

PRESS RELEASE



**An Roinn Leanaí, Comhionannais,
Míchumais, Lánpháirtíochta agus Óige**
Department of Children, Equality,
Disability, Integration and Youth

Minister O’Gorman Appoints Programme Board to Oversee Planning for a dedicated State Agency for Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC)

- **Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, Roderic O’Gorman, today announced the appointment of a Programme Board to oversee the design and implementation planning phase for a dedicated State agency for Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC) in Ireland.**

Monday 21 February

In March 2022 Government approved the findings of the independent [Review of the Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare Operating Model in Ireland](#) which concluded that a dedicated State agency is the optimal operating model for ELC and SAC for the years ahead. This agency will be responsible for the functions currently undertaken by Pobal (Early Years), Better Start and the City/County Childcare Committees, as well as the operational functions currently undertaken by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. This agency will support the delivery of accessible, affordable and high-quality ELC and SAC services for children and their families and the significant reform agenda for ELC and SAC committed to by Government.

The Department has commenced a period of detailed analysis, planning, engagement and consultation in respect of this programme of reform, and this work will be overseen by a Programme Board.

The Programme Board is chaired by the Secretary General of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth and comprises the following members:

- Kevin McCarthy (Chair) Secretary General Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

- Sylva Langford, former Director General of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs
- Michael Kelly, Former Chair of the Higher Education Authority and former Secretary General of the Department of Health
- Professor Eva Lloyd OBE, Professor of Early Childhood in the School of Education and Communities and the Director of International Centre for the Study of the Mixed Economy of Childcare, University of East London
- Pat McLoughlin, former CEO of the Alzheimer Society of Ireland
- Representatives of the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth, the Department of the Taoiseach, the Department of Rural and Community Development, the Department of Education, and the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer

The Programme Board will oversee the initial phase of this significant programme of reform which will entail examining all aspects of the creation of the new agency. The Programme Board will oversee a range of work stream groups and a programme management office, make recommendations on the key design and costing decisions throughout the project to ensure that this work progresses in a timely manner, and provide evidence-based recommendations to the Minister, following international best practice. A key component of this work will be ensuring that the views of a wide range of stakeholders are sought throughout the process to help shape the design of the new agency.

It is expected the Programme Board will be in place throughout 2023 and 2024. The work of the Board will inform future proposals of the Minister for Government agreement on the establishment of the new agency.

Minister O’Gorman said:

“I am happy to announce the appointment of the Programme Board to oversee the planning for a dedicated ELC and SAC agency. This Programme Board possesses an excellent mix of experience and expertise and will ensure that proposals for a new agency are based on offering the best possible service to children and their families, educators and practitioners and providers while providing value for money. I also welcome the strong representation from other government departments on this Board highlighting the whole of government commitment to the delivery of accessible, affordable and high-quality ELC and SAC services. The process will involve close consultation with all of the relevant stakeholders and a strong focus on business continuity and continuing improvement through our existing partner agencies in a time of exciting development for the sector. I look forward to following the work of the Programme Board in this very important task.”

ENDS

NOTES TO EDITOR

Review of the Operating Model

A review and redesign of the Early Learning and Care (ELC) and School-Age Childcare (SAC) operating model in Ireland was committed to *in First 5, the whole of Government Strategy to improve the lives of babies, young children and their families*. The purpose of this review was to ensure that the operating model (which operates across multi-level structures and organisations) is equipped to deal with the significant reform agenda envisaged for the ELC and SAC sector in the years ahead, including the introduction of a new funding model, a new workforce plan, the regulation of paid non-relative childminders.

An independent review of the existing model, whilst acknowledging the very many strengths inherent within the model, identified several key weaknesses, and ultimately concluded that a dedicated statutory agency is the optimal operating model for the sector for the years ahead. This finding aligns with the commitment in the Programme for Government to establish a dedicated agency for ELC and SAC. This new agency will undertake the functions currently carried out by Pobal Early Years and the 30 City/County Childcare Committees (CCCs) which include administering national ELC and SAC funding programmes, providing programme support, delivering training, and providing advice to families.

In March 2022, Government accepted the findings of the independent review of the ELC and SAC operating model that a dedicated agency should replace the existing model. Government tasked the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) with commencing a phase of detailed design and implementation planning to establish, inter-alia, the functions and design of this new agency alongside a comprehensive evidence-based cost projection for its establishment and annual running costs.

This next phase of work is already underway. This has included extensive stakeholder engagement. Feedback to date has been positive, as the shared aim of the sector is to better meet the needs of children and their families, providers, educators, and practitioners.

Programme Board Member Biographies

Ms. Sylva Langford

Sylva Langford was the Director General of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs until her retirement in 2010. Prior to this, she was an Assistant Secretary General in the Department of Justice Equality and Law Reform where she led a review to examine the scope for rationalising and restructuring the delivery of State services provided for under the Children Act 2001. She chaired an Expert Working Group which proposed the first National Childcare Strategy for the management and development of the childcare sector and led on the implementation of this strategy. She has worked in the Department of Social Welfare, the Office of the Ombudsman, the Eastern Health Board and the National Social Service Council. She has extensive experience in policy and legislative work across a broad range of government areas. She is a former member of the Board of the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) and of the Board of Oberstown Children Detention Campus. She has a professional background in social policy and social work and is a graduate of University College Cork and the London School of Economics.

Mr. Pat McLoughlin

Pat McLoughlin served as CEO of The Alzheimer Society of Ireland from 2016 to 2022. Prior to that he was Chief Executive of the Irish Payment Services Organisation and worked as a management consultant. He served on the management teams of four health boards and was Chief Executive of the South Eastern Health Board and Eastern Health Board. He served as the first National Director of the National Hospitals office and Deputy CEO of the HSE. He has also served as a member of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure, and the Independent Review Group on the Department of Justice and Equality.

Professor Eva Lloyd

Eva Lloyd is a Professor of Early Childhood in the School of Education and Communities at the University of East London. She is the Director of The International Centre for the Study of the Mixed Economy of Childcare which she co-founded in 2007. For over three decades Professor Lloyd has specialised in the study of national and international early childhood education and care policies and systems, particularly marketised systems, and their impact on children growing up with disadvantage.

Professor Lloyd has extensive experience working with national and international policymakers at central government level and with non-governmental organisations. She co-authored a range of UK government commissioned policy studies and evaluations, and advised the UK Department for Education and Department of Health on the development and implementation of early childhood policy. She has also served as member of an Expert Group for the First 5 Funding Model Review commissioned by DCEDIY to develop a new funding model for its early learning and care and school-age childcare systems. She held policy and research positions at Save the Children UK and at Barnardo's and was CEO of the National Early Years Network. Professor Lloyd holds the post of Visiting Professor at University College London and is attached to its Thomas Coram Research Unit. In 2013 Eva Lloyd was awarded an OBE for services to education.

Mr. Michael Kelly

Michael Kelly is a Director and Managing Partner in Governance Ireland. He has wide experience of the public sector and of public management, with a particular focus on organisation re-structuring, change management, human resources and related issues. He previously served in a number of senior roles in the public service including as Chair of the Higher Education Authority, Secretary General of the Department of Health, and Deputy Secretary in the Department of Justice. He also served as a member of the Public Service Pay Commission. He is a member of the Institute of Directors and a director (and previously chair) of the Corporate Governance Association of Ireland.

Issued by the Press and Communications Office at the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.

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