

Access to after-school and community employment childcare programmes to be extended

Changes to eligibility and parental contributions will increase childcare supports for low-income families making their way into employment

The Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, Charlie Flanagan T.D. and the Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection, Joan Burton T.D. have today (08 July 2014) announced that the afterschool childcare (ASCC) programme and the community employment childcare (CEC) programme, will undergo improvements to increase access to the programmes for low income families. The ASCC programme was first introduced in 2013 and is currently available nationally in all Intreo Centres and Social Welfare Offices providing up to 800 subsidised after-school childcare places. The CEC programme was introduced in January of this year and provides 1,800 subsidised childcare places to CE participants. The changes to both programmes are due to become available from Monday 14 July 2014.

The eligibility criteria for the after-school childcare programme is expanding to provide places to recipients of the Jobseeker's Allowance (JA), Jobseeker's Benefit (JB) and One-Parent Family payments (OFP) who participate in a Department of Social Protection employment programme. To date the ASCC programme primarily provided support for those entering employment. This enhancement will provide eligible customers with the choice to avail of after-school childcare support while on an employment programme, when entering or increasing their employment or a combination of both. In addition OFP customers will now receive the same level of support under the programme as those in receipt of a Jobseeker's payment i.e. they can avail of this support if they take-up part-time work or an employment programme, and still retain part of their OFP payment. Previously OFP recipients were only eligible if they left the payment to take-up employment. These changes will result in more customers meeting the eligibility criteria for the ASCC programme.

In addition a new option is being made available to provide subsidised after-school childcare places, with a pick-up service, at no additional cost to the customer. The additional cost of these places will be funded by the Department through an increased subsidy to the childcare provider. The provision of a pick-up service was identified by customers and providers as a valuable addition to the ASCC programme.

Customers who are participating in Community Employment (CE) schemes will now also receive full support for children in primary school, under the newly named CE childcare (CEC) programme (previously known as the CE Childcare Education and Training Support (CE CETS Programme)). This programme was introduced in Budget 2014 and is expanding to

provide subsidised childcare places for CE participants with primary school children aged up to 13 years of age. This is an increase from the current age limit of 5 years. As a result of this change CE participants will no longer require access to the after-school childcare programme as their childcare needs will now be met under one scheme. CE participants already on the ASCC programme will not be affected.

In order to further achieve better coherence between these childcare supports the parental contribution for the ASCC programme is reducing from €20 per week per child to €15 to bring it in line with the current parental contribution on the CEC programme of €15. This makes the programme more accessible to low income families.

Minister Flanagan said: **“Over the past few years my department has added to our childcare support programmes to assist parents in low income families return to employment. I am delighted that we have been able to work with the Department of Social Protection to support these changes to ensure that the programmes are more accessible and equitable for those eligible to avail of them. Supporting parents to return to employment is a key focus for this Government and I am committed to ensuring my department can play its role in this.”**

The Tánaiste said: **“Getting people back to work is the Government’s number one priority, because all the evidence shows that having a fairly-paid and secure job is the best protection against poverty, and we want to help low income families gain a firm foothold in work and build a better future for themselves and their families. Childcare is a crucial element for families returning to work, or embarking on employment programmes, and these changes are aimed at ensuring that they will get the childcare supports they need to do exactly that. My Department will continue to work closely with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to further expand childcare services and supports.”**

The afterschool childcare programme will continue to operate as currently where customers who meet the criteria get a letter of eligibility from their local Intreo Centre/Social Welfare Office. They are then referred to their nearest County Childcare Committee (CCC) who connects them with the relevant providers.

The CE childcare programme will also continue to operate as currently where the CE sponsor provides a letter to the customer that they can take to their nearest CCC who will then arrange the childcare places.

ENDS

Note for Editors:

After-School Childcare (ASCC) Programme

Eligibility

1. From 14 July 2014 the ASCC scheme will be available to customers of the Department of Social Protection who:
 - are currently getting Jobseekers' Benefit (JB) or Jobseeker's Allowance (JA) or One - Parent Family Payment (OFP) or are on a DSP employment programme; **and**
 - have been in receipt of JB, JA or OFP or on a DSP employment programme (or any combination of the 4) for at least 3 months; **and**
 - have one or more children aged between 4 and 13 who are in primary school, **and**
 - either:
 - start a new job; or
 - increase the days currently worked; or
 - start a DSP employment programme (except CE¹).
2. For those in part-time employment, subsidised after-school childcare will be provided on a pro-rata basis.

Administration and Controls

3. The Department of Social Protection assesses customers of the Department in order to determine if they are eligible to avail of the childcare support. Evidence of employment is required from the employer where applicable. Once an individual is deemed eligible, they receive a letter confirming their eligibility and the amount of afterschool childcare provision applicable. They are then referred to their nearest County Childcare Committee who connects them with the relevant providers.
4. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs are responsible for providing the after-school childcare places, including the contracting and payment of the childcare providers, quality standards for the provision of these places and for all other engagements with the providers and the County Childcare Committees.

State rate of contribution and parental contribution

5. From 14 July 2014 the state contribution for the scheme will be increased to €40 per week per child from €35 and the parental contribution will decrease from €20 per week per child to €15 per week per child. A state contribution of €80 will be provided for after-school childcare with pick-up service but the parent contribution will remain at €15 per week. During school holidays, for 10 weeks the state contribution will increase to €105 per week from €100 but the parental contribution will remain at €15 per week.

¹ CE is excluded from eligibility for ASCC as the CE Childcare Programme now caters for all CE participants with children from 0 to 13 years of age.

Type of Childcare	State Contribution	Max Parental Contribution
Basic ASCC*	€40	€15
ASCC* with Pick-up	€80	€15
*10 Weeks Holiday (no pick-up service)	€105	€15

Duration of support and progression

6. Individuals who are granted a subsidised after-school care place will be able to retain this place for one year (52 weeks) while they remain in employment or on their employment programme.

Community Employment Childcare (CEC) Programme

Eligibility

A CE Applicant who needs childcare in order to take up a place on a CE scheme is eligible for a CE childcare place.

Note: where a child/children of a CE Participant is participating in ECCE during the same time as the CE Programme (i.e. morning or afternoon), that child cannot transfer to a CE childcare place. However if a parent is participating on CE on an alternative time of day to the child's ECCE programme the parent can also avail of CE childcare for the time of day they are participating on CE.

Access to the CEC Programme for CE participants means participants can access childcare support in the same way as participants pursuing ETB/Solas training courses. Feedback from CE Sponsors in 2013 was that lack of access to affordable childcare was a barrier to participation for parents with young children, particularly lone parents; this measure is an important provision in their engagement.

Further detail in relation to how Community Employment childcare places will be managed is set out below:

1. Childcare Places will be allocated to children up to 13 years of age;
2. There will be 1,200 part-time places available for CE participants with children up to 5 years of age (as CE is a part-time programme), and 800 places available for CE participants with children who require after-school childcare;
3. The Parent contribution is €15 per week and the state contribution is €80 per week for part-time childcare;
4. In the case of after-school childcare, the parent contribution is the same at €15 and the state contribution is €40 per week;
5. In the case of after-school childcare, during holidays, the state contribution will increase to the part-time childcare rate of €80 per week. Places will be allocated on a first come first served basis;

6. CE participants in receipt of the One Parent Family Payment (OFP) prior to commencement on CE will be particularly welcome to take up a childcare place;
7. Places will be open to existing participants as well as new entrants;
8. Places will be approved for 50 weeks in a 12 month period for CE participants. A parent can re-apply for a CE childcare place after the 50 week period comes to an end, and a place will be approved subject to demand and availability.

Type of Childcare	State Contribution	Max Parental Contribution
CE Childcare (part-time)	€80	€15
CE After-school* (no pick-up service)	€40	€15
*10 Weeks Holiday (no pick-up service)	€80	€15

The CE Policy Division has on-going engagement with the County Childcare Committees (CCC) in relation to this programme.

Monitoring take-up of CE Childcare places:

Take-up of CE childcare places is monitored on a monthly basis by the Department of Social Protection (DSP) and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). A DSP monitoring form is circulated to all CE Scheme Sponsors at the end of each month and Sponsors make returns to the DSP Employment Policy Unit. The provision of this data to the Department of Social Protection allows the Policy Unit to accurately report on take-up of the places available to CE participants, and to plan effectively in relation to any necessary changes to the Scheme. The DCYA also monitor the take up of places and ensure the availability of places and budget is kept in accordance with the allocation.

Existing Childcare Provision

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs currently implements two childcare programmes, the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) scheme and the Childcare Education and Training Support (CETS) scheme.

Between both of these programmes, subsidised childcare is provided to 40,000 children of low-income parents. Approximately 1,600 providers, both community and commercial, participate in the CETS scheme.

In addition, the Department administers the free Pre-School Year in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme, which is availed of by over 65,000 children each year at an annual cost of €175 million.