



20th October 2020

Dear Provider,

I am writing to update you on some impact from the Level 5 COVID restrictions that will come into force tomorrow night. As you are all aware, the Government had decided, with the advice of NPHE, to keep the early learning and care and school aged childcare sector open over this the next 6 week period.

This decision was made in recognition of the relatively low incidence of COVID in the sector which has been recorded both in Ireland and internationally. It is also influenced by the high levels of compliance with HSPE guidelines that providers and staff have demonstrated. It is important to note that compliance by the sector has been commended by the HSE and the sector should be proud of this achievement. In deciding to keep the childcare sector open under Level 5 restrictions, the Government recognises the importance of early learning and childcare to children, families, society and the economy.

Successes to date

The childcare sector was one of the first sectors to reopen after the spring lockdown. I want to thank you all for the amazing and tireless work you have done to welcome children and families back to your services, in a safe and child centred way. I know that the safety and wellbeing of your staff has also been a huge consideration and that you have worked extremely hard, and successfully, to protect them also. Children have benefited enormously from returning to the familiar faces and nurturing surroundings of early learning and childcare service. I am delighted that children will not have to cope with another loss of this in the next 6 weeks, as the country enters into Level 5 restrictions.

Financial support

I am very conscious that you have enough challenges operating your service in current times without being worried about your finances and sustainability. I hope therefore that the enhanced EWSS Government announced yesterday will be a further significant support to you. The Government has agreed to significantly increase the funding available for all sectors under the Employment Wage Subsidy Scheme, and to continue the exemption to the turnover rules for the ELC and SAC sector.

As you will see from the details set out below, the new enhanced EWSS will meet an average of 80% of a service's total staff costs, before any income is received from parents' fees or Department funding schemes. This, together with other measures, will assist you if you experience any reduction in parental demand or hours. The revised EWSS rates are as follows:



Gross weekly pay	Revised Rates
Less than €151.50	Nil
€151.50 – €202.99	€203
€203 - €299.99	€250
€300 - €399.99	€300
€400 - €1,462	€350
Over €1,462	Nil

The enhanced EWSS is available to providers from today, until 31 January 2021. The general rules of the EWSS will continue to apply.

The Government has also agreed a package of supports for all businesses, which will help some ELC and SAC providers, including the following measures:

- The commercial rates waiver has been extended for the remainder of 2020; and
- Additional time is being provided for refund of overpayments made to employers under the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme (TWSS). If an employer is unable to repay the Revenue excess immediately, due to the impact of COVID on their business, the existing tax debt warehousing scheme will be expanded to include these repayments, to give employers additional time to return the overpayments.

Testing and Contract Tracing

My officials have been engaging regularly with various representatives of the sector and I am aware that some of you have concerns about the time taken to get COVID tests and results and any necessary contact tracing, for both staff and children in your services. I am meeting with the Director General of the HSE to discuss this further later this week. I am very aware how important it is for early learning and childcare services to have rapid access to testing and contact tracing, to avoid unnecessary concerns, staff cover issues and room or service closures.

Finally, I would again like to thank all providers, and your staff, for the commitment you have shown to the children in your care, which will enable our children to continue to thrive and develop, despite all the fears and instability that COVID may be causing in their lives. I am committed to continuing to do my very best for the sector as we get through COVID.

With kind regards,

Roderic O'Gorman, TD

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth