

## Equal Participation Model (EPM) - Project Steering Committee (PSC) Terms of Reference

### **Background and Introduction:**

The Equal Participation Model (EPM) is a strategic policy currently under development in the Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC) Division of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY). It is part of a suite of supports offered under *Together for Better*, the Department's new funding model for ELCSAC. The Equal Participation Model will seek to promote equitable access and participation for all children in ELC and SAC. With a particular focus on children experiencing different forms of disadvantage, the EPM will promote inclusion and provide supports to enhance belongingness, engagement, care, and learning equitably in ELC and SAC settings.

The Equal Participation Model will aim to provide universal supports to children all over the country, and targeted supports to address the needs of children in areas of concentrated disadvantage to enhance access to and participation in ELC and SAC; while complementing existing vehicles addressing barriers to access including NCS, AIM, ECCE and Core Funding. Supports other than ELC/SAC related support for children experiencing disadvantage is beyond the scope of this work. Acknowledging that there is not always a clear line between ELC/SAC focussed support and the wider context of disadvantage, the Chair will be the final arbiter of what is within scope.

### **Objectives and Purpose:**

The Project Steering Committee (PSC) will be the key decision-making forum for the Equal Participation Model (EPM) project. All developments to the EPM are to be approved by the PSC and its role will be to ensure that the policy progress are in line with the objectives and deliverables outlined in the Project Charter.

The specific objectives of the PSC are as follows:

- Provide strategic direction to the EPM project
- Identify any complementary structures or initiatives that need to be factored into the project
- Consider the work of the EPM in relation to their own functions and identify opportunities for integration or alignment with EPM objectives
- Approve the project goals and objectives
- Ensure that project goals align with DCEDIY's Statement of Strategy goals
- Ensure project deliverables are in line with the strategic actions in *First 5, Partnership for the Public Good, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, and Ireland's National Action plan for the EU Child Guarantee*.
- Monitor the project's progress towards agreed deadlines
- Identify potential risks and uncertainties that may be a threat to the project's success
- Approve updates (both structured and informal) to the Management Board (MB) and Minister
- Stay informed of the project's activities, progress, and outcomes
- Help resolve any conflicting priorities
- Approve changes to the project scope, budget, or timeline.

### **Membership**

Membership of the PSC will include:

1. Chair and Project Sponsor ELC and SAC Divisional Assistant Secretary, DECDIY
2. Project Team, DCEDIY:
  - Project Owner: Principal Officer, Access and Inclusion Unit, ELC and SAC Division
  - Project Manager: Assistant Principal, Access and Inclusion Unit, ELC and SAC Division
  - Assistant Principal Specialist, Access and Inclusion Unit, ELC and SAC Division
  - Project Support, Access and Inclusion Unit, ELC and SAC Division
3. Principal Officer, Quality Unit, DCEDIY
4. Principal Officer, Sector Development Unit, DCEDIY
5. Principal Officer, Parenting Unit, DCEDIY
6. Principal Officer, Child Rights Policy Unit, DCEDIY
7. Principal Officer, Early Years Education Policy, Department of Education
8. Assistant Principal, Social Inclusion Unit, Department of Education
9. National Manager, Better Start
10. Principal Officer, Social Inclusion Unit, Department of Social Protection
11. Representative of Childcare Committees Ireland
12. Manager, Early Years Operations Pobal
13. Representative of Children and Young People Service Committees, Tusla

#### ***Quorum, attendance and replacements***

8 attendees represents a quorum, so long as there are representatives from both the Project Team and another unit or organisation. The chair, or designated alternate, is also required to constitute a quorum (the designated alternate chair must be one of the Principal Officer members of the PSC). PSC members should notify the Project Team as early as possible in any case of non-attendance. Replacements will not be permitted other than where there is a staff change and with the agreement of the Chair. Meetings may be rescheduled if there is a timing issue for a majority of members.

#### ***Decision making process:***

All decisions for approval by the Committee will be sought, in the first instance, via *Consensus* from the attending committee members. In those instances where a consensus cannot be reached, a *2/3 Majority* will be required. Each decision (and the mode by which same was arrived at) will be recorded in the minutes. All standing committee members have a vote in the approval process. If a decision as laid out above is not possible, the Chair will have authority to make a final decision.

#### ***Frequency and location of meetings:***

To occur approx. every 4 weeks, commencing on **January 31<sup>st</sup> 2023** to be flexed to fit around milestones/significant events requiring updates/direction. Meetings will take place using a hybrid model – with most meetings to take place online via WebEx, and occasional meetings to take place in Miesian Plaza, when and as agreed by the members.

#### ***Duration of the PSC:***

The PSC will continue throughout the design phase of the EPM, and until a final policy paper/strategic plan is completed and published.

#### ***Confidentiality:***

All discussions that take place in PSC meetings must be kept confidential and not be shared outside the PSC. All documents marked “draft” are also not for sharing outside the PSC members. Minutes

and other approved documents will be published on a dedicated resource page on the Department's website.

***Reporting:***

A project progress-report will be submitted by the Project Manager to all committee members, three days in advance of any regularly-scheduled meetings.

Updates for submission to the Management Board (MB) will also be prepared by the project team as required – for review and approval by the Steering Committee prior to advancement to the MB.

As Working Groups are established for designing key elements of the EPM (e.g. identification model, expanding elements of the AIM programme etc.), a report the progress of each group will be provided at each Steering Committee meeting. Members of specific Working Groups may be being invited to attend relevant Steering Committee meetings, when and as appropriate.

The Project Team also undertakes to produce a project final report; outlining and summarising the project outcomes, lessons learnt, etc.

***Agenda, minutes and decision papers***

The Project Team will manage this aspect – with agendas being circulated three days in advance of regularly scheduled meetings, minutes being circulated for agreement after each meeting (same to focus on any action points and decisions arising at each meeting). Each meeting will start with the approval of the previous meetings minutes and an update on any actions committed to. Agenda items for the next meeting will be a standing item at the end of each meeting, and these will be determined on the basis of key project milestones and events.