



Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

Conditions for receipt of Nurturing Skills Learner Funds (2024/2025)

A. Background to the Nurturing Skills Learner Fund

The Nurturing Skills Learner Fund is co-financed by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (“DCEDIY”) and the European Commission. The 2024/2025 NSLF is a pilot scheme and may be amended by the DCEDIY for future academic years.

Through the NSLF, the DCEDIY seeks to increase significantly the level of funding for approved early years educators and School Aged Childcare (“SAC”) practitioners who undertake flexible education programmes in Early Learning and Care (“ELC”) or SAC at Levels 7 and 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ) while continuing to work in the sector.

From 2024 the NSLF will pay a contribution each year to approved educators’ costs of studying, with funding going directly to the education institutions, in order to minimise the up-front cost barrier facing early years educators and SAC practitioners who wish to upskill. It is condition of funding that the recipient of funding will remain in employment in the ELC or School Age Childcare sector throughout the period of study.

The proposed fund is designed to complement (and avoid double-funding with) other financial supports available to educators, including through the Free Fees Initiative.

DCEDIY is committing to providing funding for an amount equal to 80% of fees up to a maximum of €3,200 to recipients, after all other governmental tuition support funds have been taken into account, with the student being liable to the relevant higher education institution for the remaining 20% of fees owed.

The rules and conditions in relation to funding under the NSLF are created by the DCEDIY. Pobal will conduct the application process and operate and manage the provision of funding provided under NSLF to applicants on behalf of the Department. Pobal will provide the funding for a student directly to the student’s applicable higher education institution.



B. Conditions of NSLF Funding

The provision of funding by way of the NSLF is subject to the conditions set out below. A Glossary of Terms is included at Appendix 3 in order to assist potential applicants better understand some of the terms included in this document. The **Rules Applicable to the Provision of Funding under the NSLF 2024/2025**, which is available at the DCEDIY's website at www.gov.ie/NurturingSkillsLearnerFund specifies the rules applicable to the provision of funding including the assessment process conducted by the DCEDIY in respect of applications for funding. As stated above, the DCEDIY reserves the right to amend and/or update the rules applicable to the provision of funding pursuant to the NSLF. The onus is on potential applicants to fully consider the rules applicable to funding in respect of any given academic year.

By submitting an application for funding under the NSLF **the recipient acknowledges and agrees that:**

1. NSLF funds are only provided to recipients who have been deemed eligible for funding in accordance with the **Rules Applicable to the Provision of Funding under the NSLF 2024/2025**;
2. funding under the NSLF is only provided to recipients who are accepted, enrolled and studying an Approved Course;
3. in line with the commitment in Nurturing Skills, the NSLF will only support recipients who are undertaking courses that have been quality-assured as being in compliance with the Professional Award Criteria Guidelines (PACG) (for level 7 and 8 awards) through approval by the QAB as listed in Appendix 2;
4. the provision of funding under the NSLF is conditional on funding being available and / or subject to continuation of the scheme;
5. the total amount a recipient will receive is calculated on the basis of the funding model identified in the **Rules Applicable to the Provision of Funding under the NSLF 2024/2025**. For the avoidance of doubt the amount received is calculated on the basis that all other forms of Government funding that the recipient is in receipt of is deducted initially from what is owed to the higher education Institution;
6. information about payment of funding by Pobal on behalf the DCEDIY to a recipient of funding shall be set out in the NSLF funding letter sent to the student through the NSLF Student Portal or by email from Pobal. For the avoidance of doubt funding for the student will only be paid directly to the relevant higher education institution subject to verification by the DCEDIY



in advance of the discharge of the funding of the information submitted by a recipient in its application for funding. The specific amount of funding will be provided at later date once the calculation has been completed;

7. recipients of NSLF funding will not receive funding directly. The funding amount received, as identified in the NSLF funding letter sent to the recipient from the DCEDIY, will be provided directly to the higher education Institution providing the Approved Course;
8. funding for each recipient from the NSLF will not exceed a maximum of €3,200 per recipient per academic year irrespective of the total course Fee. The remaining 20% (of which 10% will be refunded to the recipient after completion of the course contingent on working in the sector and completing the relevant exit survey) plus any outstanding fees above €3,200 will be paid by the recipient directly to the higher education Institution;
9. as part of the DCEDIY and European Commission funding there is a requirement that an exit survey be carried out by recipients who have been in receipt of NSLF. Recipients will be entitled to receive a rebate of 10% of course fees to a max of €400 per year if they can provide proof of employment in the sector 6 months after their graduation and completing the relevant exit survey This rebate will be paid directly to the recipient;
10. if funding to a recipient is terminated by the DCEDIY for whatever reason then, for the avoidance of doubt, any outstanding or prospective fees in respect of the provision of an Approved Course is a matter as between the relevant recipient and the higher education Institution;
11. information held by the DCEDIY on NSLF is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2014 (FOI Act). Access to information is set out in the following link: <https://DCEDIY.ie/freedom-of-information/>

The provision of funding to a recipient of funding is further **subject to the following conditions:**

12. the a recipient of funding shall ensure accurate up to date information and all documentation required by the DCEDIY is uploaded to the NSLF Student Portal within the timeline set by the DCEDIY / Pobal;
13. the a recipient of funding shall reply to any queries submitted by the DCEDIY, Pobal and/or by any other persons as the DCEDIY may require; and
14. compliance by the a recipient of funding with the **Rules Applicable to the Provision of Funding under the NSLF 2024/2025**; and



Failure to comply with the above conditions by recipient of funding may affect the provision of funding up to and including the cessation of funding by the DCEDIY.

C. Termination of Funding

The DCEDIY shall have the right to discontinue the provision of funding to a recipient on the happening of any of the following:

1. if recipient commits a serious breach or series of breaches of the above conditions of funding;
2. if a recipient commits any breach of the above conditions of funding and fails to remedy such a breach within the time specified in writing by the DCEDIY;
3. if the DCEDIY becomes aware that the recipient suspected to have provided false and/or misleading information as part of their application for funding;
4. if the DCEDIY is unable or no longer intends to provide the funding under the NSLF.

In the event that the DCEDIY discontinues the provision of funding to a recipient for whatever reason then, for the avoidance of doubt, any outstanding or prospective fees in respect of the provision of an Approved Course to that recipient is a matter as between the student and the higher education Institution.

D. Updates to these Conditions

The DCEDIY may update the conditions contained in this Conditions for receipt of NSLFs (2024/2025) document. Any such changes will be communicated to recipients.

Rules for Nurturing Skills Learner Fund- Appendix 1

“Rules” for Nurturing Skills Learner Fund (NSLF) can be found on the Nurturing Skills webpage at NSLF- www.gov.ie/NurturingSkillsLearnerFund

Approved Courses- Appendix 2

Link to NSLF eligible courses for the academic year 2024/2025 QAB approved can be found on the NSLF page- link- www.gov.ie/NurturingSkillsLearnerFund

Or at the link [here](#).

Glossary of Terms – Appendix 3

Glossary of Terms

In this document each capitalised term will have the meaning set out as follows:

“Approved course” means ELC degrees (level 7 and 8) that have been approved by the QAB by 1 November 2023 and that are thereby approved for recognition by DCEDIY. A full list of NSLF approved courses for academic year 2024/2025 is available at Appendix 2

“Course Fees” means Course Tuition fee and Student Contribution fee only. It does not include institutional levies or student support costs.

“Data” means all Confidential Information, whether in oral or written (including electronic) form, created by or in any way originating with the DCEDIY (including but not limited to its employees, agents, independent contractors and/or Sub-contractors) and all information that is the output of any computer processing, or other electronic manipulation of any information that was created by or in any way originating with the DCEDIY provided under this Agreement and includes any Personal Data.

“Data Controller” has the meaning given under the Data Protection Laws.

“Data Processor” has the meaning given under the Data Protection Laws.

“Data Protection Laws” means all applicable national and EU data protection laws, regulations and guidelines, including but not limited to Regulation (EU) 2016/679 on the protection of natural persons with regard to the processing of personal data and on the free movement of such data, and repealing Directive

95/46/EC (the “General Data Protection Regulation”), and any guidelines and codes of practice issued by the Office of the Data Protection Commission or other supervisory authority for data protection in Ireland.

“Data Subject” has the meaning given under the Data Protection Laws.

“Data Subject Access Request” means a request made by a Data Subject in accordance with rights granted under the Data Protection Laws to access his or her Personal Data.

“DCEDIY” means the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

“Early Learning and Care” or “ELC” means any regulated arrangement that provides learning and care for children from birth to compulsory primary school age. “Eligible Applicant” means a staff member in a Tusla-registered ELC or SAC service where the service they work in has a signed and active Core Funding Agreement with the DCEDIY. This aligns with Partnership for Public Good objectives to see Core Funding unlocking supports for the sector. Rules governing who is eligible to participate in the NSLF are as set out in Appendix 1.

“Eligible Student” means an applicant registered by the Institution(s) on an approved course, whose eligibility for NSLF has been verified by the DCEDIY.

“Funding” means the support provided to Eligible Students from the NSLF (paid directly to the Institution) to attend an Approved Course as detailed in Appendix 1 for the initial academic year 2024/2025 and for subsequent years, subject to sufficient budget allocation.

“Government Supports” means financial assistance provided by any Government Department or Agency towards the full or partial cost of undertaking a higher education award. A list is available at <https://hea.ie/funding-governance-performance/funding/student-finance/> and includes the Free Fees Scheme, SUSI grants and a range of other financial supports.

“Institution” means the provider of an Approved Course as listed in Appendix 2

“Nurturing Skills” means the Workforce Plan for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare, 2022-2028" (www.gov.ie/nurturingskills).

“NSLF” or “NSLF” means an initiative, administered by Pobal on behalf of DCEDIY, through which those working in ELC and SAC settings undertaking level 7-8 qualifications that are in line with the new standards may qualify for financial supports to reduce the cost of participating in those courses.

“NSLF Student Portal” is an online platform that serves as a hub to enable staff working in Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC) to apply for NSLF Funding and access information regarding the NSLF”

“Personal Data” has the meaning given under Data Protection Laws.

“Processing” has the meaning given under the Data Protection Laws.

“Professional Award Criteria Guidelines” or “PACG” means the Professional Award Criteria and Guidelines (PACG) for Initial Professional Education (Level 7 and Level 8) Degree Programmes for the Early Learning and Care (ELC) Sector in Ireland as agreed by the Minister of Education and the Minister of Children, published- <https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/c2e6b-qualifications-advisory-board-qab-for-the-early-learning-and-care-elc-sector/#list-of-approved-programmes-with-adherence-to-the-professional-award-criteria-and-guidelines>.

“Qualifications Advisory Board” or “QAB” means the body which was jointly instituted by the Minister for Education and the then Minister for Children and Youth Affairs on a non-statutory basis to review Initial Professional Education (Level 7 and Level 8) Degree Programmes for the Early Learning and Care (ELC) Sector. The QAB reviews Initial Professional Education (Level 7 and Level 8) Degree Programmes for the Early Learning and Care (ELC) Sector and advises both Departments whether a programme, once validated as a professional award, can be considered for inclusion on a list of professional qualifications for the Early Learning and Care sector. Further information in relation to the QAB is available-here:<https://www.gov.ie/en/organisation-information/c2e6b-qualifications-advisory-board-qab-for-the-early-learning-and-care-elc-sector/>

“Quality and Qualifications Ireland” or “QQI” means the State agency responsible for promoting the quality, integrity and reputation of Ireland’s further and higher education system (<https://www.qqi.ie/>).

“School Age Childcare” or “SAC” means any school age service that is regulated under the Child Care Act 1991.

“The Minister” means the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

“Institution” means Educations providers of QAB approved programme registered on the Pobal Early Years Portal eligible for the NSLF

“DCEDIY website for NSLF” can be found at NSLF- www.gov.ie/NurturingSkillsLearnerFund

“Rules” for NSLF can be found on the Nurturing Skills webpage at NSLF- www.gov.ie/NurturingSkillsLearnerFund

SAMPLE Student Letter of Conditional Funding- Appendix 4



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Arna chomhchistiú ag
an Aontas Eorpach
Co-funded by the
European Union

Student Name

NSLF ID

To whom it concerns,

This letter confirms that ***Student Name*** has been approved for funding under the Nurturing Skills Learner Fund. The Nurturing Skills Learner Fund provides funding to eligible early years educators and school-age childcare (SAC) practitioners looking to upskill through participation in a Qualification Advisory Board (QAB) approved academic programmes in early learning and care (ELC) at levels 7 to 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

The Nurturing Skills Learner Fund is a co-paying agreement, with the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) committing to providing funding for an amount equal to 80% of fees up to a maximum of €3,200 to eligible students, after all other governmental tuition support funds have been taken into account, with the student being liable to the institution for the remaining 20% of fees owed.

Please note that this letter confirms that the DCEDIY has approved funding for the 2024/2025 academic year only.

Please ensure that this letter is provided to the Higher Education Institution where you are studying, on registration. Failure to do so may result in funding not being issued on your behalf to the Institution.

If you have further queries on this matter please contact Pobal at NSLF@pobal.ie