

# BETTER OUTCOMES BRIGHTER FUTURES

The national policy framework  
for children & young people  
2014 - 2020

Annual Report for the Final  
Year of Implementation

January – December 2020

Active &  
Healthy

Achieving

Safe

Economic  
Security

Connected  
& Respected

## Contents

<b>Part 1: Minister’s Foreword</b> .....	<b>4</b>
<b>Part 2: Introduction</b> .....	<b>6</b>
2.1 Overview .....	6
2.2 National Outcomes, Structures and Commitments.....	6
<b>Part 3: Indicators and Data</b> .....	<b>9</b>
3.1 Introduction .....	9
3.2 Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures Indicator Set .....	9
3.3 State of the Nation’s Children Report Series .....	10
3.4 Growing Up in Ireland .....	10
3.5 Outcomes for Children Data Hub.....	11
<b>Part 4: Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures Achievements 2014–2020</b> .....	<b>12</b>
4.1 National Outcomes .....	12
Outcome 2: Achieving Full Potential in all Areas of Learning and Development .....	19
<b>Part 5: Reporting on Commitments</b> .....	<b>47</b>
5.1 The Reporting Process .....	47
5.2 Status of Commitments under the Transformational Goals.....	48
5.3 Status of Commitments Under the 5 National Outcomes .....	49
<b>Part 6: Constituent Strategies</b> .....	<b>50</b>
6.1 National Strategy for Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making 2015–2020 .....	50
6.2 National Youth Strategy 2015-2020.....	51
6.3 LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020 .....	52
6.4 First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and Their Families 2019-2028 .....	53
6.5 Irish Youth Justice Strategy.....	54
<b>Part 7: Perspectives on Implementation</b> .....	<b>57</b>
7.1 Secretary General of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. 57	
7.2 Elizabeth Canavan, Assistant Secretary, Department of the Taoiseach, Vice Chair of the Children and Young People’s Policy Consortium .....	58
7.3 Young Voices-EU Youth Dialogue.....	59
7.4 Comhairle na nÓg National Executive .....	62
7.5 Chair of the National Advisory Council for Children and Young People .....	63
7.6 Children and Young People’s Services Committees.....	65
<b>Part 8: Learnings from Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures</b> .....	<b>67</b>
8.1 Introduction .....	67

8.2 Mid-Term Review.....	68
8.3 Other Perspectives on Implementation.....	68
8.4 Overview of Perspectives and Learning.....	69
8.5 Learning from the Implementation Process.....	71
8.6 The Course of Action for the Successor Framework.....	72

## Part 1: Minister's Foreword



**Roderic O'Gorman T.D.**

*Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth*

I very much welcome the publication of the final Annual Report 2020 for *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, the national policy framework for children and young People 2014–2020. I would like to sincerely thank all the stakeholders involved for their ongoing efforts since 2014 in the provision of services and providing better outcomes for children and young people. This includes the members of the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium, the Sponsors Group, the National Advisory Council, Children and Young People's Services Committees, Comhairle na nÓg, Young Voices, all the other children and young people who participated in this process and the NGO sector who played a huge role in collaborating with government departments. I would also like to thank officials in my own Department for their sterling work and that of the framework's implementation team. A lot of work was completed over the lifetime of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* with 81% of commitments completed, 18% still in progress and 1% not completed.

When launched in 2014, *Better Outcomes: Brighter Futures* was the first overarching national policy framework for children and young people aged from birth to 24 years. It set out the six big transformational goals, five national outcomes and the new implementation structures through which government departments could work together to achieve these outcomes and be accountable for progress. This framework represented a comprehensive outline of every government department's goals, commitments and responsibilities to children and young people.

Along with the publication of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* in 2014, came the landmark establishment of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency which offered a fresh start in the delivery of services for children and families in Ireland and represented one of the largest and most important public sector reforms ever undertaken by government.

There have been many other milestones along this journey. One major achievement was the *Children First Act* in 2015 followed by the launch of *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* in 2017. The act represented an important extra protection in the child welfare and protection area, providing that child protection concerns are brought to the attention of Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, without delay by mandated persons. We, as a society and government, have a duty of care towards children to protect them from abuse and neglect so this piece of legislation was a major achievement and ground breaking from an Irish perspective. Following on from this, Tusla, introduced the *National Childcare Information System (NCCIS)* which marked a significant milestone in child protection for the agency and the country. For the first time in the history of the State, all 17 social work areas can access one integrated, up-to-date information system to manage child protection and welfare cases.

There has been many developments in the early years' sector over the lifetime of the framework. In 2018, the government unveiled *First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young children*

*and their families 2019–2028* which was launched to make life easier for families, while also providing children with the best possible start. In 2019, the *National Childcare Scheme* was launched to ensure that children can access the quality early learning and care that can be so important for their development. It now provides financial support to help meet the costs of childcare and is the first ever statutory entitlement to financial support for childcare. It was a highly innovative and ambitious scheme and was a watershed moment in giving our children the best start in life.

*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* offered us a unique opportunity to identify and address key issues that require a strategic and multilateral approach in ensuring optimum outcomes for children and young people. Under the framework, child poverty was identified as a priority. Work in this area exemplified best practice by government departments and the NGO sector working together collaboratively to tackle this issue. In particular, I would like to express my gratitude to the National Advisory Council under the previous leadership of Dr Owen Keenan and presently Ms. Tanya Ward, CEO of the Children’s Rights Alliance who is the current chairperson. In addition, officials in my own department and the Department of Social Protection who worked tirelessly on this important area should also be commended. I am pleased to say that the child poverty rate has reduced over the lifetime of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. However, while good progress has been made, I am aware that the original target outlined when *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* was published has not been met. We will redouble our efforts to reduce child poverty by working across government and in tandem with the NGO sector during the lifetime of the new successor framework.

The involvement of children and young people in decision-making on issues that affect their lives is a prerequisite, particularly when implementing a strategy like *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures*. The department has taken a ground breaking approach relating to children and young people’s participation since 2014. Key highlights was the launch of the *National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making* in 2015 along with the launch of the *LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018–2020* which guaranteed a cross-governmental approach to putting additional measures in place to further enhance the lives of LGBTI+ young people and address some of the key challenges they may face as part of their day-to-day lives. It was a world first and something which I and my department are proud of.

Although *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* has concluded we still look forward in our collective efforts to improve outcomes for children and young people in Ireland. We will take the learnings from the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* process on board and focus on priorities, current, new and emerging. I am pleased to say work on the development of the successor framework has begun in my department and I look forward to working with all stakeholders in its development and implementation.

---

**Roderic O’Gorman T.D.**

**Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth**

## Part 2: Introduction

### 2.1 Overview

*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, launched in April 2014, represented the first overarching national children's policy framework encompassing children and young people aged 0–24 years. It adopted a whole-of-government approach and was underpinned by a number of constituent strategies in the areas of early years, youth, participation and LGBTI+.

The framework:

- established a **shared set of outcomes** for children and young people to which all government departments and agencies, statutory services and the voluntary and community sectors worked to ensure a coherent response for children and young people;
- identified the **range of commitments** in place across government and progressed these based on a structured, systematic and outcomes-focused approach;
- prioritised the **key cross-cutting transformational goals** under each outcome area, which required concerted and coordinated action to ensure the realisation of the respective outcomes;
- emphasised an **integrated and evidence-informed approach** to working across government, on horizontal and vertical levels – an approach that was child-centred, benefited from interagency and multidisciplinary working, and which transferred to all sectors and settings working with children and young people.

### 2.2 National Outcomes, Structures and Commitments Introduction

*Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* adopted an outcomes approach based on five national outcomes for children and young people. These outcomes are interconnected and reinforcing and capture current and new government commitments to improving policy and services in relation to each.

These are:

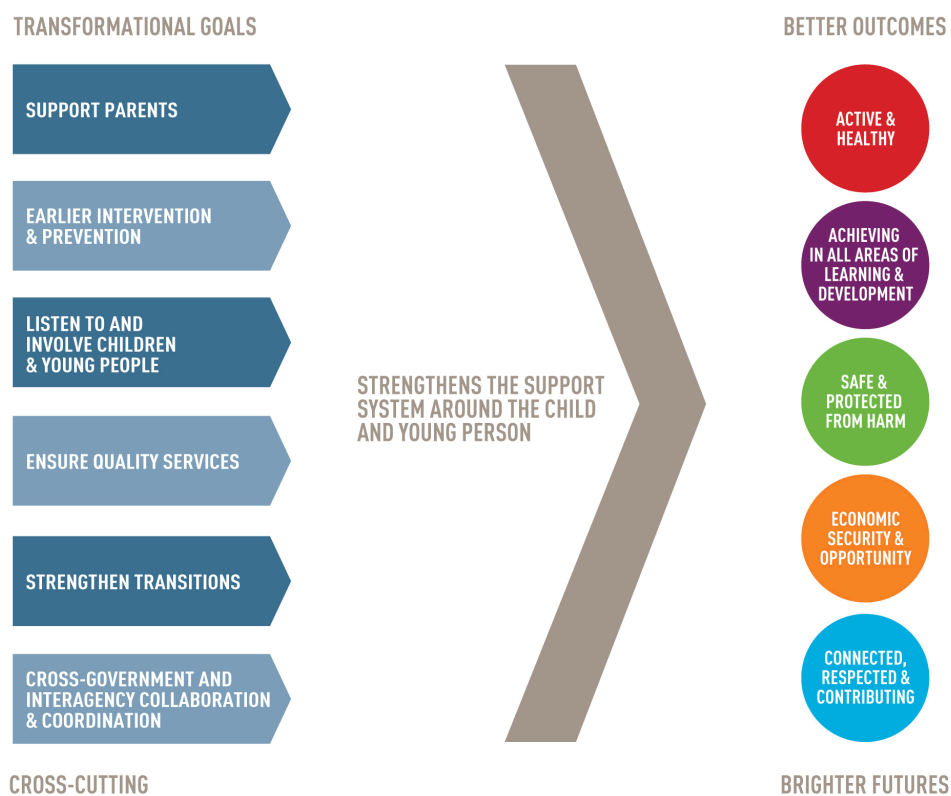
1. Active and healthy with physical and mental well-being
2. Achieving full potential in all areas of learning and development
3. Safe and protected from harm
4. Economic security and opportunity
5. Connected, respected and contributing to their world.

In order to deliver better outcomes for children and young people, a number of cross-cutting themes that required whole-of-government attention were identified. These six transformational goals were identified as key to ensuring that policies and services were made more effective in delivering better outcomes for children and young people.

It was envisaged that achieving these goals would lead to improvement in the quality and timeliness of support to children and young people, and to the effectiveness and responsiveness of policy and

services provision. Some of these goals required cultural change, some required the rebalancing of resources, and some required better planning and communication. However, all were required to strengthen the support systems around children and young people to achieve better outcomes.

The individual commitments that make up the transformational goals were the responsibility of many different departments and agencies. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth had responsibility for the transformational goals at the Sponsors Group.



**Figure 1: The 6 transformational goals for achieving the national outcomes**

The 163 commitments in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* were drawn from across government. The framework recognised the need to connect, nationally and locally, if we were to effectively utilise all of the inputs and resources available to support our vision for children and young people.

## Implementation Structures

In light of this, a range of structures were established or aligned – Children and Young People’s Policy Consortium, Sponsors Group, National Advisory Council, Children and Young People’s Services Committees National Steering Group, Comhairle na nÓg National Executive and EU Structured Dialogue Working Group (Young Voices). The aim was to ensure that the State and its partners worked and planned service provision in a way that was centred on the child or young person, emphasising interagency and outcomes-focused working. These groups brought together representatives from

government departments, statutory agencies, the community and voluntary sector and independent experts to inform and develop key actions to support these objectives.

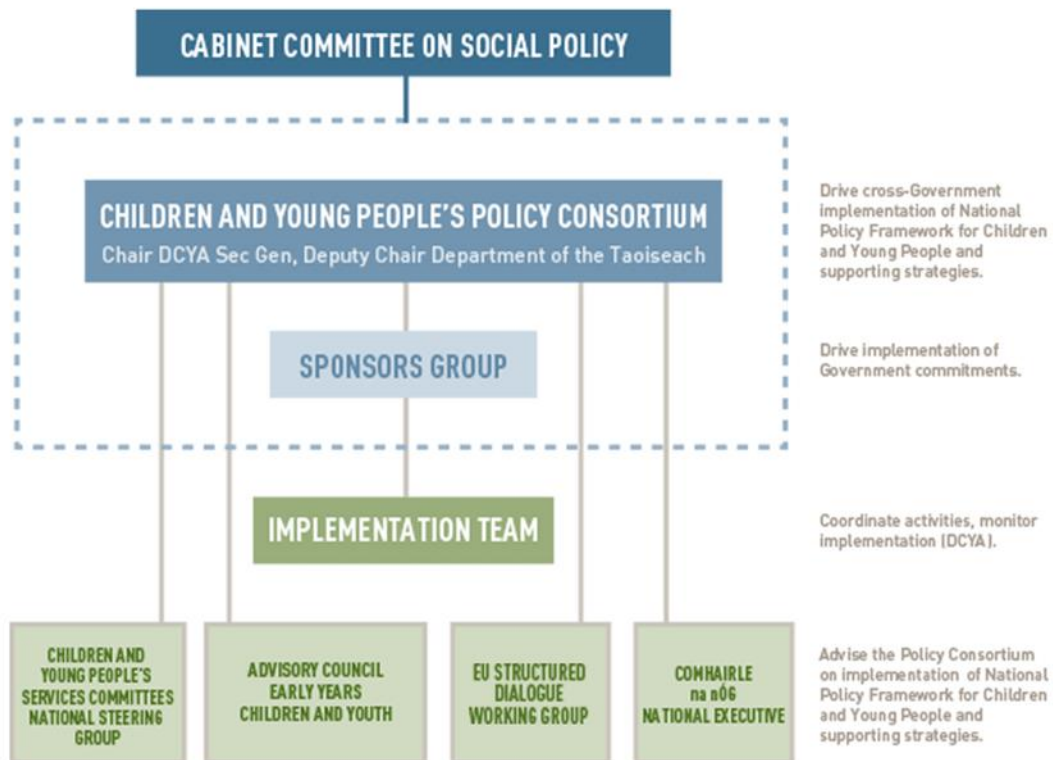


Figure 2: Implementation structures under *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*

## Implementation Plan

To provide a baseline for the commitments in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* an implementation plan was developed by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs' implementation team in 2014. This sought specific annual actions for each of the 163 commitments in the initial implementation phase as well as a desired outcome for 2017. The implementation plan's focus on outcomes in 2017 was intended to front load progress, as well as generate momentum for implementation. The implementation plan also committed to a [mid-term review](#).

A review of progress under each of the national outcomes from 2014-2020 is included in Part 4 of this report.



## Part 3: Indicators and Data

### 3.1 Introduction

Through our investment in our research programmes, data and analysis, and prevention and early intervention initiatives such as *What Works* (<https://whatworks.gov.ie/>), we have emerging Irish evidence as to what works in supporting children and young people and their parents to achieve better outcomes. Adopting an evidence informed approach has ensure investments and policy priorities are targeted directly at achieving optimum outcomes. Investment in early years care and education reaps significant dividends throughout a child's life and to society as a whole. The evidence confirms the importance of parents, particularly in the early years of a child's life, and the importance of friendships as children grow into adolescence.

Easy access and effective use of data is critical to improving children and young people's lives. Effective use of data and evidence can also be a powerful tool to build stronger services for children and young people and ensure the appropriate allocation of resources. The initiatives listed below highlight some of this work undertaken in this area by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in this area since in collaboration with other key partners.

### 3.2 Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures Indicator Set

#### Overview

In 2017, a national indicator set to track progress against the five outcomes in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, the Children and Young Peoples Policy Framework* was published by the Research and Evaluation Unit in the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

#### Purpose

The purpose of the indicator set is to act as a barometer of progress on the five national outcomes in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and to inform future policy development. Outcome indicators will not explain how or whether a particular action or commitment on the policy framework gave rise to or caused a particular outcome. But they are important because they will:

- help track progress towards outcomes
- assist in identifying trends
- contribute to priority setting or resetting
- inform policy formulation and service provision
- provide for international comparisons where possible

Since the publication of the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* indicator set in 2017, work has been ongoing in compiling disaggregated data for each of the indicators. A methodology report detailing the methodological process used to develop this indicator set was published on [www.gov.ie](http://www.gov.ie) in August 2019. More detailed data for specific subsets of the population of children and young people, including on young carers and young Travellers have also been published<sup>1</sup>.

---

<sup>1</sup> See the DCEDIY REU Statistics Programme's Statistical Spotlight Series for more information <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/c2a87f-the-statistical-spotlight-series/>

This Annual Report 2020 is accompanied by a companion report updating the indicator set for *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures 2014–2020*. The purpose of this update is to provide the most recent available data for all *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* indicators, and to highlight how these indicators have changed over the lifetime of the Framework.

The indicator set, available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/582092-better-outcomes-brighter-future-indicator-set/>, represents a significant resource to support policy development and the work of government departments and others involved in developing strategies to improve outcomes for children, young people and their families. It provides a broad picture of:

- How children and young people in Ireland are faring in terms of how active and healthy they are;
- The extent to which they are achieving their full potential in learning and development
- How safe and protected they are from harm
- How economically secure they are
- How connected, respected and engaged they are in society.

### 3.3 State of the Nation's Children Report Series

The State of the Nation's Children (SONC) Report provides a comprehensive picture of children's lives by presenting key information on children's health, behavioural and educational outcomes, and their relationships with their parents and friends. SONC provides the most up-to-date data on the National Set of Child Well-being indicators, and:

- charts the well-being of children in Ireland
- tracks changes over time
- benchmarks progress in Ireland relative to other countries.

Delivery of the SONC Series has been moved online, with links to the underlying data tables. The most recent version of the State of the Nation's Children Report is available at <https://www.gov.ie/en/campaigns/1f703-state-of-the-nations-children/>.

### 3.4 Growing Up in Ireland

Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) is the national longitudinal study of children and young people, funded by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and managed by DCEDIY in association with the Central Statistics Office (CSO). Established in 2006, the purpose of the study is to examine the factors that contribute to, or undermine, the well-being of children and, to contribute to the setting of effective policies and services for children and their families.

GUI data is collected under the Statistics Act (1993) and the study is currently carried out on behalf of DCEDIY by a team of researchers at the Economic and Social Research Institute and Trinity College. GUI involves regular waves of data collection to track the development of two cohorts. Just over 11,000 children, mainly born in 2008, were recruited into Cohort '08 at nine months old; and 8,570 children, mainly born in 1998, were recruited into Cohort '98 at 9 years old. Data has been collected

from Cohort '08 and their parents at the ages of nine months, three years, five years, seven years and nine years. Data is being collected from this cohort at age 13 in 2021/22. Data has been collected from Cohort '98 at the ages of 9 years, 13 years, 17/18 years and 20 years. The next main data collection for this cohort is planned for 2023 at the age of 25. In addition, a special GUI COVID-19 survey was carried out in December 2020, capturing data from Cohort '08 and their parents at the age of 12, and from Cohort '98 at the age of 22.

GUI collects data on experiences and outcomes across the domains of health, education and cognitive development, socio-emotional development, and economic/civic participation. It also collects background data about the family and local contexts in which children grow up (e.g. family social class, income and neighbourhood characteristics).

GUI is currently transitioning to a new ambitious model of delivery from 2023. DCEDIY will continue as the GUI sponsor, and will lead on the research aspects of the study, such as identifying research needs to guide data collection in advance of every wave and maximising the policy and research use of data afterwards.

The Central Statistics Office will lead on the data aspects of the project, including the finalisation of questionnaires, data collection itself, the production of statistical outputs and the preparation and release of study data for research use. The retention of the skills and expertise of the current GUI study team at the ESRI within either DCEDIY or the CSO is also a central feature of the new model; and consultations with stakeholders, including children, young people, policymakers and researchers will continue to inform the ongoing development of GUI. The potential for a new GUI birth cohort is currently being examined, arising from a commitment in *First Five*, the cross government strategy to improve the lives of babies, young children and their families.

### 3.5 Outcomes for Children Data Hub

The Outcomes for Children Data & Information Hub is an online interactive mapping system developed in a collaboration between the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and Tusla, with funding from the What Works initiative. *Outcomes for Children* visualises published data sets as they relate to children and young people, providing a powerful tool for service planning and delivery. *Outcomes for Children* is aligned with the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* 5 national outcomes, and will continue to develop as new data relating to children and young people becomes available.

Outcomes for Children is available for everyone online at: <https://outcomes4children.tusla.ie/>

# Part 4: *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*

## Achievements 2014–2020

### 4.1 National Outcomes

#### Introduction

This policy framework adopted an outcomes approach based on five national outcomes for children and young people. These outcomes are interconnected and reinforcing and captured current and new government commitments to improving policy and services in relation to each.

These are:

1. **Active and healthy with physical and mental well-being**
2. **Achieving full potential in all areas of learning and development**
3. **Safe and protected from harm**
4. **Economic security and opportunity**
5. **Connected, respected and contributing to their world.**

The framework established this shared set of national outcomes for children and young people so that all government departments and agencies, statutory services and the voluntary and community sectors could work collaboratively to ensure a coherent response for children and young people.

The purpose of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* was to develop and implement policies and services for children and young people across the 163 policy commitments under each national outcome. The aim was to progress these commitments using an integrated and evidence-informed approach to working across government thus achieving these five national outcomes for children and young people across the country.

Achieving these outcomes can lead to improvements in the quality, timeliness, effectiveness and responsiveness of policy and services provision. Some of these goals required cultural change, some required the rebalancing of resources, and some required better planning and communication; however, all were required to strengthen the support systems around children and young people to achieve better outcomes.

This chapter aims to set out the main achievements under each of the five national outcomes. The 'gains' achieved as listed below are not exhaustive as *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* encompassed a seven-year period. Rather we are highlighting the main achievements which we feel have impacted most on the lives of children and young people in Ireland over this period under each national outcome.

# Active & Healthy

## Outcome 1: Active and Healthy with Physical and Mental Well-being

Being active and healthy is a significant contributor to overall well-being. The majority of children and young people in Ireland enjoy good health. However, we have some significant health challenges, including obesity, inactivity, substance misuse and supporting mental health.

The intended outcomes were that all children and young people are physically healthy and able to make positive health

choices, have good mental health, have a positive and respectful approach to relationships and sexual health, and that their lives are enriched through the enjoyment of play, recreation, sports, arts, culture and nature.

2014

- The Department of Health concluded the successful enactment of the Public Health (Standardised Packaging of Tobacco) Act.
- Arising from the Irish Presidency of the EU, the Department of Health led with the EU Commission on the development of an EU Childhood Obesity Action Plan. The plan was published in February with follow-up work on EU Joint Action.
- The Protection of Children's Health (Tobacco Smoke in Mechanically Propelled Vehicles) Bill 2014 was signed into law by the President.
- The Department of Health worked closely with other departments as part of the whole of government approach to the Healthy Ireland Framework. The Department worked with the Department of Education and Skills on embedding and integrating health and well-being in the educational agenda across primary, post-primary, higher and further education and training, and with the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation toward 'healthy workplaces' as part of *Good for Business, Good for the Community*- the national corporate social responsibility plan.
- *Tobacco Free Ireland* set a target for Ireland to be tobacco free by 2025. The two key themes underpinning the report are the protection of children and the denormalisation of smoking.

2015

- The Healthy Ireland Council identified the need to advocate for a focus on the health and well-being of children as a national priority in its 2015 Action Plan.
- Ireland's first *National Sexual Health Strategy (2015–2020)* was published. One of the key measures in the strategy was to ensure that everyone who works with young people, including parents, teachers and youth workers, has access to proper training and back-up resources.
- Universal GP care for all children under six years of age commenced.

2015

- *Public Health (Sunbeds) (Health Information) Regulations 2015* and the *Public Health (Sunbeds) (Notification) Regulations 2015* placed tighter controls on the use of sunbeds, in particular in order to protect children.
- New protocols for Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services were introduced, and improved assessment and referral pathways. One result was reduced waiting times for those waiting over 12 months, despite an overall increase in demand for services.

2016

- Regulations to implement the *Protection of Children's Health (Tobacco Smoke in Mechanically Propelled Vehicles) Act 2014* were published, and the legislation came into force on 1 January. Smoking a tobacco product in a vehicle in which a child is present was prohibited by legislation.
- *Get Ireland Active! The National Physical Activity Plan for Ireland* was launched. Children and young people were the key focus for the plan, which recommended the development of new national guidelines for promotion of early childhood physical activity, as well as the promotion of healthy lifestyles and physical activity in primary and post-primary schools.
- The establishment and launch of the *National Healthy Cities and Counties of Ireland Network* represented a further step in establishing a strong structure to enable and support local authorities to fully contribute to the implementation of Healthy Ireland, and the ongoing implementation of this work supported alignment and collaboration between LCDCs and Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC).
- DCEDIY launched *Healthy Lifestyles – Have Your Say*, the result of a national consultation of children and young people, to help inform the development of the new national obesity strategy.
- Legislation was introduced to ensure that graphic warnings on tobacco products occupy at least 65% of the surface area of cigarette packs.
- Two new mental health clinical programmes were established: Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder (ADHD) in Adults and Children, and Dual Diagnosis of those with Mental Illness and Substance Misuse.
- *A Healthy Weight for Ireland: Obesity Policy and Action Plan 2016–2025* was published and launched. In accordance with Action 1.1 of the plan, the Department of Health and other partners continue to work on implementing a 'whole-of-school' approach for healthy schools.
- *Healthy Food for Life – National Healthy Eating Guidelines* was published and launched. The guidelines include a food pyramid to inform everyday food choices for adults, teenagers and children aged five years and over.

2017

- The President signed the Health (Amendment) Act into law. This legislation provides that all children in receipt of a Domiciliary Care Allowance payment will now be eligible for a medical card in their own right.
- A National Clinical Lead for Obesity was appointed in the HSE.
- The *Nutrition Standards for School Meals* were published under the auspices of Healthy Ireland.
- A five-year public health awareness campaign – ‘START’ – to set families on the path to a healthier future, was launched.
- The Healthy Ireland fund was established. Through the *Healthy Ireland Fund*, and in partnership with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the Department of Health match-funded a contribution to CYPSC to implement actions to achieve national Outcome 1. This funding relationship continues.
- New Healthy Eating Guidelines, Food Pyramid and supporting resources were published and distributed, including distribution to all primary and post-primary schools.
- New Nutrition Standards for schools- with an initial focus on school meal programmes-funded by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection were developed.
- Implementation of the *National Sexual Health Strategy* by the Sexual Health Crisis Pregnancy Programme is ongoing. The Strategy’s key aims are to improve sexual health and wellbeing and to reduce negative sexual health outcomes.
- The introduction of standardised packaging of all tobacco products commenced.
- Significant progress was made to promote the role that schools can play to help students develop resilience and coping skills, to better equip them to manage the social and emotional challenges of modern living. This included a review of Department of Education policy and practice relating to the promotion of well-being in schools and the development of well-being indicators.

2018

- The *Public Health (Alcohol) Act 2018* was signed into law. Of its 31 provisions, 23 were commenced by Order on 1 November. Among the primary policy objectives of the act are delaying the start of alcohol consumption by children and young people, and regulation and control of the supply and price of alcohol. The act prohibits alcohol advertising on public service vehicles, stops and stations, within 200 metres of schools, crèches and playgrounds, restricts alcohol advertising in cinemas and contains a ban on children’s clothing that promotes alcohol.
- The *Healthy Ireland Outcomes Framework* was published in 2018. The Framework includes three indicators taken from the *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures Indicator Set*: Condom Use, Screen Time and Feeling Safe.

2018

- New voluntary Codes of Practice for the advertising and marketing of food and non-alcoholic drinks were launched. The purpose of the Codes, which were agreed with the food industry, is to ensure that foods high in fat, salt and sugar are marketed in a responsible way. In particular the Codes seek to ensure that children are not exposed to inappropriate marketing, advertising or sponsorship associated with these kinds of food and drink products, and that healthier food choices are actively promoted.
- A Sugar-Sweetened Drinks Tax commenced in May.
- The Department of Health continued to support the Health Behaviours in School-Aged Children Study, an international study led by the WHO, which is carried out in Ireland by NUIG. The Study is a vital source of data on children's wellbeing and in terms of fulfilling national and international data reporting requirements.
- Healthy Ireland, through the HI Fund, supported and co-funded the all-island 2018 Children's Sport Participation and Physical Activity Study, led by Sport Ireland in the Republic of Ireland. The study provides valuable data on children's sport participation and activity levels; the next Wave of the Study, planned in 2022, will provide vital information on the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic on activity levels.

2019

- A Hot School Meals Pilot Scheme commenced in September. Nutrition standards for the Hot School Meals Pilot Scheme were developed by Healthy Ireland with the assistance of *safe*food and the HSE in cooperation with the Department of Social Protection.
- The General Scheme of the Public Health (Tobacco and Nicotine Inhaling Products) Bill was approved by government in October. The proposed legislation will prohibit the sale of tobacco products and nicotine-inhaling products by those under 18 years; prohibit the sale of nicotine-inhaling products to persons under 18 years; prohibit the sale of tobacco products at events/locations primarily intended for persons under 18 years and prohibit the sale of tobacco products from self-service vending machines.
- Parenting Learning Initiatives were introduced by Tusla where each area of Parenting Support Champions (PSCs) receives a small amount of funding (up to €3,000) to deliver local events for parents. These events were hosted by the PSCs and assisted by Tusla with the overall aim of being innovative and creative, also promoting parental participation and emphasising well-being through Parenting24Seven.
- New Jigsaw sites for Wicklow and Tipperary were announced, enhancing mental health services in these counties. Jigsaw is a network of programmes across Ireland designed to support young people based on best international best practice and is aligned with *A Vision for Change*. The new sites brought the number of Jigsaw sites to 15 nationwide.



2019

- Development and piloting of the *Healthy Ireland Smart Start (HISS) Programme* for children under 3 was underway under First 5.
- First 5 commits to rolling out a First 5 Trials programme. Funding was also secured to pilot a meals programme in early learning and care settings and a hot meals programme in schools in Budget 2020. In addition, Cycling Ireland piloted the introduction of cycling skills to early learning and care and junior/senior infant age groups. The Childcare Committees developed a bespoke model of the School Milk Scheme for early learning and care settings taking the specific needs of children and settings into account. In 2019, a total of 12 early learning and care settings in Kilkenny and Carlow were selected to participate in a 2020 three-week pilot.

2020

- New activities on tobacco were developed as part of the first substance misuse module of Junior Cycle SPHE which is aimed at first-year students. Activities relate to the dangers of second-hand smoking, the contents of nicotine, and general myths and facts on the short-term consequences of smoking.
- A number of initiatives aimed at introducing tobacco free environments in areas frequented by children were established by local authorities.
- The Health (General Practitioner Service and Alternation of Criteria for Eligibility) Act 2020 provided for the further extension of universal GP care to children aged up to and including 12 years of age and budget 2022 provides resources for the first phase of this extension, to children aged 6 and 7.
- The first ever *National Healthy Eating Guidelines for 1-4 Year Olds* were published. The guidelines and associated resources, including a new Children's Food Pyramid to help parents and carers establish good eating habits in children during the crucial early years. They were informed by the FSAI Scientific Committee dietary recommendations.
- The 27 CYPSC co-ordinated a total of 129 Healthy Ireland Initiatives, including initiatives around mental health. Altogether 8 CYPSC worked jointly with LCDCs on Healthy Ireland initiatives.
- A partnership approach from the onset of the pandemic and throughout 2020, linking across the infrastructure of Child and Family Support Networks, CYPSC, Tusla Area Based Childhood Programmes, local authorities and the community and voluntary agencies ensured a coordinated delivery of food parcels, educational supports and wellbeing packages to some of the most marginalised families.

2020

- The *My Place to Play* initiative for families living in international protection accommodation centres was extended and rolled out to 47 International Protection Accommodation Services (IPAS). It is a collaboration between CYPSC and DCEDIY and other partners. It builds on the work of Dublin City North CYPSC from 2018–2019 which promoted the development and well-being of very young children living in homeless accommodation with a limited amount of space available for free movement and play. *My Place to Play* aims to promote the importance of play; increase developmental activities for babies including tummy time and sensory development; and encourage parent-child bonding. It was awarded a “Child Health and Wellbeing Award” at the 2019 Irish Healthcare Centre Awards.
- DCEDIY developed *Supporting Children*, a campaign and online information platform designed to acknowledge the potential harms of the COVID-19 public health crisis and to draw attention to the robust network of supports which exist for those in need across areas including parenting and family support, domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, and child protection and welfare. It was also designed to encourage the general public to look out for vulnerable children and young people and highlighted many significant adaptations of services across Ireland to COVID-19.
- In Budget 2020, provision was made for the expansion of the Hot School Meals Pilot Scheme.
- Both the *Active School Flag* and *Incredible Edibles* programmes continued to provide valuable supports for children and for schools at times during the COVID-19 pandemic when schools were closed and learning was taking place remotely.
- Under *First Five Healthy Ireland Guidelines* for 0–4 year olds, a Children’s Food Pyramid and associated resources were launched. These informed the *Nutrition Standards* and *Early Learning and Care* which were also developed and published in 2020.

# Achieving

## Outcome 2: Achieving Full Potential in all Areas of Learning and Development

learning and development, have social and emotional well-being, and are engaged in and achieving in education.

Learning goes far beyond formal schooling to embrace the broad range of life experiences and learning processes that enable children and young people, individually and collectively, to develop their personalities, talents and abilities, and to live a full and satisfying life within society. The aims are to ensure that all children get the best foundation in

2014

- Work on the Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life: The National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy among Children and Young People 2011–2020 continued.
- The evaluations of the DEIS programme were published, the Department of Education and Skill's (DES) main policy initiative to address educational disadvantage in schools, showed encouraging trends in terms of attainment levels and pupil retention and attendance rates.
- All primary and post-primary schools participating in DEIS received a range of additional resources including additional staffing, funding, access to literacy and numeracy programmes and assistance with activities such as school planning.
- Approximately 1,140 grants issued to primary and special schools for the purchase of specialist equipment to assist children with special needs in the classroom. The type of equipment provided included sound field systems for children with hearing impairment, or software and computer facilities for children with communicative disability.
- A total 15,835 places were provided for CPD for teachers of children with special educational needs by the Special Education Support Service.
- DES provided ongoing support to tackle bullying in schools through the continued implementation of the Action Plan on Bullying, including the provision of funding for training sessions for parents, introduction of resources such as UP2US and continuing professional development for teachers to develop their ability to tackle bullying.
- The National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) developed guidelines for the establishment or review of student support teams. The role of student support teams is to support students with social, emotional and behavioural issues and they are also a focal point for training, support and advice from the NEPS psychologist assigned to the school.

2014

- Continued support for the Early Start Programme, which is a pre-primary initiative in designated areas of urban disadvantage, was provided by the Department of Education and Skills. In 2014, 1,261 children availed of the programme. DES also continued to provide funding for the Rutland Street pre-school project. A focused policy assessment of the Early Start Programme was published and this assessment identified measures to strengthen the future operation of Early Start by improving efficiency and effectiveness.
- Work continued on implementing the actions in the Action Plan on Bullying. The actions in the plan, which was launched in 2013, focus on support to schools, education and training, research and awareness raising. Funding was made available for 199 anti-bullying training sessions for 4,300 parents.
- Other activities included, developing and delivering a programme of CPD in relation to the action plan, supporting awareness-raising initiatives such as Safer Internet Day, the Stand Up! Awareness Week against Homophobic and Transphobic Bullying in second level schools and the ISPCC Shield Campaign.
- A study on 'The Prevalence and Impact of Bullying Linked to Social Media on the Mental Health and Suicidal Behaviour among Young People', which was commissioned by DES and the National Office for Suicide Prevention, was published.

2015

- A new language curriculum for junior infants to second class was published.
- A report, *Supporting Access to Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme for Children with a Disability*, was published by DES. The report outlined a new model for inclusion, which was developed following extensive consultation across government departments and agencies and with parents of children with disabilities. The interdepartmental group also drew on national and international evidence and experience to develop the model.
- The *National Assessments of English Reading and Mathematics* at primary level showed the first improvements since 1980, with overall primary level targets having been reached.
- Reform at Junior Cycle and Senior Cycle continued to be progressed with the introduction and development of new subject specifications.
- DES liaised with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs on a range of measures, including, the development of an early-years education-focused inspection model to inspect the quality of education provision in early-years settings participating in the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme.

2015

- Ongoing support to tackling bullying in schools was provided by DES through the continued implementation of the *Action Plan on Bullying*, including launching a new national anti-bullying website [www.tacklebullying.ie](http://www.tacklebullying.ie) which provides information, support and advice for students, teachers and parents on how to recognise and address bullying behaviour and allows teenagers to share experiences with their peers online.
- The *Well-Being in Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion* were launched following a collaborative process between DES and Health, and the HSE. The guidelines provide practical guidance on how primary schools can promote mental health and well-being in a whole school way and build on the existing good practice already in place.
- DES in conjunction with the Department of Health and Children, also launched a number of initiatives to promote well-being amongst young people including the third schools' Lifeskills survey and the Active Schools Week 2015 to take place in all schools, primary and post-primary and Youthreach centres.

2016

- The Minister for Education and Skills published the Action Plan for Education 2016–2019. The plan encompassed five high-level goals that permeate the strategic actions and targets set out for the education and training sector. It also set out proposed actions specifically targeting the promotion of well-being and positive mental health in school communities.
- *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Post-Primary Schools*, a new quality framework for school self-evaluation, was published.
- In the early year's sector, a new system of education-focused inspections in the universal pre-school centres, funded through the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) Programme, was rolled out by the Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate at the request of DCYA.
- The Better Start Access and Inclusion Model (AIM) was launched by DCYA. This is a model of supports designed to ensure that children with disabilities can access the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme and DES played a supporting role for this initiative.
- Ireland's 15-year-olds were among the best in OECD countries in reading and performing significantly higher than the OECD average in mathematics and science (PISA 2015).
- The Department published the fourth Life Skills Survey, providing information on how primary and post-primary schools cater for the well-being of their students in 2016. The data, on topics such as healthy eating, physical activity, substance misuse, relationships and sexuality education (RSE), bullying, enterprise in schools and education for sustainable development, aims to inform future priorities and policies on well-being.

2016

- During 2016, an assessment was undertaken of the provision of supports to schools in the areas of mental health and social and emotional competence, with a view to providing an enhanced and better integrated service.
- DES continued to implement *Síolta*, the quality framework for early years education, across the sector. DES was playing a lead role in rolling out the National *Síolta* Aistear Initiative with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA).
- Following development and dissemination of the *Well-being in Post-Primary Schools, Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion and Suicide Prevention* (2013) and *Well-being in Primary Schools Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion* (2015), NEPS psychologists engaged in ongoing work during 2016 with school to promote their adoption and use. A DES Cross Division Audit Group finalised a draft report on activities that related to the promotion of well-being and mental health in the education system.
- Work continued in 2016 on implementing the actions in the *Action Plan on Bullying*. The actions in the plan focus on support to schools, education and training, research and awareness raising.

Actions supported in 2016 under the *Action Plan on Bullying* included:

- 'Being LGBT in School', a resource for post-primary schools to prevent homophobic and transphobic bullying and support LGBTI+ students was published by GLEN in 2016. It supported schools in the implementation of the DES Anti-Bullying Procedures.
- A Stand Up! Pilot project for primary schools was conducted by BeLongTo in 2016 and a report on the project, called 'All Together Now' and associated teaching resources were launched.
- Funding was provided for the revision of the *Stay Safe Programme* to address new forms of risk, including cyberbullying, and to incorporate new research, best practice in the area of safeguarding children and changes and developments in the educational context in terms of policies, provision and curriculum.
- Anti-bullying training for Boards of Management commenced and funding was also provided for 66 anti-bullying training sessions for 1,288 parents organised by the National Parents' Council.

2017

- The *DEIS Review Report* and *DEIS Plan 2017* were published. A new data-based identification process, which resulted in extension of the DEIS Programme to 79 schools as well as the upgrading of a further 30 DEIS schools from Band 2 to Band 1 was introduced. DEIS now supports 902 schools – 704 primary and 198 post-primary with an overall investment of €125m by DES.

- The School Excellence Fund (SEF) initiative, targeted primarily at DEIS schools, was introduced in 2017 to support and reward innovative practice in schools. The SEF aims to encourage schools to work in clusters to explore and apply new, innovative solutions to tackle educational disadvantage and to improve learning outcomes for students.
- *The Junior Cycle Well-being Programme* was introduced to post-primary schools in 2017 to promote measures to support the mental resilience and personal well-being of students.
- Significant progress was made in 2017 to promote the role that schools can play to help students develop resilience and coping skills, to better equip them to manage the social and emotional challenges of modern living. This included a review of DES policy and practice relating to the promotion of well-being in schools and the development of well-being indicators.
- A new model for allocating special education teachers to schools was introduced to all mainstream primary and post-primary schools.
- *The Interim Review of the National Strategy: Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life 2011–2020* was published by DES. The interim review showed that considerable progress had been made at the mid-way point in the strategy and set out new and updated ambitious targets for numeracy and literacy in schools.
- The theme of well-being is evident in the curriculum at all levels – early years, primary and post primary. Well-being as an area of learning was introduced in September 2017 to schools commencing with all students in their first year of Junior Cycle. This area of learning is supported by a continuing professional development (CPD) programme for teachers. Work also continued to embed anti-bullying policies across the system.
- During 2017, a review was undertaken of current supports and programmes offered by DES to schools in the area of well-being with a view to rationalising and improving provision. Work commenced during the year on the development of a Departmental Policy Statement and Framework for practice with regard to the promotion of well-being in schools and centres for education, including indicators of well-being promotion success.
- During the year, NEPS-sanctioned psychologist staffing numbers were increased from 173 w.t.e to 184 w.t.e. specifically to improve NEPS service to DEIS schools. This represents the highest number of psychologists employed in this capacity since the inception of NEPS in 1999.
- €10.4 million funding was awarded to support 11,800 students with disabilities to access higher education.
- New child protection procedures for schools were published by DES in line with the commencement of the Children First Act 2015.
- The Education (Parent and Student Charter) Bill was published.

2017

- A composite report on the findings of evaluations conducted over a three-year period in schools and settings attached to High-Support Units, Special Care Units and the Children Detention Centres was published by DES.
- The Creative Youth programme was launched in 2017, with the aim of ensuring that every child has access to tuition, experience and participation in music, drama, art and coding by 2022.

2018

- The *Education (Admission to Schools) Act 2018* was introduced to provide families with fairer access to their local schools. The act aims to provide an overarching framework to ensure school enrolment policies are more structured, fair and transparent and that every child receives a school place.
- The DES Education and Skills *Well-being Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (2018-2023)* was launched in July, providing an overarching structure encompassing existing, ongoing and developing work in the area of well-being promotion. The policy outlines a multicomponent, whole-school preventative approach to the promotion of well-being with interventions at both universal and targeted levels.
- In November, *First 5, a Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families (2019-2028)* was published. *First 5* is Ireland's first-ever strategy for early childhood. This ten-year strategy will deliver a broader range of options for parents to balance working and caring, a new model of parenting support, new developments in child health, reform of the early learning and care system and a package of measures to tackle early childhood poverty and disadvantage. The strategy identifies more than 150 initial actions across government departments and State agencies, which will be substantially progressed in the initial implementation phase from 2019 to 2023.
- Implementation of the 108 actions in the DEIS Plan was progressed during 2018.
- A new in-school Speech and Language Therapy Service was piloted to develop greater linkages between educational and therapy support and assist schools to develop their capacity to support children with speech and language needs in schools.
- Additional NEPS psychologists were recruited to enhance access to the NEPS service and increase the range of NEPS in-school supports
- The inaugural Literacy and Numeracy Forum was held in October 2018; it was designed to promote and encourage quality, excellence and innovation in literacy and numeracy, and, inter alia, showcased exemplars in the Irish school system.



2019

- A DES Well-being Office was established in 2019 in NEPS to support the implementation of the Well-being Policy.
- The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) completed its review of Relationships and Sexuality Education (RSE) in December. On foot of this the NCCA commenced work on interim guidelines to support the teaching of SPHE/RSE in schools.
- The National Childcare Scheme (NCS) was introduced by DCEDIY to ensure that children can access quality early learning and care. The NCS provides financial support to help meet the costs of childcare, and is the first-ever statutory entitlement to financial support for childcare.
- A two-year pilot programme was established in 2019 in specific Traveller and Roma Communities to target attendance, participation and retention/school completion.
- The published findings from the OECD Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA 2018) show Ireland's 15-year-olds are among the best in reading literacy and are performing significantly higher than the OECD average in mathematics and science.
- In light of the First 5 A Whole-of-Government for Strategy and Babies, Young Children and their Families, the DES Inspectorate began work in 2019 on extending the early years education-focused inspection (EYEI) model to include children from birth to 3 years of age. The extension of the EYEI model to include babies, toddlers, and young children in Ireland is in keeping with the national commitment contained in the strategy to 'develop, enhance and implement standards and reform regulation and inspection systems'.
- SOLAS commissioned an independent evaluation of the Youthreach model and SOLAS made recommendations to further improve and develop the Youthreach model. SOLAS is now under the auspices of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.
- In Budget 2019, an additional €89.6m was allocated to early learning and care and school-age childcare – representing more than 18% of the public investment target. Further progress was made in Budget 2020 (i.e. an additional allocation of €63.5m or a cumulative 31% of the public investment target).

2020

- DCEDIY continued with important reforms in the early years' sector. A significant and extensive stakeholder engagement process was completed to inform the Expert Group developing a new funding model for ELC and School Aged Childcare (SAC) and the *Workforce Development Plan*. An online pre-school at home hub was developed and launched to support children and parents while ELC and SAC services were closed which included extra resources and guidance.

- Following the closures of schools and other education settings from March, the Department of Education (DE) assisted schools in their provision of remote teaching and learning. In June, DE published *Reopening Our Schools: The Roadmap for the Full Return to School* a comprehensive plan which provided guidance for schools, additional teachers at post-primary level and supports such as additional substitution, supervision, guidance counsellors and psychologists. The implementation of this plan was supported by a funding package of €639 million, of which €331 million was allocated for 2020 to support the operation of schools in a COVID-19 context.
- DE put in place measures following the disruption to the 2019/2020 school year, with a focus on well-being and preparation for returning to school in the new academic year. The summer programme was expanded to include an increased number of children with special educational needs ranging from in-school to home – based supports and guidance material was provided for parents. Summer provision in 2020 was also available to all DEIS schools.
- In September, the NEIC City Connects pilot project formally launched in the 10 NEIC primary schools. This innovative interagency approach is designed to improve outcomes for children by addressing multiple domains of development and through the enhancement of interagency cooperation at a local and national level; the pilot has been successful to date.
- The calculated grades process was introduced by DE to allow as many Leaving Certificate students (by opting to receive calculated grades) as possible to progress to employment further education and training.
- The DE Parents and Learners Unit updated the DE procedures for responding to child protection concerns that come to the attention of staff employed by DE.
- NEPS developed a range of resources for schools, pupils and parents to support the well-being of children and young people in line with the DE *Well-being Policy and Framework*.
- NEPS also developed well-being webinars and well-being toolkits for school staff available to support the reopening of schools after the COVID-19 period of prolonged school closures. These contained information, guidance, tips and advice for schools on how best to support the well-being of children and young people, including those with special educational needs. NEPS also produced a targeted well-being resource, –*Supporting the Well-being of Students with Special Educational Needs Returning to School*.
- In the 2020/2021 academic year there are 887 schools in the DEIS Programme serving over 185,000 pupils 689 and 198 pupils. DE allocated €125 million to the DEIS Programme in 2020.



## Outcome 3: Safe and Protected from Harm

Keeping children and young people safe and protected from harm is the responsibility of everyone in our society. Children and young people themselves must be educated and made aware of dangers and how to protect themselves from harm, and harmful or risky behaviour. The aims are that all children and young people have a secure, stable and caring home environment; that they are safe from abuse, neglect and exploitation; that they are protected from bullying and discrimination; and that they are safe from crime and antisocial behaviour.

2014

- Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, was established on 1 January and is responsible for improving well-being and outcomes for children. It represented the most comprehensive reform of services for the development, welfare and protection of children and the support of families ever undertaken in Ireland. Tusla is governed by the Child and Family Agency Act, 2013.
- The National Review Panel was commissioned and established by Tusla. It is functionally independent and its purpose is to conduct a review of child deaths and serious incidents and produce reports that are factually based; it also identifies points of learning with a view to improving the quality of services provided to children and families.
- The Department of Education and Skills published a new resource to tackle cyberbullying – Up2Us – which was launched through the internet safety initiative.
- A study on *The Prevalence and Impact of Bullying Linked to Social Media on the Mental Health and Suicidal Behaviour among Young People*, was commissioned and published by the Department of Education and the National Office for Suicide Prevention.
- The Tánaiste and Minister for Education and Skills re-launched the Anti-Bullying Centre as the National Anti-Bullying Research and Resource Centre.
- Tusla introduced intervention thresholds and standardised intake and assessment processes in child protection.

2015

- Two sets of Child Care Regulations, governing the care and welfare of children detained in special care settings and the registration of such settings, were finalised and published.
- DCYA developed and published a high-level policy statement to support and strengthen children and families, entitled *Parenting and Family Support as an Effective Prevention and Early Intervention to Promote Best Possible Outcomes for Children*. This guides the provision of universal evidence-informed parenting supports.

2015

- Tusla established a national governance structure for children’s residential services.
- The Children First Act 2015 was signed into law. Its enactment met the commitment in the Programme for Government to put key elements of *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* on a statutory footing. The act came fully into force in December 2017 and provides for a number of key child protection measures, including:
  - A requirement on organisations providing services to children to keep children safe from harm and to have a Child Safeguarding Statement in place.
  - A requirement on defined categories of persons (mandated persons) to report child protection concerns over a defined threshold to the Child and Family Agency.
  - Placing the Children First Inter-Departmental Implementation Group on a statutory footing. All government departments as well as Tusla, the HSE and An Garda Síochána are represented on the group.
- The act also includes a provision which abolished the common law defence of reasonable chastisement in relation to corporal punishment.
- The legislation operates in tandem with *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (2017)*, which outlines the non-statutory obligations which continue to operate administratively for all sectors of society.
- Tusla established a 24-hour Emergency Out of Hours Service (EOHS).
- Tusla established a National Counselling Programme.

2016

- The Department of Education continued its work on implementing the *Action Plan on Bullying*. The actions in the plan focused on supports to schools, education and training, research and awareness raising.
- Funding was provided by the Department of Education for the revision of the *Stay Safe Programme* to address new forms of risk, including cyberbullying, and to incorporate new research, best practice in the area of safeguarding children and changes and developments in the educational context in terms of policies, provision and curriculum.
- Anti-bullying training for school Boards of Management commenced and funding was also provided for 66 anti-bullying training sessions for 1,288 parents organised by the National Parents’ Council.
- The special care processes were established and launched by Tusla. These created a structure to support young people’s placements in special care and help to avoid unnecessarily lengthy placements.

2016

- *Being LGBT in School*, a resource for post-primary schools to prevent homophobic and transphobic bullying and support LGBT students, was published by the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN). It supported the Department of Education in the implementation of the department's anti-bullying procedures.
- Tusla developed an implementation plan in response to the national assurance review of retrospective cases of abuse.

2017

- Tusla published the implementation of the *Child Protection and Welfare Strategy 2017–2022* to ensure that all Tusla interventions are based on the best informed evidence-based approaches to working collaboratively with children, families and communities to achieve effective safety for children.
- Tusla rolled out *Signs of Safety* as a national approach to practice. *Signs of Safety* is a strengths-based, safety-focused child protection methodology where social workers encourage everybody relevant to the child's life to come together and discuss how best to meet the child's needs and keep the child safe. The rollout of *Signs of Safety* introduced, for the first time, one unified approach to practice across Tusla.
- Tusla established Implementation teams in each service area for the full implementation of *Children First*.
- Garda vetting legislation (Children and Vulnerable Persons Act 2012) to comply with National Vetting Bureau was implemented across all Tusla areas.
- A *National Aftercare* implementation group ensured alignment of resources with stakeholder bodies for effective commencement of the Child Care (Amendment) Act 2015.
- Mandatory reporting provisions of the Children First Act commenced.

2018

- Tusla launched the new National Childcare Information System (NCCIS) which marked a significant milestone in child protection for the agency and the country. For the first time in the history of the State all 17 social work areas can access one integrated, up-to-date information system to manage child protection and welfare cases.
- DCYA established a Parenting Support Policy Unit to coordinate policy direction and activity relating to parenting supports
- Tusla's new national Out of-Hours Social Work Service was staffed by an on-call rota of Tusla Principal Social Workers. This is a new single point of contact for out-of-hours child protection and welfare referrals to Tusla, as well as emergency care and residential placements.
- The Childcare Support Act, 2018, was enacted.

2018

- *The Child Care Law Reporting Project (CCLRP)* conducted research on child care law in order to promote transparency of, accountability for, and debate on child care court proceedings. Ongoing research by the CCLRP has been particularly valuable for policymakers seeking to promote better outcomes for children in or entering the care of the State.
- Revised guidance for the National Review Panel (NRP) was drafted and agreed with the chair of the National Review Panel and Tusla. The NRP reviews and reports on tragic incidents involving the serious injury or death of individuals in care or known to social work services. NRP findings have supported on-going learnings in the system, which have in turn led to continuous improvements for children and their families.
- A new Child Safeguarding Statement Compliance Unit (CSSCU) was established by Tusla. It is a dedicated unit to manage the requirement for service providers to have a Child Safeguarding Statement in line with the requirements of the *Children First Act*
- An Unallocated Cases Project Group was established by Tusla to advance a coordinated approach in each child welfare and protection area to reduce the number of unallocated cases and to establish a maximum waiting time for allocation to a social worker.
- Tusla secured the agreement of DCYA and the Department of Justice and Equality to provide placements for 20 unaccompanied children in need of care from the *Calais Special Project* and the *Irish Refugee Protection Programme*.
- The Tusla Portal was launched in January to allow for the safe and secure transmission of child protection and welfare reports into Tusla by professional reporters and members of the public.

2019

- *The Outcomes for Children Data and Information Hub* was launched under the *What Works* initiative. The hub is an online interactive area-based system based on a geo-mapping system developed in collaboration with Tusla and stakeholders across the sector. It is an intuitive web platform to visualise published data sets as they relate to children and young people. This powerful tool is available to practitioners, providers and policymakers.
- An addendum to the *Children First National Guidance* was published. This was to include a specific reference to the need for organisations to consider online safety risks in the context of developing a Child Safeguarding Statement.

2019

- Processes to ensure liaison between Tusla and An Garda Síochána Divisional Protective Services Units (DPSUs) were established and rolled out. Under the Children First joint working protocol, a Senior Liaison Management Forum (SLMF) was established in each Tusla area and Garda division, and a National Principal Social Worker Garda Liaison was introduced.
- The Barnahus model pilot – bringing together health, medical, therapeutic and policing services in a child-centred way where sexual abuse is suspected – was launched in Galway supported by Tusla in the provision of staffing and collaboration with key agencies including the HSE and An Garda Síochána and supported by their parent departments.
- The Tusla Advisory Group (TAG), was re-established; it consists of a group of young people aged between 18 and 25-years old who have been through the care system. It acts as an advisory group to Tusla on matters relating to care and aftercare.
- The Tusla portal continued to provide for efficiencies in the system for making mandated reports, by providing the agency with a ‘digital front door’ for reporters to securely and instantly submit concerns using an easy-to-use online form, which is then forwarded to the relevant dedicated contact teams in each Tusla area.

2020

- Ireland committed to implementing an integrated model of child sexual abuse services, using the Barnahus model. A National Agency Steering Committee was established to deliver the model nationally, with representatives from the HSE, Tusla, An Garda Síochána and Children’s Health Ireland. A pilot service is in operation in Galway with a dedicated site due to open shortly, and work is underway to establish the service nationally.
- Tusla Child Protection and Alternative Care Services are subject to regulatory inspection by the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA). In addition to individual area-based inspections, HIQA carry out thematic overview inspections to develop a nuanced view of performance across the system. HIQA’s inspection regime clearly demonstrates improved compliance with the relevant standards and regulations in residential care, and the child protection and welfare services in most Tusla areas.
- Presently there are approximately 5,800 children in alternative care. Both DCEDIY and Tusla recognise that there is a need to know more about their lives, as well the lives of those who are care experienced. To that end, a working group, comprising relevant officials from both DCEDIY and Tusla, was established in November to inform the minister as to how the Ryan Report recommendation for longitudinal research into the lives and experiences of children in care and leaving care can be best met. This will include consideration of the feasibility of conducting longitudinal research.

2020

- Officials from DCEDIY, Tusla and the CSO are engaged in a joint project to improve the availability of data on the educational attendance and attainment of children and young people in care and those who are care experienced.
- A new working group was established in Tusla to review the current *Parenting Support Strategy* and support the development and publication of a new five-year strategy and to update the research and evidence on the 50 key messages.
- The *Parenting Support Champions Project* (PSC) has continued to strengthen, with 130 active PSCs across the country (this figure increased to 160 in 2021). The regional learning events were transitioned to an online platform and the attendance and interactions exceeded expectations.
- The number of Child and Family Support Networks (CFSNs) has grown significantly since the establishment of PPFS, and there are now 121 CFSNs across the country.



# Economic Security

## Outcome 4: Economic Security

The government recognises that young people want to work and progress in life, and need to be given opportunities to do so. Poverty, sub-standard housing and social exclusion have a significant impact on a person's life outcomes and efforts must be made to promote social inclusion and reduce inequalities for children, young people and their families. The aims are that all children and young people are protected from poverty and social exclusion; that they are living in child/youth-friendly sustainable communities; that they have opportunities for ongoing education and training; and that they have pathways to economic participation, entrepreneurship, fulfilling employment and independent living.

2014

- In April, a child-specific poverty target was set out in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* (BOBF). The target aimed to lift over 70,000 children out of consistent poverty by 2020, a reduction of two-thirds on the 2011 level. In 2011, approximately 107,000 children were experiencing consistent child poverty.
- BOBF confirmed a cross-governmental and multidimensional approach to tackling child poverty, which prioritised early identification and intervention policies. The framework itemised a range of new and ongoing measures and reforms intended to break the cycle of intergenerational disadvantage. These focus on increasing rates of parental employment, reducing the number of jobless households, and increasing investment in evidence-based, effective services that can improve child poverty outcomes.
- The number of working families in receipt of family income supplement increased by 19% to some 50,300 families supporting over 111,000 children.
- A total 615,000 families received child benefit payments in respect of almost 1.2 million children
- Initiatives under the Youth Guarantee provided more than 28,000 places for unemployed young people.
- Over 166,000 families supporting some 304,000 children benefitted from the back to school clothing and footwear allowance scheme at a cost of almost €42.3 million.
- Child Benefit increased from €130 to €135 per month for each child and benefitted over 611,000 households with children.
- *The Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan* was published in January 2014 as part of the overall *Pathways to Work* strategy. Within this framework, the youth guarantee set a medium-term objective of ensuring that young people receive an offer of employment within four months of becoming unemployed.

2014

- 2014 was a turning point in terms of the poverty impact of the recession. Real disposable income of the median Irish household increased significantly by 3.5%, while key poverty indicators stabilised or decreased for the first time since 2007.
- Consistent poverty among children was 12.7%, the highest recorded since the CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions (SILC) were first published in 2004. Increases in the consistent child poverty rate since 2009 (8.7%) are attributed to the adverse impact of the economic recession since 2008. In 2014 there were 143,000 children living in consistent child poverty.

2015

- There was a Child Benefit increase of €5, from €135 to €140 per month, for each child, thereby benefiting over 623,000 households with children, an increase of €5 per week for families with one child and €10 per week for families with two or more children in the Family Income Supplement (FIS) income thresholds.
- The combined value of child benefit and qualified child increases was €63 per child per week, equivalent to 33.8 per cent of the minimum adult welfare rate. This was in line with the commitment in the *National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2016* to maintain the combined value of child income support measures at 33–35% of the minimum adult welfare rate (BOBF Commitment 4.1).
- An additional €2 million was allocated to the School Meals Programme, bringing the total spend to €39 million. The School Meals programme was available in 1,700 schools and organisations, supporting 217,000 children at a cost of €39m, an increase of €2m over the previous year.
- The new Back to Work Family Dividend, which was introduced in Budget 2015, provided €22 million to help lone parents and long-term unemployed families to return to work and resulted in an additional €1,550 per child being available in the first year of employment or self-employed.
- The final phase of the One-Parent Family Payment (OFP) reforms were introduced, bringing the maximum age of the youngest child for receipt of OFP to seven years for all recipients.
- Working families in receipt of Family Income Supplement (FIS), a weekly tax-free payment for families (including one-parent families) at work on low pay, increased by over nine per cent. This meant that FIS supported some 55,000 families, including some 120,000 children, in 2015, at an estimated cost of €349 million.
- Payments were made to a further 48,000 families under the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowances scheme. Over 153,000 families with some 281,000 children benefited from the scheme, at a cost of €41.4 million.

2015

Priority for funding under the scheme is given to schools that are part of Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) in line with *BOBF*

- A new *Back to Work Family Dividend* (BTWFD) scheme was introduced. The scheme provides financial support to jobseeker and one-parent family recipients with children who end their claim in order to take up employment, self-employment or increase their hours of employment.
- The final phase of the One-Parent Family Payment reforms took place in 2015.
- Approximately 25,500 One-Parent Family Payment recipients transitioned to alternative income supports, including Jobseeker's Allowance, Jobseeker's Transitional Payment, and Family Income Supplement. Those moving to Jobseeker's Allowance and Jobseeker's Transitional Payment will receive enhanced activation supports (BOBF Commitment 4.4).
- Under the Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan, the Dept of Employment Affairs and Social Protection committed to developing an internship or work experience scheme for the most disadvantaged young people in the 18 to 24 age bracket, who have been identified as having significant barriers to gaining employment. *First Steps*, a variant of the Job Bridge Scheme, which is targeted specifically at 18 to 24-year-olds who are ready to make the transition to a supported internship but are not yet ready for a standard Job Bridge internship or full employment, was launched at the start of February 2015. It replaced the previous Youth Developmental Internship (YDI).
- The rate for children living in consistent poverty fell further from 12.7% in 2014 to 11.5% in 2015, a drop of 1.2% meaning a further 11,000 children were lifted out of consistent poverty with the number now standing at 132,000.

2016

- There was an increase in Child Benefit of €5 per month, which, on its own, increased the average income of households with children by 0.24%, with a proportionally higher increase for lower-income households. A further €20 million was announced to introduce a *Paternity Benefit* scheme (BOBF Commitment G3, G4).
- There were more than 424,000 recipients of the *Household Benefits Package*, which is made up of electricity/gas allowance, and a free television licence, and had a total annual value of €580m.
- The number of working families in receipt of *Family Income Supplement* (FIS) rose by more than 1,500 to over 57,000 families, including some 127,000 children, at an estimated cost of €415.5 million.
- A total of almost 155,000 families with some 284,000 children, benefited from the *Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance* scheme at a cost of over €39.8 million. Altogether 108,000 eligible families received an automated payment under the scheme. A further 47,000 eligible families who did not meet the criteria of an automated payment, were also awarded payment under the 2016 scheme.

2016

- The rent supplement scheme supported approximately 48,000 tenants, consisting of families and individuals, at a cost of approximately €267 million.
- The introduction of a new *Paternity Benefit* scheme was announced in Budget 2016 and took effect from September 2016. The new scheme provides for up to two weeks of paternity leave for new fathers who have the relevant social insurance contributions, to allow them spend time with their new baby.
- Some 50 DEIS schools outside the programme were prioritised for inclusion in the school meals scheme, resulting in 21 joining. Funding towards school meals was provided in 1,400 schools and organisations, supporting 210,000 children, at a cost of some €40 million. Additional funding was provided to DEIS schools already participating in the scheme, to provide breakfast and lunch to pupils.
- An *updated Pathways to Work 2016–2020*, launched in January 2016, adopted a two-pronged approach:
  - Consolidation: consolidating the recent reforms to the Public Employment and Welfare Services and optimising provision to maximise outcomes for its clients; and
  - Development: gradually expanding access to activation services, as resources allow, to other non-employed people of working age.

*Pathways to Work 2016–2020* commits to continuing to implement the actions set out in the *Youth Guarantee Implementation Plan* (BOBF Commitment 4.4)
- The *Updated National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2015–2017* was published. It comprised 14 new goals, four of which reflect new and emerging issues for children (BOBF Commitment 4.1).
- A thematic report entitled *Social Risk and Social Class Patterns in Poverty and Quality of Life in Ireland* was published. This study examined trends in poverty and deprivation in Ireland over the ten-year period, 2004 to 2013, looking at patterns across social classes and over the life-course. These groups include lone parents, people with a disability, and children among others.
- The rate for children living in consistent poverty decreased further to 10.9% a drop of .6% on 2015 meaning a marginal drop of 2,000 in the number of children experiencing consistent child poverty to 130,000.

2017

- Under the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* framework child poverty was identified as a priority, and, in conjunction with the Advisory Council, the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection formed an ad hoc group with key officials from relevant government departments and NGOs towards the adoption of a whole-of-government approach to tackling child poverty. The group was co-chaired by the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection and the Children’s Rights Alliance (CRA). This way of working resulted in a great deal of shared learning and led to a common understanding of the complexities involved in addressing the issue of child poverty. The group published its paper in 2017.

- The second paper, produced by the NGOs – including Barnardos, the Children’s Rights Alliance, the National Youth Council of Ireland, One Family and the Society of St. Vincent de Paul – follows the format of the EU Recommendation on Investing in Children and was intended to provide policy advice to *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* on the approaches which should be taken in relation to tackling child poverty. This paper was also published in 2017.
- The payment in respect of qualified children increased from €29.80 to €31.80 per week. This was the first increase in this weekly rate of payment since 2010. The measure was targeted at low-income families, such as lone parents and their children, who have relatively high rates of poverty.
- The income disregards for the One Parent Family payment and Jobseeker’s Transition payment increased by €20, from €110 to €130 per week, to encourage one-parent families to stay in, and return to, work.
- The thresholds for the *Family Income Supplement* (now renamed the *Working Family Payment*, to better reflect that it is a payment aimed specifically at working families) increased by €10 per week for families with up to three children.
- Additional funding of €3.2 million was also allocated to the Department’s School Meals Programme. This will enable the extension of school breakfasts to newly designated DEIS schools. School breakfasts have been shown to increase attendance and improve concentration levels in children. Funding allocated for 2017 stood at €47.5 million with further increases due in 2018 as per Budget 2018 measures.
- At year-end 2017, a total of 1,530 schools were participating in the school meals scheme benefiting some 241,000 children. This included 129 new non-DEIS schools. Total school meals’ funding allocated for 2017 was €47.5 million and expenditure was €46.6 million.
- The *Fuel Allowance* season was extended by an additional week, from 26 weeks to 27 weeks. Funding for the *Free Travel* scheme increased by €10 million to €90 million in 2018, in line with the Programme for Government commitment to fully protect the scheme.
- Improvements to the terms of the Back to School Clothing and Footwear Allowance (BSCFA) scheme (increased by 25%), were announced in June 2017 with effect from the new school year, to assist families and children, in particular, lone parent families. The rates of the payment for the 2017 scheme were increased from €100 to €125 for children aged 4 to 11 and from €200 to €250 for children aged 12 years and over.
- The Paternity Benefit Scheme was introduced for children born on or after 1st September 2016 and also applies to children placed with their adoptive parents on or after that date.
- Youth unemployment fell from a peak of 31.2% in 2012 to 13.7% in December. Youth unemployment fell from well above the EU average in 2012 (23%) to well below the figure of 16.2% in the European Union.

2017

- A new *Youth Employment Support Scheme* was also developed. This scheme was targeted at young jobseekers who are long-term unemployed or who face barriers to employment.
- The *Action Plan for Jobless Households* was published and fulfilled a commitment in the Programme for Government and in the overall *Pathways to Work 2016-2020* strategy.
- Social transfers in 2016 continued to perform strongly in reducing the at-risk-of-poverty rate. In relative terms, it represented a poverty reduction effect of 51%. In 2017, Ireland was among the best performing EU Member States in reducing poverty through social transfers.
- The rate for children living in consistent child poverty continued to fall with a reduction in the rate from 10.9% in 2016 to 8.8% in 2017, a reduction of 2.1% and a drop of 25,000 children living in consistent child poverty with the actual number now standing at 105,000.

2018

- The income disregards for the One-Parent Family payment and Jobseekers' Transition payment increased by €20, from €110 to €130 per week, to help encourage one parent families to stay in, and return to, work.
- The thresholds for the Working Family Payment also increased by €10 per week for families with up to three children.
- The allocation for the School Meals Programme for 2018 was €54 million, for 1,580 schools and organisations, supporting over 250,000 children.
- In 2018, the rent supplement scheme supported approximately 28,700 tenancies per month at a cost of approximately €179 million.
- In 2018, 54,116 individuals received the Working Family Payment in respect of more than 122,000 children.
- This Back to Work Family Dividend scheme (BTWFD) helps to support welfare recipients move from dependency on primary social welfare payments into work. It also reduces the risk of child poverty, in line with the Programme for Government commitments. By the year end, the scheme had 14,694 child beneficiaries.
- Irish youth unemployment fell from a peak of 31.2% in 2012 to 12.2% in December 2018. Youth unemployment fell from being above the EU average in 2012 (23%) to below the EU-28 average at the end of the year (14.9%).
- The Youth Employment Support Scheme (YESS) was launched by DSP. YESS is targeted at young people aged between 18 and 24 who have been unemployed for 12 months or more or who face significant barriers to employment. The scheme aims to help young people by providing them with an opportunity to learn basic work and social skills in a supportive environment while on a work placement.

2018

- The Homeless HAP Place Finder service, which had been introduced on a pilot basis in Dublin and Cork, was made available to all local authorities. This service is a targeted support for homeless households, or those at risk of entering homelessness, who may find it difficult to secure HAP tenancies. By the end of 2019, over 10,500 households had been supported nationally via HAP on foot of referrals from local authority homeless units.
- The rate of consistent poverty among children fell further to 7.7% down from 8.8% in 2017 signifying a drop of 13,000 with the number now at 92,000. Having reached a high of 12.7% in 2013, the rate was now lower than the 2009 level of 8.7%.

2019

- The income disregards for the one parent Family Payment and Jobseeker Transition Payment both increased by €20 to €150 per week. These further measures help to encourage one parent families to stay in and return to work.
- A maintenance disregard was also introduced for the Working Family Payment with a €95.23 per week disregard in respect of housing costs.
- A new Parent's Benefit scheme was introduced, which allows both parents to access an additional two weeks paid parental leave in the first year of their child's life, in addition to the existing Maternity and Paternity allowances. Parent's Benefit is paid at a rate of €245 per week; the same rate as Maternity and Paternity Benefits.
- The Back to School clothing and Footwear Allowance increased by €25 to €150 for children aged 4 to 11 and from €250 to €275 for younger people aged 12 to 22.
- A pilot programme delivering hot school meals to 7,200 children in 36 DEIS schools at a cost of €1 million commenced. An evaluation of the schools meals programme continued and early indications were that it is proving successful.
- Irish Youth employment fell from a peak of 31.2% in 2012 to 12.6% in 2019. Ireland's youth unemployment has now been below the EU average for several years.
- 5,971 adults and their associated dependents exited homelessness into homes. This was a 16% increase on the 5,135 recorded in 2018.
- The Department of Children and Youth Affairs in conjunction with the Children's Rights Alliance held a Child Poverty event, bringing together key stakeholders from Government Departments, State Agencies and the NGO sector. Discussion centred on reducing child poverty including input from stakeholders to feed into the next National Policy for Children and Young People.
- The rate of consistent poverty among children increased marginally from 7.7% in 2018 to 8.1% in 2019 an increase of .4%. The numbers of children living in consistent poverty increased slightly to 96,000.



- The Department of Social Protection (DSP) published the Roadmap for Social Inclusion (2020–2025) which assembled in one place the range of policy measures across government departments that are designed to address the different aspects of poverty and social exclusion.
- The roadmap builds on the work of its prior strategies and aims to reduce the number of people in consistent poverty in Ireland to 2% or less by 2025 and to position Ireland within the top five countries in the EU under several leading social inclusion measures. The roadmap presented 7 high-level goals, 22 targets and 66 unique commitments. The focus of the Roadmap is on building social inclusion, using an expanded approach that moves beyond the traditional focus on income poverty which will benefit children.
- The qualified child payment was increased by €3 per week for children aged 12 and over and by €2 per week for children under 12, bringing the rates to €40 and €36 per week respectively.
- The income disregard for the One Parent Family Payment and Jobseeker Transition Payment was increased by €15 to €165 per week. These measures help one-parent families to stay in or return to work by increasing the amount of money that can be received from employment without these social welfare payments.
- The Working Family Payment thresholds increased by €10 per week for families with 1, 2 or 3 children. Some 55,000 families were expected to benefit, at a cost of €19 million.
- DSP funded school meals during school closures under level five restrictions for additional schoolchildren. In response to children and young people affected by the pandemic, DSP extended the school meals into the summer months. The Hot School Meals scheme was extended from September to 35,000 children.
- DSP helped one-parent families, who lost their job due to COVID-19, by not only providing the pandemic unemployment payment (PUP) but also maintaining the current rate of their primary payment and putting in place measures to address difficulties with maintenance payments.
- DSP introduced the pandemic unemployment payment (PUP) and the development of the Temporary Wage Subsidy Scheme, which was subsequently replaced by the Employee Wage Subsidy Scheme.
- Children and Young People’s Services Committees nationwide responded to the COVID-19 pandemic and diverted up to 50% of DCEDIY and Healthy Ireland funding to co-ordinate supports for disadvantaged children, young people and their families including delivery of school meals and support packs and collaboration with the Children’s Rights Alliance in a Food Provision Scheme amongst other supports.



- The Minister for Social Protection noted that her Department was to establish a judge-led group to determine, based on best international practice, maintenance guidelines and regulations which can hopefully be put on a statutory footing and which will achieve better outcomes for families.
- Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic in 2020, the Tusla ABC Programme reported several adaptations to services including sites ensuring that the needs of some of their targeted families from the Traveller communities, families living in homeless hubs and direct provision are identified and met, delivering speech and language services using tele-therapy and home learning packs, and strengthened collaborative planning in delivery of practical supports to children and families across Tusla's prevention and early intervention programmes, such as Area Based Childhood Programmes, Family Resource Centres, and through structures including Child and Family Support Networks and Children and Young People's Services Committees.
- Minister O'Gorman announced the publication of the Department's report: *Income, Poverty and Deprivation among Children: A Statistical Baseline Analysis* under the Child-specific Poverty Research Programme, initiated in late 2019. It draws from existing data and literature to provide a 'baseline' understanding of what we know about the situation of children living in poverty. It describes families' financial circumstances at different income levels, providing insights into the depth of poverty and movements into and out of poverty from 2011 to 2018. It also identifies the main risk factors for experiencing child poverty. The report shows that child poverty rates have reduced quite substantially for young children, down 12.2 percentage points between 2010 and 2018, and for young adults, down 10.3 percentage points. In 2018, Ireland had the lowest poverty rate among children aged 0 to 5 years in the EU. Those aged 6-11, however, show a concerning trend of increasing income poverty and consistent poverty.
- The *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* National Advisory Council formed a Child Poverty Sub-Group and it provided specific advice to the Council in relation to the impact of COVID-19 and recommendations with regard to the development of the next National Policy Framework for Children and Young People. Subsequently the Council made a submission to government in relation to the development of the next national policy framework for children and young people.
- The rate of consistent poverty among children decreased to 8% in 2020. (CSO SILC Data). Some work by the CSO linking SILC with revenue data shows that the 2020 rate would have been higher without COVID-19 supports. The PUP payment and also other wage subsidies have had a big impact on the reduction on the consistent child poverty rate
- Over the lifetime of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* 2014–2020 there was a drop in the consistent child poverty rate from 12.7% in 2014 to an estimated 6.8% in 2020 (utilising comparative statistical analysis)

## Connected & Respected

### Outcome 5: Connected and Respected

With the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) in 1992, Ireland, like almost all other countries in the world, committed to ensuring that the voices of children and young people are heard and that their opinions are given due weight in matters that affect them.

Children and young people should be supported and encouraged to play a full role in society recognising that they themselves, through their choices and determination, can heavily influence their own lives now and in the future. Measures are needed to create a society in which all children and young people are valued and respected for who they are, so that they can freely express their identity. The aims are that all children and young people have a sense of their own identity, are free from discrimination and are part of positive networks of friends, family and community; furthermore, that they are civically engaged, socially and environmentally conscious, and are aware of their rights as well as being responsible and respectful of the law.

2014

- *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014–2020* was launched in April. The Framework included Five National Outcomes one of which was Outcome Five ‘Connected and Respected’ This national outcome was committed to ensuring that the voices of children and young people are heard and that their opinions are given due weight in matters that affect them.
- The Comhairle na nÓg National Showcase took place in Croke Park on 20 November 2014, with 500 young people aged 12-17, from Comhairle na nÓg from all over Ireland, celebrating the 25th anniversary of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child.
- The age remit for Children’s Services Committees (CSC) was extended to include 18 to 24-year-olds, so the name of the committees was changed to Children and Young People’s Services Committees (CYPSC). The number of CYPSC nationally increased from 12 to 21 across 22 counties and 25 local authority areas. Initiatives and consultations around participation of children and young people was extended to the 18–24 age group.

2015

- In June the Department of Children and Youth Affairs launched the *National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation on Decision-making (2015–2020)*. Ireland was the first country in Europe to develop such a strategy. The focus of this national strategy on children and young people was to ensure that children and young people have a voice in their individual and collective everyday lives.

2015

- DCEDIY produced *A Practical Guide to Including Seldom-Hearth Children and Young People in Decision-Making*.
- The National Youth Strategy (2015–2020) was launched and had its basis in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*. Implementing the national youth strategy was a shared responsibility across government. There was good progress with many of the strategy’s 51 actions, particularly the reformed targeted youth funding scheme (*UBU Your Place, Your Space*) which is designed to target young people who are marginalised, disadvantaged, or vulnerable and whose outcomes fall short of general population outcomes.
- 2015 saw the completion of an online children’s participation database of publications on the theory and practice of children and young people’s participation in decision-making. It also saw the completion of a scoping exercise to explore the needs of stakeholders and inform the establishment of the DCYA Children and Young People’s Participation Hub.
- An audit was commissioned of education and training on children’s rights and children and young people’s participation in decision-making in all third-level, further education and continuing professional development programmes in Ireland.

2016

- In 2016, the Programme for Government gave a commitment to develop a Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Intersex (LGBTI+) Youth Strategy. This was a key commitment for DCEDIY in the Programme for Government and also made a contribution towards the Government’s broader commitment to continue to strive for full inclusion of LGBTI+ people in Ireland.
- The first Annual Report on Implementation of commitments in the *National Strategy on Children and Young People’s Participation in Decision-Making, 2015-2020* was published online in July 2016. The report showed a positive picture of how the strategy was being implemented.
- In June, the Comhairle na nÓg National Executive presented to the Children and Young People’s Policy Consortium in An Taoiseach’s a video on ‘What Happens in the Classroom’.

2017

- Young Voices presented to the Children and Young People’s Policy Consortium in An Taoiseach’s on Youth Check. This is intended to be an impact assessment tool designed to consider the impact of any new policy or legislation on children and young people. The group discussed the need for young people to be involved in decisions that affect their lives.
- Hub na nÓg, which is led by DCYA, worked with children and young people on a wide range (25) of initiatives. Hub na nÓg also provided training to Sport Ireland.

2017

- Hub na nÓg was established in June as a centre of excellence to support Government Departments, State agencies and non-government organisations to give children and young people a voice on decisions that affect their lives, with a focus on seldom-heard children and young people.

2018

- In February, a *Guidance for Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) on participation by children and young people in decision-making* was published. The purpose of this document is to provide guidance to CYPSC informed by the current policy context and to provide a series of practical steps in engaging children and young people in decision-making.
- The LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018–2020 was published in June and was a world first. It is a key commitment for the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) as part of the 2016 Programme for Partnership Government and made a significant contribution towards the government's broader commitment to continue to strive for the full inclusion of LGBTI+ people in Irish society.
- The DCYA participation unit conducted a number of consultations with seldom-heard children and young people including: consulting with young people resident in Oberstown on the draft Oberstown Standards, consulting on how the Adoption Authority or Court will hear the voice of the child in adoption proceedings, getting the views of young people as part of the Garda Youth Diversion Programme (GYDP) change process and seeking the views of children and young people on creative activities they would enjoy at Cruinniú na nÓg, a creativity festival which took place in June.
- In February SWAN Youth Service from Dublin North East Inner City presented to the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium in the Department of An Taoiseach as part of the BOBF Mid Term Review Process. The Young People produced a video on the five national outcomes in BOBF and what it means to them. The aim of the video was to create a conversation with children and young people on the BOBF outcomes and how issues affected them in their daily lives. Some of the issues discussed were funding for programmes and services in the North East Inner City, mental health, feeling safe in the community, and LGBTI+ supports.

2019

- Minister Zappone published the *Mid-Term Review* and Phase Two Action Plan of the National Strategy on Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-making 2019-2020 in October. This strategy contained actions for all government departments and agencies who provided or oversaw services which have an impact on children and young people. This was to ensure that their voices are heard and they can influence decisions of relevance to their lives.

- Comhairle na nÓg had a successful year. Dáil na nÓg 2019 was held in the Houses of the Oireachtas on 23 November as part of the Dáil 100 celebrations. The topic was climate change.
- The Comhairle na nÓg National Executive 2017–2019 completed work on Equality in Schools. One project developed guidelines for schools on improving the voice of students in decision-making in school through an online resource, *Our Voices Our Schools*. A second project, an online campaign called *Teach Me as Me*, focused on improving how young people are enabled to express their individuality in schools, launched in October.
- Comhairle na nÓg worked with schools and youth clubs to improve the participation of seldom heard or hard-to-reach young people and sought to include seldom-heard children in Comhairlí.
- DCEDIY undertook a review of implementation of the Participation Strategy and worked across government to develop a Phase Two implementation plan. The Mid-Term Review and Third Annual Report of the strategy illustrate how all government departments and agencies are actively progressing agreed actions, with 93% of the agreed actions reaching completion or in progress.
- *The National LGBTI+ Inclusion Strategy 2019-2021* was launched in November. The strategy contains over 100 actions that promote inclusion, protect rights and improve the quality of life and well-being of LGBTI+ people. The strategy shares some actions with the LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy and DCEDIY is engaged with DJE in relation to these.
- A report on the implementation of the first year of implementation of the *LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy*, from June 2018 to June 2019, was published in October. The report showed that significant progress had been made on 55 of the 59 actions; 47 were initiated and there were plans for initiating a further 9 actions by the action leads, demonstrating a high level of implementation across government.
- DCEDIY provided additional funding to support new LGBTI+-specific youth service provision with a particular focus on the availability of, and access to, youth services for young people in rural areas (Action 3b).
- The LGBTI+ Youth Forum was established to support the implementation of the strategy. The forum comprises young people with different backgrounds (ethnicities, sexualities, gender identities). It played an active role in supporting the development of some actions within the strategy and also participated in the deliberations on strategy implementation which took place at the Implementation Forum.
- Of the 27 Children and Young People’s Service Committees, 26 reported activity on the participation of children and young people.
- In September, the Comhairle na nÓg National Executive presented to the Children and Young People’s Policy Consortium on equality in schools, barriers to individuality in schools and Student Councils.

2019

- Tusla, the Child and Family Agency launched its new Child and Youth Participation Strategy for 2019–2023. The strategy is a central part of Tusla’s on-going commitment to the participation of children, young people and parents in decisions that affect their lives.

2020

- In March, Minister Zappone opened a fund to support youth-led action and innovation on climate justice at community, regional and national level. The fund was open to applications from all national youth service grant scheme organisations and from Gaisce – the President’s Award. The fund was established following the United Nations focus on youth engagement as part of the global response to climate change.
- All 27 Children and Young People’s Services Committees reported activity on the participation of children and young people around the country.
- Minister O’Gorman launched your ‘How’s your Head- Young Voices’ a national consultation with young people on mental health and well-being during COVID-19. The consultation found that the COVID-19 pandemic has had negative effects on young people’s health and well-being, especially amongst marginalised groups.
- Over the life time of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, children and young people were invited to the Children and Young People’s Policy Consortium held in An Taoiseach’s to present to policymakers on issues affecting their lives.
- In September, Young Voices presented to the Children and Young People’s Policy Consortium in the Department of the Taoiseach on issues such as young people effecting policy change, engaging minority voices, climate change amongst other important issues.

## Part 5: Reporting on Commitments

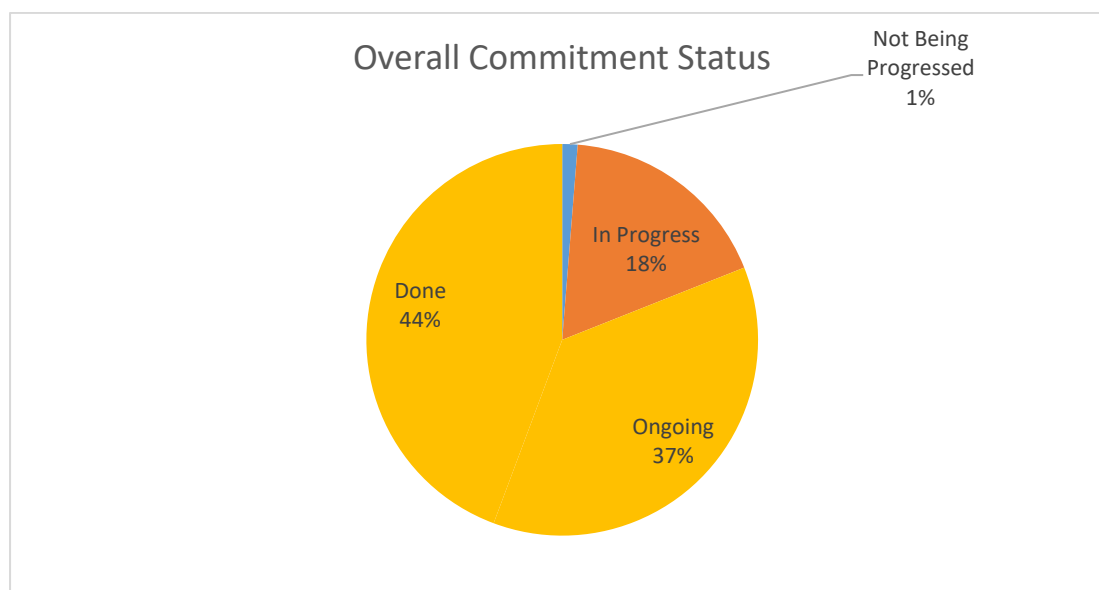


Figure 3: Overall Commitment Status

### 5.1 The Reporting Process

Of the 163 commitments in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, 69 refer to the transformational goals, 89 refer to the five national outcomes and five commitments were actioned by the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* implementation team over the lifetime of the Framework.

In the development of this report, government departments and agencies were asked to account for their progress against 158 commitments as follows:

- **Done:** These commitments are considered to have been achieved.
- **Ongoing:** These commitments, by their nature, will not have a point at which they would be complete. These are commitments whose work will continue. An example is Commitment G3: *Continue to support parents financially with the costs of rearing children through the provision of Child Benefit.*
- **In Progress:** Work on these commitments remains in progress.
- **Not being progressed:** These commitments are facing serious issues that hinder their completion, where the timeframe for achievement has passed, or where other developments have superseded the action.

It should be noted that while many commitments are either time bound or task bound, there are some which are ongoing actions without a definitive end. Overall, strong progress has been made towards the completion of the commitments as the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* implementation process has concluded.

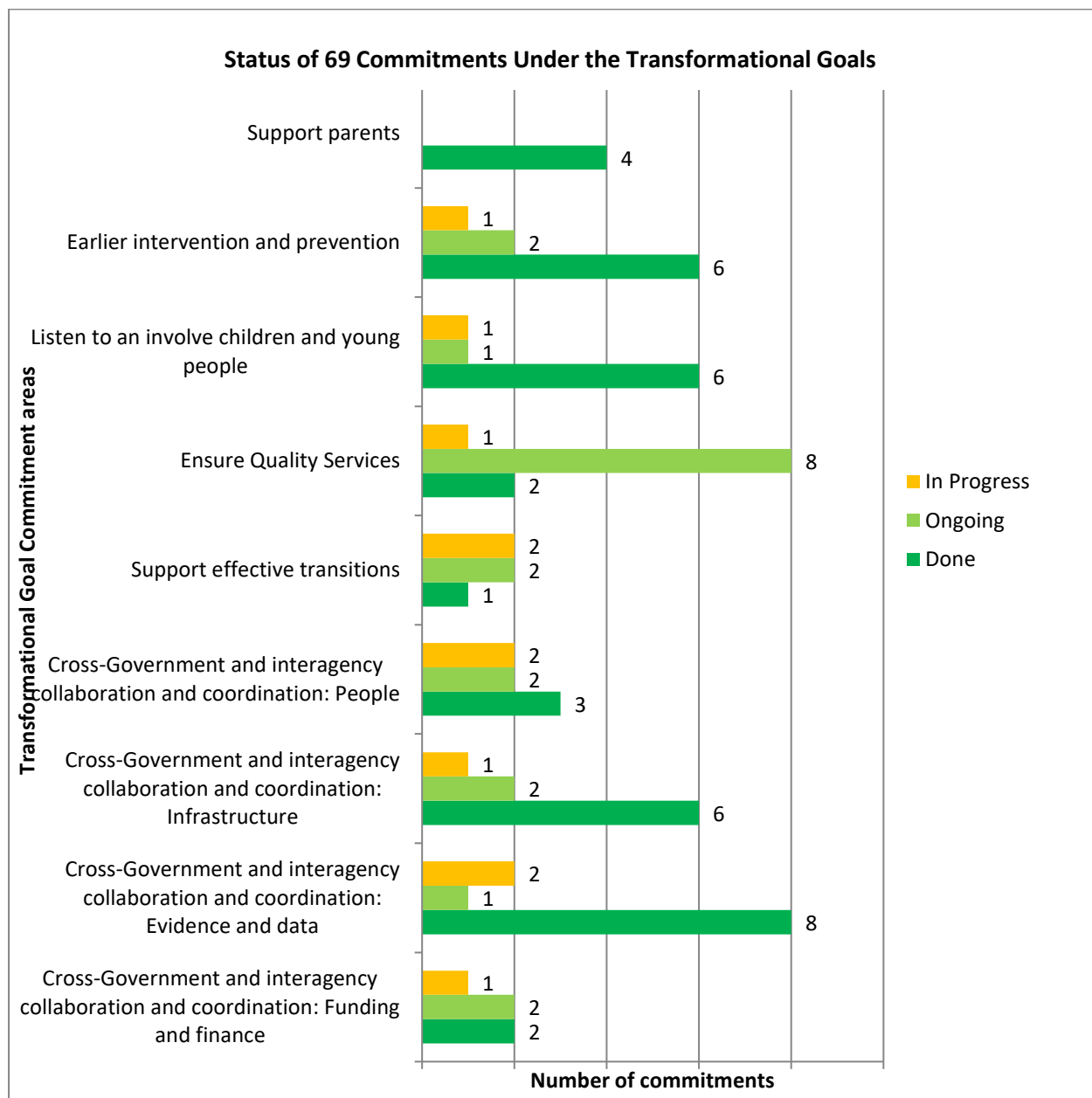
The two commitments marked as not being progressed are:

- **3.18** Develop a national framework for anti-bullying, taking a community-wide approach to tackling bullying from childhood through to adulthood. (**DCYA (DCEDIY)**, All).
- **5.4** Hold a referendum before the end of 2015 on a proposal to amend the Constitution to reduce the voting age to 16. (**DHPLG**, Referendum Commission).

## 5.2 Status of Commitments under the Transformational Goals

The 69 individual commitments that make up the transformational goals are the responsibility of many different departments and agencies. The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth held responsibility for the transformational goals at the Sponsors Group.

As shown in the following chart, implementation of the transformational goals were progressed across the whole of government.



**Figure 4: Status of Commitments under the Transformational Goals**



### 5.3 Status of Commitments Under the 5 National Outcomes

The 89 individual commitments correspond with the five national outcomes for children and young people. The following chart documents progress under the five national outcomes. Further details of progress under the national outcomes is outlined in Chapter 4.

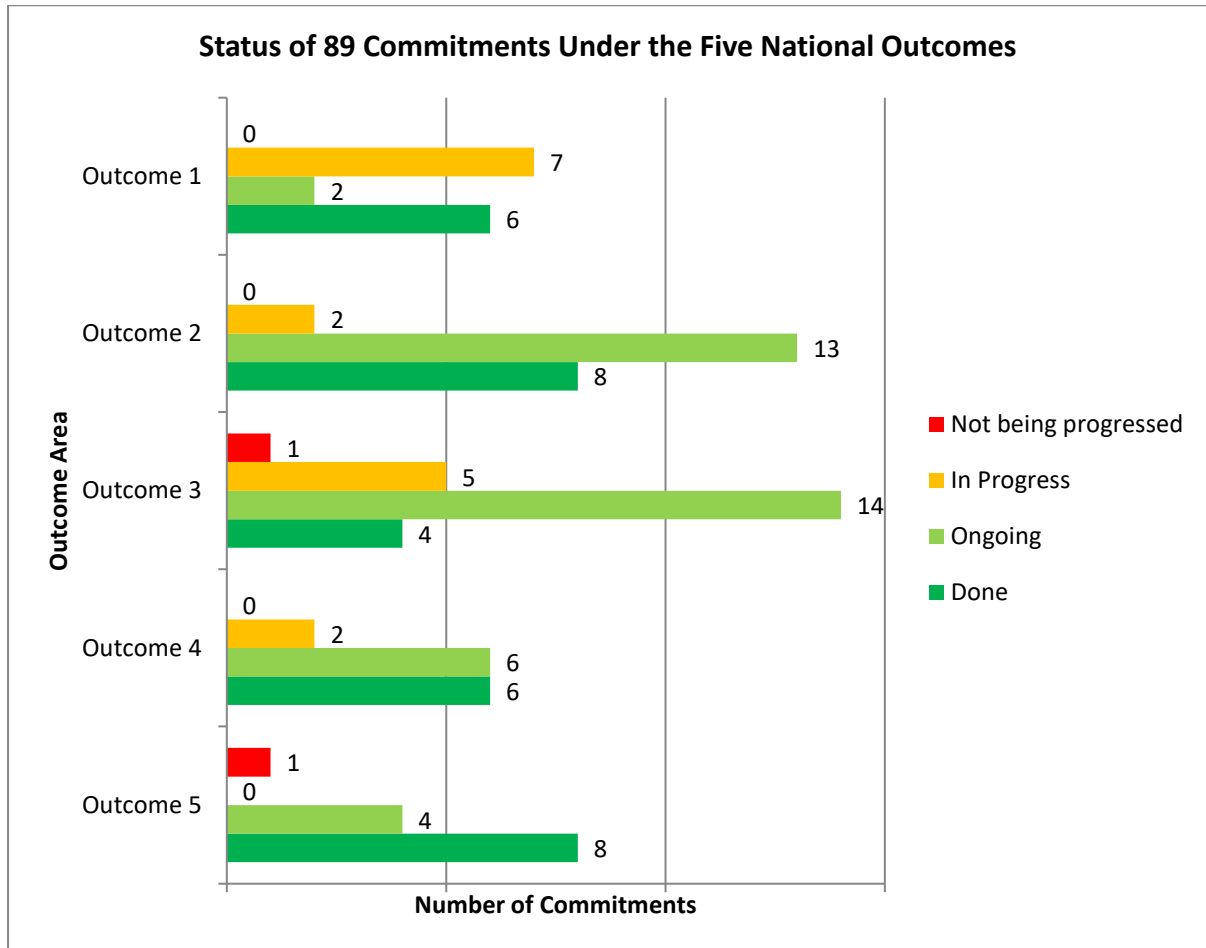


Figure 5: Status of Commitments Under the 5 National Outcomes

## Part 6: Constituent Strategies

### 6.1 National Strategy for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015–2020

The *National Strategy for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making 2015-2020* sets out actions for all government departments and agencies who provide or oversee services which have an impact on children and young people, to ensure that their voices are heard and influence decisions of relevance to their lives. A successor strategy is committed to in the current Programme for Government and expected to commence development in late 2021.

Implementation has been strong since the publication of the strategy; the Third Annual Report on Implementation showed that 93% of the agreed actions had reached completion or were in progress. The report demonstrated a positive picture of implementation across all government departments and State bodies. In 2019, a bi-lateral process with government departments and agencies took place, to agree commitments for Phase 2 of the Strategy. A mid-term review of the strategy was published in Q3 of 2019 which included the revised 2-year action plan for 2019 and 2020.

The mid-term review highlighted how the establishment of Hub na nÓg as a centre of excellence has provided increased capacity across all sectors through the provision of training, support and advice for service providers and policymakers alike. Since its inception, the Hub has been working with Professor Laura Lundy on co-producing a series of frameworks, including national standards, a planning framework, evaluation frameworks and a child-friendly evaluation form, influenced by the extensive child participation practice of the department and Hub na nÓg. Hub na nÓg has provided training for HIQA inspectors, the Department of Education and Skills Inspectorate, Sport Ireland coaches across sporting bodies, Arts Council, Creative Associates under the Creative Ireland programme, Active Schools teachers and the National Gallery of Ireland Education Team. Other significant developments include the development and publication of *Tusla's Child and Youth Participation Strategy*.

The Participation Unit and Hub na nÓg continue to collaborate on developing and conducting a number of consultations with children and young people including consultations on the Climate Action Plan, the Cruinniú na nÓg programme, the Laureate na nÓg 'An Bosca Leabharlainne' project, the voice of the child in adoption proceedings, on a change process for the Garda Youth Diversion Programme, review of the Childcare Act, Youth Services Grant Scheme Reform, Skin Cancer Prevention, new Family Justice Strategy, as well as on a series of consultations as part of the State's preparations for Ireland's next reports to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC), the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) and the UN Human Rights Council under the Universal Periodic Review process (UPR).

In 2021, Hub na nÓg published the *National Framework for Children and Young People's Participation in Decision-Making* in collaboration with Professor Laura Lundy. This framework supports departments, agencies and organisations to improve their practice in listening to children and young people and giving them a voice in decision-making. The framework will become the strategic foundation from which Hub na nÓg will develop targeted policy and practical guidance. To date implementation actions of the framework include the delivery of a capacity building grant and training programme across sectors including seldom-heard organisations (particularly the Travelling

community and disability), youth services, early years and arts organisations in 2021. In 2022, the emphasis for capacity building will move to education and sports organisations.

## 6.2 National Youth Strategy 2015-2020

The National Youth Strategy 2015-2020 identified 51 priority actions that were to be delivered by stakeholders including government departments, State agencies and by the NGO sector over the course of 2015 to 2017. These priority actions drew on existing commitments under *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and were structured under the five national outcome areas with a number of objectives identified in relation to each.

The overall aim of the strategy was *'to enable all young people to realise their maximum potential, by respecting their rights and hearing their voices, while protecting and supporting them as they transition from childhood to adulthood'*. The recognition that the transition from childhood to adulthood is a critical period and therefore warranted specific attention and supports was a defining feature of the strategy. The tenure of the strategy came to an end in 2020. While COVID-19 presented a myriad of challenges that shifted the focus of the department and other stakeholders to respond to the crisis during the strategy's final year, important progress was nevertheless made on a number of its actions in 2020.

In July 2020, the *UBU Your Place Your Space* Scheme became operational. This is a targeted youth funding scheme, replacing previous targeted funding schemes, aimed at supporting young people between the ages of 10 and 24 who are described in the strategy as disadvantaged, marginalised or vulnerable. It was established in accordance with one of the strategy's 'Enabling Actions' which called for: *'Enhancing effective prevention and early intervention through the reformed targeted youth programme as recommended in the Value for Money and Policy Review of Youth Programmes (2014), while ensuring a preventive focus in and across all other universal programmes and schemes within the Department of Children and Youth Affairs which focus on the development of young people.'* *UBU Your Place Your Space* addresses a number of the objectives of the strategy by improving young people's access to services and providing opportunities to develop the personal and social skills required to improve their life chances, including with respect to their health, education, employment and social connectedness. *UBU Your Place Your Space* provides almost €42 million in funding to over 250 targeted youth services across 16 Education and Training Boards. It was established on a continuous improvement basis, meaning that the Department is committed to the ongoing development of the scheme.

The year 2020 also saw the launch of the *Youth Climate Justice Fund*. This initiative relates to Objective 9 of the Strategy *'Young people are included in society, are environmentally aware, their equality and rights are upheld, their diversity celebrated, and they are empowered to be active global citizens'*. The purpose of this fund is to empower young people via national youth organisations to lead climate justice action at community, regional and national level. In 2020, grants of almost €465,000 were awarded to 14 projects comprised of 23 different youth organisations.

A key measure enacted during the lifetime of the strategy was the launch of the *Youth Employability Initiative* in June 2016, which was directly related to action 4.1 *'Promote and develop opportunities for those young people furthest from the labour market through measures such as a Youth Employability*

*Initiative, which can be delivered by youth services*’. This fund provides grants to voluntary youth services for programmes that target disadvantaged young people to improve their employability. The focus of the fund is on the harder-to-reach cohort of young marginalised and vulnerable young people, who would benefit from the development of soft skills to access education, training, apprenticeships and employment. The initiative was subsequently run in 2017 and 2018/19.

In order to connect national policy with local implementation, all Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) funded youth organisations draw upon the National Youth Strategy’s Outcomes and Actions to plan and structure their strategy for delivering youth programmes. Over the course of the implementation period of the strategy, youth organisations have developed innovative programmes and supports for young people in a broad range of areas connected to the objectives, vision and goals of the strategy, including physical and mental health, validation of non-formal learning, arts and creativity, digital skills, web safety, active citizenship, employment and entrepreneurial skills. Funding has also been provided by DCEDIY to the National Youth Council of Ireland to support training programmes for youth workers and volunteers in areas including child protection, health promotion and equality and inclusion.

Challenges have been acknowledged in precisely monitoring and measuring the implementation of the National Youth Strategy. This is due in part to ambiguities in ownership and the large quantity of broadly defined actions, which will be important to address in future strategies.

## 6.3 LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020

The *LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020* is action-oriented with a mission to ensure all LGBTI+ young people are visible, valued and included. The strategy is a key commitment for DCEDIY in the 2020 Programme for Government and as a significant contribution towards the government’s broader commitment to continue to strive for the full inclusion of LGBTI+ people in Irish society.

Due to the public health emergency caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the strategy was extended into 2021 to allow all actions to be fully implemented.

### Key achievements for the Department

- The Department established and delivered the work programme of the **LGBTI+ Youth Forum** to support implementation of the strategy. Twenty-five young people, aged 16 to 22 years, from diverse backgrounds and who identify as LGBTI+ are actively engaged in the implementation of the strategy.
- The Department developed a **LGBTI+ Youth Leadership Programme** to enable LGBTI+ young people to develop the skills to be effective leaders by building their inspiration, vision and confidence. The programme was amended in light of COVID-19 restrictions for deliver over 2021.
- The Department awarded funding to organisations under the **LGBTI+ Capacity Building Grant Scheme** to support capacity building in organisations that work with young people, over the duration of the strategy. In 2018, the €100,000 grant scheme was available to make services

more accessible to LGBTI+ young people. In 2019 a two-phased scheme totalling €400,000 over 2019 and 2020 awarded funding to LGBTI+ specific organisations to develop initiatives that disseminate LGBTI+ specialist information, skills and knowledge to service providers that work with young people. In 2021, the department will collaborate with Tusla to provide funding for LGBTI+ training and guidance for professionals providing support to LGBTI+ young people and their families.

- The Department commissioned NUIG to conduct a ***LGBTI+ Youth in Ireland Europe: A two-phased Landscape and Research Gap Analysis***. The project reviewed relevant research on LGBTI+ youth in Ireland and Europe and mapped the findings to the objectives of the *LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy*. The report, for publication in 2021, will identify which objectives are well supported with scientific evidence, where there are information gaps and where more research is needed.
- The national ***Live Out Loud: Celebrating LGBTI+ Youth campaign and event*** was launched by the minister in October 2020 to culminate in a live streamed national event in June 2021. This campaign and event celebrates LGBTI+ young people, showing they are visible, valued and included across culture, society and sport.
- In 2019, the Department successfully held a national competition for young people to design a ***LGBTI+ welcome sticker*** for display in businesses in Ireland. (Roll out of the sticker has been put on hold due to the COVID-19 restrictions.)

### Progress reporting and evaluation

*The First Annual Report on the Implementation of the LGBTI+ National Youth Strategy 2018-2020*, published in 2019, provided details of progress across government in the implementation of the strategy.

The actions initiated in the first year of implementation centred on the lives of LGBTI+ young people, with a particular emphasis on education, health, safe and inclusive spaces, and issues faced by trans young people. Of the 59 actions, 56 had either already been started (46) or had reported a plan for carrying out the action (10). There were three actions for which Leads had not reported any information on (2) or were under review (1).

Final progress reporting on the implementation of the strategy across government will take place at the end of 2021. The Department will also carry out a process review of the implementation of the strategy over its lifetime. This will help inform and improve the implementation processes for future strategies in this area. A final implementation forum will be held in early 2022.

## 6.4 First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and Their Families 2019-2028

First 5 was published in November 2018. The strategy focuses on the period of early childhood and takes a joined-up, cross-government approach to supporting babies, young children and their families during their early years.

The Implementation Plan, published in May 2019, covers the first phase of the ten-year plan and identifies key milestones for each action across 2019, 2020 and 2021. An Implementation Office monitors progress supported by an Inter-Departmental Group and produces an Annual Implementation Report. The implementation structures of the *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures* framework provide further support and oversight for implementation. The measurability of the actions committed to, the oversight structures, and the transparent approach to monitoring are described by the *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures* Advisory Council as ‘a model for other strategies’.

The Annual Implementation Report for 2019 monitored progress on all 305 milestones for 2019, illustrating that 69% of milestones were met by the end of 2019. By the end of 2020, 90% of 2019 milestones were met.

The Annual Implementation Report for 2020 is currently being compiled and when published will show continuing and significant progress being made on all 322 milestones for 2020, notwithstanding the significant impact of COVID-19 during that year and since.

The Programme for Government negotiated in 2020 also reaffirmed commitment to First 5 implementation.

Major examples of progress include the extension of Parent’s Leave and Benefit to five weeks for each parent. Unpaid parental leave has increased by four weeks to 26 weeks for each eligible child and can now be taken until the child's 12th birthday.

Healthy eating guidelines and a children’s food pyramid for 1-5 year-olds were developed and published. A pilot milk schemes was run with early learning and care providers in 2020.

Clearly the COVID-19 pandemic has had an impact on anticipated progress in 2020 given the significant requirement of the civil and public service to respond to the public health emergency and put in place alternative arrangements across many of the major action areas in the strategy including early learning and childcare services, education and, most obviously, health services.

Despite this, there are many examples of good progress that have been achieved across government to realise the vision set out in First 5. The 2020 Annual Implementation Report will soon be published and outline a full account of year two of implementation.

## 6.5 Irish Youth Justice Strategy

The *National Youth Justice Strategy 2008-2010*, followed by *Tackling Youth Crime: Youth Justice Action Plan 2014-2018* (YJAP) provided a framework to guide the continuing development of Youth Justice Systems. YJAP focused on continuing the downward trends in high volume crime and reducing the necessity for detention. Particular progress achieved under YJAP 2014-2018 included:

### **Centralisation of detention in Oberstown and the closure of St Patrick’s Institution**

The Children (Amendment) Act 2015 amalgamated the Children Detention Schools into a single facility. The amalgamation of the Children Detention Schools took place over a period of three years, and since 1 June 2016, a new legal entity – Oberstown Children Detention Campus – has been in existence. Reforms in Oberstown have enabled implementation of the goal that all young people up to 18 years

are detained in a child-focused facility, facilitating the closure of the outdated St Patrick's Institution and an end to the practice of detaining children in adult institutions, in line with international standards in this area.

In addition, systems to improve efficiency in service delivery have been continuing to develop, including advancing work on developing a case management system to digitise record-keeping in Oberstown. A Strategic Plan was developed in 2017, and its implementation reviewed in 2018. A new policy framework was introduced with revised policies governing the operation of the campus. These policies continue to be reviewed on an ongoing basis.

In the period 2014-2020 the numbers of young people in detention annually (including remand and committal) decreased from 198 to 122, in line with the principle of detention as a last resort.

### **Development of Community Programmes (YDPs)**

The Children Act 2001 provides that all children who may commit a crime are considered for admission to the Garda Diversion Programme. Referrals for consideration under the diversion programme have declined from a level of over 20,000 in 2007 to less than 10,000 in 2019.

The Garda Diversion Programme is supported by a network of youth diversion projects (GYDPs). The projects are community based, multi-agency crime prevention initiatives to divert young people who have become involved in crime / anti-social behaviour and to support wider preventive work within the community and with families. The national network of 105 GYDPs was augmented under the YJAP and includes a further 10 projects with a special focus (e.g. more challenging children, family support, etc.).

Particularly noteworthy developments, which have been recognised internationally, include:

- The Bail Supervision Scheme which provides effective support for young offenders on bail (and their households) to help them refrain from further offending.
- The Greentown Programme, building on original research by Dr Sean Redmond this has evolved, with the assistance of Irish and international experts, into a community-based intervention programme to tackle coercive control of children by criminal groups. Pilot applications of the Greentown programme, developed by the team in the University of Limerick, commenced in two locations in 2020 and will run for three years initially.

### **Youth Justice Strategy 2021–2027**

Developed under the guidance of an expert steering group which has been in place since early 2019, the Youth Justice Strategy 2021–2027 was published in April 2021. The strategy is informed by detailed consultation with key agencies and stakeholders and also reflects feedback from a public consultation process.

The strategy is conceived as a developmental framework, encompassing a broad range of issues which may contribute to offending behaviour by children and young people, as well as measures for diversion away from offending, necessary criminal justice processes, detention (as a final resort) and post-detention supports.

There is a very strong emphasis on evidence-informed development of initiatives with an enhanced role for the dedicated youth justice research partnership with the *Research Evidence into Policy*

*Programmes and Practice* (REPPP), University of Limerick, which is already supporting a number of cutting-edge projects.



## Part 7: Perspectives on Implementation

### 7.1 Secretary General of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

I welcome this the final *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Annual Report 2020. This report sets out the progress made over the course of 2020 as well as highlighting achievements under the five national outcomes since 2014 when *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* was first published. Over those seven years we strove to improve outcomes for children and young people across the country. Further progress has been made with 81% of commitments progressing and completed. The report also highlights the learning from the process with positives and challenges identified which can inform successor strategies.

A key focus of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* was on effective implementation to ensure accountability, and a forum for stakeholder engagement. This was addressed through the establishment of an efficient and effective infrastructure that was outcomes focused, while having appropriate regard for establishing enabling processes for engagement. The implementation structure as envisioned served us well and I must pay tribute to all the stakeholders involved. The Children and Young People's Policy Consortium Chaired by the minister, and which met over three times each year in the Department of the Taoiseach, was a very positive experience. In particular, this forum afforded us, the policymakers, the opportunity to engage with children and young people and to listen to their concerns and the issues that were affecting them in their everyday lives. This implementation structure was unique in that it enabled cross-government working in a way that never occurred before. Indeed, this framework and the inclusion of its five national outcomes along with the new implementation structures were of great interest to many other jurisdictions and it is quite pleasing to see the influence it has had in informing international approaches.

The experience of the framework has generally been positive. There has been a lot of substantive work undertaken under each of the five national outcomes. A few of the personal highlights which stand out for me include the establishment of Tusla the Child and Family Agency in 2014, Children First and the launch of the National Childcare Scheme in 2019. Other highlights include the progress made with the Children and Young People's Services Committees and the work that they do around the country. The cross-government working which enabled us to progress many significant issues such as greater investment in prevention and early intervention approaches, Healthy Ireland, innovations in LGBTI+ supports, advances in youth services, children and young people's participation and tackling child poverty are of particular note.

With the conclusion of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* we are now looking forward to the development of its successor. As the minister has mentioned, work on the successor framework has already begun. To inform this work we can learn from *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* as to how we implement policy and how we can further improve the lives of children and young people over the next decade. Going forward we will focus on current challenging issues and respond to new and emerging priorities.

Finally I would like to thank the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* implementation team in the Department for their hard work since 2014 and without whom the implementation of the framework would not have been possible.

**Dr Fergal Lynch**  
**Secretary General**  
**Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth**

## 7.2 Elizabeth Canavan, Assistant Secretary, Department of the Taoiseach, Vice Chair of the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium

I am pleased to have the opportunity to contribute to this the final *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* Annual Report for 2020.

As the representative from the Department of the Taoiseach and as Deputy Chair at the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium, I want to congratulate everyone involved in the work including my colleagues leading implementation in the DCEDIY and all the stakeholders who have contributed to the achievements since 2014 - the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium members, members of the Sponsors Group, the CYPSC National Steering Group, the National Advisory Council. I want to give a special mention and thank you also to all the children and young people who participated and so willingly informed us, the policy makers on the issues affecting their everyday lives.

There is much to be proud of in terms of how structures have developed and evolved to contribute to implementation of *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures*. At the outset, *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* represented a fundamental change in the way we view children and young people, moving away from a focus on legacy challenges and failures to look forward in a proactive, more innovative way to make Ireland a country where the rights of all children and young people are respected, protected and fulfilled, where their voices are heard and where they are supported to realise their maximum potential now and in the future. The implementation structures – not unusual now - were somewhat unique at inception and they emphasised our understanding that an integrated and evidence-informed approach to working across Government, on horizontal and vertical levels would be critical to have an impact on children and young people's lives. The agenda set was child-centred and demanded interagency and multidisciplinary thinking and working. It was also practical - focusing on principles, themes and issues that had relevance to everyone working with children and young people across all sectors and settings.

Looking through the report, there have been a great many achievements and of course, still some work in progress.

For me, a number of important initiatives came to fruition during the Framework's lifetime, including

- Our ongoing drive to better understand children and young people’s lives - the National Indicator set, State of the Nation’s Children Reporting, the establishment of the National Childcare Information System and the Outcomes for Children Data Hub.
- The landmark policies such as Children First, the National Childcare Scheme and constituent strategies under *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures* such as the Early Years *First Five Strategy* which were devised and advanced.
- Improvements in child welfare, protection and family support: Tusla was only established at the outset of the Strategy and as a new organisation had all of the challenges associated with set-up to overcome. Nevertheless, it has overseen a range of improvements in both the management and delivery of child welfare and protection services and an improved focus on the role of family support and universal parenting supports focusing on the assets that families have and not deficits.
- The period of the Strategy has seen better embedding of support for innovation and better efforts to mainstream some of those innovations such as prevention and early intervention initiatives.

Finally, I am struck by the fact that 2020 brought a huge challenge to us who work with and for children and young people in the pandemic. I have no doubt that our capacity to respond collectively and across boundaries was critical to how families were supported during the difficult period we have been through and are still going through. The networks, relationships, interconnectedness and capacity to collaborate which informed so many “rapid” responses to issues that were arising were built on the foundations of the BOBF implementation process and structures that have served us so well over the period of the implementation of the Strategy.

As we look to the successor framework we need to capture the “can do” spirit that we saw during that pandemic to ensure that same creative approach and full engagement is achieved from all members as there are still some demanding commitments yet to be implemented as well as new challenges to be considered.

**Elizabeth Canavan**  
**Assistant Secretary Social Policy & Public Service Reform**  
**Department of the Taoiseach**

## 7.3 Young Voices-EU Youth Dialogue

Young Voices-EU Youth Dialogue is a process that actively engages with young people’s capacity to influence decision-making spaces under the framework provided via *the Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* national policy framework for children and young people (BOBF) and the EU Youth Strategy 2019-2027, which aims to ‘Engage, Connect, Empower’ young people. The National Youth Council of Ireland leads out on the implementation of the Young Voices programme and engagement of young people in the EU Youth Dialogue process on behalf of the National Working Group on EU Youth Dialogue.

Young Voices creates opportunities for young people, bringing them into the policymaking process at a national and European level. **A space to grow and develop capacity to influence.** The programme facilitates quality opportunities and experiences at a personal, community and societal level. This impacts at both an individual level in terms of personal growth and builds capacity to influence in wider social and political contexts. **A place where key skills are fostered and developed.** A key strategy is building the capacity of young people to facilitate meaningful participation in the decision-making space. The model also recognises the expertise of young people and the skills and commitment they bring to the process. **Young Voices strives to achieve long-term outcomes;** Understanding the role of voice in addressing inequality and taking action is a core part of the Young Voices process. The programme creates key platforms and opportunities to meet with decision-makers, building confidence in the process and instilling a capacity for long-term engagement in change-making. **Young Voices actively targets and supports diverse participation.** Participants of a recent evaluation of the programme identified the specific ways in which the programme has facilitated inclusion and, also how the programme has supported a deeper understanding on how to develop and practice an inclusive approach. **Young Voices is facilitated by the connection with Europe and European spaces of participation.** Importantly, the European policy arena is in dialogue with **the national policy context** and these policy spaces complement each other in supporting youth democratic engagement. **Young Voices is a model of youth democratic participation,** leveraged decision-making outcomes and engagement opportunities for young people at both a national and EU level. The programme is a formative space for understanding policy and supports young people to see themselves as co-designers of policy processes and outcomes.

A recent qualitative evaluation report of the Young Voices – EU Youth Dialogue process, was undertaken to better understand how young people experienced *Young Voices* and its impact on society and policy from their perspective. The evaluation sought to gain an understanding on what the space meant to participants, and the ways in which the young people felt engaged with discussions undertaken. It was also important to identify, the ways in which they felt they had made specific contributions to decision-making spaces within the period of their involvement with *Young Voices*. Participants have engaged with the BOBF outcomes and presented to the policy consortium; however, this engagement could be further developed in line with the recommendations from the report. This evaluation was an opportunity to consider how the *Young Voices* programme could be further supported and developed.

For the youth participants, coming to understand the role of BOBF as a key policy document in the Irish context was noted by several contributors, as well as understanding the wider policy framework for children and young people.

*“I’m studying government and political science, so I’m very interested in how policy works and implementation. And I think that definitely did come from Young Voices. Like I wouldn’t have known so much about Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (BOBF) if it wasn’t for Young Voices, that got me so engaged in those policies and I probably wouldn’t have gone in the direction I went. I probably would have gone studying history and geography, this put me on this path.”(Female youth participant, aged 22)*

*“I would also say I learned about BOBF, which was something that I would never have, and I learned a lot more about the NYCI. And to be honest, at the beginning as well, I learned about the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, which was probably a relatively new department at the time, and I definitely didn’t think it was much to do with me or I would have much to do with it.” (Male youth participant, aged 27).*

## Recommendations from youth participants

**A place at the table:** Young people see themselves as having a key role in policymaking and therefore, need channels and platforms to facilitate this as at a national level, linked to existing and emerging platforms of representation. For example, their strategic engagement with *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* was an acknowledgment of their expertise and right to be consulted on policies directly affecting them. As work commences on a successor strategy to *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, Young Voices should be consulted on the framework development and the strategies emerging from the framework on participation and youth work.

**Maintain status within BOBF:** A related recommendation is that the Young Voices-EU Youth Dialogue process should remain in the implementation infrastructure of the new *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* framework. This is to ensure a meaningful dialogue between Young Voices and policymakers - namely The Children and Young People's Policy Consortium and the BOBF Advisory Council.

**Value the contributions at national and EU levels:** The relationship between the Irish and European policy arena, realised through the EU Youth Dialogue forum, is considered by the youth participants as a vital mechanism to ensure youth issues are represented. It is also a space to build connectivity, wider social and political capital. The value of the EU Youth Dialogue space should be formally recognised as a successful model of youth democratic engagement within the Irish context.

**Model of effective practice for participation:** The participation strategies within the Young Voices space are seen by participants as a key strength of the programme. It is a space that recognises the necessity of consulting with the specific expertise of young people and understands them as having a key political role to play. The model should be adapted by other networks and fora, particularly in terms of a democratic participation model, as a framework for youth work engagement and for broader participation objectives.

**Model of effective practice for inclusion:** Understanding the lived experience of inclusion was cited by many of the young people consulted as a feature of their engagement with the programme. This model of inclusive engagement should be adapted by other networks and fora, committed to targeting the inclusion of those who are vulnerable or affected by discrimination, including intersectional discrimination. The need for dedicated youth participation spaces that progress policy issues for minority ethnic groups was also identified.

**Outreach to youth groups:** For young people who might not be accessing the Young Voices space, outreach has always been a part of the approach, specifically in a relationship-building context. Participants see the potential for this to be built on and enhanced, with further potential to equip the youth-led dimension of the programme. This corresponds with a commitment to continuing to build a responsive inclusion practice.

**Resourcing the evolution of Young Voices:** Young people participating in this evaluation see Young Voices as a unique platform to facilitate the youth voice. Dedicated long-term funding and a dedicated programme to support Young Voices to continue to build a youth-led space, would support an evolution to an independent youth-led space over time, offering a unique and dedicated forum to consult with the expertise of young people. It would also allow the programme to continue to build specific capacities and skills amongst participants to influence decision-making structures.

**Supporting the amplification of Young Voices:** Some young people are keen to see the method of delivery diversify i.e., host a Young Voices podcast; host a Young Voices communication platform where Young Voices could keep connected outside of the meeting context and continue to build on the collective aspect of the programme.

For the full report see [This is Young Voices. A model of youth democratic engagement - National Youth Council of Ireland](#)

## 7.4 Comhairle na nÓg National Executive

Comhairle na nÓg are child and youth councils in the 31 local authorities of the country, which give children and young people the opportunity to be involved in the development of local services and policies. Comhairle na nÓg is the permanent structure enacting Ireland's commitment to Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the child to a voice in decision-making on all matters that have an impact on the lives of children and young people. Local Authorities work with Comhairle na nÓg work to enable young people to have a voice on the services, policies and issues that affect them in their local area and a national executive of Comhairle na nÓg works on issues of national relevance and scale.

When *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* was published in 2014, the vision for the Framework was to ensure that Children and young people have a right to have a voice in decisions that affect them, both individually and collectively. Failure to listen to children and young people in the past resulted in a failure to protect children and young people from abuse and neglect. The Government was committed to strengthening efforts to ensure that children and young people have this right and that they are supported to express their views in all matters affecting them and to have those views given their due weight, including those of 'seldom-heard' children.

Therefore Comhairle na nÓg were invited and included as an important member of the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* implementation infrastructure. Through this engagement the Comhairle had access to the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium held in An Taoiseach's there times each year over the lifetime of the Framework.

In June, 2016 the Comhairle na nÓg National Executive presented to the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium in An Taoiseach's with a video on "What Happens in the Classroom".

The Comhairle na nÓg National Executive 2017- 2019 completed their work on Equality in Schools in 2019, with a focus on two projects. One project developed guidelines for schools on improving the voice of students in decision making in school through an online resource, *Our Voices Our Schools*, which was launched in Collins Barracks on 4 December 2019. A second project, an online campaign called *Teach Me As Me*, focused on improving how young people are enabled to express their individuality in schools. This was launched on 7 October 2019. In September of that year Comhairle na nÓg National had the opportunity to present to Children and Young People's Policy Consortium on equality in schools, barriers to individuality in schools and Student Councils. The presentation was well received by the Government Departments, Agencies and the NGO sector who were present.

The 31 Comhairlí around the country worked on their chosen topics during 2019 and 57 projects/initiatives across 16 key topics were delivered in 2019. Mental health was identified as the key topic by the majority of Comhairlí.

In 2019 Comhairle na nÓg had a successful year. Dáil na nÓg 2019 was held in the Houses of the Oireachtas on 23 November as part of the Dáil 100 celebrations. The topic was Climate Change, specifically sustainable transport solutions. The National Executive of Comhairle na nÓg's work on this topic led to the government's announcement in Budget 2022 of the Youth Travel Card, which will provide a 50% discount on public transport for all young people up to the age of 23.

Over the lifetime of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*, Comhairle na nÓg raised many issues impacting on children and young people and flagged new and emerging ones such as equality in schools, climate changes and mental health and well being. Comhairle na nÓg found the opportunity to speak to policy makers and service providers on issues affecting children and young people as a very positive experience and an ideal forum to raise these issues. It is envisaged that Comhairle na nÓg will be one of the constituent grouping for children and young people during the consultative phase of the development of the successor Policy Framework in 2022. Comhairle na nÓg welcomes this opportunity and looks forward to being involved in this process and future engagement with policy makers.

## 7.5 Chair of the National Advisory Council for Children and Young People

### Overview of the Council

The National Advisory Council for Children and Young People was established under the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* (BOBF) structures to advise government on the implementation of the national policy framework. Over the years, the council developed governance rules to govern its operation and latterly was guided by a Business Sub-Committee. The council received considerable administrative support and guidance from the Department in performing its functions and participated at all levels in the Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (BOBF) structures. In general, the council met three times a year for half-day formal sessions and an annual residential to plan its work agenda. During the COVID-19 pandemic, the council met more frequently through online sessions.

The council is made up of representatives recruited through panels and independent experts appointed by the minister covering early years, children and youth. This worked well as it meant that the council could work as a collective across the life cycle of a child and young person. Council members were senior appointments and this contributed to the decision-making, analysis and quality of the work. The council was also required to consider the voice of the child and young people in its deliberations and met with different youth stakeholder groups. While this was invaluable to its work, the council believes a more formal approach could be developed under the next BOBF.



The council largely carried out its work by working as sub-groups on specific topics including on child poverty, homelessness, early years, LGBTI+ strategy and youth justice. It had a monitoring role in relation to specific strategies including: the Participation Strategy, First Five – The National Early Years Strategy and the LGBTI+ Strategy. The council found that the monitoring function became more formal and structured as the years progressed. Given the council’s workload, it also chose to prioritise the monitoring of certain strategies where it could have most impact.

Given the breadth of commitments in BOBF, the council took the view that it should focus on cross-cutting issues impacting on children and young people, while at the same time, it should respond to the most pressing issues. This meant that the council operated at a high level and in a strategic fashion. Its work involved generating policy papers and correspondence, presentations to decision-makers and formal / informal engagements with senior decision-makers and officials. Since 2014, the council’s work has impacted and led to changes in national policies on child poverty, early years, education, youth policy, youth justice, Brexit and child/youth homelessness. Child poverty represented the most intensive investment of effort over the years. The council has latterly aligned its thinking more closely on prevention and early intervention within the child poverty lens and taking into account mainstreaming efforts being made by Tusla. Initially the Council co-convened a sub-group with the Department of Social Protection which helped influence a ‘whole-of-government approach’ on child poverty. In recent years, a Child Poverty Sub-Group generated several policy papers, and in mid-2021 the council consolidated its thinking and advice within the framework of sustained government-led action planning.

### **The Council’s Annual Report 2020**

The COVID-19 pandemic had a profound impact on children and young people resulting in early years and school closures, job losses, falls in incomes, spikes in domestic violence incidents and falls in child protection referrals. Children and young people were severely impacted leading to learning loss, poverty, exposure to violence and neglect in the home, anxiety and poor mental health. The pandemic affected all, with certain groups being disproportionately impacted including children with disabilities, migrant children and Traveller/ Roma children. At the same time, Ireland witnessed an extraordinary effort to address the fallout nationally, regionally and locally. Children and young people played a critical role during the lockdown by helping people in their local communities, by informing key decisions, by getting their voice heard on the national stage and working hard to help control the spread of COVID-19. Early years services, schools, youth services, family support services and community/voluntary services worked hard to reopen and to control the spread of COVID-19 in difficult circumstances.

As a result, 2020 was one of the most significant in the National Advisory Council for Children and Young People’s history. Council members were acutely aware of the challenges that children, young people and families were experiencing as a result of COVID-19. The Council produced the following outputs in 2020:

- The council formed a Child Poverty Sub-Group and it provided specific advice to the council in relation to the impact of Covid-19 and recommendations in relation to the development of the next *National Policy Framework for Children and Young People*. Subsequently the council made a submission to government in relation to the development of the next



*National Policy Framework for Children and Young People*. Work on broader child poverty paper progressed into 2021.

- The council provided two sets of advice to government on the impact of COVID-19 with recommendations. The council received a written response to this correspondence from the minister.
- Council members met with officials in the Department of Social Protection seeking the extension of school meals for the summer months because we were concerned about reported high levels of food poverty during the pandemic.
- The First Five (10 Year National Early Years Strategy) was an exemplar for the council in the way council monitoring was in-built from the start. The council received an input on progress under and formed a sub-group to prepare a response in relation to the Department's Annual Report.
- The council was requested to and provided views in respect of Tusla's Corporate Plan.
- Council members formed a sub-group to develop its ideas and recommendations in respect of youth justice reform and made a submission in relation to the new Youth Justice Strategy. Council members were also represented on the Youth Justice Steering Group.
- The council received an input on progress under the LGBTI+ Strategy in 2020 and council members worked with young people currently and formerly involved on the Youth Forum for the LGBTI+ Youth Strategy.
- The council was the first group of stakeholders to meet with the then newly elected Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth Roderic O'Gorman in June 2021.
- The council met with the minister and with the secretary general and his senior officials in December 2021.

**Tanya Ward**  
**Chairperson**  
**National Advisory Council**

## 7.6 Children and Young People's Services Committees

Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC) are a significant initiative of the Department of Children, Equality Disability and Youth dedicated to generating and sustaining collaborative inter-agency working amongst organisations and agencies whose services impact on the lives of Ireland's children and young people. While CYPSC was initiated in 2007 as Children's Services Committees; under the strategic guidance of *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures* (BOBF) from 2014 significant development and a full national rollout of CYPSC has been achieved in the intervening years (BOBF, G47). Every county in Ireland now has a fully functioning, collaborative, action-oriented, inter-agency forum dedicated to promoting the welfare and well-being of all children and young people aged 0 to 24 years.

There are now 27 local CYPSC throughout the country that bring together key State agencies and the community and voluntary sector in every county to consider how best to support existing strengths and respond to emerging needs; unifying through their development and implementation of local, three-year Children and Young People's Plans. The work of each local multi-agency and multi-sector CYPSC, while responsive to specific needs and issues identified in their own county, organise their

work-plans to align with *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*' five national outcomes for children and young people. This supports a rounded and evidence-informed approach.

CYPSC have made great strides in realising their commitments as set out in BOBF. All CYPSC are meeting the goal to plan and co-ordinate parenting support in every county in Ireland (BOBF, G2). Additionally, the provision of implementation support to CYPSC is now resourced through Tusla Child and Family Agency at both national and local level (BOBF, G48), providing a secure and durable foundation, and building a platform to ensure that children and young people's expertise in their own lives is heard and shapes how services are delivered in their county.

The CYPSC network of agencies committed to working together to improve the lives of children and young people proved a valuable asset and a highly effective structure when the COVID-19 pandemic struck in the final year of BOBF implementation. CYPSC were at that time, and remain, a strong and present resource for listening to partners, devising rapid and collective responses to emerging needs of children and young people, communicating system-wide important government policy and messaging and communicating horizontally: sharing information, resources, expertise and personnel in very practical and effective ways across their counties.

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth has continued to provide seed funds annually to each CYPSC in support of local innovation and since 2017, mid-way through BOBF implementation, secured Healthy Ireland investment in to the CYPSC model of inter-agency working to ensure that children and young people are central to the Department of Health's population health strategy. CYPSC greatly value the strong connections forged with our parent Department DCEDIY and are consolidating positive working relationships with other government departments including Health, Justice, Community and Rural Development, Tourism, Sport and Culture.

Every CYPSC across Ireland has developed an expert knowledge in the landscape of service and programmatic provision for children and young people in their county. CYPSC are attuned to local need and are an important resource and information source that now offer potential for all government departments and their agencies to collaborate in translating policy goals into local implementation that enhances the lives of children, young people and their families.

More detail on CYPSC is available on [www.cypsc.ie](http://www.cypsc.ie)

**Colma Nic Lughadha**

**National Coordinator, Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSC)**

# Part 8: Learnings from *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*

## 8.1 Introduction

DCEDIY leads significant engagement on cross-government, agency and sectoral working. This engagement and interface is a key part of the Department’s remit to which the Department accords significant importance. Since 2014, a more strategic and structured approach to such engagement was developed through the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014–2020*. (BOBF).

BOBF represented the first overarching national policy framework comprehending an age range that spanned children and young people of 0–24 years. It adopted a whole-of-government approach and was underpinned by a number of constituent strategies in the areas of early years, youth, LGBTI+, and participation, and it was envisaged that the framework would encompass other related policies as they develop.

BOBF was a significant departure as an ambitious, whole-of-government framework, and has afforded the rights and interests of children and young people a central role in the policy system. Its significance and impact was assisted also by a range of parallel structural developments including the establishment of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs as a separate government department, and of Tusla.

The framework:

- Established a **shared set of outcomes** for children and young people to which all government departments and agencies, statutory services and the community and voluntary sectors worked to ensure a coherent response for children and young people.
- Identified the **range of commitments (163)** in place across government and progressed these based on a structured, systematic and outcomes-focused approach.
- Prioritised the **key cross-cutting transformational goals** under each outcome area that require concerted and coordinated action to ensure the realisation of the respective outcomes.
- Emphasised an **integrated and evidence-informed approach** to working across government, on horizontal and vertical levels – an approach that is child-centred, benefits from interagency and multidisciplinary working, and which transferred to all sectors and settings working with children and young people.

The life cycle of BOBF involved a range of phases, as illustrated below.



To provide a baseline for the commitments in BOBF an Implementation Plan was developed by the DCEDIY Implementation Team in 2014. This sought specific annual actions for each of the 163 commitments in the initial implementation phase up to 2017. A BOBF Indicator Set was also developed by DCEDIY's Research and Evaluation unit (REU).

## 8.2 Mid-Term Review

DCEDIY sought to take a strategic and sustainable approach to the implementation of BOBF. In doing so, it was decided early in the implementation process to carry out a [mid-term review](#) to ensure that adequate progress and appropriate monitoring was put in place so that the framework is implemented in a real time and responsive manner.

This mid-term review of BOBF took a holistic approach to reviewing the implementation, effectiveness and impact of BOBF. It served as a general progress and process check on the implementation of the first national children and young people's policy framework and was directly informed by the views and perspectives of key groupings in this area. The main aim was the delivery of a mid-term review that focused on the status of the framework and the progress made on its implementation, while offering learning to inform the next phase of the implementation process. This included a focus on the following:

- A review of the process and implementation structure.
- A review of awareness and visibility amongst stakeholders.
- A review of engagement amongst stakeholders.
- A review of outcomes to date.
- An identification of learning and innovative practices.
- The need to determine the content and course of action for Phase 2 of implementation 2018–2020.

## 8.3 Other Perspectives on Implementation

In 2020, the National Advisory Council submitted a paper (at the request of the BOBF implementation team) on its perspectives on the implementation of BOBF over its lifetime looking at key positives, challenges that have arisen, the learning from the process while also giving its perspectives on how BOBF 2 could be developed and priorities that need to be addressed.

The experience of the BOBF implementation team in leading the implementation of the framework has also been considered and both positives and challenges of the implementation of BOBF have been identified including at the mid-term review stage. Feedback from ongoing engagement with stakeholders throughout the implementation process has also helped to inform thinking for the development of the successor framework.

## 8.4 Overview of Perspectives and Learning

### Positives

- Establishment of one Advisory Council structure, to ensure greater coherence in unifying the policy domains of early years, children and youth and reflecting a life cycle approach to addressing issues facing children and young people.
- The ongoing work and commitment of the National Advisory Council and its annual work plan and focus on top priorities.
- Establishment of a more dynamic implementation infrastructure than originally envisaged in the design phase.
- Leading the Sponsors Group and securing agreement to identify key 'cross-sectoral priorities' (intractable issues that require multilateral action across government).
- There is some evidence of specific changes being driven, or bottlenecks in implementation cleared, directly through the Sponsors Group, Consortium, or Cabinet Committee system.
- Ensuring that the constituent groups in the BOBF infrastructure had the opportunity to inform the identification of annual priorities and the development of the outcome indicators, and to comment on progress via the Annual Report.
- Development of an Implementation Plan.
- Development and publication of annual reports that sought to account for quantitative and qualitative progress.
- Situating and strengthening the focus on 5 national outcomes and transformational goals.
- Communications via quarterly e-zine and the provision of pro-forma briefing material for all stakeholders for dissemination.
- Introducing the concept of annual cross-sectoral priorities such as child poverty, prevention and early intervention, etc. to ensure responsiveness to emerging themes. The child poverty piece worked extremely well with cross-government and NGO cooperation.
- Reinvigoration of the CYPSC initiative via enhanced remit and age range, role and representation; and developing a strong local infrastructure directly connected with central government and the BOBF infrastructure, thereby allowing multidirectional information flow and minimising implementation impediments.
- Profiling the BOBF infrastructure as the 'go-to and go-through' mechanism for children and young people's issues.
- The consortium mechanism to allow children and young people to present and highlight issues to government departments and agencies on issues that affected them.
- The publication in 2017 of the BOBF Indicator Set provides a basis for stronger evidence-based assessment of child outcomes achieved in the lifetime of the next strategy.

## Challenges

- Ensuring that government and civil society structures are truly aligned in support.
- Sustained leadership across the lifetime of the framework. This must be made visible from the top of government, to breathe life into the current structures. Leadership needs to be seen in action through using the structures (especially Consortium and Sponsors Group if kept) to drive implementation including a reinvigorated leadership role from the Department of An Taoiseach's.
- The BOBF oversight structures are more effective currently as *enablers* of the framework, especially across departmental and sectoral silos. They have not always been as successful as *drivers*.
- Government departments have cooperated with and embraced BOBF to varying degrees. Some have used the framework successfully to advance policy goals that chime with the frameworks (i.e. DSP). Therefore the 'the bar' for engagement is higher. In any event, addressing this issue in the next framework is essential.
- BOBF as an instrument of policy delivery has been challenged by lack of focus and, in particular, the mixing of a long and undifferentiated list of micro and more macro actions. This can weaken the overall focus on effective implementation.
- The structure of BOBF (Transformational goals, commitments, outcomes, implementation structure) was viewed as unclear. The transformational goals in the framework are seen as having added complexity without always adding value, and make the task of monitoring more complex.
- Agreement on an appropriate level of public visibility of BOBF has been unclear – the mid-term review raised useful suggestions but limited resourcing is a barrier here.
- The implementation team lacked sufficient resources space to implement and resource the BOBF structures, including secretariat support for the Advisory Council.
- The role of BOBF and its structures (especially the Advisory Council) in monitoring constituent strategies is not always clear and has been uneven.

## Key Messages

- The implementation structures have generally worked well and have provided a solid platform for cross-collaboration and interdepartmental working, with the work on addressing the child poverty issue identified as particularly noteworthy.
- The work of coordination and influencing needs full time resourcing. This is different to the work needed to drive implementation of specific more micro actions, and relies on skilful influencing allied to a strongly supported mandate from the top.
- There were issues around the sponsor group and its effectiveness and also the consortium not being action focused enough. The value and remit of each structure warrants consideration to streamline an effective implementation structure.
- The BOBF Framework is complicated, with a huge range of commitments, many of which very broad and unmeasurable, contained within it. There is a need to focus on particular priorities such as child poverty and child homelessness for example and other emerging priorities such as post COVID-19 and mental health and well-being.
- Government departments and agencies need to be held equally accountable for their own commitments and their level of engagement particularly at the consortium meetings.

- There is a need for strengthened government leadership to act as a key driver in implementation. i.e. Taoiseach's Cabinet Committee on Social Inclusion.
- There is a low level of awareness and visibility of BOBF across some sectors, with children and young people and the general public. This needs to be addressed with the successor framework.
- Engagement via the BOBF implementation structures is positive, although some departments and agencies need to improve in this regard.
- There has been some good learning and innovative practices such as addressing child poverty and childhood obesity. This momentum needs to be carried forward.
- There is a need for discernible impacts/outcomes to be communicated to a wider audience. Publication of progress and highlighting significant 'wins' should be considered.
- For the successor framework there should be a renewed, succinct approach focusing on important priorities such as child poverty, child homelessness, mental health and well-being, prevention and early intervention and the progression of the early years strategy, amongst other issues. The annual reporting process should be revised to take account of these priorities.
- The reporting process for the successor framework should be looked at closely. The annual reporting process for BOBF while well intended was not sufficient to measure progress. This can be attributed to a lot of the commitments being very vague, having too many stakeholders and generally unmeasurable etc.

## 8.5 Learning from the Implementation Process

The review process of the *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures* implementation has been very helpful in forming our thoughts as we commence the development of new the successor framework for children and young people. Some key learning has been identified as follows:

- Importance of focusing not just on the development of structures, but also on the development of a collaborative culture based on a shared agenda.
- Importance of ensuring that in pre-development phase all policy actions and commitments be weighted according to importance and impact.
- Importance of ensuring that the implementation of the policy is not solely focused on commitments fixed at development phase and followed at implementation phase. Rather, the policy and the implementation process needs to remain relevant and responsive to issues which may not have been foregrounded in the original policy, but which have subsequently become critical, e.g. homelessness.
- Importance of the system and of respective departments to recognise the need to minimise policy proliferation and ensure policy maintenance, so that specific, strategic and sustainable policy actions are held and advanced, thereby reducing fragmentation and burden for policymakers, providers and practitioners alike.
- Importance of identifying and differentiating the primary – ultimate – beneficiaries and the secondary beneficiaries of the policy.
- Importance of recognising that the continuum of policy, provider and practitioner interests are focused on service to the citizen, thereby ensuring the development and delivery of policy that harnesses such inputs and focuses on end-user impact.

- Importance of recognising the benefits and limitations to the application of whole-of-government approaches to policies and policy implementation.
- Importance of acknowledging and holding to account the delivery agents of policy commitments, which may be non-statutory agencies. These are key constituents in the broad and diverse system in place in social services.

## 8.6 The Course of Action for the Successor Framework

In approaching the development of the successor framework and informed by the learning derived from implementation of the first framework and in preparing for policy succession planning, there is an opportunity to develop one composite whole-of-government strategy based on the following rationale:

- To ensure a single unified policy approach.
- To ensure a more age- and phase-related policy continuum aligned to the developmental phases of children and young people, rather than sector or thematic specific concerns.
- To be more strategic and efficient in establishing – and achieving – the policy objectives of DCEDIY and those of government departments, agencies and constituent sectors.
- To sharpen a policy development and implementation process based on prioritised and aligned actions through a systems approach.
- To support DCEDIY in fulfilling its specific mandate in leading on and harmonising cross-government innovations.
- To minimise the bureaucratic and implementation burden both within DCEDIY and the wider system.
- To recognise that many specific or ‘niche’ developments are now mainstreamed in the broad children and youth sector since 2014.
- To standardise the pace and quality of policy implementation.
- To maintain and maximise the use of one robust policy implementation infrastructure.
- To forge greater cross government and agency collaboration and investment in policies, programmes and services for children and young people.

A key learning from the process since 2014 is the challenge of implementing and maintaining policy in a system prone to policy proliferation and initiative saturation. To ensure that the successor framework is a high-impact and sustainable, it will design in capacity for ongoing agility and responsiveness. The recommendations and learning arising from the mid-term review framed and focused the implementation of BOBF and the work programmes of the relevant groups in the implementation structure.

Emerging priorities were considered and advanced by the respective groups in the BOBF infrastructure having regard to alignment with the existing commitments in the framework:

- Child Poverty
- Child Homelessness
- Prevention and Early Intervention
- Mental Health and Well-being (personal and communal)
- Continued Progression of the First National Early Years Strategy



- Constituent Strategies such as participation LGBTI+, youth, youth justice, disability, integration and equality
- Responding to the COVID-19 Pandemic

In developing the successor strategy, a whole of society and cross government approach will be adopted to ensure the rights of children and young people are placed firmly at the centre as government, state agencies, sectoral partners and wider society address these challenges and design services and programmes to meet the individual and collective needs of our next generation.