



## Equal Start - *Bia Blasta* Frequently Asked Questions

### What is *Bia Blasta*?

*Bia Blasta* (Delicious Food) - the Pre-school Nutrition Programme, is a key funding programme under the Equal Start model. It supports the provision of a light nutritious meal to preschool children in Equal Start services and ECCE sessional services with the highest concentrations of preschool children experiencing disadvantage. It achieves this by providing €1.50 per child per day, along with a weekly payment to services for preparation.

### How are services chosen for inclusion in the programme?

The Equal Start identification model has been used to identify services working with the highest concentrations of preschool children experiencing disadvantage. Roll out of *Bia Blasta* in 2025 will provide daily lunches for up to 25,000 children.

### How will *Bia Blasta* support children's learning?

A key element of *Bia Blasta* is the engagement and participation of children in learning about nutritious foods. Mealtimes will be provided within a learning framework that builds children's experiences of nutritious foods, along with the experience of preparing, sharing, and clearing up after meals. Children will be encouraged to make choices and discover varied and exciting foods. They will be engaged wherever possible in menu planning, using utensils, in putting out and clearing up meals and snacks, cutting, pouring, and feeding themselves, and should be encouraged to support one another in these tasks while eating together. Services will be supported in this regard by a dedicated dietitian who will advise and support participating services.

### What funding is available?

A daily capitation of €1.50 per ECCE registration for the programme year.

A weekly payment to services of €27.23 for preparation, such as food ordering, for the ECCE programme year.

### How will services be supported?

A dietitian will be recruited in Better Start to support services with participation, developing resources and training around key topics such as menu planning for preschool children.

A pack of publications developed by Healthy Ireland, Safe Foods Ireland and Barnardos, will be available in both Irish and English in September, and can be picked up by all participating services from their local City and County Childcare Committee.

Among other key resources, the pack includes:

Nutrition Standards for Early Learning and Care Services <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/4b9dd-nutrition-standards-for-early-learning-and-care-services/>

Mealtimes: Valuable Learning Opportunities in Early Learning and Care, published by Barnardos

### **Can other ECCE services join *Bia Blasta*?**

*Bia Blasta* is being provided to all Equal Start Tier 1 and Tier 2 designated services that provide the ECCE Programme, and to other ECCE sessional services with the highest concentrations of disadvantage, as identified by the Equal Start Identification Model.

ECCE Programme services that have not been invited by email to participate in *Bia Blasta*, cannot apply to participate, at this time.

### **Do parents make a contribution to the food?**

One of the conditions of participation in the *Bia Blasta* programme is that it is free to parents.

### ***Bia Blasta* – Equipment Grant 2025 – How does it work?**

A limited equipment grant is available for every *Bia Blasta* service up to the end of 2025 with up to €1,000 available from a list of eligible items including for example, a fridge, a cooker, a dishwasher.

### **How does an eligible service apply for the capital programme?**

- Participating services will receive an Equipment Grant application form from their CCC at the start of September, to complete and return.
- A list of eligible items is included on the application form.
- Original receipts must be supplied.
- Receipts for items purchased must be dated from the date of the scheme announcement (August 14th).
- The minimum spend for the *Bia Blasta* equipment programme is €200.
- Services can use the maximum grant of €1000 towards a number of eligible items.
- Services will complete the form and return it to their CCC with the original receipts.
- The CCC will assess the form and receipts, where appropriate, approve it for reimbursement.

### **Important Please Note**

#### **For services receiving funding from the Department of Social Protection (DSP) Meals Programme:**

Services currently in receipt of funding from the DSP schools meals programme cannot also receive funding from *Bia Blasta*.