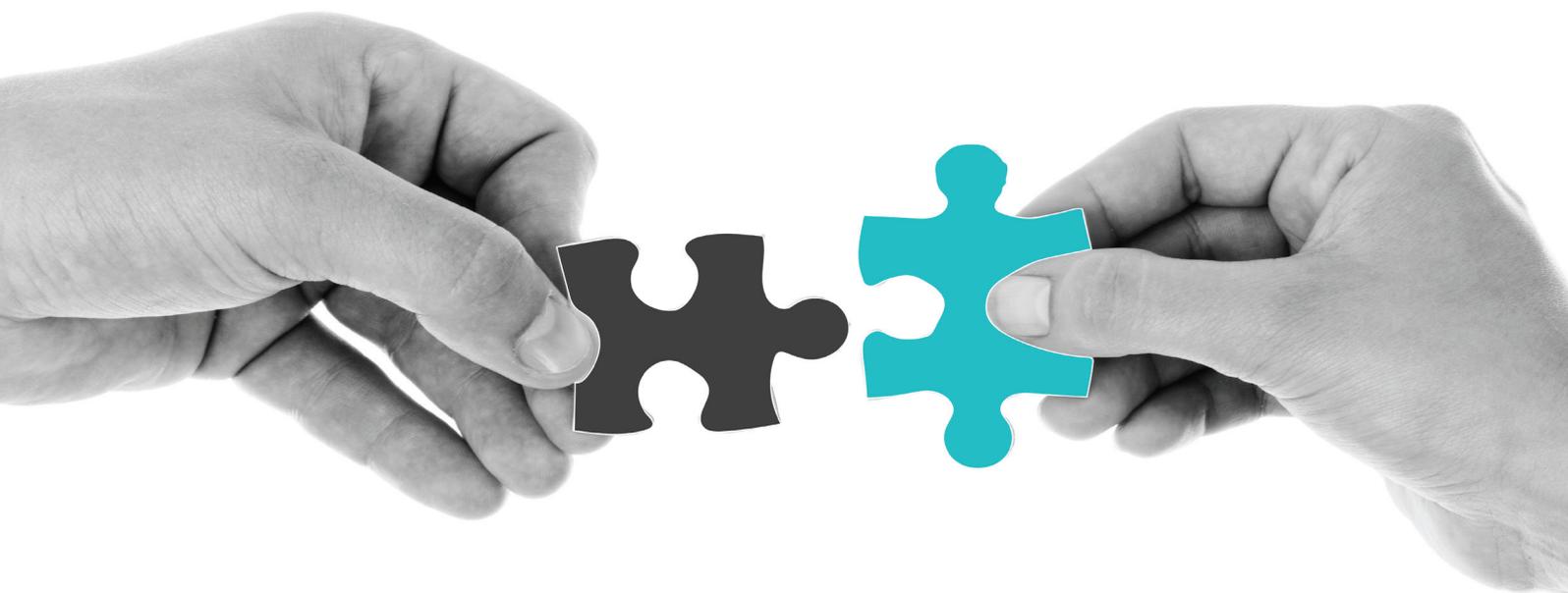


Tusla – Child and Family Agency Research Needs Analysis Executive Summary



By Dr Rosemary Crosse and Dr John Canavan
UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre,
NUI Galway
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TUSLA

An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

1. Introduction

This is the Executive Summary of the Research Needs Analysis (RNA) Report conducted on behalf of Tusla Ireland’s dedicated State Child and Family Agency. This summary is divided into five sections. It begins with the purpose of the research, followed by the nature of the research, then the study findings outline short- and long-term research priorities and requirements needed to develop the research capacity of the agency. Links between the RNA and Tusla’s corporate objectives precede the concluding comments, which finalise the summary.

2. Purpose of the Research

The purpose of the Research Needs Analysis is to respond to Tusla’s Research Strategy, specifically to identify and prioritise the research and research development needs of the Agency’s functions for the period 2015–2017. Moreover, in a broader context the RNA contributes to the achievement of Tusla’s corporate objectives.

As part of a partnership agreement, the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre (UCFRC) was commissioned to conduct the RNA on behalf of Tusla. Throughout this work, the UCFRC has worked in close collaboration with Tusla’s research department staff.

3. Nature of the Research

The methodological approach to this research is based on a concurrent, mixed-method approach comprising both primary and secondary data collection which took place over a four-month period. The primary data in this RNA is based on a multi-method strategy of data collection which targeted a number of stakeholders, outlined in Table 1 below.

Qualitative Interviews	No. of Responses	Surveys	No. of Responses
Tusla management	n=35	Tusla staff	n=59
Tusla-funded organisations	n=10	Tusla-funded organisations	n=18
Government Departments	n=4	School completion programmes	n=16
HIQA	n=1	Family resource centres	n=39
		Parents	n=362
		Youth	n=259

Table 1: Primary Data Collection

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were carried out with Tusla management, selected Tusla-funded organisations,¹ and government departments connected to Tusla, which are the main data source utilised for this study and form the basis of the findings presented. Additional views obtained via quantitative questionnaire surveys of Tusla staff, a random sample of organisations funded by Tusla,² School Completion Programmes, Family Resource Centres, as well as parents and youth, build on and provide further depth to the findings. The secondary data for this study comprises desk research in the form of a literature review.

4. Findings

This section provides an overview of the findings of the report, which are broken down into three areas:

- The categorisation and prioritisation of research requirements on the basis of themes which are aligned to each of Tusla’s service delivery areas.
- The requirements needed to develop a research capacity within the agency as a whole, focused on embedding a culture of research by providing supports in key functional areas.
- Other considerations that need to inform decisions on research.

Given that this RNA represents one of Tusla’s building blocks in its efforts to meet its corporate objectives, and is intended to reflect as well as inform the agency’s planning, the links between the emerging research agenda from the RNA study and the corporate objectives are elaborated in section 5 of this summary document.

4.1 Priorities for Research – Service Delivery Areas

This section provides an account of both short- and long-term research priorities identified by the respondents, which pertain to each of the six key service areas for which Tusla has responsibility.

¹ See section 2.1 of the main report for details of the Tusla-funded organisation selection process.

² See section 2.1 of the main report for details on the random selection of Tusla-funded organisations for survey participation.

Service Delivery Area	Short-Term Priorities	Long-Term Priorities
Child Protection	<p>Approaches, Interventions, Outcomes Assessment framework in area of Percentage threshold.³ Needs assessments – each area of service delivery. Measuring outcomes across services and interventions: ‘What works’.</p> <p>Cultural Diversity Reasons for the over-representation of ethnic minority children in the care population. Development methods and models to engage with minority communities. Movement of migrant families, unaccompanied minors.</p> <p>Legislation and Mandatory Reporting Mandatory Reporting – its impact on the CP system and its implications for services. Implications of Children’s First legislation generally.</p> <p>Service User Participation and Engagement Methodologies for engaging with young people in a participative manner.</p> <p>Child Injury and Death Non-accidental injury of children. Effectiveness of National Review Panel Child Deaths and ‘signs of safety’ require further exploration.</p> <p>Other Short-Term Priorities Research is required on the context in which social workers and service agencies operate.⁴ The separation of child and family services from the HSE and impacts for practitioners and inter-/intra-agency working needs to be explored.</p>	<p>Approaches, Interventions, Outcomes Assessment: Do interventions produce better outcomes? Comparisons between State interventions and family support approaches to child protection.</p> <p>Cultural Diversity Cultural diversity – what are the factors that lead to over-representation of minority groups in the CP system? The responses of key agencies to the sensitivity of cultural norms.</p> <p>Legislation and Mandatory Reporting Mandatory reporting – benefit to children? Does it work for staff? Effects of referrals? Children First – are the ambitions of this legislation achievable? What does new child protection guidance look like? How does international practice in this area compare?</p> <p>Service User Participation and Engagement How to effectively engage with families? Best practice in conducting timely assessments.</p> <p>Other Long-Term Priorities National Service Framework – what worked? Research is required on transitioning back into family, community and the crossover between care and the criminal cases following periods of detention. Data is required on the numbers of and responses to children below the age of criminal responsibility.</p>

³ The threshold at which state social work services respond to children who may have been maltreated (Platt and Turney, 2014).

⁴ ‘Practice on the ground’ is often referred to but rarely explained or researched, therefore further exploration of what this means is required.

Service Delivery Area	Short-Term Priorities	Long-Term Priorities
Alternative Care	<p>Approaches to Alternative Care The limitations of the range of models and alternatives in an international context. Early interventions to manage adolescent risk behaviour in a sustainable way. Direct alternatives to care and permanency planning.</p> <p>Outcomes Young people's engagement and participation in planning and comparisons of outcomes for children based on decisions made through child protection and welfare processes.</p> <p>Fostering and Adoption The recruitment of foster carers and assessment of what works in this area.</p>	<p>Approaches to Alternative Care A long-term framework is required to assess the tendering and commissioning of services, and the suitability of the services in meeting needs and outcomes of both children and families in receipt of such services. Effective management and organisational structures are required for the effective delivery of alternative care services.</p> <p>Outcomes Engagement with young people who are in the care system and child protection system. Aftercare and outcomes for young people and families in the AC system. Experiences of fostering to adoption. Outcomes for children who are adopted.</p> <p>Other Long-Term Priorities Longitudinal studies – following young people on their care journey. Experiences of young people moving between different systems of AC. Access to family for children in AC – quality of access. How to facilitate it. Tracing – experiences and impact on all groups involved.</p>

Service Delivery Area	Short-Term Priorities	Long-Term Priorities
Family Support	<p>Interventions, Needs, Evaluations and Outcomes Needs – the type and level of service that is required, demographics and targeted social need locally. What is needed in terms of early intervention and preventive family support? Parenting Supports aimed at all types of situations. What’s available? What’s needed? An analysis of different parenting models in the context of strengthening families. Responding to the needs of adolescents.</p> <p>Other Short-Term Priorities Participation – impact of youth voice in service delivery. Resources and funding – costings for service provision. What resources are needed to fully implement all required programmes successfully? What resources are needed to operate FRCs appropriately?</p>	<p>Interventions, Needs, Evaluations and Outcomes What works leading to a common framework for outcome measurement. Assessment of best practice. An evaluation of and data collection from services at a local level, community-level research projects and early intervention support. The long-term impact of service provision on children in the wider community and family. Importance of FS preventative work.</p> <p>Other Long-Term Priorities Developing family support services that target the needs of migrant and Traveller families and communities, with a focus on integration for migrant families. Exploring mental health from a family orientation perspective versus a child protection perspective. Outcomes of collaborative work. Consequences for families of non-collaboration. Qualitative research surrounding children and family experiences. Voice of the child in policy-relevant questions</p>

Service Delivery Area	Short-Term Priorities	Long-Term Priorities
Educational Welfare	<p>School and Wellbeing How the school system is dealing with new migrant children and also vulnerable groups.</p> <p>Effectiveness of Support Programmes Interface between parents and the educational system. Review of data on school attendance and impact of prosecutions on attendance. Implementation of practice models. Fidelity and impact of practice models.</p>	<p>Effectiveness of Support Programmes Impact of various initiatives on attention, retention and participation. Impact of programmes involving home schools, school completion and education welfare in the long term. Early school leaving, benefits and weaknesses in academic education, and preventive responses.</p> <p>Other Long-Term Priorities Examination of new legislation with a focus on school admissions and Children First – the impact which these have on service delivery. Impact of the reconfiguration of SCP, HSCL within DEIS</p>
Early Years	<p>Evidence-based practice on regulations. Compliance – National Standards. The impact of inspections on children and research in relation to complaints. Cost and affordability of childcare and range of choice.</p>	<p>Service provision generally in this area. Seeing strategically where services are going in terms of regulating early years. There is a need for systemic sectorial analysis in this area.</p>
Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence	<p>Domestic Abuse Impact of DV on children. Etiology of DV in an Irish context. The impact of alcohol on DV.</p> <p>Sexual-Based Violence Research on adolescents and sexual violence Crime and justice responses to sexual violence.</p> <p>Responses, Impacts and Outcomes Effective models of practice and service user engagement.</p>	<p>Legislation The implications of Ireland's ratification of the Istanbul Convention, in relation to provision of services.</p> <p>Data Sharing Best practice in sharing information across statutory bodies and voluntary organisations that collect information on sexual violence.</p>

Table 2: Priorities of Research in Tusla's Service Delivery Areas

4.2 Developing a Research Capacity in Tusla

In addition to identifying priorities for research, the RNA focused on requirements needed to build the research capacity of the agency. Both Tusla's operational systems and the potential of collaborative research were highlighted as key areas that could contribute to the development of a research capacity. In order to develop a research capacity, the agency requires:

- A whole-organisation approach to research, achieved through the establishment of an evidence-informed decision-making framework.
- Consideration of the ability of the organisation's functional areas to provide the necessary supports and structures to enable research production, participation, collaboration and utilisation.

The findings from this study indicate a number of issues across Tusla's functional areas that need to be addressed in order for research to progress within the organisation.

Finances

- A budget specifically allocated to research is required.

Human Resources

- The recruitment of specialised research staff or the realignment of existing staff into research posts is necessary to increase research capability in the organisation.
- Time for research must be incorporated into the operational responsibilities of staff in order for a research culture to develop.

Workforce Development

- Research training and upskilling were identified as being key to research utilisation in the organisation.
- Professional development of staff is seen to require opportunities for research as part of further education and in the form of practitioner research.

Communications

- Focus needs to be on effective dissemination of research, regular updates for staff of ongoing and completed research, and evidence-based practitioner research.
- Promoting the importance of research and its benefits was identified as a priority for the communications department.
- There is also a perceived need to create a pathway to link the research happening locally to the goal of informed decision making as articulated in Tusla's corporate strategy.

ICT

- ICT systems need to be streamlined and have the capacity to interact with each other.
- Information and research need to be accessible to all practitioners. Better methods to share research across the organisation require further consideration.

- Access to high-quality online and hard copy resources would be the most effective way to promote the use of research, with access to report summaries needing particular consideration.

Quality Assurance

- Increased focus on business intelligence, performance data, auditing, and quality reviews would highlight areas that may require further research consideration.

Research Collaboration

- Research collaborations have a significant role in the development of a research capacity in Tusla. While there is no doubt that barriers exist to establishing and maintaining such practices, the findings show that collaborative relationships have a number of potential benefits to the Tusla Agency.⁵

4.3 Other Considerations to Inform Research Decisions

In addition to identifying priorities for research and requirements needed to develop a research capacity within the organisation, the findings from this study also show that decisions on research need to be informed by a number of different considerations.⁶

Namely:

- **Internal Policy and Collaboration** – decisions on research need to reflect priorities that inform shared practice as well as government policy and national priorities.
- **Previous Research and Legislative Change** – decisions on future research also need to take account of previous recommendations for research made by other studies and research reports. Research will play a key role in supporting Tusla’s response to policy and legislative developments.
- **Methodological Approaches** – consideration also needs to be given to the best methodological approaches to achieve the research goals of Tusla.
- **Literature** – it is recommended that comprehensive reviews of the literature covering each service delivery area be conducted.

⁵ See section 3.5 of the main report.

⁶ See section 6.3 of the main report.

5. Links between Tusla’s Corporate Objectives and Study Findings

Addressing both the priorities and requirements outlined previously should enable strategic coordination across the agency in support of Tusla’s corporate objectives. The following table details the links between Tusla’s corporate objectives and the findings of this study.

Corporate Objective	Study Findings
<p>1. Improve the quality and focus of the delivery of services for children and families.</p>	<p>Needs assessments in each area of service delivery.</p> <p>Assessment of services tendered to determine suitability in respect of target group, taking account of demographics and social need.</p> <p>Measuring outcomes across interventions and services to determine what works, leading to a framework for outcome measurement.</p> <p>Longitudinal research to measure sustained outcomes.</p> <p>Comparative research on international models of practice across service delivery areas to identify alternative approaches that may be successful in an Irish context.</p> <p>Identifying what has been achieved in respect of the National Service Delivery Framework.</p>
<p>2. Develop the governance structures, processes and supporting infrastructure to ensure that Tusla is in a position to carry out its functions in an effective and efficient manner.</p>	<p>In respect of developing a research capacity: supporting infrastructure is required in areas of Finance, HR, Communications, ICT and Quality Assurance.⁷</p> <p>Whole-organisational approach to research.</p>
<p>3. Establish a new and distinct values-based culture that empowers children and families through high quality services.</p>	<p>Research on methods of engagement with children and families across all areas of service delivery, with a focus on participation in planning and delivery.</p> <p>Experiences of children and families involved in Tusla’s service delivery areas.</p> <p>Examination of cultural competence in the context of service practice.</p> <p>Research on staffing issues that promote an empowering culture, with a focus on skills and competencies.</p>

⁷ See section 3.4 for further explanation.

Corporate Objective	Study Findings
<p>4. Develop an organisation that lives within its means and utilises its resources in an efficient and cost-effective manner.</p>	<p>Knowledge of gaps in and priorities for research, as well as information on what is needed to enable research production, participation, collaboration and utilisation will assist Tusla in allocating resources to achieve maximum effect.</p> <p>Collaborative research relationships could lead to increased cost-effectiveness.</p> <p>Taking account of previous research recommendations can inform both practice and future directions for research, which is an efficient use of resources.</p> <p>Consideration given to the best methodological approaches to achieve the research goals of Tusla will assist with cost-effectiveness.</p>
<p>5. Develop a workforce that is valued and supported within a learning organisation.</p>	<p>Findings show that HR as part of workforce development needs to support research production, participation, collaboration and utilisation of research.⁸</p> <p>Development of a directory of services across all areas to identify what services are available, with an overview of all models of intervention being utilised; to support staff in practice work.</p> <p>Comprehensive literature reviews based on each service delivery area would support staff and assist in learning development.</p>
<p>6. Position the agency as a responsive, trustworthy and respected body with its own unique identity.</p>	<p>Pertinent research, such as that which has been identified in this study, may lead to improved responses, interventions and outcomes, all of which will support Tusla in positioning itself as a trustworthy and respected body.</p>
<p>7. Build our research strategy to develop policy and enable evidence-based decision-making and high-quality service delivery.</p>	<p>An evidence-informed decision-making framework for research is required, taking a whole-organisation approach.⁹</p> <p>Research on developing an organisational research culture.</p> <p>Research on building a learning organisation.</p>
<p>8. Ensure a strategic approach to quality assurance, information management and risk management that supports continuous improvement and good governance.</p>	<p>In developing a strategic approach to quality assurance, a focus on business intelligence, performance data, auditing, and quality reviews would highlight areas that may require further research consideration.</p> <p>In relation to developing a strategic approach to information management the current capacity of ICT operations requires further investigation.¹⁰</p>

Table 3: Links between Tusla's Corporate Objectives and Study Findings

⁸ See section 3.4.2.1 for further detail.

⁹ See section 3.2 for more.

¹⁰ See section 3.4.4.

6. Concluding Comments

This report shows that there are three overarching areas that need to underpin consideration of the research and research development needs of the agency. First are the gaps in and priorities for research identified in each of Tusla's service delivery areas. Second are the requirements needed to develop a research capacity within the organisation; and third are the other considerations needed to inform research decisions.

It is important to acknowledge that the Tusla agency is still in an infancy stage and is only beginning the process of promoting a culture of research throughout the organisation. The Research Needs Analysis report is the first in a series of reports to be published over the coming years. It is intended that this report will assist Tusla by providing an account of what is required in the research and research development area of the organisation. In addition, highlighting how these requirements are reflective of and informative to Tusla's corporate objectives will assist in the future planning of the agency.



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Child and Family Agency

National Research Office, Heuston South Quarter, 4th Floor,
Brunel Building, St John's Road West, Kilmainham, Dublin 8, D08 X01F
E -mail: trc@tusla.ie