

**New Funding Model for ELC and SAC  
Expert Group Meeting  
Wednesday 20 January 2021  
Webex  
Minutes**

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**Participants**

Michael Scanlan (Chair)  
Eva Lloyd  
Edward Melhuish  
Tim Callan  
Rory O'Donnell  
Tove Mogstad Slinde  
Niamh Callaghan (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform)  
Philip Crosby (Department of Education)  
Anne-Marie Brooks (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth)  
Hazel O'Byrne (Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth)  
Gillian Martin (Secretariat, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth)  
Andrew Burrows (Secretariat, Department, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth)

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**Welcome**

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

The Chair outlined recent staff changes in the Department noting, in particular, that Bernie McNally has left the Early Years Division. The Expert Group expressed their appreciation of the work done by Bernie for the Group.

**Minutes from last meeting and matters arising**

The minutes of the meeting of 16 December were adopted. It was agreed that the minutes and agenda would be published. The Secretariat and Chair will work together to progress the actions arising from that meeting.

The Chair noted the request from Pobal for input on the Annual Early Years Sector Profile questions for 2020/21, and invited members to send any comments to the Secretariat by the end of the week.

**Topical Issues**

Gillian Martin provided an overview of topical issues, including a planned meeting the following morning between representatives of the Workforce Development Plan Steering Group and the Expert Group; developments in relation to the Review of the Operating System; the impact of the latest COVID-19 restrictions; a CSO report on graduate employment in the sector; and the work being done on gender equality by The Citizens' Assembly. It was agreed that the Secretariat will source information on the cost of the employment wage subsidy scheme for the ELC sector, and that the relationship between the work being done by the Expert Group and in the Review of the Operating System would be an agenda item for the next meeting.

**Project Plan and Stakeholder Engagement**

A revised project plan had been circulated. It was agreed that this will be published.

The newly established ELC Stakeholder Forum will form the basis for the next phases of stakeholder engagement. It is proposed that Frontier Economics would facilitate these phases of stakeholder engagement. The Group discussed the format and timing of this engagement.

#### **National Childcare Scheme Review**

Anne-Marie Brooks explained that the Department is required to undertake a 1-year review of the National Childcare Scheme, the output of which will be relevant to the work of the Expert Group. It was noted that the review will be undertaken by the Department, but the Expert Group will be able to access the report to inform their work.

#### **Quality Work Strand**

There was a discussion on the quality work strand, including the relationship between the Workforce Development Plan and the Expert Group. The Group discussed various quality measures, including pay and conditions, training, qualifications, staff retention, and CPD. There was a discussion on how the funding model could best enable higher quality, without reducing affordability or equity. The Secretariat will draw up a paper outlining options based on the discussion for the next meeting.

A discussion on the curriculum will be held at the February Expert Group meeting.

#### **Access & Disadvantage Work Strand**

It was agreed that Frontier Working Paper 6 could be published.

The Group discussed how the funding model could address access and disadvantage issues for ELC & SAC. Learnings from the Access and Inclusion Model and on the DEIS model operated by the Department of Education were considered, and the Group discussed how best to identify and meet the needs of children and families through an appropriate mix of universal and targeted measures. It was agreed that the Secretariat would draw up a paper outlining options based on the discussion for the next meeting.

#### **AOB**

Tove Mogstad Slinde briefed the Group on recent developments in Norway relating to the funding of privately delivered services and agreed to provide further information in this regard to the Secretariat.

The Secretariat requested feedback from members on Draft 2 of Frontier Working Paper 7.

The first morning of the meeting of the Expert Group concluded.

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

**Apologies**

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

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**Welcome**

The Chair welcomed everyone to the second morning of the meeting.

**Update on joint meeting of representatives of the Expert Group and the Workforce Development Plan Steering Group**

The Group was briefed on the earlier joint meeting between representatives of the Expert Group (Michael Scanlan, Edward Melhuish, Rory O'Donnell, and Tove Mogstad Slinde) and the Workforce Development Plan Steering Group (Toby Wolfe, Mathias Urban, Teresa Heeney, Fiona McDonnell and Margaret Rogers). Members of the secretariat of both groups were also present. The joint meeting discussed a number of issues of common interest, including funding mechanisms, continuous professional development of the workforce, curriculum, and pay and conditions in the sector.

**Affordability Work Strand**

The group discussed a draft ERSI report examining the effect of the NCS on childcare affordability and incentives to work, and a draft Crowe report on profits/surpluses in the sector. Further clarifications are being sought on both reports. It was noted that these reports may provide useful input to the Expert Group's deliberations on affordability. It was agreed that the Secretariat, Chair and relevant group members would review the ESRI report, identify issues for further investigation, and report back to the Group.

The Group noted that concerns relating to sustainability and the burden of administration are regularly raised by the sector, some of which may arise from the existing funding model. The Secretariat will prepare a note on the attendance requirements for the existing schemes, the COVID-19 funding arrangements, and previous funding models for the sector.

**Review of Guiding Principles and Issues**

It was agreed that the draft guiding principles (which had been included in the call for submissions) should be published on the website for ease of reference (subject to any comments received by the secretariat within the next few days).

**AOB**

It was agreed to amend the draft parental engagement report to reflect the gender demographics of those that attended the sessions. The importance of ELC/SAC in terms of gender equality was noted.

It was agreed that the Chair/Secretariat would meet with individual members to elicit and discuss their views on the key points to be reflected in the Group's report. In the meantime, each member would be invited to provide the secretariat with a short note on what they see as the main priorities for the Group and how these might be addressed in a new funding model.

**ENDS**