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CHILD AND FAMILY RESEARCH CENTRE



NUI Galway
OÉ Gaillimh



Institute for
Lifecourse and Society

Commissioning Work Package Final Report

Key Findings

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Development and Mainstreaming Programme for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support (PPFS)

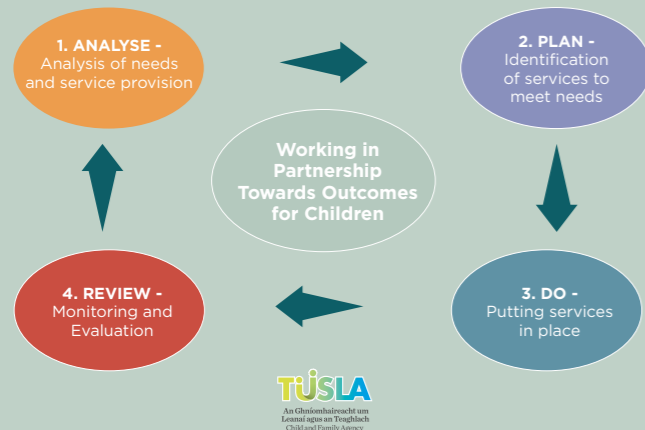
This is a programme of action being undertaken by Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, as part of its National Service Delivery Framework. The programme seeks to embed prevention and early intervention into the culture and operation of Tusla. The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway has undertaken an evaluation study focusing on the implementation of and the outcomes from the PPFS Programme. The study's overall research question is:

Is the organisational culture and practice of Tusla and its partners changing such that services are more integrated, preventative, evidence informed and inclusive of children and parents? If so, is this contributing to improved outcomes for children and their families?

We have adopted a Work Package approach reflecting the key components of the PPFS Programme. The five work packages are: Meitheal and Child and Family Support Networks, Children's Participation, Parenting Support and Parental Participation, Public Awareness and Commissioning. While stand-alone studies in their own right, each Work Package contributes to the overall assessment of the programme.

What is the Commissioning Work Package?

In 2014, Tusla started implementing a commissioning model in order to ensure that the total resources available for children and families are applied to improving outcomes in the most efficient, equitable, proportionate and sustainable way. The commissioning process encompasses a cycle of activities for identifying, meeting and monitoring area-based needs (current and future) that takes place in collaboration with stakeholders and responds in a cost-effective, evidence-informed manner.



Tusla undertook to implement a three-year commissioning plan accompanied by a commitment to training and capacity building activities both internally and with external service providers to support this new approach.

What is the focus of this report?

Our study of Tusla's Commissioning activities was guided by the following objectives:

1. To determine whether Tusla's service commissioning is increasingly rigorous and evidence-informed and if it privileges prevention and early intervention.
2. To establish the value of Tusla's activities in increasing provider capacity to undertake evidence-informed commissioning for services.
3. To determine the impact on the service provision landscape for children and families.

How was the research conducted?

The evaluation is a multi-method, primarily qualitative study, involving three discrete interview based qualitative sub-studies, documentary analysis and a limited set of quantitative financial data. The Research Team focused on Tusla's activities in relation to:

- Development of Area Commissioning Plans
- Establishment of a national Commissioning Unit
- Provision of guidance and resources
- Management of Provider Relationships

WHAT ARE THE KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS?

Overall, the case for commissioning, founded on a number of well-established principles related to transparency and accountability resonates within Tusla and with key external stakeholders. The terminology of commissioning is embedded in the language and corporate identity of the agency. Through the methodology of Area Commissioning Plans, understanding of commissioning as a set of related practices has evolved. The introduction of commissioning has identified a number of opportunities and challenges including the opportunity to address 'legacy' funding arrangements and to remove duplication and gaps in provision.

The approach developed by Tusla has engendered a certain amount of goodwill within the Community and Voluntary Sector as regards its intent. In particular, commissioning is accepted as having a distinct, capacity-building approach and recognised as having differentiated itself from the UK-based procurement model. Nevertheless, within the sector, a predominant perception of commissioning remains focused on the rationalisation and economic elements associated with reducing costs. This view equates commissioning with procurement practices associated with competitive tendering.

Tusla has developed a range of good quality strategic and operational materials on commissioning. Key guidance documents and tools make an explicit commitment to collaboration with the Community and Voluntary Sector in capacity-building for and implementing commissioning.



By early 2018, the commissioning infrastructure, including the planned scope and structures underpinning the Commissioning Unit were in place. Tusla has identified what will be commissioned at national, local, regional and individual levels. A fundamental commitment to supporting local commissioning underlies the strategy.

As a result of the Area Planning process, a standardised and coherent approach to commissioning practice is in place for adaption throughout the country. Early commissioning work focused on capacity building particularly within Tusla and primarily on the Commissioning Cycle, with some involvement of the Community and Voluntary Sector as stakeholders. In the context of Parenting Support, a commissioning framework is in development that demonstrates a commitment to using evidence in commissioning parenting support programmes. Much remains to be done in developing 'commissionee capacity' of stakeholders and in working effectively in partnership.

In mid-2017, a revised Service Agreement format and Governance Framework was developed to underpin future funding relationships with Community and Voluntary providers, involving consultation with that sector. Under the new governance arrangements, interaction between Tusla and external service providers has become more formalised with greater emphasis on documented processes and standardisation. The provisions contained in the new Service Agreement and Good Governance Framework will test the capacity of the Community and Voluntary Sector to respond. Ensuring that the formalities of contractual relationships do not diminish the principle of partnership working will be critical, requiring a commitment by Tusla to continued dialogue and ongoing consultation with representatives of the sector.

Conclusions and Recommendations

The study concludes that Tusla has undertaken significant work in building solid foundations for the long-term implementation of commissioning in the organisation. Specifically, the development of the Commissioning Unit, the creation and ongoing development of materials, the development of a revised Service Agreement, and critically, the piloting of a commissioning model at local level represent key achievements that will support future implementation. Significant work on building commissioning capacity, broadly understood, remains to be done in order to build and support the capacity of external organisations to engage effectively with commissioning.



The development of a framework for evidence is only at the early stages. Findings highlight:

- o the complexity of outcome measurement in the child protection and welfare field;
- o the capacity for engaging with issues of outcomes, evaluation and evidence exists in only a small number of organisations; and
- o the opportunity for Tusla to develop more meaningful outcomes by engaging with providers, particularly in niche provision areas.

Findings indicate the need to build capacity in this area to generate useful service outcome data and to analyse data for system improvement purposes. There is a significant gap in meaningful data on prevention, early intervention and Family Support provision. Tusla has trialled a methodology to systematically capture the nature of the service mix provided by externally funded organisations, which demonstrates the potential value of such approaches to local and national commissioning activity.



About the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre

The UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre (UCFRC) is part of the Institute for Lifecourse and Society at the National University of Ireland, Galway. It was founded in 2007, through support from The Atlantic Philanthropies, Ireland and the Health Service Executive, with a base in the School of Political Science and Sociology, the mission of the Centre is to help create the conditions for excellent policies, services and practices that improve the lives of children, youth and families through research education and service development. The UCFRC has an extensive network of relationships and research collaborations internationally and is widely recognised for its core expertise in the areas of Family Support and Youth Development.



List of Publications for the Public Awareness Work Package:

- Shaw, A. and Canavan, J. (2016) *Commissioning in Ireland: Exploring the Landscape for Child and Family Services*, Galway: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway.
- Shaw, A. and Canavan, J. (2017) *Introducing Commissioning in Ireland: Establishing a Baseline*, Galway: UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway.
- Shaw, A. and Canavan, J. (2018) *Commissioning Work Package Final Report: Tusla's Programme for Prevention, Partnership and Family Support*. UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway.



Further Information

If you would like to read the Commissioning Work Package Final Report, or any of the publications listed above please visit our website www.nuigalway.ie/childandfamilyresearch

If you have any questions on our research, please email cfrc@nuigalway.ie

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