Rialtas na hÉireann
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Spending Review 2020

Tusla: Staffing and Workforce Planning

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Executive Summary

Tusla is the dedicated state agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children. Its activities include the delivery of child protection and welfare services, alternative care services, and family support services. Most of the agency's services and activities directly involve social workers and/or social care workers operating as frontline staff. Tusla's 2020 pay budget was €313 million (40% of total budget). In December 2019, Tusla employed 4,122 whole time equivalent (WTE) staff and 605 agency workers.

Tusla's workforce has grown in size and consequently cost in recent years, in the context of increased demands for their services.

Between December 2015 and December 2019, Tusla's workforce increased in size by a fifth (3,460 to 4,122 WTE Staff) and in cost by over a quarter (€233m to €298m).

- WTE staff numbers rose by 18%, staff pay costs rose by 27%, and agency worker use rose 168%.
- The growth in staff numbers coincided with a significant year on year increase in demand, demonstrated by a 30% increase in referrals since 2015.

Most increases in WTE staff were among administrative (457 to 798), social work (1,402 to 1,533), and management (92 to 200) roles. Agency worker use grew to become 13% of the workforce (225 to 605).

- Among frontline staff, the largest percentage increases were in senior social work/social care roles.
- Conversion of 408 agency workers to staff contracts, conducted in Q1 2020, has since significantly reduced agency staff usage.
- The increase in administrative and management staff has coincided with a substantial growth in demand for Tusla's services and the increased use of agency staff.

Tusla's workforce challenges centre on recruiting and retaining staff in Ireland.

Staff turnover, particularly in frontline roles, has slowed Tusla's workforce growth.

- Job exits have been consistently higher among social work roles than other job roles. For example, 142 Social Workers joined Tusla in 2018, but 124 left over the same period.
- While the staff exit rate (c. 8% p.a.) is low compared to other sectors and countries, the small size of the pool of qualified hireable professionals available in Ireland – particularly in social work roles – presents challenges from a workforce planning perspective.

It is uncertain how sustainable Tusla's staffing model currently is, or will be in coming years.

It is difficult just yet to assess the sustainability of Tusla's staffing model, echoing the finding of a 2019 Spending Review paper focused on the agency's performance measurement capacities.

- It is unclear what efficiency impacts there are from task shifting between Tusla's administrative staff and frontline staff, however Tusla has recently begun to profile the work of administrative staff supporting social work teams.
- Forecasting future budget constraints and service needs will be critical to Tusla maximising its impact. Demands for child protection services may rise in line with growth in the eligible population.

Tusla has undertaken several workforce planning initiatives, and the agency will benefit from emphasising an efficient approach to resource management that maximises services within budget constraints.

- In the short term, Tusla should continue to integrate workforce planning initiatives and ensure this feeds into the annual Business Plan process in a meaningful way. It should also continue to engage in the National Strategic Framework for Health and Social Care Workforce Planning and ensure Tusla Workforce Planning needs are considered in the wider Health & Social care forum.
- In the medium-to-long term, as Tusla transitions out of the set up phase into an established agency phase, it should seek to advance measurement, forecasting, and planning of effective and efficient ways to develop and deploy its workforce.

1. Background and Objectives

Tusla is the dedicated State Agency responsible for a range of services including improving wellbeing and outcomes for children through child protection and welfare services, alternative care services, and family support services. Tusla's 2020 spending allocation was €791 million, with pay and pensions accounting for 40%.

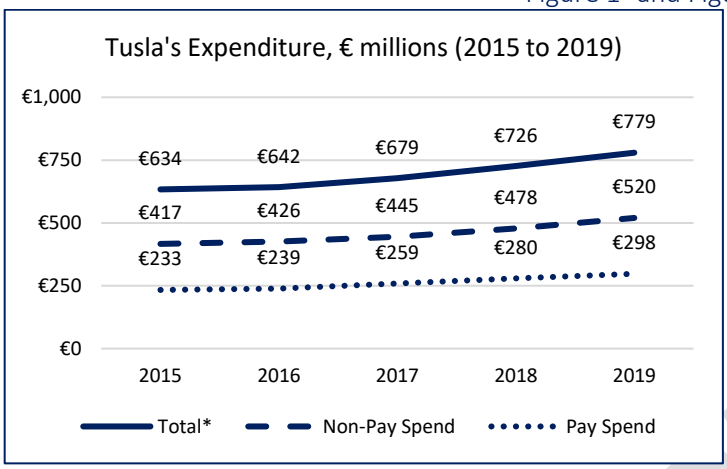
"Tusla, the Child and Family Agency" (Tusla) was established on the 1st of January 2014 as an agency of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA), under the Child and Family Agency Act (2013). Tusla's statutory functions centre on supporting and promoting children's development, welfare, and protection, and the effective functioning of families. The agency manages a high-risk service which includes having responsibility for the c. 6,000 children that are currently in the care of the state. Tusla's 2020 non-capital spending allocation was €791 million, with pay costs (incl. agency workers and pensions) accounting for 40% of this (€313 million).[1]

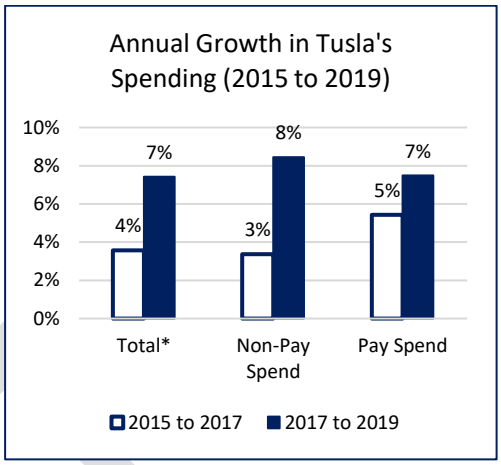
Tusla's activities align with policies and programmes led by the Government of Ireland that prioritise the welfare of children and young people and the effective functioning of families. These include but are not limited to "Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014–2020", the DCYA Performance Framework 2018–2020, and the DCYA Statement of Strategy 2016-2019. The Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) and the Health and Social Care Professionals Council (CORU) regulate Tusla's activities.[2] Figure 1 and and Figure 2 display the steady increase in Tusla's expenditure since 2015. The increase in pay is due to both workforce WTE increases, and pay restoration, which recommenced in 2017.

[1] Tusla (2020) Business Plan 2020; Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2020) Minister Zappone announces a €94 million budget package. Government of Ireland. Note: The €791 million figure for 2020 reflects the current allocation only, and is a net figure.

[2] In 2012 HIQA launched standards for child protection and welfare, and the Health and Social Care Professionals Council (CORU) began regulating social work professionals in Ireland. For more information see Burns and McGregor (2019) Child Protection and Welfare Systems in Ireland: Continuities and Discontinuities of the Present.

Figure 1[3] and Figure 2





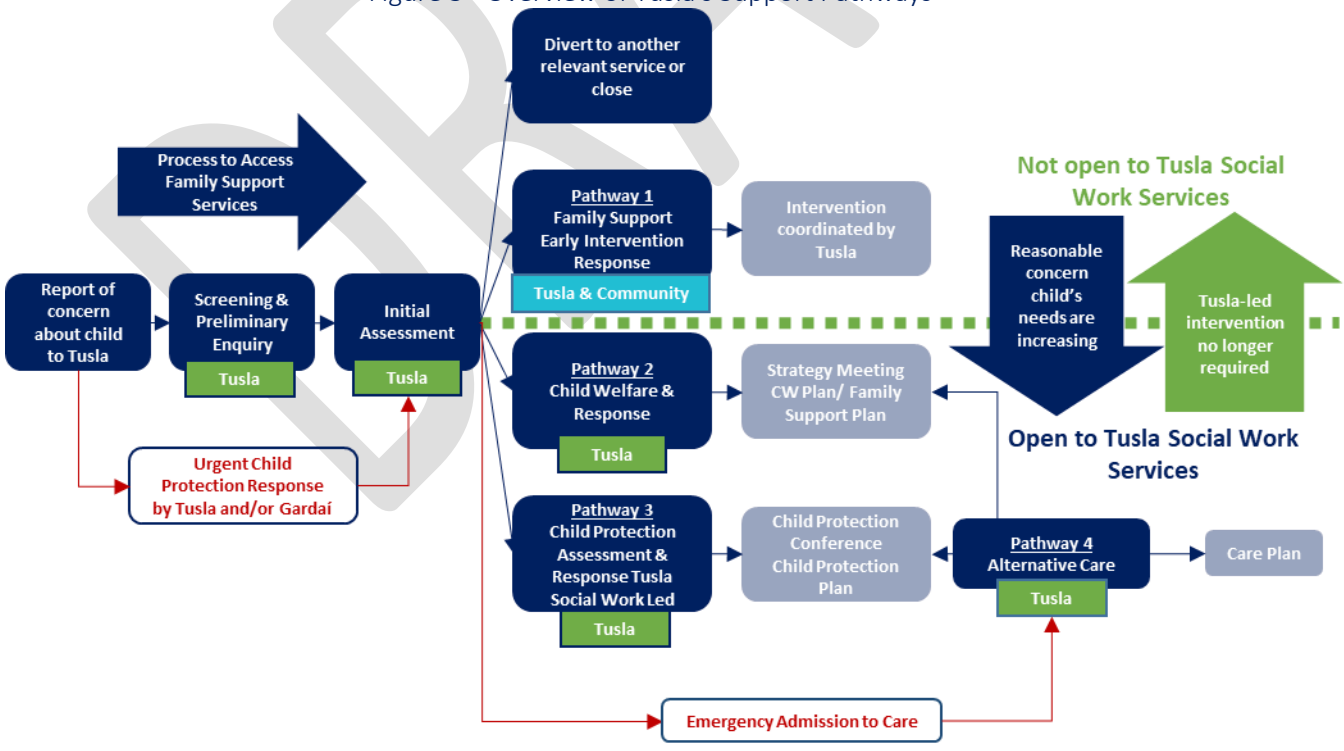
[3] Total costs is the sum of non-pay spend and pay-spend, less any income and Superann/PRD Income.

Tusla is responsible for services that the HSE, the Family Support Agency, and the National Educational Welfare Board provided prior to 2014 – this includes several types of child protection supports (see Table 1). In 2014 the Family Support Agency, the National Educational Welfare Board and the HSE's Children and Family Services directorate all merged together to form Tusla.[4] Figure 3 offers an overview of the support pathways available to a child who may need support and protection.

Table 1 - Tusla's services and activities[5]

Area	Description
Alternative Care	Functions relating to children in care.
Child Protection and Welfare	Child protection and welfare services, emergency out of hours services and services for separated children seeking asylum.
Children Service Regulation	Alternative education, assessment, and registration services, and the regulation of alternative care.
Early Years Inspectorate	Considered separately, though it falls under children service regulation.
Educational Welfare Services	School completion and home school liaison, and alternative education, assessment, and registration.
Family Support Services	Family support services, prevention, partnership and family support services (e.g. Meitheal and family resource centres), and domestic sexual and gender based violence services.

Figure 3 - Overview of Tusla's Support Pathways[6]



[4] Institute for Public Administration (2017) Case Study on Tusla: The Child and Family Agency. Case Studies on Innovation and Reform in the Irish Public Sector.
[5] Kane (2019) Tusla: Assessment of Performance Measurement. Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.
[6] Kane (2019) Tusla: Assessment of Performance Measurement. Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

This paper addresses four key questions about Tusla's pay and staffing experiences to date. Descriptive analysis addresses these questions, building on previous examinations and available information.

This paper offers a high-level analysis of Tusla's pay and staffing situation, with particular attention to those working in frontline Social Work roles. Four key questions guided this analysis:

1. **What is Tusla's current workforce and how has it evolved since the establishment of the organisation?**
2. **What is the state of the relevant skills pipeline in the Irish labour market?**
3. **How sustainable is the current staffing model in terms of delivering on the remit of the organisation?**
4. **How is Tusla performing against its own strategic workforce plan 2018-2020?**

This analysis addresses these questions by drawing upon quantitative data[7] and reporting on Tusla's pay and staffing. Further analysis included a synthesis of previous research and reporting on Tusla,[8] as well as evidence from other jurisdictions, sectors, and approaches to improving child protection services.[9]

The rest of the paper takes the following structure: Section 2 will profile Tusla's workforce, both in terms of size and costs and how these have changed over time, it will also briefly outline trends in Tusla's non pay expenditure. Section 3 will examine trends and issues in recruitment and retention for Tusla, as well as measures of productivity and how demand for Tusla's services has changed in recent years. Section 4 assesses Tusla's performance against their workforce planning objectives. Workforce planning is a process of analysing the current workforce, determining future needs and threats, and implementing a strategic plan to address them. Tusla's performance against these objectives is therefore crucial for their medium to long term performance. The paper will then conclude with a discussion structured around key questions and key findings.

DRAFT

[7] This work drew upon sources of data from Tusla, the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, and the Health and Social Care Professionals Council (CORU).
[8] Examples of this include Tusla's corporate documents (e.g. Annual Reports) and a 2019 Spending Review Paper, by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, which looked at Tusla's performance metrics and concluded that available data was insufficient to suitably assess the efficiency or effectiveness of Tusla's services.
[9] Collection involved structured searches for analysis on providers of children protection services, published between 1 January 2009 and 31 January 2020, through Google Scholar and online databases hosted by public sector and research organisations (e.g. DPER, ESRI, and Tusla). Literature was synthesised and reported using a judgement sampling approach.

2. Tusla – Workforce Profile

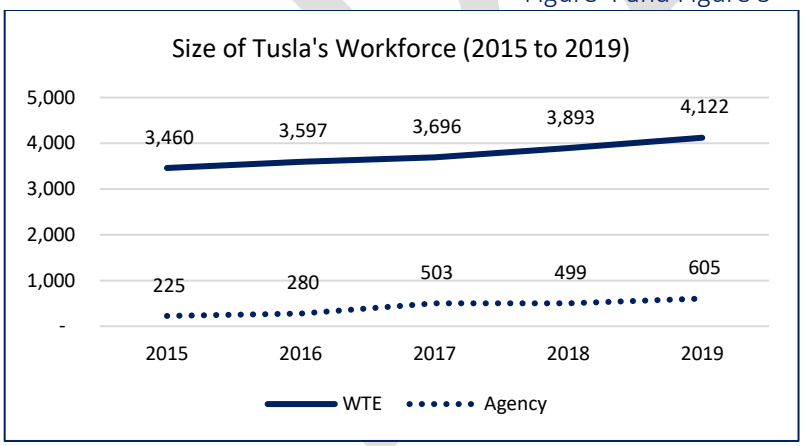
Tusla employed 4,122 WTE staff in December 2019, mostly in social work, social care, and administrative roles. Agency workers directly support Tusla's staff, while independent/voluntary organisations support the delivery of services linked to Tusla's child protection remit. Tusla's 2020 pay budget was €313 million.

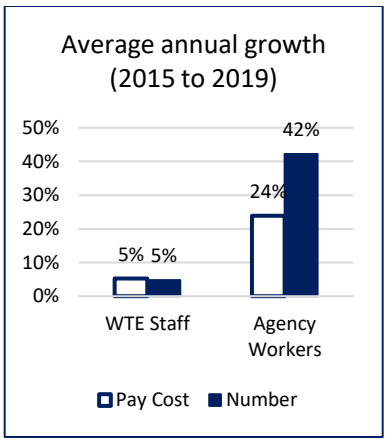
Tusla's WTE staff grew 18% between December 2015 and December 2019. The highest job growth was in administrative and management roles. Staff resources for social work and social care have grown more slowly. A substantial agency worker conversion programme in Q1 2020 has arrested recent trends.

This section profiles Tusla's workforce through outlining trends in the costs and size of Tusla's staff, and highlighting the role of agency workers and other organisations in the delivery of child protection services. Most statistics draw upon data provided by Tusla for between December 2015 (2015) and December 2019 (2019). Additional data extended these findings to April 2020, to highlight the workforce situation following an agency conversion programme that added 408 WTE staff to Tusla's workforce in Q1 2020 (see page 7).

In December 2019, Tusla directly employed 4,789 workers, amounting to 4,122 whole time equivalent (WTE) staff. In addition to this Tusla also engaged the services of 605 agency workers. Figure 4 displays the 682 WTE (18%) increase in Tusla's workforce between 2015 and 2019. This trend is similar to those observed in primary education, secondary education, and the Health Service Executive (HSE) over recent years.[10] As of April 2020, Tusla directly employed 5,204 workers, amounting to 4,506 whole time equivalent (WTE) staff.

Figure 4 and Figure 5





At time of writing, it is not possible to predict the impacts of the ongoing COVID-19 Pandemic on Tusla's workforce profile. It is likely that stressors and impacts will appear around staff availability, efficiency, and costs. Data from Q2 2020 will help inform forecasting and analysis of the impact on Tusla's services. As of April 2020, total costs for COVID-19 related activities were €715,943, with pay costs of €127,409 and non-pay costs of €588,535.

[10] DPER (2019) Spending Review 2019: Trends in Public Expenditure. Between 2014 and 2018, HSE staffing rose by 20,000 WTEs (20%). Between 2009 and 2018, WTE staffing rose for First Level education by 21% and Second Level education by 16% , most of the occurred between 2014 and 2018.

Agency Conversion (Q1 2020)

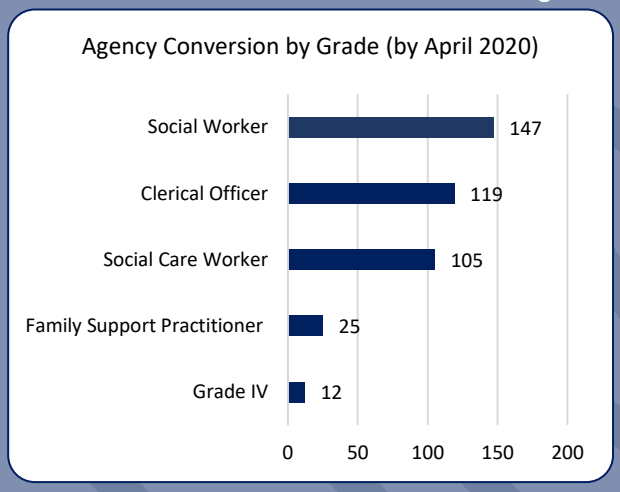
In Q1 2020, Tusla completed a targeted program to convert agency workers to staff contracts ("Agency Conversion"). This program substantially reduced agency worker numbers and drove increases in WTE staff between December 2019 and April 2020. The Agency Conversion programme had two main aims: [a]

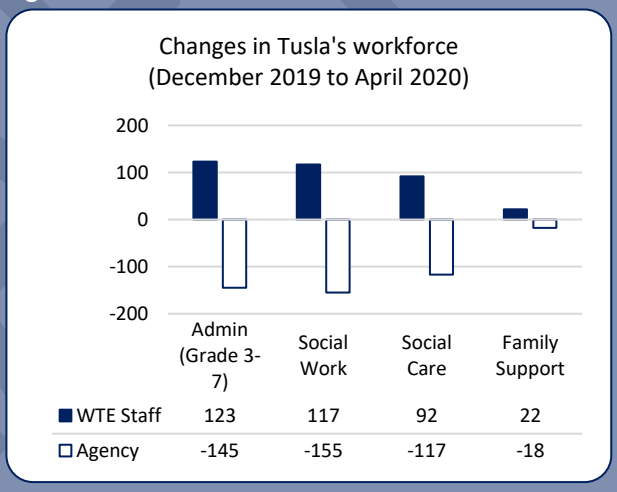
1) Improve continuity of care and increase standardisation of service delivery, building on HIQA recommendations regarding to service improvement opportunities.
2) Create headline cost savings.

Tusla's Agency Conversion took place between 27 November 2019 and 31 March 2020, as a collaborative effort by Tusla's HR team alongside its Service Directors, Area Managers and local line managers. The aim was to move 389 agency workers to staff contracts. In total, Tusla converted 408 agency workers across six job grades (see Figure 6).

Figure 7 highlights the substantial changes in Tusla's WTE staff and agency workers between December 2019 and April 2020. Agency conversion focused on the job categories presented in Figure 7, and likely was the main driver of changes this period.

Figure 6 and Figure 7





The projected savings for 2020 were expected to be €3,241,000 if targets were met, which represents about 10% of 2019 agency worker costs.[b] Tusla has completed agency staff conversion before. In late 2016, Tusla offered temporary (three-year) contracts to 50 long-term agency staff based on agreed criteria between national residential care services management, HR, and Tusla Recruit.[c]

Tusla expects to use its remaining agency workers, totalling 167 in April 2020, to cover shift dependant occurrences in Residential Units as well as short-term vacancies in critical, client facing roles. The vast majority of these agency workers are in social care roles (see and Table 6). The number of remaining agency workers is less than the number converted; it is unclear whether there is a notable difference in profile between those converted and those remaining as agency workers.

[a] Tusla (April 2020) Human Resources Board Report - OD Committee - Agency Conversion.

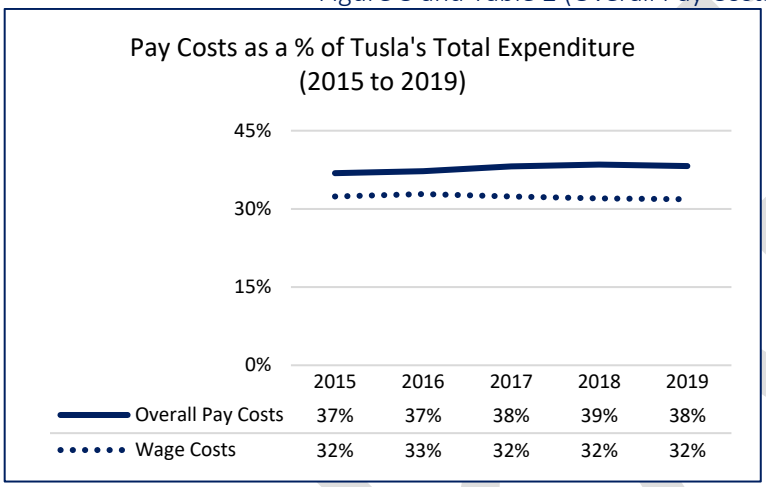
[b] Projected Savings from Conversion of Agency Staff to Tusla Contracts; Source - Tusla (November 2019) Organisation Design Committee Tusla Board – a HR Pay Number Strategy.

[c] Tusla (2017) Business Plan 2017.

2.1 Staff Profile – Pay

Tusla's initial 2020 pay budget was €313 million, with the agency forecasting that WTE staff numbers would rise from 4,122 to an estimated 4,550 WTE staff by December 2020 – an additional 44 to the 4,506 WTE staff on payroll in April 2020. [11] The 2020 pay budget was €15 million higher than the €298 million in pay costs for 2019. These included €255 million on staff wages (€22m of which was employer PRSI), €10 million on pensions, and €33 million on agency workers. Figure 8 and **Error! Reference source not found.** display the trend in T usla's overall pay costs since 2014. Rising wage bills and increased use of agency workers in response to hiring challenges had driven recent overall cost increases.[12]

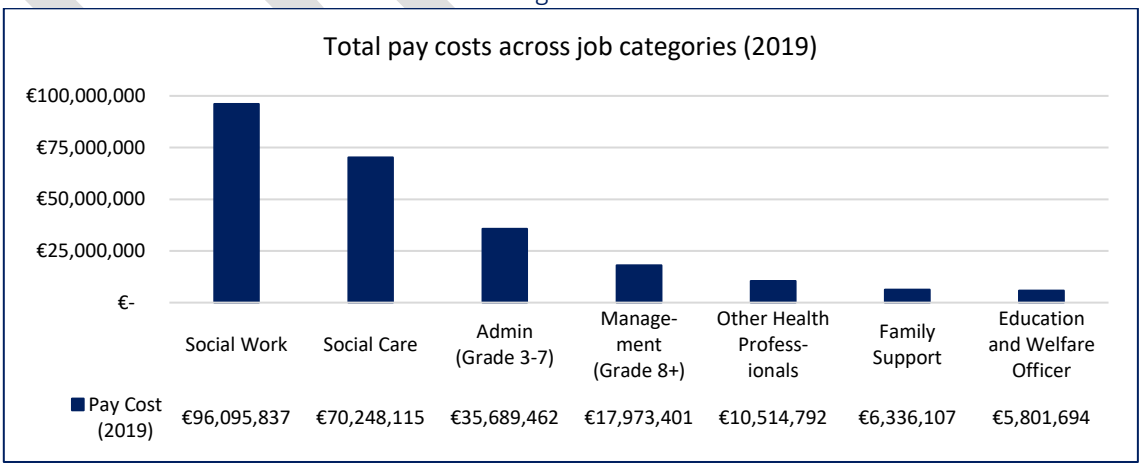
Figure 8 and Table 2 (Overall Pay Costs and Wage Costs)



Year	Overall Pay Costs	Wage Costs
2015	€ 233,468,062	€ 205,031,400
2016	€ 238,942,983	€ 210,943,173
2017	€ 258,856,912	€ 219,892,869
2018	€ 279,532,556	€ 232,394,368
2019	€ 297,659,105	€ 248,288,347

Figure 9 displays Tusla's disaggregated spend on pay across the job categories that had annual spend of over €5 million in 2019. Social work and social care staff make up about two-thirds of Tusla's pay costs.

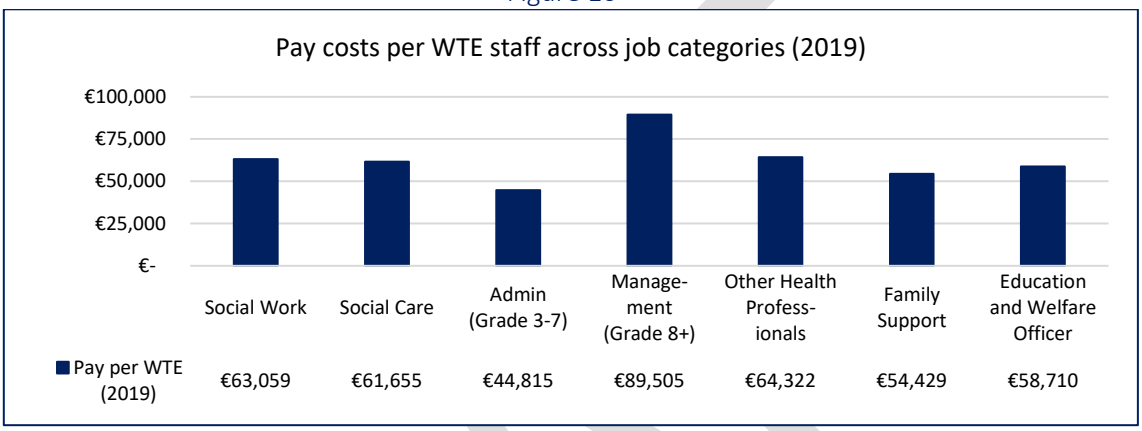
Figure 9[13]



[11] Tusla (2020) Business Plan 2020
[12] Tusla (2019) Organisation Design Committee Tusla Board - HR Pay Number Strategy (26 November 2019).
[13] Payroll only Pay and WTE by Grade by Year (excludes Agency Pay, Pension and Psychology payments). Job categories with annual pay costs of over €5 million are omitted from this graph, these included: Other Support Staff (inc. catering) [€2,258,652]; Psychology and Counselling [€1,878,942]; 9000/Not assigned [€1,077,680]; and Nursing [€413,666].

Figure 10 displays the variance in average pay costs for Tusla staff across job roles. The highest average spend is for Management (Grade 8+) staff at €89,505 across 201 WTE staff in 2019. The lowest average, of the categories displayed is, for Administrative (Grade 3-7) staff at €44,815 across 796 WTE staff in 2019. The two largest job categories, Social Work and Social Care, are close to Tusla's average pay costs of €60,238, with averages of €63,059 across 1,524 WTE staff in Social Work roles and €61,655 across 1,139 WTE staff in Social Care roles.[14]

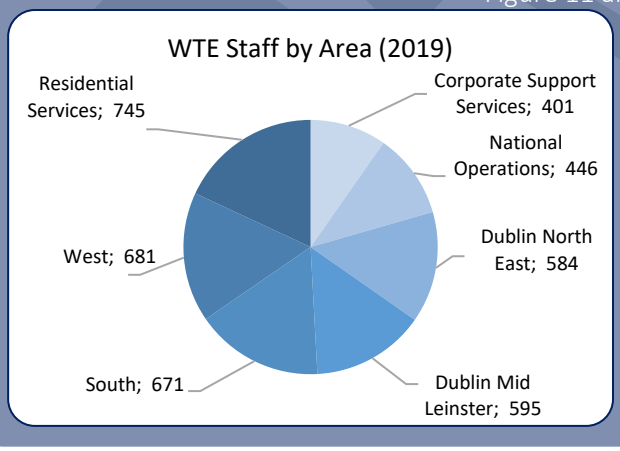
Figure 10[15]

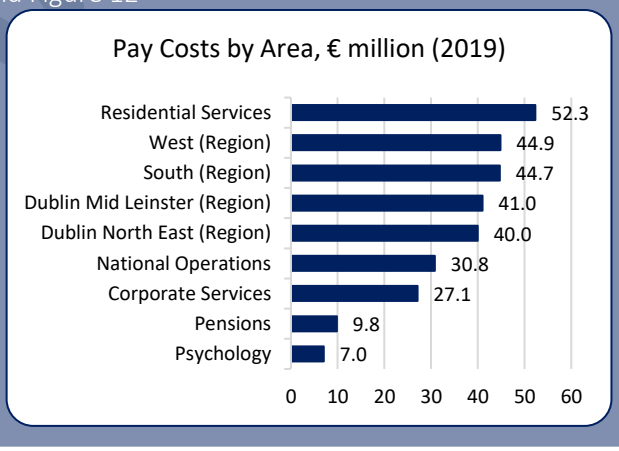


Distribution of Staff

Tusla's staff are distributed across four frontline service regions, national and corporate administrative services, and residential care services. Costs are also recorded for psychology services and pensions. Figure 11 and Figure 12 display these distributions.

Figure 11 and Figure 12





[14] Across the four main Social Care job roles, 2019 pay costs per WTE staff were: €73,722 (Social Care Leader), €68,757 (Social Care Manager), €64,458 (Deputy Social Care Manager), and €56,439 (Social Care Worker). Across the four main Social Work job roles, pay costs per WTE staff were: €67,340 (Social Work Practitioner, Senior), €55,188 (Social Worker), €84,431 (Social Worker, Principal) €71,630 (Social Worker, Team Leader).

2.2 Staff Profile – Overall Trends

Most of Tusla's WTE staff work in Social Work, Social Care, and Administrative job roles, representing 84% of total WTE staff. In December 2019, a substantial majority of Tusla's staff were classified as female (83%). The size of the majority varies across job roles, from 61% female in Management (Grade 8+) to 86% in Social Work.

Over the past four years between the ends of 2015 and 2019, most of the 19% rise in Tusla's WTE staff size was attributable to increases of those working in Social Work, Management, and Administrative roles. Figure 13 and Figure 14 display changes in WTE staff numbers over the period. Administrative and management staff sizes grew the most, WTE numbers rose 75% and 117% respectively, as Tusla established its own corporate and administrative functions following the agency's launch in 2014 and developed supports for new initiatives as outlined in the Annual Business Plans 214-2019. Social work and social care cohorts grew less, WTE numbers rose 9% and 1% respectively. Figure 14 highlights that a large portion of recent growth in these job categories occurred in 2020 as a result of new starters and the Agency Conversion.

Figure 13[16]

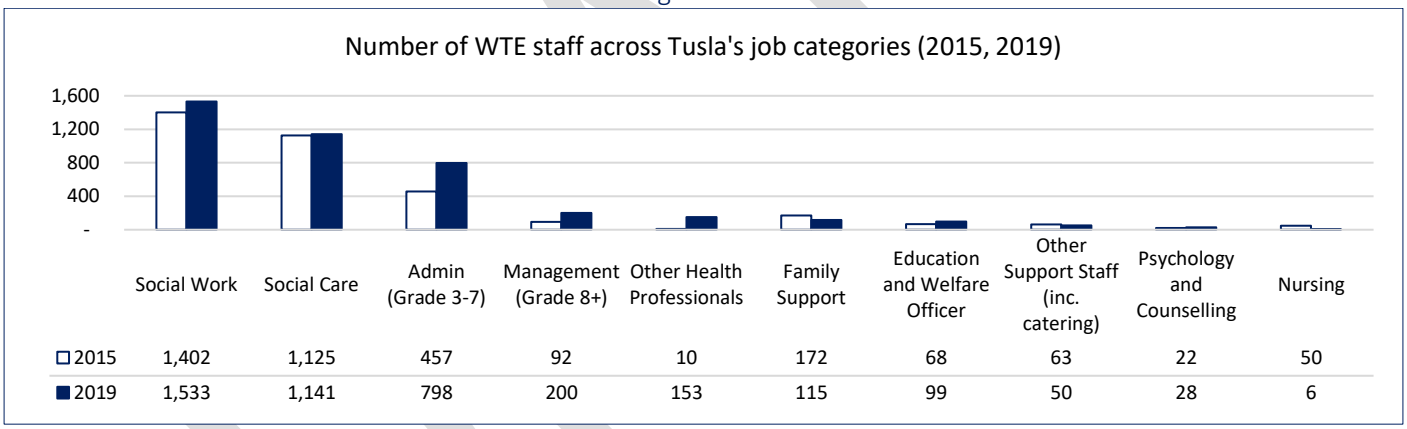
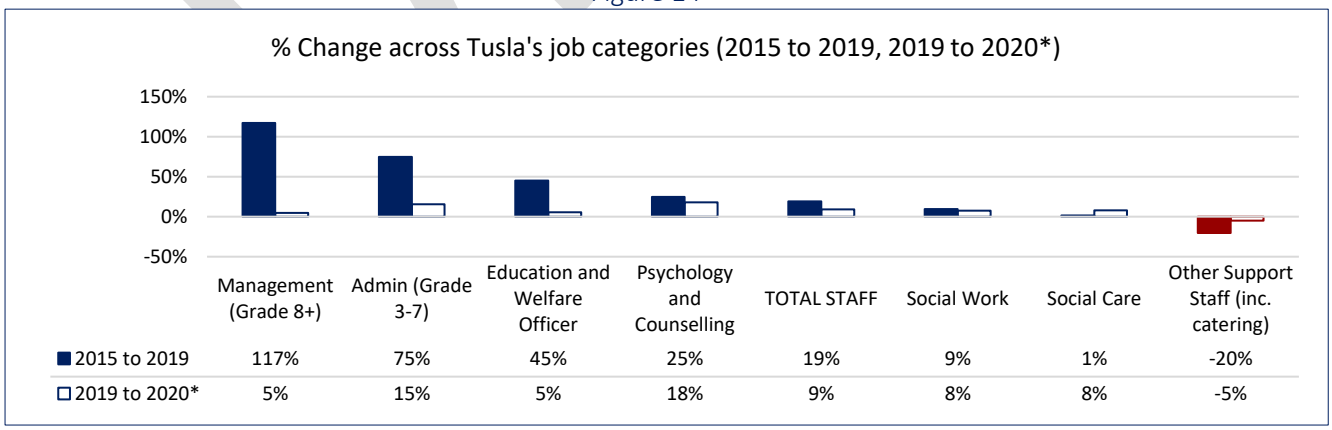


Figure 14[17]



[16] €55,188 (Social Worker), €84,431 (Social Worker, Principal) €71,630 (Social Worker, Team Leader).
[17] Data provided by Tusla. "Nursing" and "Other Health Professionals" excluded due to regrade of job roles in 2018.

2.3 Staff Profile – Trends Across Job Categories

The majority of Tusla's WTE staff in social work, social care, and administrative is concentrated across four or five sub-categories (or job grades) across each of the job categories. This section describes the trends within these three job categories in recent years, including a trend towards higher growth in more senior positions and a recent surge in the number of entry-level staff due to the Tusla's Agency Conversion programme.

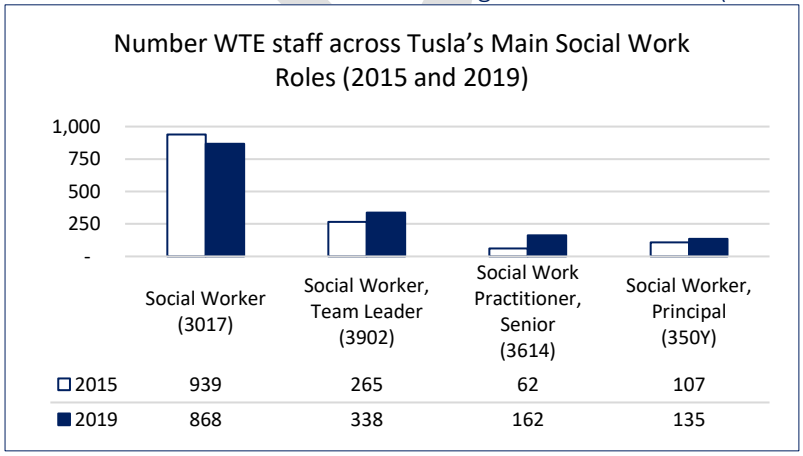
Further understanding of the dynamics of effort within Tusla's workforce may include analysing how Tusla distributes responsibilities between workers and how different job roles contribute to a child's journey through Tusla's assessment and care pathways (see Figure 3).

- For example, increasing the number of staff in Management and Administrative roles may have improved the productivity of those working Social Work or Social Care roles. Alternatively, it's also possible that promotions or movements into administrative positions may have had the effect of eroding the experience and expertise levels of frontline staff, thereby harming productivity.
- The tendency for higher job growth in more senior job role will require monitoring. Tusla have stated that the higher growth in these categories was due in part to the growth in agency staff use, resulting in an increased need for supervisory staff. However, should this growth trend continue going forward, it may present an issue for Tusla's medium-to-long-term workforce planning objectives.

Figures 15 to 17 and tables 3 to 5 summarise the number of WTE staff in December 2015 and December 2019, and the growth in WTE staff between those dates and between December 2019 and April 2020 (reflecting Tusla's recent Agency Conversion programme).

In December 2019, the vast majority of Tusla's social work staff (98%) worked in one of four job grades, mostly as Social Workers (Grade 3017). Most of the net-increase in WTE staff in social work roles have been for senior posts – such as team leaders, senior practitioners, and principals. Tusla's recent Agency Conversion programme is responsible for the net-increase in WTE Social Workers (Grade 3017) since December 2015, as up to December 2019 the net change in WTE staff for this grade was -8%.

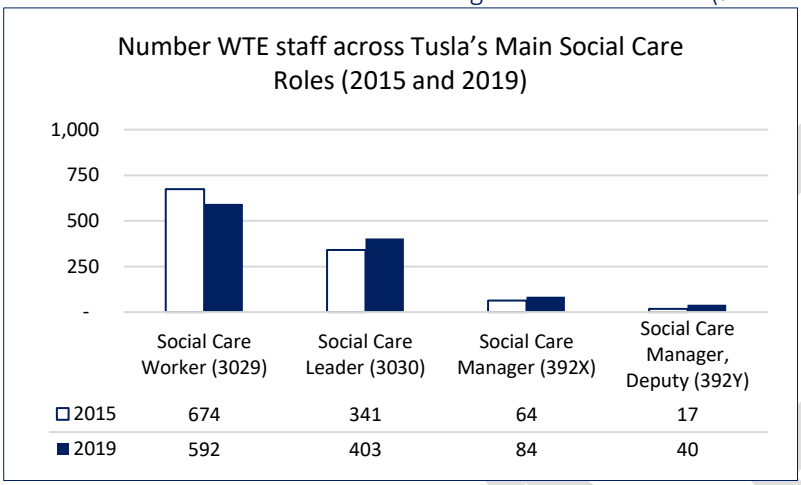
Figure 15 and Table 3 (% Growth)



Social Work Sub-Category	2015 to 2019	2019 to 2020*
Social Worker (3017)	-7.6%	11.1%
Social Worker, Team Leader (3902)	27.6%	-0.5%
Social Work Practitioner, Senior (3614)	162.4%	15.6%
Social Worker, Principal (350Y)	25.9%	1.6%

In December 2019, the vast majority of Tusla's social care staff (98%) worked in one of four job grades, mostly as Social Care Workers (Grade 3029). Most of the net-increases in WTE staff in social care roles have been for senior posts - such as leaders, managers, and deputy managers. Tusla's recent Agency Conversion programme is responsible for the net-increase in the WTE number of Social Care Worker (Grade 3029); between December 2015 and December 2019 the net change in WTE staff for this grade was -12%.

Figure 16 and Table 4 (% Growth)

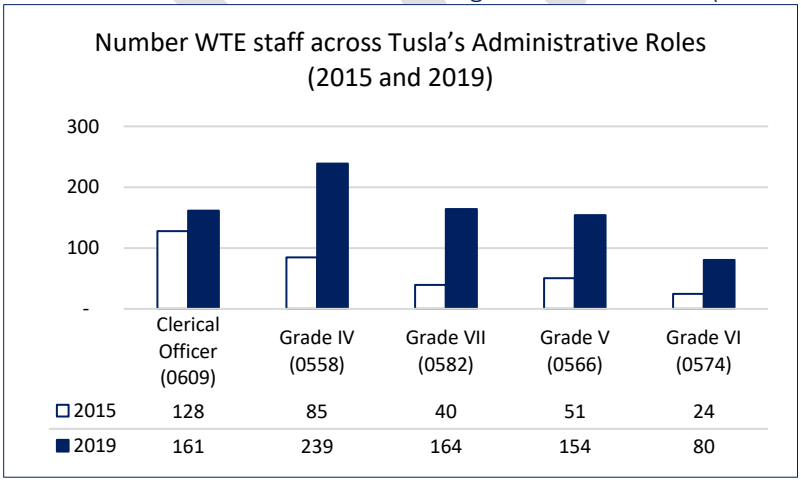


Social Care Sub-Category	2015 to 2019	2019 to 2020*
Social Care Worker (3029)	-12%	14%
Social Care Leader (3030)	18%	0%
Social Care Manager (392X)	31%	0%
Social Care Manager, Deputy (392Y)	133%	23%

Tusla's administrative staff all worked in one of five job grades. In December 2019, most worked in Grade IV (0558) roles, though there is a more even distribution of administrative staff than for staff in social work and social care roles. Between December 2015 and December 2019, there were large net-increases across all job grades, with the highest proportionate increase for Grade VII (0582) staff (314%).

Tusla's recent Agency Conversion programme is responsible for a large part of the net-increase in WTE Clerical Officers (Grade 0609). Prior to Q1 2020, most of the net-increases in WTE administrative staff were for roles other than Clerical Officers.

Figure 17 and Table 5 (% Growth)



Administrative Sub-Category	2015 to 2019	2019 to 2020*
Clerical Officer (0609)	26%	64%
Grade IV (0558)	182%	6%
Grade VII (0582)	314%	2%
Grade V (0566)	205%	2%
Grade VI (0574)	230%	1%

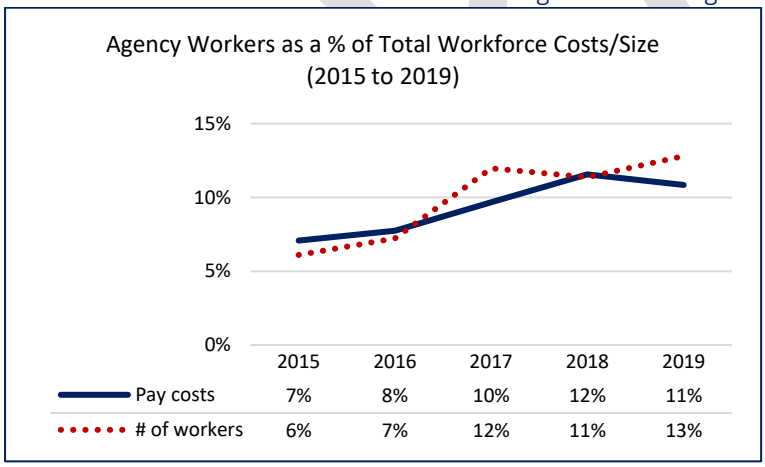
2.4 Agency Workers

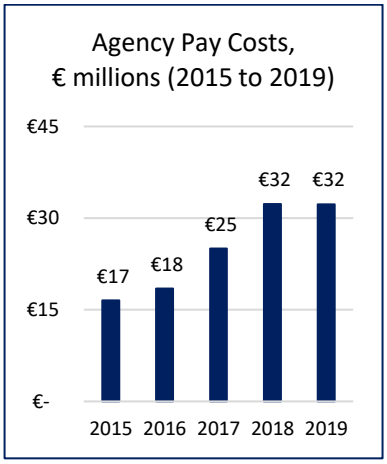
Agency workers are a common feature of Tusla's delivery of services across Ireland, in addition to regular staff capacities. Agency workers offer flexibility to manage fluctuations in demand for services and help address short-term workforce shortages. However, agency provision can increase job insecurity for workers, limit time spent with services users, and limit opportunities for continuity of care.[18]

It is difficult to evaluate specific cost comparisons for agency workers versus Tusla staff. Across Tusla's workforce in December 2019, the average cost per agency worker (€53,349) was lower than the cost per Tusla staff member (€61,953). This may reflect the more junior roles that agency workers operate in, many of whom were on-boarded through Agency Conversion in Q1 2020 (see Page 7).

Figure 18 and Figure 19 display the growth in the presence and costs of agency staff in recent years. In 2019, total agency costs were €32,276,189, 11% of total pay costs. However, agency conversion has countered this trend by significantly lowering immediate agency staff use – as of April 2020, agency workers represented 6% of pay costs and 4% of workers in 2020. The forecast Agency cost for 2020 per the June 2020 Board Report is €13.4m[19].

Figure 18 and Figure 19





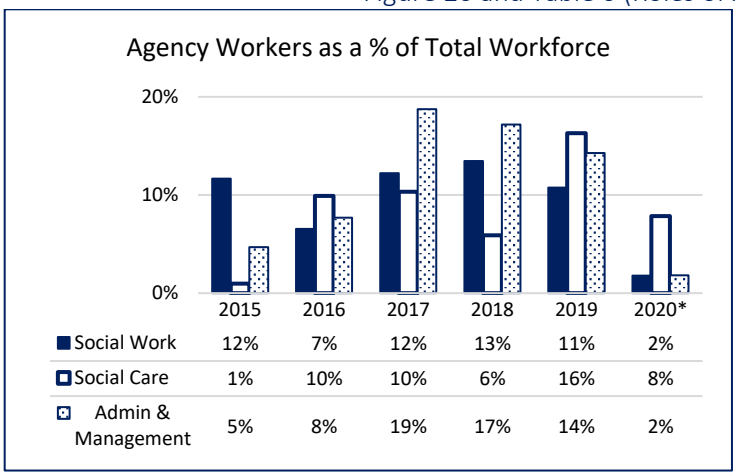
[18] Carey (2006) Selling social work by the pound? The pros and cons of agency care management; Manthorpe et al (2012) Considering the safeguarding risks presented by agency or temporary social care staff: research findings and recommendations. Further research into the use of agency workers in social protection services includes:

- Cornes et al (2013) Assessing the effectiveness of policy interventions to reduce the use of agency or temporary social workers in England.
- Alfredsson and Arnamo (2018) Being an agency social worker A professional outsider?
- Kirkpatrick et al (2018) Client organizations and the management of professional agency work: The case of English health and social care.

[19] Tusla's June 2020 Management Accounts.

Figure 20 displays the trend over time for the proportion of the total workforce made up by agency workers for those in Social Care, Social Work, and Administrative/Management job roles, which comprised 94% of Tusla's total number of agency workers in 2019 (see and Table 6). In relative terms, agency workers have some significant presence (over 5%) in other job roles – such as Family Support, Other Support Staff (including catering), and Psychology and Counselling roles job roles.[20] Agency Conversion catalysed a fall in the ratio of agency workers to Tusla staff in social work roles from 1:8 in December 2019 to under 1:50 in April 2020.

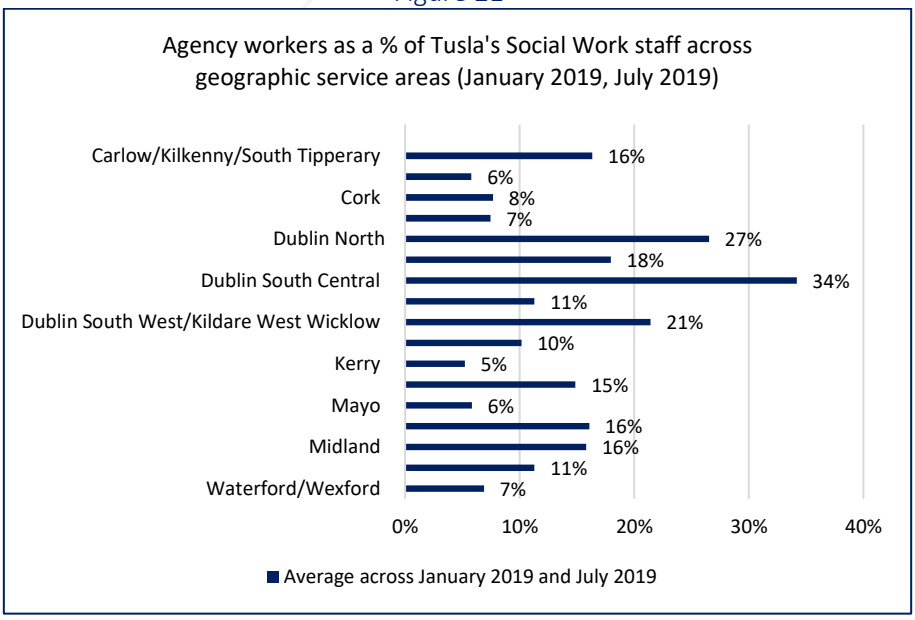
Figure 20 and Table 6 (Roles of Agency Workers)



Agency Workers by Job Category	2019	2020*
Social Care	222	105
Social Work	185	30
Admin (Grade 3-7)	163	18
Family Support	-	6
Other Support Staff (inc. catering)	5	3
Management (Grade 8+)	24	3
Psychology and Counselling	2	1
Other Health Professionals	1	1
Nursing	-	-
Education and Welfare Officer	3	-

Tusla's use of agency staff in social work roles varied across Ireland in 2019. Figure 21 displays agency workers, as a proportion of the total workforce in social work roles, across all Tusla's geographic areas in January 2019 and July 2019.[21] The highest presence of agency workers appeared in the Dublin region.

Figure 21[22]

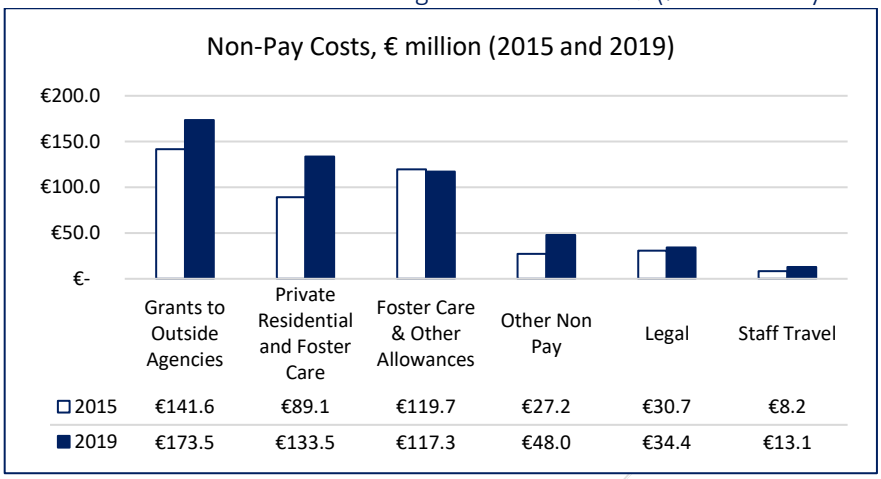


[20] Specific statistics are unavailable for other roles pre-2019, as data is grouped into a single category.
[21] It is unclear what the workload of an average agency worker is, as compared to 1.0 WTE staff at Tusla.
[22] Data provided by DCYA. More recent data is unavailable.

2.5 Collaboration with Other Organisations

Spending on the activities of external organisations, via non-pay costs associated with "Grants to Outside Agencies"[23] and "Private Residential and Foster Care" may have important implications for medium-term planning around the size and scope of Tusla's workforce. This is due to the fact that these organisations often provide services that would otherwise have been provided by Tusla staff. In 2019, Tusla spent over €300 million across these two areas – making up almost 60% of the agency's total non-pay expenses. Figure 22 and Table 7 display the make-up of these costs in 2015 and 2019.

Figure 22 and Table 7 (% of Non-Pay Costs)



Type	2015	2019
Grants to Outside Agencies	34%	33%
Private Residential and Foster Care	21%	26%
Foster Care & Other Allowances	29%	23%
Other Non-Pay	7%	9%
Legal	7%	7%
Staff Travel	2%	3%

Tusla also relies on the support of voluntary organisations to support families and children. However, based on the data available at the time of this analysis, it was not possible to assess the extent to which voluntary organisations contribute to the delivery of Tusla's services, what services they provide, and what operational and governance structures are involved. Given their significant role in providing services, future research is needed to understand the extent to which Tusla relies on the services of voluntary organisations.

[23] The growth in the value of Grants to Outside Agencies is due to the transfer of schemes from other Government Departments since 2014. Tusla has not increased the allocations for these services. All increases in recent years have been allocated by the Irish Government for Family Resource Centres and for Domestic, Sexual and Gender Based Violence services.

3. Tusla - Trends in Recruitment and Retention

Tusla's workforce has steadily increased in size since the agency's formation in 2014. However, in some areas, such as Social Work roles, net increases in staff have been slower due to similar numbers of staff joining and leaving Tusla. Retention is a common issue among social workers and is present in many high-income European countries.

Tusla's hiring pool is constrained for some roles, for example – there are c.200 Social Work graduates in Ireland each year and the role is not covered by visa-sponsorship. Some areas in Ireland appear to have relatively higher levels of unallocated social work cases while also indicating higher demands for more social work staff (based on job orders and the presence of agency workers).

This section examines Tusla's trends in recruitment and retention between 2015 and 2019. Understanding these trends could help define the causes of and responses to Tusla's medium term workforce challenges. Drawing upon data on incoming and outgoing staff, job orders, and service demands – this analysis covers staff availability, Tusla's demand for social work staff, and demand for social work services in Ireland.

3.1 Staff Availability

Tusla's ability to offer services relies on the size and shape of staff recruitment and retention over time. Proactively addressing issues influencing recruitment and retention, such as worker morale, is important because of the potential impacts on efficiency and effectiveness within the agency - which can lead to service users not receiving the consistently high quality support that they need.[24]

Recruitment

Tusla's main job category, Social Work, draws upon a pool of professionals in Ireland who are registered to work through registration with the Health and Social Care Professionals Council (CORU). Registration data from CORU indicates that there were 4,427 social workers registered to work in Ireland in 2019/2020, with 39% of social workers registered to practice in the Dublin region.[25] Beyond this figure, is it is difficult to measure the number of active social workers in Ireland at any one time.

Tusla's recruitment potential draws upon the agency's ability to hire from the existing pool of eligible professionals and the pool's size over time. The number of potential hires increases based on the availability of new social work graduates from third level education in Ireland and the net-immigration of social work professionals from abroad.

[24] Webb and Carpenter (2011) What Can Be Done to Promote the Retention of Social Workers? A Systematic Review of Interventions. The British Journal of Social Work.
[25] Irish Association of Social Workers (2020) Social Work Registration. Note: This is an imperfect measure of the distribution of qualified Social Workers within Ireland, as some of the individuals are registered in more than one area.

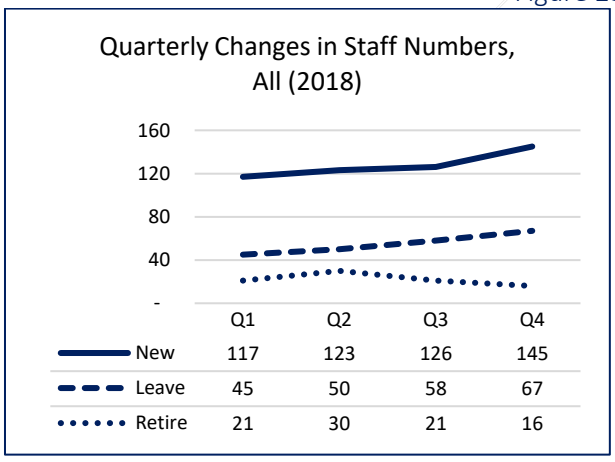
Attracting recent graduates does not appear to be a major issue for Tusla at this time. In 2018, 215 social workers graduated from third level education institutions in Ireland. Tusla alone recruited 65% of them (about 140).[26] As Tusla is competing for staff with the HSE, voluntary services, the private sector and social service providers abroad, this proportion indicates that Tusla is competitive in terms of recruitment. For comparison, in the United Kingdom, only 74% of all 2016/2017 social work graduates gained employment as social workers, across all employers, in the 6 months following graduation.[27]

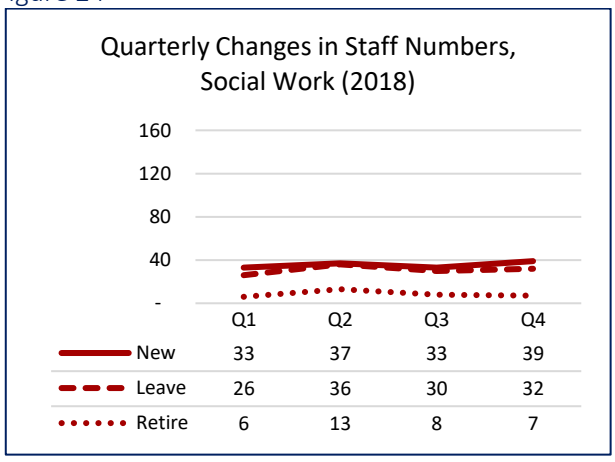
The (lack of) growth in the labour market for social workers in Ireland may be a significant constraining factor in Tusla meeting its workforce needs.[28] The factors driving the number of qualified social workers and the factors influencing whether Tusla hires them are complex. As noted above, potential influences of the number of social workers include the number graduating each year from third level education and immigration from abroad. Social work professionals from non-EU countries are currently not eligible for a visa via the "Critical Skills Employment Permit", due to not qualifying as a "Highly Skilled Eligible Occupation" – an occupational category where employment shortages occur in Ireland.

Retention

Improved employee retention could help maintain Tusla's workforce size, and avoid the considerable financial costs associated with hiring and training new workers. Data on joiners, resignations, and retirements from 2018 indicates that trends appear to be relatively even over the course of a year (Figure 23 and Figure 24).[29]

Figure 23 and Figure 24





Worker retention is uneven across roles. Figure 25 highlights disproportionately higher leaver rates among those working in social work job roles. This issue is not isolated to Ireland, high turnover rates exist in many

[26] Tusla (2018) Annual Report. For comparison – In the United Kingdom, 74% of new social work graduates in 2016/2017 were employed as social workers in the 6 months following graduation.
[27] Skills for Care (2019) Social work education 2019: Skills for Care analysis of Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) data.
[28] Tusla (2018) Corporate Plan 2018-2020; Tusla (2019) Tusla to host first ever open day to recruit social workers on 14th June 2019.
[29] Data provided by DCYA.

high-income European countries.[30] Analysis from 2018 identified leaver rates of 16% across all social work roles in England, two-thirds of whom left their jobs within 5 years of beginning.[31] While the UK's leaver rate is higher than Ireland's, they have a much larger pool of potential staff to hire from, which places them in a stronger position to manage their staff levels. More information on international comparisons is available in Appendix 1. However, there is substantial variance in countries' definitions and descriptions for the providers and recipients of child protection services, making it difficult to draw direct comparisons. More research is needed to be able to adequately compare Ireland's child protection services to that of other countries.

Figure 25

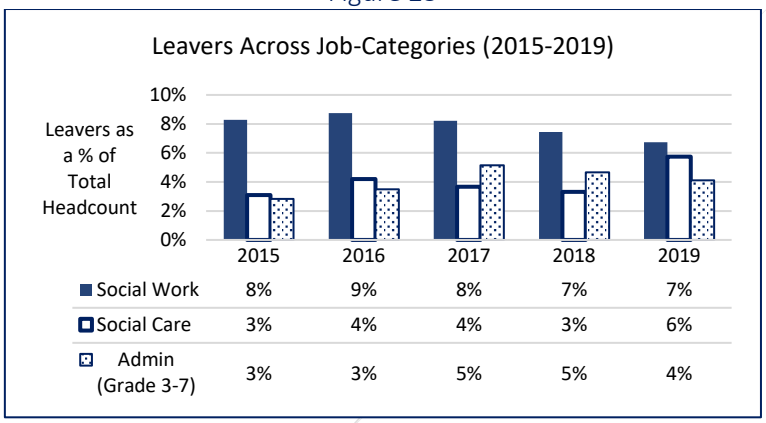
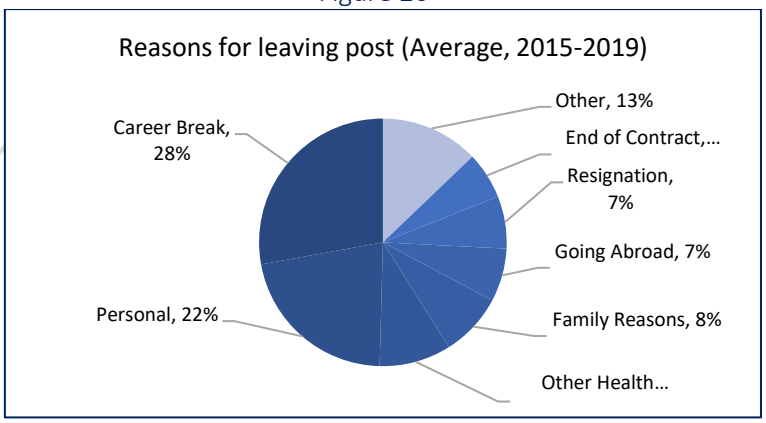


Figure 26 displays a distribution of reasons workers give for leaving Tusla. Many highlighted career breaks and personal reasons, with a minority focusing on job satisfaction – though one third did not specify a reason. Reasons for leaving a role are complex and likely a confluence of various factors – rather than one alone.

Figure 26[32]



[30] Frost et al (2017) Why do they stay? A study of resilient child protection workers in three European countries.
[31] Department for Education, United Kingdom (2018) Experimental statistics: Children and family social work workforce in England, year ending 30 September 2018.
[32] "Other" included: Further Training (3%), Unsuitable Hours (3%), No Promotional Opportunities (3%), No Job Satisfaction (3%), Dismissal (0%), Suppression of Post (0%), End of Training (0%).

- This chart excludes the "Not Specified" responses to profiles of Tusla's staff leavers between 2015 and 2019. No data was available which broke these reasons down according to job role or job grade.
- We cannot assume that the distribution of "Not Specified" leaver responses would closely match the distribution of reasons presented in Figure 26. "Not Specified" responses made up the following proportion of total responses: 2015 (34% of 208), 2016 (39% of 237), 2017 (43% of 247), 2018 (39% of 220), and 2019 (16% of 257).

Other Factors

Other factors that influence size and shape of Tusla's staff over time include job promotions and time away from work.

If many entry-level staff receive promotions from a particular job grade and a large number leave that job grade for external opportunities, there may not be a large enough number of new hires to replace them. It is not clear, based on available data, whether this is a significant issue at Tusla. Increases in Tusla's WTE for staff in Social Work roles between 2015 and 2019 skewed significantly towards those working in roles that are more senior (Section 1.3). Some of this change may be linked to internal promotion processes – for example in 2018, Tusla promoted 205 Social Work staff and hired 142 new starters, while 124 workers left their jobs.[33]

Additional factors affecting Tusla's staff availability include the proportion of workers on maternity/paternal leave or sick leave/marked as absent at a given time. In 2018, the rate of absenteeism was 7% – averaging from 6.1% for social work roles to 9.2% for social care roles. For comparison, the average rate of sick leave for health and social care professionals in the HSE was 3.2% in 2019.[34] In 2019, 3.7% of Tusla's workers were on maternity/parental leave, down from 4.3% in 2018.[35]

Forecasting Staff Availability

Tusla conducts forecasting for Agency use on expected staff numbers for the coming year, including new hires, leavers, and absenteeism. Based on available reporting, forecasting is based on a mixture of accepted posts with planned start dates, potential fulfilment of job orders and recruitment campaigns, and average leavers based on a recent period or an average trend over time. It is unclear to what extent broader factors such as population increases, service ratios, and expected funding influence forecasting of recruitment and retention statistics.

[33] Data provided by DCYA, finding based on staff working with Tulsa at start of 2018 (1466 WTE employees). Not clear which categories of social worker are leaving their jobs.
[34] HSE Absenteeism (June 2020) https://www.hse.ie/eng/staff/resources/our-workforce/workforce-reporting/absenteeism-june-2020.pdf
[35] Calculations assumed that one individual on maternity leave was equal to one WTE worker. This may overestimate the proportional prevalence of Tusla staff on maternity leave.

3.2 Demand for Staff

Indicators of recruitment demands for new staff at Tusla appear in job orders created across specific roles. A job order is a written request from a manager for someone to do a particular job in a particular location, an example of this would be to advertise a vacancy for an entry-level Social Worker in Cork. Figure 27 shows that of the 2,684 job orders received by Tusla between January 2019 and December 2019, almost half were for social work roles. The social work job orders were equivalent to approximately 81% of the total 2019 number of social workers, this number was 54% for social care and 75% for admin roles. Figure 28 highlights that the proportion of job orders submitted across Tusla's geographic service areas appear to vary, based on data from January 2019 and July 2019.[36]

Figure 27

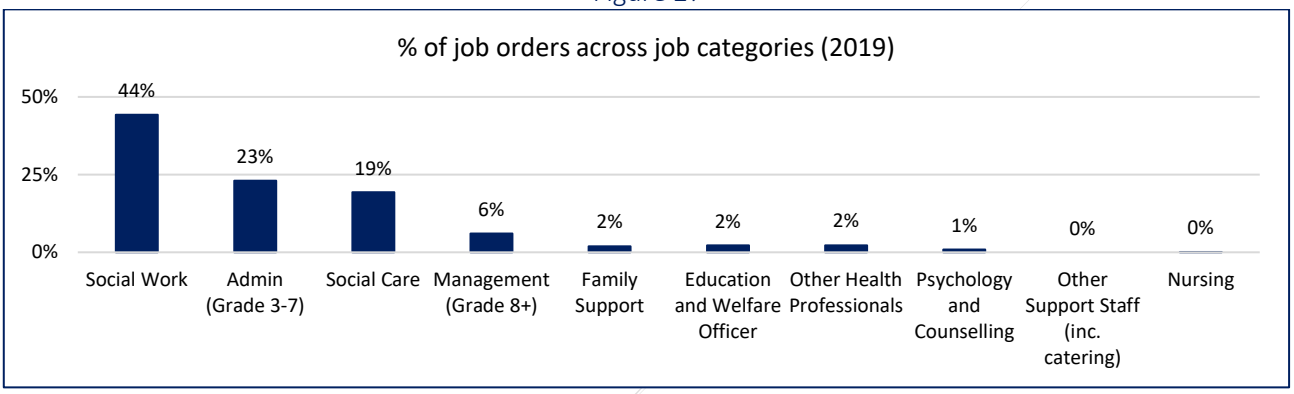
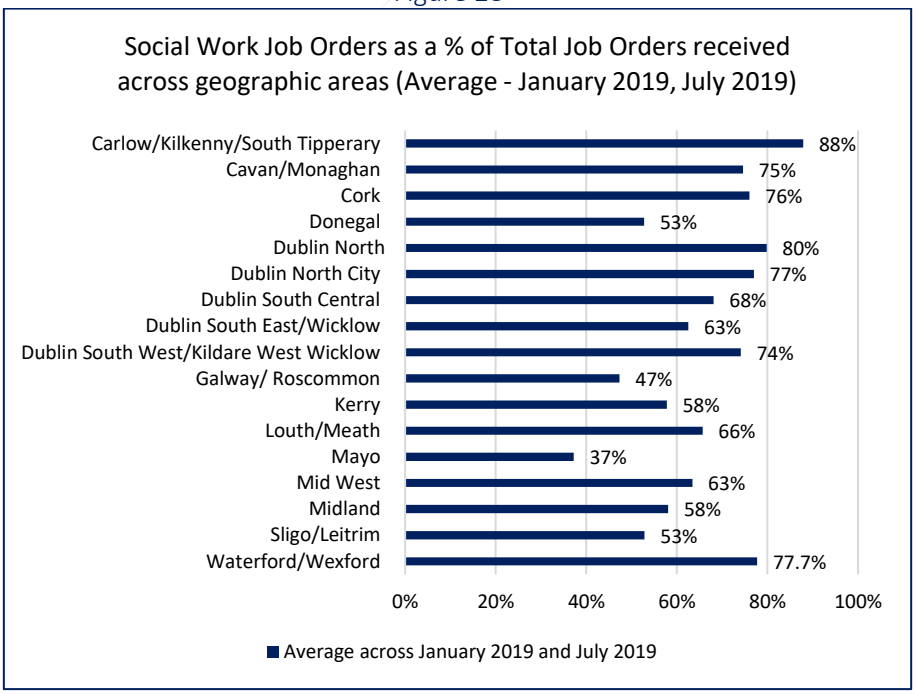


Figure 28[37]



[36] Job orders across geographic service areas do not reflect job orders for Tusla's Child Residential Services, National Services, or Corporate Directorate. It is unclear how many WTE staff a single job order is equivalent to.
[37] Data provided by DCYA.

3.3 Demand for Services

Data on demands for Tusla's services can help analyse Tusla's previous staff constraints and future staff requirements – particularly for staff in Social Work and Social Care roles. It is difficult to estimate demand for social work services in Ireland, but it is possible to examine the presence of persistent pressures on service provision by noting service use trends among individuals already engaged with Tusla (see Figure 3).

One approach to doing this at a high level is to examine recent trends in the number of Child Protection and Welfare referrals Tusla has received, and the number of children in care with an allocated social worker compared to those awaiting allocation of a social worker.

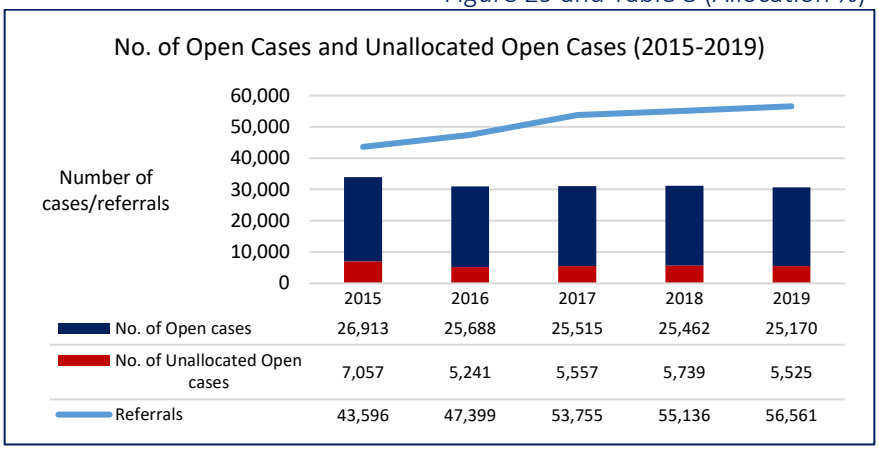
Tusla's policy is that all children requiring social work intervention receive allocation to a named social worker.[38] Statistics on individuals awaiting assignment to a social worker is a measure previously used to highlight challenges faced by Tusla; it is an imperfect measure and cannot account for unknown needs, as child protection systems may be unaware of children in need of support.[39] However, when combined with information on the number of referrals Tusla has received in each year, a clearer picture of demand for Tusla's services can be obtained. A referral is any contact with Tusla where a social work assessment or response is required. It is therefore an important part of Tusla's workforce activity, as all referrals, even those that do not become cases, require staff time to process.

Figure 29 displays the average quarterly number of open cases (overall) and unallocated open cases, and the number of referrals in each year between 2015 and 2019. Open cases include all those allocated and awaiting allocation to a named social worker. Since 2016, the ratio between the number of allocated cases and unallocated open cases has remained relatively similar (Table 8), while the proportion of cases to referrals has increased significantly. The average percentage of allocated cases rose from 74% in 2015 to 78% in 2019, while the number of referrals rose by 30% across this period. The decrease in the proportion of unallocated cases has therefore come at a time when demand for Tusla's services has been increasing significantly.

[38] Averages based on Quarterly reported figures. Sources – Tusla Integrated Activity and Performance Reports (Q4 2016, Q4 2017, Q4 2019) Note: A case awaiting allocation may be "active" on a "duty" system, with a dedicated duty team or rotating social workers on a duty roster taking actions to progress child's protection and welfare. (*Tusla Business Plan 2018*)

[39] Lonne et al (2019) Reconstructing the workforce within public health protective systems: Improving resilience, retention, service responsiveness and outcomes. Child Abuse & Neglect; Hilliard (2019) Tusla got one child protection and welfare referral every ten minutes last year. Irish Times.

Figure 29 and Table 8 (Allocation %)

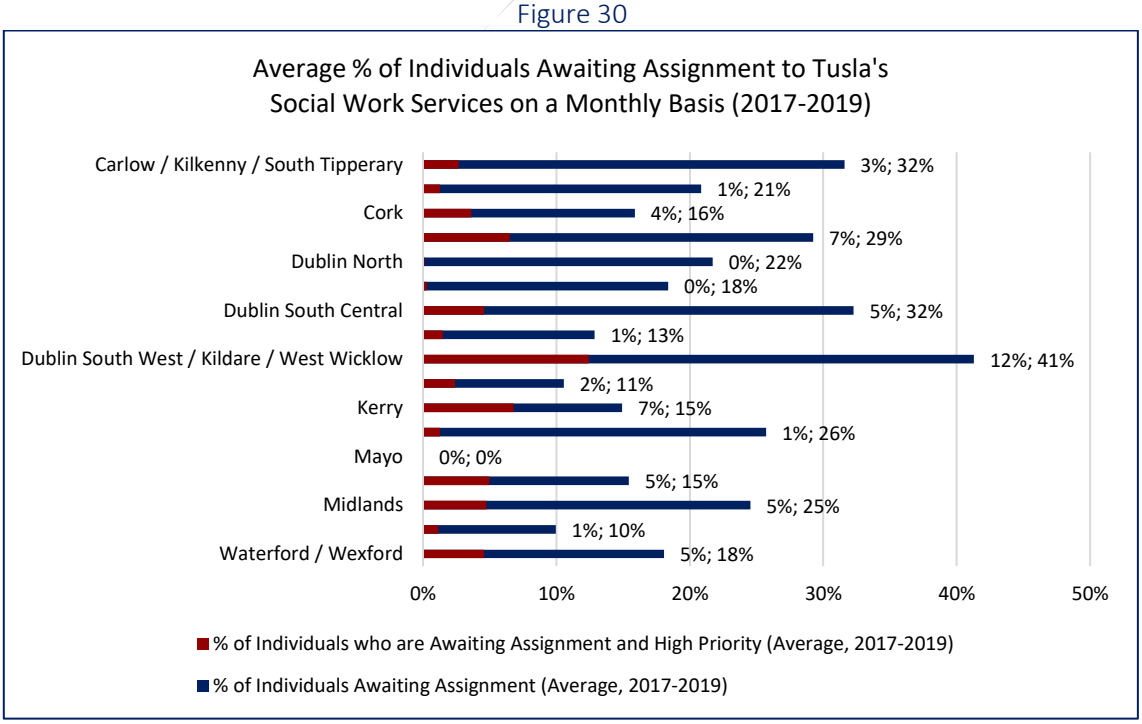


Open Cases	Allocated	Unallocated
2015	74%	26%
2016	80%	20%
2017	78%	22%
2018	77%	23%
2019	78%	22%

Across Tusla's seventeen geographic service areas, there appears to be an uneven distribution in the ratio between the number of allocated cases and unallocated open cases.

Figure 30 displays the average trend in this distribution between January 2017 and December 2019, based on the average number of individuals awaiting assignment to Tusla's social work services each month, as a proportion of all open cases. The highest average was in Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow, with an average of 41% of individuals (696 from 1000/month) open to social work awaiting assignment each month.[40] The lowest was in Mayo, with an average of 0.02% of individuals (0.1 from 467/month) awaiting assignment.

Figure 30



[40] This means that on average, 59% of those open to social work were allocated during this time period.

High proportions of high priority individuals awaiting assignment, seen in several areas in Figure 30, may indicate a strain on local service provision. The annual average figure for high priority individuals awaiting assignment was 836 in 2019, 903 in 2018 and 904 in 2017, representing 3.3%, 3.6%, and 3.6% of all cases respectively.[41] The average between January 2017 and December 2019 was 881 (3.5%) - significantly lower than the averages for Donegal (6.5%), Dublin South West/Kildare/West Wicklow (12.4%), and Kerry (6.8%) during that period.

However, as of June 2020 Tusla are reporting significant improvement on the numbers of unallocated cases. In six of the 17 areas, over 90% of cases have been allocated to a social worker with two of these areas reporting 100%. A further seven areas reported between 80 and 90% of cases allocated. Additionally, between 2019 and 2020 the proportion of cases that remain unallocated for longer than 3 months dropped from 49% to 36%.

Despite the improvements in the proportion of cases that remain unallocated and in the wait time for cases to be allocated (especially in the context of a rise in referrals), a significant level of unallocated cases remain, this needs be a considered in future workforce planning initiatives.

[41] Tusla (2019) Annual Review on the Adequacy of Child Care and Family Support Services Available 2018.

4. Tusla – Workforce Planning

Tusla's workforce planning involves coordination with national level activities in the broader health and social care sector, with specific planning outlined across several strategic documents. At present key challenges include Tusla's ability to hire, retain, and effectively deploy staff.

Further questions remain around the efficiency and effectiveness of Tusla's current workforce and service delivery structures, some of which may be informed by analysis conducted in efforts involving other jurisdictions, sectors, and approaches to improving child protection services.

This section examines Tusla's workforce planning through a look at the agency's overarching approach, current challenges, and responses to those challenges. Understanding these processes can help address the opportunities and risks faced by the Agency within the context of its staffing and workforce planning.

This analysis draws upon a mixture of corporate planning and recent reports on approaches to identifying and addressing workforce related challenges. A compilation of evidence, outlined in Appendix 1, highlights insights which can be drawn from evidence on similar issues from other jurisdictions, sectors, and approaches to improving child protection services.

Kane (2019) Tusla: Assessment of Performance Measurement. DPER.

This analysis builds on a 2019 Spending Review paper that focused on performance measurement capacities and data access.

- The 2019 paper found that, at the time, Tusla lacked data capacity to evaluate the efficiency of the services that the agency provides.
- It also noted that while some data on services could inform an understanding of the effectiveness of services, such as referrals and allocations of cases, there remain gaps, "including information on outputs such as interactions between the social worker and child, and other aspects of the case management".

The paper concluded that Tusla's development and use of an integrated service performance and improvement system would be helpful in supporting the planning and use of the agency's resources.

4.1 Approach

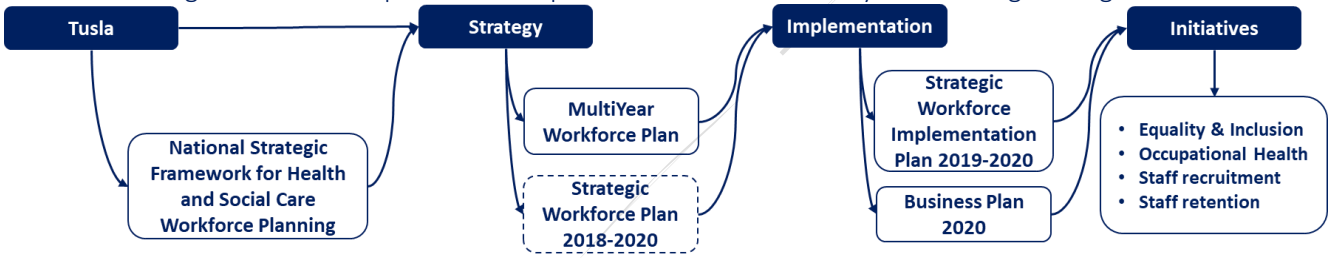
Tusla's overarching approach to developing and implementing workforce planning involves several steps, including alignment with the activities of the wider Health and Social Care sector. Figure 31 outlines the mixture of strategic planning activities, which combine with discrete initiatives, in the development and implementation of Tusla's pay and staffing strategies

Multiple corporate areas, including the Office of the CEO and Human Resources, share Tusla's working planning responsibilities. Tusla's HR functions have focused on addressing workforce issues – Tusla Recruit, was set up in 2016. *Tusla's Strategic Workforce Implementation Plan 2018-2020*, an internal working

document to assist with the imbedding of Workforce Planning in the Agency, is not publicly available. However, substantial information is available in other recently published documents on Tusla's pay and staffing strategy, for example, the Strategic Workforce Plan 2019-2020, and priorities contained within Tusla's business plans.[42]

The Governance Framework established for the implementation of the Workforce Plan formulated a Steering Group, Working Group and wider Representative Group including internal and external stakeholders. The Steering Group provides strategic oversight in addition to direction and leadership for the implementation of the Workforce Planning Implementation Plan 2019-2020. Within the Governance Framework escalated risks are managed and key issues discussed and resolved by these groups. These groups also take decisions on overall priorities and next steps.

Figure 31 – Development and Implementation of Tusla's Pay and Staffing Strategies



4.2 Challenges

Tusla's 2020 Strategic Workforce Implementation Plan notes the Agency faces staffing and workforce planning challenges that are driven by increasing demands for child and family services, a limited labour market for qualified frontline staff, and retaining of staff in a complex and competitive labour market.[43] Additional persistent challenges, beyond staff recruitment, include a range of financial risks.[44]

Increasing demands for child and family services

Since Tusla's establishment in 2014, the annual amount of referrals that the Agency receives has increased by 30.6%, a rise from 43,630 in 2014 to 57,000 in 2018. Moreover, the age group supported by Tusla's services

[42] Tusla (2020) Business Plan 2020; Tulsa (2019) Business Plan 2019.
[43] References are used when additional data has been drawn upon to expand on information presented in Tusla's 2020 Strategic Workforce Implementation Plan.
[44] Hilliard, Mark (2019) Tusla got one child protection and welfare referral every ten minutes last year. Irish Times; Tusla (2018) Corporate Plan 2018-2020; Key risks outlined in Tusla's Financial Performance Reports (Nov 2018 to Oct 2019):

- Demand Led Specialist Residential and Foster Care Placements; Guardian Ad Litem;
- Historical Lack of investment in ICT; Implementation of Joint Protocol between HSE and Tusla;
- IRPP Programme; Legislation for Children First, After Care and Early Years;
- Part year funding of new posts and funding of priority posts to implement HIQA recommendations;
- Payments to the State Claims Agency; Pension Costs;
- Public Liability Insurance for Foster Carers; Risk that the Agency will not be able to live within its 2019 Allocation.

has risen in recent years – which may be a driver of past and potential increases in the levels of demands on Tusla's services.

Statistics from Ireland's most recent Census highlight that, between April 2011 and April 2016, the number of children between 5 and 12 years old (548,693) that were living in Ireland rose 8.8%, and that the number of children between 13 and 18 years old (371,588) rose 7.7%. Comparatively, the number of children between 0 and 4 years old (331,515) fell by 7% over the same period.[45] Ireland's birth rate has declined each year since 2016, so it is likely that the cohort of children for which Tusla has responsibility will decline steadily over the next 5-10 years[46].

Limited labour market of qualified frontline staff

As discussed in Section 2.1, the pool of qualified frontline staff – in particular social workers – that Tusla can draw upon is limited. Tusla is dependent on a small number of third level education providers for new social workers. While non-EU recruitment is limited due to employment permit restrictions linked to the (lack of) Social Work grades' classification as a "Highly Skilled Eligible Occupation" and eligibility for the "Critical Skills Employment Permit" in Ireland. It is unclear what barriers may exist to the recruitment of EU nationals.

Retaining of staff in a complex and competitive labour market

As discussed in Section 2.1, Tusla's corporate planning documents note that there are persistent challenges to acquiring social work and special care staff in a "very competitive labour market". For example, recently qualified social workers appear to exhibit high levels of mobility and often leave Tusla for new opportunities soon after joining (in particular for opportunities abroad). This presents a significant issue, as social workers need to invest time in the role to develop "meaningful experience" and the ability to manage cases that are more complex.

Retention initiatives planned for 2019 and 2020 may address some issues, but it is likely they will take time to impact turnover and overarching issues around the demand and supply of workers may remain.

4.3 Responses

Tusla has recently announced and implemented several discrete initiatives to address staffing and workforce challenges. These include activities outlined in Tusla's 2020 Business Plan and the Agency's Strategic Workforce Implementation Plan 2019-2020, which focused on a mix of workforce planning, service delivery, and overarching corporate governance. Further information on recently completed activities is available in Table A1.

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[45] CSO (2017) Press Statement Census 2016 Results Profile 3 - An Age Profile of Ireland.
[46] CSO (2019) Number of Births, Deaths and Marriages

Workforce Planning

Workforce planning responses include engaging educational institutions, reviewing capacity issues, and engaging with regulatory bodies. Tusla's 2020 Business Plan highlighted efforts to promote Tusla as an employer for social work graduates and engage with third level education providers on the future supply of social workers from higher education institutes. The Plan also noted that Tusla would establish a "clear accountable Pay & Numbers profile for each service".

Tusla's Strategic Workforce Implementation Plan 2019-2020 outlined a planned "Comprehensive Review of Challenges in Areas with High levels of Unallocated Cases", which aims to examine recruitment and retention difficulties and other factors driving the limitation in Tusla's capacity to allocate open cases to services. Lessons from the Review will also inform the organisation-wide Implementation Plan, MDTs pilots, and other retention and capability building initiatives.

The Implementation Plan also noted efforts to liaise with CORU to improve timelines for registration required by regulation, for new graduates to work as social workers in Ireland – an effort which will extend to processes for international social workers if/when visa Social Workers are eligible for work permits based on their profession (e.g. via the "Critical Skills Employment Permit").

Service Delivery

Tusla's Strategic Workforce Implementation Plan 2019-2020 describes a planned "Initial High-Level Design of Multi-Disciplinary Teams model (MDTs)". This approach would be a starting point, with incremental development over the next two to five years, to explore and test the make-up and use of MDTs in Tusla's service delivery approach. Tusla's intends for this work to influence the Agency's broader design and organisation of providing consistent and best practice services to families.

Overarching Corporate Governance

Tusla's 2020 Business Plan highlighted the aim to continue working with overarching efforts by public bodies, including engagement with the "Cross Sectoral Group" led by the Department of Health and the "Social Work Education Group" led by the Department of Children, and Youth Affairs.

Tusla's Strategic Workforce Implementation Plan 2019-2020 highlights the aim in 2014, upon creation of the agency, of creating a Memorandum of Understanding linked to engagements between Tusla and the HSE, in relation to the provision of supports to assist with the transition to and formation of Tusla services. The Implementation Plan notes that while Tusla has undertaken an ambitious programme of reform, set out by government, to move the Agency to a sustainable footing – there remains a reliance on interagency collaboration. Such collaboration can ensure there is an appropriate interface between the agencies and an effective provision of referral pathways, ensuring that the needs of children and their families are at the centre of service delivery.

Discussion and Further research

This section addresses the paper's four key questions and identifies avenues for future research, in light of key findings from this descriptive analysis.

What is Tusla's current workforce and how has it evolved since the establishment of the organisation?

Tusla employed 4,122 WTE staff in December 2019, mostly in social work, social care, and administrative roles. Both the pay budget and the workforce steadily increased between 2015 and 2019, WTE staff numbers rose by 18% and staff pay costs rose by 27%. Tusla's pay budget has been set at €313 million for 2020. Tusla has some recruitment and retention issues. However, recruitment issues may be more important for the agency in the context of medium to long term workforce planning. In some areas, such as Social Work roles, net increases in staff have been slower due to similar numbers of staff joining and leaving Tusla. This area would benefit from further research into how Tusla's staffing levels compare to the staffing levels of similar child protection services in other countries. Future research on the extent to which Tusla relies upon voluntary organisations for service delivery would also be beneficial.

What is the state of the relevant skills pipeline in the Irish labour market?

Tusla has a limited recruitment pool of c.200 graduates each year from higher education in the Republic of Ireland and is in competition with other institutions for these graduates. Ireland can draw upon international recruits where they are eligible to work in Ireland due to citizenship or free movement, but access to the broader international pool of labour is extremely limited due to social work not being a job category that would validate a visa application. Efforts are underway to increase the number of graduates that Tusla can hire each year, via targeted programs addressing needs in underserved geographic areas, increasing education access, and consultations on visa related issues. This area would benefit from future research on the successes of these initiatives.

How sustainable is the current staffing model in terms of delivering on the remit of the organisation?

Forecasting future needs will be critical to ensuring Tusla can maximise the effectiveness of its services within financial and professional constraints. Staff level increases since 2015 have coincided with a 30% increase in referrals and a 4% decline in the proportion of unallocated cases. It is not yet clear if the proportion of unallocated cases can be reduced without increases to the workforce. It isn't possible at this time to determine what efficiency impacts there were from task shifting between Tusla's administrative staff and frontline staff, however, Tusla has recently begun to profile the work of administrative staff supporting social work teams. This area would benefit from further research into the extent to which staffing increases have translated to increased service provision in child protection service in other countries.

How is Tusla performing against its own strategic workforce plan 2018-2020?

At this time, it is difficult to measure the level of progress Tusla has made against its own workforce planning goals, based on available information. It is apparent that Tusla is working to address its staffing and workforce issues, such as trying to increase the pool of workers that Tusla can hire from and to expand the efficiency of its services through more integrated delivery approaches. Over the medium-to-long-term, Tusla will need to develop and implement a strategy that ensures the agency has a sustainable, effective, and well-distributed workforce to implement its services and help link resources to service needs. This paper offers a high-level overview of Tusla's workforce planning and productivity, and can provide a baseline for future research into this area.

Appendix

Appendix 1 - Evidence on Similar Issues

There is significant amounts of publicly available reporting on Tusla's activities from the agency itself and from other state agencies, such as HIQA, the National Review Panel, and the Ombudsman for Children.[47] However, there is less independently published evidence to inform Tusla's workforce planning, though future activities could draw upon analysis of other jurisdictions, sectors, and approaches to improving child protection services. Key actions may include broader efforts to improve service integration and/or adopting a public health approach to child protection that emphasises prevention over response.[48]

Evidence on Tusla (and elsewhere) can be grouped into analysis that is relevant to understanding factors that may influence the size and scope of Tusla's workforce, the management of that workforce, and synergies with other agencies.

- Employee hiring, retention, and turnover drive the size and scope of Tusla's workforce. Several factors influence changes in these drivers.
- Broader governance issues that influence Tusla's workforce may include legacy issues linked to Tusla's formation, Tusla's current corporate structures, and its current synergies with other agencies.
- Little analysis appears to be available on the synergies between Tusla-led activities and those of other agencies.

In the past decade, researchers have highlighted knowledge gaps, conducted analysis, and synthesised evidence surrounding turnover intention predictors among child welfare workers.[4950] Tusla's Strategic Workforce Implementation Plan 2019-2020 highlights the aim in 2014, upon creation of the agency, of creating a Memorandum of Understanding linked to engagements between Tusla and the HSE, in relation to the

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[47] Kane (2019) Tusla: Assessment of Performance Measurement. Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

[48]
- Caffrey (2020) How everyone's business can become no one's business: A systems study of interprofessional referral to child contact centres. Children and Youth Services Review;
- Lonne et al (2019) Reconstructing the workforce within public health protective systems: Improving resilience, retention, service responsiveness and outcomes. Child Abuse & Neglect;
- OECD (2019) Child Protection Online;
- OECD (2015) Integrating Social Services for Vulnerable Groups: Bridging Sectors for Better Service Delivery;
- Whelan (2018) At the Front Door: Child Protection Reporting in a Changing Policy and Legislative Context. School of Social Work & Social Policy, Trinity College Dublin.

[49] Kim and Kao (2014) A meta-analysis of turnover intention predictors among U.S. child welfare workers. Children and Youth Services Review.

[50] McGowan et al (2009) Turnover in the Child Welfare Workforce: A Different Perspective. Journal of Social Service Research.

provision of supports to assist with the transition to and formation of Tusla services. The Implementation Plan notes that while Tusla has undertaken an ambitious programme of reform, set out by government, to move the Agency to a sustainable footing – there remains a reliance on interagency collaboration. Such collaboration can ensure there is an appropriate interface between the agencies and an effective provision of referral pathways, ensuring that the needs of children and their families are at the centre of service delivery. summarises a sample of studies examining recruitment and retention in child protection services in a variety of other jurisdictions. These mostly draw upon evidence from high-income countries, such as Australia, Canada, New Zealand, the United States, and the United Kingdom. Available evidence has useful implications, but it is important to note that there is substantial variance in countries' definitions and descriptions for the providers and recipients of child protection services.[51] Generating comparable data can be challenge, and Tusla may benefit from fostering links with emerging international networks focused on child protection data.[52]

Other sectors, such as healthcare, might add insights. For example, evidence from the UK suggests that the labour supply of healthcare nurses – particularly in large urban centres (i.e. London) – increases in response to increases in wages, relative to other opportunities.[53] This may inform analysis of Tusla's pay structure reform, which has sought to improve staff recruitment rates.[54]

Increasing social service integration could improve staff effectiveness, but doing so comes with risks. Challenges include the need for responsiveness, complex governance structures, variety in skills demands and availability, prioritisation challenges, integrated service delivery, and resource requirements.[55] Addressing these challenges will involve conducting evaluations to understand full value of integrated social services and developing ways to measure the effects of collaboration and the benefits to service users, particularly the most vulnerable.[56] Evidence on inter-professional working in child service referrals from England, which explored why improvement attempts failed, found that cases which could not be safely managed continued to be referred and accepted at supported child contact centres because all actors believed it was someone else's role was to analyse the case and make a decision to accept or reject. Researchers concluded that the

[51] OECD (2015) Integrating Social Services for Vulnerable Groups: Bridging Sectors for Better Service Delivery.
[52] Furey and Canavan (2019) A review on the availability and comparability of statistics on child protection and welfare, including children in care, collated by Tusla: Child and Family Agency with statistics published in other jurisdictions.
[53] Crawford et al (2015) The short run elasticity of National Health Service nurses' labour supply in Great Britain. Institute for Fiscal Studies.
[54] Conneely (2019) Revised pay structure proposed to tackle shortage of social workers. RTE.
[55] OECD (2015) Integrating Social Services for Vulnerable Groups: Bridging Sectors for Better Service Delivery.
[56] OECD (2015) Integrating Social Services for Vulnerable Groups: Bridging Sectors for Better Service Delivery.

complex, adaptive nature of child protection systems makes inter-professional working inherently unpredictable.[57]

Adopting a broader public health approach to child protection might help reduce the number of individuals who need services, and, in turn, staffing requirements.[58] This would involve using public health interventions, at a community level, to address health inequities and structural disadvantages like poverty, racism and social exclusion. Public health interventions are typically lower cost and lower intensity activities than responsive activities. However, it would entail re-imagining the scope of the workforce and the workforce knowledge, skills and values to ensure system capacity and practitioner capability to deliver properly targeted prevention strategies. Nevertheless, existing programs may offer a bridge. Toolkits that support school partnerships with medical and mental health professionals, such New Zealand's Stronger for Tomorrow program, can help provide community-level access to specialised workers that have a diverse range of skills, including social workers and youth workers.[59]

Applying a public health approach could help a substantial proportion of the difficulties reported to Tusla as 'welfare issues', rather than clearly defined "abuse" cases, which relate to parental capacity and family functioning. These issues are more likely to be complex and multi-faceted and require case-by-case deliberations in order to make a decision about the next step to take. Identified challenges involved in achieving this include high levels of demand, low resources, time constraints and limited information.[60]

[57] Caffrey (2020) How everyone's business can become no one's business: A systems study of interprofessional referral to child contact centres. Children and Youth Services Review.
[58] Lonne et al (2019) Reconstructing the workforce within public health protective systems: Improving resilience, retention, service responsiveness and outcomes. Child Abuse & Neglect
[59] Ronchi and Robinson (2019) Child Protection Online. OECD.
[60] Whelan (2018) At the Front Door. Child Protection Reporting in a Changing Policy and Legislative Context. Trinity College Dublin.

Table A1 – Drivers of Recruitment and Retention in the Child Protection Workforce (Sample of Evidence)

Authors	Focus	Summary
Astvik et al (2019)	Drivers	• Focusing on management systems can better ensure sustainable work conditions, particularly systems that promote openness and reciprocity, legal certainty, and ethics, as well as efficacy and productivity, among personnel.[61]
Jansen (2017)	Drivers	• A study of the experiences of newly graduated professionals found that multiplicity, uncertainty, professional divergence and emotional strains were prominent features of the challenges of child protection work.[62]
Kim & Kao (2014)	Drivers	• Meta-analysis of factors influencing turnover intention of child welfare workers in the United States. Found high associations with the attitudes and perceptions of child welfare workers (e.g., organizational commitment and job satisfaction), medium to high associations with stress and burnout, and medium associations with worker inclusion autonomy.[63]
McFadden et al (2017)	Drivers	• Relationships between co-workers and managers also can affect their ability to manage the challenges of child protection work.[64] • Child protection social workers are often a set of younger, and sometimes inexperienced staff, and may require distinct professional supports to encourage retention.[65]
Modderman et al (2019)	Drivers	• Place-related change can profoundly affect transnational social workers.[66]
Lonne et al (2019)	Interventions	• Successful initiatives to increase staff resilience (and in turn retention) within child protection agencies' workforces has proved to be quite elusive at a systems level.[67]
Modderman et al (2017)	Interventions	• High-income countries often use international recruitment to address shortages in social workers. There is little research describing the effectiveness of international recruitment, the profile of recruits, and their retention rates.[68] (The extent of this practice in Ireland is unclear)
Webb & Carpenter (2011)	Interventions	• Evidence reviews indicate that organisational and administrative interventions may improve retention of social workers, more so those focused on addressing individual employee circumstances.[69]

[61] Astvik et al (2019) Reasons for Staying: A Longitudinal Study of Work Conditions Predicting Social Workers' Willingness to Stay in Their Organisation. The British Journal of Social Work.
[62] Jansen (2017) 'It's So Complex!': Understanding the Challenges of Child Protection Work as Experienced by Newly Graduated Professionals. The British Journal of Social Work.
[63] Kim and Kao (2014) A meta-analysis of turnover intention predictors among U.S. child welfare workers. Children and Youth Services Review.
[64] McFadden et al (2017) Commonalities and Differences in Social Work with Learning Disability and Child Protection: Findings from a UK 'Burnout' National Survey. The British Journal of Social Work.
[65] McFadden et al (2017) Commonalities and Differences in Social Work with Learning Disability and Child Protection: Findings from a UK 'Burnout' National Survey. The British Journal of Social Work.
[66] Modderman et al (2019) The Role of Place for Transnational Social Workers in Statutory Child Protection. The British Journal of Social Work.
[67] Lonne et al (2019) Reconstructing the workforce within public health protective systems: Improving resilience, retention, service responsiveness and outcomes. Child Abuse & Neglect.
[68] Modderman et al (2017) Transnational social workers in statutory child welfare: A scoping review. Children and Youth Services Review.
[69] Webb and Carpenter (2011) What Can Be Done to Promote the Retention of Social Workers? A Systematic Review of Interventions. The British Journal of Social Work.

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To ensure accuracy and methodological rigour, the author engaged in the following quality assurance process.

- Internal/Departmental
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