



**An Roinn Leanaí, Míchumais
agus Comhionannais**
Department of Children,
Disability and Equality

Department of Children, Disability and Equality

Rules for the ECCE Programme

Valid for the 2026/2027 Programme Year

Please note that information contained in these Rules is subject to change.

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GLOSSARY OF TERMS

“AIM” means the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), it is a model of supports designed to ensure that children with additional needs can access the ECCE Programme. AIM is a child-centred model, providing universal and targeted supports based on the needs of the child and the preschool setting. It does not require a formal diagnosis of disability. For further information on the AIM Programme see <https://aim.gov.ie/>.

“Better Start” refers to the Better Start National Early Years Quality Development Service hosted by the Scheme Administrator.

“CCC” means the City/County Childcare Committee. The CCCs are funded by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE) to act as the local agent in the delivery of Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Aged Childcare (SAC).

“Capitation/Subsidy” means the amount(s) of money payable by the Minister to the ECCE Approved Provider in respect of the provision of the ECCE Programme to an individual registered child.

“Childminder” is a person who is currently or was registered with Tusla as of 2024 under the Child Care (Amendment) Act 2024.

“Core Funding” means the supply-side funding stream that the Department has made available to Partner Services in order to achieve a range of policy objectives including improved quality of services, affordability for Parents/Guardians and sustainability for providers.

“Department” means the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE).

“Early Start” is a one-year preventative intervention scheme offered in selected schools in designated disadvantaged areas. The objective of the preschool programme is to tackle educational disadvantage by targeting children who are at risk of not reaching their potential within the school system. The programme is managed, funded and evaluated by the Department of Education and Youth (DEY).

“Early Years (EY) Service” as defined in the Child Care Act 1991, means a service providing a preschool service, a school age service, or a childminding service. An EY Service will be referred to as a “ECCE Service” in the context of the ECCE Programme rules.

“Early Years (EY) HIVE” - the ELC and SAC service provider portal for programmes funded by the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE)

“Early Years Platform (EYP)” is the system that hosts all DCDE childcare schemes allowing ECCE Approved Providers to manage the administration of their facility or facilities, including organisation details, Funding Agreement, registrations, and funding related to all DCDE childcare funding programmes. It contains the NCS applicant portal, and the ECCE Approved Provider portal titled “EY HIVE” and enables Core Funding and capital programmes applications. The platform can also be used to submit queries and receive responses and information from the Early Years Provider Centre.

“Early Years Educator” means an Early Years qualified staff member with a minimum of a National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Level 5 major award in early childhood care and

education, or a qualification that the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality has deemed to be equivalent.

“ECCE Approved Provider” means a Tusla registered provider of an Early Learning and Care Service (ELC) or a combined ELC and School Age Childcare (SAC) Service. An ECCE Approved Provider delivers ECCE in accordance with the ECCE Programme and has entered into this Agreement with the Minister.

“Educator” means an Early Years qualified staff member with a minimum of a National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Level 5 major award in early childhood care and education, or a qualification that the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality has deemed to be equivalent.

“Fee” means the sum of money that an ECCE Approved Provider charges a Parent/Guardian for childcare services before the discount of any capitation. The fee must be agreed between the Parent/Guardian and the ECCE Approved Provider before the Parent/Guardian signs off on the Parent Statement.

“Lead Educator” means an Early Years Educator or childminder who leads practice with a group of children (previously referred to as “room leader”). Lead Educators in an ECCE service must hold a minimum of a National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) Level 6 major award in early childhood care and education, or a qualification that the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality has deemed to be equivalent.

“Minister” means the Minister for Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE).

“NCS” means the affordable childcare scheme established under the Childcare Support Act 2018 and known as the National Childcare Scheme.

“On-boarding process” involves the Scheme Administrator gathering and approving details of the ECCE Approved Providers’ legal structure and approving the PAU.

“Optional Extra” means additional chargeable services that may only be selected from the approved DCDE “Optional Extra(s) List” and shall not include activities which are considered key parts of the ECCE curriculum e.g. general arts and crafts activities.

“Parent Statement” provides clarity and transparency for Parents/Guardians regarding services delivered, information about the Department’s schemes, and fees charged. The Parent Statement introduced under Core Funding has been adopted across all schemes since the 2023/2024 programme year (ECCE, NCS, CCSP Saver and Core Funding) and has a streamlined, online process.

“Partner Service” means an Early Learning and Care (ELC) and/or School Age Childcare (SAC) service in its entirety, including all rooms, sessions and Service Types within that service, who has entered into the Core Funding Partner Service Funding Agreement with the Minister. A Partner Service may include Childminders who meet the eligibility criteria set out in the Core Funding Agreement. A Partner Service may also include Childminders who meet the eligibility criteria.

“Preschool Service” means any preschool, play group, day nursery, crèche, day care or other similar service which caters for preschool children.

“Primary Authorised User (PAU)” is a person nominated by an ECCE Approved Provider to manage all interaction between the Scheme Administrator and an ECCE Approved Provider. This person also has the authority to sign contracts on behalf of their organisation.

“Programme Year” covers the period of the 2026/2027 ECCE Programme. The programme commences 24th August 2026 and runs until the 16th of July 2027.

“Registration” means the point at which the ECCE Approved Provider adds a child to the ECCE Programme (via the EY HIVE).

“Scheme Administrator” means the organisation appointed to administer the ECCE Programme. The Minister has appointed Pobal as the Scheme Administrator.

“ECCE Service” means a Tusla registered Pre-school service and/or a childminding service which is maintained by Tusla under section 58C of the Child Care Act 1991.

“Service” means a Tusla registered Early Learning and Care (ELC) and/or a childminding service which is registered with Tusla on the register of ECCE Approved Providers maintained by Tusla under section 58C of the Child Care Act 1991.

“Sessional Preschool Service” means a preschool service offering a planned programme to pre-school children for a total of not more than 3.5 hours per session. Services covered by the above definition may include preschools, playgroups, crèches, Montessori preschools, Naíonraí, or similar services which generally cater for preschool children.

“Term-time Week” means a week agreed between a Parent/Guardian and an ECCE Approved Provider during which a child is eligible to participate in the ECCE Programme.

“Tusla” refers to the Child and Family Agency.

“Working Day” means a day which is not a Saturday, Sunday or public holiday.

Introduction

The Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme is a universal **free programme** available to all children within the eligible age range. It provides children with their first formal experience of early learning prior to commencing primary school.

The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) is a model of supports designed to ensure that children with disabilities or additional needs can access the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme. The goal of AIM is to empower Early Learning and Care (ELC) providers to deliver an inclusive preschool experience, ensuring that every eligible child can meaningfully participate in the ECCE Programme and reap the benefits of high-quality early learning and care through universal and targeted supports.

AIM Level 7 funding acts to either reduce the child-to-adult ratio in the room or to fund an extra staff member as a shared resource with other children during the ECCE session. Level 7 funding is available to ECCE eligible children for 15 hours per week during ECCE term time. If an ECCE eligible child is also availing of NCS outside of their ECCE hours, they can be eligible for up to 15 hours per week during term time and up to 30 hours per week outside of term time.

For more information on AIM, please visit the website www.aim.gov.ie

Equal Start is a funding model and a set of associated universal and targeted measures to support access and meaningful participation in Early Learning and Childcare (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC) for children and their families who experience disadvantage. As well as universal supports available to all, certain measures will be targeted at individual children experiencing disadvantage and at Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC) services with higher concentrations of children experiencing disadvantage.

In October 2025, Bia Blasta pre-school nutrition programme became available for children availing of ECCE in Equal Start priority designated services and invited additional ECCE provision serving disadvantaged communities.

This document sets out the rules governing the ECCE Programme and should be read in conjunction with a suite of 'How to Guides' available on the EY HIVE which provide information on the operation of ECCE Programme.

Pobal administer the 2026/2027 ECCE Programme on the EY HIVE on behalf of the Department of Children, Disability and Equality (DCDE).

Any queries in relation to the ECCE Programme and the rules of the programme should be directed to the local City/County Childcare Committee (CCC). Please see the EY HIVE Homepage on <https://earlyyearshive.ncs.gov.ie/> or gov.ie - [City and County Childcare Committees](#) for CCC contact details. The CCCs are funded by DCDE and act as local agents in the administration of aspects of national early education and childcare programmes.

ECCE Approved Providers can raise a service request through the EY HIVE at <https://earlyyearshive.ncs.gov.ie/>. For assistance in administering the rules of the programmes, payments queries, or any technical issues with the EY HIVE, ECCE Approved Providers can contact the Early Year Providers Centre on eypc@pobal.ie or 01 511 7222.

Note: Information in the DCDE Rules for the ECCE Programme are subject to change. Please check the EY HIVE regularly for updates.

Chapter 1 Overview of ECCE Programme

The ECCE Programme is a universal free programme available to all children within the eligible age range. It provides children with their first formal experience of early learning prior to commencing primary school. The ECCE Programme is provided for 3 hours per day, 5 days per week over 38 weeks¹ per programme year and the programme year runs from August to the beginning of July.

Children enrolled in the ECCE Programme may also avail of the National Childcare Scheme (NCS). While the NCS and ECCE are two separate programmes/schemes, they are intended to work together. This means that Parents/Guardians can avail of NCS subsidised hours for the time spent outside of the ECCE Programme. If a provider has contracted to offer both the NCS and ECCE, Parents/Guardians should be able to use both programmes/schemes once the eligibility requirements are met.

1.1 Early Years Education Standard

Childcare services taking part in the ECCE Programme must provide an appropriate preschool educational programme which adheres to the principles and standards of [Síolta](#) and [Aistear](#), the national frameworks for early learning and care. Local CCC staff are on hand to support participating services with assistance visits and advice. ECCE is only available through participating Early Years Services. A list of these services is available through the relevant local CCC.

1.2 Eligibility for ECCE

A child must have turned 2 years and 8 months on or before 31st August 2026 and not be older than 5 years and 6 months on or before 2nd July 2027, to be eligible for the 2026/2027 programme year.

Table 1 below sets out relevant eligibility dates by year of birth.

Table 1: Eligibility for ECCE by Month of Birth		
Birth Date Between	ECCE Start Date	ECCE End Date
1 st January 2022 - 31 st December 2022	1 st September 2025 + 1 st September 2026	June 2027
1 st January 2023 - 31 st December 2023	1 st September 2026 + 1 st September 2027	June 2028
1 st January 2024 - 31 st December 2024	1 st September 2027 + 1 st September 2028	June 2029
1 st January 2025 – 31 st December 2025	1 st September 2028 + 1 st September 2029	June 2030
1 st January 2026 – 31 st December 2026	1 st September 2029 + 1 st September 2030	June 2031

¹ A small number of ECCE services are permitted to run over 41 weeks in exceptional circumstances. These existing arrangements will continue for these registered services only and are subject to all rules contained herein except that they can deliver the ECCE Programme for 4 days per week for 3.5 hours per day. No other ECCE service can avail of the 41-week option. Once an ECCE service relinquishes their 41-week option/does not register children for 41 weeks in a programme year they may not revert to it in the future.

1.3 Exceptions to the Upper Age Limit

The provision of an exemption to the upper age limit (formally known as an overage exemption) where a child has special/additional needs is under review in the DCDE in conjunction with the Department of Education and Youth (DEY). The provision of an exemption to the upper age limit in the ECCE programme should not be a mechanism for delaying a child's entry to primary school or to address any issue of non-availability of a school place.

It is a requirement that any request for an exemption to the upper age limit in the ECCE programme must include a letter from a medical specialist/therapist (**not** a GP/Public Health Nurse/Medical Officer/Social Worker), specifically recommending why an ECCE service would meet the child's specific needs in a more appropriate way than a primary school.

In deciding on applications for exemptions to the ECCE age requirements, the DCDE is guided by a review of the exemption to the upper age limit process which was carried out by the National Disability Authority for the DCDE and the DEY in 2018. In their published report, they concluded that it is in the best interest of children with additional needs to transition to primary school with their age cohort.

Applications for such exemptions must be submitted in writing to eyqueries@dcde.gov.ie. Please note, applications will only be accepted from a child's Parent/Guardian and not from an ECCE Approved Provider.

1.4 Required Documents/Information

Parents/Guardians must provide the ECCE Approved Provider with the child's full name as per their birth certificate or passport, child's date of birth, child's Personal Public Service Number (PPSN) and Eircode, to register their child in the ECCE Programme.

1.4.1 Pre-Registration Form

The Pre-Registration Form must be given to all Parents/Guardians whose child/children will be in attendance in the ELC or childminding service. The information is used by the ECCE Approved Provider to register the details on the EY HIVE and the Parent/Guardian signs this form to give consent to the DCDE, the Scheme Administrator, the Department of Social Protection and the DEY, to use this information to verify that the child/children are eligible, to calculate funding, and for statistical purposes.

While the retention of the ECCE Pre-Registration Form is not a requirement for compliance purposes, an ECCE service provider can securely retain the pre-registration forms to show that Parents/Guardians have given consent to record personal information on the EY HIVE in cases of dispute or misunderstanding.

1.4.1.1 Eircode Requirement

The Eircode is mandatory when the "ECCE Pre-Registration Form" is being completed by the Parent/Guardian. ECCE Approved Providers will be unable to make a registration without the Eircode.

Where an Eircode is unavailable for a property, ECCE Approved Providers should save the registration as a draft and raise a [Request](#) on the EY HIVE quoting its registration identifier code.

1.4.1.2 Ethnicity Identifiers

While it is not mandatory for Parents/Guardians to provide data on ethnic or cultural backgrounds, it is very important for DCDE to collect this information so that it can ensure that school age childcare is working effectively for all children and that no group is discriminated against. With the information gathered through this question on the Pre-Registration Form, DCDE can examine the impact of existing programmes and develop policies in the future which best meet the needs of all children. The collection of this data will be used to monitor outcomes for children of different ethnicities, allocate future resources as well as to inform future policy and planning for school age childcare, and for international reporting purposes.

Please note that disclosing your child's ethnic or cultural background will not affect your child's eligibility or access to services.

If the Parent/Guardian does not consent, these two data fields (ethnic/cultural backgrounds) may not be recorded by the Approved Provider on the EY HIVE.

Once the information is submitted on the EY HIVE, the Parent/Guardian will be required to sign an ECCE Applicant Declaration Form. Please refer to Chapter 3.9.1 in relation to further information on the Applicant Declaration Form.

1.5 Staff-to-Child Ratios

The staff-to-child ratio for an ECCE session is 1:11 (all children in the room must be aged between 2 years 6 months and 6 years old) fee-paying children who attend the same room as the ECCE session, must be included in the staff-to-child ratios. The staff-to-child ratios for the ECCE Programme must be strictly adhered to.

AIM funding may allow for reduced ratios in certain circumstances. Please refer to [AIM Rules](#) section 9.

Please see **Table 2** below which relates to number and type of staff-to-children ratios.

Table 2: Staff-to-Child Ratio	
1 - 11 Children per Session	At least 1 eligible preschool Lead Educator in the room at all times
12 - 22 Children per Session	At least 1 eligible preschool Lead Educator and 1 eligible Early Years Educator in the room at all times
23 - 33 Children per Session	At least 2 eligible preschool Lead Educators and 1 eligible Early Years Educator in the room at all times
34 - 44 Children per Session	At least 2 eligible preschool Lead Educators and 2 eligible Early Years Educators in the room at all times

A Lead Educator must have a minimum of Level 6 to lead an ECCE room. For further information regarding staffing qualifications, please refer to Chapter 5 of this document.

1.6 Minimum Enrolment

The ECCE Approved Provider shall have a minimum daily enrolment of 8 registered children in preschool room sessions who are eligible for the ECCE Programme. Subject to compliance with all other contractual requirements, exceptions will be considered by the Minister (through the CCCs) in the case of:

- a) ECCE Approved Providers who have a daily enrolment of at least 8 children, but for good reason, only 3 or more are in the ECCE Programme and the remainder are between the ages 2½ years and 6 years.
- b) ECCE Services limited by capacity but are considered appropriate settings for delivery of the preschool programme and have a daily enrolment of not fewer than 5 ECCE eligible children in preschool room sessions.
- c) An ECCE service that has a full ECCE room **and** has additional children eligible for ECCE in another room that is delivering the ECCE preschool programme to a daily enrolment of not fewer than 5 children subject to the requirement that ECCE staff qualification criteria are met.
- d) Tusla-registered childminders with a daily enrolment of 5 children between the ages of 2½ years and 6 years.
- e) A Service has a minimum of 4 children in a childcare service, who are all eligible for the ECCE Programme and is based in an area where no other ECCE provision is available to Parents/Guardians.

1.7 Leaving with Notice

If a Parent/Guardian wishes to move their child to another ELC service, Parents/Guardians must give 4 weeks' written notice of a departure from an ECCE service (excluding holidays/closed days/weeks) to the current ECCE Approved Provider.

4 weeks' notice means a continuous 4-week period that the ECCE Service is open. Therefore, if the ECCE Service closed for 2 full weeks, these 2 weeks may not be included as part of the 4-week notice period.

1.8 Leaving Without Notice

If a Parent/Guardian removes their child from an ELC service without providing 4 weeks' written notice, the ECCE Approved Provider may claim up to 4 weeks of ECCE capitation for that child. ECCE funding for the new service will only commence after the end date of claimed notice period. However, if an ECCE Approved Provider requests that a child is removed from their ECCE service without giving the Parent/Guardian 4 weeks' notice, the ECCE Approved Provider must register that child as a leaver from the last day they attended.

1.9 Notice When Moving a Child to an Alternative ECCE Timeslot

If an ECCE Approved Provider wishes to move a child to a different ECCE timeslot after a child has been previously registered on a particular ECCE session, e.g. from the morning to the afternoon, they may only do so with the Parents'/Guardian's permission.

1.10 Provision of ECCE Programme

An ECCE Approved Provider must provide the ECCE Programme 3 hours per day, 5 days per week for 38 weeks/182 days for the capitation received for the 2026/2027 programme year.

This also applies to any additional ECCE sessions provided. Under no circumstances should a child's hours be reduced without the full agreement of the Parents/Guardians. This includes where a Parent/Guardian does not choose any of the optional extra(s). In this instance, their child must be provided with the full ECCE Programme based service provision.

1.11 ECCE Rate(s)

The standard weekly ECCE capitation is €69.00 for the 2026/2027 ECCE programme year. Where a child is attending a part-time or full-time service and availing of additional childcare hours the ECCE Approved Provider must reduce the weekly fee paid by the Parent/Guardian by a minimum of €64.50.

1.12 Provision of Split Place Exemption

For the 2026/2027 programme year, those children who availed of a split place exemption in the 2025/2026 programme year are eligible to apply. However, split places exemptions are closed to new applicants.

Special arrangements will be put in place under the AIM scheme for children who have a disability or additional needs, who need to attend more than one service for necessary supports.

For further information on applying under a special arrangement, please see the [AIM Rules](#).

Chapter 2 Obligations of an ECCE Approved Provider

2.1 Obligations of an ECCE Approved Provider

There is an obligation on those in receipt of public funding to adhere strictly to all the rules contained in this entire document as set out by the Minister. The ECCE Approved Provider must demonstrate tax compliance by providing their tax reference number, together with their tax clearance access number. By supplying these numbers, the ECCE Approved Provider acknowledges and agrees that the Scheme Administrator and/or the Minister has the permission of the ECCE Approved Provider to verify its tax cleared position online.

The ECCE Approved Provider must be aware of and comply with all relevant legal, regulatory, and compliance obligations.

Failure to comply with any of these rules and/or terms of the ECCE Funding Agreement may result in the suspension/stoppage of ECCE funding and/or DCDE funding, or part thereof, may be withdrawn and/or a termination of the ECCE Funding Agreement. Please see Clauses 5.1 and 6.1 of the ECCE Funding Agreement 2026/2027.

An ECCE Approved Provider who provides an ELC service must meet the early learning and care principles and standards of Aistear and Síolta to support the learning and development of all children from birth to six years through the provision of an appropriate curriculum.

The ECCE Approved Provider must take all measures to safeguard the Health, Safety and Welfare of the children attending the ELC service and to comply with the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016 or the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) (Childminding Services) Regulations 2024.

2.1.1 Provision of Free ECCE Only Sessions

The ECCE Approved Provider must offer free ECCE only sessions for the ECCE programme year. Parents/Guardians of children availing of such sessions will not be required to attend or pay for any additional service offers.

The ECCE Approved Provider shall ensure that Parents/Guardians are informed that their agreement to additional hours or to any optional charge is entirely voluntary and that agreement is not a condition of initial or continued enrolment.

In the case of additional hours, while not a condition of enrolment, part-time and full-time services may prioritise places for those who wish to avail of extra hours over those availing of ECCE only.

2.2 Tusla Registration

An ECCE Approved Provider must be registered with Tusla to receive funding from DCDE. Tusla registered services who provide both an ELC and an SAC service must be registered with Tusla for both services. A childminder must be registered with Tusla with the appropriate age range.

All facilities/locations operated by an ECCE Approved Provider must be registered with Tusla, have an individual Service Reference Number and children must attend the facility/location in which they are registered. Proof of Tusla registration must be available on the premises for inspection if required.

ECCE Approved Providers must be registered with Tusla for the places being provided, e.g. ECCE Approved Providers cannot be funded for part-time places when registered with Tusla as a sessional service.

- Full day care places (more than 5 hours per day);
- Part-time places (between 3 hours 31 minutes and 5 hours per day);
- Sessional places (between 2 hours 16 minutes and 3 hours 30 minutes per day);
- Half-session places (between 1 hour and 2 hours 15 minutes per day).

It is compulsory for all Approved Providers providing childcare to register with Tusla. Full details on how to register can be found on the Tusla website www.tusla.ie or alternatively you can contact your local CCC at gov.ie – [City and County Childcare Committees](http://gov.ie).

Funding will not be paid for any period where the ECCE Approved Provider is not Tusla registered.

Funding will be put on hold if:

- i. The ECCE Approved Provider is removed from or otherwise ceases to be on the Register of Prescribed Early Years Services maintained by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, as either a pre-school service or a childminding service.
- ii. The ECCE Approved Provider is prohibited from operating an early years service by Tusla for any period of time.

Where an ECCE Approved Provider wishes to start offering an additional service beyond their ECCE Programme calendar in the same premises, a change in circumstances application should be submitted to Tusla in relation to the proposed extended service provision, i.e. change in the number of weeks' service offered and hours of operation.

2.2.1 Tusla Registration for Childminders

To be registered with Tusla, a childminder must comply with the requirements for childminders as outlined in the [Child Care Act 1991 \(Early Years Services\) \(Childminding Services\) Regulations 2024](#).

2.3 Tusla De-Registration

As the Independent Regulator, Tusla's role is to monitor the safety and quality of care and support of children in Early Years provision to ensure compliance with regulations. Where there are consistent and serious breaches, Tusla may take action up to and including prosecution and removal of an ECCE Approved Provider from the register of Early Years Services.

In circumstances where an ECCE Approved Provider is removed from the Tusla Register, or Tusla issues an ECCE Approved Provider with notice of removal from the register, a Parent/Guardian is entitled to remove their child from the ECCE service and re-register the child in a new service. The Parent/Guardian can re-register their child during the Tusla de-registration notice period without being required to serve the normal 4 week notice period as per the rules for attendance in Chapter 7 of this document.

When the Department is notified by Tusla that an ECCE Approved Provider has been de-registered, funding will cease with effect from the date of de-registration.

No funding will be paid for any period where the service is unregistered with Tusla.

2.4 Service Reference Number (SRN)

All facilities/locations operated by an ECCE Approved Provider must be registered with Tusla, have an individual SRN and children must attend the facility/location in which they are registered. An ECCE Approved Provider must log onto the EY HIVE with all the relevant details in order to request a new or additional SRN. A combined ELC/SAC service should only have one SRN unless they are situated in separate locations.

To get an SRN, Approved Providers need to be registered with Tusla and start the on-boarding process on the EY HIVE. For further assistance, please contact the Early Years Provider Centre on 01 511 7222 at eypc@pobal.ie, or you can raise a request on the HIVE.

2.5 Change of Circumstances for an ECCE Approved Provider

In the following circumstances an existing ECCE Approved Provider must request a new Service Reference Number:

- I. In the case of a transfer of ownership of an ELC service, the ECCE Approved Provider must log onto the EY HIVE with all relevant details to request a new SRN. The ECCE Approved Provider must ensure the new ownership is registered with Tusla.
- II. In the case of a change of legal status of an ELC service, the ECCE Approved Provider must log onto the EY HIVE with all relevant details to request a new SRN. The ECCE Approved Provider must ensure the new legal status is registered with Tusla.
- III. In the case of a change of address of an ELC service, the ECCE Approved Provider must ensure the new address/premises is registered with Tusla and then the ECCE Approved Provider must log onto the EY HIVE with all relevant details to request a new SRN.

2.6 Service Closure

If an ECCE Approved Provider closes its ELC service, or ceases to provide a DCDE childcare programme, notice must be submitted in writing immediately to the local CCC and the Data Management Team in Pobal by raising a service request on the EY HIVE and selecting:

- User Account Management
- How to, and
- Closures

An ECCE Approved Provider must give a minimum 4 weeks' notice to Pobal the scheme administrator as well as Parent(s)/Guardian(s) of their intentions to close or if ceasing to provide a particular programme

2.7 Staff Qualifications

Under the [Child Care Act 1991 \(Early Years Services\) Regulations 2016](#), all staff working directly with children in a preschool service must hold at least a Level 5 major award in early learning and care on the [National Framework of Qualifications \(NFQ\)](#), or equivalent as deemed by DCDE.

Lead Educators in an ECCE service (including childminders) must hold at least a Level 6 NFQ qualification in early learning and care.

The DCDE has published a list of qualifications that meet the regulatory requirements for working in the ELC sector in Ireland. This list can be found on the DCDE webpage: [gov.ie - Recognition of Early Years Qualifications](https://gov.ie/Recognition-of-Early-Years-Qualifications).

If a person does not hold a qualification on the DCDE's recognised qualifications list, the individual is required to apply for the recognition of their qualifications at eyqualifications@dcde.gov.ie. For further information on requirements and the application process please refer to the DCDE webpage: [gov.ie - Recognition of Early Years Qualifications](https://gov.ie/Recognition-of-Early-Years-Qualifications).

Due to GDPR, applications must be made by the individual themselves as the Department cannot accept applications and/or queries from third parties such as employers.

Applicants who start employment without qualification recognition are in breach of the Regulations.

It is the responsibility of the ECCE Approved Provider to check and ensure that all staff they are employing have the required minimum qualifications.

2.8 Contact Information

An ECCE Approved Provider must provide an email address to be used for communications in relation to the ECCE service and the Department reserve the right to communicate important information, including information relating to payments, electronically.

A postal address must also be provided. Where your place of residence is different to the facility address, both addresses must be provided (this does not apply to a limited company).

A contact telephone number, at which the PAU/ECCE Approved Provider can be contacted during work hours, must also be provided.

The ECCE Approved Provider must have access to facilities that enables them to conduct business online and have an EY HIVE user account in order to participate in the ECCE Programme. The ECCE Approved Provider must administer the ECCE Programme on the EY HIVE. The ECCE Approved Provider should access the EY HIVE website (EarlyYearsHive.ncs.gov.ie) on a regular basis to remain up-to-date with all ECCE Programme requirements and developments.

2.9 Funding Agreement

The ECCE Approved Provider must have a Funding Agreement in place with the Department 2 weeks before the ECCE Approved Provider commences the ECCE Programme. A date later than the commencement of the start of the programme year on 24th August 2026 may be permitted where the Minister deems it appropriate.

2.10 Registration of a Fee Table and Service Calendar

The ECCE Approved Provider must upload a Service Calendar to the EY HIVE a minimum of 2 weeks prior to the beginning of the new programme year. The ECCE Approved Provider must also upload a Fee Table to the EY HIVE, a minimum of 2 weeks prior to the beginning of the new programme year.

The Fee Table must demonstrate that the weekly appropriate reductions in childcare fees for qualifying Parents/Guardians will be applied. The Fee Table will be subject to review by the

relevant CCC and may also be reviewed on a Pobal Compliance Inspection. For more information, please refer to Chapters 3 and 4 of this document and the Pobal 'How to Guides' on the EY HIVE.

2.11 Availing of More Than One Early Learning and Care Programme

Children may be enrolled in either the Early Start Programme which is administered by the DEY or in the ECCE Programme. Children are not eligible to be enrolled in both programmes at the same time.

Chapter 3 Fee Table

3.1 Fee Table Requirement

The ECCE programme must be provided free of charge. Other than the prescribed list of optional extras, it is not permitted to charge any other fee. All Fee Tables will be checked and approved by the local CCC.

ECCE Approved Providers must complete a Fee Table prior to the beginning of each programme year. An ECCE Approved Provider's Fee Table must show details of all the fees charged to Parents/Guardians, the ECCE Fee Table must be reflected on a weekly basis over the ECCE programme year i.e. over the 38 weeks of the programme, as well as details of any additional childcare hours, optional extra(s) (as approved by the local CCC), or any discounts applied by the ECCE Approved Provider.

The Fee Table should display fees inclusive and exclusive of ECCE capitation, including fees payable with regard to additional childcare provision outside of ECCE. It should also include fees ordinarily payable with regard to a child of the same age attending full-time or part-time childcare but not participating in the ECCE programme.

If an ECCE Approved Provider does not collect any deposits, offer discounts, or optional extra(s), this must be stated on the Fee Table.

The ECCE deduction must not be offset against childcare fees outside of the ECCE programme year.

3.2 Parent Statement

Parents/Guardians **must sign and date** the Parent Statement to indicate that they understand the fees that the ECCE Approved Provider will apply.

The Fee Table is subject to review by the Department/Scheme Administrator/local CCC/Pobal Compliance.

The ECCE Approved Provider must publish and distribute to Parents/Guardians a Parent Statement using the standard template provided/specified by the Scheme Administrator, and/or the Minister and, on the EY HIVE. The Parent Statement for the ECCE Approved Provider must be provided to Parents/Guardians, in print or email, no later than 4 weeks after signing their Funding Agreement, or no later than 4 weeks after the child started in the ECCE service, whichever is the later. The ECCE Approved Provider agrees to allow the Minister or Scheme Administrator to publish its Parent Statement for the ECCE Approved Provider.

The Parent Statement must be returned to the ECCE Approved Provider by the Parent/Guardian within 4 weeks of the eligible child taking up an ECCE place.

An updated Parent Statement is required when there is a change to the base fee, a copy must be given to the Parent/Guardian, but a signature is not required. An email to the Parent/Guardian is acceptable. Proofs must be kept on file for compliance purposes.

Where there is a change to a Parent's/Guardian's hours or days, or if a child moves from Year 1 to Year 2 of ECCE, there will be no need to issue or sign a revised Parent Statement.

ECCE Approved Providers must keep copies of the Parent Statement and the ECCE Applicant Declaration Forms for compliance purposes on site, to be available for inspection. In relation to the Parent Statement, providers are only required to keep a signed copy of the last page. Further guidance is available on the EY HIVE.

3.3 Requirement to Provide ECCE Free of Charge

ECCE must be available free of charge to Parents/Guardians for 3 hours a day, 5 days per week for 38 weeks/182 days during the 2026/2027 programme year, in return for the capitation, ECCE Approved Providers receive from the DCDE. ECCE Services may not, under any circumstances, extract ECCE fees from Parents/Guardians, including non-refundable and optional extra deposits.

3.4 Optional Additional 30 Minutes in Sessional Preschool Services

An ECCE Approved Provider who provides a sessional preschool service and does not offer part-time/full-time childcare, may offer as an option only, a maximum additional 30 minutes per day. These 30 minutes **must** be listed as an optional extra on the Fee Table with the weekly fee amount.

3.5 Replacing Registered Children

An ECCE Approved Provider must not replace a child after the child's ECCE registration is approved unless the child voluntarily leaves the ECCE service (please see Clauses 1.7 - 1.9).

3.6 ECCE Deposits

An ECCE Approved Provider must give an accurate description and the total cost of any deposit requested on its Fee Table.

3.6.1 Maximum ECCE Deposit

An ECCE Approved Provider may charge a refundable booking deposit to hold an ECCE place for a child. The maximum deposit a provider may charge is equivalent to 4 weeks ECCE payment. This must appear on the Fee Table.

3.6.2 Return of ECCE Deposit

The full ECCE deposit must be returned to the Parent/Guardian once the child's registration is approved on the EY HIVE. If an service is holding a legacy deposit from when the child first started attending the service that exceeds 4 times the weekly ECCE capitation amount for a child that has been attending that service prior to their commencement on ECCE, and has not collected a separate ECCE deposit, the ECCE Approved Provider must return up to €276 of that deposit to the Parent/Guardian once the child's ECCE registration has been approved on the EY HIVE. The deposit must be returned in full in one instalment, once the registration is approved.

The ECCE Approved Provider shall retain all financial records relating to deposits from Parents/Guardians and evidence of return.

Failure to comply with any of the ECCE Rules may result in the suspension of ECCE funding and/or DCDE funding or part thereof may be withdrawn and/or a termination of the ECCE Funding Agreement.

3.7 Optional Extras

ECCE Approved Providers cannot charge for any activities which are considered key parts of the ECCE curriculum.

ECCE Approved Providers may only charge for approved optional extra(s) listed on the ECCE Optional Extra(s) document (see Appendix 1), but where a Parent/Guardian does not choose any of the approved optional extras, their child must be provided with the full ECCE Programme based service provision.

Each optional extra must be identified individually on the Fee Table with the frequency of the cost. ECCE Approved Providers cannot prioritise ECCE places on the basis of uptake of optional extra(s) otherwise they will be found in breach of their Funding Agreement/Rules for the ECCE Programme.

Any approved optional extras being chosen by a parent should be paid to the ECCE Approved Provider directly, if paid to a 3rd party it must appear on the providers Fee Table and include the frequency and cost.

Please note when adding ECCE 'Optional Extras' or 'Additional Services' for those availing of childcare outside of ECCE, you must select the Frequency at which the ECCE Optional Extra or Additional Service takes place. You must also enter the cost in the "Amount" box.

Refusal of an ECCE Approved Provider to follow the direction of the local CCC in relation to a Fee Table or to alter a Fee Table after the CCC approval may result in funding being put on hold.

3.7.1 ECCE Optional Extras Approved List

Only the optional extras from the approved ECCE optional extras list can be added to an ECCE Approved Provider's Fee Table. An ECCE Approved Provider **must** give an accurate description, and the total cost and frequency with which they may occur, of any optional extra requested on its Fee Table.

See Appendix 1 for further guidelines on ECCE optional extras.

3.7.2 Additional Services

Where children are availing of additional childcare hours outside of ECCE, additional services may be offered. However, where a child is availing of ECCE only, additional services are not permitted.

3.8 Voluntary Donations

Parents/Guardians should not pay for any other type of donation additional to what is in the ECCE service's Fee Table. There are no voluntary donations permitted for the ECCE Programme.

3.9 Requirements for a Parent/Guardian Signing a Parent Statement

Parents/Guardians must sign and date a Parent Statement to indicate that they understand the fees that the ECCE Approved Provider will apply.

An updated Parent Statement is required when there is a change to the base fee, a copy must be given to the Parent/Guardian, but a signature is not required. An email to the Parent/Guardian is acceptable. Proof must be kept on file for compliance purposes.

The Fee Table is subject to review by the Department/Scheme Administrator/local CCC/Pobal Compliance. The Parent Statement must be returned to the ECCE Approved Provider by the Parent/Guardian within 4 weeks of the eligible child taking up an ECCE place.

3.9.1 Requirements for a Parent/Guardian Completing an ECCE Applicant Declaration Form

Parents/Guardians must fully complete the ECCE Applicant Declaration Form, and it should be done in conjunction with the Parent Statement. The information on this form is taken from the registration details uploaded on the EY HIVE by the ECCE Approved Provider.

An ECCE Applicant Declaration is required to be signed by both the ECCE Approved Provider and parent/guardian for each individual ECCE child.

The Parent Statement and the ECCE Applicant Declaration Form, once signed and dated, must be returned to the ECCE Approved Provider. ECCE Approved Providers must keep copies of the Parent Statement and the ECCE Applicant Declaration Form for compliance purposes, on site, in order to be available for inspection.

No other forms will be accepted in lieu of DCDE's ECCE Applicant Declaration Form, and one of each form must be filled out per child i.e. there cannot be more than one child's names on any individual completed form.

3.10 Fee Table Changes

All changes to a Fee Table must first be approved by the CCCs before informing the Parents/Guardians.

Parents/Guardians must be given 4 full weeks written notice of any change to the Fee Table.

Copies of Parent Statements/ECCE Applicant Declaration Forms subsequently issued and signed must be retained on file on the premises for compliance purposes.

ECCE Approved Providers must keep their Fee Table updated to reflect all current fees charged to Parents/Guardians as well as details of any changes to any other charges or discounts applied by the ECCE service, on the EY HIVE at all times. Fee Table charges should be displayed as a weekly charge.

3.11 Document Display Requirement for Childminders

Childminders are required to have a copy of the up-to-date Fee Table, together with copies of any standard documentation (including Parent Statement) that relate to DCDE funded programmes issued to Parents/Guardians, included in their Childminding Handbook. Copies must be retained on file and given to anyone who requests it.

3.12 Document Filing Requirement for Parent Statement

ECCE Approved Providers must retain on file the signature page of the Parent Statement for each family.

3.12.1 Document Filing Requirement for ECCE Applicant Declaration Form

ECCE Approved Providers must have a signed copy of an ECCE Applicant Declaration Form on file for each child i.e. there cannot be more than one child's name on any individual completed ECCE Applicant Declaration Form.

3.13 Publishing of ECCE Programme Documents/Data

As a condition of the ECCE Programme Funding Agreement for the 2026/2027 programme year, ECCE Approved Providers agree to allow the Minister/Scheme Administrator to publish their Fee Table and Parent Statement online and in any format. The Minister/Scheme Administrator also reserves the right to publish this data and use the data in aggregate form for the purpose of reporting on fees.

3.14 CCC Checks

It should be noted that the CCCs will be checking all Fee Tables to ensure that they comply with the terms of the signed Funding Agreement and the Rules for the ECCE Programme.

In cases of non-compliance, ECCE Approved Providers will be given 4 weeks to rectify their Fee Table.

If after this time the Fee Table has not been updated as per the CCCs' direction, the Scheme Administrator will be notified for further follow up, e.g., ECCE funding being put on hold.

Sanctions may be applied if the Fee Table is found to contravene any rules/the policy of the ECCE Programme.

Chapter 4 Service Calendar

4.1 Service Calendar Requirements

ECCE Approved Providers must submit a Service Calendar to the EY HIVE prior to the signing of the Funding Agreement, but no later than 2 weeks before the opening of the 2026/2027 programme year.

Once the calendar has been submitted to the EY HIVE, ECCE services will not be able to edit their calendar where dates have passed, calendars will be retrospectively locked. Please note that this applies from the start of the programme call (24th August).

The calendar is subject to review by the Department/the Scheme Administrator (Pobal) /CCC.

ECCE services opening later than 24th August 2026 must have their calendars on the EY HIVE a minimum of 2 weeks prior to their opening for the 2026/2027 programme year.

ECCE Approved Providers in contract for the ECCE Programme must be open for a minimum of 38 weeks (182 days) over the programme year unless otherwise determined by the DCDE.

4.1.1 Calendar for Parents/Guardians

The ECCE Approved Provider will distribute to Parents/Guardians a Service Calendar indicating the days the ECCE service is due to be closed over the ECCE Programme year 2026/2027.

4.1.2 Minimum Opening Weeks per Term

ECCE Approved Providers are required to open for a minimum number of weeks per ECCE term.

Table 3 shows the maximum ECCE weeks and the required number of ECCE weeks an ECCE Approved Provider needs to deliver in each term to add up to 38 weeks.

Table 3: ECCE Term Times and Minimum Number of ECCE Weeks			
ECCE Terms	Dates	Total No. of Weeks in Each Period	Required Payment Weeks for ECCE Approved Providers
Term 1	24/08/2026 – 01/01/2027	19 weeks	15 - 19 weeks
Term 2	04/01/2027 – 23/04/2027	16 weeks	13 - 16 weeks
Term 3	26/04/2027 – 16/07/2027	12 weeks	8 - 12 weeks
Total Overall No. of ECCE Weeks		47 weeks	ECCE Approved Provider must meet the required 38 weeks (separate system rule in place for 41-week services)

4.2 Non-Payment Week

If a service is closed for 3 days or more in a single week this is regarded as a non-payment week.

4.3 Document Accessibility Requirement

An up-to-date copy of the Calendar must be accessible to Parents/Guardians and copies are to be given to anyone who requests them. Childminders should include the Calendar in their Childminding Handbook.

As a condition of the ECCE Programme Funding Agreement for the 2026/2027 programme year, ECCE Approved Providers agree to allow the Minister/Scheme Administrator to publish their calendars online and in any format.

4.4 Changes to Service Calendars

Any changes to a Service Calendar must first be approved in advance by the CCCs, prior to informing the Parents/Guardians.

Parents/Guardians must be given 20 working days written notice of any change to the ECCE Approved Provider's calendar once the calendar has been approved by the CCCs, and copies of such notices must be kept on file.

Once the calendar has been submitted to the EY HIVE, ECCE services will not be able to edit their calendar where dates have passed, calendars will be retrospectively locked. Please note that this applies from the start of the programme call (24th August). If an amendment is required to a date in the past, please raise a case on the EY HIVE giving an explanation as to why this is necessary.

Where the calendar has been revised, an amended copy of the calendar must be accessible to Parents/Guardians. The Department will accept confirmation of receipt of a revised calendar by the relevant Parent/Guardian by email or by hard copy, whichever best suits the Parent/Guardian.

ECCE Approved Providers must keep copies of all emails for compliance purposes on site and available for inspection.

Please see Clause 11.5 with regards to closures in relation to a premises being used as a polling station.

4.5 ECCE Calendar 'How to Guide'

All details in relation to setting up/editing/changing, etc ECCE Programme calendars can be found on the ECCE Programme 'How to Guide' available on the EY HIVE.

For any further information on Service Calendars, please contact your local CCC at gov.ie - [City and County Childcare Committees](#).

Chapter 5 Staff Qualifications

5.1 Obligations of an ECCE Approved Provider

An ECCE approved pre-school service must ensure all staff working with children hold, at a minimum, a Level 5 qualification that meets the requirements of the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016. (For childminders, see section 5.3.)

5.2 Recognition of Qualifications for ECCE

The levels of approval are also set out by the DCDE on the approved list of qualifications, and on “Letters of Qualification Recognition” awarded to those who are successful in their applications.

- **Early Years Educator** - meets regulatory requirements (applicant must have a minimum Level 5 NFQ)
- **Lead Educator** and childminders - standard capitation (applicant must have a minimum Level 6 NFQ)

5.3 Minimum Qualifications to Deliver ECCE

Each ECCE room/session (including a childminding service) must have a Lead Educator during the entire session, holding a minimum of a Level 6 qualification which meets the ECCE Funding Agreement requirements for ECCE Lead Educator. Lead Educators must hold a qualification that is on the published list of DCDE ‘Early Years Recognised Qualifications’ or, holds a Letter of Qualification Recognition at this level issued by the DCDE (see more information relating to qualifications, including the published list on (<https://www.gov.ie/en/service/000073-recognition-of-an-early-years-qualification/>)).

Chapter 6 Child Registration on the ECCE Programme

6.1 Registering a Child on the ECCE Programme

The service manager or childminder must confirm and agree with Parents/Guardians the attendance that the child is being registered for, prior to registering the child for the ECCE Programme.

Each child's registration must reflect the actual attendance pattern of the child. Where there is a discrepancy between attendance and registration, the ECCE Approved Provider must amend the registration on the EY HIVE.

Once a child is registered and in attendance on 2026/2027 ECCE Programme the ECCE Approved Provider cannot make continued attendance on the ECCE Programme conditional on the parents/guardians availing of additional childcare hours.

Failure to update registrations to reflect the actual attendance pattern may result in an over-claim due to the Department. Over-claims will be recouped in accordance with the ECCE Funding Agreement. Instructions on child registration are available on the EY HIVE.

6.2 ECCE Applicant Declaration Forms

ECCE Approved Providers must ensure that Parents/Guardians sign and date an ECCE Applicant Declaration Form to indicate that they understand the terms of the programme, that all the child's registration details are accurate, and they agree to the optional extra fee payable to the ECCE service where applicable. Optional extra fee information will be manually entered by the Approved Provider.

It is compulsory that ECCE Approved Providers keep a record of each ECCE Applicant Declaration Form for compliance purposes on site and available for inspection.

Please refer to Chapter 3, Clause 3.9 Requirements for a Parent/Guardian Signing a Parent Statement and Clause 3.9.1 Requirements for a Parent/Guardian Completing an ECCE Applicant Declaration Form for further information.

6.3 When to Register a Child

ECCE Approved Providers can begin to register a child up to 7 weeks in advance of the programme year start date. Registrations will open on Monday 6th July 2026.

6.4 Latest Date for Registration

The latest an ECCE Approved Provider can register a child is **6 weeks** after the child's start date. DCDE reserves the right not to backdate funding on any late registrations (i.e. more than 6 weeks after the child's start date).

In cases of late registrations, proofs of the child's start date and attendance must be submitted to the Scheme Administrator, or the registration will be declined.

6.5 Child Non-Attendance from Start Date

If a child does not attend within 4 weeks of the start date, the registration must be cancelled immediately, and any payment received for that child will be recovered.

Chapter 7 Attendance

7.1 Persistent Under- Attendance

An update on the EY HIVE must occur immediately after the 4 weeks of the reduced attendance pattern commencing unless they apply to the Scheme Administrator for special circumstances, where they may be able to retain the registrations beyond 4 weeks.

Under-attendance and failure to reflect the actual attendance pattern will result in an over-claim due to the Department see Clause 7.3 below.

Additional consideration is given to children with complex needs attending ECCE with nursing support and while some attendance is expected, for compliance purposes the attendance rules will not apply in these circumstances.

7.2 Non-Attendance

If a child is not attending the ECCE Approved Provider should, within the first week of the absence commencing, contact the Parent/Guardian to establish the cause of the child's absence. Where a child has not attended the ECCE service for 4 consecutive weeks without a qualifying special circumstance as outlined in Clause 7.3 below, the ECCE Approved Provider must enter the child as a "leaver" on the EY HIVE stating the date the child last attended the ECCE service.

7.3 Reduction in Attendance and EY HIVE Updating

An update on the EY HIVE must occur immediately after the 4 weeks of the reduced attendance pattern commencing.

Failure to update registrations to reflect the actual attendance pattern may result in an over-claim due to the Department. Over-claims will be recouped in accordance with the terms of the ECCE Funding Agreement. Please note that DCDE reserves the right to recoup overpayments made from one childcare funding programme allocations from monies due to another funding stream.

7.4 Special Circumstances

In certain special circumstances of non-attendance, an ECCE Approved Provider may apply to the Scheme Administrator to retain the registration beyond 4 continuous weeks up to a total of 6 or 12 continuous weeks. Please see Table 4 for situations which only qualify for special circumstances. Proofs may be requested by the Scheme Administrator. Acceptable proof may include a letter or medical certificate which can be uploaded on to the EY HIVE by the ECCE Approved Provider (as provided by and with the agreement of the Parent/Guardian). This can be granted **once only** for the period set out below and strictly at the discretion of the Scheme Administrator.

ECCE Approved Providers should apply to the Scheme Administrator for special circumstances prior to the end of the 4th week of persistent non-attendance, otherwise the registration should be end dated and a new registration created with the new pattern of attendance. Where a letter is submitted after 4 weeks, but no later than 6 weeks from the original non-attendance, and the registration has been end dated, the original registration may be restored.

If the child does not return after availing of special circumstances, the child must be marked as a leaver from the date they were due to resume.

Table 4: Qualifying Special Circumstances	
Qualifying Circumstances	Maximum Absence for which Capitation is payable
Immediate family bereavement	6 weeks
Extended travel once a year to the birthplace of the child or either of the child's Parents/Guardians	6 weeks
Prolonged illness (more than 4 weeks), of either the child, the Parent/Guardian, or a sibling	12 weeks

Where an application for special circumstances is submitted and special circumstances do not apply, the ECCE Approved Provider must end date the registration and payment will cease with effect from that end date (which can be no later than the end of the 4 weeks of continuous absence).

Where no supporting letter is submitted by the end of 6 weeks of continuous absence and, the child has not returned to the ECCE service within that time, the ECCE Approved Provider must end date the registration with the end date of the 4th week and payment will cease with effect from that end date.

Where a supporting letter is submitted after 4 weeks, but no later than 6 weeks from the original absence and the registration has been end dated, the registration may be restored.

7.4.1 Applying via Post for Special Circumstances

Parents/Guardians can choose to apply for a special circumstance directly to the Scheme Administrator via post. The Parent/Guardian will need to get the form from the ECCE Approved Provider.

The postal address to send all Parent/Guardian special circumstances forms is [Early Years Parent Centre, PO Box 13105, Southside Delivery Office, Cork City](#).

7.5 Persistent Under-Attendance as a Result of a Series of Medical or Therapeutic Appointments

Special circumstances in relation to persistent under-attendance are limited to regular attendance at medical or therapeutic appointments by the child, the Parent/Guardian, or a sibling.

Where these circumstances arise, a letter must be submitted, either by the provider or the Parent/Guardian, which provides evidence of a series of medical or therapeutic appointments over a defined period directly to the Scheme Administrator. Subsidies may continue to be paid for up to a maximum of 16 weeks. This can be granted **once only** and strictly at the discretion of the Scheme Administrator.

Where possible, ECCE Approved Providers should notify the Scheme Administrator in advance of forthcoming persistent under-attendance where they believe special circumstances will apply.

7.6 Departure from an ECCE Service

If a child leaves the service, the ECCE Approved Provider must update the EY HIVE immediately stating the date the child last attended the service. Parents/Guardians must give providers 4 weeks' notice of a departure from a service (excluding service holiday closures/closed weeks). This will allow the ECCE Approved Providers to update the EY HIVE with payment ceasing on the actual date of departure. In cases where no notice of departure is given to the ECCE Approved Provider, they may claim 4 weeks' capitation in lieu of notice.

While a Parent/Guardian is free to remove their child from an ECCE service at any point, they will not be allowed to avail of further childcare funding while the approved funding is committed to the service during this 4 week notice period.

7.7 Exceptions to the 4 Week Notice Period Rule

(1) Where a service requests a Parent/Guardian to remove a child registered on the ECCE Programme, Parents/Guardians will not be required to serve a 4 week notice period.

(2) A Parent/Guardian can remove their child from an ECCE service and re-register them in a new service without being required to serve the 4 week notice period where a service has been given notice by Tusla that they are to be removed from the Tusla register.

Chapter 8 Record Keeping

8.1 Obligation of an ECCE Approved Provider

ECCE Approved Providers must keep an accurate record of each child's **actual attendance** to include daily arrival and departure times for each child. The ECCE Approved Providers' registrations on the EY HIVE must match actual attendance as recorded in the attendance records (actual child attendance and not opening times of session/service). A copy of a good practice attendance record can be found at the end of this chapter.

8.2 Requirement to Maintain Attendance Records

The ECCE Approved Provider must maintain attendance records of registered children that records the daily hours of attendance (in a weekly format), showing the child's full name, date of attendance, time of child's arrival and departure, and the name of the person responsible (employee, volunteer or person on work experience) for recording each arrival and departure. The record of attendance for each room must accurately reflect the children in the room, alongside the name of the lead educator, and must be updated when a child leaves or enters.

The arrival and departure of each child must be recorded in real time by the ECCE Approved Provider. Attendance records must be kept in an appropriate manner that is sufficient to establish actual duration of attendance of each named child in terms of hours. The child's name must be recorded in a consistent manner in order to facilitate identification of patterns of attendance i.e. if the attendance records are weekly sheets, the child's name should be recorded in the same order.

Weekly attendance formats are highly recommended (as opposed to separately kept daily formats) as they facilitate establishing patterns of attendance.

In addition, the following points should be noted:

1. Maintain separate attendance records/roll books for each session/room.
2. Where source records are used to transcribe attendance to a secondary record, the source records must be retained and made available for review.
3. If a child moves to another room during the day, then this should be identifiable through the attendance records.
4. State child's full name (as per EY HIVE records).
5. Keep names of children in a consistent sequence throughout the cycle. Retain records of children who have left the service i.e. do not delete or overwrite.
6. All absences must be recorded.
7. Ensure attendance records/roll books are filled out by a staff member working in the room.
8. Keep Parent's/Guardian's sign in and out book(s) separate to attendance records/roll books.
9. Input time of arrival and departure for all children within the service including afterschool and breakfast clubs. **Don't use ticks.**
10. Where paper records are maintained, they should record the attendance in real time of each child in a weekly format for example as shown in Figure 1 in Chapter 8.

11. Where electronic records are maintained, the ECCE Approved Provider must record the attendance in real time and be able to show weekly/monthly reports for individual children which show their level of attendance for the cycle to date. **Reports should also be specific to rooms and sessions as they would be when kept in paper form.**

Attendance records will be reviewed during compliance visits. Please refer to the “Good Practice Guide – Attendance Records” at the end of this chapter.

8.3 Failure to Maintain Appropriate Attendance Records

Where attendance is not maintained for any children on a day, this may result in an assumption of the service not in operation i.e. closure.

DCDE may withdraw future payments from the ECCE Approved Provider and/or require repayment of over-claimed monies already paid for the period concerned.

Failure to maintain sufficient attendance records may result in an assumption of minimal hour's attendance. E.g. where attendance records are kept, but in a format which does not allow a compliance visit officer to determine the hours which a child has attended, i.e. sessional/half sessional service, such as through the use of “ticks.”

Failure to maintain records in the required format may result in a finding of non-compliance. For further information, please refer to Chapter 9.

8.4 Staff Rosters/Register

The ECCE Approved Provider must also have, as per Tulsa QRF, a staff roster/register always available onsite. This staffing roster/register must clearly show the dates, times, and durations of each staff member working in each session and room.

Good Practice Guide - Attendance Records

The maintenance of good attendance records is a requirement for compliance with the **DCDE Rules for the ECCE Programme**. Attendance records can be maintained in a variety of formats e.g. roll books, weekly sheet formats, or electronic formats. Pobal/DCDE don't direct any specific format be used, however, from a good practice perspective we have collated some tips on how attendance can be consistently recorded to meet DCDE Funded Programme requirements. For more support, please contact your local CCC.

From the Start

- Don't use individual daily sheets/diaries. Weekly formats are strongly encouraged. This will facilitate tracking patterns of attendance to assist with keeping registrations up to date.
- Ensure there are attendance records/roll books for each session/room including breakfast clubs.
- State child's full name (as per EY HIVE records) - Don't use nicknames.
- Keep names of children in a consistent sequence throughout the cycle (facilitates attendance tracking). If a new child starts with the ELC service, add their name to the bottom of the list.
- Staff names should be included on all attendance records.
- Use a ball point pen not pencil.
- Ensure attendance records/roll books are accessible from beginning of cycle (including where a child's registration period has expired).
- Ensure attendance records/roll books are filled out by staff member working in the room.
- Keep parent's/guardian's sign in and out book separate to attendance records/roll books (if necessary).
- Date the week of attendance.
- Where siblings attend, each child must be listed in the attendance record individually with their own arrival and departure time recorded.

Each Day

- Input time of arrival and departure for all children within the ELC service. Don't use ticks. Record attendance in real-time, as arrival and/or departures occur.

Absences/ Leavers/ Movers

- Be consistent in documenting non-attendance e.g. always use an X for absent.
- If a child leaves the ELC service, leave name on roll book and put a line through the remaining days of the programme cycle to show as a leaver.
- If a child moves session/room within the ELC service during the cycle – enter a note to reflect this on attendance records/roll books.
- If child shares their day/week on an ongoing basis between different sessions/rooms – enter a note to reflect this on attendance records/ roll books.
- A child should be recorded in record of attendance for each room they attend if moving rooms during day/week.
- Don't use Tippex on the attendance sheet/roll book.
- Keep the information visible if a child has left.

Weekly Sheets

- If using weekly sheets, keep in date order and secure in a folder.

Electronic Records

- Make sure they are consistent and show attendance of a child for a full cycle.
- Where electronic records are maintained on any electronic platform /app, the ECCE Approved Provider **must** be able to produce weekly/monthly reports for individual children and per room/session which show their level of attendance for the cycle to date. It is recommended that these reports are regularly produced and made available for compliance purposes.
- Please do not use mobile phones for presenting attendance records.
- Make sure that the password is to hand and that a staff member understands how to retrieve the information from the system.

Archiving

- Attendance records/roll books must be kept as outlined in this DCDE Rules for the ECCE Programme document i.e. a minimum period of 6 years from the expiry date of ECCE 2026/2027 Funding Agreement.

Figure 1 Sample Child Attendance Record

Room Name: XY1			SAMPLE CHILD ATTENDANCE RECORD							
Staff Name(s):										
Week Ending Friday: __/__/__	Monday		Tuesday		Wednesday		Thursday		Friday	
Childs Name	Time of Arrival	Time of Departure	Time of Arrival	Time of Departure	Time of Arrival	Time of Departure	Time of Arrival	Time of Departure	Time of Arrival	Time of Departure
Child A	9:03	12:00	9:00	12:01	8:59	12:00	9:00	12:02	9:01	12:05
Child B	9:00	12:00	Not scheduled to be in	Not scheduled to be in	9:00	12:02	9:00	12:00	9:00	12:01
Child C	8:55	12:05	8:59	12:00	Absent	Absent	Absent	Absent	9:00	12:05

* If a child attends a room on more than one occasion during the day, then each in and out time must be recorded.

Chapter 9 Compliance

9.1 Responsibility of an ECCE Approved Provider

It is the responsibility of the ECCE Approved Provider to ensure compliance with their Funding Agreement requirements, which includes adherence to the Rules for the ECCE Programme 2026/2027. ECCE Approved Providers should ensure that they understand and adhere to the contents of this document, as well as with the ECCE Funding Agreement and 'How To Guides' available on the EY HIVE.

Failure to comply with any of the terms of this Agreement may result in the suspension of ECCE funding and/or a termination of this Funding Agreement. Core Funding, or part thereof, may also be withdrawn from Partner Services under the conditions set out in the Compliance Framework.

Funding may be put on hold where compliance issues are not rectified.

9.2 Compliance File

In order to make compliance visits as efficient as possible for both ECCE Approved Providers and visiting officers, ECCE Approved Providers should ensure that their compliance file is kept up-to-date and contains:

- Signed Parent Statements;
- Approved minimum enrolment exemption where relevant;
- Completed and signed ECCE Applicant Declaration Forms;
- Fee records, including deposits;
- Staff qualifications and Department issued Letter of Eligibility to practice/Letter of Qualification Recognition.
- Evidence of Tulsa registration(s).

The compliance file must be kept on site and available for inspection at all times.

Services should also ensure that:

- Child attendance records are maintained on site and available for the full cycle.
- As per Tulsa QRF, staff roster/register should always be available onsite.
- The registrations are correct i.e. updated on the Hive for absences, under-attendances, leavers etc.
- **There is a staff member on site at all times who has access to the compliance file and attendance records and can facilitate the visit.** Please note that if the records are readily available for review any interruption to the ELC service will be minimal, other than seeking clarifications when required.

Failure to do the same could result in an ECCE service being found non-compliant.

An ECCE Approved Provider will receive a sanction (as described below) for persistent non-rectification of non-compliant outcome(s) following a compliance inspection (any programme) and/or failing to engage with the supports provided.

9.3 Compliance Framework and Sanction

The Framework covers three levels of support: **Initial Support Level, Level 1, Level 2**. These supports will differ depending on the nature of a non-compliant outcome.

If a major non-compliant outcome(s) is detected, or a non-compliant score of 18 is reached during a compliance visit, an ECCE Approved Provider is placed on the Initial Support Level of the Compliance Framework. The ECCE Approved Provider has 30 calendar days to rectify their non-compliance outcome(s). Should that not be achieved and/or if there is no engagement with their CCC, then the ECCE Approved Provider moves to Level 1 of the Framework from the Initial Support Level. Likewise, if there is no engagement and/or an ECCE Approved Provider does not rectify the non-compliance outcome(s), they move to Level 2 of the Framework. If there are repeated failures to rectify a non-compliant outcome or there is no engagement with supports offered a sanction will be issued.

This sanction, if reached, constitutes 6% of an ECCE Approved Provider's annual Core Funding allocation. The sanction is solely calculated using an ECCE Approved Provider's Core Funding allocation and does not take into account other funding streams. The sanction is calculated using the ECCE Approved Provider's Core Funding allocation pertaining to the programme year the non-compliant outcome was issued, not the year the sanction is applied. 80% of the sanction is payable when an ECCE Approved Provider is initially placed on Level 2 of the Framework with the remaining 20% payable if a service fails to rectify at the end of Level 2.

Please refer to the Compliance Framework Guide for further information: [Compliance – Documents - Service Provider Portal](#).

To assist services to comply with the ECCE Programme requirements, the Department and the Scheme Administrator provide a range of training and supports on the EY HIVE [ECCE - Documents - Service Provider Portal](#). These include:

- A Compliance Guide for ECCE Approved Providers
- Supports and advice from your local CCC [gov.ie - City and County Childcare Committees](#).
- The Good Practice Guide for Attendance Record Keeping
- Compliance Checklists for each programme

The Department continuously works on providing further resources to support providers.

ECCE Approved Providers are strongly encouraged to engage with these supports, both before and after compliance visits, to ensure that they maintain compliance with programme rules.

9.4 Compliance Visits

1. ECCE Approved Providers must facilitate compliance visits which will be made without notice, to include access to the premises, personnel, and relevant records. Attendance records whether kept in electronic or paper format must be readily accessible for the current and previous Programme Year.
2. All documentation, whether kept in electronic or paper format, related to the financial affairs of the ECCE Approved Provider, accounts, fees records, staff qualifications, their Fee Table, rosters/registers, and attendance records must be on-site at all times. These

records must be kept for a minimum period of 6 years from expiry of the ECCE Programme Funding Agreement.

3. Compliance visit officers may inspect and take copies of any books, records, or other documents (including books, records or documents stored in non-legible form), or extracts therefrom, that the visiting officer finds in the course of their inspection.

9.5 Review/Queries

If a provider has an issue/query in relation to a compliance outcome following a Pobal compliance inspection, they can seek clarification by raising a case on the EY HIVE for the attention of the Pobal Compliance team. Or, if a provider believes a compliance outcome is incorrect, a request for a review of the outcome can also be made by raising a request on the EY HIVE. The review of the compliance outcome will be undertaken by a Pobal Compliance Reviewer who was not involved in the original compliance process. The result of the review, and an explanation for the decision, will be issued to the provider through the EY HIVE. All requests for review should be made within 30 calendar days from the date the Compliance Report is issued. If a provider is still not satisfied, then they can engage in the Pobal Complaints process.

Chapter 10 Force Majeure

10.1 Force Majeure and Funding

Force Majeure allows a party to suspend or terminate the performance of its obligations when certain circumstances beyond their control arise. The Department is under no obligation to fund 'Force Majeure' days and does so at its own discretion. Critical Incidents are separate to Force Majeure, please see [Appendix 2](#) for further information.

A condition of Force Majeure is that staff wages are paid for the duration of the Force Majeure incident. The Scheme Administrator may ask for proof that the staff's wages have been paid before granting a Force Majeure claim.

10.2 Force Majeure Clause

"If and to the extent that either party (the "Affected Party") is hindered or prevented by circumstances not within its reasonable ability to control, including but not limited to, acts of God, inclement weather, flood, lightning, fire, acts or omissions of third parties for whom the Affected Party is not responsible ("Force Majeure event") from fulfilling any of its obligations under this Funding Agreement, the Affected Party shall be relieved of liability for failure to fulfil such obligations provided always that the Affected Party complies with the provisions of this clause. For the avoidance of doubt, the Minister is under no obligation to provide Funding during a Force Majeure event and does so at their own discretion"

Ref: ECCE Funding Agreement 2026/2027, Clause 12.1

10.3 Force Majeure Claim Process

ECCE Approved Providers should formally claim Force Majeure with the Scheme Administrator no later than **5 working days after the onset of the incident**, even if the incident is ongoing, giving a brief outline of the issue and their estimated number of days' closure.

Applications will not be accepted after this timeframe.

If further evidence is required, the ECCE Approved Provider will be notified within 10 working days of the application being submitted. ECCE Approved Providers will have a maximum of 10 working days to provide all the required documentation requested by the Scheme Administrator.

In the event Force Majeure continues for more than 45 working days, either party shall have the right to terminate this agreement on written notice to the other party thereafter.

Force Majeure cannot be paid in conjunction with any insurance or any other compensation received by the ECCE Approved Provider from a third party for the same purpose.

To raise a service request on the EY HIVE:

- Programme Type "User Account Management;"
- Category "Force Majeure;"
- Select the relevant subcategory.

The application form must be completed in full and contain all necessary information, including any relevant evidence attached.

If for any reason an ECCE service is unable to access their EY HIVE account in order to apply for Force Majeure, EYPC can be contacted by phone and requested to raise a case with the Data Management team on the ECCE Approved Provider's behalf.

EYPC can be contacted Monday to Friday, 9am to 5pm (10am to 5pm on Wednesday) at 01 511 7222.

10.4 Force Majeure in the Event of Staff Illness (Staff Shortages)

Staff unavailability does not qualify for Force Majeure. According to Tusla, ECCE Approved Providers must have arrangements in place in their ECCE service to ensure that the required adult-child ratios are in place for staff absences. ECCE Approved Providers are obliged to have alternative arrangements in place for when staff members are unavailable to work.

10.5 Service is being used as a Polling Station

In the case of an ECCE Approved Provider having to close due to the premises being used as a polling station for elections/referendum, the service will be allowed to close for the day without having to update their Service Calendar.

An application for Force Majeure will not be necessary in these circumstances. Proof must be kept on file for compliance purposes.

10.6 Weather Warnings

In the case of Met Eireann issuing a **RED** Weather Warning for the county in which a facility is located, the ECCE Approved Provider will not need to apply for Force Majeure funding providing that staff are paid for the closure event.

Proof of the weather alert to cover the day(s) must be kept on an ECCE Approved Provider's compliance file.

Please note however, that ECCE services who remain closed after the RED Weather Warning has ended must apply for Force Majeure to cover any closure day(s).

Chapter 11 Financial Requirements

11.1 Responsibilities of an ECCE Approved Provider

It is an essential requirement that all public monies are appropriately accounted for and used for their intended purpose.

The ECCE Approved Provider will maintain up-to-date child registration information on the EY HIVE. Failure to comply may result in suspension of funding and/or termination of the ECCE Funding Agreement.

The ECCE Approved Provider must maintain appropriate records to enable verification by the Department or agents acting on its behalf (including the Scheme Administrator) that the general terms of the ECCE Funding Agreement are complied with.

In particular, such records **will include the following:**

1. **An attendance register which clearly shows the dates, arrival and departure times and durations of attendance for each individually identified child and staff member for every day that the child or staff member is in attendance.** Please see Chapter 8, Figure 1 of the Rules for the ECCE Programme 2026/2027 “Sample Child Attendance Record” for the preferred format of attendance records.

The ECCE Approved Provider must also have, as per Tulsa QRF, a staff roster/register always available onsite. This staffing roster/register must clearly show the dates, times, and durations of each staff member working in each session and room.

Weekly formats with the daily attendance information are strongly encouraged.
2. ECCE Applicant Declaration forms.
3. Records of income and expenditure, to include receipts from Parents/Guardians where applicable, should be kept up-to-date and available for verification purposes.

Failure by the ECCE Approved Provider to maintain accurate attendance records and/or accurate updated child registration details, as required in clause 8.1 of the ECCE Funding Agreement 2026/2027 may result in an immediate suspension of ECCE funding and/or a requirement to repay over-claimed monies already paid and may result in a termination of the ECCE Funding Agreement 2026/2027.

The ECCE Approved Provider must maintain appropriate annual accounts for each financial year in accordance with the timescales set out by the Companies Registration Office (CRO) (for limited companies) or by the Revenue Commissioners (for unincorporated entities). Copies of such accounts must be provided to the Scheme Administrator/Pobal Compliance, Audit, and Risk (CAR) or the Comptroller and Auditor General (C & AG) on request. The Scheme Administrator/Pobal CAR may share information found during a governance, audit or compliance check with the relevant authorities, including, but not limited to, the Office of the Director of Corporate Enforcement, the Charities Regulator, and the Office of the Revenue Commissioners.

The ECCE Approved Provider must, within its annual accounts, separately record all monies received from the Scheme Administrator relating directly or indirectly to the operation of the ECCE Programme and ensure that appropriate financial records are maintained.

The ECCE Approved Provider must respect and comply with the statutory role and regulatory and public accountability responsibilities of the Department, its agents and other relevant statutory bodies and at all times cooperate fully with the Department, its agents and all other statutory bodies in this regard.

The ECCE Approved Provider must ensure that all financial records relating to monies received in relation to the operation of the ECCE Programme are available to the Scheme Administrator on request. All financial records, including attendance records etc., must be retained for a period of 6 years.

11.2 De-Committal and Recovery Procedures

ECCE Approved Providers may at times be overpaid during the course of the year due to transfers, closures etc. If, at the end of the year (or on closure of an ECCE service), an ECCE service has been overpaid, a revised ECCE Programme allocation notification will issue, and any excess ECCE Programme funding must be returned to the Scheme Administrator.

The DCDE and/or the Scheme Administrator (on behalf of DCDE), reserve the right to recoup overpayments made from one childcare funding programme allocations from monies due to another. The Scheme Administrator will liaise with services impacted by de-committal/recovery to agree an appropriate repayment plan.

If due to persistent and non-rectified non-compliances a service will receive a sanction set at 6% of their Core Funding allocation see Section 9.3.

Chapter 12 Frequently Asked Questions for the ECCE Programme

1. What happens if I do not have the appropriate Tusla registration?

During the registration process, you will be asked for the appropriate Tusla registration which will then be validated. If your Tusla registration is not appropriate for the child you are registering, you will not be able to continue with the registration process until this has been rectified. All services must be on the register of early years services maintained by Tusla under section 58C of the Child Care Act 1991. If you are a centre-based ELC service, you will need to be registered as a pre-school under the [Early Years Services Regulations 2016](#) (as amended). If you are a childminder, you will need to be registered with Tusla under the [Childminding Services Regulations 2024](#) for the correct age range of children.

2. Can a child avail of additional AIM hours outside of ECCE?

Children registered for ECCE with an approved AIM level 7 application can avail additional hours outside of their ECCE term time, if they are also availing of NCS. ECCE eligible children can be eligible for up to 15hours per week during term time and up to 30 hours per week outside of term time. To be eligible for these hours must have an NCS claim in place for any hours payable under AIM.

An exception to this rule may be granted if a child is enrolled in a specialised provision or receives specialised funding and wishes to access AIM Plus and AIM Non-Term supports.

If an ECCE eligible child is also availing of NCS outside of their ECCE hours, they can be eligible for up to 15hours per week during term time and up to 30 hours per week out of term time.

3. What is a Service Calendar?

ECCE Approved Providers must submit a Service Calendar to the EY HIVE prior to the signing of the Funding Agreement, but no later than 2 weeks before the opening of the 2026/2027 programme year.

Once the calendar has been submitted to the EY HIVE, ECCE services will not be able to edit their calendar where dates have passed, calendars will be retrospectively locked. Please note that this applies from the start of the programme call (24th August).

If for any reason you need to amend the calendar for a date in the past, please contact Pobal the scheme administrators for assistance.

For any further information on Service Calendars, please contact your local CCC at [gov.ie - City and County Childcare Committees](#).

4. How do you upload the Minimum Enrolment Exemption form to EY HIVE?

The steps for the ECCE Approved Providers to upload minimum number exemptions forms on the EY HIVE:

- Click in Requests -> click in New Request -> User Account Management;
- Request type: Programme Readiness;
- Request type detail: ECCE Minimum Exemption.

5. My local CCC has reviewed my Fee Table, and I've been requested to amend same. What should I do?

The CCCs, on the Department's behalf, check that all Fee Table and calendars are compliant with the rules of the ECCE Programme. Any amendments requested by the CCC must be made within a 4-week period or the Scheme Administrator will be informed, and funding may be put on hold until all requirements have been confirmed as completed.

6. Can a child transfer from one ECCE Approved Provider to another?

Yes. A Parent/Guardian must give the ECCE Approved Provider 4 ECCE calendar weeks' written notice of the intention to transfer their child to another ECCE service or to leave the current ECCE service.

Please note ECCE calendar weeks do not include the weeks an ECCE service is closed for holidays.

7. Is there provision for a split place exemption for the 2026/2027 programme year?

For the 2026/2027 programme year, those children who availed of a split place exemption in the 2025/2026 programme year are eligible to apply. However, split places exemptions are closed to new applicants.

Special arrangements will be put in place under the AIM scheme for children who have a disability or additional needs, who need to attend more than one service for necessary supports.

For further information on applying under a special arrangement please see the AIM rules.

8. What is a pattern of attendance?

It is an agreed level of attendance, between the Parent/Guardian and the ECCE Approved Provider, of a child who attends on this basis throughout the programme year. For example, if a child only attends 4 days they should only be registered for 4 days.

9. Can a Parent/Guardian alter the number of days of attendance in their service?

Only if the ECCE Approved Provider can cater for the request in their service.

10. What happens if a Parent/Guardian reduces their child's level of service?

ECCE Approved Providers are required to ensure that the EY HIVE registrations match actual attendance patterns. An ECCE Approved Provider must monitor attendance over a 4-week period to ascertain that the registration for each child is correct based on actual attendance. Where a child consistently, over a 4-week period, fails to attend for an identified level of service as agreed (e.g. – attending 4 days instead of 5), then the ECCE Approved Provider must update the EY HIVE registration to reflect this.

11. Can an ECCE Approved Provider reduce or offer less than the 15 ECCE hours?

Any reduction to the 15 ECCE hours must be with the consent of the Parent/Guardian. All children must be offered the full 15 ECCE hours

12. My service is undergoing a change of address/legal structure/ownership, what should I do?

If your service is undergoing a change of circumstance as listed above, the process will require that you submit a change of circumstance request via the EY Hive. As part of this process, you will provide a change effective date, from which the change of circumstance takes place. On the change effective date, the system will end all current child registrations. You will be required to re-submit all programme level information under your new service reference number. All child registrations must also be re-submitted under your new service reference number.

13. Can a childminder provide ECCE?

Yes, a Tusla registered childminder can provide ECCE provided they meet the requirements of the ECCE programme, including the requirement for lead educators / childminders to have a minimum qualification in early learning and care at level 6 on the National Framework of Qualifications.

14. When are payments made?

Payment schedules for Childcare Funding Programmes can be downloaded from the EY HIVE homepage at www.ncs.gov.ie. Non-payable weeks are determined by the ELC Service Calendar uploaded to the EY HIVE by the ECCE Approved Provider at the start of the programme call.

15. I intend on submitting a claim with my insurance company and I have claimed Force Majeure. What should I do?

Services who have claimed Force Majeure and are subsequently awarded a claim from their insurance company for the same event must inform the Scheme Administrator.

16. Can I apply for Force Majeure in the Event of Staff Illness (Staff Shortages)?

No. Force Majeure does not include any staff unavailability. Please see Clause 11.4 for more information.

17. My ECCE service had a compliance visit and I am required to carry out a rectification action(s). What should I do?

Once you receive the outcomes of your compliance inspection via the EY HIVE, you should ensure that the required rectification actions outlined against each non-compliant outcome is completed by the rectification due date. Rectification actions may include confirmation of a declaration of compliance, submission of documentary evidence through the EY HIVE, etc.

Additional information on the rectification process can be found by consulting the following documents in the Compliance [Resources Section](#) of the EY HIVE: These include:

- ECCE Compliance Guide for ECCE Approved Providers
- Accessing the ECCE Compliance Report on HIVE
- ECCE Post-Inspection Rectification Actions

If you have any further queries, you should contact your local CCC or consult the [Compliance – Documents - Service Provider Portal](#) which can be found on the EY HIVE.

18. My ECCE Approved Provider has closed for a day without giving 20 working days' written notice, what should I do?

If your ECCE Approved Provider has not offered an alternative day for the closure, and you haven't been given the required 20 working days' notice, please raise the issue with your local CCC. Details of your local CCC can be found at gov.ie - [City and County Childcare Committees](#).

19. Is an Eircode required to register a child on ECCE?

Eircodes are a required field when registering for the ECCE Programme. If an Eircode is unavailable, it is possible to get an Eircode exemption with the child's PPSN if the ECCE Approved Provider has an Eircode. If the child registering is residing in Northern Ireland and attending an ECCE Approved Provider in the Republic/South, the ECCE Approved Provider will have to request an exemption to complete the registration process.

20. Does a Parent/Guardian have to complete the part in relation to ethnicity identifiers on the Pre-Registration Form?

While it is not mandatory for Parents/Guardians to provide data on ethnic or cultural backgrounds, it is very important for DCDE to collect this information so that it can ensure that early learning and care and school age childcare is working effectively for all children and that no group is discriminated against. With the information gathered through this question on the Pre-Registration Form, DCDE can examine the impact of existing programmes and develop policies in the future which best meet the needs of all children. The collection of this data will be used to monitor outcomes for children of different ethnicities, allocate future resources, as well as to inform future policy and planning for early learning and care and school age childcare, and for international reporting purposes.

21. What do I do in the case of a Critical Incident?

Please contact your CCC immediately in the case of a Critical Incident for support. Guidance on Critical incidents is available at: [Critical Incidents in Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare Services: Planning and Responding](#).

Appendix 1 Optional Extras Document

2026/2027

ECCE Optional Extras Guide

ECCE Optional Extras Overview:

One of the core principles of ECCE is that ECCE is free of charge for 3 hours per day, 5 days per week over a 38-week period to all Parents/Guardians. Therefore, the Department would prefer that ECCE Approved Providers keep optional extra items for children attending ECCE to an absolute minimum and recommend that ECCE Approved Providers arrange for charged activities to occur outside the 3 hours of the ECCE Programme.

With the exception of 'sessional only' services, **no additional time (outside of the 3 hours 30 minutes) may be included as an optional extra.**

It is imperative that no child should ever feel excluded if they are not participating in an optional extra activity. No additional activity should be held in a manner that would leave non-participating children feeling excluded.

Charging for items which would be expected to be part of a preschool service (e.g. arts and craft materials) is not permitted. Similarly, it is not permitted for services to make payment of approved optional extra(s) a criterion for admission to the ECCE service, or to combine a list of optional extras into a single option on the Fee Table. Any optional extras must be individually optional, and this requires an individualised charge for each allowable optional extra.

Where an optional extra happens during an ECCE session, **children not attending the optional activity must have a full content-based session**, and the required **child-to-adult ratio must be maintained** for children taking part in the optional extra as well as those not participating.

If a family no longer want an optional extra previously agreed to, they must be allowed withdraw from it. While notice may be required for such withdrawal, it must not exceed 4 weeks.

The Department reserves the right to amend the approved optional extras list below. For further information on optional extras ECCE Approved Providers should contact the CCCs.

Approved Optional Extras:

(Many of these will be provided by the ECCE Approved Provider free of charge):

- **Food** (children must also have the option of bringing their own snack/lunch instead).
- **'Interactive Play and Exploration'** type classes/events (where outside providers deliver holistic child development fostering physical, cognitive and social skills in a supportive and engaging environment).
- **Nappies/pull-ups** (where applicable).
- **Baking** (where this is a regular part of the programme).
- **30 additional minutes** (sessional services only)².
- **One** paid preschool trip (entry fees, cost of transportation).

No optional extra(s) outside of this list are allowed.

² An ECCE Approved Provider who provides a sessional preschool service and does not offer part-time/full-time childcare, may offer a maximum additional 30 minutes per day as an optional extra.

Appendix 2 Critical Incidents

Definition of a Critical Incident

A critical incident is an event out of the range of normal experience – one which is sudden and unexpected, that involves a threat to life or loss of life and can include elements of physical or emotional trauma or loss. It may also involve severe damage to buildings or facilities such that the damage causes risk to children and adults or the ECCE service cannot operate. Please contact your CCC immediately in case of a Critical Incident.

Critical incidents are events that have the capacity to bring about significant distress in an individual, or a group of people, and/or overwhelm or threaten to overwhelm the normal coping capacity of an ECCE service and those in charge of its operation.

Examples include:

- Death of a child in a service
- Death of parents/guardians or a staff member
- Severe fire, flood, or storm damage that significantly impacts the service provision of childcare.

Not all upsetting incidents are critical incidents. It is only a critical incident if it is beyond capacity of the manager or staff team to cope with it or to provide support to those who may need it.

ECCE Approved Providers that are impacted by a critical incident that may involve a closure should contact their local CCC who will approach the DCDE on their behalf.

For further information concerning guidance on Critical Incidents – [Critical Incidents in Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare Services: Planning and Responding](#) or contact your [local CCC](#) directly.