



An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth



AIM Rules 2023/2024

Please note that information contained within these rules is subject to change by the DCEDIY



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Glossary of Terms

“**AIM**” means the Access and Inclusion Model.

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

“**ASD**” means autism spectrum disorder.

“**Better Start**” is a national initiative established by the DCEDIY and hosted by Pobal. Better Start promotes quality and inclusion in Early Learning and Care (ELC) settings for children from birth to 6 years of age.

“**Capitation**” means the rate of funding paid by the Scheme Administrator to an approved pre-school provider on behalf of the Minister for the provision of AIM.

“**CCC**” means City/County Childcare Committee.

“**CCSP**” means Community Childcare Subvention Scheme Plus. CCSP closed to new registrations in 2019 upon the introduction of NCS.

“**CORU**” means Health and Social Care Professionals Council.

“**DCEDIY**” means the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

“**DCYA Reference Number**” is now referred to as the Service Reference Number.

“**DE**” means The Department of Education.

“**DoH**” means the Department of Health.

“**Early Years’ Service**” as defined in the Child and Family Agency Act 2013, means a service providing a pre-school service and/or a school age service.

“**ECCE**” means the Early Childhood Care and Education programme. Further information including ECCE

programme rules are available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2459ee-early-childhood-care-and-education-programme-ecce/>

“**ELC**” means Early Learning and Care.

“**Early Start**” means a 1-year preventative intervention scheme offered in selected schools in designated disadvantaged areas. The objective of this pre-school programme is to tackle educational disadvantage by targeting children who are at risk of not reaching their potential within the school system. The programme is managed, funded and evaluated by the Department of Education.

“**EY HIVE**” means the service provider portal for the early years programmes.

“**EYS**” means Early Years Specialist.

“**HSE**” means the Health Services Executive.

“**Home Tuition Grant Scheme**” means a scheme which provides educational support within the home environment to eligible students who are unable to attend an educational setting. Three categories of home tuition are provided under the scheme which are: special educational needs and medical grounds, reasons other than special educational needs and medical grounds and maternity-related absences. The Home Tuition Grant Scheme is managed, funded and evaluated by the Department of Education.

“**INCO**” means Inclusion Coordinator.

“**LINC**” means the Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years programme. Further information available on: www.lincprogramme.ie.

“**MIC**” means Mary Immaculate Institute.

“**Minister**” means the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

“**NCS**” means the National Childcare Scheme.

“**NCSE**” means National Council for Special Education.

“**NFQ**” means National Framework of Qualifications.

“**Pobal**” means the organization appointed by the Minister to administer the various childcare programmes on behalf of the DCEDIY.

“**PPSN**” means Personal Public Services Number.

“**Registration**” means the point at which an approved childcare provider adds a child to the programme via the provider portal.

“**SAC**” means School Age Childcare.

“**Service**” means a Tusla registered ELC or SAC childcare setting.

“**SOR**” means Service Observation Review.

“**TCAN**” means Tax Clearance Access Number.

“**TRN**” means Tax Registration Number.

“**The Rutland Street Pre-school Project**” means the 2-year pre-primary programme which caters for children aged between 3-5 years. Although not part of Early Start, it was used to pilot many of the approaches later incorporated in the Early Start project.

“Tusla” means the Child and Family Agency.

1 Overview of AIM

The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) is a model of supports designed to ensure that children with disabilities can access the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. Its goal is to empower Early Learning and Care (ELC) providers to deliver an inclusive pre-school experience, ensuring that every eligible child can meaningfully participate in the ECCE programme and reap the benefits of quality early years care and education.

AIM is a child-centred model, involving seven levels of support, moving from universal to targeted, based on the needs of the child and the pre-school service. It offers tailored, practical supports based on need and does not require a formal diagnosis of disability.

2 Eligibility for AIM and definitions

2.1 Registration on ECCE programme or other eligible DCEDIY programme.

AIM is designed to ensure that children with disabilities can participate in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme. As such, in order for a child to access AIM supports, s/he must be registered on the ECCE programme in an ECCE-registered pre-school service or be eligible to avail of the ECCE programme and be registered and approved on the Community Childcare Subvention Plus (CCSP) scheme. The maximum number of hours of support available in the case of AIM Level 7 additional assistance is 15 hours per week, in line with full time attendance in ECCE.

In 2019, CCSP was replaced by the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) and no new registrations can be made under the CCSP Saver Programme. “**CCSP Saver**” for the purposes of the 2023/2024 programme year, means a person who is eligible and was in attendance and retained a registration under the CCSP Saver Programme 2022/2023 and who did not leave the CCSP Saver Programme to register for NCS.

2.2 Age of eligible child

Eligibility for AIM supports depends on the ECCE Programme rules. For eligibility details, including age criteria, please refer to the ECCE Programme rules 2023/2024 available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2459ee-early-childhood-care-and-education-programme-ecce/>

2.3 Diagnosis of disability

The Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) is a needs-based model and, as such, does not require a formal diagnosis of disability. Where a child does have a formal diagnosis of disability, this should be included in his or her Access and Inclusion Profile (the application form for accessing targeted AIM supports – see 5.1). However, a formal diagnosis of disability does not guarantee additional supports

under AIM, as it may be found that existing supports are sufficient to ensure a child's meaningful participation in the ECCE programme.

2.4 Definition of disability

For the purposes of the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), disability is defined as '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'. This 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 AIM, 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.

2.5 Eligibility for targeted supports under AIM Levels 5, 6 and 7

In order to qualify for targeted supports under AIM Levels 5, 6 and 7, these supports must be found to be critical to the child's participation in the ECCE programme.

2.6 Definition of critical to participation

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

- is unable to access the pre-school service due to environmental barriers,
- is unable to commence the ECCE programme,
- is unable to remain on the ECCE programme, or
- 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 supports will help to ensure that the child can access and meaningfully participate in the ECCE programme.

3 Availing of other State supports

When applying for targeted AIM supports, parents and service providers are requested to inform Better Start of any other supports already in place for the child. This may include supports provided by the Department of Education (DE) (e.g. Home Tuition Grant Scheme), or supports or grants provided by the HSE (either directly or by voluntary agencies on behalf of the HSE).

3.1 Supports provided by the Department of Education

The Department of Education (DE) supports a limited range of other pre-school provision, including:

- Autism/ASD Early Intervention classes in mainstream and special schools
- The Home Tuition Grant Scheme
- Early Start
- The Rutland Street Pre-school Project

Children availing of ECCE are not eligible to access other pre-school provision funded by the Department of Education (DE) at the same time. In certain circumstances, children availing of the Department of Education (DE) Home Tuition Grant Scheme may also access a pre-school service supported by the ECCE programme. Further detail is set out at 3.1.1 below.

3.1.1 Home Tuition Grant Scheme

The Department of Education (DE) administers the Home Tuition Grant Scheme, which provides funding towards the provision of a compensatory educational service for children who, for a number of specific reasons, are unable to attend pre-school and primary school. This includes early educational intervention for children with autism who meet the scheme's eligibility criteria. In certain circumstances, children availing of the Department of Education (DE) Home Tuition Grant scheme may also access a pre-school service supported by the ECCE programme. In such circumstances, the number of tuition hours funded under the Department of Education (DE) Home Tuition Grant scheme will be reduced to reflect hours of attendance in ECCE. Home Tuition Circular 0046/2023 and application forms are available through the following link: <https://www.gov.ie/en/circular/67f37-home-tuition-grant-scheme-20232024-special-education-component/>.

Please contact the DE Home Tuition Section for further information. Telephone: 090 648 4187.
Email address: special_education@education.gov.ie

3.2 HSE-funded supports in mainstream pre-school

Where HSE or HSE-funded services provide a grant directly to the service provider to bring in additional assistance in relation to a child attending the pre-school session and the grant is lower than that paid through AIM, a top up may be applied for through AIM to cover the difference.

4 AIM Level 1: Inclusion Coordinators

4.1 Eligibility to participate in the LINC Programme

Full information on eligibility criteria to participate in the LINC Programme, including frequently asked questions, can be found on the programme's website, www.lincprogramme.ie.

4.2 Eligibility to be an Inclusion Coordinator

The following eligibility criteria apply to the role of Inclusion Coordinator.

The staff member who wishes to become an Inclusion Coordinator must:

- Have a LINC Graduate ID (previously their LINC student ID) issued by Mary Immaculate College, Limerick that allows for verification by Pobal that they have successfully completed the Leadership for Inclusion in the Early Years (LINC) Level 6 Special Purpose Award;
- Be working in the service to which the increased capitation rate applies;
- Complete and sign the Inclusion Coordinator declaration; and
- Be appointed as Inclusion Coordinator in one service only.

The service provider must:

- Be a registered service under active DCEDIY contract to deliver the ECCE or CCSP programmes,
- Ensure that the child or children to whom the increased capitation relates are registered on the ECCE programme, or are eligible for ECCE and registered on CCSP and are in a pre-school room.
- Be tax compliant with a Tax Clearance Access Number (TCAN) and Tax Registration Number (TRN).
- Fully complete the application form on the EY HIVE, including a signed Inclusion Coordinator declaration and consent form, whereby the Inclusion Coordinator agrees to take on the role and responsibilities associated with the post.

4.3 Rate of additional capitation payable to services with an Inclusion Coordinator

Where a service provider is a fully qualified Inclusion Coordinator or employs a fully qualified Inclusion Coordinator in their pre-school service, that provider will qualify for:

- An increase in the rate of capitation payable to the service of €2 (pro-rata), per ECCE- eligible registered child, per week over 38 weeks.

Or

- An increase in the rate of ECCE capitation payable to the service of €1.85 (pro-rata), per ECCE-eligible registered child, per week over 41 weeks, where the service is approved to run for 41 weeks per year.

This allowance will be paid according to the number of ECCE-eligible registered children attending the service in a pre-school room, with no upper limit on the number of children. Where an ECCE-eligible registered child increases or decreases their level of attendance, the capitation will adjust to reflect this. The additional capitation will only be payable in relation to one Inclusion Coordinator per service, even if more than one LINC graduate is employed in that service.

4.4 Application for additional capitation for services with an Inclusion Coordinator

4.4.1 Date of eligibility to apply for additional capitation

A pre-school service employing a LINC graduate can apply for additional capitation on the completion of a signed agreement by the LINC graduate that they will take on the role and responsibilities associated with the post of Inclusion Coordinator and submission of same by the pre-school provider.

4.4.2 How to apply for additional capitation

The application for additional capitation must be made electronically via the EY HIVE. Applications must be completed in full and include the following:

- the applicant's unique graduate ID number (previously student ID number) issued by Mary Immaculate College
- a signed Inclusion Coordinator Declaration and Consent Form

Postal or email applications will not be accepted.

4.4.3 When to apply for additional capitation

To avail of increased capitation, eligible service providers must apply each year. It is also necessary to apply when a new Inclusion Coordinator commences this role in the service. Entitlement to the increased capitation does not 'roll over' from one programme year to the next. Therefore, service providers who employ an existing Inclusion Coordinator should apply at the beginning of each programme year.

4.4.4 Verification procedures

Applications for additional capitation will be verified against the eligibility criteria outlined in 4.2. Additional information, including proof of identity or employment, may be sought as part of this process. Pobal must be notified of changes to the Inclusion Coordinator's employment by submitting a change request on the EY Hive.

4.4.5 Payment of additional capitation for services with an Inclusion Coordinator

Additional capitation for services with an Inclusion Coordinator is paid to the service as a Special Allocation via the EY HIVE. For ECCE-contracted services, additional capitation is paid in line with the ECCE payment schedule. The increased capitation payment is not included in the ECCE advance payment. Payments in relation to children who are eligible for the ECCE programme but are registered on CCSP are paid later in the programme year.

Payment of the additional capitation will start and cease as per the employment dates of the Inclusion Coordinator and the start and end dates of the approved child registrations. The 'employment dates of the Inclusion Coordinator' refers to the period of time during which the person is employed and working as the service provider's Inclusion Coordinator, following submission on the EY HIVE and approval by Pobal of the Inclusion Coordinator Declaration and Consent Form.

In general, therefore, it is not possible to backdate payments of additional capitation for service providers with an Inclusion Coordinator to before the date of approval of the Inclusion Coordinator Declaration and Consent Form by Pobal. Applicants who submit an application before **27 October 2023** will get payment from the beginning of the programme year, if the Inclusion Coordinator has been in place since then.

4.5 Change of circumstances

4.5.1 Definition of change of circumstances

A requirement of funding is that changes in the employment of the Inclusion Coordinator must be notified immediately to the Pobal AIM Team by submitting a change request on the EY Hive. The types of changes that require notification are:

- Inclusion Coordinator ceases employment in the service
- Inclusion Coordinator changes their employment conditions, e.g. extended absence from work.

4.5.2 Definition of extended absence from work

For this purpose, an extended absence is defined as four or more consecutive pre-school weeks and includes maternity leave, sickness and career breaks, etc. The service will cease to be eligible for additional capitation in respect of employing an Inclusion Coordinator in the service after the Inclusion Coordinator has been absent for four consecutive pre-school weeks.

4.5.3 Notification of change of circumstances

Changes of circumstances must be reported to the Pobal AIM Team immediately. The service provider should inform Pobal of any change via a change request on the EY HIVE.

To note the employment of an Inclusion Coordinator in a service is subject to compliance checks. Please refer to section 14 of this document for further information on AIM compliance checks.

5 Application process for targeted supports under AIM Levels 4, 6 and 7

AIM applications are administered by Pobal on behalf of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Applications should be made by the provider, in partnership with the parent/guardian/carer, on The EY HIVE. To apply for targeted supports under AIM Levels 4, 6 or 7, providers, in partnership with parent(s)/guardian(s) or carer(s), should in the first instance complete an Access and Inclusion Profile for the child.

5.1 Access and Inclusion Profile (AIM Level 4 Application)

The Access and Inclusion Profile looks at the strengths, abilities and needs of the child, as well as the strengths and needs of the pre-school service. The Access and Inclusion Profile seeks information on the child under the headings of physical abilities, communication abilities, social skills, behaviour and health.

5.1.1 Information gathered when applying for targeted supports under AIM

Where the parent/guardian/carer in partnership with the pre-school provider, choose to apply for AIM, the information collected about the child will include:

- the child's personal information, including name, address, PPSN, date of birth and sex
- name(s) and contact details of parent(s), guardian(s) or carer (s)
- information gathered through the Access and Inclusion Profile and/or Capital Application (AIM Level 5)
- HSE or HSE-funded healthcare professional or DES Visiting Teacher AIM Capital Report Form for the pre-school service and/or capital and equipment applications

The information collected may include:

- any relevant health service assessments and/or reports
- information gathered through observation of the child in the pre-school service
- details of relevant health professionals involved with the child, e.g. GP or family doctor, Occupational therapist, speech and language therapist, physiotherapist, psychologist, pediatrician, audiologist or other health professional.

The AIM privacy statement outlines the reasons for the gathering of the above information and assists parent(s)/guardian(s)/carer(s) to understand how AIM gathers and uses the information about their child. The AIM privacy statement is available at www.aim.gov.ie and can also be viewed as part of the Access and Inclusion Profile under AIM Level 4.

5.2 When to apply

The application process for AIM targeted supports opens in May each year in advance of the new pre-school year in September. The application process remains open year round. Providers and parents are advised to apply at least 3 months before the child's planned start date in ECCE in order to ensure that the application can be processed in a timely manner.

5.2.1 Consent of both parties

Applications for AIM targeted supports may only be made with the consent of both the pre-school provider and the child's parent/guardian/carer. Where a parent/guardian/carer wishes to make an application for AIM targeted supports, but the pre-school provider does not consent to the application being made, the parent/guardian/carer should consult their local City or County Childcare Committee (CCC), who will advise them and may recommend an alternative provider, if appropriate. Contact details for all CCCs can be found on www.myccc.ie.

Where a pre-school provider wishes to make an application for AIM targeted supports for a child, but the child's parent/guardian/carer does not consent to the application being made, the application cannot proceed.

5.2.2 Where a pre-school provider wishes to make an application for AIM targeted supports

Applications can only be made with the full consent of the parent/guardian/carer. The parental consent form can be printed and signed by the parent/guardian/carer and should then be uploaded and submitted with the completed online application on The EY HIVE. Alternatively, there is an online consent process available.

In providing consent for an application to be made, the parent or guardian is also providing consent for information on the application to be shared with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, the Department of Education and Skills, the Department of Health, HSE and HSE- funded voluntary organisations and the National Council for Special Education.

Applications can only be made with the full consent of the parent/guardian/carer. When applying for AIM for the 2023 programme year, the provider can choose one of two options for consent.

Option 1) upload a document of the signed completed Informed Consent form. This form can be printed and signed by the parent/ guardian and should then be uploaded and submitted with the completed online application on the EY HIVE,

OR

Option 2) Choose "Online Consent". If the provider chooses "Online Consent", a link is sent to the email address of the parent/guardian/carer, provided on the application, asking them to confirm online that they consent to an AIM application on the child's behalf. If the parent/guardian/carer accepts this, the application can be processed.

Please note that if the "Online Consent" option is chosen, the application can be submitted before the parent/guardian/carer accepts the consent, but the parent/guardian/carer will need to confirm their consent before the application can be processed by Pobal/Better Start.

5.2.3 Withdrawal of consent

A parent/guardian/carer can withdraw consent for the child to be involved in AIM at any time without giving any reason. Withdrawal of consent for the child to be involved in AIM does not impact on the child's entitlement to the ECCE programme. Parent(s)/guardian(s)/carer (s) may withdraw their consent by telling their pre-school service that they wish to do so and by emailing aimteam@pobal.ie stating their wish to withdraw consent.

Parent(s)/guardian(s)/carer(s) may also indicate their wish to withdraw consent to Pobal by writing to Pobal AIM team at the following address: Access and Inclusion Model, Second Floor, Ormond Building, 31-36 Upper Ormond Quay, Dublin 7 DO2 EY84.

Where consent is withdrawn, the application for supports or any supports already in place for the child will be withdrawn. Where the pre-school service ceases to be provided to a child because the parent/guardian/carer has exercised the right to remove the child from the pre-school service for any reason, monies paid in excess of the monies due in respect of that child by the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to that provider for the provision of the pre-school service

shall be returned to the Minister in accordance with these AIM Rules and the DCEDIY Rules for ECCE Programme 2023-2024, which are available at the following link:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2459ee-early-childhood-care-and-education-programme-ecce/>

5.2.4 Assessing the level of support required

On receipt of a completed Access and Inclusion Profile, a Better Start Early Years Specialist (EYS) 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 sufficient, support at that level will be provided. Where the Specialist determines that more support may be required, an observation visit to the service will be arranged with the service provider. It is the responsibility of the service provider to advise parents when an appointment has been made for the EYS to visit the service.

5.2.5 Observation visit by Better Start Early Years Specialist

The purpose of the observation visit is for the Better Start Early Years Specialist to observe the child in the pre-school service in order to determine the level of extra support (if any) required for the child to be able to meaningfully participate in the ECCE programme in that particular service. This support may include levels 4, 5, 6 and 7 as described below.

The child must be present in the service during the observation visit. Where an on-site observation is not possible the EYS will arrange to complete a Service Observation Review (SOR) which will be conducted online or by phone. If at the end of the SOR the EYS is unable to determine the level of support required for the child an additional onsite observation visit may be required. To allow the Better Start Early Years Specialist to gain an accurate impression of the level of support required, providers should endeavor to ensure that the observation visit is representative of a typical day for the child in the pre-school. For example, the adult-to-child ratio should be the same as on a typical day. The EYS will engage with the parent either before, during or after the observation/SOR.

The observation visit may occur either before enrolment or after the child has started in the pre-school, depending on when the application is submitted. The Early Years Specialist will review the profile with the provider, make further observations and provide advice and support.

In exceptional circumstances the observation visit may be delayed until after the supports are in place at the discretion of the Better Start Early Years Specialist service. In such situations, targeted supports may be approved prior to an observation visit or SOR, however recommendation by the Better Start Early Years Specialist Service is required and payment in relation to targeted supports cannot be backdated to a date before the date on which approval is given.

5.2.6 The Access and Inclusion Plan

Based on the child's Access and Inclusion Profile and the observation visit, the Better Start Early Years 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 AIM level 4: Expert educational Advice, Mentoring and Support

6.1 AIM Level 4 support by telephone

The Better Start Early Years Specialist Service can be contacted by phone, email or via the online application form. It is not necessary to fill out the online application form if support from a Specialist is required over the phone. However, consent from a parent/guardian/carer is required before any information relating to a child can be shared or discussed by the service provider. If the phone support proves to be insufficient 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. The Better Start Early Years Specialist Service can be contacted by telephone at 01 511 7000, or by email at eypc@pobal.ie.

6.2 Online application for AIM Level 4 support

In applying online for support from the Better Start Early Years Specialist service, service providers, in conjunction with a parent/guardian/carer, will be asked to provide the following details:

- Name of child and service provider
- The child's PPSN
- Service Reference number (previously known as a DCEDIY reference number)
- Consent from a parent/guardian/carer for Better Start 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 service.

The application form also includes a simple Access and Inclusion Profile. A Better Start Early Years Specialist may take a service provider through some of these questions as a guide over the phone or the service provider and the parent/guardian/carer can complete the form themselves without any involvement from a third party.

6.3 Communication of allocation of Level 4 Educational Advice and Mentoring

Where the decision is to recommend AIM Level 4 Educational Advice and Mentoring, the service provider will receive a Hive notification and the parent/guardian/carer will receive an email.

Level 4 Educational advice and mentoring involves an EYS gathering information from the Early Years Educators and the child's parent/guardian/carer on the child's strengths, abilities and needs. The EYS will coach and mentor the Early Years Educators on ways to support a child in the ECCE programme. This involves working collaboratively with the Early Years Educators, the Child's parent/guardian/carer, and other professionals to develop an inclusive learning environment and to develop a 'My Inclusion Plan' for the child.

7 AIM Level 5: Grants for equipment, appliances and minor building alterations

7.1 Categories of Level 5 Applications

Applications for level 5 support are submitted via the EY HIVE and fall into one of the following 3 categories:

- i. Applications for minor alterations
- ii. Applications for equipment in respect of a visual or hearing impairment
- iii. Applications for equipment in respect of all other types of disability

7.2 Applications for minor alterations

7.2.1 Application requirements

A service provider, in partnership with a parent/guardian/carer, may submit an application on the EY HIVE for a capital grant towards the cost of minor building alterations. An application should be accompanied by 2 short reports by designated professionals (as defined in section 7.2.2), which indicate the nature of the proposed minor alteration works and confirm:

- i. 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
- ii. that the proposed minor alteration works are compliant with the Building (Part M Amendment) Regulations 2010, and
- iii. The service provider will also be required to confirm that the pre-school service 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.

7.2.2 Categories of designated professionals for minor alterations applications

Report (a), confirming that the proposed minor alteration works are necessary and critical to the child's participation in ECCE, should be completed by either:

- i. An occupational therapist working for or on behalf of the HSE, who is registered with the Health and Social Care Professionals Council (CORU);

OR

- ii. Such other category of health and social care professional as may be recognised by Pobal, in consultation with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and the Department of Health, for the purposes of this scheme.

In the case of a healthcare professional, the definition of designated professional is limited to therapists working for or on behalf of the HSE. As such, reports from healthcare professionals working in a private capacity will not be accepted for the purposes of applications for AIM Level 5 support.

Report (b), confirming that the proposed minor alteration works are compliant with the relevant Building Regulations, should be completed by either:

- i. An architect, who is registered on the register of architects maintained by the Royal Institute of Architects of Ireland;

OR

- ii. An engineer, who is 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.

7.2.3 Contribution towards professional fees

In the case of the designated professional at (i) or (ii) under rule 7.2.2 above, the service provider can apply for a contribution of up to a maximum of €300 inclusive of VAT 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) at 7.2.2 above, as they will be working for or on behalf of the HSE.

7.2.4 Procurement guidelines

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 valid 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.

7.2.5 Definition of valid quotation for minor alterations

For a quote to be deemed valid it must:

- be dated within 3 months of the application
- be on headed paper
- include a VAT number
- be clearly itemised
- where more than one quote is attached/required, they must be from separate suppliers.

7.2.6 Eligibility of expenditure on minor alterations

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 after the approval date.

7.2.7 Eligibility of applications for grants towards minor alterations

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 service under active 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 completed minor alterations are needed.
- The report supporting the application has been completed by a designated professional who is registered or accredited by the relevant professional body.
- The report supporting the application relates directly to the child named in the application and to the relevant pre-school service.
- 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.
- The alteration has not already been carried out.

7.2.8 Eligible amount of grant payable towards minor alterations

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.

7.2.9 Installation and cost of permanent fixed equipment

Permanent fixed equipment (i.e. wall mounted changing beds) will be installed by the supplier of the equipment. Therefore, the cost of installation of permanent fixed equipment should be included in the application and quotation submitted.

7.2.10 Payments and Expenditure Reporting

On acceptance of a signed grant agreement, the service provider will be paid 90% of their approved funding for minor alterations. The remaining 10% will be paid subject to the submission and verification of an expenditure return to Pobal.

7.3 Applications for equipment in respect of a visual or hearing impairment

7.3.1 Application requirements

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

- 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
- that the proposed equipment is not already available in the pre-school service or capable of being transferred to and used in the pre-school service.

Where the report is submitted by a Visiting Teacher, it is generally known as a letter of recommendation. The report submitted must be completed on the AIM Level 5 Capital Form/Recommendation Template.

7.3.2 Categories of designated professional

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

- Visiting Teacher, or
- an occupational therapist working for, or on behalf of, the HSE, or
- a speech and language therapist working for, or on behalf of, the HSE.

7.3.3 Eligibility of applications for equipment in respect of visual or hearing impairment

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 service 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.
- 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.

7.4 Applications for equipment in respect of all other types of disability

7.4.1 Application requirements

A service provider, in partnership with a parent/guardian/carer, may submit an application on the EY HIVE for 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:

- 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
- that the proposed equipment is not already available in the pre-school service or capable of being transferred to and used in the pre-school service.

7.4.2 Categories of designated professional

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

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

7.4.3 Eligibility of applications for equipment in respect of all other types of disability

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 service under contract to deliver the ECCE programme.
- The child is eligible for the ECCE programme or will be eligible 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.
- The report supporting the application has been completed by a registered occupational therapist, physiotherapist or speech and language therapist working for, or on behalf of, the HSE.

7.5 Eligibility of equipment

Applications for equipment will only be considered where they are deemed to be critical to the child's participation in the ECCE programme. Where a child requires an item of equipment for use outside the ECCE programme, e.g. at home, the parent should engage with the HSE or current healthcare provider.

7.6 Eligibility of portable equipment and appliances

Where a child uses an item of equipment or an appliance in the home that is funded by the HSE or their current healthcare provider and that could reasonably be transported to and from pre-school, applications for duplicate or similar equipment or appliances for use in the pre-school will not be granted under AIM Level 5.

7.7 Duplicate equipment for two different ECCE services

Application for duplicate equipment for use in an ECCE setting may be made where the equipment meets all other eligibility criteria set out in the AIM Rules and where a child has approval from DCEDIY to split his or her attendance between two different ECCE services. This is subject to ECCE rule 2.2.11

‘Provision of ECCE Programme by more than one Service Provider’.

7.8 Categories of eligible equipment

A list of categories of eligible equipment is maintained and updated from time to time by Pobal in consultation with the HSE. A sample list of eligible equipment can be viewed on www.aim.gov.ie.

7.9 Value of eligible equipment and appliances

Applications for equipment and appliances will not be considered where the value of an item is under €50.

7.10 Applications for multiple AIM Level 5 supports

In some cases, a pre-school service, in conjunction with a parent/guardian/carer, may need to apply for two inter-dependent categories of AIM Level 5 support, e.g. 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, e.g. 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.

7.11 Decision making process

Where an application is complete and eligible, it will be assessed and a decision will 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:

- an Appraisal Officer confirms that an application is complete and meets initial eligibility requirements, and
- the attached report by the designated professional confirms items a) and b) under the application requirements for the relevant category of application, and
- The Deciding Officer is satisfied that no further information is required in relation to the application.

An application will not be approved where:

- the attached report by the designated professional fails to confirm items a) and b) meet the

application requirements for the relevant category of application, and

- 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 applicants, a Better Start Early Years Specialist, any designated professional who has submitted a report in support of an application 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.

7.12 Incomplete applications

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.

7.13 Ineligible applications

Where an application fails to meet the eligibility requirements for its category, 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 The EY HIVE. 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.

7.14 Communication of decision

Having reached a decision, Pobal will communicate this to the service provider. Where the decision is to approve, the service provider will be notified. Where the service is approved equipment or appliances, arrangements will be made for their provision and delivery to the pre-school service. Where the service is approved for minor alterations, a funding contract will be issued. 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.

7.15 Review of decision where the decision is to decline an application.

The Service Provider, in conjunction with the parent/guardian/carer, will have the right to request verbal feedback in the first instance. Applicants who believe that the outcome of the application and appraisal

process was unreasonable based on the information provided to Pobal can then request a review.

7.15.1 Membership of review team

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

7.15.2 Review process

The review process will be documented in detail by Pobal. It will involve a desktop review of the application, the process followed in managing the application from receipt to final decision and the decision reached. It will not involve fresh assessments or service 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 relevant. Pobal may also contact Better Start for further information or clarification.

7.15.3 Decision on outcome of review

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

7.16 Requesting a second stage review

Generally, the decision of the Review Team will be final. In exceptional circumstances, service providers, in conjunction with a parent/guardian/carer, who have completed the review process as outlined above may contact Pobal AIM team to request a second stage review. A second stage review can only be made when applicants can demonstrate that proper procedures were not followed in the application/appraisal or initial review process.

7.16.1 Membership of second stage review team

Second stage reviews are conducted by staff who have not been involved either in processing the original application or in conducting the original review of the application.

7.16.2 Second stage review process

The second stage 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 service 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 relevant. Pobal may also contact Better Start for further information or clarification.

7.16.3 Decision on outcome of second stage review

The decision of the Review Team will be relayed to the service provider and the parent/guardian/carer. The outcome of a second stage review is final. If further, new information comes to hand following this decision, a new application can be submitted via the EY HIVE.

7.17 Provision of equipment and appliances

Where an application for equipment is approved, this equipment will be procured by Pobal and delivered directly to the child's pre-school service.

7.18 Duration of procurement and delivery process for equipment

Pobal will begin the procurement process as soon as possible after the application for AIM Level 5 supports has been approved. The procurement and ordering process for more specialised equipment may be longer due to the possible need to source equipment or necessary parts from abroad. Once the procurement process has been completed, the equipment will be ordered from the appointed supplier. Standard equipment may take up to 14 weeks. Some very specialist items are made to order. As such, applicants are advised to allow at least 18-20 weeks from approval of the AIM Level 5 application for the installation and delivery of equipment. As mentioned in 5.2.3, pre-school providers and parent(s)/guardian(s) are advised to apply for targeted AIM supports at least three months before the child's planned start date in ECCE.

7.19 Training in use of equipment

When training is recommended by the designated health professional, this is communicated to the supplier of the approved equipment.

Demonstration for all relevant pre-school staff in the proper use of the equipment will be provided by the supplier as a standard additional service. The designated healthcare professional will identify on the form if they also need to be present for training and set up provided by the supplier which Pobal will communicate to the healthcare professional. The supplier will liaise directly with the pre-school and designated health professional to arrange a suitable time for training. The pre-school must engage with Pobal and any other body who will provide training in relation to any equipment or appliance granted under AIM.

7.20 Disposal or transfer of equipment at the end of the child's participation in the ECCE programme

At the end of the child's participation in the ECCE programme, the following rules apply. Pobal's decision on the application of these rules is final:

- Fixed equipment and low value items (as determined by Pobal) remain in the pre-school and ownership is transferred to the pre-school
- Ownership of personal items is transferred to the parent/guardian/carer i.e. custom equipment which is specifically tailored to a child such as casted seating for equipment. Ownership of other equipment is transferred to the primary school to which the child is transitioning (where deemed appropriate by an HSE or HSE-funded professional)
- If a piece of equipment is no longer required by a child, the service provider can contact Pobal via a request on the EY Hive. A health professional or parent/guardian/carer can inform Pobal by emailing aimlevel5@pobal.ie (see 7.23)

Transfer of ownership of equipment from Pobal to the relevant party as outlined above occurs at the end of the child's participation in the ECCE programme. Pre-school providers and parent(s)/guardian(s) must engage with Pobal in relation to the transfer of ownership of equipment (including returning signed transfer of ownership forms, as appropriate). Equipment provided under AIM Level 5 should not be removed from the pre-school until the transfer of ownership process is completed.

Failure to engage in the transfer of ownership process will result in collection of the equipment by Pobal. Where collection of the equipment is not successful, all insurance obligations will transfer to the service provider.

Where the preschool service allows for the removal of items of equipment prior to the approval of the transfer of ownership, they will be held liable for the total value of any lost equipment and all insurance obligations will transfer to the service provider.

Following Pobal approval of the transfer of ownership, all insurance obligations transfer to the new owner.

7.21 Ownership of equipment and insurance

All equipment provided under AIM Level 5 is the property of Pobal and DCEDIY, until such a time as the transfer of ownership process (described in section 7.20) is completed. All equipment provided under AIM Level 5 is insured by Pobal for fire and theft. On completion of the transfer of ownership process, insurance requirements transfer to the new owner.

7.22 Transportation of equipment after transfer of ownership

If required, the transportation of AIM Level 5 equipment can be requested by the service provider during the transfer of ownership process.

7.23 Recycling of equipment

Where a piece of equipment purchased under AIM is no longer in use, the service provider can contact Pobal by submitting a request on the EY Hive. A health professional or parent/guardian/carer can inform Pobal by emailing aimlevel5@pobal.ie. On receipt of this notification Pobal will arrange for the equipment to be collected and recycled as appropriate.

8 AIM Level 6: Therapy supports

8.1 Process for Therapy Supports

8.1.1 Access and Inclusion Profile

Where all support under Level 4 Educational Advice and Mentoring have been exhausted yet challenges to the child's access and/or participation remain and/or where a service provider, in conjunction with a parent/guardian/carer, considers that a child may need therapeutic support in order to access and meaningfully participate in pre-school, they can apply for this support by completing the Access and Inclusion Profile, which will include relevant health services which the child is or has received or is waitlisted for. Level 6 support is provided where health supports are critical to the child's meaningful participation in the pre-school.

Health services are considered critical where a child is:

- Unable to access the pre-school setting, due to environmental barriers
- Unable to commence the ECCE Programme
- Unable to remain in the ECCE Programme
- Unable to meaningfully participate in their ECCE Programme.

8.1.2 Where the child is already known by the relevant healthcare service

The Better Start Early Years Specialist will contact the healthcare professional (or service) identified in the Access and Inclusion Profile to review strategies already in place for that child so that the Early Years Specialist can reinforce these strategies with the pre-school. As the child is already known to the relevant healthcare service (i.e. is currently receiving services or has in the past), the pre-school and parent/guardian/carer can also review pre-school preparation and participation needs directly with

their healthcare service.

8.1.3 Where the child is not yet known by the health service relevant to the child's participation in ECCE

Where the Better Start Early Years Specialist has reviewed the child's Access and Inclusion Plan with the pre-school, met the child and exhausted all AIM Level 4 supports and challenges to the child's access and/or participation remain, the Early Years Specialist will contact the relevant health service where the child is on a waiting list as identified on the child's Access and Inclusion Profile, or the relevant contact person in the HSE if the child is not on a waiting list, for universal supports over the phone.

Where universal strategies do not result in the child's optimal participation in pre-school, the Early Years Specialist will contact the healthcare professional again regarding the need to progress to targeted interventions. Where the child is not already on a waiting list for a HSE/HSE-funded Children's Disability Network Team (CDNT) or Service, the EYS will request the parent/guardian/carer to complete and return the following forms to the EYS:

- The HSE's National Access Policy Referral Form
- Age relevant Additional Information Form

The Early Years Specialist (EYS) will email the two forms to the parent/guardian/carer at the email contact address provided on the Access and Inclusion Profile. The parent/guardian/carer should return the completed form to the EYS, who will forward it with a copy of the Access and Inclusion Profile and an outline of strategies and supports already provided to the agreed HSE contact person, by registered post. The agreed response time is within five weeks. This is a formal referral to the Children's Disability Network Team (CDNT), where the child will receive therapeutic supports critical to his or her participation in the ECCE programme while he or she remains on a waiting list for other therapy needs.

8.1.4 Information shared during referral process

When making a referral to the Children's Disability Network Team (CDNT) for targeted supports, the Better Start Early Years Specialist will share the Access and Inclusion Profile with the HSE. The HSE, in turn, will acknowledge receipt of the referral and advise the Better Start Early Years Specialist regarding proposed strategies and supports which will be made available.

8.1.5 Diagnosis of disability

The provision of supports under AIM 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 under AIM Level 6 will not require formal diagnosis.

8.1.6 Model of service delivery – stepped care approach

The model of service delivery for AIM Level 6 supports is 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. Within this model, service delivery is aimed at:

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

As such, a response to a request for support under AIM Level 6 may include universal and/or targeted strategies to support the child. The relevant Health Service Lead will review the child's needs in order to meaningfully participate in ECCE and service/member(s) of the team most appropriate to respond to Level 6 AIM Request for Support.

9 AIM Level 7: Additional capitation

9.1 Applications for AIM Level 7 - Additional capitation

A service provider, in conjunction with a parent/guardian/carer, can apply for additional capitation under AIM Level 7 where the provider considers that this is likely to be critical to ensuring a child's meaningful participation in the ECCE programme in their service. Providers and parent(s)/guardian(s) must first complete an Access and Inclusion Profile (Level 4 application) for the child and then complete an AIM Level 7 request on the EY HIVE.

9.2 Eligibility requirements

Applications are deemed eligible for consideration if:

- The pre-school service is registered and under active contract to deliver the ECCE and/or CCSP 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.

9.3 Decision making process

The decision making process for AIM Level 7 supports generally comprises 3 steps:

1. Recommendation by Better Start Early Years Specialist
2. Review of application by appraisal officer in Pobal
3. Final decision by deciding officer in Pobal

9.3.1 Role of Better Start Early Years Specialist Service

Where an application is complete and eligible, it will be referred to the Better Start Early Years Specialist Service who may visit the service provider and child, or conduct a Service Observation Review (SOR) with a view to identifying whether AIM Level 7 support is critical to the child's meaningful participation in the ECCE programme in that pre-school service. In order to determine this, the Early Years Specialist will:

- Complete an observation or SOR based on the Access and Inclusion Profile as a means of providing a clear and objective opinion of both the child's and the service's strengths, abilities and needs,
- Conduct a review with the parent/guardian/carer of the child either before, during or after the observation/SoR
- 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 the National Early Years Quality Development Service guidelines,
- Obtain other expert input from the HSE as necessary.

Having undertaken all of the above, the Better Start Early Years Specialist will make a written, evidence informed recommendation as to whether AIM Level 7 support is critical to the child's participation in the pre-school service. She or he will forward this recommendation to an appraisal officer in Pobal for review.

9.3.2 Basis for recommendation by Better Start Early Years Specialist

The Better Start Early Years Specialist's recommendation will be based on the completed Access and Inclusion Profile, the expert judgement of the Specialist, and any other expert advice sought by the Specialist.

9.3.3 Degree of support to be granted

Where the Specialist recommends that AIM Level 7 support is critical to a child's participation in the pre-school session, the Specialist will further consider the degree and type of AIM Level 7 support required, having regard for:

- The child's needs in the context of the pre-school environment (Complex, additionally complex, medically complex)
- The capacity of the service including current adult to child ratios
- External supports available to the child and/or the service provider
- The current level of AIM Level 7 support awarded

A Deciding Officer may grant AIM Level 7 additional capitation on a pro rata basis where there is a clear justification for doing so, for example, 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.

9.3.4 Review by Appraisal Officer

An Appraisal Officer will review the recommendation made by the Early Years Specialist to establish that it is complete and meets requirements for final decision. The appraisal officer may seek additional information from the Early Years Specialist if required. Once reviewed and completed, the appraisal officer will refer the appraisal to a deciding officer for final decision.

9.3.5 Final decision by Deciding Officer

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

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

- an Appraisal Officer confirms that an application is complete and meets initial eligibility requirements, and
- a Better Start Early Years Specialist confirms that it is his or her recommendation that AIM Level 7 support is critical to enable the child's participation in the pre-school, and
- The Deciding Officer is satisfied that no further information is required in relation to the application.

An application will not be approved where:

- A Better Start Early Years Specialist confirms that it is his or her recommendation that AIM 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
- 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 Better Start Early Years Specialist seeking further information. Where that further information causes an Appraisal Officer or a Better Start Early Years 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.

9.3.6 Decision on degree of AIM Level 7 support to be granted

In deciding to grant AIM Level 7 support, the Deciding Officer will also decide the rate of the AIM Level 7 capitation, having regard to the recommendation of the Better Start Early Years Specialist.

9.4 Communication of decision

The decision of the application will be communicated to the parent/guardian/carer via email and the service provider via the EY HIVE. Where support is approved the communication will also provide details 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 (see 9.7). The views of parents/guardians are considered prior to decision being made.

9.5 Requesting a review of an AIM Level 7 application

9.5.1 Review of decision where the decision is to not approve application

The Service Provider, in conjunction with the parent/guardian/carer, will have the right to request verbal feedback in the first instance. Applicants who believe that the outcome of the application was unreasonable based on the information provided to Pobal can request a review.

9.5.2 Membership of review team

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

9.5.3 Review process

The review process will be documented in detail by Pobal. It will involve a desktop review of the application, the process followed in managing the application from receipt to final decision and the decision reached. It will not involve fresh assessments or service 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 relevant. Pobal may also contact Better Start for further information or clarification.

9.5.4 Decision on outcome of review

The decision of the Review Team will be relayed to the service provider and the parent/guardian/carer. Generally, the decision of the Review Team will be final. If further, new information comes to hand following this decision, the service provider should contact their Early Years Specialist to further discuss.

9.6 Requesting a second stage review

Generally, the decision of the Review Team will be final. In exceptional circumstances, service providers in conjunction with parent(s)/guardian(s), who have completed the review process as outlined above may contact Pobal AIM team to request a second stage review. A second stage review can only be made when applicants can demonstrate that proper procedures were not followed in the application/appraisal or initial review process.

9.6.1 Membership of second stage review team

Second stage reviews are conducted by staff who have not been involved either in processing the original application or in conducting the original review of the application.

9.6.2 Second stage review process

The second stage review process will be documented in detail by Pobal. It will involve a desktop review of the application and review, the process followed in managing the application from receipt to final decision and the decision reached. It will not involve fresh assessments or service 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 relevant. Pobal may also contact Better Start for further information or clarification.

9.6.3 Decision on outcome of second stage review

The decision of the Review Team will be relayed to the service provider and the parent/guardian/carer. The outcome of a second stage review is final. If further, new information comes to hand following this decision, the service provider should contact their Early Years Specialist to discuss further.

9.7 Uses of AIM Level 7 additional capitation

Where AIM Level 7 support is granted, additional capitation will be provided to the pre-school service to either employ an additional employee or reduce the child-to-adult ratio in the pre-school room. The approved use of the additional capitation is outlined on the EY HIVE to the service provider. Where the service provider requests a change to the approved use of the level 7 capitation awarded i.e. from maintaining a reduced ratio to employing an additional person, a change to use of capitation review must be submitted by the service provider via the EY HIVE at least 10 working days prior to the change being implemented. The processing of reviews can take up to six weeks and it should be noted that in certain circumstances changes to the original approval may impact funding.

9.7.1 Use of additional capitation to reduce adult-to-child ratio in the pre-school room

Maintenance of a reduced ratio is where a service has committed to reducing the room ratios by a minimum of three children. A service provider may choose to reduce the ratio by more than three children; however, additional funding will not be granted to the service to cover the cost of additional reductions. Where a service provider applies for maintenance of reduced ratio, the rationale that the reduction in ratio is sufficient to meet the needs of the child availing of AIM Level 7 support must be evident.

For further details on staff – child ratios in the ECCE room see ECCE Rules, section 1.5 for information.

9.7.2 AIM Level 7 additional assistance staff as a shared resource for the service

AIM does not fund Special Needs Assistants (SNAs). Accordingly, any staff member hired under AIM is a shared resource for all children in the pre-school session. Furthermore, one additional staff member may be deemed to be sufficient to meet the needs of two or more children who have been granted additional capitation, where these children are attending the same pre-school session.

9.7.3 AIM Level 7 additional assistance staff and the child-to adult ratio in the pre-school room

Where AIM Level 7 additional capitation is used to bring an additional staff member into the ECCE session, this additional person does not constitute part of the child-to-adult ratio for the purposes of the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016. This is to safeguard the use of this resource to meet the particular needs for which it was funded. This means that the staff member (who is providing the AIM Level 7 Additional Assistance) is not permitted to be included in the child-to-adult ratio. Where a room with one adult and eleven

children prior to the staff member providing the AIM Level 7 Additional Assistance commences, the room cannot add a further eleven children, as the additional assistant is not allowed to be included in the child-to-adult ratio.

For further details on staff – child ratios in the ECCE room see ECCE Rules, section 1.5 for information.

9.7.4 Additional Assistant Leaving a Service

Where an AIM Level 7 additional assistance staff member leaves the ELC service, an Implementation of Support review must be submitted within 10 working days of the staff member leaving. Funding will stop from the last date support was provided by the additional assistance staff member in the preschool room. Once an additional assistance staff member is in place the service provider must inform Pobal and funding will recommence from the date support is in place.

9.7.5 Verification of Level 7 provision

Pobal is contracted by the DCEDIY to conduct compliance visits with childcare service providers who operate one or more of the national childcare programmes. The following checks will be included for the Access and Inclusion Model:

- A check will be carried out on the day of the compliance visit as to whether additional support is in the room
- Or
- Ratios are being maintained at the reduced ratio on the day of the visit.

A check will be carried out on the day of the compliance visit on children's attendance records to confirm if ratios are being maintained, this will include checking the ratios for the day before the compliance visit.

Where the provider is found not to have provided the funded supports under AIM Level 7, they will be given 30 calendar days to verify that the provision is in place. Where the verification is not received funding under AIM Level 7 will be ended with effect from the date of the visit.

On day of inspection, evidence will be as follows:

Maintenance of reduced ratio – attendance records in the ECCE session to evidence approved lower ratios being maintained.

Additional employee – additional employee is in the room as additional to ECCE in-ratio staff.

9.7.6 Recording of AIM Level 7 additional assistance staff attendance

Tusla roster records should be made available to the inspector on the day of the visit. Where records are not available on the day of the compliance visit, a re-visit will be organised.

9.8 AIM Level 7: Changes to a session or moving to a different session and/or preschool room

Providers and parent(s)/guardian(s) should note that, where a child in receipt of AIM Level 7 additional capitation moves to a different pre-school session, for example from the morning session to the afternoon session, or to a different room in the same pre-school service, this may affect the child's entitlement to AIM Level 7 support.

For example, if a child who has been granted AIM Level 7 support, which has been used to employ an AIM additional employee to the pre-school room, moves into a pre-school room where there is an additional staff member hired under AIM Level 7 to support another child, it may be found that one additional staff member is sufficient to support both children in the pre-school room. Pobal should be informed of all changes to a child's pre-school environment and may change the level of support approved accordingly. A change of circumstance review must be submitted by the service provider at least 10 working days prior to the implementation of any change via the EY HIVE, where a change to one of the following occurs:

- The Number of days the child is attending pre-school
- A child has changed their pre-school session
- There has been a change in the adult to child ratio in a pre-school session
- A child has been awarded additional assistance from other sources i.e. Enable Ireland support
- A child is in receipt of Home Tuition.
- A child is attending a specialized pre-school.

The processing of reviews can take up to six weeks and it should be noted that changes to the original approval may impact funding.

9.9 Rates of additional capitation

A rate of €240 per week to enable a service to supplement their staffing by 15 hours per week.

AIM Level 7 additional capitation can also be approved on a pro rata basis where there is a clear justification for doing so (e.g. the child cannot attend the service on a full-time basis or other supports

are available on a part-time basis).

9.10 Recruitment of staff under AIM Level 7

Where the pre-school service is using the additional capitation to fund an extra staff member, this recruitment process is wholly carried out by the pre-school provider. Neither the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth nor Pobal has any role in the recruitment of staff for pre-school services.

9.11 Employer of staff under AIM Level 7

In the case of staff funded by AIM Level 7 additional capitation, the service provider is the employer, except in the case of HSE-approved nurses or healthcare assistants.

9.12 Qualification requirements for staff hired under AIM Level 7

Staff hired under AIM Level 7 must satisfy the qualification requirements of the Early Years Services Regulations 2016, which stipulate that all staff working in pre-school services must have, at minimum, a major award in Early Childhood Care and Education at Level 5 of the National Framework for Qualifications (NFQ) or a qualification deemed by the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth to be equivalent. There are two exceptions to this rule, outlined at 9.13 and 9.14 below.

9.13 Grandfathering

Please note that the Grandfathering Declaration extension formally ended on 1st September, 2023. For further information please refer to the ECCE Rules.

9.14 Support for children with complex healthcare needs availing of AIM

Support is provided to children with medically complex needs through the Complex Healthcare Needs (CHN) Programme to enable them to attend preschool.

The CHN Programme provides nursing support to facilitate a child's attendance during ECCE hours where the child has complex medical needs, through an extension of the Paediatric Home Care Package (PHCP). A clinical nursing need assessment must be completed by the HSE Key Contact. If the assessment determines that nursing support is required to attend preschool, a registered nurse will be engaged as an extension of the HSE PHCP.

9.14 Payment of AIM Level 7 additional capitation

In order to receive AIM Level 7 additional capitation, the provider must:

- have an ECCE-registered child, or an ECCE-eligible child approved on CCSP whose application for

AIM Level 7 additional capitation has been approved;

- have met any pre-payment conditions; and
- be tax compliant with a valid tax clearance number.

In the case of additional assistance, in order to receive the AIM Level 7 additional capitation the provider must have appointed or recruited a staff member to provide additional assistance in the pre-school room. If there is a delay in appointment or recruitment of the staff member, it is the responsibility of the provider to inform Pobal by submitting a change to implementation of support review via the EY HIVE. The review must be submitted within 10 working days of the delay to implementation of support. Funding will cease for the period the staff member was not in place.

Payments in relation to AIM Level 7 additional capitation will be paid weekly, one week in advance. The service shall make available their payroll statements to facilitate compliance checks, if required. Where records of payroll documentation are required, photographic records of redacted payroll statements will be made.

9.15 Backdating of AIM Level 7 payments

Backdating of AIM Level 7 payments related to initial applications is not permitted. Where an initial application for additional capitation is approved, the additional capitation will be applied from the latest of:

- the date on which the child commences on the ECCE programme;
- the date on which the additional assistance has been approved; and
- The date on which the additional assistance commences.

Where an extension application for additional capitation is approved, the additional capitation will be applied from the latest of:

- the date on which the child commences on the ECCE programme;
- The date on which the additional assistance commences.

10 Attendance of children in receipt of AIM supports

10.1 Absences and under attendance

The service provider must contact the child's parent/guardian/carer to establish the cause of the child's absence within the first week of the absence commencing. If a child leaves the service or has not attended for 4 consecutive weeks, the service must withdraw the AIM Level 4 application. The service must also follow the rules for absence or under attendance as set out in ECCE rules. Please refer to the

ECCE 2023/24 Programme rules available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2459ee-early-childhood-care-and-education-programme-ecce/>”

10.2 Reduction in attendance

For information on managing reduction in attendance please refer to the ECCE Programme rules. ECCE Programme Rules 2023/2024 is available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2459ee-early-childhood-care-and-education-programme-ecce/>

11 Moving services

11.1 Notice when moving a child to another service

For the rules on the notice policy when moving a child to another service please refer to the ECCE Programme Rules 2023/2024 available at: <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/2459ee-early-childhood-care-and-education-programme-ecce/>

11.2 Moving services: continuing to access AIM supports

When a child moves services and wishes to avail of AIM supports in the new pre-school service, a new application for AIM supports must be made on The EY HIVE. In order to assess a child’s needs for AIM supports, the child must be observed in the pre-school service. When AIM supports are granted, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) enters into a contract with the pre-school provider. This contract ends if the child leaves the service. This allows the child’s needs to be assessed in the new service and where approved the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and the new service enter into a new contract.

12 Carrying AIM supports forward into the next ECCE year

12.1 Carrying AIM supports forward into the next ECCE year in the same service

Where a parent or guardian wishes to carry AIM supports forward into the next ECCE year and the child will be staying in the same pre-school, a second year extension form must be completed by the pre-school and submitted on The EY HIVE. This form is reviewed by the Better Start Early Years Specialist Service and Pobal AIM team to review the level of support required for the next pre-school year. Second year extension requests can be submitted prior to the new pre-school year commencing. Service Providers are encouraged to submit extension requests as early as possible to ensure the required support is in place for the child. The application process opens in May each year and the pre-school service will be notified of this via The EY HIVE.

12.2 Carrying AIM supports forward into the next ECCE year (moving services)

Where a parent/guardian/carer wishes to carry AIM supports forward into the next ECCE year, but the child will be moving services, the rules under ‘Moving Services’ (rule 11.2) apply.

13 Complaints procedures

13.1 Complaints about an application for AIM targeted supports

Where a provider or parent/guardian/carer wishes to make a complaint about an application for AIM targeted supports, they should follow the process under ‘requesting a review of an application’ at the relevant AIM Level above.

13.2 Complaints about the running of a pre-school service

Providers are required by the Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations, 2016, to have a complaints policy. This policy should outline how a concern will be managed. Firstly, parents/guardians are advised to put their concern in writing to the ECCE service and request a copy of their complaints policy. They should also ask that their issue is addressed under that policy.

If an understanding cannot be reached after contacting the pre-school provider directly, the complainant’s local City or County Childcare Committee (CCC) will be able to offer further advice.

Finally, if the parent/guardian/carer is dissatisfied with the response received from the provider or may have reasons that they feel are prohibiting them from bringing the matter to their provider directly, they may contact the Tusla Early Years Inspectorate.

The Tusla Early Years Inspectorate does not investigate individual concerns or complaints. However, the Inspectorate reviews all information about early learning and care services and assesses this information against the Early Years Services Regulations 2016. It uses this information to determine the focus and timing of its inspections. The complainant will receive an acknowledgment indicating if their concern has been accepted by the Early Years Inspectorate. The Inspectorate may also contact the complainant to clarify information provided by them.

13.3 Complaints relating to employment under AIM Level 7

Staff employed under AIM Level 7 should note that concerns and complaints concerning their employment should be addressed in the first instance to their employer, which is the pre-school service. Neither the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, nor Pobal, may intervene in disputes between staff and their employer.

14 AIM Compliance

14.1 Responsibility of an Approved Provider

It is the responsibility of the approved provider to ensure compliance with their funding agreement requirements, which includes adherence to this AIM Programme Rules 2023/2024 document, ECCE Programme Rules 2023/2024 document and the Community Childcare Subvention Plus (CCSP) Rules 2023/24 document. Approved providers should ensure that they understand and adhere to the contents of this document, failure to comply with any of these terms may result in the suspension of AIM funding.

14.2 Compliance File

As part of a compliance visit, the approved provider's compliance file will be inspected. An approved provider should ensure that this file is kept up-to-date and contains:

- Attendance records for enrolled children;
- Staff qualifications and letter(s) of qualification.
- Tusla roster records should be made available to the inspector on the day of the visit.

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

Services should also ensure that:

There is a staff member on site at all times who has access to the compliance file and can facilitate the visit. Please note that if the records are readily available for review any interruption to the ELC service will be minimal, other than seeking clarifications where required.

14.3 Compliance Visits

Approved providers must facilitate compliance visits which will be made without notice, to include access to the premises, personnel and relevant records.

All documentation relating to staff qualifications, registers and attendance records must be on-site at all times. These records must be kept for a minimum of 6 years.

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

Subsequent to a compliance visit Pobal will issue the service provider outcome notification. It is the responsibility of the service provider to carry out any rectification actions required in order to become compliant with scheme rules.