

New Funding Model for ELC and SAC

Expert Group Meeting

Wednesday 28 April 2021

Webex

Minutes

Participants:

Michael Scanlan (Chair)

Eva Lloyd

Edward Melhuish

Tim Callan

Rory O'Donnell

Niamh Callaghan (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform)

Philip Crosby (Department of Education and Skills)

Anne-Marie Brooks (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth)

Hazel O'Byrne (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth)

Gillian Martin (Secretariat, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth)

Andrew Burrows (Secretariat, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth)

Matthew Duffy (Secretariat, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth)

Apologies

Tove Mogstad Slinde

Present (for relevant parts of meeting):

Gillian Paull, Frontier Economics

Karina Doorley, ESRI

Welcome

The Chair welcomed the Expert Group to the first morning of the meeting.

Minutes from last meeting and matters arising

The minutes of the meeting of 24 March were adopted.

Topical Issues

Gillian Martin provided an overview of developments since the last meeting, including updates on the Workforce Development Plan; the Review of Operating System; the 1-year NCS review; the publication of the reports from Phase 1 of the Stakeholder Consultation; the publication of the Department's Childminding Action Plan; EU developments including Child Guarantee and the Rights of the Child; the Citizens' Assembly on Gender Equality; and the Joint Labour Committee process.

Affordability Work Strand

Karina Doorley from the ESRI gave a presentation on two draft papers on the National Childcare Scheme, which cover issues related to affordability, incentives to work, and the profile of users of Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare in Ireland. These papers analysed trends in the use of services, childcare costs, the distribution of the NCS, and the relationship between the NCS and work incentives for the parents of service users. The papers examined correlations between household income, family composition, and costs, including costs as a proportion of disposable income.

The group discussed how these reports might inform changes to the NCS to improve affordability. Further exploration and modelling of options will be conducted for future meetings.

Gillian Paull presented a draft report by Frontier Economics on the income to cost ratio for childcare services. The methodology and findings of the report were presented and discussed in depth. The discussion focused on the interpretation of the findings, their implications and how they might inform the development of the funding model, particularly in the areas of affordability, accessibility, and quality.

Quality Work Strand

Andrew Burrows presented a Secretariat discussion paper, which was based on discussions on various work strands at previous meetings of the Expert Group relating to quality (including staff pay and conditions), affordability, and sustainability. Different approaches and issues were identified and considered, including forms of supports; the extent of supports and their terms and conditions; participation and eligibility; incentivisation; risks, feasibility and implementation issues; and the potential impacts on current initiatives, service providers and service users.

The Secretariat will continue to develop the options outlined, in line with feedback from the Expert Group.

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Present (for relevant parts of meeting):

Nick Fitzpatrick, Frontier Economics

Gillian Paull, Frontier Economics

Apologies:

Niamh Callaghan (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform)

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Stakeholder engagement update

Nick Fitzpatrick of Frontier Economic gave an update on Phase 2 of stakeholder engagement. An introductory meeting and two half-day sessions have been held so far, covering disadvantage/inclusion and quality. The Group discussed the results of the stakeholder engagement sessions, their implications and the ways in which they can inform the development of the new funding model.

The Group also discussed the upcoming Phase 3 stakeholder engagement and agreed to return to this item in the next meeting.

Inclusion and Disadvantage work strand

Hazel O'Byrne presented a Pobal paper and led a discussion on how services operating in the context of concentrated disadvantage within the Early Learning and Care and School Aged Childcare environment can be identified. The Group discussed methods of identification of services with a view to offering effective and targeted supports.

The Secretariat and Chair will meet to progress options for identification and allocation models under this work strand.

Service Delivery Models

Gillian Martin presented a Secretariat discussion paper on the role of State in the ELC/SAC sector and its relationship with providers. The Group noted that the State already exercised significant public management functions, and discussed areas of potential further development, in line with the Group's draft Guiding Principles and Terms of Reference. The potential benefits and risks of greater State involvement in these areas, and the forms that such involvement might take, were discussed.

