



An Roinn Breisoideachais agus Ardoideachais,
Taighde, Nuálaíochta agus Eolaíochta
Department of Further and Higher Education,
Research, Innovation and Science

Children First Sectoral Implementation Plan

Department of Further and
Higher Education, Research,
Innovation and Science

December 2022

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Foreword by the Minister

I am pleased to publish this Sectoral Implementation Plan for the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science in accordance with Section 27 of the Children's First Act. This plan sets out how my Department and the relevant agencies under the aegis of my Department will ensure their compliance with the Act and with the best practice obligations as set out in Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children.

I am committed to the highest standards of child safeguarding in respect of all of my Department's interactions with, or relating, to children. My officials and their colleagues in our aegis bodies share this commitment.

Arrangements have been put in place to ensure that the sector meets its obligations under the Children First Act and observes non-statutory best practice in this area. We continue to monitor the arrangements which have been put in place, which include preparing risk assessments, child safeguarding statements and associated policies and procedures; raising awareness and providing appropriate instruction.

Every Government Department, including my own, has a responsibility to safeguard the rights of children and young people while accessing services provided or funded by them.

Education is accessible at every stage in life but many of the learners my Department serve are young people making the transition from post-primary to tertiary education. We are committed to ensuring their learning environment is safe. This sectoral plan outlines the commitment my Department and I have made in ensuring the protection and welfare of children and young people as they access our education system.

Simon Harris, T.D.,

Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

December 2022

Introduction

- (A) This Children First Sectoral Implementation Plan relates to the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science which includes the Department, the agencies and offices under its aegis. This Implementation Plan has been prepared and published in accordance with the *Children First Act 2015*.
- (B) This Sectoral Implementation Plan outlines the programme of measures taken, or proposed to be taken, to ensure compliance with the *Children First Act 2015* and with the *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* by:
- a) The Department itself and
 - b) Any agency or body that provides a relevant service and receives funding from the Department in that regard.
- (C) This Sectoral Implementation Plan contains information on the following:
- a) The relevant services provided by or on behalf of the Department
 - b) The measures taken or proposed to be taken to promote, review and report on compliance under the legislation and guidance
 - c) The monitoring and review procedures in relation to the Sectoral Implementation Plan
- (D) Copies of this Sectoral Implementation Plan must, in accordance with Section 27(4) of the Act, be laid before each House of the Oireachtas.

Relevant Services

Relevant Services Provided by the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science's mission is to *Develop Ireland's further and higher education and research systems to support people in reaching their full potential and to create value, prosperity, resilience and a cohesive, sustainable and vibrant society.*

- (A) Within the Department itself, direct interaction between children and young people with DFHERIS staff is limited. The Department does not provide services (as defined under the Act) directly to children. However, it may occasionally employ staff who are under the age of 18. In addition, the Department intends to support the development of children and young people by occasionally facilitating short work experience placements within the Department. The Department is committed to safeguarding all children working or training in the Department, in line with the Children First Act 2015, the Children First Guidelines and best practice.
- (B) The Department may also occasionally interact with children and young people through our outreach and engagement work. The Department is committed to understanding the needs of our learners and often arrange public events and consultations to engage with a wide audience. Through this, Department staff may occasionally come into contact with children and young people.

Relevant Services Provided by DFHERIS – non-commercial bodies under it's aegis

The following section provides an outline by education sector of bodies that may provide "relevant services" and which receive funding from the Department in that regard. It also sets out the measures taken or proposed to be taken to promote, review and report on compliance with the *Children First Act 2015* and with the *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children*.

- (A) There are a number of Bodies and Offices under the aegis of the Department. The relevant Business Unit of the Department, on an annual basis, will seek Child Protection Assurance returns for each of the aegis bodies as part of their regular

governance and oversight activity. Those providers of a 'relevant service' will submit their child safeguarding statement for review.

- (B)** The HEA requires institutions under its remit to confirm in their annual governance statements that a child protection policy is in place, and these assurances in turn are communicated to the Department. The Department also engages with a small number of Higher Education Institutes which it directly funds to seek assurances with regard to compliance with the Act.
- (C)** Guidance has been provided to the non-commercial bodies to enable them to determine if they fall within the definition of being a provider of a 'relevant service' under the legislation.
- (D)** Those that are providers of a 'relevant service' have been notified of the statutory obligation to produce their own Child Safeguarding Statement and to ensure that appropriate reporting procedures are in place to reflect the Act's reporting requirements in respect of any mandated persons working in those organisations and also the best practice reporting obligations for all persons set out under the updated *Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children*. On behalf of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, the child protection section in the Department of Education's Parents and Learners Unit will review the Child Safeguarding Statements of the providers of a 'relevant service'.
- (E)** The Department has provided the non-commercial bodies under its aegis with a template that they may use in devising their Child Safeguarding Statement and Risk Assessment.
- (F)** The measures taken will ensure that the Department has sufficient checks and balances in place to monitor the quality of the Child Safeguarding Statements and processes provided in the Annual Child Protection Assurance Form.

Relevant Services in the Further Education Sector

The Further Education and Training (FET) sector covers education and training which occurs after second level schooling (or post senior-cycle) and is not part of the third level system. The FET sector is largely funded by An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna (SOLAS), the Further Education and Training Authority, established in October 2013. SOLAS is an aegis body of this Department and as such, provides annual child protection assurances through the process described above.

The main providers of further education and training are the 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs). ETBs are also engaged in the provision of post-primary services. The governance of ETBs remains under the remit and responsibility of the Minister for Education. There are a number of channels through which the ETBs provide assurances

to the Minister of Education that child safeguarding procedures are in place. The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science will seek annual assurance from the Department of Education that the ETBs have reported the necessary compliance in relation to their child safeguarding requirements.

ETBs also manage a number of Youthreach Centres. The Department of Education carries out inspections on these centres on behalf of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science.

Measures to Promote, Review and Report on Compliance with the Provisions of the Act

Child First Interdepartmental Implementation Group (CFIDIG)

The Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth has established a statutory Children First Interdepartmental Implementation Group (CFIDIG) to bring central government oversight to the implementation process. The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science is represented on the CFIDIG Group by the Designated Liaison Person.

Reporting Protocol

Procedures for reporting alleged child protection concerns are outlined in the Department's Child Safeguarding Statement. A record of any such concerns made to the Designated Liaison Person will be maintained in a confidential and secure manner. Reporting of concerns will be made in the appropriate way to Tusla in accordance with the requirements of the *Children First Act 2015*.

Relevant Persons

The Department has appointed a Designated Liaison Person (DLP) and Deputy Designated Liaison Person (Deputy DLP) as the relevant person and deputy relevant person for the Department's Child Safeguarding Statement. They are the resource persons for any child protection concerns within the Department. They are responsible for ensuring that reporting procedures within the organisation are followed, so that child welfare and protection concerns are referred promptly to Tusla. They will act as a point of contact for reporting child protection concerns raised in relation to the Department and will liaise with outside agencies, as required.

Training and Awareness Raising

The DLP and Deputy DLP along with other relevant staff will undergo the relevant training in the application of the Children First Act 2015 and the Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children. This will include the requirement to complete the Children First E-Learning Programme.

The Department's Sectoral Implementation Plan and Child Safeguarding Statement will be central to raising awareness among staff of: (i) who the designated liaison person and deputy designated liaison person are, (ii) the procedures they should follow in the event of their having concerns of a child protection or welfare nature of children and young people with whom they interact in the provision of the Department's services, and (iii) the obligations on them to report these concerns.

Sectoral Implementation Plan

The Department's Sectoral Implementation Plan sets out the high-level sectoral guidance principles to be applied across the Department and the bodies under its aegis, in the ongoing implementation of the Children First Act 2015 and Children First National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children. The plan is published on the Department's website. It will be reviewed every three years, or more regularly as required.

Monitoring and Review

The Department's Organisation Development and Operations Unit has developed this Sectoral Implementation Plan and the Department's Child Safeguarding Statement. The Sectoral Implementation Plan will be reviewed every three years or more regularly as necessary. The Department's Child Safeguarding Statement will be reviewed every two years, or more regularly as necessary.

Annual Compliance Report

An annual compliance report will be prepared for submission to the Department's Management Board. This report will set out: details on any relevant activity for the Department for the preceding year, including details of the Department's designated liaison person, training provided, number of reports, if any, submitted to Tusla; and issues of concern or of broader interest to the bodies under the Department's aegis notified to the Corporate Governance Unit in the context of the Department's oversight and engagement framework for such bodies.

Annex 1

Bodies Under the Aegis of the Department

Name of non-commercial body	Relevant Section in DFHERIS
An tSeirbhís Oideachais Leanúnaigh agus Scileanna (SOLAS)	Further Education and Training
Grangegorman Development Agency	Capital Programme Delivery
Higher Education Authority	Higher Education Quality and Governance
Irish Research Council	Higher Education Quality and Governance
Léargas – The Exchange Bureau	International Cooperation Unit
Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI)	Higher Education Quality and Governance
Science Foundation Ireland	Innovation and Research Organisation and Programmes
Skillnet Ireland CLG	Further Education and Training