

Update on the implementation of previous recommendations made by the Committee of Public Accounts to the then Department of Children and Youth Affairs following the Committee's engagement of 13 June 2019

- [Committee of Public Accounts \(32nd Dáil\) - Periodic Report No. 7, April 2019 – July 2019](#)
- [Minute of the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform, June 2020](#)

	Recommendations from the Committee of Public Accounts	Minute of the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform	Update on progress of implementing the Committee's recommendations
1.	<p>It is unacceptable that 6,000 children had not been allocated a social worker by Tusla even though the Department surrendered €58.7m to the Exchequer in 2017.</p> <p>The Committee recommends that the Department of Children and Youth Affairs works with Tusla to ensure that all children requiring a social worker are allocated one and that gaps in the system are eliminated, especially where funding has been provided.</p>	<p>The Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform is informed by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs that it accepts this recommendation.</p> <p>The Minister is informed by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, that it is important to note that Tusla's issue in the recruitment of social workers was not related to availability of additional funding. In fact, Tusla's challenge is in recruiting social workers, where there is a shortage of personnel both in Ireland and internationally. In addition, the money returned to the Exchequer in 2017 was not related to Tusla, but mainly to Early Years schemes, where it was extremely difficult to predict uptake of expanded schemes late in that year. There are approximately 215 social worker graduates annually, a rate that is insufficient to meet demand across all adult and child services.</p> <p>Due to the complex nature of child welfare and protection work and case load volumes, retention of social workers is also a challenge. Tusla has increased its cohort of employed social workers by 139 whole time equivalents</p>	<p>There were 1,668.93 whole time equivalent (WTE) social workers in Tusla as of December 2021. This is a 9% increase on the number employed in 2019 (1,532.75) and almost the same as the number employed in December 2020 (1669.42).</p> <p>Recruitment and retention of social workers in child protection remains challenging, due to the small number of available graduates each year and to the various employment opportunities for social workers in Ireland's health and social care sectors.</p> <p>DCEDIY convened a Social Work Education Group to work with social work employers, higher education institutions and other stakeholders including government departments to increase the number of available places on professional social work training courses. As a result of the work of the group social workers are now on the Critical Skills Employment List, allowing social workers from outside the EEA to work in Ireland.</p>

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		<p>over the last number of years and also uses agency social workers where necessary to ensure all vulnerable children receive a service. In addition to this, Tusla is investing in IT supports and recruiting business support staff to carry out administrative functions associated with social work activity. This frees up social workers to concentrate on core professional services.</p> <p>Tusla has also developed a workforce strategy which, in addition to setting out recruitment strategies, also targets supports to front line staff to include resilience training and health and wellbeing measures to improve retention rates. The Department is also working with the education sector to consider how best to increase the number of social work graduate places over the coming years.</p> <p>In relation to children requiring a social worker, progress is being made. At the end of August 2019 just over 5,000 open cases with Tusla did not have an allocated social worker. This represents a 21% (1,365) reduction in unallocated cases from 31 December 2018. It should also be noted, that the absence of an allocated social worker does not mean a child at risk is not receiving appropriate social work services.</p> <p>The majority of the unspent monies in 2017 related to the Early Learning and School Age Childcare allocations. Numbers enrolling under the ECCE scheme were lower than originally</p>	<p>DCEDIY has also supported the development, by third level institutions, of a social work placement initiative which is seeking to increase the number of the placements social work students need to complete their skills. These placements take place in all settings in which social workers are employed, including Tusla and disability services.</p> <p>Additional places have come on-stream in recent years by way of new social work courses and additional places to current courses. An increase of 5% in training placements was achieved in 2021.</p> <p>Further progress will be required to meet the demand for qualified social workers, in Tusla and adult services, in the short- to medium term, and it is DCEDIY's expectation that the number of trainee placements will continue to increase year-on-year.</p> <p>Tusla has committed to offer all suitably qualified graduates who meet recruitment requirements employment in 2022</p> <p>DCEDIY is engaging with the Department of Health's Health and Social Care Workforce Planning Strategy and Action Plan and Planning Projection Model for Ireland, which will include social work. At the end of Q4 2021 there were 21,248 cases open to social work. Of those 77% were allocated to a named social worker, a</p>

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		<p>planned for. In 2017, improvements were made to the scheme, and provision was made for a potential 100% take-up rate. In the event, the actual take-up rate was 94%. The shortfall in ECCE enrolments also led to a lower than anticipated engagement in AIM programme for children with special needs by pre-school providers and parents. Further savings arose on other schemes due to lower than expected uptake during 2017.</p> <p>As the Early Learning and School Age Childcare programme year commences each September and can often have fluid movement of children between schemes, it is often very late in the financial year before the Department can fully determine what, if any, savings might arise. The under-spending of the magnitude that occurred in 2017 has not been repeated in subsequent years.</p>	<p>slight decrease on the figure report at end Q4 2020 (80%).</p> <p>Tusla has stated its intention to examine in full the impact of targeted measures to increase allocation of cases in five areas of the country with higher levels of unallocated cases. The Department is due to receive an update on this work in June 2022.</p> <p>It should be noted again that the absence of an allocated social worker does not mean that a child or family do not receive a social work service. HIQA has commented favourably in inspection reports on risk mitigation strategies such as visits to children in care by social care workers under the supervision of a social work team leader, and the operation of 'duty' social work systems within fostering teams and child protection and welfare teams to respond to urgent need.</p>
2.	<p>It is not clear that contracts with private agencies to provide residential and foster care services are appropriately managed. These contracts provided services for 260 children at a cost of €100m in 2017 and many of the contracts were in place prior to Tusla's establishment.</p> <p>The Committee recommends that Tusla reviews all contracts with private agencies for the provision of residential</p>	<p>The Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform is informed by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs that it accepts this recommendation.</p> <p>The Minister is informed by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, that Tusla made considerable efforts to minimise costs during 2017 in an environment of increasing challenge to provide these services. In response to the recommendation, Tusla has confirmed that two separate review processes</p>	<p>Increased demand for residential care has placed significant cost pressures on Tusla in recent years. It has been the main contributing factor to overspending and the requirement for additional funding in 2019 and 2020.</p> <p>In 2020, IGEES and the Department conducted a spending review of Tusla residential care costs. The review noted a growing reliance on private residential care</p>

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	and foster care services.	have been established in respect of foster care and residential care. The outcome of these procurement review processes will put in place new contract arrangements for these services.	<p>providers for both mainstream and specialised placements, as well as a trend towards smaller numbers of children per residential care settings.</p> <p>In 2020, Tusla reported €7.3m of non-compliant contracts (not all relating to residential services). In the period from 2020 to 2021, Tusla carried out a number of key procurement exercises, including residential services, which has reduced the value of non-compliant contracts.</p> <p>The Department has provided budget increases for Tusla in 2021 and 2022. This funding is expected to allow Tusla to increase mainstream, Tusla owned and operated residential care provision, and capital budget is available to purchase new units of accommodation.</p> <p>Tusla has developed a three year Residential Care Strategy (2022-2025). It is the ambition of this strategy to increase public residential capacity by an additional 104 beds and to achieve 50:50 private:public provision by 2025.</p>
3.	The rate of non-compliance of childcare service providers in relation to the childcare schemes they receive payments for can be attributed to the lack of clarity regarding the qualifying	<p>The Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform is informed by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs that it accepts this recommendation.</p> <p>The Minister is informed by the Department of</p>	<p>Numerous actions have been implemented to provide and ensure ongoing clarity to scheme qualifying criteria as to reduce incidents of non compliance arising from lack of clarity. These include:</p>

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	<p>criteria for these schemes.</p> <p>The Committee recommends that the Department of Children and Youth Affairs works to clarify the criteria of the childcare schemes and takes appropriate steps to communicate any changes to such criteria more effectively.</p>	<p>Children and Youth Affairs, that a number of factors influence non-compliance rates, one of which has traditionally been lack of clarity re qualifying criteria. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs has taken several steps to improve this, including a major review of scheme rules for 2017/18 to better ground the payment subsidies on child attendance. This was undertaken in consultation with the Chief States Solicitor's Office (CSSO).</p> <p>The National Childcare Scheme, which was introduced on November 2019 has very clear rules and strengthens the link between attendance and subsidy, providing a direct link between an attendance return and a payment. It ensures clarity of ruleset, grounded in both primary and secondary legislation, further developed in a set of comprehensive policy guidelines.</p> <p>The Department of Children and Youth Affairs communicates scheme requirements through various channels, including the publication of scheme rules, communications with providers, training and supports offered through local City/County Childcare Committees, and information available online and by phone. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs is committed to continuing to improve communications. The consolidation of several schemes into the single National Childcare Scheme, with one set of rules, should also assist in this regard.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under the National Childcare Scheme (NCS) there are a number of additional measures to simplify and clarify the award of subvention and hours for both parents and providers. A tool on the NCS website allows parents to calculate the subvention rate and number of hours they are entitled to before they formally apply. Once a parent has made their application a Childcare Identifier Code Key (CHICK) is generated by the system. This CHICK contains the information on their award (the rate of subvention and the number of subvented hours they are entitled to). The service provider can then enter this into the Early Years Platform (EYP) in order to register the child. This removes the uncertainty that existed on both the The Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) and The Community Childcare Subvention Plus (CCSP) schemes where a child could be registered on the wrong Band (subvention rate) thus creating an overclaim. • The migration of all schemes onto the Early Years Platform (EYP) and the development of a compliance function on the EYP, which will launch for all schemes in the upcoming programme

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		<p>An extensive training and communications campaign has been undertaken in the lead up to the introduction of the National Childcare Scheme to inform providers and parents of the criteria and eligibility for the new scheme. A suite of resources is also available to parents and providers providing key information and guidance on the scheme and their respective responsibilities and is available on the dedicated National Childcare Scheme website at https://www.ncs.gov.ie.</p>	<p>year, will see better oversight and a reduced administrative burden. NCS, which is already on the EYP, allows for service providers to rectify non-compliant actions and this is being extended to all schemes from the start of the 2022/2023 programme cycle.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Compliance function for NCS began in September 2021 with desk based inspections and onsite inspections commenced in November 2021. Strong clarity on schematic rules and the clear link between attendance and subsidy is evident in compliance outcomes as the average number of non-compliant checks for NCS to date is 2.7 checks per service out of a total of 28 checks. This is further supported with overclaims identified, as a percentage of funding allocation reviewed, currently standing at 1.48%. This compares favourably to potential overclaims identified on the CCSP scheme in 2019/2020 at 3.3%. However, it must be noted that basis of direct comparison is limited as NCS overclaims are based on actual overclaims for a 6 month period while CCSP overclaim at 3.3% in 2019/2020 is based on extrapolated overclaims for a full year. • It is noted NCS overclaims (1.48%), as

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			<p>a percentage, are higher than ECCE overclaims (0.6%). This is largely attributable to the scheme rules where payment is linked to hours of attendance rather than attendance for a session. Due to this added safeguard it is more likely for overclaims to arise as the NCS scheme imposes firmer and more stringent rules on the subsidy being linked to actual attendance. This is appropriate as it is an added protection for the Exchequer.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • It is also relevant to note that for NCS there is an opportunity for services to rectify non-compliance. Of the 147 services that were found to be non-compliant, 139 took the rectification actions required of them. This means that in total only 8 services will, at time of writing have PSP withdrawn as a result of non-compliance. This approach is progressive in that it encourages services to become compliant in the case that the service takes steps to address the issues identified. • The Community Childcare Subvention (CCS) was closed at the end of the 2017/18 cycle. This scheme was identified as being the scheme of highest risk as a result of a number of factors. One such factor was the existence of the snapshot window

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			<p>which was a four week period at the beginning of the cycle. The attendance during this window was the basis for payments for the remainder of the cycle regardless of attendance fluctuations after this point. These rules created a situation whereby if a service provider failed to make adjustments to their registrations after the window an overclaim would begin to accrue as registrations were then locked in place.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Closing the CCS led to a significant reduction in risk as under the other schemes services could make corrections throughout the year. The scheme identified as being of the second highest risk of overclaims historically, Community Childcare Subvention Plus (CCSP), has been closed to new entrants since November 2019. Hence the CCSP is being phased out along with other legacy schemes as children age out. This will streamline the schemes offered and operated and reduce the risk of inconsistencies in scheme requirements. • Additionally, the scheme rules undergo a yearly review with the goal of strengthening and clarifying the rules. This review was formalised

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			<p>recently when scheme oversight and compliance units met to standardise and streamline language and requirements across the funding agreements and contracts.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following inspection visits, providers will be afforded the opportunity to rectify non-compliance. Certain types of non-compliance will be further supported in that Pobal Integrated Case Management (ICM) will be automatically flagged to the non-compliance outcome. Pobal ICM will then engage with the relevant CCC to ensure that appropriate supports are offered to services so that they can achieve compliance, including clarification on schematic rules. • There is a long term project to place the Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) programme on a legislative footing. This would provide greater powers and enshrine the rules and requirements in law. An RfT was submitted to eTenders and a contract has been awarded to the preferred bidder.

Update on the implementation of previous recommendations made by the Committee of Public Accounts to the Department of Justice and Equality following the Committee's engagement of 4 April 2019, for which responsibility now falls to the current Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth

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1.	<p>The existing accommodation centres do not have the capacity to deal with the number of asylum seekers entering the country.</p> <p>The Committee recommends that the Department of Justice and Equality ensures its Reception and Integration Agency works intensively to procure sufficient and suitable accommodation for asylum seekers in a timely manner and with due regard for costs.</p>	<p>The Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure & Reform is informed by the Department of Justice and Equality that it accepts this recommendation.</p> <p>The Minister is further informed by the Department of Justice and Equality that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Department of Justice and Equality has been working with the Office of Government Procurement since Quarter 3 2017 to develop a procurement strategy to deliver quality accommodation to meet the demand for places. As a result, the Department 	<p>The Department is seeking to acquire further accommodation. On 18 January, a published a request for tender (RFT) to procure additional accommodation for singles, couples and families seeking international protection was published.</p> <p>The RFT encourages tenders from not-for-profit organisations and promotes tenderers to work with not-for-profit organisations in the delivery of related services. This tender process is a key step in the Government's strategy to end reliance on emergency accommodation.</p> <p>The compliance check process was due to begin</p>

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		<p>is engaged in a regional procurement process which is scheduled for completion in Quarter 2 2020. Covid 19 has delayed the final assessment of the last tenders received. A method of remotely assessing these is being examined.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Following completion of this regional procurement process, an assessment will be carried out by the Department of Justice and Equality in consultation with the Office of Government Procurement to ascertain whether a further procurement process will be required and what form that process should take. • The procurement process is utilizing the Most Economically Advantageous Tender Method where bids are assessed on both the quality of the submission and the proposed costs. • As part of the Transformation Programme within the Department of Justice and Equality undertaken in 2019, a dedicated International Protection Procurement Services Unit has been established to procure accommodation that meets standards and is sufficient to meet demand while achieving value for money. • An assessment is ongoing whereby the Department of Justice and Equality is 	<p>on 28 February but was delayed due to the Ukrainian refugee situation. However, the compliance check has now recommenced. IPPS is focusing on completing the evaluation process and establishing the framework as soon as possible.</p> <p>Circa 4,500 IP applicant have arrived in Ireland since 1 January 2022. In the past month, 1,458 persons sought international protection (IP) - an average of 360 per week since the start of the year. There are over 11,500 people currently in IPAS accommodation.</p> <p>Since 24 February 2022 over 22,000 Ukrainian Beneficiaries of Temporary Protection (BOTP) have arrived in Ireland and are accommodated largely in hospitality sector settings.</p> <p>The Department continues to seek suitable accommodation for both IP applicants and Ukrainian BOTPs.</p>

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		<p>considering the use of lands within State Ownership to build accommodation centres for asylum seekers to reduce the exposure of the Department's reliance on the commercial sector to provide accommodation.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> In 2019, 735 additional beds were made available in existing and new accommodation centres (distinct from emergency beds). However, 220 bed spaces were lost due to the closure of one centre in Dublin. Arising from Covid 19, the Department of Justice and Equality procured a range of new facilities which has ensured no more than three unrelated people will be housed in any room. The Department has also given a commitment that this will be the norm henceforth. In addition four isolation units were opened and all vulnerable people identified and separately cocooned. 	
2.	<p>The system to move individuals who have been granted legal status to reside in Ireland out of accommodation centres and into permanent housing is not adequate.</p> <p>The Committee recommends that the Department of Justice and Equality works with local authorities and appropriate bodies to ensure that</p>	<p>The Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure & Reform is informed by the Department of Justice and Equality that it accepts this recommendation.</p> <p>The Minister is further informed by the Department of Justice and Equality that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Department of Justice and Equality has established a working group consisting of representatives of the 	<p>The Persons with Status team is a dedicated IPAS unit that works intensively with funded organisations such as the Peter McVerry Trust and DePaul to assist people with protection status or permission to remain to move into housing within the community. The unit also works closely with the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government and the City and County Manager's Association</p>

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	<p>individuals who receive legal status to reside in Ireland are assisted to move out of accommodation centres as speedily as possible.</p>	<p>Department, the City & County Managers' Association (CCMA) and the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government (DHPLG) to develop a coordinated response to assist persons with legal status to reside in Ireland to find accommodation;</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Department of Justice and Equality has engaged the services of two NGOs to provide a case-managed approach to finding suitable accommodation, mainly via HAP tenancies, and to ensure a breakdown in tenancy is avoided; • An oversight group, chaired by the Department of Justice and Equality and consisting of representatives of the CCMA, DHPLG, Department of Employment Affairs & Social Protection and the NGOs has been established to drive this process and ensure it achieves its full potential. • In 2019, as a result of this response, in excess of 800 persons with status were supported in moving from International Protection Accommodation Service (IPAS) accommodation. 	<p>(CCMA) in this regard.</p> <p>The number of people with status still in IPAS accommodation was 2,873 at 30 April 2022 (1,324 grants were issued by end April for 2022).</p> <p>There are a number of supports to assist accessing housing in the community provided to residents leaving accommodation centres.</p> <p>In the first half of 2022, the IPPS was due to publish a request for tender (RFT) and commission the successful bidders to provide further support to enable people with status to move out of IPAS accommodation. This has been delayed due to the Ukraine situation.</p> <p>It is important to note the severe constraints in the private rental market at present that is impacting on the ability of persons with status to move on from IPAS accommodation. This constraint has been made even more significant by the arrival in Ireland of over 31,000 Ukrainian beneficiaries of temporary protection since 24 February 2022.</p>