



Information & Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

Learner Fund 3 (May 2016)

Version: 27 May 2016

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Section1: Introduction

The revised Child Care Regulations require that all early years practitioners have a minimum of a full Level 5 Major Award, or equivalent, in order **to work directly with children after December 31st 2016**. These minimum qualification requirements will mean that established services must ensure that all staff are appropriately qualified.

A Learner who has applied to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) for qualification status recognition, and who has received a letter from DCYA verifying that their current qualification is not a Major Award, is eligible to apply for Learner Fund 3 (May 2016) in order to undertake a Major Award at Level 5 to meet future minimum regulatory qualification requirements.

Note: Learner Fund 3 (May 2016) is also open to Learners with Qualification Recognition Letters from DCYA (dated 2016) and who had not already applied for a Learner Fund 3 subsidy before the closing date of March 10th 2016.

Online Application Timeframe:
Opening for Applications from Friday 27th May 2016 at 14:00hrs
Closed for Applications on Friday 29th July 2016 at 18:00 hrs.

In advance of applying for the **Learner Fund**, employers should consult with eligible staff members to obtain consent for the submission of an application on their behalf and ensure the staff member has a **DCYA Qualification Recognition Letter**. The application form requests confirmation that the staff member is aware of, and consents to, the application.

NB Staff who do not currently meet the minimum qualification requirement and do not intend to continue working in the early years sector can apply for a temporary exemption to the minimum qualification requirement. This exemption only applies to the Level 5 (on the national framework of qualifications). **See FAQ Q20.**

All **Learner Fund** applications must be made online through the Pobal **Learner Fund** portal. A separate guideline **Learner Fund - 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 along with uploaded DCYA Qualification Recognition Letters, which verifies the status of the learner applicant's current qualification, can be considered for approval.**

Learner Fund Round	Course Level	Course Completion date only QQI Certification to follow	Compliance Deadline for Early Years Services
LF1 & LF2	5 & 6	02/12/16	31/12/16
LF3	5	31/12/16	31/12/16
LF4	6	31/12/17	To be confirmed

Section2: Overview of the Learner Fund 3 - May 2016

The **Learner Fund** is an initiative of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA). The **Learner Fund 3 (May 2016)** will provide funding to assist **existing staff working directly with children in registered Early Years services** to meet the mandatory minimum qualification requirements to be introduced after December 31st 2016 **and who have DCYA Qualification Recognition Letters verifying the status of their current qualification.**

There is a panel of approved Training Providers who will deliver courses that meet the requirement for the **Learner Fund**. Only courses taken with a Training Provider on the approved panel can be considered for subsidy under the **Learner Fund**. City/County Childcare Committees will review **Learner Fund** 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. The panel list of Training Providers can be accessed on the Pobal website **Learner Fund** page. Contact your City/County Childcare Committees for further details of approved Training Providers.

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 the Learner Applicant to ascertain which course type is best suited to their needs.** Please bear in mind that courses must be completed by 31st December 2016. 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.

Learners 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 for a Learner Fund 3 (May 2016) subsidy; the learner applicant must be working in a registered early years' service at the time of application **and** have a **DCYA Qualification Recognition Letter** verifying the status of their current qualification i.e. Learner requires additional accredited qualifications/components in order to meet the minimum requirements of Level 5 on the National Framework of Qualifications (NFQ).

From January 2016 QQI/FETAC awards obtained within the last 5 years can continue to be used to claim exemptions against CAS (Common Awards System) components where the exemption enables the Learner to obtain a Major Award. Speak to your Training Provider for more details.

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

The FAQs will be updated periodically during the application process.

Q 1: What is a DCYA Qualification Recognition Letter and do I need this letter to apply?

A Learner who has applied to DCYA for qualification status recognition will receive a Qualification Recognition Letter verifying the status of their current qualification (i.e. the Learner does not hold a Major Award at Level 5); those Learners are eligible to apply for Learner Fund 3 if they wish to undertake a Major Award at Level 5 in order to meet future minimum regulatory qualification requirements. Learner Applicants must have a Qualification Recognition Letter from DCYA in order to make an application to Learner Fund 3 and will be obliged to upload the letter with their application.

Q 2: What is the application time frame for Learner Fund 3 (May 2016)?

Learner Fund 3(May 2016) will open for applications to Learner Applicants who have DCYA Qualification Recognition Letters from **May 27th 14:00hrs** and will close on **July 29th 2016 18:00hrs**

Q 3: What happens if I do not finish the course?

If you do not complete the course/required components for the award, you will not achieve the relevant major award at Level 5 on the national framework of qualifications. It should be noted that following the introduction of the revised Preschool Regulations, Early Years Services will not be able to employ anyone **to work directly with children after December 31st 2016** if they do not hold the relevant awards at level 5 on the NFQ or equivalent. (Please see **Q20** below with regard to possibility of exemption.)

Q 4: What fees will I have to pay?

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: Can I apply for a Level 6 course subsidy?

No, **Learner Fund 3 (May 2016)** is available only to staff who do not currently meet the minimum requirement of a major award at level 5 on the NFQ **and who have DCYA Qualification Recognition Letter verifying the status of their current qualification.**

Q 7: If I have already started a Level 5 course can I get the subsidy?

Yes, if you have already started your course and you have a **DCYA Qualification Recognition Letter**, you can apply. If deemed eligible, you can get a subsidy towards components already completed or underway, provided the Training Provider you are with is on the **Learner Fund Training** Panel and your course started after the close of the **Learner Fund 2** (20th November 2014). You may be asked for a receipt / proof of fees paid.

Q 8: 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 if you have been previously approved for a **Learner Fund** subsidy and **if you remain eligible** for a subsidy. Contact your local County Childcare Committee to check your eligibility. Please remember if you were approved a subsidy for Level 1 or 2, your course must be completed by December 2nd 2016.

Q 9: I was successful under a previous round but did not take up my course leading to a major award at level 5. Am I still eligible for a subsidy?

Yes, if you have been previously approved for a subsidy for a course offering an award at Level 5 and **if you remain eligible** for a subsidy, you can still complete a L5 course. Please remember your course must be completed by **31st December 2016**.

Q 10: I was successful under Learner Fund 1 / 2 but didn't complete/failed my Level 5 course. Can I apply again under Learner Fund 3?

No, if you availed of a subsidy under a previous round you cannot apply for **Learner Fund 3**.

Q 11: Will I lose my job if I do not get my qualification or finish my course at all?

After the new regulations qualification requirements are commenced (after December 31st 2016); early years services will not be able to employ anyone **to work directly with children** if they do not have a Level 5 qualification. (Please see **Q20** below with regard to possibility of exemption.)

Q 12: 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. **NB It is the responsibility of the course provider to supply all information about how you will access and be able to participate on the course.**

Q 13: What is a blended learning course?

It is the responsibility of the course provider to provide all information about the delivery, format and structure of the 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 tutorial sessions. Please discuss options with your Local CCC who will know more details about the options available and you can also discuss with the Training Providers

Q 14: I'm on a CE scheme working in a crèche can I apply for a subsidy?

No, if you are on a CE scheme you will not be eligible for a subsidy, as there is already a training fund for CE scheme participants.

Q 15: 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](#).

In such scenarios, you should discuss the 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 a major Level 5 qualification on the NFQ or equivalent this will affect your future prospects for working directly with children in the early year's sector. A preschool service will not be compliant with the Preschool Regulations if a staff member working directly with children does not hold a major award at Level 5 on the NFQ or equivalent.

Q 16: What happens once my application has been submitted?

Your employer will receive a pop up message saying “Your Application was successfully submitted”. You will be notified by email from the CCC as to whether you have been successful in your application for a subsidy. Once you are notified that you have been approved, the CCC will support you to choose an appropriate Training Provider and course to meet your training needs and preferences.

Q 17: Will I be informed if I am not approved for a subsidy?

Yes, you will be informed by email from your CCC if you are unsuccessful.

Q 18: I'm due to retire in the next couple of years; do I have to gain these qualifications?

If you will be due to retire in the coming years, and do not therefore wish to embark on a Level 5 course, you can sign a ‘Grandfather Declaration’ with your local CCC **before June 30th 2016**. This offers a temporary exemption from having to have the Level 5 qualification, and is intended for those who will be retiring soon. If you have signed a ‘Grandfather Declaration’ you will not be able to work directly with children in the early year’s sector beyond 2021. Please note that this exemption only applies to the Level 5 qualification requirement. Please contact your local CCC if you are planning to retire in the coming years and do not, therefore, wish to embark on a Level 5 course. If you choose to sign the Declaration you should not apply for a **Learner Fund** subsidy. Please note that once you have signed a ‘Grandfather Declaration’ you are deemed no longer eligible for the **Learner Fund**.

Q 19: I have signed a ‘Grandfather Declaration’ can I apply for Learner Fund 3?

Yes, anyone who has previously signed a ‘Grandfather Declaration’ can apply under **Learner Fund 3**. However, you must officially cancel the ‘Grandfather Declaration’; to do this you should contact your City/County Childcare Committee. Please note that you will not be allowed to re-enter the ‘Grandfather’ exemption option if you change your mind in the future.

Q 20: If I do not complete or fail my course can I sign a ‘Grandfather Declaration’?

No, anyone who avails of a **Learner Fund** subsidy cannot subsequently avail of ‘Grandfather’ Option.

Q 21: What will happen if my course is not completed by the 31st December 2016?

If you do not complete the course for whatever reason, you will not have the accredited Major Award at Level 5 and will therefore not meet the minimum qualification requirement. Employers in the sector will not be compliant with the Preschool Regulations if a staff member working directly with children does not have a Major Level 5 Qualification. Please ensure that the course you choose will enable you to be completed before the 31st December 2016.

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

If after you submit your application, you move job to work in a different early years’ service you will still be eligible for **Learner Fund 3** subsidy. If you are no longer working in the early year’s sector you will **not** be eligible to receive a **Learner Fund 3** subsidy. In both of these instances you must notify your City/County Childcare Committee.

Q 23: I’ve been made redundant, am I still eligible?

You must be working in an early year’s setting in order to make an application to **Learner Fund 3**. However, if you have been made redundant since you applied and are actively seeking work in another early years’ service, you should notify your City/County Childcare Committee.

Q 24: I am a relief worker, am I eligible to apply for Learner Fund 3?

Yes, but only under the following conditions:

- The relief worker has worked in the service during the past 6 months;
- The employer has emailed the City/County Childcare Committee in advance, requesting

- permission to apply and has attached evidence, e.g. a payslip or P45, that confirms that the applicant has worked as relief in the service during the past 6 months;
- Permission has been given by the City/ County Childcare Committee to apply.

The employer should then apply on behalf of the relief worker in the normal way.

Q 25: I am an auxiliary staff member, and occasionally work directly with children, am I Eligible for a Learner Fund subsidy?

An auxiliary staff member who is not employed as a childcare worker but who works directly with children on a regular basis, e.g. for a set number of hours each week, will be required to hold the minimum qualification (major award at Level 5 on the NFQ or equivalent) in order to continue working directly with children and is eligible for a **Learner Fund 3** subsidy.

Q 26: What if my question was not answered in these FAQs?

For help with technical issues such as logging in please contact: onlinesupport@pobal.ie

For help with information/queries please contact: learnerfundqueries@pobal.ie

Q 27: Where can I find more information about QQI exemptions?

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/>