



A new Model for Supporting Access to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme for Children with a Disability

Policy on the Operation of the Access and Inclusion Model

Purpose of this Document

This document sets out the overall policy on the operation of the new Access and Inclusion model for supporting children with a disability to access the Early Childhood Care and Education Programme. All other documents and materials relating to the model should be read in conjunction with this main policy document.

June 2016

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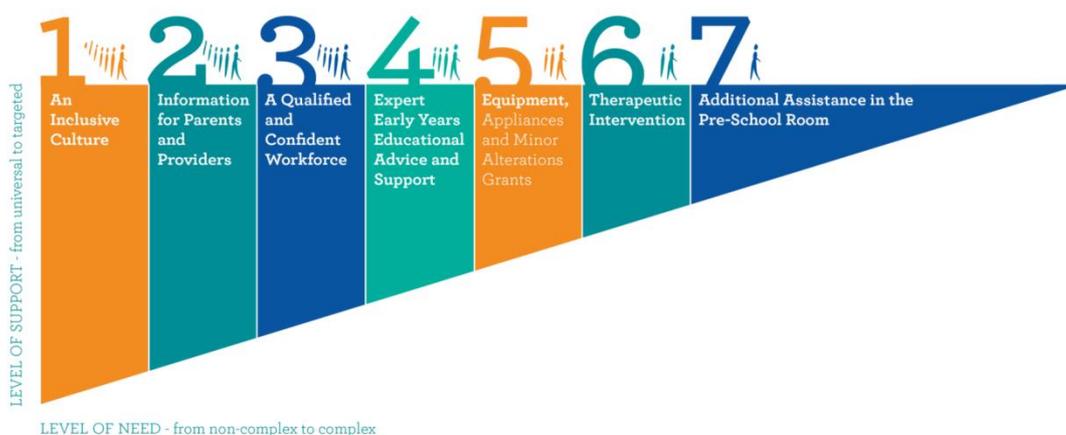
Part A- Introduction, Aims and Overview of the New Model

A1. Background and Introduction

The immense value of quality early years care and education is well documented. The international evidence shows a wide range of benefits for children, families and society at large. However, while all children benefit from quality early years care and education, this is especially so for children with a disability.

In acknowledgement of this, in November 2015, the Government launched the *Report of the Inter-Departmental Group on Supporting Access to the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme for Children with a Disability*. The report set out a clear vision for a comprehensive, child-centred model of supports which will ensure that children with disabilities can access and meaningfully participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme in mainstream pre-school settings. This model, entitled the **Access and Inclusion Model** or AIM, involves seven levels of progressive support, moving from universal to highly targeted based on the strengths and needs of both the child and the pre-school.

A Model to Support Access to the ECCE Programme
for Children with a Disability



The Access and Inclusion Model was endorsed by Government and funding was committed through Budget 2016 to support its introduction from September 2016 onwards. While full implementation will take time due to the need to build capacity across the early years sector, parents and service providers will be able to submit applications for assistance and supports from June 2016 onwards to allow them to plan for pre-school enrolment in September 2016.

A.2 Objectives and Overview of the Model

The overall objective of the Access and Inclusion Model is to **help service providers to deliver an inclusive pre-school experience, ensuring that children with a disability can fully participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme,**

thereby reaping the benefits of quality early years care and education and realising the opportunity to reach their full potential.

The model aims to promote and support an inclusive culture within pre-school settings, by:

- developing a new Inclusion Charter for the Early Years Sector, underpinned by updated and strengthened National Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Guidelines and a nationwide training programme,
- having up to date information available on a dedicated website,
- funding a new higher education programme (LINC)¹ which will see up to 900 pre-school staff graduate each year over four years and proceed to work as Inclusion Co-ordinators in the ECCE setting, and
- funding a broad, multi-annual programme of formal and informal training for pre-school staff in relation to disability and inclusion.

The focus is on empowering service providers to build truly inclusive environments which understand the diverse needs of children, especially those with a disability, which are responsive to those needs, and which allow every child to flourish.

Where a service provider, in conjunction with a parent, considers that they may need some further additional support in order to meet the needs of a child with a disability in an inclusive way, they can apply for a suite of more targeted services, namely:

- ✓ Expert advice and mentoring from a team of Access and Inclusion Specialists within the national Early Years Quality Development Service
- ✓ Equipment, appliances and minor alterations which are necessary to support a child's participation in the ECCE programme
- ✓ Access to therapy services which are critical to enabling a child's participation in the ECCE programme
- ✓ The provision of additional capitation to fund an extra person in the classroom or to enable the reduction of the staff: child ratio, where this is critical to ensuring a child's participation in the ECCE programme (it is estimated that service providers may need this in the case of approximately 1- 1.5% of all children or those children with very advanced, complex needs).

A single online application process can be used to apply for any of the services listed above through the ECCE Online System, i.e. it will not be necessary to undergo multiple application processes. The Early Years Programme Implementation Platform (PIP) system will host this online application process as service providers are already registered and familiar with it². The City and County Childcare Committees will also play a role in supporting service providers and parents to complete this form.

¹ This is a Level 6 Higher Education Special Purpose Award in Inclusion.

² The use of the PIP system will also ensure an integrated approach, whereby the one IT system will capture information on, and facilitate the delivery of, all funding and supports for ECCE settings, whether provided under the new model or otherwise.

In considering the requirement for services and supports, the focus will be on the developmental level of the child, their strengths, functional ability and needs, as well as the strengths and needs of the pre-school. The focus will not be on diagnosis and the access to supports under the model will not require formal diagnosis.

Further information on each of the new supports and services, as well as the process for applying for them, is set out in part B of this policy.

A3. Scope of the Model

Definition of Disability

The underlying vision of the model is that all children, including children with a disability, will be able to meaningfully participate in the ECCE Programme in mainstream pre-school settings (apart from exceptional situations where specialised provision is required for unavoidable reasons).

In line with this vision, the model is about supporting the access and inclusion of children with a **disability** which is defined “a long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment which, in interaction with various barriers, may hinder a child’s full and effective participation in society on an equal basis with others”³. The definition is broad and should ensure that children with needs arising from a long-term physical, mental, intellectual or sensory impairment will be supported by the model, even where the particular impairment may not be traditionally recognised as a disability. “Long-term” should be understood as referring to an impairment which is enduring and permanent or likely to be permanent.

Definition of Critical to Participation

Services are considered **critical to participation** in the ECCE programme where it is reasonably agreed that a child, in the absence of those services and taking into account other existing or available services and supports,:

- (i) is unable to access the pre-school setting due to environmental barriers,
- (ii) is unable to commence the ECCE programme,
- (iii) is unable to remain on the ECCE programme, or
- (iv) is unable to meaningfully participate in the activities provided as part of the ECCE programme,

and it is further agreed that the provision of the particular services will help to ensure that the child can access and meaningfully participate in the ECCE programme.

To participate meaningfully, children with a disability should be enabled to reach their full potential in terms of experiencing new skills and opportunities, and actively engaging in social activities and interactions with their peer group.

ECCE Programme in Pre-schools

The model applies to all mainstream pre-school settings which are funded through the ECCE programme (also known as the free pre-school programme). The services and supports offered through the model apply in relation to the ECCE programme only, i.e. they apply for

³ The definition is derived and adapted from *Supporting Access to the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme for Children with a Disability. Report of the Inter-Departmental Group*, September 2015

the duration of the child's time in the ECCE programme⁴. Currently, all children in Ireland qualify for the ECCE programme from age 3 up until the time they transition to formal schooling. However, it is envisaged that the model will have 'spill-over benefits' which will extend beyond the ECCE programme in terms of fostering an inclusive culture in early years settings.

In addition to mainstream settings, pre-school services are also offered in special pre-schools and early intervention classes which cater exclusively for children with disabilities. While the underlying vision of the new model is to cater for as many children as possible in mainstream settings, it is recognised that a small number of children will continue to need specialised services. The report of the Inter-Departmental Group recommended that special pre-schools and classes and other specialist supports should remain in place and be reviewed three years from the introduction of the model. This will allow policy-makers, in consultation with parents and providers, to assess whether some children can transfer from specialised to mainstream pre-schools.

Budget cap

The model will operate within a fixed, annual budget cap, with funding allocated by Government each year through the annual estimates and budgetary process.

Guiding principles

The following guiding principles were used to develop the model and also inform its implementation:

- Consistent:** The provision of supports and services for children with a disability should be consistent across the country. In other words, the new, national Access and Inclusion Model will involve a uniform set of eligibility and resource allocation principles, thus ensuring a clear and consistent approach to the delivery of supports and services across the country.
- Efficient and effective:** Implementation, monitoring and accountability mechanisms and lines of responsibility for the delivery of ECCE supports and services for children with a disability should be in place to drive timely and effective implementation.
- Equitable:** All children should have equality of opportunity to access and participate in the ECCE Programme.
- Evidence-informed:** ECCE supports and services for children with a disability should be evidence-informed.
- High quality:** ECCE supports and services for children with a disability should be of high quality.

⁴ It is noted that there may be a small number of cases where a child qualifies for the ECCE programme but is availing of early childhood care and education services funded under the CCS or TEC programmes. In such circumstances, a child should not be excluded from availing of the services and supports provided under this model once the service provider in question is a registered pre-school setting which is funded under the CCS or TEC programmes.

- Inclusive:** Provision of the ECCE Programme for children with a disability should be on the basis of inclusion within mainstream pre-school settings (apart from exceptional situations where specialised provision is valid for reasons unavoidable).
- Integrated:** ECCE supports and services for children with a disability should be designed and delivered in partnership with all stakeholders, including families and pre-school providers.
- Needs-driven:** The provision of ECCE supports and services for children with a disability should be needs-driven

Part B- Operation of the Model

B1. Level 1- An Inclusive Culture

The starting point of the new model is a clear commitment to fostering an inclusive culture across the early years sector. This is the critical foundation on which all other levels of the model are built and is key to truly achieving the policy vision of full access and inclusion, thereby ensuring that each child has the opportunity to realise their potential. Access to an inclusive setting is the first real step in a child being able to meaningfully participate in mainstream pre-school. In order to support the sector in creating inclusive environments, this level involves the following initiatives:

National Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines

The 2006 Equality and Diversity Guidelines have been updated and developed to incorporate a stronger focus on inclusion of children with disabilities. The revised *Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education* are available to view on the new dedicated website, www.preschoolaccess.ie.

The guidelines are accompanied by a new *National Inclusion Charter* and an inclusion policy template. All pre-school settings participating in the ECCE programme will be asked to sign-up to the Charter by completing and publishing an Inclusion Policy in respect of their own setting. This will ensure that each pre-school setting has an explicit, visible and clearly documented Inclusion Policy articulating both its commitment to inclusion and the principles and practices underpinning that commitment.

To support service providers in adopting the guidelines and charter, and developing their own inclusion policy, the City and County Childcare Committees are rolling out national training. All service providers will be invited to attend this training and to extend the invitation to managers and practitioners in their pre-school settings, i.e. the training will not be limited to Inclusion Co-ordinators.

To assist with monitoring and compliance, from 2017, the PIP service profile will include a mandatory reporting field in relation to the Inclusion Policy. This field will require service providers to confirm whether they have a published Inclusion Policy for their setting and will invite them to upload a copy of same. Given that completion of the service profile is a contractual requirement under the ECCE programme, this reporting mechanism will ensure full capture of information in relation to the proportion of pre-schools with a published policy and allow for follow up with those who don't. It is envisaged that this 'soft' approach to compliance should encourage service providers to approach the development of their inclusion policy in a reflective and expansive way, rather than treating it as a minimal 'tick box' exercise. However, it will also provide the national level data to inform any future measures in relation to the Inclusion Policy, i.e. whether there is a case for making the Inclusion Policy a contractual requirement once training has been delivered or whether it should be a pre-requisite for access to targeted supports.

Inclusion Co-ordinators and Increased Capitation

A new role of inclusion co-ordinator has been created to provide expert support and leadership in relation to access and inclusion within pre-school settings. A dedicated higher education programme has been developed to provide training for practitioners so that they can take on this new role within their settings. The one year higher education level 6 special purpose award has been developed by a consortium led by Mary Immaculate College, Limerick, together with Froebel and Early Childhood Ireland, and funded by the Department of Education and Skills. It is being delivered on a nationwide basis by the consortium. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs will fund up to 900 places on the programme per annum over the period 2016 - 2019 (i.e. 3,600 places over a 4 year period). It will also pay candidates on the programme a once-off bursary of €200 to help with any costs which may be associated with attendance on the programme.

Practitioners wishing to avail of the programme can apply to Mary Immaculate College via its online application system, www.lincprogramme.ie. Further information on the programme and on how to apply can also be found on this website.

Where a service provider is a fully qualified Inclusion Co-ordinator or employs a fully qualified Inclusion Co-ordinator in their pre-school setting, that provider will qualify for an increase of €2 per child per week in the rate of ECCE capitation payable. This increase recognises the leadership and mentoring role being delivered by the Inclusion Co-ordinator in their ECCE setting and, subject to detailed operational guidelines, can apply from the date of:

- (i) graduation of the Inclusion Co-ordinator from the higher education programme, and
- (ii) completion of a signed agreement by the Inclusion Co-ordinator that they will take on the roles and responsibilities associated with the post.

The application for additional capitation can be made through the PIP system. The application process will open in 2017 as this is when the first entrants to the new programme will graduate and qualify for recognition as Inclusion Co-ordinators.

Where an Inclusion Co-ordinator ceases employment with a service provider, that service provider will have a duty to notify Pobal through the PIP system and will no longer qualify for the increased capitation rate.

Access and Inclusion Profile

The Access and Inclusion Model is needs-driven and recognises that children with disabilities are a diverse group, with needs that can vary from mild to moderate to severe or complex, while also having different functional abilities and requirements for support. In order to assist and guide service providers in understanding both the strengths and needs of each individual child, and the capacity and constraints of their own setting, an Access and Inclusion Profile has been developed. This is a multi-functional resource which can act as an aid to individual service providers in building inclusive settings, as well as being used to apply for targeted supports (i.e. levels 4-7). More information on the Access and Inclusion Profile is provided under section B.4.

B2. Level 2- Information for Parents and Providers

In order to plan and prepare for a child's enrolment and participation in pre-school, parents and service providers need relevant, up to date, consistent and accessible information. They need to know what supports are available and how they can be accessed. In order to meet this need, a single, comprehensive information resource has been developed in the form of a dedicated, national website www.preschoolaccess.ie. The website is hosted by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and acts as a 'one stop information shop' in relation to:

- Comprehensive information for parents and service providers on the new Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)
- Information on how to access or apply for supports and services under AIM
- Links to the application form to be used when applying for supports under AIM and to the Access and Inclusion profile
- Frequently Asked Questions
- The National Diversity, Equality and Inclusion Charter and Guidelines for Early Childhood Care and Education, as well as the Inclusion Policy Template⁵
- Other national resources in relation to inclusion and creating inclusive settings, including information on training programmes for early years practitioners being delivered under level 3 of the model
- A directory of local services and resources for pre-school children with a disability by county
- Links to general information on the ECCE programme
- Links to the websites of other key bodies such as Pobal, the City and County Childcare Committees, the National Council for Special Education, the Health Service Executive and various key government departments.

All stakeholders⁶ will be encouraged to direct parents and service providers towards this single, national resource so that there is one clear and consistent information resource for those in need of advice and guidance. The website will be subject to regular review by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, in partnership with the relevant bodies, so that information remains relevant and up to date.

Parents and service providers will also be able to contact Pobal, City and County Childcare Committees and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs by phone where they require further information.

B3. Level 3- A Qualified and Confident Workforce

There is widespread consensus regarding the link between a qualified workforce and quality services. The State supports continuous quality development in the early years sector. Recent and ongoing actions to achieve this are outlined in the Early Years Quality Agenda, and include the following:

- Improving the Tusla inspection system to make it more consistent and robust, increasing the number of inspectors and introducing a registration system for all pre-school services

⁵ This template has been developed to assist service providers in developing an Inclusion Policy for their setting (see section B1).

⁶ This includes service providers, CCCs, Pobal, HSE, NCSE, NDA, Tusla, DES, D/Health and DCYA.

- Establishing an Early Years Inspectorate within the Department of Education and Skills to carry out inspections focusing on the quality of the educational provision in early years settings
- Introducing a minimum qualification requirement for all staff working directly with children in pre-school services, and increasing the qualification requirement for pre-school leaders delivering the free pre-school programme
- Providing a Learner Fund to support staff already working in the early years sector to meet the minimum qualification requirements
- Establishing an Early Years National Quality Development Service to provide mentors to support the early years sector in improving quality and assist them in implementing the Síolta Quality Framework and the Aistear Curriculum
- Recruiting a Síolta Co-ordinator and an Aistear Co-ordinator to further develop the Síolta Quality Assurance Programme and the Aistear /Síolta Practice Guide, and to manage and co-ordinate the roll-out of these programmes across the sector. Additional Síolta Mentors and Aistear Tutors will also be recruited from CCCs and NVCOs and trained under this initiative.

Level 3 bolsters these initiatives by providing training courses and training resources for early years practitioners in ECCE settings which are specific to disability issues and strategies to support inclusive practice. Training courses and resources will be provided in accordance with a national training programme which, in turn, will be informed by a baseline survey of training needs across the sector. As such, the training is intended to represent a practical, tailored response to the particular needs identified in any given geographic area or in relation to any specific issue.

The training programme will be developed annually by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, in partnership with the CCCs and the HSE, and in consultation with the Early Years Specialist Service (Access and Inclusion). Once signed-off by the Department, the CCCs will:

- develop local training schedules in consultation with the HSE Children’s Disability Network/ Early Intervention services,
- ensure that available training places are advertised on the dedicated national website, as well as on relevant, individual CCC websites, and
- manage the allocation of course places.

The CCCs will have lead responsibility for local delivery of training, with some training also provided by members of HSE Children’s Disability Network/ Early Intervention services (level 6). In order to ensure a nationally consistent approach, Childcare Committees Ireland (CCI), which already has a national training model in place, will co-ordinate the development and delivery of the training programmes.

B4. Level 4- Expert Educational Advice and Mentoring

Service providers can avail of expert advice and mentoring support from Early Years Specialists (Access and Inclusion) operating within the national Early Years Quality

Development Service. It must be emphasised that this specialist service is not intended to replace or diminish the role of the provider in serving the child and their family. Rather, it is intended to support the provider, where necessary, in fulfilling this role.

Specialists can be contacted by phone, email or via the online application form.

It will not be necessary to fill out the online application form if support from a Specialist is required over the phone. This support will be provided, however, should the phone support prove inadequate to address matters of concern, the service provider may choose, or be directed to proceed to, an online application in order to receive a higher level of support.

In applying online for the Early Years Specialist (Access and Inclusion) service, service providers, in conjunction with parents, will be asked to provide the following details:

- Name of child and service provider
- DCYA reference number
- Consent from parent for the Early Years Quality Development Service to interact with the child and service provider and to share information with other relevant professionals where this is necessary to prepare and plan for the child's inclusion in the pre-school setting

The application form will also include a simple Access and Inclusion profile (copy available to view on www.preschoolaccess.ie). A Specialist may take a service provider through some of these questions as a guide over the phone or the service provider and the parent can complete the form themselves without any involvement from a third party.

The purpose of the Access and Inclusion profile is to:

- ✓ help the service provider, in partnership with the parent, to ascertain a child's abilities and needs in order to support that child to fully and meaningfully access and participate in the ECCE programme.
- ✓ help the service provider, in partnership with the parent, to ascertain the setting's strengths and challenges in supporting the child to fully and meaningfully access and participate in the ECCE programme.
- ✓ identify the need for expert early years educational advice and support, thus enabling the Early Years Specialists (Access and Inclusion) to prioritise their response.
- ✓ guide the Specialist and the pre-school setting, in supporting the child's access and participation in the ECCE programme.
- ✓ assist in identifying if any additional support may be needed to enable the child's participation in the ECCE setting (Level 4-7).

On receipt of a completed Access and Inclusion profile, the Early Years Specialist (Access and Inclusion) will contact the service provider by phone to discuss and agree what level of support is required.

Where the Specialist determines that telephone support is deemed adequate, support at that level will be provided. Where the Specialist determines that more support is required, i.e. a visit to the service, this higher-level of support will be initiated. Engagement with parents will be part of this process.

Further detail on this process is provided in Box 1 below.

Box 1: AIM Early Years Specialist Support

Support as a result of a telephone request through Pobal Client Support Services

1. An Early Years Specialist responds to a general telephone query from a service provider (child/ren's identity details not disclosed). General support, advice and guidance provided by phone. Child's details are not disclosed unless signed parental consent has been provided and is verified.

Accessing support through Early Years Programme Implementation Platform (PIP) process

2. A Service Provider completes an Access and Inclusion Profile on PIP, in partnership with the parent/guardian/carer in order to access education support and mentoring by an Early Years Specialist (Level 4 support). This may also include an application for Level 5 and/or level 7 supports.
3. Applications are ranked in order of priority, based on the complexity of the child's needs. Better Start AIM Service Coordinators review applications and allocate support which may be phone support or an on-site visit. All applications will be responded to, however, responses will be prioritised on the basis of need. Where more than one application is received from the same provider, the applications will be ranked in order of priority. Where several children with complex needs are enrolled, support will be provided as soon as possible.
4. Early Years Specialist makes contact with the service by phone and specific advice or guidance is provided, based on the child's profile, additional information provided by the service provider and the setting capacity.
5. If phone support is not sufficient to enable the child's access and inclusion, the Early Years Specialist will arrange a visit with the setting. The Service Coordinator will allocate a portion of support hours to the service. The visit may occur either before enrolment or after the child has started in the pre-school, depending on when the application is submitted. The Specialist will review the profile with the provider, make further observations and provide advice and support. The Specialist will support the provider, in consultation with the parent/guardian/carer, to devise an Access and Inclusion Plan for the child. This will outline what actions, adaptations and additional supports may be required to ensure the child's inclusion in the pre-school.
6. The Specialist will also advise and support the provider in relation to making an application for Level 5 (capital) and/or Level 7 (additional capitation) where this is relevant.
7. Where a service provider, in consultation with the parent/guardian/carer and the Early Years Specialist, considers that therapeutic support is critical to the child's access and inclusion, the Specialist will make contact with the HSE through an agreed protocol (Level 6 support).
8. The Specialist will work with the provider over one or more visits (usually no more than 4) to develop adaptations and strategies to ensure the child's inclusion and to progress their Access and Inclusion Plan.
9. The Specialist will also liaise with the NCSE to support the child's transition to Primary school when they have completed the ECCE programme.
10. Ongoing support and monitoring will be carried out by phone, or additional visits if required.

B5. Level 5- Equipment, Appliances and Minor Alterations

A service provider, in conjunction with a parent, can apply for equipment, appliances or a capital grant towards the cost of minor alterations to the pre-school setting. This is done by completing the relevant part of the application form on PIP.

Applicants are encouraged to apply as early as possible for level 5 supports and preferably three months in advance of enrolment of the child in the ECCE setting. This timeframe reflects the need to process applications, as well as the time required to complete minor capital works or arrange for the provision of equipment.

Where the applicants are unsure about the equipment, appliances or minor alterations they may need, they can contact the Early Years Specialist (Access and Inclusion) service for advice. Alternatively, if the child is already in receipt of services from the HSE, then the applicants could contact the HSE for advice.

Categories of Level 5 Applications

Applications for level 5 support will fall into one of the following three categories:

- ❖ Applications for minor alterations
- ❖ Applications for equipment in respect of a visual or hearing impairment
- ❖ Applications for equipment in respect of all other types of disability

The application and approval process for each category is set out below.

❖ Applications for minor alterations

A service provider, in partnership with a parent, may submit an application for a capital grant towards the cost of minor alterations. An application should be accompanied by a short report by a 'designated professional' which indicates the nature of the proposed minor alteration works and confirms:

- a) that the proposed minor alteration works are necessary and are critical to enabling the participation of the child in the ECCE programme in the relevant pre-school, and
- b) that the proposed minor alteration works are compliant with the *Building (Part M Amendment) Regulations 2010*, and

The service provider will also be required to confirm that the pre-school setting will not be rendered non-compliant with the *Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016* as a result of the minor alteration works.

For the purposes of this category, a designated professional is limited to:

- (i) an architect,
- (ii) an engineer,
- (iii) an occupational therapist working for or on behalf of the HSE, or
- (iv) such other category of health and social care professional as may be recognised by Pobal, in consultation with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Health, for the purposes of this scheme.

In the case of the designated professional at (i) or (ii) above, the service provider can apply for a contribution towards the cost of any professional fees. One valid quote for professional

fees should be included with the application. No professional fee will apply in the case of the designated professional at (iii) or (iv) as they will be working by or on behalf of the HSE.

When submitting an application for minor alterations, service providers must adhere to statutory procurement requirements as per Pobal's procurement guidelines. Current requirements are:

- For building works and alterations less than €5,000 one written quotation/tender is required.
- For building works and repairs equal to or in excess of €5,000, a minimum of 3 written quotations/tenders are required.

Service providers are required to source valid⁷ quotations at the application stage and to include the most favourable quote with their application. Where appropriate, Pobal can request the submission of all quotes as part of the appraisal, contracting, payment, reporting and compliance stages.

No alteration costs, or part thereof, which have already been expended or purchased are eligible. All items or services purchased (excluding professional fees) must be post the approval date.

The submitted application will be reviewed by an Appraisal Officer in Pobal, who will firstly establish if the application is complete and meets the initial requirements to be eligible for consideration. These requirements are as follows:

- The service provider is a registered pre-school setting under active contract to deliver the ECCE programme⁸.
- The child qualifies for the ECCE programme or will qualify for the programme from the planned date of enrolment for which completed minor alterations are needed.
- The proposed minor alterations fall within the list of eligible building works maintained by Pobal (see appendix A).
- The report supporting the application has been completed by a designated professional who is registered or accredited by the relevant professional body⁹.
- The report supporting the application relates directly to the child named in the application and to the relevant pre-school setting
- The service provider has confirmed that the minor alteration works remain compliant with the *Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016*.
- Quotes have been provided in line with Pobal procurement guidelines.

⁷ For a quote to be deemed valid it must: (1) be dated within 3 months of the application, (2) be on headed paper, (3) include a VAT number, (4) be clearly itemised and (5) where more than one quote is attached/required, they must be from separate suppliers.

⁸ There may be a small number of cases where a service provider is a registered pre-school setting delivering early childhood care and education but is funded under the CCS or TEC programmes, even in cases where a child qualifies for the ECCE programme. In such circumstances, the child should not be excluded from accessing services and supports under AIM and, so, the application should not be rejected on the grounds that the provider is not under contract to deliver the ECCE programme.

⁹ An architect must be registered on the register of architects maintained by the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland, an engineer must be registered with Engineers Ireland as a Chartered Engineer CEng MIEI or an Associate Engineer AEng MIEI or an Engineering Technician EngTech MIEI or a Fellow CEng FIEI, and an occupational therapist must be registered with the Health and Social Care Professionals Council (CORU).

- The proposed minor alterations have not already been funded by way of the Early Years Capital 2013 Strand 2 Disability Access from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

In the case of a healthcare professional (such as an occupational therapist or physiotherapist), it may be noted that the definition of designated professional is limited to therapists working for or on behalf of the HSE. This reflects the holistic, integrated approach recommended in the Report of the Inter-Departmental Group, whereby services and supports would be prescribed and provided in a joined-up, child-centered way by a multi-disciplinary HSE team, i.e. it should support a situation where the same team is assessing and considering the child's needs across the home, pre-school and other settings. This approach also takes account of important guiding principles of equity and 'needs-driven' which underpin the model, i.e. access to supports under the model should not be affected by ability to pay. As such, reports from healthcare professionals working in a private capacity will not be accepted for the purposes of applications for level 5 support.

Where an application is incomplete, it will be immediately referred back to the applicant who will be informed that the application is incomplete and cannot be considered further. However, the applicant will have the opportunity to resubmit as appropriate, e.g. an applicant could remedy any omissions in the original application and resubmit.

Where an application fails to meet the above eligibility requirements, this will be immediately communicated to the applicant who will be informed that the application is ineligible and cannot be considered further. However, the applicant will have the opportunity to submit a new application form via PIP. The applicant will also be informed of their right to seek verbal feedback in the first instance and, if not satisfied by this feedback, to seek a review of the Appraisal Officer's decision in the matter.

Where an application is complete and eligible, it will be assessed and a decision will then be made by the Deciding Officer who will be a separate individual to the Appraisal Officer. The Deciding Officer may decide to 'part-fund' an application. The Deciding Officer will reach a decision on the basis set out below.

An application will be approved, subject to funding, where:

- (i) an Appraisal Officer confirms that an application is complete and meets initial eligibility requirements, and
- (ii) the attached report by the designated professional confirms the items at a) – b) above, and
- (iii) the Deciding Officer is satisfied that no further information is required in relation to the application.

An application will be rejected where¹⁰:

- (i) the attached report by the designated professional fails to confirm the items at a) – b) above, and

¹⁰ Where an application is incomplete or fails to meet initial eligibility requirements, it will not be considered by the Deciding Officer. However, the applicant may seek a review.

- (ii) the Deciding Officer is satisfied that no further information is required in relation to the application.

Before reaching a decision, the Deciding Officer may seek additional information from the Appraisal Officer, the applicants¹¹, an Early Years Specialist (Access and Inclusion) or from the relevant City or County Childcare Committee (CCC). Where that further information causes an Appraisal Officer or the designated professional to alter their conclusion, then the Deciding Officer should take this new conclusion into account and reach a decision in accordance with the criteria set out above.

Having reached a decision, Pobal will communicate this to the service provider. Where the decision is to approve, the service provider will be notified and the decision will be forwarded to the Contracts Team where arrangements will be made for the provision of a minor capital grant to support the alteration work. This grant will, where applicable, include a fixed maximum amount towards the professional fees incurred by the service provider in obtaining the designated professional's report. The maximum grant payable under the scheme is capped at €7,000 inclusive of VAT. This can include a maximum contribution towards the cost of professional fees of €300 inclusive of VAT. In other words, the maximum grant payable to cover both minor alterations and professional fees cannot exceed €7,000 including VAT.

Where the decision is not to approve an application under this section, the service provider will be informed of his/ her right to verbal feedback in the first instance and, if not satisfied with this feedback, to seek a review.

❖ **Applications for equipment in respect of a visual or hearing impairment**

A service provider, in partnership with a parent, may submit an application for equipment in respect of a visual or hearing impairment. An application should be accompanied by a short report¹² by a designated professional which specifies the precise equipment sought and confirms:

- a) that the proposed equipment is necessary and critical to enabling the participation of the child in the ECCE programme in the relevant pre-school, and
- b) that the proposed equipment is not already available in the pre-school setting or capable of being transferred to and used in the pre-school setting.

For the purposes of this category, a designated professional is limited to:

- (i) visiting teacher, or
- (ii) an occupational therapist working for, or on behalf of, the HSE, or
- (iii) a speech and language therapist working for, or on behalf of, the HSE.

The submitted application will be reviewed by an Appraisal Officer in Pobal, who will firstly establish if the application is complete and meets the initial requirements to be eligible for consideration. These requirements are as follows:

¹¹ This can include any designated professional who has submitted a report in support of an application.

¹² In the case of the Visiting Teacher, this report is generally termed a 'letter of recommendation'.

- The service provider is a registered pre-school setting under contract to deliver the ECCE programme.
- The child qualifies for the ECCE programme or will qualify for the programme from the planned date of enrolment for which the equipment is needed.
- The proposed equipment falls within the list of eligible equipment maintained by Pobal (see appendix B).
- The report supporting the application has been completed by a visiting teacher or a registered occupational therapist or speech and language therapist working for, or on behalf of, the HSE.

Where an application is incomplete, it will be immediately referred back to the applicant who will be informed that the application is incomplete and cannot be considered further. However, the applicant will have the opportunity to resubmit as appropriate, e.g. an applicant could remedy any omissions in the original application and resubmit.

Where an application fails to meet the above eligibility requirements, this will be immediately communicated to the applicant who will be informed that the application is ineligible and cannot be considered further. However, the applicant will have the opportunity to submit a new application form via PIP. The applicant will also be informed of their right to verbal feedback in the first instance and, if not satisfied, to seek a review of the Appraisal Officer's decision in the matter.

Where an application is complete and eligible, it will be assessed and a decision will then be made by the Deciding Officer who will be a separate individual to the Appraisal Officer. The Deciding Officer will reach a decision on the basis set out below.

An application will be approved, subject to funding, where:

- (i) an Appraisal Officer confirms that an application is complete and meets initial eligibility requirements, and
- (ii) the attached report by the designated professional confirms the items at a) and b) above, and
- (iii) the Deciding Officer is satisfied that no further information is required in relation to the application.

An application will be rejected where:

- (i) the attached report by the designated professional fails to confirm the items at a) and b) above, and
- (ii) the Deciding Officer is satisfied that no further information is required in relation to the application.

Before reaching a decision, the Deciding Officer may seek additional information from the Appraisal Officer, the applicants¹³, an Early Years Specialist (Access and Inclusion) or from the relevant City or County Childcare Committee (CCC). Where that further information causes an Appraisal Officer or a designated professional to alter their conclusion, then the

¹³ This can include any designated professional who has submitted a report in support of an application.

Deciding Officer should take this new conclusion into account and reach a decision in accordance with the criteria set out above.

Having reached a decision, Pobal will communicate this to the service provider. Where the decision is to approve, the service provider will be notified of this and advised that arrangements will be made for provision of the equipment. Where the decision is not to approve, the service provider will be informed of his/ her right to verbal feedback in the first instance and, if not satisfied with this feedback, to seek a review.

❖ Applications for equipment for all other types of disability

A service provider, in partnership with a parent, may submit an application for all other types of equipment which may be required for a child with a disability. An application should be accompanied by a short report by a designated professional which specifies the precise equipment sought and confirms:

- a) that the proposed equipment is necessary and critical to enabling the participation of the child in the ECCE programme in the relevant pre-school, and
- b) that the proposed equipment is not already available in the pre-school setting or capable of being transferred to and used in the pre-school setting.

For the purposes of this category, a designated professional is limited to:

- (i) an occupational therapist working for, or on behalf of, the HSE, or
- (ii) a physiotherapist working for, or on behalf of, the HSE.
- (iii) a speech and language therapist working for, or on behalf of, the HSE, or
- (iv) such other category of health and social care professional as may be recognised by Pobal, in consultation with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Health, for the purposes of this scheme.

The submitted application will be reviewed by an Appraisal Officer in Pobal, who will firstly establish if the application is complete and meets the initial requirements to be eligible for consideration. These requirements are as follows:

- The service provider is a registered pre-school setting under contract to deliver the ECCE programme.
- The child qualifies for the ECCE programme or will qualify for the programme from the planned date of enrolment for which the equipment is needed.
- The proposed equipment falls within the list of eligible equipment maintained by Pobal (see appendix B).
- The report supporting the application has been completed by a registered occupational therapist or physiotherapist working for, or on behalf of, the HSE.

Where an application is incomplete, it will be immediately referred back to the applicant who will be informed that the application is incomplete and cannot be considered further. However, the applicant will have the opportunity to resubmit as appropriate, e.g. an applicant could remedy any omissions in the original application and resubmit.

Where an application fails to meet the above eligibility requirements, this will be immediately communicated to the applicant who will be informed that the application is ineligible and cannot be considered further. However, the applicant will have the opportunity

to submit a new application on PIP. The applicant will also be informed of their right to seek verbal feedback in the first instance and, if not satisfied with this feedback, a review of the Appraisal Officer's decision in the matter.

Where an application is complete and eligible, it will be assessed and a decision will then be made by the Deciding Officer who will be a separate individual to the Appraisal Officer. The Deciding Officer will reach a decision on the basis set out below.

An application will be approved, subject to funding, where:

- (i) an Appraisal Officer confirms that an application is complete and meets initial eligibility requirements, and
- (ii) the attached report by the designated professional confirms the items at a) and b) above, and
- (iii) the Deciding Officer is satisfied that no further information is required in relation to the application.

An application will be rejected where:

- (i) the attached report by the designated professional fails to confirm the items at a) and b) above, and
- (ii) the Deciding Officer is satisfied that no further information is required in relation to the application.

Before reaching a decision, the Deciding Officer may seek additional information from the Appraisal Officer, the applicants¹⁴, an Early Years Specialist (Access and Inclusion) or from the relevant City or County Childcare Committee (CCC). Where that further information causes an Appraisal Officer or designated professional to alter their conclusion, then the Deciding Officer should take this new conclusion into account and reach a decision in accordance with the criteria set out above.

Having reached a decision, Pobal will communicate this to the service provider. Where the decision is to approve, the service provider will be notified and arrangements will be made for the provision of the equipment. Where the decision is not to approve, the service provider will be informed of his/ her right to verbal feedback in the first instance and, if not satisfied with this feedback, to seek a review.

Provision of Equipment

Where an application for equipment is approved, Pobal will arrange for the equipment to be procured and directly delivered to the relevant pre-school.

For the purposes of the Access and Inclusion Model, Pobal will provide equipment through the national HSE- Health Business Service Procurement systems.

Having approved a request for equipment under level 5, Pobal will forward details of that request to Health Business Service (HBS) Procurement in the agreed format.

¹⁴ This can include any designated professional who has submitted a report in support of an application.

HBS Procurement will firstly review live contracts to establish if the required equipment can be obtained under one of these contracts. If so, they will forward the details of the contract to Pobal. Pobal will then raise a purchase order for the item and issue it to the supplier, who will deliver the relevant equipment directly to the setting. This arrangement could involve the purchase or the rental of the equipment depending on the nature of the contract.

Where the required equipment cannot be obtained under an existing live contract, HBS Procurement will request quotes in line with standard procurement practice. HBS Procurement will assess the returned quotations will forward the most favourable option to Pobal. If Pobal is satisfied with the quote, having regard to its own internal guidelines, it will proceed to order and arrange for delivery of the equipment. Rental options will also be considered as part of this process.

There may be situations where a company, in responding to a request for quotation, seeks payment for assessing the setting/child's needs as part of its tender. Where such a payment is requested and agreed to in advance, Pobal will process this request as part of the application.

Ensuring a quality service and continuity for children:

The HBS tendering processes relating to AIM will take into consideration:

- ✓ the nature of the equipment,
- ✓ the lifecycle of the equipment in the context of the age of the child,
- ✓ the need for the supplier to provide training in relation to correct use of the equipment
- ✓ spare part provision,
- ✓ maintenance and service .

HBS will also build in a retrieval and disposal clause into contracts where relevant and where it is feasible to do so.

Where a rental arrangement applies, it is the policy intent to negotiate additional rental years should this become a requirement. This could arise, for example, in a situation where a piece of equipment may be subject to rental for 1-2 years and where the child may remain in the setting for a longer period or where a decision is made that the piece of equipment, specific to the needs of the child, can transition with the child into primary school.

Insurance:

In line with HBS Procurement standard practice, details of the manufacturer's insurance is required as part of the quotation and forms part of the contract for 'on-contract' products. This insurance covers public liability subject to correct usage of the item procured. All equipment will be insured against fire and theft by Pobal.

As the owners of the equipment, Pobal will retain and manage an Asset Register. However, where equipment is no longer needed, Pobal will agree to surrender the equipment to the HSE so that it becomes available for general re-use.

Arrangements between Pobal and HSE- HBS Procurement are set out in a service level agreement between the two parties, which is underpinned by a Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and HSE- HSB Procurement. There is agreement to review and refine arrangements as system rolls out. In particular, the use of recycled equipment will become an option in 2017 (Phase2).

Budget Management

Pobal will have one ring-fenced annual budget to cover all three categories of level 5 supports. It will be important that this budget is used as efficiently and flexibly as possible across the three categories and in line with identified needs.

All approved applications in respect of level 5 supports which are submitted by Deciding Officers to the Finance Officer should be time and date-stamped and should be approved for funding in strict chronological order. This approach reflects the fact that all applications will have been assessed on the same, standardised basis and will have been deemed critical to participation. Accordingly, the only robust alternative to chronological order would involve prioritising applications based on a further specialist assessment of each individual case.

Applicants should be notified once funding has been approved and should be advised of next steps. Where the budget is exhausted, applications will remain active and, as funding becomes available, they will continue to be approved for funding on the basis of strict chronological order, assuming that the requirement for the level 5 support remains valid, eg. the child is still in the relevant pre-school setting.

At the beginning of each financial year, Pobal will profile estimated expenditure by month under level 5 and will then monitor actual outturn against this estimate. While this will be difficult in the initial phase of the model, over time, monthly expenditure trends will emerge which will support more accurate profiling and management of expenditure.

Review of Decision where the decision is to decline application.

The Service Provider, in conjunction with the parent, will have the right to request verbal feedback in the first instance and, if not satisfied with this feedback, to request a review.

The membership of the Review Team will be different from those Appraisal Officers and Deciding Officers who have been engaged with the initial decision making in relation to the application for supports.

The review process will be documented in detail by Pobal. It will involve a desktop review of the application paperwork, the process followed in managing the application from receipt to final decision, and the decision reached. It will not involve fresh assessments or setting visits by specialists, healthcare professionals or any other official involved in the application process. However, any new information submitted by the applicant can be taken into account, if applicable.

The decision of the Review Team will be final and the decision will be relayed to the service provider and the parent. If further, new information comes to hand following this decision, a new application can be submitted via PIP.

Joint Applications for Multiple Level 5 Supports

In some cases, a pre-school setting may need to apply for two inter-dependent categories of level 5 support, eg. a minor alteration and specialised equipment. In this instance, the applicant should flag the relationship between the two applications and should seek to ensure that there is consistency across the supporting reports, eg. the same designated professional might complete one report covering both applications or the report for minor alterations might reference and take account of the report for specialised equipment and vice versa.

B6. Level 6- Therapeutic and Health Intervention

Where a service provider, in conjunction with a parent, considers that a child may need therapeutic support in order to access and participate in pre-school, they can apply through level 4 for this support by completing the Access and Inclusion profile. The Early Years Specialist Service (Access and Inclusion) will consider whether it can provide assistance directly or whether therapeutic input is likely to be required and will initiate contact ('a referral') to the HSE where necessary. In order to support this referral process, the Early Years Specialist will have access to an agreed named point of contact for each CHO area in respect of AIM. This agreed point of contact will be responsible for ensuring that the case is referred to the appropriate team/ service which may be a Children's Network Disability Team (CNDT), Primary Care Service (PC) or voluntary agency¹⁵.

When making a referral, the Early Years Specialist will share the Access and Inclusion Profile with the HSE. The HSE, in turn, will acknowledge receipt of the referral and will keep the Early Years Specialist informed regarding proposed strategies and supports which will be made available.

The provision of supports under level 6 will be grounded in a needs-based approach, specifically addressing the needs of the child which are critical to their meaningful participation in the ECCE programme. In other words, children seeking to access therapeutic supports (level 6) under the model will not require formal diagnosis.

The model of service delivery will be a stepped care approach ranging from universal strategies to more specific targeted individual interventions. The stepped care approach is a well-recognised, effective model implemented by many services which could be applied to the pre-school setting. Within this model, service delivery is aimed at:

- prevention,
- early intervention,
- brief, generic interventions,
- more individually tailored one to one intervention.

It is anticipated that where existing clinical information such as reports and assessment results are available, therapists will be better placed to respond to requests from level 4. For children where no clinical information exists, this may present more of a challenge to health services as the child's individual needs will not be known to the health providers. In these situations health providers will address the child's needs through universal strategies, such as provision of information, advice packs, leaflets and practical guidelines, training of parents or pre-school leaders to understand the child's needs and to respond appropriately, professional advice and support on the phone or by email, access for staff to group therapeutic programmes or workshops and drop in consultation clinics. Where universal strategies are not working and it is clear that the placement is failing for the child, this will need to be looked at on a case by case basis. In such cases, it is likely that individual assessment of the presenting needs will be required in order to provide individual, tailor-made interventions.

The HSE will advise the Early Years Specialist of all supports delivered on foot of a referral. This will enable the Early Years Specialists to provide informed ongoing support to the child

¹⁵ In the case of HSE services which are moving towards reconfiguration, the case will be referred to the appropriate and relevant team/ service.

and the setting, including monitoring progress against the child's Individual Access and Inclusion Plan.

B7. Level 7- Additional Capitation

A service provider, in conjunction with a parent, can apply for additional capitation where the provider considers that this is likely to be critical to ensuring a child's participation in the ECCE programme in their pre-school setting. This is done by completing the relevant part of the application form on PIP, namely the Access and Inclusion Profile and, within the profile, the level 7 service request.

With regard to initial eligibility requirements, applications will be considered eligible for consideration if:

- The service provider is a registered pre-school setting under contract to deliver the ECCE programme.
- The child qualifies for the ECCE programme or will qualify for the programme from the planned date of enrolment for which the additional capitation is needed.

Where an application is deemed not to meet the initial eligibility requirements, a service provider can contact Pobal client services for further assistance and will also have a right to seek a review of their case.

Where an application is complete and eligible, it will be referred to the Early Years Specialist (Access and Inclusion) service who will visit the service provider and child with a view to identifying whether a level 7 support is needed. In order to determine this, the Specialist will:

- complete the Access and Inclusion Profile as a means of providing a clear and objective assessment of both the child's and the settings strengths, abilities and needs,
- determine whether all other levels and supports have been considered and appropriately utilised,
- determine whether the provision of additional capitation would result in an undesirable balance of staff and children as indicated by any National Early Years Quality Development Service guidelines¹⁶
- obtain other expert input from level 6 and CCCs as necessary.

Having undertaken all of the above, the Specialist will offer an evidence informed view as to whether a level 7 support is critical to the child's participation in the pre-school setting. The view will be based on the rating obtained from the completed Access and Inclusion profile, aligned with expert judgement of the Specialist in conjunction with any other expert advice sought by the Specialist. This process is consistent with the recommendation of the Inter-Departmental Group which highlights that, in addition to the insights of the parent and pre-school practitioner, experience in other sectors "shows the importance of oversight from professionals unknown to the child, family or provider in order to ensure a fully objective and

¹⁶ It has been stated that evidence suggests that a staff : child ratio which is too low, i.e. too many adults in the room, is not good practice and does not support quality service provision. Accordingly, the Better Start service in Pobal will produce its own internal guidance on this issue. This will help to inform whether additional assistance would be beneficial or could result in too many adults in the setting. This could be particularly relevant in cases where a service provider has a number of children with complex disabilities and has made more than one application for level 7 support.

transparent assessment. This experience will also be reflected in the design of the application process.”

Where the Specialist’s view is that a level 7 support is critical to a child’s participation in the pre-school setting, the Specialist will further consider the degree of level 7 support required having regard to whether the child, in the context of the environment, has:

- **Complex needs** which necessitate that a setting can supplement their staffing by approx. 10 additional staff hours per week so that the Inclusion Co-ordinator or a key worker can spend more time working directly with the child or have more non-contact time with relevant health and social care professionals involved in the child’s case,

or

- **Highly complex needs** which necessitate that a setting can supplement their staffing by approx. 15 additional staff hours per week, thereby reducing the staff: child ratio for the full duration of the weekly ECCE service and ensuring that there is constantly additional support available where this is critical due to, for example, monitoring of a medical condition or the need for intensive 1: 1 support.

In many circumstances, an Appraisal Officer may receive an application which already includes the input and expert view of the Specialist (Access and Inclusion). This could arise where a Specialist has already been working with the service provider and parent under level 4. In this instance, the Appraisal Officer would review the application to establish that it is complete and meets the initial requirements to be eligible for consideration.

Once an application is complete and eligible, including the completed form from the Early Years Specialist (Access and Inclusion), the Appraisal Officer will refer the application to the Deciding Officer, who will be a desktop administrator within Pobal, for final decision.

The Deciding Officer will reach a decision on the basis set out below.

An application will be approved, subject to funding, where:

- (i) an Appraisal Officer confirms that an application is complete and meets initial eligibility requirements, and
- (ii) an Early Years Access and Inclusion Specialist confirms that it is his or her view that a level 7 support is critical to enable the child’s participation in the pre-school, and
- (iii) the Deciding Officer is satisfied that no further information is required in relation to the application.

An application will be rejected where:

- (i) an Early Years Access and Inclusion Specialist confirms that it is her or her view that a level 7 support is not critical to enable the child’s participation in the pre-school and/or that other supports have not been sufficiently considered and utilised, and
- (ii) the Deciding Officer is satisfied that no further information is required in relation to the application.

Before reaching a decision, the Deciding Officer may revert to the Appraisal Officer or the Early Years Specialist (Access and Inclusion) seeking further information. Where that further information causes an Appraisal Officer or an Access and Inclusion Specialist to alter their conclusion, then the Deciding Officer should take this new conclusion into account and reach a decision in accordance with the criteria set out above.

In deciding to grant a level 7 application, the Deciding Officer will also decide the rate of the level 7 capitation, having regard to the view of the Specialist as to whether the needs are complex or highly complex (see above). Where it is decided that the needs are complex, the rate of additional capitation payable will not exceed €130 per child, per week. Where it is decided that the needs are highly complex, the rate of additional capitation payable will not exceed €195 per child per week.

Where the decision is to approve, the service provider and parent will be notified by Pobal of the approval and of the basis on which the additional capitation is being approved, i.e. the type of support which should be provided on foot of the additional capitation, supervision arrangements etc, taking into account any views expressed by the parent or service provider. For example, it is envisaged that, generally, the additional capitation would allow for a reduction in the staff: child ratio such that the Inclusion Co-ordinator, pre-school manager or another experienced staff member could dedicate more time and attention to the child in question. At the same time, the decision to approve will be forwarded by the Deciding Officer to the Finance Manager within Pobal.

The Finance Manager will have responsibility for a ring-fenced annual budget for level 7 and will arrange for the additional capitation to be paid¹⁷ on a strict chronological order, i.e. once an approved application is received, it is time and date stamped and placed in strict chronological order for payment purposes. This approach reflects the fact that all applications will have been assessed on the same, standardised basis and will have been deemed critical to participation. Accordingly, the only robust alternative to chronological order would involve prioritising applications based on a further specialist assessment of each individual case.

Once the budget cap is reached, approved applications will remain active and, as funding becomes available, they will continue to be approved for funding on the basis of strict chronological order, assuming that the requirement for the level 7 support remains valid, eg. the child is still in the relevant pre-school setting.

At the beginning of each financial year, Pobal will profile estimated expenditure by month under level 7 and will then monitor actual outturn against this estimate. While this will be difficult in the initial phase of the model, over time, monthly expenditure trends will emerge which will support more accurate profiling and management of expenditure.

Where the decision is not to approve, the service provider will be informed of his/ her right to verbal feedback in the first instance and, if not satisfied with this feedback, to seek a review. In practical terms, a decision not to approve is also likely to be accompanied by a commitment to offer other supports such as mentoring under level 4 or access to therapeutic interventions under level 6.

¹⁷ The payment will be activated on PIP and will be applied to a named child's registration.

Date of Payment of Additional Capitation

Where an application for additional capitation is approved, this will be paid from the date of enrolment or the date on which the application is approved, whichever is the later. Backdating of payments will not be permitted.

Payment of Additional Capitation on a Pro-rata Basis

In administering the level 7 scheme of additional capitation, Pobal has a duty to ensure value for money in the disbursement of public funds and to ensure that the maximum number of children can benefit from available funding. Accordingly, a Deciding Officer may grant an additional level 7 capitation on a pro-rata basis where there is a clear justification for doing so. This could arise where a child is not able to attend the service on a full-time basis or where other supports are available on a part-time basis.

Review of Decision where the decision is to decline application.

The Service Provider, in conjunction with the parent, will have the right to request a review.

The membership of the Review Team will be different from those Appraisal Officers and Deciding Officers who have been engaged with the initial decision making in relation to the application for supports.

The review process will be documented in detail by Pobal. It will involve a desktop review of the application paperwork, the process followed in managing the application from receipt to final decision, and the decision reached. It will not involve fresh assessments or setting visits by specialists, healthcare professionals or any other official involved in the application process. However, any new information submitted by the applicant can be taken into account, if applicable.

The decision of the Review Team will be final and the decision will be relayed to the service provider and the parent. If further, new information comes to hand following this decision, a new application can be made via PIP.

Part C- Implementation and Evaluation

The Access and Inclusion Model will be introduced from June 2016 to allow parents and providers to plan for September 2016 enrolments and to enable AIM supports and services to be funded from September 2016 onwards. Applications will remain open throughout the year although, in the case of children with more complex disabilities, service providers and parents are encouraged to apply early.

The model is a highly collaborative, cross-Government initiative, with implementation shared across a number of different bodies. Each body will ensure that services are delivered in line with its own quality assurance, monitoring and compliance arrangements. As the lead administrator for levels 5 and 7 supports, Pobal will manage the award of grants towards minor alterations and additional capitation in accordance with its existing procedures on monitoring, reporting and compliance.

Implementation of AIM will be overseen by a Cross-Sectoral Implementation Group comprising representatives from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Health, Pobal, HSE, Tusla, Childcare Committees Ireland, the National Early Years Quality Development Service (Better Start), the National Council for Special Education, the National Disability Authority and a parent's representative.

The model will be subject to regular review in its initial years, with a full formal evaluation undertaken after 3 years.

Appendix A

Minor Alterations Eligible for Funding

Minor Works associated with Access in/Out of preschool setting
Minor Works associated with access to and from play areas
Minor works associated with reconfiguration of toilet/changing areas
Minor works associated with reconfiguration of ECCE room to facilitate ease of access and quiet space
Other as specified by Applicant

Appendix B

Equipment and Appliances Eligible for Funding

Categories	Description
Portable ramp	Portable or temporary threshold type ramps
Specialised chairs	Adjustable chairs with accessories- i.e., footrests, armrests, backrests, pommel seats, pelvic cushions. Also, adjustable benches
Changing Table/nursing bench	Height-adjustable changing table or nursing bench
Hoists and slings	Mobile hoists and slings for transferring children
Positioning supports	Corner chairs, wedges, rolls, Move-n-sit cushions
Toileting supports	Toileting supports, such as; adapted toilet seats, toilet support cushions, adjustable arm rests and footrests, aperture ring reducers, over-toilet chair, potty and commode – stand alone with arms and footrests
Therapy related items	Therapy mats Items to develop balance or coordination (therapy / peanut balls, etc) Multi-sensory items
Gait trainers, standers and standing frames	Gait trainers designed to develop balance and help children to learn to walk unassisted. Standers and standing frames support children with significant mobility issues to stand for periods of the day.
Assistive Technology & Equipment for children who are deaf/hearing impaired or blind/visually impaired	Equipment for pupils who have been assessed as having a visual or hearing impairment that requires specialist equipment in order to access the ECCE curriculum
Duplicate items	In general items which a child

	requires outside the ECCE setting will not be eligible under this scheme. However, where a piece of equipment is critical to a child's participation in the ECCE programme but cannot be transported from home a duplicate item may be eligible.
Play & learning material	While it is expected that ECCE setting will have a range of toys and learning material suitable to all children, including children less developed in some areas of development than their peers, adapted or therapy related toys and learning material may be eligible under this scheme.
Other	Equipment not listed under the categories above should be applied for under this category. Equipment applied for under the "Other" will be considered on a case-by-case basis. Funding decisions will arrived at based on supporting material supplied.