Commissioning Work Package Final Report

Key Findings

Dr Aileen Shaw and Dr John Canavan
UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway

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WHAT ARE THE KEY RESEARCH FINDINGS?

Overall, the case for commissioning, founded on a number of well-established arguments, is, 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, an 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 processes associated with competitive tendering.

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 principles of partnership working will be critical, requiring a commitment by Tusla to maintain dialogue and ongoing consultation with representatives of the sector.

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 organisation. Early commissioning work focused on capacity building, particularly within Tusla and primarily on the Commissions’ Cycle, with some involvement of the Community and Voluntary Sector as stakeholders. The introduction of the Community and Voluntary Sector as stakeholders in the Commissioning Cycle, with some involvement of the Community and Voluntary Sector as stakeholders, has engendered a certain amount of goodwill within the Community and Voluntary Sector, particularly within Tusla and primarily on the Community and Voluntary Sector, involving consultation with Tusla and external service providers.

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 and implementing commissioning.

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

- the complexity of outcome measurement in the child protection and welfare field;
- the capacity for engaging with issues of outcomes, evaluation and evidence exists in only a small number of organisations; and
- 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.

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.

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 improving outcomes for children and families.
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 research methods: 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

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

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 in an effective, evidence-informed manner.

The commissioning process encompasses a cycle of activities for identifying, measuring and monitoring area-based needs (current and future) that take place in collaboration with stakeholders and responds in a cost-effective, evidence-informed manner.

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UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre
Institute for Lifecourse and Society, Upper Newcastle Road,
National University of Ireland Galway
Galway, Ireland

T: +353 91 495 398
E: cfrc@nuigalway.ie
W: www.nuigalway.ie/childandfamilyresearch
@UNESCO_CFRC
ucfrc.nuig

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

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: