



## Pobal

# Early Childhood Ireland Explainers

### History

Pobal was established in 1992 by the Irish Government in agreement with the European Commission. It was formerly known as Area Development Management and was charged with managing an EU Grant for local development. Renamed Pobal in 2005, its parent department is the Department of Rural and Community Development.

### Role

Today, Pobal works on the government's behalf to support communities and local agencies towards achieving social inclusion and development. Pobal provides management and support services to 38 programmes in the areas of social inclusion and equality, inclusive employment and enterprise, and early years and young people.

Several groups are supported by the Government through Pobal. These include the long-term unemployed, young people, fishermen, Travellers, and ex-prisoners. The work of Pobal includes programme design, implementation support, financial administration, and governance of funding allocations.

This explainer is focused on Pobal's role in the Early Years and School Age Care sector.

Pobal administers funding programmes and a range of supports for Early Years and School Age Care (EY and SAC) services. These include the Access and Inclusion Model (AIM), Better Start, the Community Childcare Subvention (CCS), Core Funding, the County/City Childcare Committees (CCCs), the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Scheme, Early Learning and Care and School Age Capital Programmes, the Learner Fund, the National Childcare Scheme (NCS), Training and Employment Childcare (TEC) programmes and Voluntary Childcare Organisations (VCOs).

### Access and Inclusion Model (AIM)

AIM is a model of supports designed to guarantee that children with disabilities can fully participate in the ECCE programme. [Click here to read our explainer on AIM.](#)

Pobal's role in AIM includes managing and administering functions under AIM levels one,

five and seven. These include the application processes, appraisal and decision-making, contract management, financial management, including payment processing and reporting, information supports, and support and advice for services and parents.

## **Better Start**

Better Start National Early Years Quality Development is a national initiative established by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and is hosted by Pobal. This initiative aims to promote and enhance inclusive high-quality early years care for children from birth to six years of age in Ireland.

To learn more about this initiative, [click here](#).

## **Community Childcare Subvention Saver Programme (CCSP)**

The CCSP is a targeted programme that aims to support low-income parents to avail of reduced fees. Pobal's role involves paying participating services for their CCSP-approved children. Pobal also conducts checks and site visits on behalf of the DCEDIY to guarantee that eligible parents receive the correct cost reduction in their fees. Pobal is involved in providing support and guidance to services to promote sustainability.

The CCSP was closed for new registration for the 2021 programme year following the introduction of the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) in 2019.

## **Core Funding**

The Core Funding Scheme is administered by Pobal. The Pobal Early Years Provider Centre also makes itself available to help providers with the online application for the scheme. Settings also had to complete Pobal's Sector Profile to access Core Funding.

As the Scheme Administrator, Pobal distributes the grant to partner services. Pobal also must verify the service capacity of a setting, as it underpins the amount of funding received from the scheme. Pobal also undertakes compliance visits in settings in relation to Core Funding. They also provide settings with templates for their Fee Policy and Parent Statement.

## **County/City Childcare Committees**

CCCs work to provide support to over 4,000 early education and care service providers. [To learn more about the CCCs, take a look at our explainer](#).

On behalf of the DCEDIY, Pobal manages the funding of CCCs, oversees their work and provides development supports. Pobal also works with the CCCs and the DCEDIY to ensure that any contracted services experiencing challenges are supported.

## Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme

The ECCE programme is a universal early years programme that is available to children of pre-school age prior to entering primary school. [To learn more about ECCE, please see our Explainer.](#)

For the ECCE programme, providers submit child registrations on the Hive portal and Pobal processes payments to service providers. Pobal is also involved in undertaking annual compliance visits, ensuring providers are adhering to the terms of the programme. Pobal also pays the capitation rate directly to services.

## Early Years Practitioners Learner Funds

The Learner Fund Bursaries provide funding to support existing staff working directly with children in registered Early Years settings and registered childminders to meet the mandatory minimum qualification requirements. It also provides funding to support existing Early Years Practitioners who have an early years Level 5 qualification, to attain a Level 6 qualification.

Pobal oversees the Learner Fund on behalf of the DCEDIY. In 2021, it supported 334 Early Years learners.

## National Childcare Scheme (NCS)

The NCS provides financial support to help parents to meet the costs of Early Years and School Age Care. [To learn more about the NCS, please see our Explainer.](#)

NCS policy, legislation and oversight are the responsibility of the DCEDIY. Pobal oversees the day-to-day administration of the scheme.

## Voluntary Childcare Organisations (VCOs)

VCOs, like Early Childhood Ireland, provide a range of supports to the Early Years and School Age Care sector. Pobal manages the funding to VCOs on behalf of the DCEDIY, oversees the work of VCOs and provides development supports.

