

## **DRAFT Terms of Reference of the Early Learning and Childcare Stakeholder Forum (Dec 2020)**

### **Introduction**

The Early Learning and Childcare Stakeholder Forum (ELCSF) is the main consultation mechanism between the Early Years division of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (the Department) and the stakeholders in the early learning and care and school age childcare sector.

### **Objectives**

The high level objectives of the ELCSF are to

- Support evidence based decision making and policy making, informed by the sector
- Give stakeholders the opportunity to develop, and deliver on, a shared vision with the Department
- Give stakeholders the opportunity to raise issues with the Minister and the Department and to contribute to the design of solutions
- Ensure that all members have up to date and accurate information
- Enable the Department to canvass stakeholder views
- Support networking between all members (stakeholders and officials)
- Support the professionalisation of the ELC and SAC sector

### **ELCSF guiding principles**

The ELCSF will adhere to the following core principals of stakeholder engagement (as set out in the Government publication 'Consultation Principles & Guidance')

- **Commitment** – is demonstrated when the need to understand, engage and identify with stakeholders is recognised and acted upon early in the process,
- **Integrity** – occurs when engagement is conducted in a manner that fosters mutual respect,
- **Respect** – is created when the views of all stakeholders are considered and not dismissed,
- **Transparency** – is demonstrated when engagement is open, fair and where concerns raised are responded to in a timely manner and
- **Inclusiveness** – is achieved when broad participation is encouraged and supported by appropriate participation opportunities.

## **Membership**

The membership of the ELCSF will be made up of stakeholder groups representing children, families, childcare providers, childcare staff, academics and other groups with an interest in early learning and childcare. State bodies and agencies involved in the regulation or delivery of early learning and childcare services, or the development or delivery of policies which impact on early learning and childcare will also be members of the Forum, including Tusla, Pobal, CCI and the Department of Education.

The ELCSF is a consultative forum and members will share their views and experiences with the Department and other members in an open and mutually respectful manner.

The membership of the Forum as of 21 December 2020 is included in the Annex. The Minister may invite additional members to join the Forum.

## **Meetings**

The ELCSF will meet two to three times a year. Meetings in late 2020 and early 2021 will be on-line, but resumption of some in-person meetings will resume once permitted under Covid guidelines.

Meetings will be chaired by the Department. Minutes will be circulated a week prior to the meetings with draft agenda and will include a call for additional agenda items. Minutes, once approved by the ELCSF will be published on the Department's website.

Members or their representative organisations will cover their costs associated with attendance at meetings.

## **Communications**

The Department will email regular updates to the ELCSF, including the regular Early Years e-bulletin, and copies of emails to providers, press releases and relevant reports.

Consultations between the EYSF meetings will use a variety of methods.

## **ELCSF sub-groups**

A series of ELCSF sub-groups will be established to support focused consultation on key issues. Sub-groups of different composition will be established to advise on a range of issues; some may exist for a short term only, others may remain in place for more substantial periods.

The Department will provide a chair and secretariat for each sub-group.

Decisions regarding membership of the sub-groups will be overseen by the Department based on the issue at hand, the need for an appropriate stakeholder mix on the sub-group, and having regard to the interests of each member. Sub-group places will be filled in various ways:

- The Department may ask members of the ELCSF to nominate members.
- DCEDIY may ask representative groups to nominate members from their organisations.
- Where a specific expertise is needed, the Department may nominate ELCSF members to a sub-group and may co-opt non-EYSF members where additional expertise is needed.

## **Review of Terms of Reference**

These Terms of Reference will be reviewed annually.

## **Membership of the Early Learning and Childcare Stakeholder Forum (December 2020)**

### **Groups representing ELC and SAC providers**

- Early Childhood Ireland
- National Childhood Network
- Childminding Ireland
- Seas Suas
- Association of Childhood Professionals (ACP)
- National Forum for Community Childcare Services
- Steiner Early Childhood Association
- Federation of Early Childhood Providers
- Association of Fulltime Day-care Providers
- Childhood Services Ireland (CSI)

### **Staff representatives**

- SIPTU
- ACP (listed above as a provider representative also).
- Saint Nicholas Montessori Association
- Men in Childcare Network Ireland

### **NGOs promoting early learning and care**

- PLÉ (Pedagogy, Learning and Education Association)
- OMEP Ireland

### **NGOs representing parents and children**

- Children's Rights Alliance
- Barnardos
- National Parents Council.
- Treoir
- Immigrant Council of Ireland
- Saint Vincent de Paul
- Disability Federation of Ireland

### **Irish language groups**

- Gaeloideachas
- Comhar Naíonraí na Gaeltachta

### **Departmental and other agencies**

- DCECIY
- Department of Education
- Tusla Inspectorate
- Pobal
- Childcare Committees Ireland