allocations rules If a Partner Service submits an Application Change, payments are based on pre-existing approved Core Funding allocations, while awaiting approval of the Application Change.

Further Information

For further information regarding the Core Funding Programme, visit the First Five website HERE.

Early Years Provider Centre (EYPC): The Pobal Early Years Provider Centre is available to assist ELC and SAC providers with their online applications for Core Funding.

For queries relating to technical support, accessing, and using the Early Years Hive and / or questions regarding sector/service profile or application queries please raise a 'Service Request' on the Early Years Hive.

The Early Years Provider Centre is open Monday to Friday, 9.00am – 5.00pm, however on Wednesday the opening times are 10.00am - 5.00pm.

City and Country Childcare Committees (CCCs): The CCCs are also available to support local ELC and SAC providers with queries associated with Core Funding. In particular, questions relating to specific Service Profile requirements or the Core Funding Application Module should be directed to the local City and County Childcare Committee in the first instance.