

EQUAL PARTICIPATION MODEL
POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

FEEDBACK FROM NGO, ELC AND SAC
WORKSHOPS ON OBJECTIVE AND
OUTCOMES OF EPM

MARCH 21ST AND APRIL 18TH 2023

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INTRODUCTION

BACKGROUND

Meehan Tully and Associates Ltd. were assigned to host a number of thematic workshops on behalf of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. The aim of the workshops was to gather feedback from representative organisations, service providers Early Years Educators and School-Age Practitioners, which would inform the Equal Participation Model (EPM) Policy Development Project.

EPM POLICY DEVELOPMENT PROJECT

The aim of the EPM policy development project is to deliver a model of universal and targeted supports in a strategic policy framework to address the impacts of disadvantage in Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School Age Childcare (SAC) in a child-centred manner, assisting services to better support children and families from all backgrounds in an equitable way. The project is being implemented by the EPM development Project Team, and guided by the EPM Communications and Consultation Plan.

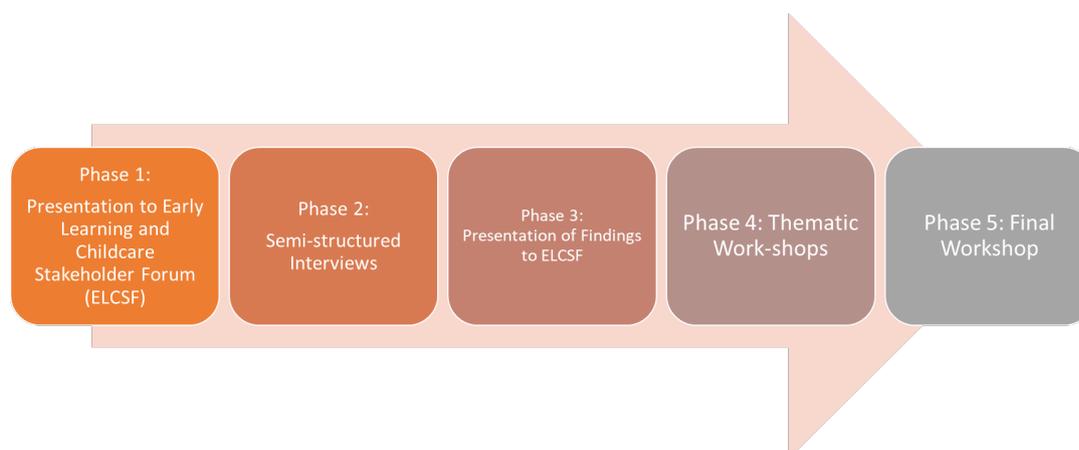
EPM: COMMUNICATIONS AND CONSULTATION PLAN

The communications and consultation (C&C) plan sets out how the EPM development Project Team will engage, in the design stage of the project, with the primary external and internal stakeholder groups for the EPM.

1. Strand 1: Engagement with Representative Organisations, Service Providers, Early Years Educators and School-Age Practitioners
2. Strand 2: Engagement with Parents and Children
3. Strand 3: Inter- and intra-Departmental stakeholders

STRAND 1: ENGAGEMENT

The five phases of engagement involved in Strand 1 are illustrated in the diagram below.



Of the above phases, Phase 4: Thematic Work-shops is relevant to this assignment.

FACILITATED WORKSHOPS

Phase 4 of Strand 1 was comprised of two pairs of workshops, held to gather feedback and facilitate the discussion of common themes and responses to the design of the EPM, as well as a final workshop to discuss the general findings raised in the previous sessions. The participants for the two pairs of workshops were:

1. Non-governmental organisations who work with and/ or advocate for, or represent, the different cohorts of children the model will try to reach, including Traveller, Roma, homeless, refugees, migrants, lone parent families.
2. ELC and SAC providers, educators, practitioners and ELC and SAC representative bodies. In addition to this element of Phase 4, two online sessions were held with staff working in ECL and SAC services.

METHODOLOGY

STRUCTURE

The facilitated onsite workshops used a 'café-style' setting with each table seating between 6-8 people. The number of tables depended on the number of attendees, which resulted in between 4-8 tables being used across the different workshops.

CAFÉ STYLE DISCUSSION

The methodology can be summarised as follows:

- Facilitator to commence the workshop with a PowerPoint presentation, introducing the EPM and/ or the schedule for the day
- The main focus of the workshop is centered upon discussions to be held by the participants at each of the tables:
 1. One topic is introduced and described by the Facilitator, e.g., barriers to access, solutions, etc., with a brief overview of the breadth of discussion to take place
 2. Each table to nominate a notetaker, using large colored card to be provided by the facilitator
 3. The topic is presented for discussion among all the tables at the same time, but each table to discuss the topic separately
 4. Upon conclusion of the discussion, the facilitator will seek summary feedback from each table, as well as encourage discussion from other tables; and gather all colored cards (notes).
 5. On a number of occasions, participants are moved between tables by the Facilitator (using a simple number system) to ensure that participants can begin the new discussion with new people.
 6. The next topic is introduced, following the steps above.

REPORT

A report was prepared by Meehan Tully and Associates Ltd. on the workshop feedback gathered at each Workshop Day. A final report was then prepared, gathering all of the feedback and categorising the information in terms of its relevance to the EPM.

EPM OBJECTIVE AND OUTCOMES

At each of the first workshops for the NGOs and ELC & SACs, which were held on March 21st and April 18th, the participants were asked to give their feedback and recommendations regarding the Objective and Outcomes of the EPM. For the purposes of this report, the feedback from both groups has been grouped together, due to the duplication of items raised on both occasions.

The EPM Objective and Outcomes are below, with the feedback provided on the following pages.

EPM OBJECTIVE

To enhance belongingness, engagement, care, and learning equitably in early learning and care and school age childcare settings.

EPM OUTCOMES

OUTCOME 1

All children, in particular children experiencing disadvantage, overcome barriers to access, engagement, participation and learning in ELC and SAC settings

OUTCOME 2

All settings, in particular settings operating in the context of concentrated disadvantage, equitably provide and promote the care and learning of children from diverse and varied backgrounds

OUTCOME 3

Parents and families experiencing disadvantage have the tools and supports necessary for children to equitably access and participate in ELC and SAC

FEEDBACK ON EPM OBJECTIVE

The feedback on the proposed Equal Participation Model (EPM) objective in Ireland can be summarised as follows:

1. Several participants felt that the objective was too broad and idealistic, suggesting that it should be more focused and child-centric.
2. Accessibility issues, such as transport and resources, were raised as important factors to include in the objective.
3. Some reviewers felt that the objective should include a more comprehensive approach to disadvantage, considering multiple forms and not just focusing on DEIS areas.
4. The need for a more interdisciplinary approach that involves parents, families, and settings outside of childcare was emphasised.
5. There were concerns about building upon, and adding to, an already complex system.
6. The objective's wording was questioned, particularly the use of "enhance." Some suggested using "ensure and enhance" instead.
7. The importance of understanding diversity and ensuring equality of outcomes for all children, particularly those from marginalised communities, was highlighted.
8. Some called for a more cohesive plan that consolidates different policies and visions instead of having separate policies for various aspects of the services.
9. The need for the EPM to address the diverse nature of the sector, including private, commercial, rural, and urban settings, was emphasised.
10. Some reviewers expressed concerns about the practical implementation of the EPM, noting the difference between ideals and what can be realistically rolled out on the ground.

FEEDBACK ON EPM OUTCOMES

Below, are the key points and suggestions raised in relation to the outcomes of the proposed Equal Participation Model.

OUTCOME 1

- Address the overall lack of places/services for under 5's, with particular attention to the urban/rural divide.
- Improve parental education on available services.
- Address staffing issues, including training and support.
- Ensure adequate funding and resources for settings to accommodate children with diverse needs.

OUTCOME 2

- Ensure equitable provision of quality services, regardless of location or socioeconomic background.
- Address issues of exclusion for children from certain backgrounds (e.g., Traveller, Roma) or with additional needs.
- Provide additional support and resources for settings dealing with complex challenges, such as language barriers, sensory processing issues, and physical disabilities.

OUTCOME 3

- Empower parents and families experiencing disadvantage with the tools and support necessary to access ELC and SAC settings.
- Address gaps in service provision and support for hard-to-reach families.
- Improve access to and ease of use for government subsidies and programs, such as the NCS.
- Consider offering sponsored places for disadvantaged families.

OTHER SUGGESTIONS

- Emphasise the importance of belongingness for staff, children, and families.
- Improve engagement and coordination between ELC and SAC settings and outside agencies, such as family hubs.
- Address issues with the AIM program, including its limited hours and lack of support for certain children.
- Explore the need for legislative changes to ensure equal access and participation.
- Consider restructuring funding models and grants to better support settings in meeting diverse needs.