



**New Funding Model for ELC and SAC  
Expert Group Meeting  
Tuesday, 29 October 2019  
Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Miesian Plaza  
Minutes**

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**In attendance**

Michael Scanlan (Chair)

Tove Mogstad Slinde

Edward Melhuish

Eva Lloyd

Tim Callan

Rory O'Donnell

Niamh Callaghan (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform) (09:30 – 11:00/14:00-17:00)

Bernie McNally (Department of Children and Youth Affairs)

Anne-Marie Brooks (Department of Children and Youth Affairs)

Gillian Martin (Secretariat, Department of Children and Youth Affairs)

Laura Brady (Secretariat, Department of Children and Youth Affairs)

**Also in attendance**

Minister Zappone (9:30-10:00)

Ela Hogan (Pobal) (15.15-15.45)

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**Welcome and Introduction**

Minister Zappone welcomed members of the Expert Group (EG) to the Department and opened the inaugural meeting of the Group with a short address.

The Chair re-iterated the Minister's welcome and noted that the Department of Education and Skills EG representative should be in place before the December meeting. The Chair then invited members of the EG to introduce themselves.

**Practical and Logistical Issues, Including Meeting Schedule**

The Secretariat briefed the EG on practical and logistical issues, including the project meeting schedule (**Paper 4**). The Secretariat also outlined the intention to create a shared IT platform to house meeting documents, indicating that the intention is to have a platform progressed by the December meeting. The EG was also informed that a public facing webpage will be developed in tandem.

**Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare in Ireland**

The Secretariat introduced Paper 6 - *Funding of Early Learning and Care and School Age Childcare Services in Ireland: Background and Current Arrangements*. Following a broad discussion, the EG indicated it would welcome more information on the ELC and SAC schemes and operating systems, and on the Early Start Model operating in 40 primary schools.

**Terms of Reference**

The Chair introduced the draft *Terms of Reference* (ToR) (**Paper 3**). The ensuing discussion included delivery models (private and public), the extent to which centre- and home-based provision was in scope, the EG's remit over existing schemes (ECCE and NCS) and the scope to channel additional

funding through these schemes. The breadth of the ToR and some other points requiring clarification (e.g. annual capital funding and capital funding earmarked under Project 2040) were noted. The Secretariat undertook to review the ToR in the light of the discussion.

### **Project Outline**

Anne Marie Brooks presented the project outline (**Paper No. 5**) that proposed six inter-related work packages (foundations, engagement, affordability/sustainability, quality, inclusion and implementation), potential inputs into each work package and a high level project plan. Among the issues raised during the subsequent discussion were the following:

- whether any analysis had been done on the cost of running a high-quality service and if any forecast modelling had or could be carried out; it was agreed to include the Independent Review of Costs on the agenda for the next meeting;
- the need for an overview of the current ELC and SAC quality assurance regime, including Ireland's participation in the OECD project - Quality Beyond Regulation;
- a suggestion that migrant children who require language support be identified as a specific cohort under the inclusion work package (in addition to children with additional learning needs and children at risk of poverty);
- the need to determine the optimal identification approach – which may not be spatially based - for the inclusion work package;
- the importance of looking ahead to implementation in the initial stage of the project and the importance of scenario planning to pre-empt intended and unintended consequences; in this context, the importance of simplicity and minimising any administration burden was noted; and
- the advantages and disadvantages of an interim report, and other alternatives such as a straw man proposal or a progress report.

The Secretariat undertook to amend the Project Outline on foot of the discussion.

### **Research Partnership**

Anne-Marie Brooks introduced the paper on the *Research Partnership (Paper 9)* describing the role of the Research Partnership, the approach to agreeing requirements for each working paper and the process to quality assure outputs. It was noted that, arising from a Request for Tenders, two proposals have been received and would be subject to evaluation on 30 October. The Research Partner will attend the next meeting of the EG (subject to contract agreement).

### **Workforce Development Plan**

Bernie McNally provided an overview of the Workforce Development Plan (WDP) (**Paper No. 11**). It was noted that, given some overlap between the work of the EG and the WDP Steering Group, there will be officials from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs common to both Groups. There would also be scope for both Groups to meet to ensure a consistent approach and reduce duplication of effort. A copy of the ToR for the WDP Steering Group will be circulated to the EG for information.

### **Early Years Sector Profile Survey**



An official from Pobal (Ela Hogan) joined the meeting to present the preliminary findings from the Early Years Service Profile Survey 2019. The EG was advised that the presentation circulated previously (**Paper No. 10**) had been updated and would be circulated to the EG.

The need to distinguish clearly between the gross fees charged by providers (included in the survey) and the net fees paid by parents after any deductions arising from State subsidies (not captured by the survey) was highlighted. It was noted that the Secretariat has access to data on the net fees through another source and will examine this. The Secretariat also undertook to circulate the Early Years Sector Profile Survey and offered to undertake any additional analyses of interest to the EG. It was also noted that there would be scope for the EG to request new questions for the Early Years Service Profile Survey for 2020. Data collection for this survey will commence in Spring 2020 with an end January deadline to finalise instrumentation.

#### **Related First 5 Initiatives**

Anne-Marie Brooks introduced a paper on First 5 (**Paper No. 13**) which provided a summary overview of *First 5, A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families* and First 5 actions that will inform the work of the EG and other actions that could be delivered through the funding model (e.g. transition supports).

#### **Close**

The Chair closed the meeting for the day noting the EG would reconvene at 9:00 am on the following day.

#### **ENDS**



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Anne-Marie Brooks (Department of Children and Youth Affairs) (from 09:00 – 11:15)  
Gillian Martin (Secretariat, Department of Children and Youth Affairs)  
Laura Brady (Secretariat, Department of Children and Youth Affairs)

**Also in attendance**

Nuala Connolly (Department of Children and Youth Affairs)

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**Welcome**

The Chair welcomed EG to the meeting.

**Principles for a New Funding Model**

Anne Marie Brooks introduced Paper No. 8 - *Discussion Paper on Principles to Underpin a New Funding Model* - noting the references to principles in the draft Terms of Reference (ToR).

Following a substantive discussion, it was agreed that the Secretariat would prepare a brief paper summarising the ELC and SAC policy objectives, and proposing an initial set of guiding funding principles for consideration by the EG based on the principles that underpin existing policies and those used in other countries. The intention would be to test and refine these initial guiding principles over the course of the project having regard to the issues being faced by children, parents, staff, providers, the State and other stakeholders. These principles could be used to review existing approaches to funding and to develop options to structure additional funding.

**Approaches to Engagement and Consultation**

Anne Marie Brooks introduced Paper No. 7 - *Engagement and Consultation Discussion Paper* - which identified key stakeholders and proposed three phases of consultation over the duration of the project, including the objectives of, and possible methods for, each phase. It was noted that the consultation and engagement work package will be led primarily by the Research Partner under the direction of the EG.

The overall approach outlined in the paper was agreed by the EG. It was suggested that consideration be given to:- the inclusion of stakeholders from other sectors reflecting the move toward integrated service delivery; the use of other planned engagement and consultation activities and material

previously gathered; and using established questionnaires or part thereof to gather views from stakeholders. Two EU-wide projects (CARE and ISOTUS) were noted.

Paper No.7 will be updated to reflect the EG discussions and shared with the Research Partner who will be invited to prepare a proposal for Phase 1 engagement and consultation in advance of the next meeting.

### **First Set of Working Papers**

Nuala Connolly presented a paper setting out a proposal for the first set of working papers (**Paper No. 11**). Following a broad EG discussion, the following papers were agreed with some specific pointers for each paper recorded:

- Comparative and Contextual Analyses of ELC and SAC Fees, Staff Wages and Public Investment
- International Approaches to funding ELC and SAC
- Review of Working Conditions for ELC and SAC Staff
- Potential Mechanisms to Control ELC and SAC Fees Charged to Parents

It was agreed to update Paper No. 11 to reflect the discussion and share it with the Research Partner, inviting the Research Partner to prepare input for the December meeting.

In addition, the EG indicated that it would be interesting to have a piece of research on what exactly constitutes a good quality control assurance system (having regard to any material developed by the WDP Steering Group). Also, reflecting a commitment in First 5 and the Programme for Government, a review of approaches to the withdrawal of funding if quality controls are not adhered to would be useful.

### **Terms of Reference**

It was agreed that the Secretariat would review and amend as necessary the ToR in the light of discussions over the two days, and circulate to the EG. It is envisaged that the ToR will be adopted at the next meeting

### **Publication of Papers**

It was noted that the decision to publish any EG related documents would be made by the EG. A decision on papers to publish from the foundations work package will be taken at the next meeting.

### **AOB**

- The EG was advised that legal advices previously received may be useful to the EG. The Secretariat will circulate these advices for information.
- The EG was advised that Professor Peter Moss had prepared a short paper for the EG. This will be circulated for information.
- The EG expressed an interest in visiting some ELC and SAC settings. The Secretariat undertook to schedule these visits.
- The Secretariat and EG undertook to share, on an on-going basis, relevant reading material and information on upcoming conferences of interest.
- The Secretariat undertook to circulate all presentations from the inaugural meeting.
- It was noted that the Chair and some members of the EG will meet with Brid Horan (chair of Expert Group on Funding Model Reform for Higher Education) on 12 November. An update of this meeting will be provided to the EG in December.

### **Next Meeting**



The next meeting of the EG will take place on 12 December 2019. The Secretariat will liaise in relation to planning and agenda.

**ENDS**