

New Funding Model for ELC and SAC
Expert Group Meeting
Thursday 25th June 2020
Skype for Business
Minutes

Participants

Michael Scanlan (Chair)
Tove Mogstad Slinde
Eva Lloyd
Edward Melhuish
Tim Callan
Rory O'Donnell
Bernie McNally (Department of Children and Youth Affairs)
Anne-Marie Brooks (Department of Children and Youth Affairs)
Philip Crosby (Department of Education and Skills)
Gillian Martin (Secretariat, Department of Children and Youth Affairs)
Laura Brady (Secretariat, Department of Children and Youth Affairs)
David Carabini (Department of Children and Youth Affairs)

Also in attendance (for parts of day)

Heidi Amot (Norwegian Ministry of Education and Research)
Gillian Paull (Frontier Economics)
Cavin Wilson (Frontier Economics)

Apologies

Niamh Callaghan (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform)

Welcome

The Chair welcomed the Expert Group to the meeting and noted the apologies as indicated above. Internet connectivity issues were also noted.

Minutes from last meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the meetings of 19th and 20th May 2020 were adopted with a minor edit. It was agreed that the minutes and agendas would be published.

No objections were raised to publishing certain papers from previous meetings, a list of which was circulated to the Group in advance of the meeting.

The draft Guiding Principles, circulated to the Group in advance of the meeting, were discussed. Some slight amendments were suggested. The Chair agreed to re-draft and recirculate.

Updates from Secretariat

The Secretariat indicated that the legal advice referred to at previous meetings is out of date and out of context and that relevant legal advice could be sought by the Group during Phase II of the project.

Topical Issues

Anne-Marie Brooks provided an overview of recent topical issues, outlining developments arising from COVID-19 and the re-opening of settings on 29 June. There was also a focus on the draft Programme for Government.

The Group queried what endorsement of the draft Programme for Government would mean for the project schedule and timelines. Bernie McNally indicated that clarity would be sought when a new Government is formed and a new Minister in place.

Presentation from Norwegian Ministry

Heidi Åmot, Advisor at the Department of Kindergartens and Schools, Ministry of Education and Research, gave a presentation on Norway's Funding Model, including a recent review of the regulation on private kindergartens (ie. ECEC) that involved a public hearing. This was followed by a question and answer session.

The Chair and the Group thanked Ms. Åmot for her presentation and asked that any further questions on the Norwegian funding model be directed to her through the Secretariat.

Research Paper: Set 1, Working Paper 2: International approaches to funding ELC / SAC

Frontier Economics provided an overview of WP2, including a summary of key findings relating to international approaches to funding ELC/SAC in Ireland and in other jurisdictions.

The Group noted that some confusion regarding Ireland's approach to funding and in particular whether the subsidy schemes are predominantly supply or demand side. The Group also suggested that the title of the paper is revisited given the narrow focus of funding in the paper (i.e. on reducing fees charged to parents). While the paper takes this narrower focus, the Group asked if conditions attached to funding in the various jurisdictions could be listed to provide a fuller understanding on funding approaches. The Group also asked if data on hours for jurisdictions could be added (where available) and that eligibility for free hours in England is clarified.

Tove Mogstad Slinde offered to share some information on Norway and advised that the reference to the OECD's report on Norway should be inserted.

Frontier Economics welcomed the comments, responded to issues raised and agreed to consider any further written comments received, as well as undertaking to take comments from the previous meeting on-board regarding the use of GDP. Members of the Group undertook to revert to the Secretariat with observations in writing on WP2 by 2 July.

Research Paper: Set 1, Working Paper 4: Potential mechanisms to control fees charged to parents

Frontier Economics provided an overview of WP4, including a summary of key findings relating to potential mechanisms to control fees charged to parents.

The Group noted that the equity purpose of fee caps was not developed in the paper. The Group also raised the impact of Covid-19 on the issue of fee controls and advised that impact of fee controls on supply and demand would have to be considered in both the short-term and long-term. It was also noted that fee caps require other policy measures if they are to be effective. Therefore, fee caps should be examined within the wider system.

Frontier Economics welcomed the comments, responded to issues raised and agreed to consider any further written comments received. The members undertook to revert to the Secretariat with observations in writing on WP4 by 2 July.

Research Papers: Set 2 Proposal

Before leaving the meeting Frontier Economics advised that evidence of effectiveness, thinking about a framework, using case studies, and key lessons, would be a valuable way to approach the next set of working papers, rather than the comprehensive international review. They advised that this approach would yield more useful information on effectiveness of funding approaches.

Anne-Marie Brooks presented a proposal for the second set of working papers. Following the presentation, the Chair asked the Group to consider if there was anything in the Terms of Reference not captured in the working papers proposed or already underway. Clarification was sought on childminders and the extent to which the funding model will apply to childminders. The role of capital funding was also raised.

There was broad agreement that papers 8 and 9 on quality and inclusion should proceed. In developing the proposal for paper 8, Frontier should be asked to consider the European Quality Framework and the five domains to frame the working paper.

The Group asked that consideration be given to combining Papers 6 and 7 on optimal service and collaboratives.

Project Plan

Anne-Marie presented a revised meeting schedule and stakeholder engagement options. The Group approved the revised schedule and agreed to revert on dates proposed. The Secretariat indicated that a draft call for submissions and plan for a focus group exercise will be put to the Group for agreement at the July meeting.

AOB/ CLOSE

The next meeting of the Group will take place on Wednesday 29 July.

ENDS