



## What Works Learning Strategy

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## 1. Introduction

What Works is a prevention and early intervention initiative led by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) and funded through Dormant Accounts. This learning strategy aims to set out the initiative's approach to delivering learning opportunities for all those working with prevention and early intervention (PEI) approaches for children, young people and their families in Ireland. The audience for learning opportunities under What Works is intended to be broad, covering both those already familiar with PEI and those to whom the concept is new, but for whom it may lead to better outcomes. It covers the spectrum of policy, provision and practice.

This document focuses on outlining the key principles which should guide every learning opportunity commissioned under What Works. For decision makers involved with the initiative, it should serve as a guide to deciding whether an opportunity aligns with the goals of What Works. For those who may be taking up a learning opportunity under What Works, it should set expectations about what such an opportunity will entail. Through this strategy, readers should become familiar with what we want to achieve with the learning and development strand of this initiative. Namely, a learning environment which is inviting, supportive, approachable and responsive to the needs of this important sector.



## 2. What Works

Under What Works, four key strands have been identified to embed and enhance prevention and early intervention in children and young people's policy, service provision and practice. The four strands under What Works are interconnecting and mutually supporting. They address key problems that have hampered service provision for children and young people. These strands are:

- **Data:** This strand aims to improve access and use of data and information relating to children, young people and their families by aligning and developing existing and emerging data.
- **Evidence:** This strand aims to harness the learning from prevention and early intervention initiatives and research and support the use of this learning as a source and resource to inform planning, delivery, evaluation and continuous improvements.
- **Learning and Development:** This strand aims to enhance the capacity and skills of policymakers, providers and practitioners in the appraisal and application of evidence informed approaches in prevention and early intervention for children and young people.
- **Quality:** This strand aims to align, enhance and sustain quality in prevention and early intervention as it relates to the development and delivery of policy, provision and practice for children and young people.

What Works will foster better coordinated, coherent and connected policy and provision focusing on effective prevention and early intervention, improved access to data informing PEI approaches, improved development of practitioner-led outcome data for clients at individual service level to inform practice and service design, and improved availability of evidence for practitioners, service providers and policy makers informing PEI approaches.

What Works will foster enhanced cross government commitment and alignment to PEI programming leading to an integrated system of services with less duplication, overlaps and an improved use of resources and a space for innovation to respond to emerging needs of children and families. It will foster enhanced use of data in planning and provision and targeting of resources to improve outcomes for children and young people through national and local area planning structures, and the systemic and mainstreamed use of evidence informed programmes, initiatives and approaches to PEI.



### 3. Why Prevention and Early Intervention?

Realising the potential of professionals to improve the lives of children and young people begins by recognising the transformative power of prevention and early intervention. Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children and Young People defines prevention and early intervention as “intervening at a young age, or early in the onset of difficulties, or at points of known increased vulnerability such as school transitions, adolescence and parenthood.”<sup>1</sup> Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures recognises that prevention and early intervention is cost effective: high quality, evidence informed prevention and early intervention services can help to address difficulties such as early school leaving and behavioural problems, and the Government is committed to rebalancing resources to place greater emphasis on prevention and early intervention for children, young people and their families.<sup>2</sup>

Recent research has bolstered the case for prevention and early intervention. According to the Early Intervention Foundation (EIF), when offered in response to identified risks early intervention approaches can support four key areas of children’s development: physical, cognitive, behavioural, and social and emotional.<sup>3</sup> Physical development is associated with children’s physical health, maturation, and the presence or absence of a physical disability. Cognitive development includes children’s acquisition of speech and language, literacy and numeracy skills. Behavioural development relates to a child’s ability to regulate their own behaviour, while social and emotional development includes the ability to understand and manage emotions, set and achieve positive goals, feel and show empathy for others, and make responsible decisions. By stimulating these four areas of development, long-term benefits of early intervention may increase a child’s employment opportunities, life expectancy, and reduce crime.<sup>4</sup>

Making the case for investment in prevention and early intervention across Government, the Prevention and Early Intervention Network (PEIN) have argued that such services benefit young

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<sup>1</sup> Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2014). *Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for children and young people 2014–2020*. Dublin: Department of Children and Youth Affairs, p.29.

<sup>2</sup> *ibid*, p.29-30.

<sup>3</sup> Early Intervention Foundation (2018). *Realising the Potential of Early Intervention*. London: Early Intervention Foundation, p. 8.

<sup>4</sup> *ibid*.



children, older children, parents and society. Practical benefits for young children may include a higher birth weight, higher immunisation, and a reduced risk of maltreatment. Older children may have a reduced risk of engaging in substance abuse (alcohol, tobacco, and other drugs), and improved school engagement. According to a recent PEIN report, parents may experience improved self-esteem and improved parenting skills, and society may benefit from reduced use of psychiatric and hospital services, and reduced use of care services.<sup>5</sup>

While significant recent research has demonstrated the benefits of prevention and early intervention approaches for children in the early years, such an approach may improve the outcomes of children and young people of any age. As recent international research has pointed out, prevention and early intervention 'may be adopted early in the life of the child but also early in the life of the difficulty.'<sup>6</sup> Considerable focus has been placed on early years provision, but such a focus, to the exclusion of provision for older children, may distort our understanding of the importance of this period of a child's life or devalue work taking place with older children.<sup>7</sup>

In addition, prevention and early intervention can reduce the long-term need for more costly, disruptive interventions throughout the child and young person's life. In the UK, EIF have developed a Guidebook capable of ranking programmes by evidence of effectiveness and cost rating for a number of child outcomes, encompassing cohorts from antenatal to adolescents. EIF have specifically studied the costs of late intervention in Northern Ireland, finding that "[w]hile there is a clear moral case to reduce harm caused in childhood, there are also significant fiscal benefits for doing so: intervening early has the potential to reduce costs in the public sector, before issues become entrenched and more expensive to deal with."<sup>8</sup>

However, we also know that prevention and early intervention is not a panacea. The effectiveness of an intervention is determined by the nature of the intervention, the evidence for its effectiveness, the services involved in delivering the intervention, the context in which it is delivered and,

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<sup>5</sup> Prevention and Early Intervention Network (2019). *Prevention and Early Intervention in Child Health Services*. Dublin: Prevention and Early Intervention Network, p. 9. Available online from PEIN ([https://www.pein.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/PEIN-Child-Health-Policy-Paper\\_Every-Childhood-Lasts-a-Lifetime\\_2019-10-1.pdf](https://www.pein.ie/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/PEIN-Child-Health-Policy-Paper_Every-Childhood-Lasts-a-Lifetime_2019-10-1.pdf)) (Accessed 7 January 2021).

<sup>6</sup> Priscilla Magee (2017). 'The potential of all the 'P's'—provision, practice and positioning of parenting programmes: can application of these collectively attain a P+ in early intervention for families within Northern Ireland?' *Child Care in Practice*, 23:1, p.13.

<sup>7</sup> Priscilla Magee (2017). 'The potential of all the 'P's'—provision, practice and positioning of parenting programmes: can application of these collectively attain a P+ in early intervention for families within Northern Ireland?' *Child Care in Practice*, 23:1, p.13.

<sup>8</sup> Peter Fitzsimons and William Teager (2018). *The Cost of Late Intervention in Northern Ireland*. London: Early Intervention Foundation, p. 5.



principally, the practitioners working with the child or young person. Prevention and early intervention is an approach to service delivery, and while interventions delivered using this approach may have beneficial effects for children's development, the intervention must effectively address the difficulty or vulnerability of the service user.

Across public services, even where what works for service users is known through a process of scientific research, change can be stubborn and slow. Impact evaluations demonstrate that 'the same' policy can have different effects on different populations, and successful trials in small areas may yield different results at scale, even in the same country.<sup>9</sup> While there is widespread agreement about the value of evidence in policy making and service design, what constitutes 'good' evidence is disputed, and models of implementation have prized the translation of explicit, 'scientific' knowledge.<sup>10</sup> Cathy Sharp notes that debates about the relative merits of different kinds of knowledge is evolving, and policy makers may now employ evidence more contingently, balanced against factors such as '[values and preferences] of local communities, and a focus on practice, local reinvention and customisation, particularly in healthcare improvement.'<sup>11</sup>

Careful consideration must be invested by practitioners, providers and policymakers to understand the needs and experiences of the potential client group before and during the delivery of an intervention. Responses may include population approaches, universal provision targeted in specific areas of social disadvantage, or availability across a wider geographical area. There is also variation in terms of mode of delivery according to whether an individual or group-based approach was most likely to work with that group of parents.<sup>12</sup>

## Prevention and Early Intervention - Learning

Knowledge and understanding of PEI has grown considerably in recent years with an increase in the range and depth of research on the subject. The Cambridge Handbook of International Prevention Science (2017) offers a comprehensive global overview on prevention science research from around the world. It includes major sections on the foundations of prevention as well as examples of new

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<sup>9</sup> Cathy Sharp (2018). *Collective Leadership: Where Nothing is Clear and Everything Keeps Changing*. Edinburgh: Collective Leadership for Scotland, p. 30.

<sup>10</sup> Jodie Pennacchia (2013). *Exploring the Relationships Between Evidence and Innovation in the Context of Scotland's Social Services*. Glasgow: IRISS, p. 12-13

<sup>11</sup> Cathy Sharp (2018). *Collective Leadership: Where Nothing is Clear and Everything Keeps Changing*. Edinburgh: Collective Leadership for Scotland, p. 31.

<sup>12</sup> Fiachra Kennedy (2019). *Prevention & Early Intervention Series Focussed Policy Assessment No.6 - Family Services Supporting Children and their Families*. Dublin: Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service, p. 32.



initiatives in the field, detailing current prevention efforts across five continents. More locally, an Irish report: Prevention and Early Intervention in Children and Young People's Services: Ten years of Learning (Rochford et al, 2014), summarises the learning emerging from six outcome reports based on the findings from evaluations of prevention and early interventions in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The report highlights eight key messages, including that supporting parents pays real dividends in terms of better outcomes for children. It shows that supporting key transitions – such as moving from early years services, to primary school – is critical and can make a significant difference to life outcomes, and that consultation with local communities is essential to ensure that prevention and early intervention services and programmes fit with the needs of children, young people and their families.

Considerable practice wisdom now supplements the research. Evaluated Irish programmes include: the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme (PEIP) 2007-2013; the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative (PEII), the Area Based Childhood Programme (2013-2017), the Prevention Partnership and Family Support Programme (PPFS) in Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, the Nurture Programme and Parents Support Initiative (2013-2016) in the Katherine Howard Foundation, and the Early Intervention Transformation Programme in Northern Ireland.

From all sources, it is now widely agreed that prevention and early intervention rests on a core set of key values and principles, as expressed in a report for the Social Care Institute for Excellence (Waine, et al, 2005) which concludes that:

- Although some basic needs are universal, there are many ways to meet them.
- There are unique advantages for children in experiencing normal family life in their own birth family, and every effort should be made to preserve the child's home and family links, with support at and closer to home.
- Children and young people are entitled to protection from neglect, abuse and exploitation.
- Children, young people and parents should all be considered as individuals with particular needs and potentialities.
- Young people's wishes must be elicited and taken seriously, with rights protected and choices available for people using services
- Social inclusion and equitable access are key, as age, sex, health, personality, race, culture and life experiences are all relevant to any consideration of needs and must be taken into account when planning or providing help.

Recent research and developments are also now pointing to the centrality of everyday human qualities in PEI. Writing for the Carnegie Trust UK, Unwin (2018), shows how much human



relationships matter in times of change and challenge, with acts of kindness having a powerful impact on the wellbeing of individuals and communities. Other work highlights how professionals nurturing kindness in communities is essential to providing the 'good help' that equips people to take positive action to improve their lives (Wilson et al, 2018). There is growing emphasis on interactions that build altruism and mutual aid, which extend the radius of trust and reduce anti-social behaviour in communities.

This essentially relational approach requires policy and practice to support innovations that boost trust, social capital or social cohesion across communities (bringing indirect benefits for individual health and development). The two-way communication that is essential between users and providers also opens up the possibility for policies and practices to be better informed by the ideas coming from citizens, children and young people, as well as professionals.

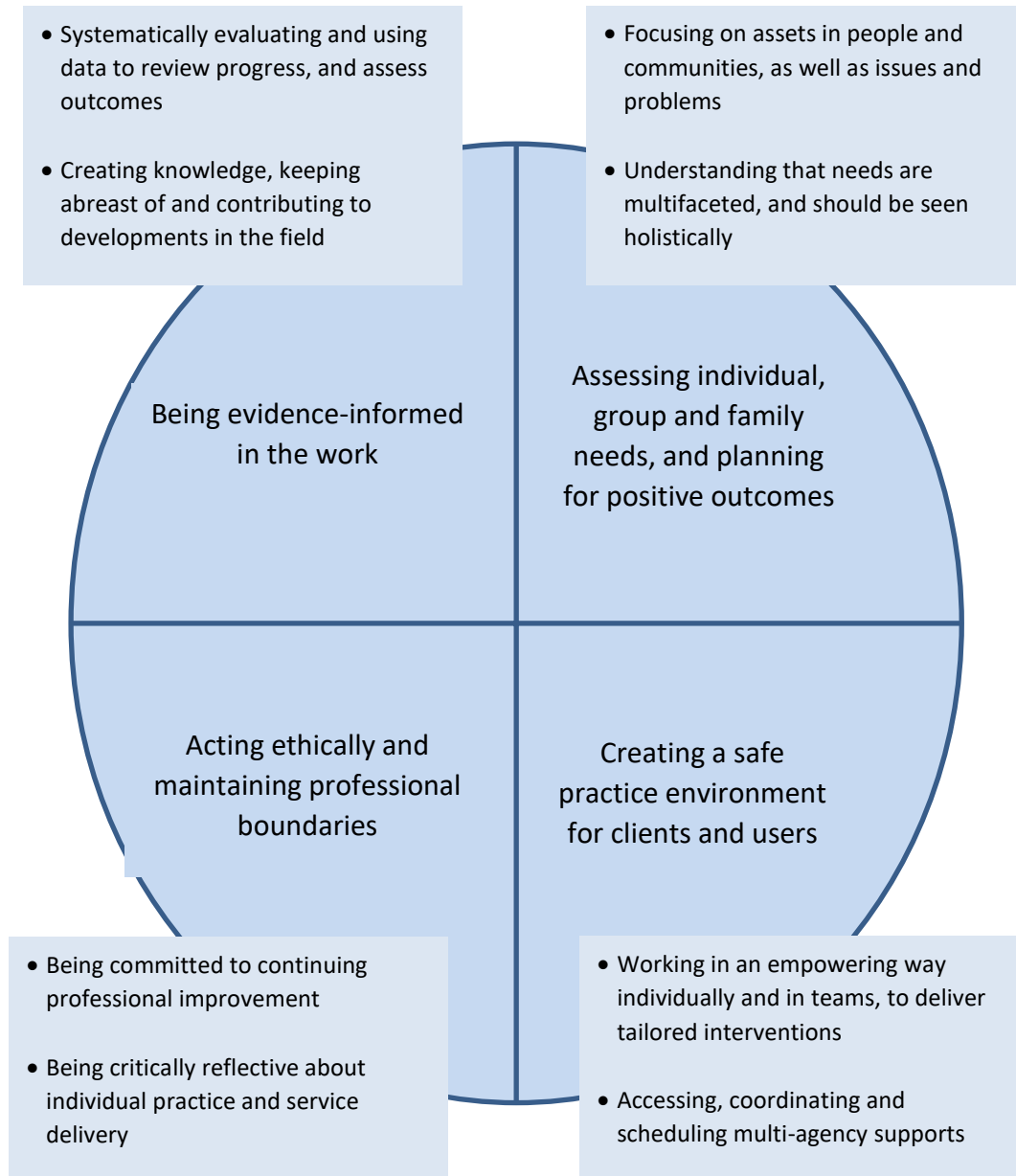
A collective approach to leadership is required to affect change. Enacting this approach, however, requires recognising the practical reality of working in a complex area which requires establishing and maintaining fraught human relationships. Recent research has established that traditional approaches to evaluation may act as a 'barrier to transformation,' and suggests a model which navigates, rather than obscures, the difficulties in the evaluative process. 'Action inquiry' is a promising approach which focuses on learning and collaborative development of practice-based knowledge. It is based on a sound diagnosis of established problems of evaluation (Sharp, 2018).

Taken as a whole, the research and practice wisdom points to a core set of relational behaviours in PEI learning, which gives a focus to the content of the Learning Strategy. This core is illustrated below in **Figure 1**.





**Figure 1: Core behaviours in Prevention and Early Intervention Learning**





## What Works – Key Elements

### What Works Website

The What Works [website](#) is continually being developed as a source and resource to support best practice responses for those working with children and young people in the area of prevention and early intervention. As new learning resources are developed, the website will grow as a library of information on this sector. Already, the What Works website houses lectures, panel discussions, and conversations from the What Works launch and Festival of Learning as well as data and evidence resources, with further development forthcoming.

### Outcomes for Children Data and Information Hub

[The Outcomes for Children Data & Information Hub](#) is an online interactive area based mapping system developed in collaboration with Tusla and with input from stakeholders across this sector. The hub provides an intuitive web platform to visualise published data sets as they relate to children and young people. This powerful tool for practitioners, providers and policymakers is available online.

The information that can be accessed through the hub is based on an agreed set of indicators referencing the national set of indicators framed against the five national Outcomes of Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures. The hub has been designed to use validated and quality assured datasets from agencies to populate the agreed indicator set and overlay the indicators with additional information as required for planning purposes e.g. child population overlaid with child health indicators and / or child health service location details.

Initially, the project was piloted with eleven CYPSC in the first year, with the aim of rolling it out across all CYPSC areas in subsequent years. It has included training and support for Tusla and relevant CYPSC personnel during all phases of the project including the operation of a geo mapping system, data interpretation, trend analysis and specific training in Results Based Accountability (RBA). This project therefore offers a sustainable opportunity to provide a national standardised technical solution for mapping outcomes, indicators and services for children and young people.

### Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice Project (REPPP)



In 2016, the Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS) and University of Limerick (UL) established the Research Evidence into Policy, Programmes and Practice (REPPP) project. It is an innovative partnership between the School of Law, University of Limerick and Government. The School is leading the development of evidence-informed policy research in the youth crime area in Ireland.

UL is assisting What Works to develop evidence informed approaches to policy, programmes and practice. This work comprises the design and delivery of learning opportunities with key groups and the creation of training materials to support the initiative. In 2021, UL will continue to

- a) Roll out of executive programmes to local leadership teams identified by DCEDIY. This will include a level of technical assistance for projects developed as part of this programme. This may include facilitation, academic consultation, or acting as a 'critical friend' when reviewing project materials.
- b) Design, develop and deliver training and teaching materials to support prospective public servants, local leadership, existing public and voluntary sector leaders and potential public and voluntary sector leaders in making better evidence-informed decisions relating to planning for children and young people.
- c) Devise an implementation and impact report on this partnership for publication, and contribute content to the What Works website.

## **What Works – Context**

This Department is acutely aware that What Works is not the only significant development focusing on prevention and early intervention in this sector. It is one of a number of developments in the area of learning and development which are being pioneered by statutory and non-statutory bodies alike. As What Works continues to develop, it is increasingly apparent that communication between and mutual awareness of these developments is vital to prevent duplication of effort or, worse, conflicting learning.

It is important for all those of us working in this area to recognise What Works, and indeed Government, only have some of the answers. Only by working together and learning from one another can we achieve the best possible outcomes for children and young people. As such, it is important to set out some of the other current developments in this sector, acknowledging that it is not possible to capture all the work in this growing space.



This strategy recognises that What Works needs to engage with a diverse range of professionals working with children and young people during the period of the initiative. Relevant sectors include, but are not limited to, education, health (including mental health and substance abuse work), social work, housing, early years, probation, An Garda Síochána, and youth services. The potential workforce operates under specific regulatory requirements, and served by different representative and oversight structures.

The Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (DCEDIY) recognises that the scale of ambition in this Learning Strategy. Its aims to enhance the knowledge, skills and capacity of policymakers, providers and practitioners to appraise and apply evidence informed prevention and early intervention approaches cannot be achieved without cross-Government and cross-sectoral collaboration. While DCEDIY has a key role in policy and provision for children and young people it is not the only significant stakeholder within Government or the wider environment of children and young peoples' services.

The focus of DCEDIY in the period 2021-2022 will be based on working first in areas in which the Department already has a clear remit. However, the wider ambition of the Learning Strategy is to stimulate activity around prevention and early intervention for children and young people with the engagement and active participation of the whole of Government and other stakeholders across society.

The Learning Strategy recognises that over recent years, there has been an increased focus on strategic workforce planning which has included a commitment to enhanced professional development alongside recruitment and retention of staff. In November 2017, The Department of Health published the National Strategic Framework for Health and Social Care Workforce Planning to support the recruitment and retention of the right mix of workers across the health and social care system to meet planned and projected service need.

Policy in this area has also developed considerably, particularly with the landmark publication of First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families in November 2018. First 5 is a ten-year plan across all aspects of children's lives to help ensure positive early experiences. First 5 provides a framework to improve the lives of babies, young children and their families consisting of four goals with key objectives and building blocks. In particular, Building Block



3 focuses on the creation of ‘an appropriately skilled and sustainable workforce that is supported and valued and reflects the diversity of babies, young children and their families.’<sup>13</sup>

As this suggests, progress in the area of prevention and early intervention has not been driven solely by this Department. In May 2017, a Prevention and Early Intervention Unit’s (PEIU) was established in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) with a focus on prevention and early interventions that can improve the life outcomes of children as well as the quality of life of older people dealing within long term conditions such as chronic illness within the context of population health.

In 2018, the PEIU began the process of undertaking a series of Focussed Policy Assessments on key prevention and early interventions supported by public resources with the initial assessments focusing on the areas of Immunisation, Aftercare, Diabetes Retina Scanning, Education Welfare and Early Learning and Childcare. As a whole, this series of descriptive reports provides the evidential base for a thematic consideration of prevention and early interventions in Ireland. While the prevention and early intervention work of the unit has now concluded, its valuable series of reports is available [online](#), and continues to inform What Works. This includes valuable comparisons of PEI programmes across Ireland, and a working paper on the design and implementation of PEI approaches.

Tusla, the Child and Family Agency is the dedicated State agency responsible for improving wellbeing and outcomes for children and ensuring that all decisions affecting children are guided by the best interests of the child. Tusla was established in 2014 and continues to develop a robust programme of preventative and early intervention work for children, young people and their families. In recognition of the need for a rebalancing of resources towards prevention and early intervention, Tusla developed the Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Programme in 2015. The programme seeks to strengthen and develop Tusla’s prevention, early intervention and family support services. PPFS is being implemented by Tusla under four work streams: the Area-based Approach; Meitheal and Child and Family Support Networks, Parenting Support, Child and Youth Participation, and Information and Evidence.

PPFS was subject to a significant evaluation by the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre at NUI Galway, published in September 2018. The evaluation found that Tusla is developing a greater focus

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<sup>13</sup> Government of Ireland (2018) First 5: A Whole-of-Government Strategy for Babies, Young Children and their Families. Government Publications, p. 14.



on prevention and that the agency's organisational culture is increasingly inclusive of families, in line with the vision for PPFS.



## 4. Learning

The intentions and scope of the What Works Learning Strategy are expressed in an overarching logic model, which shows the links between objectives, inputs, outputs and outcomes (see [Figure 2](#)). The logic model provides a template for a detailed action plan delivered annually animating the various elements in the strategy. It is anticipated that other Departments and State Agencies, and others, may undertake activities aligned to the Learning Strategy, and in some cases be supported to do so. The plan will be prepared by DCEDIY and updated to reflect new activities as they arise.

In respect of the What Works Learning and Development strand, the Department recognises that it must respond to the needs of professionals working in practice, provision, and policy. The approach must be coordinated to ensure its impact is felt at the right time for children and young people, and it must have regard to existing capacity development initiatives across children and young peoples' sectors. The What Works Learning Strategy provides a strategic approach to investing in professional learning and will guide activity to ensure that these objectives are met.

The Learning Strategy is premised on the idea that effective PEI is underpinned by an evidence-informed approach that helps people and organisations make informed decisions, which is achieved by integrating the best available evidence with the professional judgement of commissioners, managers, practitioners and the experiences of service users. This approach can include promoting or adopting evidence-based programmes where there is good evidence from rigorous evaluations that they can have a positive impact on outcomes. However, this also necessitates a level of skill on the part of the programme implementer who must balance programme fidelity with flexibility and fit within specific community contexts. The opportunities offered under What Works must support reflective practice and continual growth by practitioners across the policy to practice continuum, facilitating persistent curiosity to ensure quality, evidence informed services for children, young people and their families. This year has also highlighted the importance of a mixed-method of deliver of these opportunities, and the potential of online learning to grow the audience of those engaged with PEI.

Covering the period 2021 to 2022, the Learning Strategy brings together the key learning in prevention and early intervention and evidence informed approaches from different initiatives, practice fields and organisations. It will link all the strands of What Works as interacting and supportive parts of one initiative. As generating and using data and evidence is essential in practice, service and policy development, it will be central to learning opportunities supported under the



initiative. Quality enhancement understood as continuous improvement, and innovation as a process of problem-solving, will also be a primary focus.

## Aim, Objectives and Learning Outcomes

The **aim** of the Learning Strategy is to enhance the knowledge, skills and capacity of policymakers, providers and practitioners across all sectors serving children, young people and families to appraise and apply evidence informed prevention and early intervention approaches and models to their work with children, young people and their families. Ultimately, the desired long-term outcome from the implementation of this strategy is improved outcomes for children and young people.

As learners have different starting points, the strategy will cater for four main groups: those new to PEI and an evidence-informed approach, for experienced practitioners, for managers and others in executive roles, and for policy and decision-makers. The **objectives** of the Learning Strategy are to

- Disseminate key messages concerning the principles and practices of prevention and early intervention.
- Enable access to a range of relevant training, information and guidance.
- Establish platforms for debate and development in PEI.
- Bring stakeholders together to consider latest thinking and practices.
- Support existing networks and other key influencers aligned with the aims of What Works.
- Provide mentoring and coaching support for initiatives.

The Learning Strategy will enhance knowledge and stimulate thinking as well as help to develop skills and competences. The **outcomes** can be articulated as follows:

- Increased and more widespread understanding of the research and theory behind PEI.
- Improved knowledge of the principles underpinning PEI.
- Enhanced knowledge of effective PEI practices.
- Enhanced skills and competences to carry out PEI practices and approaches.
- Enhanced knowledge of implementation science.
- Increased capacity to adopt an evidence informed approach including:
  - needs analysis





- uses of data
- outcomes focused planning
- measurement
- monitoring, evaluation and review.



## 5. Elements in the Learning Strategy

The Learning Strategy must meet several requirements. It should support capacity building at policy, service provider and practitioner levels. Furthermore, the learning content needs to enhance knowledge, stimulate thinking and promote a sense of persistent curiosity as well as help to develop skills and competences. As learners have different starting points and learn in a variety of ways, the strategy must cater for needs at introductory, developing, and advanced levels, and at different levels of intensity.

Moreover, all learning and development activities need to fit into learners working patterns. The requirements call for a comprehensive, coherent and flexible suite of activities that together support capacity building across a range of sectors. To this end, the strategy champions a mixed-method methodology, with a graduated approach to learning with opportunities targeted at cohorts with a range of experiences on PEI.

- **Conferences, roundtables and symposia** which bring people together to stimulate debate and develop thinking and consideration of latest ideas, trends or practices and a venue for dissemination of knowledge.
- **Seminars/workshops/roadshows**, which enable widespread and rapid access to new ideas and practices. They are a useful mechanism for spreading messages, particularly to those new to PEI.
- **Information, guidance, materials, and resources**, disseminated on the WHAT WORKS website.
- **Coaching and mentoring** which meets the need for expertise, guidance and advice in relation to an evidence informed approach, or a specific topic such as use of data at different levels of need.
- **Engaging with networks and key influencers**, which may promote ideas and messages about PEI and EIA through existing research and practitioner networks through grant support or other methods.
- **Learning communities**, which may bring people together to receive training, share lessons and best practices, evaluate performance, and work individually and collaboratively to implement practice changes over time
- **Action Learning Sets** which allow in depth consideration of barriers to develop in a solution-focused way, and can bring people together from different levels, organisations and sectors



- **Executive type modules** which meet the need for policy makers and funders to create an enabling context for PEI to flourish, and to support the adoption of evidence informed approaches at all levels.
- **Short courses for practitioners**, which may operate on a short series of linked inputs delivered in blocks which allow practice work to continue between them, concluding with a practitioner conference which enables the dissemination of learning.

## 6. Learning Strategy Action Plan

Under What Works, the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth will develop an action plan for each calendar year setting out a number of learning and development items which will proceed. The plan will be developed with due regard for developments in other areas to avoid duplication, and will be built on a robust needs analysis of children and young people's sectors. Under What Works, the Department will aim to deliver a mix of learning opportunities in 2021 and 2022 open to all those working with children and young people, and more targeted interventions for those in greatest need.

Stakeholders will be kept abreast of developments in this area through the What Works website, the What Works mailing list, and other communication channels open to the Department.



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Figure 2: Learning Strategy Logic Model

### Aim

**To enhance the capacity of policymakers, providers and practitioners** across all sectors serving children, young people and families, **to appraise and apply evidence informed prevention and early intervention**

### Monitoring and evaluation

- Regular updates and reports to What Works advisory group
- Monitoring by DCEDIY Lead Team as per targets set out in the detailed action plan

### Objectives

- Disseminate key messages concerning the principles and practices of PEI
- Enable access to a range of relevant training, information and guidance
- Establish platforms for debate and development in PEI
- Bring stakeholders together to consider latest thinking and practices
- Support existing networks and other key influencers aligned with the aims of What Works

### Inputs

- Dormant Accounts Funding
- DCEDIY Lead Team
- Consultancy support
- Networks and key influencers
- DCEDIY units and Government.
- Support from What Works coordinating organisation.

### Outputs

- Conferences, roundtables and symposia
- Seminars/workshops/road shows
- Information, guidance, materials, and resources
- Coaching and mentoring
- Work with networks and key influencers
- Learning communities
- Action learning sets
- Academic study
- Executive module

### Outcomes (practitioners, providers, policy makers)

- Increased and more widespread understanding of the research and theory behind PEI
- Improved knowledge of the key tenets and principles underpinning PEI
- Wider distribution of knowledge of effective PEI practices and approaches
- Wider distribution of knowledge of implementation science
- Enhanced skills and competences to carry out PEI practices and approaches
- Increased capacity to adopt an evidence informed approach including:
  - needs analysis
  - uses of data
  - outcomes focused planning
  - measurement

### Underpinning Evidence

A substantial body of research demonstrates the need for and effectiveness of PEI. In addition, considerable learning is available from a wide range of evaluated Irish programmes including: the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme (PEIP) 2007-2013; the Prevention and Early Intervention Initiative (PEII), the Area Based Childhood Programme (2013-2017), the Prevention Partnership and Family Support Programme (PPFS) in Tusla, the Child and Family Agency, the Nurture Programme and Parents Support Initiative in the Katherine Howard Foundation, and the Early Intervention Transformation Programme in Northern Ireland.