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Nurturing Skills Learner Fund (NSLF) will open to applicants for the academic year 2025/2026 today 12th March 2025

Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Norma Foley has today announced the opening of applications for the *Nurturing Skills Learner Fund 2025*, co-funded by the European Union through the EIST programme 2021 to 2027.

Continuing in a pilot phase, the Nurturing Skills Learner Fund (NSLF) will support early years educators to undertake approved early learning and childcare qualifications at levels 7 and 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications, while they continue to work within the early learning and care sector with a service that has a Core Funding contract with DCEDIY. The Nurturing Skills Learner Fund aims to help meet the Government objective of achieving a graduate-led workforce in early learning and care services by 2028.

Applications for NSLF for Academic Year 2025/2026

The new application process for NSLF for the academic year 2025/2026, will open for applications today **12th March 2025**.

Application Process and Timelines

From 12th March, 2025, **applicants should email Pobal**, at NSLF@pobal.ie to request a link to the NSLF Student Portal in order to create an account and upload employment details and complete the new application process.

Applicants who applied for NSLF for the academic year 2024/2025 and were unsuccessful, should make a **new application** for the academic year 2025/2026 through the NSLF Student Portal. Applicants should login to their NSLF account, upload employment details and complete the **new** application process.

Applicants will be required to complete a number of pre-requisite tasks prior to completing the application process.

The application process will close on **1st May, 2025**.

Continuing Students (existing students who successfully received NSLF funding for Academic Year 2024/2025 and wish to continue to receive funding for NSLF for Academic Year 2025/2026)

Pobal will contact continuing students directly in early Summer asking individuals to verify their continuing eligibility for NSLF. Once eligibility is confirmed a new Letter of Conditional Funding will issue to the student for the academic year 2025/2026.

Rules and conditions for academic year 2025/2026

Details of the pilot NSLF rules and conditions for the pilot scheme can be viewed on the Nurturing Skills Learner Fund website at <http://www.gov.ie/NurturingSkillsLearnerFund> Please read carefully prior to completing the application process

Eligibility

Those wishing to make an application must meet the following eligibility criteria for the NSLF,

- be working with children in a Tusla-registered Early Learning and Care (ELC) or School Age Childcare (SAC) service,
- the service in which the applicant is working in, must have a **current** signed Core Funding contract with DCEDIY.
- Applicants must have worked within an ELC or SAC service for the six months prior to their application.
- Applicants must have a current application/offer for 2025/26 entry to a Level 7/8 Degree course approved by the Qualification Advisory Board (QAB) that is eligible for NSLF.
- be a new entrant to an Approved Course for the academic year commencing 2025/2026 (Autumn 2025)
- not be an ELC educator or SAC practitioner currently undertaking the completion of an Approved Course or an equivalent degree; and
- not be an ELC educator or SAC practitioner who has already completed an Approved Course or equivalent degree.

For clarity purposes, at time of application an applicant must not hold (or be undertaking) an Approved Course at level 7 or level 8 in Early Learning and Care

Selection Criteria

Where the demand for funding is greater than the available budget, the selection of successful applicants is based on the following criteria as set out in the Scheme rules:

1. The number of graduates in the applicant's service, with priority for applicants from services with no graduates,
2. Priority index (Equal Start Index, formerly EPM index), with priority for applicants from services supporting the most disadvantaged children
3. The role of the applicant in a service, with priority for those in lead educator or manager roles.
4. If, after the above prioritisation has been applied and not been decisive, random selection was applied.

NSLF has secured funding under the Irish Government's Employment, Inclusion Skills and Training (EIST) scheme and the European Commission's European Social Fund + (ESF+).