

Information Update on the Early Childhood Care and Education scheme (ECCE)

Pre-school Leader Qualifications – Interim measure

During the first 2 full years of the scheme, as an interim measure the Pre-school Leader must be able to demonstrate that he or she has achieved a certification for an award in ECCE that includes significant content relating to early childhood education/early learning and child development, health and welfare and has at least 2 years experience of working in a position of responsibility with children in the 0-6 age range. By September 2012 every Pre-school Leader must have at least a full FETAC Level 5 qualification in childcare.

Birth Dates for eligibility to ECCE

The birth dates for children to be eligible for entry to the ECCE scheme on 1 January 2010 are from 2 February 2005 to 30 June 2006. The eligibility dates for children for entry to the ECCE scheme on 1 September 2010 are 2 February 2006 to 30 June 2007. Please note that children born between 2 February 2006 and 30 June 2006 are eligible for entry to ECCE in both January and September 2010 but parents must decide which free pre-school year they wish to avail of as only one free pre-school year applies. The exemption regarding children with special needs will continue to apply, as will the exemption where the local school admission policy makes it impossible for the child to otherwise avail of the ECCE place. (See Exemptions below)

Exemptions

Exemptions can be made where children are over the eligibility age requirement due to special needs or by virtue of the local national school's entry age policy requires the child commence junior infants aged over 5 years and 7 months. Parents of children with special needs should write to the OMCYA seeking an exemption enclosing either a HSE assessment or that of a consultant (N.B. a G.P.'s note will not suffice). The other exemption will require parents to provide a letter from the Principal of the local national school specifying their entry age policy and the enrolment of the children in their school. Where exemptions are being sought please inform parents of these requirements and that applications for an exemption should be made as soon as possible to OMCYA for early decisions. Otherwise ECCE payments based on an exemption not previously applied for cannot be guaranteed.

Processing applications

Providers should return the Electronic Fund Transfer form (EFT), current tax clearance certificate, pre-school leaders qualifications and any supporting documentation relating to a 4 day service where it applies. Contracts will issue to providers during October.

New capitation rate for higher quality services

In keeping with the commitment of the Government to increasing standards in the pre-school sector, sanction has been obtained for a higher rate of capitation in sessional playschool services where (a) all the pre-school leaders have a childcare / early years educational qualification at FETAC level 7 or 8 (i.e. degree level) and 3 years experience of working in the pre-school sector, and (b) all the pre-school assistants have the qualifications required for a pre-school leader under the general provisions of the scheme. (Full FETAC level 5) The higher rate amounts to €75 per

week (€2,850 p.a.), and applies to sessional services operating under the 38 week (and 41 week) option(s) of the scheme, although these can be co-located with a full-day 50-week service (which will not qualify for the higher rate).

The ratios applicable generally to the ECCE scheme apply to the higher capitation rate i.e. there must be 1 leader to 1 assistant. Each childcare worker can deliver the pre-school year at a ratio of 1 leader/assistant to 10 children. This means that for 10 children there must be 1 leader, for 20 children there must be 1 leader and 1 assistant, for 30 children there must be 2 leaders and 1 assistant, and so on.

N.B. To avail of the higher capitation rate, all childcare staff in a service must hold qualifications which meet the requirements set out above. This includes childcare staff in a service which is providing a sessional playschool service to children outside of the ECCE age range. For example, if a sessional playschool caters for forty children aged 3 to 5 years and engages four childcare staff for this purpose, two of the staff must hold a childcare/early years education qualification at level 7 or 8 and two must hold a childcare/early years education qualification equivalent to FETAC level 5.

Rates exemption for sessional services

The Valuation Office has agreed that, from January, ECCE funded sessional services which are funded "wholly or mainly" from Exchequer funds are exempt from commercial rates under the Act, provided they are used exclusively for educational purposes, such as ECCE. This does not include services which are mainly funded from parental fees.

The Valuation Office is particularly insistent that mandatory ("top-up") fees can not be levied by exempt services, and that measures must be in place to ensure compliance with this, and the role of the CCCs in ensuring compliance with the scheme was of particular importance in their decision. Services however, who give the parents the option of the extra half hour and charge an appropriate fee can avail of the exemption.

The OMCYA will supply the Valuation Office with a schedule of services which would, from the information supplied to us, qualify for this exemption, although they will reserve the right to inspect premises to ensure the exemption has not been granted in error.

The Valuation Office also confirmed that community based childcare facilities can be considered for exemption, but this is done on a case-by-case basis.

Number of weeks/days for January 2010 ECCE scheme

The following are the levels of service required under the various options:

- (a) 3 hours per day for 5 days a week over 23 weeks (111 days) during the period January to June 2010
- (b) subject to agreement, 3 hours 30 minutes per day for 4 days a week over 25 weeks (95 days) during the period January to July 2010
- (c) 2 hours 15 minutes per day for 5 days a week over 34 weeks (148 days) during the period January to August 2010
- (d) subject to agreement, of 3 hours 45 minutes per day for 3 days a week over 34 weeks (89 days) during the period January to August 2010.

Electronic return for ECCE scheme

In December, providers will receive an information pack and forms to distribute to parents for children's PPS Nos. who are attending their facility in the snapshot week. These when received back from the parents will be completed electronically with the hard copies returned to Childcare Directorate. When these forms are processed the payment for the first term will be adjusted (see Payments for ECCE scheme below). Further information on this process will issue with the pack in December 2010.

Payment of capitation

The service return for the ECCE is scheduled to be based on the week 11-15 January, and is to be made, electronically, by 22 January.

It has been decided, to assist services with their cash-flow, to make an advance payment by the 15 January. The advance payment will be calculated to provide for 6 weeks, based on the expected number of qualifying children indicated in each service's application.

A second, balancing payment will be made as soon as possible following the service return, and before the end of the 6-week period following the return, for the rest of the first term, bringing payments up to 12 weeks capitation. The final payment for sessional services will be made before Easter, for 11 weeks to the end of the sessional year. 50-week services will receive a payment at Easter followed by 12 week payment in June.

Generally, the expected numbers will be based on the figure provided by the applicant at the time of their application. Exceptions will be made in the following cases;

1. Where a service can demonstrate to its CCC that it will have significantly more qualified children in January than entered on the application form (this of course includes services which left this blank at application). Such applicants will be required to provide evidence, e.g. a higher number of eligible children enrolled from September.
2. Where an application is in respect of a new service, its "expected number" entered before it opened may significantly under-estimate or over-estimate the numbers.

In such cases where these services have opened in September 2009, CCCs should approach them, asking them to provide information regarding "current level of service" and also revising their "expected number" of ECCE participants from January, based upon current enrolments of eligible children and pre-enrolments (with details of any booking deposits paid). Where the CCC is satisfied from the information provided that the "expected" number is realistic, it should update this field. If they are not, they make their own estimate, or forward the information on to the OMCYA for decision.

Where a new service is set to open in January 2010, it should be asked to revise the "expected number" figure, and provide details of the number of eligible children pre-enrolled (with details of any booking deposits paid), the hours of its sessions, and the service capacity as signed off by the HSE. Based on this information, the CCC will

estimate an “expected number” and forward this to the OMCYA, who reserve the right to advance less than 6 weeks payments for that “expected number” if there is a significant risk of paying for a service that may not open. If such an advance is so reduced, the amount due to the service will be calculated and paid within two working weeks of receipt of the service return.

Payment for ECCE Places

Full payment will be made per ECCE place filled during the snapshot week and returned and processed on the electronic return. The full payment does not depend on the number of days the child attends as long as the rest of the week the place remains vacant e.g. one child, one place (1). However should a place be filled by two or more children, e.g. two days a week (0.4) for one child and three days a week (0.6) for another child, a pro-rata payment will be made to the facility based on the number of places and not the number of children attending. Please note that staff to child ratios will be taken into account before the adjusted payment is made.