



Information & Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

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Section 1: Introduction

This document provides an overview of the **Learner Fund 4**, the eligibility criteria for Learner Applicants and Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs).

All **Learner Fund 4** applications must be made online through the Pobal Learner Fund portal. A separate guideline document '**Learner Fund 4 - How to Apply**' gives details of how to register and complete the online application form and is available on the Pobal website and the Learner Fund portal. Only fully completed online applications can be considered for approval.

The **Learner Fund 4** online application form will open **25th January 2016** and remain accessible until **10th March 2016**.

Section 2: Overview of the Learner Fund 4

The **Learner Fund** is an initiative of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). Since this Initiative was established in 2014, more than 3,000 early years practitioners have been supported through three rounds of **Learner Fund** to raise their qualification level in Early Childhood Care and Education.

The recently announced **Learner Fund 4** will focus specifically on supporting the expansion of free pre-school provision under the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme announced in Budget 2016, which will increase the number of children benefiting from free pre-school from about 67,000 currently, to around 127,000 in a given programme year. The expansion of free pre-school applies from September 2016, when the minimum qualification requirement for ECCE Room Leaders will be a Level 6 Major Award on the National Qualifications Framework.

To ensure there are sufficient numbers of qualified ECCE Room Leaders to meet the requirements of expansion of the ECCE Programme, the Department will provide funding to assist existing early years practitioners who hold a full Level 5 Major Award, or equivalent, working in an ECCE service that intends to increase the number of ECCE places offered in the next funding year (September 2016 – August 2017) **to obtain an appropriate major award at Level 6 on the NFQ**, to meet the requirements to work as an ECCE Room Leader.

As with Learner Fund 3, applications should be submitted by the employer on behalf of the eligible staff member.

In advance of applying for the **Learner Fund 4**, the employer should consult with the staff member to obtain consent for the submission of an application on their behalf. The application form requests confirmation that the staff member is aware of, and consents to, the application.

Please note that only one application per ECCE service may be submitted under **Learner Fund 4.**

There is a **Learner Fund** panel of approved Training Providers who will deliver courses that meet the requirement for the **Learner Fund 4**. Only courses taken with a Training Provider on the approved panel can be considered for subsidy under the **Learner Fund 4**.

City/County Childcare Committees will review **Learner Fund 4** applications and, once approved, issue notification emails. This notification email is a requirement in order to enrol on a subsidised course.

Once approved for a subsidy the Learner Applicant can proceed to enrol with one of the approved Training Providers. An Updated **Learner Fund** panel list of Training Providers can be accessed on the Pobal Learner Fund portal or through City/County Childcare Committees.

Courses should be completed by June 2017

Courses are normally delivered in one of 3 ways, either fully classroom-based, fully online or blended i.e. part online and part classroom based. Employers should consult with eligible staff members to ascertain which course type is best suited to their needs. **Please bear in mind that courses should be completed by June 2017.** This may mean that a classroom-based course is not appropriate for an applicant who requires a number of components in order to obtain their major award.

Learner Applicants will pay a contribution to the cost of the course.

- Learner Applicants enrolling for a classroom-based course will contribute €50 per component (up to €400 for a full course).
- Learner Applicants enrolling for an online or blended course will contribute €30 per component (up to €240 for a full course).

Course Type	Maximum Learner Fund subsidy	Maximum Learner Applicant Contribution	Maximum cost per Component	Maximum cost per Course
Classroom-based courses	€150 / component	€50 / component	€200	€1600
Blended/Online Courses	€120 / component	€30 / component	€150	€1200

Once notification of approval is received from the City/County Childcare Committee, the Learner Applicant can then enrol on the course and pay their contribution.

Section 3: Eligibility

To be eligible, a **Learner Applicant must already hold an ECCE full Level 5 Major Award or equivalent, AND be working in an ECCE service.** **Learner Fund 4** is focused on ECCE expansion and for this reason the early years' service must be participating in ECCE; applications are completed and submitted by the service provider as the Learner Applicant's employer. The **employer must confirm their intention to increase the number of ECCE places offered** in the next funding year (September 2016 – August 2017) to meet increased ECCE demand. The employer must also confirm their intention that the staff member on whose behalf the application is being made will work as ECCE room leader when they have successfully completed the Level 6 major award.

A staff member who does not hold a full Level 5 Major Award, or equivalent, will be not be eligible for **Learner Fund 4**. The ECCE service will be asked to confirm on the application form that the Learner Applicant holds a full Level 5 Major Award, or equivalent and this qualification should be included on the list of DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications. Where a qualification is not published on the list of DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications but the holder considers it to be an appropriate Major Award at Level 5 on the NFQ or equivalent, the holder can apply to have their qualification assessed for approval (see DCYA Early Years Qualifications Recognition Application Process for details). If it is approved for recognition the details of the qualification will be added to the list of DCYA Early Years Recognised Qualifications. More information on the requirements of the QQI major awards is available [here](#).

A new ECCE service (i.e. that is not yet open) should be planning to employ appropriately qualified staff and therefore will not require, and hence will not be eligible under, Learner Fund 4.

Learner Applicants who already hold some Level 6 component awards relevant to the 6M2007 major award may apply for **Learner Fund 4** subsidy for 'part' rather than a 'full' Level 6 course. These applicants must check with a training provider as to possible exemptions for component awards already certified.

Training Providers can advise as to how many and which components need to be completed in order to attain the Level 6 Major Award. Learner Applicants will be asked to provide copies of any component certificates to the Training Provider when enrolling on their course. This will allow the Training Provider to check if the Learner Applicant can be exempted these components when submitting for the relevant major award. Learner Applicants and Training Providers should await approval (confirmed by email) from the relevant City/County Childcare Committee before commencing the training. Only those courses offered by approved Training Providers on the Learner Fund Panel will be eligible.

Section 4: Learner Applicant - Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

The FAQs will be updated periodically during the application process. The FAQs below are valid as of January 2016.

Q 1: Do I have to be an ECCE Room Leader to be eligible?

No. You do not have to be an ECCE Room Leader to apply, you must be a potential ECCE room Leader in the context of ECCE expansion. Your employer must confirm their intention that you will be an ECCE room leader when they expand their ECCE service. To be eligible you must be working directly with children in an ECCE service, and must already hold a full ECCE Major Award at Level 5 or equivalent.

Q 2: Is it a requirement of Learner Fund 4 that my employer is expanding his/her service to provide more ECCE places?

Yes. **Learner Fund 4** requires that the employer confirms their intention to increase the number of ECCE places offered in the funding year September 2016 – August 2017.

Q 3: I am opening a new service. Can I apply on behalf of my staff for Learner Fund 4?

No. A new ECCE service (i.e. that is not yet open) should be planning to employ appropriately qualified staff and therefore will not be eligible under **Learner Fund 4**.

Q 4: What fees will I have to pay as a Learner?

If you are approved for a subsidy for a classroom-based course you will pay €50 per component / €400 for a full course. If you are approved for a subsidy for an online or blended course you will pay a contribution of €30 per component / €240 per full course.

Q 5: When will I need to pay my fee contribution?

Once you have been approved a Learner Fund subsidy you will pay your fee contribution on enrolment with your chosen Training Provider.

Q 6: When must I have my course completed?

Under **Learner Fund 4** all Level 6 courses should be completed before end June 2017. Please be aware that from 31st December 2016 all ECCE Room Leaders must have an ECCE qualification at Level 6 on NFQ or equivalent. This means that if, for example, you have successfully completed your course by December 2016, you may work as an ECCE Room Leader from January 2017 provided that you can evidence that you have successfully completed the Level 6 Major Award (i.e. submitted to QQI and pending certification).

Q 7: What happens if I do not finish the required components?

If you do not complete the required number of components to achieve 120 credits for whatever reason, you will not achieve the relevant Level 6 Major Award and you will not be eligible to work as an ECCE Room Leader after 31st December 2016. Please discuss your options with a Training Provider.

Q 8: If I have already started a Level 6 course can I get the subsidy?

Yes. If you have already started your course after 20th November 2014, you can apply for **Learner Fund 4**. If eligible, you can get a subsidy towards components already completed or underway, provided the Training Provider you are with is on the Learner Fund panel of approved Training Providers, and your course started after 20th November 2014. The CCC will request you to provide a receipt or proof of fees paid.

Q 9: I applied under a previous round and was unsuccessful. Can I apply again?

Yes. You can apply again if you are now eligible for **Learner Fund 4**.

Q 10: I was successful under a previous round of Learner Fund but did not take up my course. Can I apply to the Learner Fund again?

You do not need to re-apply in 2016 if you have been previously approved for a **Learner Fund** subsidy for a Level 6 Major Award, and if you remain eligible for a subsidy. Contact your local CCC without delay, and arrange to enrol with a Training Provider from the panel.

Q 11: I was successful under Learner Fund 1 / 2 but didn't complete/failed my Level 6 course. Can I apply again under Learner Fund 4?

No. If you availed of a subsidy for a Level 6 course under a previous **Learner Fund** but did not achieve a Level 6 Major Award, you will not be eligible for another subsidy under Learner Fund 4.

Q 12: Will I lose my job if I do not get my qualification or finish my course at all?

Provided you meet the minimum level of qualification requirement set out in the new Child Care Regulations you will be able to work with children in an early years' service - this new legal requirement will come into effect from 31st December 2016. The minimum qualifications will require that all early years' practitioners working directly with preschool children hold an ECCE qualification at **Level 5** on NFQ or equivalent.

From 31st December 2016, the ECCE Programme will require that all ECCE Room Leaders hold an ECCE Major Award at **Level 6** on the NFQ or equivalent. For compliance reasons therefore your employer will not be able to allow you to work as an ECCE Room Leader after this date unless you meet these ECCE qualification requirements.

Q 13: Do I need to have Broadband to do a course online?

Yes. You will need to have Broadband, a webcam and speakers to do an online course. You will be asked on the application form to give your preference for a classroom-based course, an online course or a blended course, and you can choose which your 1st, 2nd and 3rd preference is. If you choose online or blended as your first choice, you are thereby confirming that you have the necessary broadband/webcam/speakers. There may be additional specifications required, depending on the particular Training Provider.

N.B. It is the responsibility of the Training Provider to provide all information about how you will access and be able to participate on the course.

Q 14: What is a blended learning course?

It is the responsibility of the Training Provider to provide all information about the delivery, format and structure of the training programme, how you will access and be able to participate on the course. A blended course is generally one that is delivered online for the most part, but includes elements that are delivered in a traditional classroom setting, such as occasional face-to-face tutorial sessions, as part of the course. For example there may be five Saturday tutorial sessions to be attended in addition to the online sessions. Please discuss options with your City/County Childcare Committee who will know more details about the options available and you can also discuss with the Training Providers.

Q 15: I'm on a CE scheme working in a crèche will I be eligible for a Learner Fund 4 subsidy for Level 6?

If you are on a CE scheme you will not be eligible for a Learner Fund subsidy as there is an existing training fund for CE scheme participants.

Q 16: I am on Jobs Bridge Scheme am I eligible for a Learner Fund subsidy for Level 6?

No, if you are on a Jobs Bridge Scheme, you are not eligible for a Learner Fund 4 subsidy.

Q 17: I am on a TUS scheme, am I eligible for Learner Fund 4 subsidy?

No, if you are on a TUS scheme you are not eligible for a Learner Fund 4 subsidy.

Q 18: What happens if I fail a component?

The award is made up of 120 credits with mandatory and elective components. More information on the requirements of the QQI Major Awards is available [here](#). If you fail a component you should discuss your options with the Training Provider; you will need 120 credits to obtain a Major Award. If you need to repeat a component this would have to be done at your own expense. If you do not have an ECCE Major Award at Level 6 on NFQ or equivalent, you will not be able to work as an ECCE Room Leader after 31st December 2016.

Q 19: What happens once my application has been submitted?

Your employer will receive a pop up message saying 'Your Application was successfully submitted'. It will then be a number of weeks before you are notified by email from the City/County Childcare Committee as to whether you have been successful in your application for a Learner Fund 4 subsidy. Once you are notified that you have been approved, the City/County Childcare Committee will support you to choose an appropriate Training Provider and course to meet your training needs and preferences.

Q 20: Will I be informed if I am not approved for a subsidy?

Yes. You will be informed by email from your City/County Childcare Committee if you are unsuccessful.

Q 21: I signed a Grandfather Declaration, can I apply for Learner Fund

No, you are not eligible to apply for Learner Fund round 4.

Q 22: If I move job after I submit my application, will I continue to be eligible for a Learner Fund 4 subsidy?

If after you submit your application, and are successful, you move job to work in a different ECCE service, you will still be eligible for a Learner Fund 4 subsidy. If you are no longer working in the early years sector you will not be eligible to receive a Learner Fund 4 subsidy.

In both cases you must notify your City/County Childcare Committee.

Q 23: My employer is applying on the basis that she/he intends me to work occasionally as a relief worker as the ECCE room leader?

If you will be working as a relief worker for the ECCE room leader, you are not eligible for a Learner Fund 4 subsidy.

(N.B. relief workers were eligible for a Level 5 subsidy under the previous round **Learner Fund 3**, but will not be eligible for a Level 6 subsidy under **Learner Fund 4**).

Q 24: Where can I find more information about QQI exemptions for component awards already acquired?

- For details see <https://qhelp.qqi.ie/providers/certification-queries/common-award-system-cas-exemptions/>
- For information on non CAS award exemptions <https://qhelp.qqi.ie/providers/certification-queries/exemptions-with-relevant-non-qqi-qualifications/>
- For information on recognition of foreign qualifications <https://qhelp.qqi.ie/international-visitors/qualifications-recognition-advice-service/>

Q 24: What if my question was not answered in these FAQs?

If you have read both the **Learner Fund - How to Apply** guide and this document and still have queries relating to the **Learner Fund 4**, you can email us at onlinesupport@pobal.ie for further support.