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## Frequently Asked Questions : Force Majeure (COVID-19)

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## FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS FORCE MAJEURE (COVID-19)

The Department Of Children and Youth Affairs provides subvention towards childcare and will continue to do so during the closures announced by the Taoiseach Leo Varadkar TD on the 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020.

DCYA will continue to pay for all Government childcare schemes while crèches and preschools are closed. This means that providers will be fully paid for the free pre-school scheme (ECCE) and it will remain free to parents. Likewise NCS, CCSP and TEC will continue to be subsidised to eliminate or reduce the fear of lower income families.

### **Are there funds in place from the DCYA to continue to pay staff in early learning and care and school-age childcare settings?**

As the State is not the employer, the DCYA does not pay the wages of staff working in early learning and care settings and school-age childcare settings and cannot direct on this matter. However, a significant proportion of crèches' income on a national level comes from the State. This is estimated to be over 75% nationally. This will support many services to continue to pay staff in this challenging time.

If any employer is unable to pay an employee or cannot provide a flexible working solution to the employee then the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection provides a range of income supports that can support parents in these situations.

These include the following;

- If the employee has been temporarily laid off for the duration of the current school closure due to a reduction in business they may claim a **Jobseeker's payment**;
- Where the employer and employee arrange for the employee to work on a short-time basis e.g. 3 days on and 2 days off the employees can claim **Short Time Working payment** for the days they are not working (up to a maximum of three days per week);
- If the employee can work a set pattern e.g. week on week off they may be eligible for a **Jobseeker's payment**;
- If the employee works a minimum of 19 hours per week they may be able to avail of the **Working Family Payment** which provides income support to certain parents with children;



- Where an employee does not qualify for any of these payments and has an income need they can apply for **Supplementary Welfare Allowance**, which is means-assessed.

For further information, please refer to the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection, at the link below:

- <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/99104a-covid-19-coronavirus/>

### **Are there resources in place to support childcare businesses?**

Resources are available to support businesses from the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation. <https://dbei.gov.ie/en/>

### **Will Crèche fees be waived for the period of the closures or will parents still pay the fees?**

All 4500 crèches and preschools in the country are operated by private providers, 25% of which are community / not for profit.

DCYA will continue to pay for all Government childcare schemes while crèches and preschools are closed. This means that providers will be paid for the free pre-school scheme (ECCE) in full and it will remain free to parents. Likewise other lower income families accessing the NCS, CCS or TEC, will have their subsidies paid.

It is a matter for parents to talk to providers about whether they must continue to pay fees. This may be covered in contracts they may have with providers.

A significant proportion of crèches' income on a national level comes from the State (estimated to be over 75%) and this should support many services to continue to pay staff in this challenging time. However, some services may have little or no State income and are heavily dependent on parental fees.

### **Does a childcare service have to apply for Force Majeure due to the decision to close services?**

There is no need to apply for force majeure due to the decision announced on March 12 and services will not be required to make up days for those closed due to force majeure. See notice on PIP portal.

### **Are there any conditions attached to the continued funding during this time of closure?**

There are no conditions, it is expected that the funds be used to pay and retain staff where appropriate.



### **At what rate will subvention be paid?**

Subvention to childcare services will be paid at the same rate as the last full week of service.

### **As a Provider can I work in my setting while the closure is ongoing?**

For the moment, the advice is that only remote working can take place. This may facilitate administration, e-learning and professional activities.

### **Can childminders continue to operate?**

Childminders can continue to operate. It is important that they follow HSE advice to minimise the spread of COVID-19.

To support social distancing and minimise risk, it is recommended that childminders:

- Keep numbers of children to a minimum,
- Do not work if they have symptoms,
- Do not care for children who have symptoms,
- Consider prioritising children of essential frontline workers.

The advice on childminding is being reviewed on an ongoing basis. DCYA will provide a further update as soon as available from the Public Health team.