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PRESS RELEASE

JOBSPLUS CLARIFIES HOW ABSENCE ENTITLEMENT IS CALCULATED UNDER THE FREE CHILDCARE SCHEME

Jobsplus notes the public petition regarding the operation of the Free Childcare Scheme and fully respects the right of individuals to express their views and advocate for policy changes.

At the same time, it is important to clarify a number of facts regarding how the scheme currently operates and how absence entitlement is calculated.

The Free Childcare Scheme is designed to support families in balancing work and family life while ensuring that childcare centres are adequately funded for the places they reserve for children. For this reason, childcare centres are compensated based on booked hours rather than attended hours. This guarantees that providers receive funding for the childcare places they make available, regardless of attendance fluctuations.

Under the current system, the absence entitlement is calculated at 25% of the booked hours. When a child attends fewer hours than those booked, the difference is deducted from the child's absence entitlement.

This methodology has been a core element of the scheme and reflects the principle that absence entitlement is calculated on the basis of the childcare service reserved for the child.

It is also important to note that several situations may contribute to the faster use of a child's absence entitlement that are not necessarily related to illness alone. These include instances where more hours are booked than the parent ultimately requires, situations where centres apply minimum hours policies, months where booked hours are not adjusted despite prolonged absences, instances when parents decide to transfer children from one centre to another and not respect the one month transfer notice, and occasions where planned closures or special activities are not correctly reflected in booking schedules.

In cases involving unplanned hospitalisation, separate provisions already exist. Where a child is hospitalised unexpectedly and the absence entitlement has been exhausted, childcare centres may be compensated by Jobsplus following the necessary verification process. These arrangements are additional to the standard absence entitlement available under the scheme.



Earlier this year, Government and Jobsplus concluded negotiations on a new childcare agreement under the Free Childcare Scheme. Throughout these discussions, the policy

objective remained clear: the absence entitlement is intended primarily to cater for periods when children are unable to attend childcare, including sickness-related absences, while ensuring the sustainability of the scheme and the continued viability of childcare providers.

The scale of this commitment is significant. Between 2025 and 2028, expenditure under the Free Childcare Scheme is projected to reach approximately €276.7 million, of which around €69.2 million is allocated specifically towards absence entitlement. Hospitalisation-related cases are addressed separately and are funded in addition to this allocation.

Government and Jobsplus remain committed to listening to parents, childcare providers and stakeholders across the sector. The Free Childcare Scheme has been instrumental in supporting thousands of families and increasing workforce participation, and any future improvements will continue to be assessed in a manner that safeguards children's wellbeing, supports parents and educators, and ensures the long-term sustainability of this important national investment.



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