

**TÚSLA**  
An Ghníomhaireacht um  
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach  
Child and Family Agency

**ALTERNATIVE  
CARE  
INSPECTION &  
MONITORING**

**Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service-  
A Guide to Registration of Children's Residential Centres**

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# Registration of Children's Residential Centres Guidance

## Pursuant to Part VIII, Child Care Act 1991

### 1.0 Registration Requirements for New Applications

Part VIII of the Childcare Act 1991 sets out the basis and rules governing the regulation of a children's residential centre (CRC) that is provided by any entity other than Tusla the Child & Family Agency.

The definition of a CRC is quite broad. Any centre or care provision delivered with a residential component where a child stays overnight with his / her carers and where the child is present in that setting primarily as they are in the care of Tusla or are deemed by Tusla to be in need of care and protection meets the definition of a CRC currently and requires to be registered. It is unlawful to operate a CRC without first being registered to do so.

These settings are intended to provide care and safety to children who are vulnerable and at risk and are designated by the state to operate in accordance with statutory safeguards as prescribed. It is therefore an offence for a provider entity to operate a CRC without first obtaining registration to do so. Only the registered provider can operate the centre, it cannot be registered by one entity and operated by another.

Securing the registration of centres proposed to be operated by a provider is an essential requirement of attainment of a state contract from Tusla to provide services, but there are a wide range of requirements that must also be satisfied prior to a new entrant to the market successfully securing such contracts. The registration model prescribed below focuses upon the licencing of centres and not the operating company or organisation. Providers are best advised to confirm that they are eligible to secure a contract with Tusla before embarking on the task of centre registration.

### 2.0 The Registration Model

The registration model prescribed by the legislation, is a preapproval licencing model. Registration is a licence to operate for a maximum period of three years, upon approaching expiry of this period the provider is mandated to make a new application to retain or continue its registration. The model is designed to register individual centres and not provider organisations, each centre must have a separate registration.

It should be noted that centres are registered and inspected against their stated purpose and function. The purpose and function is determined by the applicant and designates the type of care it intends to deliver, this in turn becomes the perspective under which the registration and inspection officers will interpret the

application of regulations and standards in the centre during the application and inspection processes to follow.

Centres can offer long term care to children, short term emergency intervention, therapeutic care, and or bespoke care programmes to individual young people. The registration approval process will take into consideration what type of service the provider intends to offer.

A provider can seek to register and open a centre in advance of receiving a service contract with Tusla. However, achieving a contract with Tusla to provide settings or placements does not of itself derogate or remove any obligation to obtain registration by the provider.

### **3.0 Exemption from Registration under Part VIII**

If Tusla were to deem any centre provided by a third party as being provided on behalf of the agency then that centre would not need to firstly obtain registration pursuant to Section 60 of the Act. However, such designations in practice are rare and need to be formally agreed and confirmed by Tusla. These are not automatic irrespective of any request by Tusla to seek a provider to operate children's residential centres.

There are occasions when Tusla require a third party provider to provide care and accommodation to children or young people who are at risk in the absence of any other available accommodation. If the child is identified as homeless and not in the care of Tusla or is not intended to be placed in care these arrangements are provided pursuant to Section 5 of the Child Care Act 1991. If the child is in care or will be taken into care the arrangement is provided pursuant to Section 36(d) of the act. Such arrangements are temporary in nature and can operate for a period of 45 days without registration. However, if the centre is required to remain operational post the 45-day threshold, and where the provider is happy to continue providing the service, then the centre is no longer considered an emergency, and the centre provider must seek registration. The responsibility to do lies with the operator and they will be afforded 60 days to achieve registration.

### **4.0 Applications for Registration**

Applications for registration are prescribed by statute and are made centrally to the Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service (ACIMS) which is located in Nexus Building, Blanchardstown Corporate Park, Dublin 15.

Applications for registration are made electronically to ACIMS via a prescribed application form and must be accompanied by prescribed supporting documentation (Please see below). There are currently no application fees payable.

Information concerning the application process is available on the Tusla Website at the following [link](#). Applicants are advised to make themselves familiar with the information and defer submission of applications until confident that the application is complete in all its facets.

Applicants are responsible to ensure that their application is suitable, appropriate and accompanied by all documentation. From January 1<sup>st</sup>, 2026, only completed applications are accepted.

ACIMS also do not provide pre-application advisory visits in advance of applications to confirm suitability of premises or location.

## 5.0 Application Assessment

**Stage 1: Submission:** Complete applications are sent via email to [acims.applications@tusla.ie](mailto:acims.applications@tusla.ie). The applicant will receive an acknowledgment of their application; this is not an approval of the applications acceptance but simply confirmation that an application was received. It will then be screened for completion.

**Stage 2: Screening:** The application and supporting documentation will be assessed for completion and suitability. If the application is complete, it will then be passed for further assessment via the centralised administration team. If the application is not complete and if the applications team identify any shortfall or requires clarification as to any aspect of the application, the applicant will be afforded 10 days to supply or rectify. In the event this information is not forthcoming the application will be closed and any information supplied to that date will be deleted.

Applicants do not receive any advantage by making an incomplete submission whilst awaiting the availability of outstanding documentation. Only completed applications progress to assessment.

Applicants who have made a submission but wish to temporarily pause or defer an application must withdraw their application by written confirmation and make a new application. ACIMS will delete any information related to the application from their records. Tusla does not provide an application management or advisory resource to those who are unable to see their submissions through to completion in a single process.

**Stage 3: Application assessment:** Applications are considered against the centres proposed purpose and function. This is a desk top exercise, and the applicant must be available to answer queries and or provide clarity where requested. Only when the application is deemed complete by the applications team and further reviewed by the regional inspection manager will it be considered as accepted.

Information supplied for registration purposes should be truthful and accurate. All information is validated during assessment, and the provision of false or misleading information is a statutory offence. If falsified information is identified the application process will be suspended pending consideration.

**Stage 4: Provider suitability & conflict of interest enquiries:** Background verification checks are carried out in respect of the proposed registered providers of the centre (including members of board of management where applicable). These include Garda and Police clearance checks, reference and regulatory

history checks. Applicants will also be asked to provide a general declaration of potential conflicts of interest that may be relevant to the applicant's ability to be in charge of or availability to carry on a children's residential centre. This stage of the process is carried out by the office of Head of Regulatory Enforcement.

The applicant is required to complete a questionnaire and provide information pertaining to themselves, any other person involved in the ownership of the centre or provider organisation and the proposed person in charge. Failure to co-operate with this stage of the process will result in the application rendered void.

**Stage 5: Fit for Purpose / Proposed Centre Visit:** The centre premises will be visited by a member of the inspection team for the purposes of accessing its suitability and verifying other particulars as supplied in the application. The premises should be ready for inspection, be furnished and presentable. If deficits are identified, these are communicated by the inspector manager to the registered provider and evidence of any remedial action required submitted to ACIMS.

If there have been any changes to the particulars of the centre the applicant must ensure that this is brought to the attention of the regional inspector manager in advance of the visit.

**Stage 6: Centre Registration:** Once the inspector manager is satisfied that the centre is likely to operate in accordance with the regulations a certificate of registration along with a pre-registration inspection report will issue to the provider, and the centre will be added to the National Register of Children's Residential Centres maintained by ACIMS. All newly approved registrations will be brought to the ACIMS Registration Committee for mention. The inspector manager may bring an application to the ACIMS registration committee for discussion and approval if deemed necessary. If following this committee meeting, the centre is deemed suitable to register, a certificate of registration will issue to the applicant, and the centre will be added to the National Register of Children's Residential Centres maintained by ACIMS.

If the committee do not believe that the centre will meet the requirements of the regulations it can propose to refuse to register the setting or propose some changes to the application. Consideration of the former will result in a referral to Tusla's National Registration Enforcement Panel which is overseen by the Head of Regulatory Enforcement.

Once registered a centre cannot make any alteration to its registration particulars without first securing approval by ACIMS. Information on the change in circumstances process can be found [here](#)

## 6.0 Application Form and Supporting Documentation

### 1) Application Form

The application form is available for viewing at the following link [here](#) The applicant should carefully consider all sections prior to completion and

subsequent submission. The form must be signed and dated by the proposed registered proprietor and **not** the proposed person in charge of the centre.

## **II) Supporting Documentation**

### **(ii.i) Confirmation of Planning Permission for Centre**

This refers to documentation confirming that the premises and use are deemed by the relevant local authority to be both suitably located and suitable for use as a children's residential centre. Centres catering for six children or less with no more than two staff staying overnight can apply to the local authority for an exemption from planning subject to Section 5 of the Planning & Development Act 2000.

The department of local government have set out planning derogation from provisions for change of use planning for the duration of the Temporary Protection Directive (TPD) for those who intend to operate a CRC for unaccompanied minors via statutory instrument, please see link [here](#)

Centres who are seeking to cater for 6 or more children will require full planning permission unless operating under the TPD. This is a lengthy process and the time to secure planning should be factored into the expected time period for opening. Please note that planning for change of use will be required for any premises that is not considered a domestic dwelling at time of application.

ACIMS only accept confirmation of planning from local authorities, and do not accept letters from solicitors, landlords, property owners, or any other parties expression of opinions of compliance.

Applicants are advised to seek the services of a registered architect with suitable experience to make applications for planning and exemptions on their behalf.

In some instances, if an applicant has taken over a premises that was operating as a CRC continuously for a period of seven years up to the point of transfer and where the premises does not have planning or an exemption certificate, then the centre can continue to be operated as a CRC without any further applications to the local authorities being made. This is often referred to as the 7-year rule. This provision does not however retrospectively bestow planning on the centre, it simply means that the local authorities cannot take enforcement action arising from an absence of planning. In such instances the applicant will be required to submit a sworn affidavit attesting to the duration of operation of the centre prior to the takeover.

Please note if the applicant wishes to later make material alterations to the setting, such as adding an extension, changing a gate way, etc then they must apply for both planning retention for the property and the material alterations.

Confirmation of planning is requested as the applicant is obliged pursuant to Regulation 8, Accommodation, to satisfy Tusla that the premises is both adequate and suitable for use.

### ***(ii.ii) Confirmation of Fire Safety***

Not dissimilar to planning permission, there are differing pathways depending on the number of young people and type of premises the applicant is seeking to use as a CRC.

Since 2017, the Code of Practice for Fire Safety in New and Existing Community Dwelling Houses applies to domestic premises that are being utilised for purposes of childcare and other residential social care uses. The code applies to settings catering for no more than six residents. Applicants whose proposed premises falls within the remit of this code must have the premises firstly assessed by a “competent person”, once assessed carry out any fire safety works deemed necessary by the assessment and have them signed off by the competent person as completed. The competent person must then complete a statutory declaration as prescribed for submission with your application for registration which can be found [here](#)

Competent Persons with regard to building control regulations, any works to a children’s residential centre regarding fire safety assessment or certification under the Building Control Management System (BCMS) are;

- a) Architects that are entered on the register maintained by the RIAI under Part 3 of the Building Control Act 2007;
- b) Building Surveyors that are entered on the register maintained by the SCSI under Part 5 of the Building Control Act 2007;
- c) Chartered Engineers that are entered on the register maintained by Engineers Ireland under section 7 of the Institution of Civil Engineers of Ireland (Charter Amendment) Act 1969.
- d) Members of the Institution of Fire Engineers who hold the title Chartered Engineer

This pathway is not applicable to commercial premises, former hotels, guesthouses etc, it is designed for community domestic dwellings only. Please see [here](#) for additional information.

For applicants seeking to cater for a larger number of children or repurpose an existing commercial premises such as a hotel, guesthouse, hostel, etc then a full fire safety certificate is required. The application process for a fire certificate is prescribed by the Building Control Regulations and overseen by the local authorities Building Control Management System (BCMS). Applicants are advised to engage the services of a suitably qualified competent person as defined above to assist. For this category ACIMS will only accept the BCMS generated “Compliance upon Completion Certificate” as confirmation of fire safety in this category of premises. Letters from solicitors, competent persons, or other third parties indicating works are completed or unnecessary will not be accepted in lieu of the completion certificate.

In a minority of cases, there may be premises intended to cater for more than 6 children due to the period it was constructed<sup>1</sup> that will not fall under the fire certification regime as prescribed by the Building Control Regulations. In such instances a fire safety assessment carried out by a competent person and confirmation by the competent person that all necessary works were carried out is required.

As with planning permission, this aspect of registration application takes time and which should be factored into the planned centre opening schedule.

### ***(ii.iii) Staffing and Centre Manager Qualifications & Experience***

Regulation 7, Staffing, requires the registered proprietor to ensure that there are a sufficient number of suitably qualified and experienced staff to meet the needs of the young people who are or will be resident in the centre. ACIMS issues regulatory notices prescribing the minimum number of staff required for settings and their qualifications including those of proposed centre managers which can be found [here](#)

Compliance with these notices at application is mandatory and staff teams presented for registration must adhere to its requirements. These notices sets out minimum requirements only.

In addition, the suitability and number of staffing at application stage will also consider the proposed purpose and function of the setting. Settings that intend to carry out specialised interventions with young people, or those catering for more challenging behaviours, or those delivering therapeutic or specialised assessment programmes may require additional staff and or those with specific training and or experience.

You are required to complete a Pro Forma Staff Audit Sheet which as mentioned previously will be compared against staff files during the application assessment stage. The Pro Forma Audit Sheet can be downloaded at this [link](#) The staff presented should be reflective of the requirements of any existing regulatory notice, failure to present accordingly will serve to suspend the application.

Applicants are obliged to ensure that the staff presented are suitable persons to provide care to vulnerable children. Upon presentation the applicant must demonstrate that the identity, experiences, qualifications and bone fides of the proposed staff team has been robustly verified with evidence of same available for examination.

Police vetting must be obtained for any staff members with access to children who have spent 6 months or more (excluding Northern Ireland) outside of the Rep of Ireland since their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday.

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<sup>1</sup> Premises built in Ireland prior to 1992

For the absence of doubt each staff member considered to work in a children's residential centre must have the following submitted during the application process.

1. Confirmation of staff members identity (photo id only)
2. A complete and up to date CV with all periods of employment/ education from 16 years of age.
3. Three references of suitability, one of which must be from their most recent employer.
4. Evidence that the references were validated, whereby the referee is contacted to confirm the validity of the reference and its content.
5. A copy of the staff members qualification and verification from the college that the qualification is bone fide in all its facets.
6. Where a staff member has spent 6 months or more outside of Ireland from the age of 16 years, a police vetting document from that or those jurisdictions.
7. Confirmation, where relevant, that non-EU staff members hold an appropriate visa to work in Ireland.
8. Where staff member has criminal convictions on either their Garda vetting declaration or Police clearance, evidence that an [appropriate risk assessment](#) addressing their suitability to work with children and or be in charge of a centre where it applies to a person presented as the person in charge.

#### **(ii.iv) Insurance Confirmation**

Applicants are required to demonstrate that the young people who will reside in the centre will be adequately insured against accident, injury or general harm. In addition, the centre must have insurance that will allow the continuation of the centre in the event of an adverse incident. The minimal recommended insurance and levels of cover per incident are as follows (please note the address of the centre and correct company/trading name must be on the insurance document):

- a) **Professional Indemnity.** Where appropriate, the service provider must apply for professional indemnity coverage under the Clinical Indemnity Scheme. (b) To the extent professional service is provided and not otherwise covered, the provider must have high risk Professional Indemnity with a limit of indemnity of €6,500,000 (€6.5million) any one occurrence.
- b) **Public Liability** with a limit of indemnity of €6,500,000 (€6.5million) any one occurrence, with an indemnity to the Client arising from the provision of the Services.
- c) **Employers Liability** with a limit of indemnity of €13,000,000 (€13 million) any one occurrence, with an indemnity to the Client arising from the provision of the Services.
- d) **Motor Insurance.** If services involve use of motor vehicle by the service provider on business of TUSLA, motor insurance is required with a third-party

property damage limit of €2,600,000 (€2.6million) any one occurrence with an indemnity to the Client arising from the use of motor vehicle in the provision of the Services.

It should be noted that centres who become contracted by Tusla may also be required to indemnify the agency as the contracting entity. Applications accompanied by insurance quotations from a reputable firm will be accepted however registration will be withheld until confirmation that insurance has been secured and is in place.

***(ii.v) Premises specific safety and wellbeing measures***

Depending on the type and location of the proposed centre there may be specific additional assurances that will be requested at time of registration. These are

1. Centres with independent water supply – a recent test by a competent body confirming that the water is safe for consumption will be required.
2. Centre heating systems – should be serviced before commencement to ensure they are safe and do not pose any risk from carbon monoxide emissions.
3. Larger centres providing intake emergency or short stay services - should have sufficient space and accommodation to comfortably allow larger numbers of young people to use kitchen and bathroom facilities. In addition, there should be sufficient communal and rooms available to ensure quiet spaces for personal visitation, study and meetings with advocates.
4. Longer term care settings should ensure young people have access within the grounds to an outdoor area, and sufficient indoor space to facilitate study, and development of hobbies.
5. Young people having their own non shared bedroom is considered the default standard.

***(ii.vi) Policies and Procedures***

The National Standards for Children's Residential Centres 2018 HIQA provide the basis against which centres are inspected once operational. The standards are divided into eight themes, with each theme encompassing standard statements each with criteria of features.

The standards will specifically prescribe policies and procedures that must be developed and present in the centre, and in addition there are criteria that are designed to enhance the care experience of young people that whilst not prescribed should be underpinned by procedures.

For the purposes of registration application, the following documents are required to be submitted with the application submission.

1. Child Safeguarding Statement (Pursuant to Part 2, Section 11 of Children First Act 2015)
2. Policies and Procedures prescribed under Part 2, Section 11(3) of the Children First Act 2015.

3. Written statement of model of care of the centre.
4. Policy on behaviour management
5. Policy on missing children and absence management
6. Pro Forma Staff Audit Sheet
7. Centre Health & Safety Statement, requisite Risk Assessment including fire safety policy.
8. Staff training Pro Forma
9. Plan of centre layout including floor dimensions, size and location of proposed young people's bedrooms.
10. Evidence CRO Registration (those using a trading name will need to provide both the CRO document and a registered business name certificate.
11. Insurance documentation

ACIMS do not provide advice and or guidance on policy development. A full suite of policies and procedures to support the effective operation of the centre and compliance with the National Standards for Children's Residential Centre 2018 (HIQA) are required. These policies and procedures will be examined during inspection and must be available if requested during the application assessment stage.

***(ii.vii) Vetting & Background Checks for applicants***

The registered proprietor must complete all sections relevant to themselves on the application form, which includes their employment and regulatory history, and in addition supply the following:

1. A certified copy of their driving licence, or passport
2. Proof of address
3. Garda vetting declaration dated within the 12 months prior to date of application for a new CRC.
4. Police vetting (where applicable), persons who have spent six months or more since their 16<sup>th</sup> birthday consecutively outside of jurisdiction other than Northern Ireland must present a police vetting certificate upon application for each period in each jurisdiction. Please note that data access requests are not accepted.
5. The names and contact details of 3 referees who will be contacted.

The items listed above will be requested in respect of each proposed registered proprietor. ACIMS will carry out a background and suitability check in respect of each proposed applicant. The agency will also request applicants to participate in additional security checks as it deems necessary.

ACIMS will carry out a risk assessment where the applicant or owners Garda or police vetting discloses criminal convictions. Should it be considered that the person is unsuitable to be confirmed as a registered proprietor the matter will be

referred to the National Registration Enforcement Panel for examination and final determination.

#### ***(ii.viii) Corporate Bodies***

Whilst an applicant can make an application on behalf of corporate body the registered proprietor whose name is entered on to the register of centres if approved must be a named person. This person can be the CEO of the company or organisation, or a person correctly designated to act in that capacity on behalf of the company. This person should have operational and resource allocation authority.

Irrespective of delegation, Tusla in the event of later enforcement will pursue in addition to the registered proprietor and person in charge, the corporate body and CEO.

ACIMS will carry out a company's background check to ensure that the applicants are suitable persons to be in charge of services for children at risk.

ACIMS do not accept applications from or will engage with persons presented as acting on behalf of an applicant.

#### ***(ii.ix) Statutory Declarations***

At the end of each application the applicant must sign the application form, this cannot be delegated to a third party unless correctly and lawfully authorised / delegated as per (ii.viii) above. An incomplete application whereby either the application form or submissions are incomplete renders any declaration made thereupon void and inadmissible.

It is an offence and will render the application void to present any information or statement that is false, misleading, or materially incorrect. The applicant is always responsible to ensure that the contents of the application form are correct and have taken measures to satisfy themselves of same.

It is also an offence to fail to supply information or fail to follow instruction of an ACIMS officer when requested during the application process.

## **7.0 Application Approval**

Once ACIMS is satisfied that the application particulars and premises visit are completed, a pre-registration inspection report will be prepared. ACIMS will notify the provider of their decision to register the centre, and this decision will be affirmed by the registration committee. Once approved the applicant will be provided with a certificate of registration and the centre added to the register of residential childcare settings maintained by Tusla. Registration is granted for a period of three years from the date of confirmation.

If ACIMS is not satisfied that the application particulars are compliant, they will prepare a pre-registration inspection report. This report will be presented to the applicant and any outstanding requirements in order to meet the registration standard will be identified. The applicant will be afforded seven days to address and provide evidence of corrective measures taken. Any undue delays or

shortfalls in the response will render the application void whereupon it will be closed.

If ACIMS deems that the corrective measures have not addressed the required actions and is not recommending registration, the pre-registration report will be updated, presented to the registration committee. If the registration committee affirm that the registration should be refused or require in its estimation the addition of conditions refer the matter to the National Registration & Enforcement Panel (NREP).

## **8.0 Inspection Cycle Post Registration Approval**

Once a centre is registered it becomes subject to ongoing registration and inspection requirements. Centres are inspected against regulations governing standards for premises and care, and against national standards for the quality and operations of a children's residential centre.

The Alternative Care Inspection and Monitoring Service are committed to inspecting in a way that focuses our resources where they are needed most. If registered proprietors and centre managers have shown that they can consistently deliver services for children that are compliant with standards and regulations, we may decide to inspect less often or do a more proportionate inspection. The determination of inspection activity is based on intelligence led information which acknowledges the risk to children where inspection activity is reduced. The inspectorate is a responsive service with the ability to conduct inspections promptly where required.

During the registration cycle of a centre which is maximum three years from date of registration the centre will be subject to inspections. These inspections can either be announced or unannounced, it will be thematic, covering identified themes from the National Standard Children's Residential Centres 2018 (HIQA) and will assess ongoing compliance with the standards and the Child Care (Standards in Children's in Residential Centres) Regulations, 1996.

Based on risk escalated information that has been assessed the ACIMS Risk Response Team may carry out an inspection of a centre at any time during their registration cycle. This inspection activity may be announced, unannounced or a desk top review and agreed in advance with the regional inspector managers.

## **9.0 Notification of Centre Closure**

In the event that the registered proprietors for reasons of viability, regulatory exposure or other reasons concerning the pragmatism of ongoing service continuation decide that the closure of the centre is warranted. The registered proprietor should, where known, advise ACIMS of the impending last day of operation of the centre. If this has not been possible, should no later than 28 days post closure advise ACIMS in writing of the closure and the reasons for same. ACIMS will confirm in writing to the provider and other relevant parties that the centre has been removed from the register.

## 10.0 Note on Contracting Requirements by Tusla

Whilst it is necessary for applicants to have secured registration of their centres as a pre-requisite to securing a service delivery contracts it should be noted that the Child and Family Agency residential care commissioning department may impose additional requirements upon providers in addition to those requested to attain registration.

It should not be assumed that the attainment of registration will result in an award of a contract.

<b>QMS Reference:</b>	ACIMS-GDE12.1
<b>Version:</b>	V1.0
<b>Date:</b>	01/01/2026