

PRESS RELEASE



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

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Minister O’Gorman announces €25m in capital funding to deliver thousands of additional early learning and childcare places

- **New Building Blocks Extension Grant Scheme to open for applications in autumn**
- **Grants for early learning and childcare services to increase their capacity by means of large scale extensions**
- **Funding to also be made available for community services to purchase or build new premises**
- **This builds on previous Expansion Grant Scheme in 2024, with 23 services provisionally approved for funding to deliver over 300 new places**

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O’Gorman has today announced details of the €25m Building Blocks Extension Grant scheme for early learning and childcare providers.

The Scheme will deliver additional capacity for one to three-year-olds by supporting existing early learning and childcare Core Funding partner services, both community and private services, to undertake extensions to their existing premises. It will also fund community-based not-for-profit services who wish to purchase or construct new premises.

The Building Blocks Extension Grant Scheme is part of the wider Building Blocks Capital Programme for Early Learning and Childcare under the revised National Development Plan 2021-2030 (NDP). €25 million will be available for the scheme over 2025 and 2026.

Projects with a value between €100,000 and €650,000 will be eligible and can include:

- Extensions to existing premises.
- Installation of modular buildings or buildings built using modern methods of construction.
- Purchase of early learning and childcare premises (community services only).
- Purchase of premises that could be easily adapted for use as early learning and childcare premises (community services only).
- Construction of building to house a new early learning and childcare service on ‘greenfield’ or ‘brownfield’ site (community services only).

The Extension Grant scheme follows on from the Expansion Grant scheme which ran earlier this year. Minister O’Gorman is also today announcing that 23 services were successful in the appraisal process

under that scheme and their projects have been recommended for funding. Successful services are being contacted directly by Pobal to agree next steps required to proceed to contracting. Grants of between €25,000 and €100,000 have been recommended for projects to undertake renovation or upgrades to existing space to cater for more children. The funding is anticipated to deliver 308 new places for one to three-year-olds.

Making the announcement today, Minister O’Gorman said:

“I am very pleased for the services who were successful in their applications under the Building Blocks Expansion Grant Scheme. This will deliver a welcome increase in places, particularly for young children.”

Minister O’Gorman said that the next phase – the Building Blocks Extension Grant Scheme – will be more ambitious and have an even greater impact on the sector. He said:

“I am delighted to announce this large-scale capital grant scheme. The Building Blocks Extension Grant Scheme will provide funding to support services to deliver thousands more of affordable early learning and childcare places.

“It is the first time in many years that public funding is being made available for the purchase or construction of new premises. This element of the scheme, along with funding for large scale extensions, will support us to achieve our national target of having 60,000 places for under 3s by 2028.”

He added:

“My Department, working in partnership with the sector, has achieved huge success in recent years in improving the affordability of early learning and childcare.

“Improved affordability, along with increased population and high levels of employment, has increased demand for early learning and childcare. The Extension Grant scheme is an important initiative from Government to the sector to assist them in responding to that increased demand.”

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth continues to progress a range of other actions to increase the supply of quality and affordable early learning and childcare. These include the ongoing development and additional resourcing of Core Funding, which has given rise to a significant expansion of places since the scheme was first introduced, as well as the regulation of childminders under the National Action Plan for Childminding, which will allow the National Childcare Scheme to open to parents who use childminders from autumn 2024.

The Department is also working with the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage to review the 2001 Planning Guidelines for Childcare Facilities, including through the undertaking of a survey of planning authorities on their application.

Separately, the Department of Education has recently published *Procedures for the Use of School Buildings Outside of School Hours* which encourages and supports the use of school buildings for early learning and care and school age childcare where there is scope to do so.

An additional €5 million in capital funding in 2025 under the NDP will also support services who are experiencing sustainability threats due to problems with their buildings and the continuation of Childminding Development Grants to support the introduction of regulation to this element of the sector as well as the continuation of the Parent and Toddler Grant Scheme.

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Note for Editors:

Building Blocks Extension Grant Scheme

Key elements of the scheme

- Applications to open in autumn 2024, funding to be available from 2025.
- Total funding available for this Scheme will be €25m.
- Scheme is open to Core Funding partner services only.
- It is anticipated that the Minister will employ the use of liens over capital assets delivered through this funding programme in order to protect substantial public investment over the long term. For this reason, access to the scheme will be limited to services who own their own premises (which is not also a private residence) or services who have a long term lease.
- All projects must deliver net increases in full-time or part-time places for one to three-year-olds.
- A maximum fee threshold will apply.
- Funding will be prioritised in areas of identified undersupply (using a relative demand model) and for services that have an Equal Start priority designation.
- Project proposals will require detailed professional reports to be submitted as part of the application process. Applications will be reviewed by specialist appraisers in order to quality assure the buildings that are delivered under this scheme. Application of the Universal Design Guidelines will be key feature of the appraisal process.
- The scale of funding available for different types of projects is outlined below.

Extension

- Grants for extensions available to both private and community services.
- Project costs of between €100,000 and €650,000.
- Community services will be fully funded up to maximum of €500,000, any project costs between €500,000 and €650,000 must be self-funded.
- Match funding will be required of private services for all projects, with a maximum contribution by the Department of €250,000 or 50% of total project costs, whichever is lower.

Purchase or construction

- Grants for purchase or construction available to community services only.
- Grants of between €300,000 to €650,000 will be available to purchase an additional space or construct a new premises to cater for additional capacity.

Further details of the scheme will be provided to the sector in the coming weeks.

**Issued by the Press and Communications Office at the Department of Children, Equality, Disability,
Integration and Youth.**

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