

Peer Review on A national approach to prevention and early intervention services to address children at risk of poverty (Ireland, 18-19 February 2016)

Harnessing a national approach to mainstreaming the learning in prevention and early intervention to improve outcomes for children, particularly those at risk of poverty and social exclusion¹

Department of Children and Youth Affairs

1. Overview

This paper will succinctly set the context for Ireland's approach to prevention and early intervention in children's policy, provision and practice. A brief outline of the supporting policy context and background to initiatives in the field of prevention and early intervention will be provided. Furthermore, the strengthening and supporting infrastructure being developed in collaboration with other stakeholders will be described and reference will be made to the existing and emerging learning in place under this theme. Finally, the initial thinking of the Irish Government to mainstream the learning from this range of initiatives to achieve real and meaningful systemic change will be indicated. Such systems change will need to operate both horizontally and vertically – to comprehend not alone the Ministries and State agencies, but also the professional, sectoral, NGO and practice fields working with and for children.

2. Approach

This paper aims to create a platform for constructive dialogue and collaborative engagement with other Member States via the EU Peer Review process being in Ireland in February 2016. This will assist in further informing solutions to the challenges of mainstreaming the learning from prevention and early intervention in children's services to achieve systemic change on a range of key levels which can improve outcomes for all children particularly those experiencing or at risk of poverty and social exclusion. It is anticipated that examination of these challenges, the identification of potential solutions and the resultant learning will be of relevance to the work of many Member States.

3. Supporting policy context

The supporting policy context² at EU level underscoring the importance of ensuring a focus on children and on strengthening their outcomes to enhance resilience and

¹ Prepared for the Peer Review in Social Protection and Social Inclusion programme coordinated by ÖSB Consulting, the Institute for Employment Studies (IES) and Applica, and funded by the European Commission.

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² European Commission (2010). Europe 2020. A European strategy for smart, sustainable and inclusive growth. Communication from the commission, Brussels.

European Commission (2011). Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions An EU Agenda for the Rights of the Child, Brussels: COM(2011) 60 final. (http://ec.europa.eu/justice/policies/children/docs/com_2011_60_en.pdf)



reduce potential risk factors to social exclusion and poverty is myriad. Child poverty and disadvantage is a matter of significant concern since disadvantage at an early stage, while itself is particularly restrictive and adverse, can have a cumulative effect leading to intractable problems as children become older³. Moreover, the experiences of children facing poverty at an early age and stage offers predictors of possible trajectories and issues which they may encounter in later life. This underscores the necessity for mainstreaming prevention and early intervention to reduce such vulnerability and to disrupt these trajectories.

Although the focus on child poverty and social exclusion have admittedly become sharper in recent years owing to the financial crisis and the range of associated social issues impacting on children and young people, the key problems in this area, while well referenced and well-rehearsed, are as of yet not fully realised in policy implementation. Moreover, the call to enhance child mainstreaming and youth-centred policy proofing in EU policy making to ensure a centrality of focus on children and young people has also grown apace. In appraising such developments it is noteworthy that addressing the issue of social exclusion and its impact on children and young people should be viewed as a transversal theme and not merely a specific concern of particular and discrete Council formations or Commission Directorates and their respective range of responses. In this context it is critical that learning and effective policy and practice in prevention and early intervention is derived and developed in and across these respective domains.

4. Learning from recent and related EU Peer Reviews

In considering the point of departure for the IE Peer Review, it is important that we look not alone at the macro EU policy context, but also to the learning derived from previous Peer Review processes which may have practical application. The Peer Review of the Belgian pilot local consultation platforms on child poverty⁴, held in Brussels on 13–14 January 2015, offers a particular context in this regard, albeit with a focus on more localised responses to addressing child poverty. Gábor and Kopasz (2015) in their synthesis report of this Peer Review process identified four main issues pertinent to deliberations: (i) cooperation among services and the role of government in promoting that cooperation, (ii) involvement of primary stakeholders (children and their families) in the policy-making process, (iii) monitoring and evaluation of the policy scheme, like the *Children First* programme, and (iv) addressing poverty in early childhood.⁵

European Commission (2013b). Investing in children: breaking the cycle of disadvantage. Commission Recommendation. C (2013) 778 final.

Council Resolution of 27 November 2009 on a renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (2010-2018 - OJ C 311, 19.12.2009, p. 1-11) and the Joint Report of the Council and the Commission 2012 on the implementation of the renewed framework for European cooperation in the youth field (EU Youth Strategy 2010-2018) (OJ C 394, 20.12.2012, p. 5-16).

³ Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2014): Better Outcomes – Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020

http://dcya.gov.ie/documents/cypp_framework/BetterOutcomesBetterFutureReport.pdf

⁴ The Peer Review of the Belgian pilot local consultation platforms on child poverty was held in Brussels on 13–14 January 2015. It was hosted by the Federal Public Service for Social Integration (FPS SI) and involved representative of eight Member States as well as the Confederation of Family Organisations in the European Union (COFACE) and Eurochild, and the European Commission's DG Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion.

⁵ For more details on substantive issues raised in the paper, see Gabor, A. and Kopasz, M. (2015) *Peer Review Children First – Pilot Local Consultation Platforms on Child Poverty, Discussion Paper*. See <http://ec.europa.eu/social/main.jsp?catId=1081&langId=en>.



5. Irish context

Child poverty

It is accepted that poverty and social exclusion affect a considerable number of children in Ireland. During the period of severe economic crisis and fiscal re-adjustment the rate of children living in consistent poverty (income poverty combined with deprivation of basic items) increased from 8.7 % in 2009 to 11.2 % in 2014, affecting 134,000 children.⁶ Notwithstanding additional challenges, there remained existing underlying factors among parents contributing to child poverty such as joblessness, low education level, being a younger and especially a lone parent⁷. There is a clear connection between poverty and broader social exclusion: children's performance in schools is strongly linked to mother's education, while participation in physical exercise, organised sport and cultural activities is related to social class and parental income⁸ as is progression to third level education⁹. It is also important to note the parents' involvement in their children's education is associated with their educational background¹⁰ and that school absenteeism is linked to issues of parental engagement as well as unemployment¹¹.

Public service provision in Ireland

Ireland's arrangements for the delivery of children's services have a mixed approach, comprising Statutory and NGO providers. The arrangements are characterised by quite a centralised arrangements regarding overall responsibilities for children's services; and, at the same time, a very strong historical legacy of the role of both the Catholic Church and the non-governmental sector generally, in the provision of certain human and social services.

Health and social care services incorporating hospital, public health, primary care, disability and mental health services are provided by the Health Services Executive (HSE)¹². The HSE is a single centralised agency with a physical and corporate governance infrastructure which has national, regional and local arrangements for service delivery. The HSE in turn, commissions the bulk of disability services from the non-governmental sector.

Child welfare, protection, family support services, domestic, sexual and gender-based violence services and education welfare services are provided by Tusla – the Child and Family Agency¹³. Similarly to the HSE (where the majority of these

⁶ European Survey of Income and Living Conditions, 2014.

⁷ The latter group is at particularly high risk of poverty: in 2013 17 % of lone parent households were in consistent poverty. Social Inclusion Monitor 2013

⁸ Growing Up in Ireland, the Live of 13 year olds, Child Cohort, Wave 2; See www.growingup.ie

⁹ It was shown that farmers, self-employed and higher professionals are more likely to have their children in third level education than non-manual, semi-skilled and unskilled manual workers. Higher Education Authority (2014) *Towards the Development of a New National Plan for Equity of Access to Higher Education – Consultation Paper*. Dublin See http://www.hea.ie/sites/default/files/consultation_paper_web_0.pdf

¹⁰ Central Statistics Office, Quarterly Household National Survey, Special Module, Parental Involvement in Children's Education, Quarter 2, 2012 <http://www.cso.ie/en/media/csoie/releasespublications/documents/labourmarket/2012/QNHSparentalinvolvementchildrenseducationq22012.pdf>

¹¹ Darmody, M., Thorton, M. and Mc Coy, S. (2013) *Reasons for Persistent Absenteeism among Irish Primary School Pupils* ESRI Research Bulletin: Dublin. See www.esri.ie/bulletin

¹² <http://www.hse.ie/eng/>

¹³ <http://www.tusla.ie/>



services were located until 1 January 2014) this is a single centralised agency with an infrastructure which has national, regional and local arrangements for service delivery. Tusla commissions many of its family support services from the non-governmental sector.

Early Childhood Education and Care is not entirely free at the point of delivery in Ireland. There is universal access to a free pre-school year; and targeted subsidising of other childcare services for low income families. From September 2016 the free pre-school year will be extended to allow children take up a place from when they are 3 years old up until they are either 5 ½ years old or they begin primary school. These services are funded, in the main, by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs¹⁴. Service delivery is by private providers with some non-for-profit community provision.

The primary education sector includes state-funded primary schools, special schools and private primary schools. The state-funded schools include religious schools, non-denominational schools, multi-denominational schools and Gaelscoileanna (Irish-language schools). For historical reasons, most primary schools are state-aided parish schools, although this pattern is changing. The state pays the bulk of the building and running costs of state-funded primary schools, but a local contribution is made towards their running costs. The post-primary education sector comprises secondary, vocational, community and comprehensive schools. Secondary schools are privately owned and managed. Vocational schools are state-established and administered by Education and Training Boards (ETBs)¹⁵, while community and comprehensive schools are managed by Boards of Management of differing compositions. Teachers' salaries are paid by the Department of Education and Skills¹⁶, and the schools are inspected by the Department's Inspectorate.

There is a local authority structure at county level which has devolved local government responsibilities¹⁷. Unlike in other jurisdictions, in general terms, local authorities are not directly involved in the provision of services to children and families aside from the provision of general infrastructure, some play and recreation facilities (including playgrounds, library services and sports facilities).

Policy and institutional developments in Ireland

In Ireland there have been significant policy, organisational, institutional and practice developments impacting on the range of sectors and settings working with and for children and young people over the past decade. All such developments have increasingly focused on achieving optimum outcomes for children and reversing, where necessary, poor outcomes. A key theme running through these developments is the importance of prevention and early intervention based on sound evidence. This paper aims to contribute to the thinking on how to mainstream the learning from these developments. These include:

- In policy terms, the development and implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People 2014-2020*, has created a single, cross-government platform for improved children's services and policies - the infrastructure supporting this extensive framework is outlined in Figure 1 below.

¹⁴ <http://www.dcy.gov.ie/>

¹⁵ <http://www.etbi.ie/>

¹⁶ <http://www.education.ie/en/>

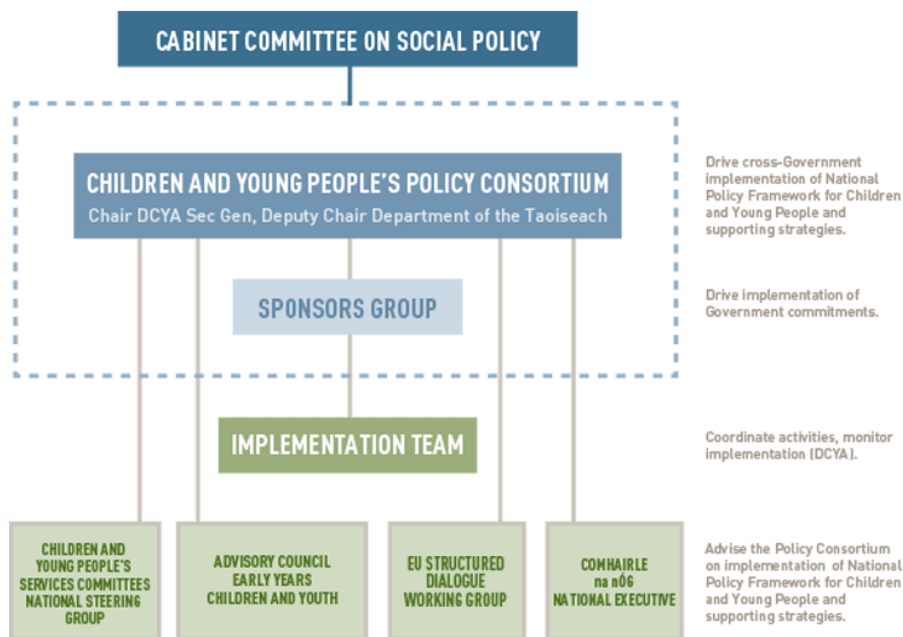
¹⁷ <http://www.environ.ie/en/LocalGovernment/LocalGovernmentAdministration/>



- Key institutional developments include the establishment of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in 2011; the establishment of Tusla, a dedicated Child and Family Agency.
- In parallel, there has been considerable investment in both organisational and area-based programmes to embed evidence-based and evidence informed approaches to prevention and early intervention in working with children and young people. (See Appendix 1)

These developments and associated initiatives provide us with a positive platform spanning policy, infrastructure and provision, from which to align focus and further develop a strategic and coordinated approach to prevention and early intervention. Much of the innovations in developments are being led through the implementation of *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and its robust implementation infrastructure, which is led by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs; overseen by a high level consortium which reports to the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy chaired by the Taoiseach¹⁸; supported by a Sponsors Group where each Sponsor Government Department has responsibility for an outcome area; and informed by an Advisory Council which brings together key representatives from NGOs as well as independent experts.

Figure 1: Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures Implementation Infrastructure



Local infrastructure includes the Children and Young People's Services Committees¹⁹ which operate at county-level. These county level structures are intended to support improved interagency working at a local level and link with the local authority structures and planning arrangements. They are a platform for a

¹⁸ Taoiseach (Irish Prime Minister)

¹⁹ <http://www.cypsc.ie/>



range of agencies to come together to plan and co-ordinate services and activities for children and young people.²⁰

Cross-sectoral priorities

In an effort to effect change on a number of significant and intractable issues, over and above the range of commitments contained in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs requested that the other key Ministries identified as Sponsors would each identify a key theme impacting on children and young people requiring a whole of government response to the effective realisation of better outcomes. This approach identified cross-sectoral priorities that captured and catalysed a range of commitments in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures and which required concerted and collaborative working. The cross-sectoral priority led by the Department of Social Protection is reduction of child poverty through policy and social targets, building on the life-cycle approach of the National Actions Plan for Social Inclusion 2007-2016. Key activities identified include monitoring the child poverty target by the Department using the EU-SILC survey, assessing social impact of budget on children contributing to childcare investment plan and monitoring the effectiveness of social transfers on reducing at risk of poverty rates. In 2015, through a combination of universal and targeted child income supports, the Department of Social Protection spent €3 billion on supporting families with children. These supports have a proven poverty reduction effect. In 2014 social transfers lifted approximately a quarter of all children out of at-risk-of-poverty. This represents a poverty reduction effect of almost 60 per cent and Ireland is among the best performers in the EU in this regard²¹.

Based on adjusted figures, the Government now needs to lift 97,000 children out of consistent poverty.²² To ensure a collaborative approach to addressing this intractable issue, the Department of Social Protection in conjunction with the Advisory Council formed a sub-group comprising of representatives from several Departments as well council members with a view to input into policy measures and actions adopted to tackle child poverty. The Department of Social Protection²³ is currently working on drafting an implementation plan for this priority, which will focus on income support provision and specific service provision required to address child poverty.

In parallel with the above the Department of Children and Youth Affairs identified prevention and early intervention as a key cross-sectoral priority to be addressed in 2015-16 in conjunction with a sub-group of the Advisory Council. This priority is set out in a logic model in Appendix 2. The approach to advancing this priority is informed by progressive universalism: where universal services are the main providers of prevention and early intervention services and therefore need to be inclusive and accessible but also need to provide targeted, effective intervention to further support children at risk. Adopting a focus on prevention and early

²⁰ Their members comprise of the Tusla – The Child and Family Agency, Health Service Executive, an Garda Síochána (Irish Police Force), Education and Training Boards, Irish Primary Principals' Network, National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals, Local Development Companies, City and County Childcare Committees, Probation Services. The Committee regularly engage with the local youth parliament (Comhairle na nÓg).

²¹ EU Survey of Income and Living Conditions 2014

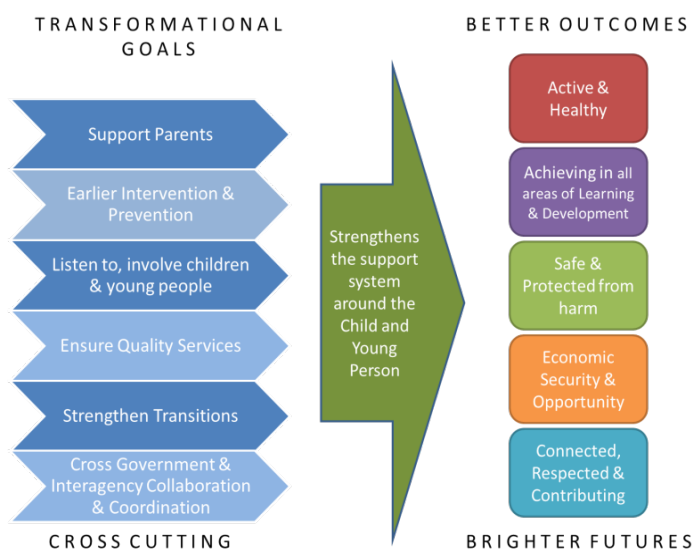
²² The original target adopted in Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures was 70,000 children, a reduction of at least two-thirds on the 2011 level. Since consistent poverty increased between 2011 and 2014, the target was adjusted so that two-third of those in consistent poverty would be lifted out by 2020.

²³ <https://www.welfare.ie/en/Pages/home.aspx>



intervention is a specific strategy to ensure that best use of the learning from the inputs and investments in this area over the past decade is realised and implemented via a systems-wide approach that underpins a re-balancing of resources toward prevention and early intervention.

Both cross-sectoral priorities (addressing child poverty and mainstreaming early intervention and prevention) are viewed as complementary 'companion pieces' in an approach to enhancing positive outcomes for children, particularly those experiencing poverty and social exclusion. In addition, adopting such an approach through the *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* infrastructure underscores the importance accorded in EU policy to aligning responses within a multidimensional approach that connects activation and income payments measures with the provision of quality services, where such a response is predicated on a coordinated and collaborative framework that is horizontal and vertical in scope and reach.



6. Early intervention and prevention services and initiatives

In Ireland there has been a general shift towards prevention and early intervention in the development of policy. This is best illustrated in the approach and commitments contained in *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures* the cross-departmental policy framework for children and young people in Ireland.

This development of this policy framework is evidence-informed, and is in turn informing national, regional and local service or local area-based initiatives aimed at children and their families.

For more than a decade there has been a considerable investment in evidence-based and evidence-informed prevention and early intervention services and programmes, co-funded by the Government and The Atlantic Philanthropies²⁴, in a number of areas such as early childhood, learning, child health and development, child behaviour, parenting and promoting inclusion.

²⁴ Atlantic Philanthropies was founded in 1982 by Irish-American businessman Charles "Chuck" Feeney. They have contributed to programmes to help the disadvantaged in Ireland, and in numerous other countries throughout the world, often co-funding with governments. <http://www.atlanticphilanthropies.org/>



The latest and perhaps most extensive initiative, the Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme (2013-2017) is a prevention and early intervention initiative consisting of committed funding for an area-based approach to implement evidence-based programmes through consortia of agencies and organisations in thirteen geographical areas. The ABC initiative is expected to improve outcomes among children and their parents and contribute to addressing inter-generational poverty where it is most entrenched. However, the ultimate goal is to mainstream learning from the ABC programme, its precursor programmes and other current and related initiatives to respective policy and practice domains, with a view to responding to child poverty and thus improve children's lives in a strategic manner. (More details on previous and current initiatives can be found in Appendix 1).

7. Utilising existing and emerging learning

Rationale

The range of investments in initiatives focusing on the theme of prevention and early intervention have been predicated on - and produced - a considerable amount of learning in terms of approaches that have the capacity to improve the outcomes for children and young people²⁵. In identifying this learning it should be emphasised that such learning does not solely or adequately reside in specific evidence-based programmes. The learning also identifies critical factors such as ensuing policy coherence, coordination, effective implementation, cultivating leadership and development of capacities and competencies at all levels of the system working with children and young people. In the absence of such a systemic approach, it is contended that focusing an over-investment on singular responses, such as an area-based focus, will have limited effect in terms of impact and transferability.

So, while a multidimensional approach to addressing child poverty includes fiscal, activation and service level measures, we must also acknowledge that within these respective approaches a further multidimensional and multidirectional approach is required. There is now a clear need to capture and capitalise on learning in a coordinated and coherent manner to ensure that such learning speaks to and supports the full policy and practice domains and systems working with and for children and young people. The rationale for this is based on ensuring resource effective investment through identifying and mainstreaming the learning and building capacities in the system for transferring and applying such learning.

8. Mainstreaming the learning - developing a systems-wide change programme

Mainstreaming is a contested term and can often be seen exclusively as mainstreaming provision and programmes. In the context of early intervention and prevention in Ireland it is specifically concerned with mainstreaming and utilising learning derived from evaluations, monitoring and assessment processes, referring to and including those from service provision, programmes and practices.

Adopting such a systems focus, rather than an exclusively organisational, area-based or manualised programmatic approach, is regarded as a far more effective

²⁵ Investment over the last decade has amassed significant learning and documentation. Specifically the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme (PEIP) and the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative (PEII) have been key mechanisms through which knowledge has been deepened, skills enhanced, models developed and evidence grown (See Appendix 1). Both programmes required evidence-informed planning of new models of service delivery as well as robust evaluation pre and post introduction of the new services.

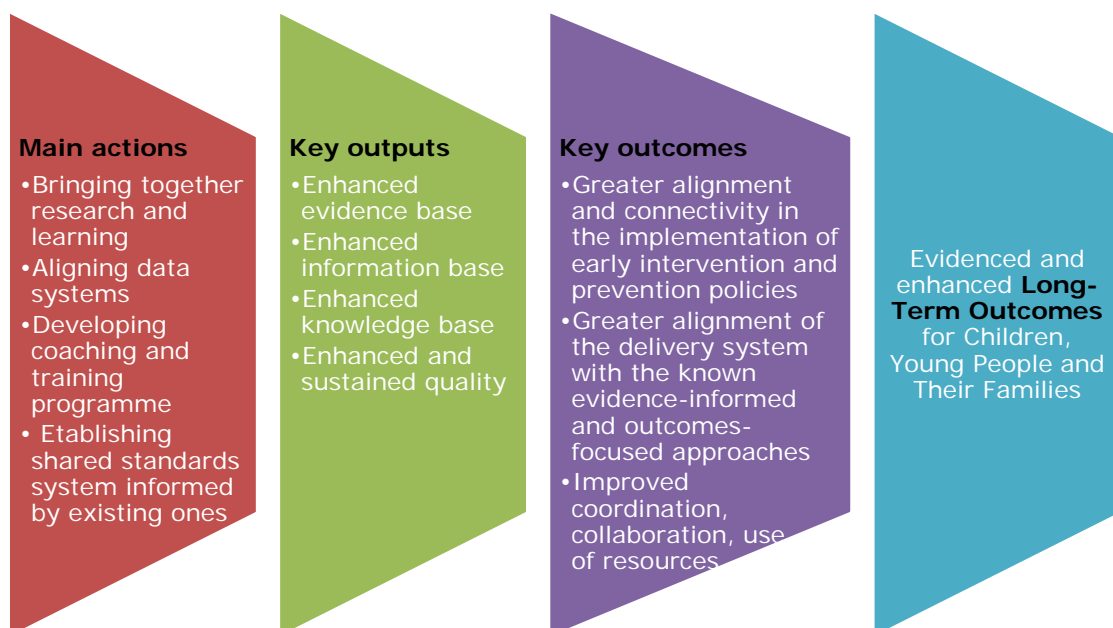


and efficient course of action. Ensuring the development of quality and evidence-informed policies and practices in existing services and supports for children and young people will ensure a greater reach and sustained impact in services across the country. Mainstreaming the learning in this way will bring improvements, not only in specific areas, but across the wider system, thereby addressing all areas of disadvantage. Such an approach should embed innovation in prevention and early intervention into mainstream policy and provision to optimise outcomes for children.

The Department of Children and Youth Affairs is currently developing a Quality and Capacity Building Initiative intended to support this systemic approach. The plan is to develop a coherent and coordinated series of activities to mainstream the learning in prevention and early intervention work with children and young people across a range of policy areas, sectors and practice fields. This ambitious programme is aimed at policy makers, commissioners, sectoral and representative bodies, service delivery organisations and practitioners. The key aims of the programme are as follows:

- Enhancing the **evidence base** by bringing together research and learning from existing and new initiatives
- Enhancing the **information base** by supporting the development and alignment of existing data initiatives and related knowledge management systems.
- Enhancing the **knowledge and skills base** by developing coaching and training programme
- Enhancing and sustaining the **quality base** by the development and implementation of a quality framework for children's services.

The initiative is intended to address deficits and delays in implementation processes, knowledge transfer and coordination, and to stimulate and support sectoral readiness along the continuum spanning policy to provision, with the ultimate aim of improving outcomes for children.



9. Conclusion and possible questions to peer countries

It is contended that such systemic reform in policy, service and practice, in combination with fiscal and activation measures, would go a long way toward aligning and maximising efforts in responding to child poverty and social exclusion. However, in implementing such a complex process key questions need to be examined and answered to ensure that the objective will be fully met.

1. To what degree is there compelling evidence of what works in prevention and early intervention for children, and how is this understood and utilised by stakeholders (policy makers, state agencies, NGOs, practitioners) in other Member States?
2. Is there a clear strategy and budget at national level for prevention and early intervention initiatives designed to improve outcomes for all children and for those experiencing poverty and social exclusion?
3. Are there examples of effective systems-wide (impacting at national level or at a large scale regional level) prevention and early intervention change programmes in your country? Are there good examples of identifying and upscaling evidence-informed local interventions, programmes and practices?
 - If so, how were these achieved?
 - What mechanisms and tools are used to collate and disseminate evidence on approaches and interventions to assess their impact on child poverty and social exclusion?
 - What is the experience of other Member States in incorporating learning from evidence-informed early intervention and prevention into changes in professional practice? What measures were utilised: mentoring, coaching or other innovative methods?
4. Are there particular mechanisms, such as professional and sectoral consortia that have proved effective in implementing early intervention and prevention approaches (e.g. early years' education with family support; formal education collaborating with non-formal education)?
5. What good examples exist in combining universal services with targeted programmes for disadvantaged children with a focus on early intervention and prevention?



Appendix 1: Relevant initiatives

Prevention and Early Intervention Programme (PEIP) (2007-2013)

The Prevention and Early Intervention Programme (PEIP) was co-funded between 2007-2013 by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and The Atlantic Philanthropies (AP). The objective of PEIP was to monitor and evaluate the effectiveness of integrated methods of service delivery and disseminate the learning into policy and services for children in three locations. In 2014, the Centre for Effective Services (CES) compiled the learning from the range of studies and activities of both the PEIP and PEII that offers the following major conclusions:

- i. Because of the importance of early brain development, a strong focus should be placed on supporting children's development from birth to three years.
- ii. Supporting key transitions – such as moving from an early year's service to primary school – can make a significant difference to a child's life outcomes.
- iii. The development of personal skills and aptitudes should be a part of formal and on-going training for all professionals working with children.
- iv. Effective interagency structures are vital to ensuring better services for children, young people and families.
- v. Supporting parents pay real dividends (better outcomes for children).
- vi. Initiatives to support children's learning must promote a love of learning and be clear how they will integrate into the school setting.
- vii. Programmes that support social and emotional learning and promote inclusion should be supported by wider school structures and policies.
- viii. Consulting with local communities helps to ensure that prevention and early intervention services and programmes fit with the needs of children, young people and their families.

Area-Based Childhood Programme

The Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme (2013-2017) is an innovative prevention and early intervention initiative that targets investment in evidence-informed interventions to break "the cycle of child poverty within areas where it is most deeply entrenched and where children are most disadvantaged, through integrated and effective services and interventions". The programme uses internationally acclaimed programmes in the areas of child development, child well-being, parenting and educational disadvantage such as [Triple P Parenting Programme](#), [Incredible Years](#), [Hanan](#), [PAX Good Behaviour Game](#) as well as Irish ones such as [Community Mothers](#). The ABC Programme is funded by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and The Atlantic Philanthropies on a matched basis with €29.7m being provided over the life-cycle of the programme. 13 Sites were approved for entry into the programme including three former Prevention and Early Intervention Programme (PEIP) Sites and are now operationalising services in their consortia sites.

The implementation of the ABC Programme is overseen by an interdepartmental Project Team chaired by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, and includes representatives from seven other Government Departments, several agencies, its funders, as well as the two managing agencies of the Programme, Pobal and the Centre for Effective Services (CES). The evaluation of the ABC Programme adopts a shared measurement framework, identifying common measures to be collected across all ABC sites on core outcomes and implementation processes and focuses on the outcomes achieved by the ABC programmes for children and families directly



involved in the ABC Programme. In the shorter term, work is being carried out with the ABC sites to develop their ability to collect and use data to inform and improve their service delivery at operational, management and strategic levels. In supporting this, each ABC site will be provided with regular reports that summarises evaluation data for their individual Area. As the focus of the ABC programme is more systemic than programmatic in focus, the evaluation will not demonstrate the effectiveness of individual programmes in each ABC area but rather to answer the following three key questions:

- How did the outcomes for children and families in ABC Areas change?
- To what extent did the ABC Programme make progress in implementing evidence-informed programmes and approaches in the ABC Areas?
- What were the costs of services provided under the ABC Programme?

Prevention Partnership and Family Support Programme (2015-2018)

The aim of the programme is to prevent risks to children and young people arising or escalating through performing early intervention work by Tusla and its partners. A major part of this is embedding the [Meitheal National Practice model](#) that ensures coordinated support for children in need. Essential a lead practitioner is required to identify a child's and their family's needs and strengths and then bring together a 'team around the child' that deliver preventative support that is properly planned, is focused on the child's developmental needs. The implementation will be helped by the establishment of child and family networks and designated prevention officers.

Better Start

[Better Start](#) coordinates and extends the wide-ranging choice of supports and services already provided through City and County Childcare Committees and Voluntary Childcare Organisations in respect of early years services for children aged 0-6. This initiative will provide a specialist on-site mentoring service that entails bringing in mentors over a six-month period. Mentors assess early years' services, identify areas for development and develop an agreed plan with quality development goals for the purpose of improving services. The service draws on standards set out in [Siolta, the National Quality Framework](#), and [Aistear, the National Curriculum Framework](#) as well as the [National Council for Curriculum and Assessment's Practice guide](#). Local Childcare Committees identify potential services to participate in the programme including the utilisation of inspection reports; but services engaged in quality development can also approach their local committees. It is expected that an online knowledge centre will be built to share learning and children's qualitative gains will be tracked as part of the mentoring service.

Nurture Infant Health and Wellbeing Programme

The [Nurture Infant Health and Wellbeing Programme](#) is focused on an integrated programme of work, primarily within the Health Service Executive (HSE) to improve health and wellbeing outcomes for infants and their families through strategic reform of universal health and wellbeing services. The activities consist of public information and education, human capital development, the development and implementation of tools and resources, and the development and implementation of an integrated service delivery model. A comprehensive programme of evaluation, research and implementation support will be put in place both to assess programme implementation and outcomes and to feed into wider learning for policy and practice. In addition, an Infant Development Fund will be established to support innovation in service design and implementation.



Appendix 2: Department of Children and Youth Affairs: 2015 Cross-sectoral Priority – PREVENTION AND EARLY INTERVENTION

Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures is the Government's overarching **National Policy Framework** for children and young people (aged 0-24 years). This **cross-government approach** will run from 2014 until 2020 and accommodate a number of constituent strategies. The Framework sets out common outcomes, policy commitments and key actions to ensure innovative and effective ways of working. The underpinning **principles** will ensure that policy and practice protect the rights of children and young people, are family-oriented, promote equality and are evidence-informed and outcomes-focused. The **vision** is to make Ireland the best small country in the world in which to grow up and raise a family, and 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.

Enhancing effective prevention and early intervention to ensure better outcomes for children and young people.

This 2015 priority will:

Work towards rebalancing emphasis and resources from crisis intervention towards prevention and early intervention, while ensuring an effective crisis intervention response at all times.

Related commitments include:

- **Interagency work and resource allocation** (G47, G48, G52, G66, G67, G68 and Implementation Commitment 3)
- **Prevention and Early Intervention** (G1, G2, G7, G5, G6, G8, G13)
- **Identification and assessment** (G12, G24, G46)
- **Effective transitions** (G33)
- **Child protection and protocols:** (G40, G55, 4.1, 4.2)
- **Planned, accessible, integrated and effective services** (G10, G22, G25, G26, G49, 1.6, 1.13 – 15, 3.20, 5.1, 5.12)
- **Enhance ante-natal and early childhood development** (G6)
- **Primary Health and Health Promotion** (G9, 1.1, 1.7, 1.8, 1.11, 1.12)
- **Reconfiguration and enhancement of disability and special needs services** (G31, 2.18, 2.20)



Structures:

- *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* structures
- ABC Interdepartmental Project Team
- ABC Areas
- Local CYPSCs
- Existing partner structures, e.g. Healthy Ireland Council, Social Inclusion Forum.

Programmes, initiatives and processes:

- PEIP, ABC and DEIS programmes
- National Early Years Quality Support Service
- Tusla's Meitheal approach and the set-up of Child and Family Support Networks
- Philanthropic investment in prevention and early intervention initiatives

Policy:

- Existing commitments in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures*
- Existing commitments in *Healthy Ireland*
- Early Years Strategy
- Youth Strategy and VfM on Youth programme
- High Level Policy Statement on Supporting Parents and Families

Information, research and evaluation:

- Development of county-level datasets
- Learning captured from evidence informed approaches and best practices in prevention and early intervention

Key Partners: DH, DES, DJE, Tusla, HSE, Community and Voluntary sector, Prevention and Early Intervention Network.



Structures:

- Develop clear and effective connections and coordination between CYPSCs and LCDCs and constituent agencies (e.g. Tusla's implementation of Meitheal) to ensure a focus on prevention and early intervention for children and young people.
- Reconstituted CYPSC National Steering Group ensuring prevention and early intervention focus in the blueprint for development of CYPSCs and in all CYPSC plans.
- ABC Interdepartmental Project Team to give preliminary consideration of findings from mainstreaming group on evidence-informed approaches in November.
- Interdepartmental Group on Future Investment in Early Years Care and Education.

Programmes, initiatives and processes:

- Implement quality frameworks and curricula in Early Years settings and sustained development of quality framework in youth sector.
- Design and deliver ABC Mentoring Programme.
- Establish mainstreaming group to examine the optimum transfer of learning in relation to evidence-informed prevention and early intervention approaches.
- Develop framework/guidance document for commissioning/securing better outcomes in the area of prevention and early intervention.

Policy:

- Progress prevention and early intervention commitments in *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures* and *Healthy Ireland* and in the strategies of key partners.
- Publish and implement Early Years Strategy, Youth Strategy, High Level Policy Statement on Supporting Parents and Families, National Physical Activity Plan, National Obesity Strategy, National Sexual Health Strategy.

Information, research and evaluation to ensure

prevention and early intervention informed focus via:

- Update and refinement of county-level data.
- Develop Outcome Indicator Set.
- Identify and disseminate available learning from ABC, PEII, PEIN, NEYA and DEIS.
- Publication of scoping exercise re. estimate on cross-

Structures:

- Better coordinated, coherent and connected policy and provision focusing on effective prevention and early intervention.
- Enhanced interagency working through national and local infrastructures focusing on key outcomes for children and young people.

Programmes, initiatives and processes:

- ABC areas will have commenced mainstreaming of prevention and early intervention approaches.
- Evidence-informed approaches are identified and implemented across sectors according to desired outcomes, age range and need.
- Enhanced implementation capacities and skills within sectors.
- Clearly aligned mandates and work programmes focusing on effective prevention and early intervention for children and young people.

Policy:

- Mainstreaming of effective programmes and practices.
- Provision of effective, quality services that improve outcomes for children and young people in the 5 national outcome areas.

Information, research and evaluation:

- Enhanced evidence and knowledge base informing policy and provision in Ireland.
- Better informed planning and targeting of resources.
- Funding aligned to the effective implementation of evidence-informed approaches.

drive implementation, address challenges and propose priorities. The **Children and Young People's Services Committees National Steering Group** will drive national to local implementation. The **Advisory Council** will guide and support implementation. **Comhairle na nÓg National Executive** and the **EU Structured Dialogue Working Group** will guide implementation and ensure youth participation and active input.

Monitoring and evaluation

- Annual reporting on implementation and achievement of commitments.
- Development of Outcome Indicator Set.
- Consortium structure to oversee implementation.

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