



Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare careers in Ireland: Frequently Asked Questions



An Roinn Leanaí, Míchumais
agus Comhionannais
Department of Children,
Disability and Equality

What kind of careers are available in Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare?

There are three main roles:

- **Early years educator:** works with children from birth to 6 years in early learning and care settings.
- **School-age childcare practitioner:** works with children outside school hours (before/after school and school holidays), for children under 15.
- **Childminder:** looks after children in the childminder's own home.

What is an early years educator and why is the role important?

Early years educators support children's development, learning and wellbeing during their most formative years. Early years educators are reflective, responsive professionals who support learning and development through relationships and play-based child-centred practice.

Do I need qualifications to work in Early Learning and Care (ELC)?

Yes. People working directly with children in Early Learning and Care services must have at least an approved Level 5 major award in Early Learning and Care (or equivalent). Many roles require higher Levels. Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme lead educator roles require Level 6, and graduate roles require Level 7+.

How do I qualify as an early years educator?

Common pathways include Post Leaving Cert (PLC) courses and further education routes (often Level 5/6) and higher education routes (Level 7/8 degrees via CAO or direct entry). A key tip is to choose a programme that includes the required early learning and care content and supervised placement. To check whether a qualification is recognised, use the Department of Children, Disability and Equality's recognised qualifications list.

https://assets.gov.ie/static/documents/cca6b3b7/20260409_List_of_Approved_Programmes_for_Adherence_to_the_Professional_Award_Criteria_and_Guidelines_.pdf

What if I already have a qualification, or I studied outside Ireland?

Check the Department of Children, Disability and Equality's list of recognised Early Learning and Care qualifications. If your qualification is not listed (especially if gained outside Ireland), it may need to be assessed through the Department's qualification recognition/approval process.

Do I need Garda Vetting to work in Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare?

Yes. Garda Vetting is required for relevant work with children, and the service provider must receive a vetting disclosure before you start.

Do I need child safeguarding training?

Yes. Everyone working directly with children must complete safeguarding training in line with the Children First Act 2015. Tusla provides a free online programme called "Introduction to Children First".

Do I need a qualification to work only in School-Age Childcare?

If you work exclusively with school-age children, there is currently no mandatory qualification required. You will still need Garda Vetting and safeguarding training to work with children.

Who is best suited to work in an Early Learning and Care or School-Age Childcare setting?

Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare are ideal for people who are passionate about supporting children's development and want a career that offers both purpose and progression. With opportunities available nationwide, career pathways, and the chance to make a meaningful difference every day, the sector offers a rewarding and fulfilling career choice.

Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare are open to people from a wide range of backgrounds and experiences. Diversity including different cultures, genders, and perspectives are important to ensure the workforce reflects the communities it serves. A diverse team not only creates inclusive opportunities

for those entering the profession but also provides positive role models for children and helps build strong, meaningful connections with families and communities.

What is a childminder, and how do I register?

A childminder is someone who works in their own home caring for other people's children (under the age of 15 years) for at least 2 hours per day.

For guidance and support to register as a childminder contact your local City or County Childcare Committee:

<https://www.gov.ie/en/department-of-children-disability-and-equality/publications/city-and-county-childcare-committees/>

or visit

<https://www.tusla.ie/early-years-inspectorate/childminding-services/i-would-like-to-register-as-a-childminder/>

Is there strong demand for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare staff?

There is strong demand for early years educators and school-age practitioners across Ireland. Employment opportunities are advertised across Ireland through local providers, County and City Childcare Committees and job board websites.

What curriculum and quality frameworks guide Early Learning and Care in Ireland?

Young children from birth to six are supported in their learning and development through Aistear, Ireland's Early Childhood Curriculum Framework, and Síolta, Ireland's National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education. Together, these frameworks promote a child-centred, play-based approach that supports children's learning, development and wellbeing.

Are there specific opportunities for staff who speak Irish in Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare?

There are Irish-medium Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare services in the Gaeltacht and outside of Gaeltacht areas. The use of Irish language in services is categorised by whether services are:

- i) wholly Irish-medium settings;
- ii) mixed settings where part of the setting is English-medium and part of the setting is Irish-medium;
- iii) English-medium settings with some use of Irish;
- iv) and wholly English-medium settings.

Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum framework for all children from birth to 6 years in Ireland, includes an aim of supporting young children to have an awareness and appreciation of Gaeilge (Irish) and our cultural and linguistic heritage. As one of Ireland's official languages, it is important that young children in English-medium settings have opportunities to be exposed to and experience Gaeilge (Irish) from an early age. Listening to and speaking Gaeilge (Irish) words supports young children's sense of identity as Irish citizens, as well as contributing to their language development. Early years educators can use routines, activities and interactions to introduce and use Gaeilge (Irish) with young children in fun and natural ways throughout the day.

Aistear the early childhood curriculum framework was also published as Gaeilge (in Irish).

How can I keep learning and progress in my career?

The website **www.nurturingskills.ie** has a page that outlines career pathways and progression routes, including Continuous Professional Development (CPD) opportunities.

What is the Nurturing Skills Learner Fund and who is it for?

The Nurturing Skills Learner Fund can cover up to 90% of fees for approved Level 7 and Level 8 qualifications for early years educators who are continuing to work in the sector. For further details and eligibility criteria visit **<https://www.nurturingskills.ie/career-development/learner-fund/>**

What can I expect for pay and conditions?

In Ireland, Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare is privately delivered. Employers in the sector set their own pay and conditions.

However, minimum pay rates and some conditions in the Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare sector are set through Employment Regulation Orders. These rates are available online and show the minimum rate of payment for each role.

https://www.workplacerelations.ie/en/what_you_should_know/hours-and-wages/employment%20regulation%20orders/early-learning-and-childcare-sector/

What should I know about sick pay and pensions?

The Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare sector is covered by general employment legislation

https://www.workplacerelations.ie/en/what_you_should_know/

Auto-enrolment is a retirement savings scheme designed to automatically enrol eligible employees who meet the scheme requirements.



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