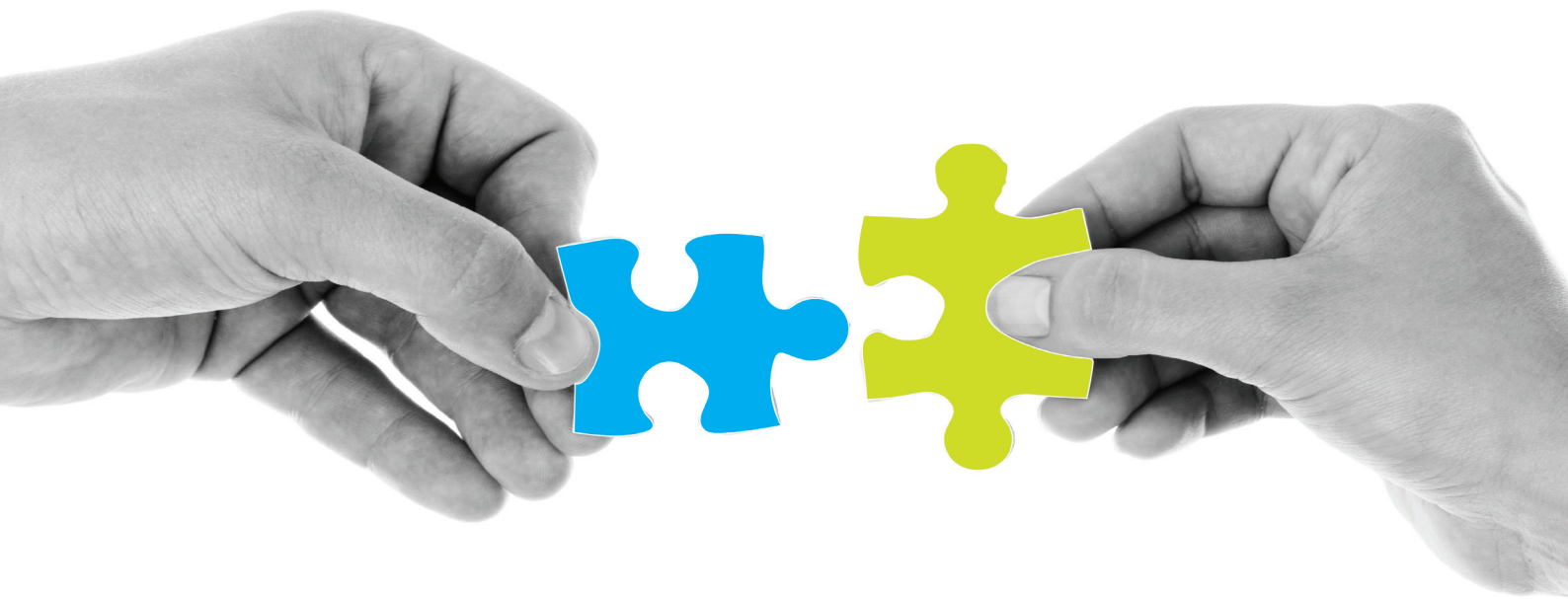# Tusla – Child and Family Agency Research Needs Analysis Report

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TÚSLA

An Ghníomhaireacht um
Leanaí agus an Teaghlach
Child and Family Agency

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1. Introduction

1.1 Background to the Study

In 2014, Tusla – Child and Family Agency became an independent legal entity, merging key Child Welfare and Protection services and family support services, including Family Resource Centres and Educational Welfare Services. Some psychological services and a range of services pertaining to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence were also integrated under Tusla's remit.

One of the statutory functions of Tusla, as set out in the Child and Family Agency Act 2013 Part 2 Section 8(1) (f), is to 'undertake or commission research relating to its functions'. To that end, the Tusla Research Strategy (2015) was developed. This sets out a long-term action plan for both the evolution of a research and development function and the promotion of a research culture across the agency (Waterstone and Brattman, 2015), in support of Tusla's corporate plan. Tusla's corporate plan establishes eight strategic objectives, and the research strategy gives effect to all such objectives. Contained within the Research Strategy is a requirement to conduct a Research Needs Analysis (RNA).

As part of a partnership agreement, the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre (UCFRC) was commissioned to conduct an RNA on behalf of Tusla. Throughout this work, the UCFRC has worked in close collaboration with Tusla's National Research Office staff, for the duration of this short project. The RNA responds to the research strategy specifically in identifying and prioritising the research and development needs of the agency's functions for the period 2015–2017.

The purpose of the Research Needs Analysis is as follows:

- To meet the Agency's statutory requirement to undertake and commission research relating to its functions
- To map out and prioritise research requirements to enable strategic coordination across the Agency in support of Tusla's corporate objectives
- To better understand and prioritise the research requirements of the Agency's services and functions
- To support internal and external commissioning
- To ensure value for money in the undertaking and commissioning of research
- To support the ongoing development of evidence-informed service delivery.

More widely, the RNA represents one of Tusla's building blocks in its efforts to meet its corporate objectives. These eight objectives, outlined below, guide all of Tusla's work. The links between the emerging research agenda from this RNA study and the corporate objectives are elaborated in section 6 of the report.

Strategic Objective One	Improve the quality and focus of the delivery of services for children and families.
Strategic Objective Two	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.
Strategic Objective Three	Establish new and distinct values-based culture, which empowers children and families through high-quality services.
Strategic Objective Four	Develop an organisation that lives within its means and utilises its resources in an efficient and cost-effective manner.
Strategic Objective Five	Develop a workforce which is valued and supported within a learning organisation.
Strategic Objective Six	Position the Agency as a responsive, trustworthy and respected body with its own unique identity.
Strategic Objective Seven	Build on our research strategy to develop policy and enable evidence-based decision-making and high-quality service delivery.
Strategic Objective Eight	Ensure a strategic approach to quality assurance, information management and risk management that supports continuous improvement and good governance.

Table 1: Tusla's Strategic Objectives

1.2 Aims and Objectives of the Study

The main aims of this study are to gather and compile data on the research needs of Tusla. Specific objectives are:

- To explore existing literature, in an effort to predict the possible future research needs of Tusla
- To determine what management and staff within Tusla believe their research needs to be
- To determine what a range of stakeholder groups, including Tusla-funded organisations, School Completion Programmes (SCPs), Family Resource Centres (FRCs) and parent and youth stakeholders believe the research needs of the organisation to be
- To consult with Tusla's Research Advisory Group[1] to enhance and develop the RNA report
- To provide a categorisation and prioritisation of research requirements on the basis of clusters or themes which are aligned to Tusla services and functions.

1.2.1 Definitions of Terms
Given the breadth of this study there are a number of terms used throughout this report that require definition, which are outlined here.

Research is defined as 'a process through which we attempt to achieve systematically and with the support of data the answer to a question, the resolution of a problem, or a greater understanding of a problem' (Leedy, 1997: 5).

Research culture is defined as the structure that gives research behaviour significance and that allows us to understand and evaluate research activity (Cheetham, 2007). Therefore, a culture of research provides a supportive context in which research is uniformly expected, discussed, produced and valued (Hanover, 2014).

Research capacity building is defined as 'a process of individual and institutional development which leads to higher levels of skills and greater ability to perform useful research' (Trostle 1992: 1321).

Research utilisation is defined as 'the process of synthesizing, disseminating, and using research-generated knowledge to make an impact on or change in existing practice' (Burns and Grove, 2005).

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[1] Tusla's Research Advisory Group (RAG) is representative of a wide range of expert stakeholders with an interest in promoting and supporting research throughout the organisation. The RAG provides independent expert advice to Tusla on identifying and prioritising research topics. Its input helps to enhance the quality of both the research process and the research findings through eliciting a broad spectrum of experiences and views.

1.3 Structure of the Report

This report is structured in six separate sections. Section 2 begins with an outline of the key methodological approaches used in the study, specifically how the data was collected and analysed, the limitations of the methodological approach, and ethical considerations.

Sections 3 and 4 present a collated account of the findings from the empirical data. The responses from the qualitative interviews with Tusla managers form the foundation of the findings, with interview and survey responses from all other participants feeding in where applicable. Section 3 presents Tusla respondents' views on the current state of research in the organisation, particularly in terms of what is required to embed a culture of research within it. All respondents' views on collaboration and the development of collaborative relations are also contained in this section. Section 4 outlines the priorities[2] for and gaps in research identified in each of Tusla's service delivery areas.

Section 5 presents a synopsis of the literature reviewed as it pertains to the findings of this study. The aim of the literature review is to establish, at an overview level, the extent to which the empirical findings reflect patterns and trends internationally in Tusla's key service provision areas and in the area of organisational research capacity.

Section 6 offers some overall conclusions and makes recommendations based on the main findings of the research.

Key Messages
• In conjunction with Tusla's National Research Office the UCFRC undertook an RNA on behalf of the agency.   • The purpose of the RNA is mainly to map out and prioritise research requirements to enable strategic coordination across the Agency in support of Tusla's corporate objectives, and to better understand and prioritise the research requirements of the Agency's services and functions.   • The RNA represents one of Tusla's building blocks in its efforts to meet its corporate objectives.

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[2] Both short- and long-term priorities identified by respondents are contained in tables at the beginning of each service delivery area section. Short-term priorities pertain to the next two years consistent with Tusla's research strategy. Long-term priorities are thereafter.

2. Methodology

2.1 Introduction

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 stakeholders such as Tusla management and staff, government departments, organisations funded by Tusla, School Completion Programmes (SCPs), Family Resource Centres (FRCs), parents and youth. Qualitative semi-structured interviews were carried out with Tusla management, selected Tusla-funded organisations[3] and government departments connected to Tusla, which are the main data source utilised for this study and form the base of the findings presented. Additional views obtained via questionnaire surveys for Tusla staff, a random sample of organisations funded by Tusla,[4] SCPs, FRCs, parents and youth build on and provide further depth to the findings.

Respondent Group	Data Type	Number of Respondents
Tusla management	Interviews	n=35
Tusla-funded organisations	Interviews	n=10
Government departments	Interviews	n=4
HIQA	Interview	n=1
Tusla staff	Survey	n=59
Sample Tusla-funded organisations	Survey	n=18
School completion programmes	Survey	n=16
Family resource centres	Survey	n=39
Parents	Survey	n=362
Youth	Survey	n=259

Table 2: Profile of Study Respondents

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[3] The Tusla-funded organisations were selected on the basis of grants payments made that were equal to or greater than €50,000 as per Grant Register information supplied by Tusla.

[4] The random sample was obtained by inputting all (except those selected for interview) of Tusla's grant awardees (supplied by Tusla) into an Excel document and generating a random sample through a sampling formula. The top twenty generated names were then selected for survey participation.

2.2 Literature Review

The secondary data for this study comprises desk research in the form of a literature review. The overarching aim of the literature review was to establish, at an overview level, the extent to which the empirical findings of this study reflect patterns and trends internationally in Tusla's key areas of service provision and in the field of organisational research capacity. A scoping method was used in an effort to identify relevant literature, which is synonymous with providing an overview of the breadth of the literature available and is commonly undertaken to examine the extent, range, and nature of research activity in a topic area or to identify gaps in the existing literature (Arksey & O'Malley, 2005). Relevant national and international research considered for this review focused on a number of specific areas within the support and protection field. Research concerning child protection, family support, educational welfare, domestic sexual and gender-based violence, as well as government policies and organisational/Agency priorities for research have all been considered. Relevant high-impact-factor journals and specialised websites (including national and international government websites as well as those of support and advocacy organisations) were all included in the review.[5]

2.3 Qualitative Interviews

Qualitative semi-structured interviews were carried out with Tusla management (n=35),[6] organisations in receipt of significant Tusla funding (n=10), government departments associated with Tusla (n=4) and the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA) (n=1).[7] Interview questions for all respondents were developed in conjunction with Tusla's research department and centred primarily on some or all of the following areas, depending on the respondent: research capacity and culture within the Tusla Agency, gaps in and priorities for research going forward, and views on collaborative research.

All respondents were contacted via an email which contained information about the study. Informed consent was sought from each interviewee. The interviews were recorded and transcribed, and the participants' names were changed to protect anonymity. Qualitative data from all interviews allowed for an in-depth examination of perceptions pertaining generally to the three key areas outlined above and formed the basis for the findings.

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[5] See Appendix 1 of this report for a brief overview of literature review details.

[6] Tusla management interviews consisted of eight face-to-face interviews with senior management and twenty-seven telephone interviews with service directors, research staff, and functional specialists, who include but are not limited to child protection, policy development, early years, and educational welfare, and a random sample of area managers.

[7] Interview schedules are in Appendix 1 of the methodology appendices developed to accompany this report.

2.4 Surveys

Surveys were conducted with Tusla staff (n=59), a random sample of Tusla-funded organisations (n=18), SCPs (n=16), FRCs (n=39), parents (n=362) and youth (n=259). The surveys for Tusla staff, Tusla-funded organisations, SCPs and FRCs were all developed in collaboration with Tusla's National Research Office and distributed electronically.[8] The Tusla staff survey focused on: how research is perceived, developed and managed by Tusla as an organisation; how research is used and interacted with by Tusla staff; views on what research is required in specific areas; the research training needs of Tusla staff; and more general questions on priorities for research.

Questions for Tusla-funded organisations, SCPs and FRCs pertained mainly to views on what Tusla's research priorities should be, gaps in research identified by the respondents, as well as views on collaboration and research partnerships in some cases.

The youth survey for this study was developed in partnership with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) Citizen Participation Unit. The survey contained one general question which asked respondents to outline three issues affecting youth in Ireland today.[9] While it is evident this question was not directly linked to the responsibilities of Tusla, the research team considered this to be the most appropriate approach and some responses were indeed pertinent. The survey was distributed in hard copy format to each of the thirty-one Comhairle na nÓg child and youth councils throughout the country, as well as to other organisations representing seldom-heard youth voices,[10] where discussion and completion of the surveys were facilitated by local coordinators. Surveys were returned by post to the research team at the UCFRC via the stamped address envelope provided. Given the youth survey focused on more general questions pertaining to issues affecting youth in Ireland today, it was felt that the parent survey should follow the same vein, and a question on issues affecting families in Ireland today was distributed to parents via the National Parents Council Primary. Contained within the survey was information describing Tusla's role and responsibilities, with a request that issues be aligned with Tusla where possible.[11]

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[8] See methodology appendices, Appendix 2 for surveys.
[9] See methodology appendices, Appendix 2.5 for the youth survey.
[10] For example, those that work with Traveller youth, youth with physical disabilities, and child and youth mental health services.
[11] See methodology appendices, Appendix 2.6 for the parent survey.

2.5 Analysis – Qualitative Interviews

Qualitative interviews were conducted and analysed by experienced external contract researchers who have a proven track record of work with the UCFRC. Given the amount of data generated by the qualitative interviews and the time constraints of the project, the research team used an adapted version of the framework method of analysis. The framework approach was developed in the 1980s by social policy researchers at the National Centre for Social Research as a method to analyse qualitative data applied to policy research (Smith and Firth, 2011). The framework method is used to organise and manage research through the process of summarisation. For the purposes of this study, it was decided that a framework for analysis would be developed examining particular themes in the respondents' narratives. Themes of research culture, gaps and priorities, and capacity and collaborations were explored by the researchers.[12] As a result of this approach, interview data was synthesised and summary documents were produced. This approach is in keeping with some aspects of the framework method approach, particularly the focus on certain themes and the reduction of data through summarisation and synthesis (Richie et al., 2013). A random selection of summary documents were compared and validated by the UCFRC project coordinator.[13]

2.6 Analysis – Surveys

As with the analysis of the qualitative interviews, the data produced by the surveys was analysed by a contract analyst regularly employed by the UCFRC. The Tusla staff survey, the SCP survey and the Tusla-funded organisations survey were analysed using Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) analysis software.[14] The parent survey and the FRC survey were both analysed using a thematic approach.[15] Given that the youth survey was not aligned specifically to Tusla's role or responsibilities, it was decided to code the issues raised by the youth according to the five national outcomes of 'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures (BOBF): National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014–2020'. The youth data is presented in this format in the appendix section of this report.[16]

2.7 Ethics

The research was guided by key ethical requirements of doing no harm and gaining informed, voluntary consent for participation in the research. Participants indicated their willingness to participate when they filled in the survey and provided their contact details for an interview. All those who took part in individual interviews were asked for and gave their consent. Anonymity was guaranteed for all participants, and therefore names and identifiable personal details throughout the report have been changed. Because youth participation in this study was organised and facilitated by the Comhairle na nÓg, the issue of informed consent was dealt with through their own processes and procedures.

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[12] See methodology appendices, Appendix 3 for interview analysis templates.
[13] The UCFRC project coordinator is Dr Rosemary Crosse, who had responsibility for the overall operation of this study.
[14] See methodology appendices, Appendix 4 for survey analysis.
[15] See methodology appendices, Appendix 4.1 and 4.2 for examples.
[16] See methodology appendices, Appendix 4.3 for issues raised by youth respondents.

2.8 Limitations

While this research has been wide-ranging in its aims and its achievements, there were certain methodological limitations to the study. In relation to the qualitative interviews, the adapted 'framework model', particularly in terms of the summary approach to the data analysis for the qualitative interviews, means that there is potential for further analysis. In relation to the surveys, it is worth noting that while the majority of the surveys conducted returned a positive response rate, the Tusla staff survey returned a 1.5% response rate, which is not favourable given the breadth of possible respondents.[17] This has significant implications for the weight that can be given to the staff survey findings. It is also worth noting that while some respondents were well-informed on research needs and issues, there may have been a lack of knowledge in some areas. Moreover, given that some respondents were not aligned to Tusla (e.g., parents and youth), responses given in some cases were not specific to Tusla's role or responsibilities, which meant that some data cannot be aligned to the aims and objectives of the RNA.

Key Messages

- The methodological approach to this research is based on a concurrent mixed-method approach comprising both primary and secondary data collection.

- Fifty qualitative semi-structured interviews were carried out with Tusla management, organisations in receipt of significant Tusla funding, government departments associated with Tusla, and the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA).

- Surveys were conducted with Tusla staff, a random sample of Tusla-funded organisations, School Completion Programmes, Family Resource Centres, parents, and youth.

- Surveys yielded a total of 753 responses.

- The secondary data for this study comprises desk research in the form of a literature review. The aim of the literature review was to establish, at an overview level, the extent to which the empirical findings of this study reflect patterns and trends internationally in Tusla's key areas of service provision and in the field of organisational research capacity.

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[17] It is worth noting that a low response rate for this type of survey is not unique to this study. A low response rate occurred in a similar study examining the research activity, skills and training needs of health and social care professionals in Ireland (McHugh and Byrne, 2011).

3. Findings – Embedding Research in Tusla

3.1 Introduction

The findings of the data collected for the purposes of this study are presented in two sections. This section presents respondents' views on the need for a whole-organisation approach to research and organisational-level research requirements. The perceived value of research in Tusla and views on research culture and the utilisation of research within the agency are also presented. Section 3 also outlines respondents' views on functional area requirements needed to develop a research capacity within the agency, with a particular focus on finances, human resources and workforce development, communications, quality assurance and ICT. Respondents' views on collaboration, perceived barriers and enablers to participating in collaborative work complete section 3 of the findings.

3.2 A Whole-Organisation Approach to Research

The need for an overall organisational approach to research was identified by a number of respondents, with a strong view held that the process of determining research activities should reflect the needs of the agency as a whole. Management respondents were of the view that in order to achieve this type of organisational approach to research, an evidence-informed decision-making framework is required. Such a framework should include processes for determining what research is to be undertaken, taking account of both work development plans and operational capacity to deliver research. How evidence is sourced, how stakeholders are engaged, how research findings are disseminated and how recommendations are to be implemented should also be included in such a framework.

3.2.1 Whole-Organisation Research Requirements
There were a number of views on specific research that would assist the agency in carrying out its functions more effectively. Examples included research to identify the necessary infrastructures required to efficiently support managers in development and planning, investigation on how the research cycle could be accelerated to support policy and practice, and market research on how Tusla is perceived by the public, particularly in terms of how its services are understood and engaged with. While perceptions on a whole-organisational approach to research are specifically not identified as priorities by the respondents, such views are extremely significant for the development of a research capacity in the agency. Therefore they are included in the links between the findings of this study and Tusla's corporate objectives, outlined in section 6.4 of this report.

For staff respondents, research into the development of integrated data analytics and performance reporting was suggested as a way to help Tusla meet its corporate objectives. Examination of best practice in resource allocation to research would also assist this process. Other views on specific types of research required pertain to specific types of research needed in practice settings; for example, the use of action research methods to encourage and inform reflective practice, evaluations of interventions, and systemic reviews of research in order to produce good practice guidelines, and meta-analysis of international research to inform practice were all identified. Moreover, there were calls for systematic assessment methods to be

established, particularly in areas of child development, psychotherapeutic needs and parental capacity. Both practitioner-led and academic research were viewed as being needed.

3.3 The Value and Use of Research in Tusla

For some respondents, research is perceived as being valued in Tusla. Many cite the organisation's commitment to commissioning research carried out by external bodies, its ongoing effort to build research capacity within Tusla, and the inclusion of research in Tusla's overarching policy (in its corporate plan, business plan, and national service delivery framework) as evidence of this. The establishment of both a dedicated national research team and a research advisory group is also perceived to signal the value of research within the organisation. In terms of its use, research is perceived as a significant component of many of Tusla's functions, and of having a pivotal role in areas such as policy and strategy development, as well as service planning and delivery.

While the intentions towards establishing a research culture within Tusla are viewed very positively, for many, research is not perceived to be valued for a number of reasons:

- Research practices are not culturally embedded in everything the organisation does, and therefore there is a view that the wider use of research throughout the organisation needs to be championed from the highest level.
- For this group, research currently has a limited role in Tusla, with the belief that there is a lack of understanding about the benefits that research can bring to the organisation, with a lack of information and a lack of awareness being cited as reasons for this.
- Many respondents asserted that research is used in a very ad hoc manner; while some believe that research is drawn on to identify gaps or work on a particular problem, others do not believe that it is used in decision-making or planning processes. Despite the development of research infrastructure, many question the current capacity of the organisation to implement its research strategy.

According to some, research that is practical and applicable to work done on a day-to-day basis tends to be more valued than other forms of research. For example:

- Research is often used when there is a need to evaluate services or a need to understand the context in which services are provided.
- There is a view that evidence-based research for the operation of frontline services is often prioritised over any other type of research. Related to this, some respondents were of the view that **evaluation** is more evident than **research** across various functions of the organisation, and in many cases evaluation was seen as more useful, easier and less time-consuming than research.
- The focus on evaluation stems from a perceived need for the organisation to measure its performance (i.e., compliance to standards, legislation and regulations).

For staff survey respondents, there was a very mixed view of Tusla as a learning organisation; while many see Tusla as a learning organisation, most do not and a significant number were unsure if Tusla could be described in this manner. For those who see Tusla as a learning organisation, training opportunities and conference participation were the most common examples cited. Other examples included research activity, university linkages, presentations at meetings, and funding supports to complete research.

There were also mixed views on the use of research by Tusla staff. The majority of staff respondents do not believe that Tusla promotes the use of research in its day-to-day work. The majority of respondents also stated that they had no opportunities to undertake research through the course of their work, while others have rare opportunities to do so. Lack of time, a difficulty in accessing appropriate research, a lack of encouragement from management or a lack of research culture in the organisation, and inadequate funding and resources for research were also perceived as constraints by Tusla staff. For those respondents who believe Tusla promotes research, examples offered included the availability of training materials, research articles and findings; the Empowering Practitioners and Practice Initiative (EPPI) programme;[18] and working groups.

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[18] The Empowering Practitioners and Practice Initiative (EPPI) was developed to address the challenges faced by social workers working in the child and family field. It provides necessary tools to assist practitioners in using evidence in a variety of critical situations.

3.4 Developing a Research Capacity in Tusla

This section presents the views of Tusla managers and staff on the requirements needed to develop a research capacity in the Tusla organisation, which pertain to the agency's functional areas (finance, HR, etc.).

3.4.1 Finance

Financial supports for the development of a research culture within the Tusla agency were highlighted as an issue by a number of the respondents. Resource allocation is perceived to favour frontline service needs over research needs. The majority of respondents maintain that research in the organisation should have a **ring-fenced budget** to address this issue. Such a budget could, according to some, be utilised to provide specialist research training, to build a research capacity into the roles of professionals and to commission research at national, regional and local levels. There was some disparity over the size of the research budget required, with most respondents having no view, while others stated that such a budget should range anywhere between 2–5% of the organisation's total budget, and one respondent stating that a budget of €1–2 million should be allocated.

3.4.2 Human Resources

Staff and time resources are the biggest perceived barriers to the production and utilisation of research within the Tusla organisation, according to the respondents. Time for research must be incorporated into the operational responsibilities of staff in order for a research culture to develop, akin to former HSE structures where research was part of particular job specifications and was therefore allocated a particular amount of time, at least in theory. The wider challenge of staff retention and unfilled vacancies further limits the possibility for staff to engage with, participate in or undertake research. The recruitment of specialised research staff or realignment of existing staff into research posts and measures to reduce caseloads were suggested as ways to embed a culture of research in the organisation, with each team or directorate benefiting from a dedicated research person.

3.4.2.1 Workforce Development

A significant shortage of skills in accessing, conducting and implementing research were highlighted as barriers to the utilisation of research by a number of respondents.[19] Several respondents believed that in order to embed a research culture within Tusla, staff need to be encouraged and supported to engage with research. Suggestions to promote the use of research in the organisation include: encouragement, time, and funding, with access to staff training being cited as a significant need by respondents. Training and upskilling in IT, literature reviews, methodologies and data analysis, and in the production and assessment of tender documents and funding applications were identified as necessary. Moreover, professional development is seen to require opportunities for research as part of further education and in the form of practitioner research. The majority of staff respondents surveyed indicated that they would like to develop their research skills, in areas such as implementation of research findings, evaluation methods and how to establish 'what works' from research.[20]

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[19] See Appendix 2.1 of this report for constraints on engaging in research.
[20] See Appendix 2.2 of this report for areas of research skills development.

A number of staff respondents have completed some form of research training, particularly in research methods courses or modules, as part of further education courses.[21] However, time since staff participated in training varied significantly, with gaps of between two and five years being cited. Levels of confidence in undertaking research also varied. Overall, the majority of staff respondents have confidence in undertaking research; however, there are those who do require support, with some having no confidence or being unsure of their ability to undertake research.

3.4.3 Communications

There is a perceived need for the communications department to increase awareness of research available, and therefore focus needs to be on effective dissemination of research, regular updates for staff of ongoing and completed research, and evidence-based practitioner research (presentations, workshops, and seminars with opportunities for discussion). According to some respondents, such communication needs to contextualise research, highlighting its relevance to particular areas with rationale and findings clearly conveyed.

There is a perception among respondents that there is a disconnect between Tusla's vision of research and its application at service-delivery level. 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. Promoting the importance of research and its benefits was identified as a priority for the communications department in conveying the value of research. This will assist in establishing research as a means to improving practice and service delivery and stimulate willingness to participate in research, both of which are required to develop a culture of research in the organisation.

3.4.4 ICT

In general, there was a view that there is deficient ICT capacity and infrastructure, which is impeding effective and efficient information-sharing and research dissemination through the organisation. In relation to ICT capacity, the continued use of HSE networks inhibits information sharing; systems in place are not streamlined and have no capacity to interact with each other. In addition, the HSE interface is described as 'elderly and cumbersome'. The majority of respondents maintain that information and research need to be accessible to all practitioners (particularly as regards accessing research through ICT channels). Part of this issue is that many workers do not have access to PCs or laptops, or to the information hub or the North/South child protection hub[22] or even to email in some cases. Tusla needs to develop better methods to share research across the organisation, with the internal website 'the Hub' suggested as an ideal method of disseminating research.

How research is accessed by and presented to staff is an issue that requires further consideration in relation to the role of ICT in promoting the use of research in the organisation. The findings from this study indicate that the majority of staff use

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[21] See Appendix 2.3 of this report for levels of staff participation in research training.

[22] Both of these are internet resources which contain research, policy and practice guidance, inspection reports, serious case reviews, court judgments, news articles and other material relevant to child protection. Published material from Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland, together with material from Great Britain and other countries, are contained within the North/South child protection hub. Both are for the benefit of child protection professionals, policy makers, practitioners, researchers and educators.

Google or other search-engine equivalents to access research generally, as well as research from external organisations, with online academic databases, with HSE libraries and other library sources also being used in some cases. There is a strong preference among staff for evidence-based research, with report summaries being the most preferred type of research presentation, followed by policy briefs and full reports.

Staff views on ways to promote research are also pertinent to the role of ICT in this area. The majority of respondents believe that access to high-quality online and hard-copy resources would be the most effective way to promote the use of research. Online and face-to-face learning events, regular research and policy updates, and easy-to-use practical tools and guides were also cited as ways to promote the use of research.[23]

3.4.5 Quality Assurance

Quality assurance is highly significant in the development of a research capacity in Tusla, according to one management respondent. Increased focus on business intelligence, performance data, auditing, and quality reviews would highlight areas that may require further research consideration.

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[23] See Appendix 2.4 of this report for staff views on ways to promote research.

3.5 Collaboration

This section presents all respondents' views on research collaboration, perceived barriers, and enablers to participating in collaborative work.

Collaborations in research are best understood as the diverse partnerships that occur between individuals or groups for the advancement of knowledge, the enrichment of processes, and the development of products and outcomes. Research collaborations can consist of either internal or external efforts. They therefore can be created between entities within an organisation, among diverse multidisciplinary fields, between distinct and separate institutions, and also among regional or national amalgams. Moreover, research collaborations help to promote greater research results and are effective means for reducing costs and unnecessary duplication of effort (Bukvova, 2010).

Considering that Tusla-funded agencies receive a significant proportion of the overall Tusla budget, it is clear that they have a major role in the development of Tusla's research capacity. There was some suggestion by Tusla management respondents that the use of funds provided to external agencies should be aligned to the priority aims and objectives of Tusla, part of which should be the importance of research and their contribution to research.

While some Tusla management respondents maintained that Tusla having its own approach to research at this time would be better than collaborative efforts, the majority viewed collaboration on research with external organisations as a significant resource, citing the significant research expertise of external organisations, research officers, established links and evaluation tools as well as client participation feedback as potential benefits. Linked to this was the view that greater multidisciplinary and multi-agency work are essential.

Tusla was also perceived to have a number of assets that could assist collaborative partnerships. Expert personnel, funding, an all-Ireland cross-sectional perspective, access to staff for research participation purposes, and the ability to establish a research forum which would include representatives from all sectors were cited by Tusla-funded organisations as being beneficial to a collaborative process. The majority of Tusla-funded organisations, along with some SCP and FRC respondents, viewed such alliances as bringing differing and complementary experience and expertise together. Collaboration can also bring consensus on what requires research and what needs to be understood.

An often-cited stipulation to such collaboration by Tusla management respondents is a necessity for Tusla to lead on such projects. Some Tusla-funded organisations also viewed Tusla as having a leadership role in this process, whereby Tusla was seen as having the leadership capacity to develop a research partnership with external organisations. For both Tusla-funded organisations and Tusla management respondents, good project and strategic management are essential to any collaboration process.

While there is no doubt that a majority of Tusla management respondents advocated collaborative partnerships and efforts, there was a distinct note of caution in some of the narratives. Tusla management highlighted issues around clashing organisational

agendas, data ownership, the challenge of meeting different priorities in a resource-limited arena, and poor inter-organisational relationships as potential barriers. Tusla-funded organisations highlighted competing agendas and audiences as an issue in collaborative work, whereby some third-level institutions are perceived as being more interested in publishing for academic audiences than for practitioners. Mutual respect, a clear understanding of what each other's role is, and a clear working relationship between the partners were cited by Tusla-funded organisations as being necessary. In addition, resources to fund research collaboration and the need for expertise to manage collaborative projects were identified as issues that need careful consideration. Collaboration also requires a system that facilitates links between Tusla and service providers and provides the capacities to share information, research needs and research priorities, with a best-practice model needed in inter-disciplinary and inter-agency communication and cooperation, according to Tusla-funded organisations.

Notwithstanding such barriers, a number of Tusla management respondents put forward ideas on how collaboration could be achieved. Service-level agreements and Children and Young People's Services Committees (CYPSCs)[24] could be used, along with developed or developing relationships with academic institutions, to provide a mix of academic and operational abilities in the research process.

3.5.1 Government Departments and HIQA
In HIQA and government department views on collaboration with Tusla, many identified an already existing collaborative relationship. All government departments interviewed highlighted research in their departments that relate in some way to Tusla's work. All identified research in their departments that could advance Tusla's knowledge, in addition to research undertaken by Tusla that could advance their departments' knowledge – all of which served to emphasise the value of such collaborative relationships.[25]

3.5.1.2 Barriers to Collaborative Research
However, a number of barriers to current and future collaborative efforts were identified by all of the respondents. Barriers included: no infrastructure to share information; data protection issues which require clarity; the need for alignment of research to departmental work; and a lack of staff with sufficient expertise to conduct and manage collaborative research. In addition to views on collaborative research, all respondents identified particular priorities for research pertaining to Tusla's role and responsibilities, which are contained in the priority tables in section 4 of this report.

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[24] CYPSCs are in operation in every county in Ireland. Their purpose is to ensure effective inter-agency coordination and collaboration to achieve the best outcomes for all children and young people in their area.
[25] For views on pertinent research between departments and Tusla, see Appendixes 3.1 and 3.2 of this report.

Key Messages

The findings of this study show that in order to develop a research capacity in Tusla, consideration should be given to:

- Developing an overall organisational approach to research which takes account of the needs of the agency as a whole, through the development of an evidence-informed decision-making framework.
- The value of research needs to be promoted within the organisation in order to culturally embed its consistent use and practice throughout the agency, this will contribute to the development of Tusla as a learning organisation.
- Supporting research utilisation and practice through a number of the agency's functional areas, particularly through:

Finances
A budget specifically allocated to research is required.

Human Resources
The recruitment of specialised research staff or 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.

Collaboration
Collaborative work also has a significant role in the development of Tusla's research capacity:

- Both external organisations and Tusla benefit from shared resources.
- Possible barriers to such relationships include: clashing organisational agendas, data ownership, the challenge of meeting different priorities and competing audiences for research, and a lack of an information-sharing structure.
- More research is required on research partnerships, particularly how such partnerships could be established and operationalised effectively.

4. Findings – Service Delivery Areas

4.1 Introduction

This section contains findings that pertain to each of the service areas for which Tusla has responsibility. Each of these sections begins with a table of both short- and long-term research priorities identified by the respondents, followed by an account of the gaps in research identified. Section 4.2 presents respondents' views on gaps in and priorities for research in the area of child protection, which include: approaches, interventions and outcomes, cultural diversity, legislation in the area of child protection, child injury and death, and false allegations of abuse. Section 4.3 explores research gaps and priorities in the area of alternative care, and focuses on approaches in alternative care, fostering and adoption and outcomes in this area. Section 4.4 examines respondents' views on gaps and priorities for research in the area of family support, with a focus on evaluations, interventions and outcomes in this area, as well as particular child and family issues identified as requiring research. Section 4.5 considers the area of educational welfare and presents findings that pertain to school and well-being and interventions in the area of education and welfare. Section 4.6 examines early years and presents respondents' views on gaps in and priorities for research in this area. Such views predominately focus on regulation, practice and assessment in the field of Early Education and Care (EEC). Section 4.7 contains findings that relate to domestic, sexual and gender-based violence, particularly responses, impacts and outcomes in the area of service delivery, and views on research required on domestic abuse generally and sexual-based violence in particular.

In this study, all respondents[26] were asked to identify gaps in and priorities for research in both their own area of responsibility and in other areas if they had knowledge of such. All respondents identified gaps in and priorities for research primarily stemming from their own areas of responsibility, and a full account of both is presented here. Because the primary function of the study is to identify priorities, these are presented first, both short and long-term, in table form, with attribution of sources. An account of gaps is then presented. In some cases the gaps identified by the respondents were also identified as priorities for research, therefore there is a large degree of overlap between the sections; however, in a small number of cases the priorities that emerged were not highlighted as gaps.

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[26] Except for parents and youth respondents.

4.2 Child Protection

Short-Term Priorities	Respondents	Long-Term Priorities	Respondents
Approaches, Interventions, Outcomes Assessment framework in area of percentage threshold.[27] Needs assessments – each area of service delivery. Measuring outcomes across services and interventions. 'What works'.	Tusla management Tusla management, staff and Tusla-funded organisations	**Approaches, Interventions, Outcomes** Assessment: Do interventions produce better outcomes? Comparisons between State interventions and family support approaches to child protection.	Tusla management and Tusla-funded organisations
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.	Tusla management and Tusla-funded organisations	**Cultural Diversity** Cultural diversity – what are that factors that lead to over-representation of minority groups in the child protection system? The responses of key agencies to the sensitivity of cultural norms.	Tusla management, Tusla-funded organisations.
Legislation and Mandatory Reporting Mandatory Reporting – its impact on the child protection system and its implications for services. Implications of Children's First Legislation generally.	Tusla management	**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?	Tusla management Tusla management, Tusla-funded organisations

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

Short-Term Priorities	Respondents	Long-Term Priorities	Respondents
Service User Participation and Engagement Methodologies for engaging with young people in a participative manner.	Tusla-funded organisations	**Service User Participation and Engagement** How to effectively engage with families? Best practice in conducting timely assessment.	Tusla management Parents
Child Injury and Death Non-accidental injury of children. Effectiveness of National Review Panel Child Deaths and 'signs of safety' require further exploration.	Tusla management	**Other Long-Term Priorities** National Service Framework – what worked? Research is required on transitioning back into family, community and the crossover between the care and criminal cases following periods of detention. Data is required on the numbers of and responses to children below the age of criminal responsibility.	Tusla-funded organisations Government departments
Other Short-Term Priorities Research is required on the context in which social workers and service agencies operate.[28] The separation of child and family services from the HSE and impacts for practitioners and inter-/intra-agency working need to be explored.	Tusla-funded organisations		

Table 3: Research Priorities in Child Protection

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[28] 'Practice on the ground' is often referred to but rarely explained or researched, therefore further exploration of what this means is required.

4.2.1 Gaps in Child Protection Research

Respondents' perceptions of gaps in research in the sphere of child protection encompass a number of areas:

- Approaches, interventions and outcomes;
- Cultural diversity;
- Legislation – mandatory reporting;
- Service user participation and engagement;
- Child injury and death;
- False allegations of abuse.

4.2.1.2 Approaches, Interventions and Outcomes

Gaps were identified in research on effective approaches to practice in child protection and welfare, particularly on the quality of service provided. National research on early intervention and prevention in all services being utilised at present was identified as being required, by both Tusla-funded organisations and Tusla management. Adolescent risk behaviour was one area identified as requiring further investigation, particularly in relation to early intervention programmes that are successful in preventing criminal justice involvement. Clarity is required on whether it is a lack of research, the applicability of research findings to practice, or difficulty in translating research into practice that has resulted in perceived gaps in research in this area.

Staff respondents identified assessing the risk of non-convicted offenders or persons of concern in relation to the abuse of children as an issue necessitating research, particularly in terms of collaborative work required to carry out such assessments and details of appropriate interventions if required. Research that focuses on underlying structural problems in interventions for children and families is also required; for example, the effectiveness of standard report forms for the child protection social work team, and how different perceptions of thresholds[29] affect interventions for children.

Waiting lists and the management of same were identified as requiring research, by both staff respondents and parents, with parents perceiving organisation issues as a barrier to timely intervention and support for children. Other issues identified are the supervision of adults in charge of children, and the protection of children in cases where there are substance misuse problems.

Another practice concern, according to staff respondents is how to communicate concerns around emotional abuse, for example in cases where parents lack insight. In addition, research on how to work with parents with communication or learning difficulties is required for practice improvement.

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[29] The threshold at which state social work services respond to children who may have been maltreated is perceived differently depending on the support worker involved.

4.2.1.3 Cultural Diversity

A number of respondents highlighted gaps in research on cultural diversity in child protection literature in an Irish context. Specific gaps were identified by both Tusla management and Tusla-funded organisation respondents pertaining to reasons for the over-representation of ethnic minority children in the child protection system in Ireland and a lack of information on practice responses to cultural diversity. Research is required on effective interventions, specifically on how best to work with ethnic minority families, children forced into early marriage, as well as unaccompanied minors and dealing with child sexual abuse and physical abuse across cultures. A profile of culturally appropriate placements for children in care and the impact on children from diverse backgrounds being placed in a traditional Irish family context were also identified as gaps in research.

4.2.1.4 Legislation – Mandatory Reporting

The lack of research on mandatory reporting was of concern to some respondents. The impact of mandatory reporting on child protection referral rates, quality of referrals and effective responses to confirmed cases of abuse was identified as a gap in research. In addition, the impact that mandatory reporting may have on the general public's perception of Tusla's services was highlighted as an issue requiring further consideration. From a wider legislative perspective, some Tusla-funded organisations and Tusla management identified two specific pieces of legislation that require research to measure and identify impact, progress and issues presenting as a result of changing legislation, namely the Children First Act (2015) and the Children's Referendum.[30]

4.2.1.5 Service User Participation and Engagement

Family and particularly child participation in planning and decision-making was identified by both Tusla management and Tusla-funded organisations as needing further exploration. This primarily relates to how participation works in practice, how to achieve meaningful participation, and research on best practice in encouraging families and young people to engage with child protection interventions and evaluations. Such research was perceived by some to be absent in the Irish context.

4.2.1.6 Child Injury and Death

Concern was expressed by some respondents that there is a particular absence of research in the area of child death and non-accidental child death. In addition, non-accidental injuries in babies and fabricated illness were identified as requiring further research.

4.2.1.7 False Allegations of Abuse

False allegations of abuse, particularly in cases of relationship breakdown where risk of such is at its highest, is indicated as an area that necessitates further research. Such research would ensure that practice can identify and manage such cases effectively.

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[30]See section 6, Table 10 for legislation explanations.

4.3 Alternative Care

Short-Term Priorities	Respondents	Long-Term Priorities	Respondents
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.	Tusla management Tusla management and staff and Tusla-funded organisations.	**Approaches to Alternative Care** A long-term framework is required to assess the tendering and commissioning of services, as well as 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 for the effective delivery of alternative care services are required.	Tusla-funded organisations
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.	Tusla management	**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.	Tusla-funded organisations, parents, Tusla management
Fostering and Adoption The recruitment of foster carers and assessment of what works in this area.	Tusla management	**Fostering and Adoption** Experiences of fostering to adoption. Outcomes for children who are adopted.	Tusla management and staff Tusla management, staff, Tusla-funded organisations and parents
		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	Tusla management, staff and Tusla-funded organisations Tusla-funded organisations and

Short-Term Priorities	Respondents	Long-Term Priorities	Respondents
		of access. How to facilitate it.	Tusla staff
		Tracing – experiences and impact on all groups involved.	Tusla management

Table 4: Research Priorities in Alternative Care

4.3.1 Gaps in Alternative Care Research

Gaps in research in the area of alternative care relate mainly to three general areas:

- Approaches to alternative care;
- Outcomes for all children in all forms of care;
- Fostering and adoption.

4.3.1.2 Approaches in Alternative Care

International models of alternative care were highlighted as requiring further research, particularly in relation to alternative care models not currently available in Ireland. The effectiveness of such models was highlighted as necessitating investigation to determine if alternative care approaches could be replicated in Ireland. Innovative approaches to residential care and alternatives to residential care were identified as areas requiring research, with a particular focus needed on preventive, evidence-based programmes, for example intensive or professional fostering and community-based preventive services. Research on therapeutic foster care and relative foster care (specific to an Irish context) was perceived by many as being useful in this regard. The use of preventive community-based services was additionally perceived as a way to tackle challenging behaviour and to address high cost issues associated with residential care, with research evidence required in relation to this. A focus on international practice in this area was perceived by some to be important due to the changing nature of secure care.[31]

Research on approaches to care for specific age groups was identified as requiring further investigation. In this sense, identification of effective models of care for older children is a perceived necessity. Research is required on effective models for older children in residential care, special care and high support services.

Effective approaches are required for the management of risk, in dealing with high-risk sexual behaviour, drug and alcohol addiction and criminal behaviour, as are approaches to address the issue of children and adolescents missing from care.

The overall effectiveness of Ireland's approach to alternative care was identified as requiring further research, with calls for research on best practice and alternative care across child and family services as opposed to particular areas.

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[31] Secure care in Ireland pertains to both special care units, where children are detained for their own welfare and protection, and children detention schools, which provide places for a child to be detained in custody in relation to criminal charges.

4.3.1.3 Outcomes for Children in Alternative Care

Research on the outcomes of all children in all forms of care was identified as a significant gap by the majority of respondents. For many, there is a need for a specific focus on the outcomes of children who are older entering into the care system. Comparative studies between groups of children in different care settings and with the general child and youth population was also identified as being required. Educational outcomes were identified as key – research exploring evidence-based practice for positive educational responses to minority groups in the care system and research on returning to mainstream education following care were cited as needing further research. The impact of initiatives specifically designed to improve outcomes and the nature of post-care outcomes over time were two other areas of research identified. Many of the respondents expressed the view that there is a lack of detailed research on the relationship between children's experiences of all forms of care and its impact on outcomes, particularly in the longer term.

4.3.1.4 Fostering and Adoption

Respondents identified a number of areas in fostering and adoption that require further investigation. In relation to fostering, respondents identified research needs on the capacity of foster carers to perform the duties expected by child welfare services; and research on attachment in foster families. Permanency planning was highlighted as requiring research, particularly in cases of long-term foster care. The fostering to adoption process was perceived as requiring research, including a focus on longitudinal outcomes. Moreover, there was a view that following the Children's Referendum there is now a need for evidence-based approaches to support the implementation of a pathway to adoption through foster care for children.

In relation to adoption, all respondent groups identified a need for outcomes-focused research. The relationship between the age of the child at placement and long-term outcomes was a specific area mentioned in this regard. In addition, new tracing legislation[32] requires research attention, particularly in terms of the experiences of all those involved in the process.[33]

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[32] See section 6, Table 10 for explanation on tracing legislation.
[33] Professionals, and service users, birth parents, adoptive parents and adoptees.

4.4 Family Support

Short-Term Priorities	Respondents	Long-Term Priorities	Respondents
Interventions, Needs, Evaluations and Outcomes Needs – the type and level of the 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.	Tusla management Family Resource Centres Family Resource Centres and Parents Parents and Family Resource Centres Government departments Tusla management	**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, the wider community and family. Importance of FS preventive work.	Tusla management and Family Resource Centres Tusla-funded organisations Family Resource Centres
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?	Tusla-funded organisations Family Resource Centres	**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 on children and family	Tusla management Family Resource Centres Government Departments

Short-Term Priorities	Respondents	Long-Term Priorities	Respondents
		experiences. Voice of the child in policy-relevant questions	

Table 5: Research Priorities in Family Support

4.4.1 Gaps in Family Support Research

Gaps in research identified in the area of family support predominantly focus on areas of:

- Evaluation and assessment, interventions being utilised, and outcomes-focused research;
- Issues affecting families and children.

4.4.1.2 Interventions, Evaluations and Outcomes

According to Tusla management, FRCs and Tusla-funded organisations, there is an absence of a collated account of the nature of family support interventions delivered by voluntary and statutory agencies. Both national and local pictures of the provision of child and family services are required. An assessment of needs at local level is required in order to inform services and action plans, to establish the relationship between levels of service provision and well-being in communities and how this varies geographically, and to respond to needs in the longer term. Connected to this is a call from FRC respondents for a coordinated body to oversee such an assessment nationwide.

Moreover, respondents perceived a need to assess the benefits of services and interventions in terms of the outcomes for families, children and young people. Tusla funded organisations emphasised user participation as key in this type of research. For Tusla management there should be a research focus on how such consultation affects how the service is planned and delivered. For both Tusla management and FRCs there is a need to understand what outcomes are currently being achieved in child and family services in order to determine future priorities and a commissioning strategy. The impact of early intervention services on outcomes was highlighted by FRCs as a significant priority for research, particularly on how successful such services are in preventing children and families from entering the child protection system. For some staff respondents, the large amounts of existing data requires both analysis and incorporation into service development planning. The possibility of utilising the SPEAK system to develop a system of external evaluation was also highlighted by the FRCs, although this was proposed with the caveat that the SPEAK system itself is in need of review.[34]

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[34] Strategic Planning, Evaluation and Knowledge System (SPEAK) is a software-based data collection and self- evaluation system which operates across multiple FRCs so that the data collected from each project is then collated into a single database.

Tusla staff respondents identified a number of other areas where outcomes-focused research is required, which include:

- The impact of addiction services;
- Direct work with families by family support services;
- Family support in the early years in terms of both universal and targeted services;
- Early intervention for families in difficulty.

4.4.1.3 Child and Family Issues Requiring Research

Reflecting the scope of family support as an area of service provision, a range of issues affecting children and families were identified as requiring further research to assist in developing more effective responses; for more see below.

- Impact of addiction on children and families
- The needs of children and families affected by homelessness
- The impact of homelessness on children's education and on families generally
- Impact of corporal punishment on children
- Impact of harm on children's development
- Ethnic minority groups – inclusion in local communities and examination of particular service needs
- Supports and services required for lone parents and separated parents
- An analysis of different parenting models in the context of strengthening families
- Challenges in adolescent services – increased understanding needed in areas of mental health and suicide prevention
- Children's rights – collation and dissemination of international research in this area
- Differential Response Model – research required for effective implementation in the Irish context
- Advocacy – links with communities, types of advocacy available and impact of advocacy.

Table 6: Child and Family Issues Requiring Research.[35]

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[35] Research on disability was identified by both Tusla staff and Tusla-funded organisations as requiring attention, particularly in respect to supports needed, housing, and community integration.

4.5 Educational Welfare

Short-Term Priorities	Respondents	Long-Term Priorities	Respondents
School and Well-being How the school system is dealing with new migrant children and vulnerable groups.	Tusla management	**Effectiveness of Support Programmes** The impact of various initiatives on attention, retention and participation.	Tusla management and Tusla-funded organisations
		Impact of programmes involving home school community liaison, school completion and education welfare in the long term.	Tusla management
		Early school leaving, benefits and weaknesses in academic education, and preventive responses.	School completion projects
Effectiveness of Support Programmes Interface between parents and the educational system. Review of data on school attendance and impact of prosecutions on attendance.	Tusla management and SCPs	**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.	Tusla management
Implementation of practice models. Fidelity and impact of practice models.	Tusla management	Impact of DEIS services working in an integrated EWO service as part of the One Child service delivery model.	Government departments

Table 7: Research Priorities in Educational Welfare

4.5.1 Gaps in Educational Welfare Research
Predominant research gaps in the field of education and welfare pertained to two general areas:

- School environment and how it pertains to children's wellbeing;
- The effectiveness of both interventions in the area of school attendance and various school-related support programmes.

4.5.1.2 School and Well-being
There is a perceived need for research to understand the link between education and child welfare, particularly on how the school environment impacts on the mental health of young people. Some respondents suggested that international research links youth suicide to the academic calendar and that this is an area worthy of further investigation. The impact of the school environment on mental health was the most common research gap identified among the SCP survey respondents. For many, research is required on programmes and practices that succeed in increasing youth engagement in schools, particularly with the move towards continuous assessment. The impact of such continuous assessment and standardised testing on young people's mental health is also an area that requires further research. In addition, general levels of happiness with and enjoyment of school, which may have an impact on levels of engagement, requires further investigation. The engagement of migrant children, in particular understanding the impact of their movement between different jurisdictions and systems, was also identified by respondents as needing consideration.

4.5.1.3 Interventions
Connected to levels of youth engagement in schools is the perceived need for information on the types of school attendance strategies proven to work. For some respondents, research is also required to develop toolkits for working with children and young people experiencing school attendance difficulties, as well as toolkits for working with parents to improve their child's school attendance and help them understand the value of attendance. The effectiveness of the use of the legal system in improving school attendance was also highlighted by Tusla staff as an area requiring further research. SCP survey respondents highlighted a need for more research on the effectiveness of school completion programmes, social competence supports[36] and the Meitheal programme.[37] Research is also needed on the impact of non-formal education on children, for example home schooling.

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[36] Social competence supports refer to supports provided to assist children in establishing and maintaining high-quality and mutually satisfying relationships and to avoid negative treatment or victimisation from others. See: http://www.healthofchildren.com/S/Social-Competence.html#ixzz4BvnU3NYp for more detail.

[37] Meitheal is the proposed Child and Family Agency–standardised approach to assessing the needs of children and families, which will ensure that the proper supports and services are made available to children and families when they are required.

4.6 Early Years

Short-Term Priorities	Respondents	Long-Term Priorities	Respondents
Evidence-based practice on regulations. Compliance – National Standards. Assessment of the impact of inspections on children and research in relation to complaints. Cost and affordability of childcare and range of choice.	Tusla management Parents	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.	Tusla management

Table 8: Research Priorities in Early Years

4.6.1 Gaps in Early Years Research

Some Tusla management respondents identified a need to examine evidence-based practice across regulations and inspection practices internationally, particularly around the Judgement Framework[38] and new legislation regulations being implemented in this area. Children First and Protective Disclosures are specific areas mentioned which require research.

In relation to the inspection of services, research is needed on the impact of such inspections. Research is also required on findings in cases of non-compliance and its impact on children/experience of the child in such services, according to Tusla management respondents.

The absence of a clearly defined workable early years strategy was identified by one Tusla management respondent as a significant gap which requires research.

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[38] The Judgement Framework is a monitoring tool to assist in the assessment of Early Years practice.

4.7 Domestic Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

Short-Term Priorities	Respondents	Long-Term Priorities	Respondents
Domestic Abuse Impact of domestic violence on children Etiology of domestic violence in an Irish context The impact of alcohol on domestic violence.	Tusla management and staff Parents	**Legislation** The implications of Ireland's ratification of the Istanbul Convention, in relation to provision of services.	Tusla-funded organisations
Sexual-Based Violence Research on adolescents and sexual violence Crime and Justice responses to sexual violence	Tusla-funded organisations	**Data Sharing** Best practice in sharing information across statutory bodies and voluntary organisations that collect information on sexual violence.	Tusla-funded organisations
Responses, Impacts and Outcomes Effective models of practice and service user engagement.	Tusla-funded organisations		

Table 9: Research Priorities in Domestic Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

4.7.1 Gaps in Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
A number of gaps in Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence were identified by respondents; these can be divided into three broad areas:

- Research on identifying cases of domestic abuse, understanding its etiology, its impact, and support services in this area
- Sexual-based violence requires specific research attention
- Responses to the impact and outcomes of domestic violence, particularly for specific groups, were also highlighted as requiring a research focus.

4.7.1.2 Domestic Abuse
Understanding how to identify domestic violence, routine screening for suspected cases of domestic violence, and its impact on children were research gaps identified by respondents. Parents' responses highlighted the relationship between addiction and domestic violence as a significant issue requiring research. For Tusla staff respondents, research is required on how to support families suffering domestic abuse, particularly focusing on service availability and service gaps.

4.7.1.3 Sexual-Based Violence

The issue of sexual-based violence was highlighted by both Tusla management and organisations working in the area as necessitating further research. Particular areas for research identified by respondents include:

- What methods and instruments should be used to track instances of sexual violence to ascertain the prevalence of sexual violence in the population
- The role of culture on levels of sexual violence in the youth population
- The impact of court procedures on victims of sexual violence
- The role of medical forensic examination of victims
- The value of preventive programmes, for example those specifically aimed at deterring abusers
- The management of convicted sex offenders in the community
- The role of families in supporting victims of sexual abuse.

4.7.1.4 Responses, Impacts and Outcomes

Tusla managers maintain that this area of service delivery requires research or audit of programmes responding to gender-based, domestic and sexual violence to clarify if they are evidence-based. In addition, some suggested that research is required into ways and mechanisms to involve the views of service users in the planning, design and delivery of services in this area. For Tusla staff, research on the prevalence, impact and outcomes of domestic violence for specific groups, namely children and minority groups, was highlighted as being a particular gap in this area of research.

Key Messages

While the findings from this section of the report revealed gaps in and priorities for research specific to each of Tusla's service delivery areas, it is also evident that a number of the gaps and priorities identified by the respondents traverse some areas of service delivery. The main themes across service delivery areas relate to requirements for:

- Needs assessments across all areas of service delivery to identify gaps in services and service requirements at local level, based on local context;
- A directory of services across all areas to identify what services are available both regionally and locally, with an overview of all models of intervention being utilised;
- Impact assessments on all interventions being utilised to determine what works, with an examination of both short- and long-term outcomes;
- Comparative research on international models of practice across service delivery areas to identify alternative approaches that may be successful in an Irish context;
- Assessment of what is needed to embed service clients' participation and engagement in service planning and delivery;
- An examination of cultural competence in the context of service practice; with specific responses to ethnic minority groups and effective interventions that take account of cultural norms and practices being required.

5. Literature Review

5.1 Introduction

The aim of the literature review was to establish, at an overview level, the extent to which empirical findings from this study reflect patterns and trends internationally in Tusla's key service provision areas and in the domain of organisational research capacity. In doing so, it serves to confirm the salience of views of the respondents and ensures that significant international trends not identified in the empirical research are highlighted for consideration as part of the RNA, which is an important part of the process. The review was a relatively small component in the overall study, and for this reason it should not be read as a comprehensive review of all research relevant to Tusla. Obviously, full literature reviews covering various aspects of Tusla's work and operation would be significant research projects in themselves, something highlighted later in the conclusion of the report as worthy of consideration.[39]

5.2 Supporting Research in Organisations

A number of international studies have been carried out on how best to support and develop research in organisations like Tusla. Much of the research in this area concurs with the findings of this study. Both national and international literature in this area suggest that organisational cultures matter in developing a culture of research in organisations like Tusla; management policies and decisions are critical in shaping practitioners' expectations of, and readiness for, research utilisation and practice change (Gray et al., 2015). For genuine and sustained change to occur, an organisational culture that values and resources the production, transfer, translation and use of research in practice is crucial, according to Gray et al. (2013). Organisational commitments, staff with dedicated research responsibilities, and budgetary support are required to build research initiatives into operational structures (McBeath & Austin, 2015). Organisational factors, pragmatic constraints and individual values and assumptions are found to be influential in a professional's capacity or preparedness to use research. Some studies in this area suggest that there is a need to bridge the gap between what practitioners want from research and what research provides (Stevens et al., 2005), to challenge inherent assumptions.

In relation to capacity, organisations providing services to children and families require competent staff who have opportunities for training at all levels, including continuing professional development (Buckley, 2009; Holzer et al., 2007). Indeed, substantial organisational research on transfer of training suggests that it is more long-term and comprehensive strategies that are needed in order to promote practice change (Cheng & Ho, 2001). Moreover, the capacity of information systems (IS) has been found to have a significant impact on research use. The future design of IS must be guided by what practitioners consider they need to enhance their practice, rather than by what might be technically possible at a particular time, according to Gillingham (2013). However, balancing these two requirements would arguably result in a more efficient, useable system.

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[39] See section 6.3.4 of this report.

While the internal systems are fundamental to establishing a culture of research in any given organisation, ambitious pursuit of organisational reform is stressed in this area of literature policy and practice, which is rhetorically rooted in 'joined-up thinking'. Collective engagement can lead to a reconstruction of the foundations of joined-up working, based on the development of a shared set of repertoires and leading to a healthy overlap between the work of professionals in a differentiated supply of child and family services (Roets et al., 2014).

Furthermore, developing more sustained programmes of research, underpinned by a balanced portfolio of methods and approaches, would maximise the potential for research impact on child protection policy and practice (Tilbury et al., 2015) across all services and agencies.

5.3 Service Delivery Areas

5.3.1 Child Protection

Many of the gaps in child protection research identified in this study correspond with international literature; in fact, an examination of child protection–related research priorities identified internationally suggests that there are shared needs and gaps in the evidence base globally. Similar to the findings of this study, interventions, approaches and outcomes in the area of child protection are seen to be a priority for research in the UK (Department for Education (DFE, formerly Department for Education and Skills, DFES), 2014a), Australia (Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2011) and the US (Petersen, Joseph and Feit, 2014). More robust evidence is particularly needed on the effectiveness of early intervention and prevention programmes and services, and both research and practice need to follow evidence-based approaches by recognising what works in policy and practice in different contexts (McElvaney & Lalor, 2014; Petersen et al., 2014). In addition, exploring what delivery systems are most effective is identified as a future research consideration, including developing new, evidence-based programmes for children and families, identifying the best means of replicating effective interventions and services, and investigating the longitudinal impacts of preventive practice responses (Petersen et al., 2014).

Exploration of studies in this area also shows that there is a need for systematic knowledge to form the basis of effective interventions. For example, there is a greater need for instrumental research into what interventions work, with connections between different studies and methodologies – including research, evaluation and cost benefit analysis – being necessary to achieve this aim (Björnberg and Ottosen, 2013; Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2011). Longitudinal research has also been identified as necessary to provide more evidence on specific policies that work in the area of child protection, according to Gilbert et al. (2012). Research from both the USA and Australia has highlighted a need to evaluate the impact of laws and policies that address prevention and intervention systems and services for child abuse and neglect at the federal, state, and local levels (Petersen et al., 2014).

The literature reviewed for this study highlighted a number of areas of research focus that did not emerge in this study. For example, there is a specific focus internationally on the factors that cause and perpetuate child abuse, such as homelessness, addiction, parental mental illness and domestic violence (Wekerle, 2013), as well as the consequences of child abuse and neglect in both the immediate and longer term (Petersen et al., 2014). The context in which child protection operates is becoming a significant focus of international research. Studies show that early intervention and protection strategies, for example, need to be tailored to specific social contexts. Such studies are highlighting how policy and practice responses need to be contextualised by considering different factors, such as belonging to social, racial/ethnic, subcultural and gender groups, in order to develop more effective interventions (Allen, Thorn & Gully, 2015).

Moreover, while cultural diversity was identified as a significant gap in and priority for research in this study, internationally there is considerable focus on cultural diversity in the area of child protection research. Areas of current investigation internationally include the influence that different types of child welfare systems

have on child protection practices (Gilbert et al., 2011), the role of ethnic status and cultural processes on child protection instances and responses (Katz et al., 2016; Petersen et al., 2014; Department of Families, Housing, Community Services and Indigenous Affairs, 2011) and race/ethnicity differences in the consequences of childhood neglect, with a focus on explaining these differences (Allen et al., 2015).

5.3.2 Alternative Care
Concurring with the findings of this study, alternative approaches to care, their effectiveness and a specific focus on outcomes, leaving care, personal identity and effective models of alternative supports have been recognised as key issues in the alternative care literature both in Ireland and internationally (Moran et al., 2016; DFE, 2014b; Petersen et al., 2014; O'Brien, 2013). Alternative models for the provision of care and the impact of these alternative models in producing successful outcomes have been the topic of some discussion internationally and in Ireland, particularly with the onset of de-institutionalisation and the transition to community-based services, substitute family care and specialist residential care (Moran et al., 2016; O'Brien, 2013; European Commission, 2012; Gilligan, 2012).

In relation to experiences of care, similarly to this study's findings, international research is very much focusing on pathways into care, including the experiences of children and adults in the care system, with a particular emphasis on the phases of care: entering care, living in care and leaving care (Moran et al., 2016; Darmody, et al., 2013; Biehal, 2007; Connolly, 2004). International research has recognised the importance of longitudinal data for understanding the experiences and pathways of young people in care. However, identifying what supports are needed for those exiting care and outcomes as a consequence of such supports are recognised as needing more in-depth study in international research (Stein, 2006). Indeed, a lack of longitudinal data on experiences of young people leaving care has been particularly recognised as a deficit in research in the Irish context (Darmody et al., 2013).

Knowledge of identity is important to the long-term mental well-being of care leavers, according to Goddard et al. (2013); therefore, research needs to examine the preservation of records, the full disclosure of the content of records, and the provision of support to search for and release records as well as for searches for family members (ibid.). There is also a suggestion that recognising the importance of these records for care leavers will result in this issue becoming a focus of research internationally.

Internationally, attention is given to the recognised link between a child's age at entry into care, length of stay in care, and child's developmental outcomes (Moran et al., 2016; O'Brien, 2014). While some international studies maintain that most young people's experiences of care are positive (Biehal et al., 2014), other research suggests that the outcomes for children and young people in care demonstrate a worrying trend towards increasingly complex behavioural problems and extensive placement instability. In addition, problems increased the longer the children spent in care, particularly out-of-home care (Osborn and Bromfield, 2007).

Research shows that adolescents entering care are far more likely to experience placement instability. Permanence and placement stability are recognised as key policy objectives in childcare systems globally. However, defining permanence and

practices of suitable matching have been identified as requiring further research attention in an Irish context, particularly in connection to issues of race/ethnicity and religion (Moran et al., 2016). In relation to fostering and adoption there is a specific focus internationally on improving foster care delivery (e.g., recruitment and the quality of foster care) as well as understanding international best practice for achieving good outcomes in adoption (DFES, 2014c; Boddy, 2013; McSherry et al., 2008).

5.3.3 Family Support
Both Irish and international literature in the area of family support identify similar gaps in research to those identified in this study. Priorities for family support research in a global context pertain to the identification and analysis of the policies and interventions that are being implemented in the name of family and parenting support in a local context, and to national and regional variations in this regard (Canavan, Pinkerton & Dolan, 2016; Daly et al., 2015). Therefore, focus needs to be given to what family support services are available at local and national level.

The necessity for needs assessments in the area of family support has previously been identified by research from both the UK and Ireland. Family support provisions are predicated on a level of need. According to Dolan et al. (2006) and Munro (2011), the needs of children and families should determine the extent and nature of the service provided. In this regard, needs assessment is required to provide the appropriate level of family support. Furthermore, research maintains that parenting and family support clearly need to prioritise a focus on children themselves in their family contexts in order to better understand their feelings, wishes and precise needs (Halpenny, 2012).

A number of national and international studies have highlighted significant gaps in assessment and evaluation in family support. Those with a focus on outcomes and sustained outcomes over time have been highlighted as particularly lacking (Daly et al., 2015; Devaney et al., 2013; Devaney, 2011; Owens, 2011; Canavan, 2010). Moreover, there is an identified gap in research on engagement with family support services. More robust methodological approaches, combining both qualitative and quantitative research methodologies, need to be used in future research in order to capture the family support processes and how people engage with preventive services (Owens, 2011).

International research has recognised information gaps in the impact of family support on parenting in adverse circumstances (Halpenny, 2012), the types of families that family support targets (e.g., ethnic minority families, low-income families and lone parent families (Daly et al., 2015), and the degree of involvement that children and young people have in the family support process (Owens, 2011). Indeed, the literature suggests that one area of focus should be the strengths and weaknesses of family support and parenting support in addressing problems that are structural in nature (e.g., poverty, inequality, unemployment, ill-health and poor education) which is identified as a research gap (Daly et al., 2015). More structural interventions are called for, which would include the development of skills to deal with adversity (Richter and Naicker, 2013).

5.3.4 Educational Welfare

Some of the gaps in education and welfare research, identified by respondents in this study, correspond with gaps in international literature. A number of international studies have been published on school and its impact on child well-being. For some, there is limited evidence that the school environment has a major influence on adolescent mental health (Kidger et al., 2012). For others, school climate can have a significant impact on well-being (Way et al., 2007). Recent research has focused extensively on school behaviour (e.g., bullying) and attendance. However, more evidence is required on effective strategies to tackle challenging behaviour, and good practices teachers use to combat bullying and to manage other types of challenging behaviour (DFE, 2014d); this is a research priority for other countries, particularly the UK.

While school attendance was highlighted by both this study and reports from the UK (DFES, 2014d) as requiring research, particularly on strategies to increase attendance, the National Educational Welfare Board has produced reports on this area: 'School Attendance and Participation: What Works and Why?' (2008) and 'Best practice in addressing Participation, Attendance and Attention of Children in Education' (2012), which may be used as a foundation to address specific gaps in knowledge in this area in the Irish context. In addition, a systematic review of interventions designed to reduce non-attendance has been produced in the US (Maynard et al., 2012).

Inclusive education has been promoted across European countries and the USA in recent decades. However, what can be done to develop and sustain a whole-family focus and encourage inter-agency collaboration to provide effective support to all young people in schools has not received significant research attention (DFE, 2014d; Kendall et al., 2008). Literature that focuses on improving educational outcomes for children suggests that interventions aimed at vulnerable groups require more robust longitudinal research evidence (Harris and Goodall, 2007).

5.3.5 Early Years

Regulation, practice and assessment were identified as priorities for research in this study. The prominent focus of research in the area of Early Education and Care, nationally and internationally, pertains to quality leading to best practice, equity of access associated with cost to providers, and affordability for families.

Both national and international literature suggest that raising quality in early education and care is a significant priority requiring further study. Both research and evaluation are key components of the determination of quality (Elliott, 2006), particularly in establishing and sustaining the best possible standards and practice that make the most difference to children's lives (OECD, 2015; DFE, 2014e). In addition, research on the most effective teaching, staffing, organisational and collaborative models of early education and childcare is required, so greater certainty and clarity can be fostered among practitioners and parents on what works are required (Garrity, 2014). Connected to this is the view that low levels of staff qualifications may impede the effectiveness, quality provision and further development of the ECCE sector in Ireland. Further research focusing on staff qualification and the provision of quality of service in the sector is required, according to Garrity (2014).

In addition, the research suggests that the childcare market is diverse and complex, and that a greater understanding is needed of how the childcare market functions (Hillman and Williams, 2015) – a focus which did not emerge in this study. Establishing the most effective means of encouraging expansion, driving up quality, stimulating demand and understanding the main pressures on providers' costs is required to tackle the issue of equity (Elliott, 2006). Moreover, affordable childcare has been identified as a priority for research in both Ireland and the UK; research suggests that there is a need to improve our understanding of how much such services actually cost households on a weekly basis after accounting for various patterns of childcare use and types of support (Millar and Crosse, 2016; DFE, 2014e). How the cost of childcare compares to what parents can afford is an area requiring further investigation in the Irish context, particularly as research from the UK suggests that childcare costs are a significant and increasing burden on parents' budgets (Rabindrakumar, 2013).

5.3.6 Domestic Sexual and Gender-Based Violence

As with the findings in this study, there is a view that domestic violence requires research in a number of different areas. Recent research from Australia suggests specific themes requiring further investigation, some of which corresponded with the findings of this study, for example experiences and impacts of domestic violence and service responses (ANROWS, 2014).[40] There are also recognised gaps in knowledge in the USA regarding proven-effective interventions in domestic violence, the scope of existing services to meet the needs of those affected by all forms of domestic violence, and research on resilience in the context of exposure to violence (Wathen et al., 2012).

Improving the justice system's responses to domestic violence has also been identified internationally (ANROWS, 2014) as a priority for further research. In Ireland the issue of custody and access in the context of domestic violence to identify how the family law system can deal more effectively with the issue to maximise the safety of women and children has been found to require further investigation (Women's Aid, 2008).

In relation to the area of sexual violence, which was a central plank in the findings of this study, perceptions of what constitutes a healthy relationship, consent, and perceptions of gender and how these are influenced by cultural systems have also been identified as requiring further research attention elsewhere (Murray et al., 2010; Humphreys, 2007).

Other themes in this area identified as requiring research, but which did not emerge in this particular study, include primary prevention aimed at young boys and adolescents, and interventions particularly in terms of early interventions with perpetrators (ANROWS, 2014). In addition, research suggests that there is a shortage of evidence internationally on the efficacy of interventions with perpetrators of domestic violence (DFE, 2014a; Eckhardt et al., 2013), which has become a research priority going forward.

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[40] Australia's National Research Organisation for Women's Safety (ANROWS) has undertaken substantial national and international research to identify gaps and priorities in the area of domestic violence.

5.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this literature review has provided a brief overarching view of research on areas pertinent to Tusla. While this review was not intended to be an extensive account of all research in all applicable areas, the scoping method utilised did provide sufficient results to ascertain that the gaps in and priorities for research identified in this study largely concur with national and international viewpoints. This review also provides readers with a sense of gaps in and priorities for research in other jurisdictions that did not emerge in this study.

Key Messages

As is evident from the literature reviewed throughout this section of the report, the findings in this study largely concur with gaps and priorities for research identified in other jurisdictions, particularly in areas of:

- Supporting research in organisations which concurs with the need for an organisational culture that values and resources the use, practice and dissemination of research, through continued professional development, effective information systems and joined-up thinking.
- The effectiveness of interventions being utilised, concentration on what works in all areas of practice is a significant focus of international research.
- The requirement for needs assessments, particularly in family support, has been identified by international research as a key priority for research.
- Outcomes for service users in both the short and long term is a focus of both national and international research.

Conversely, there are broad areas of research focus internationally that were not identified as gaps or priorities in this study, in the service delivery areas:

- The factors that cause and perpetuate the need for service intervention, such as addiction or illness.
- Research on the social context of service users: race/ethnic group, subculture and gender, for example.
- The effect of structural problems on service need: poverty, inequality, unemployment, and poor education.

All of which, according to international literature, assist in the development of more effective intervention.

- A whole family focus in interventions, particularly in terms of engagement with and participation in support services, is also a focus of international research.

6. Conclusions and Recommendations

The purpose of this Research Needs Analysis is to respond to Tusla's Research Strategy, specifically in identifying and prioritising the research and research development needs of the Agency for the period 2015–2017. This conclusion provides an overview of the research and research development needs of the agency, which have been broken down into three categories:

- The categorisation and prioritisation of research requirements on the basis of main themes which are aligned to each of Tusla's service delivery areas.
- The requirements needed to develop a research capacity in the agency as a whole, focusing 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 this RNA study and the corporate objectives are elaborated in section 6.4 of this conclusion.

6.1 Key Themes – Service Delivery Areas

While the findings from this report revealed gaps in and priorities for research specific to each of Tusla's service delivery areas, it is also evident that a number of the gaps and priorities identified by the respondents traverse some areas of service delivery. The main themes across service delivery areas relate to requirements for:

- Needs assessments across all areas of service delivery to identify gaps in services and service requirements at local level, based on local context;
- A directory of services across all areas to identify what services are available both regionally and locally, with an overview of all models of intervention being utilised;
- Impact assessments on all interventions being utilised to determine what works, with an examination of both short- and long-term outcomes;
- Comparative research on international models of practice across service delivery areas to identify alternative approaches that may be successful in an Irish context;
- Assessment of what is needed to embed service clients' participation and engagement in service planning and delivery;
- An examination of cultural competence in the context of service practice, with specific responses to ethnic minority groups and effective interventions that take account of cultural norms and practices being required.

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6.2 Developing a Research Capacity in Tusla

The findings of this study reveal that research capacity in the organisation requires further consideration. While the intentions towards establishing a research culture in Tusla are very positive and there has been a move in this direction, as previously evidenced, the findings suggest that research practices are not culturally embedded in the organisation, research is used significantly in some areas of the organisation but is limited and ad hoc in other areas, and evaluation over research dominates. In order to develop the research capacity that the agency requires, a whole-organisation approach to research needs to be established first. The findings from this research indicate that an evidence-informed decision-making framework is required to achieve this. Such a framework needs to consider the research needs of the agency as a whole and the capacity of the operational systems to deliver on intended projects. The capacity of Tusla's operational systems to deliver on research is very much dependent on 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, which include:

Finances
- A budget specifically allocated to research is required.

Human Resources
- The recruitment of specialised research staff or 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 to 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.

6.3 Other Considerations to Inform Research Decisions

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

6.3.1 Internal Policy and Collaboration
In order to decipher what research should be prioritised by Tusla, it is necessary to take account of a number of issues, many of which were raised by Tusla's Research Advisory Group as part of the process of consultation for this study. Research needs to be informed by Tusla's corporate objectives – the recommendations of this study do indeed reflect these objectives. Moreover, findings on joint agency working and collaboration between organisations and government departments suggest that there is significant value in such practices for all involved; therefore, decisions on research need to reflect priorities that inform shared practice as well as government policy and national priorities. It was noted that research could also be informed through the use of data analytics and record management on existing data held by Tusla and other organisations.

6.3.2 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; for example, recommendations made by the Ryan and Moriarty reports on child protection research. Findings from past inquiries into child abuse and neglect in Ireland must clearly and effectively inform present and future practice (Halpenny, 2012). Furthermore, over recent years a number of significant policy and legislative developments have been driving Tusla's work, which are set out in Table 10 below. Research will play a key role in supporting Tusla's response to these developments.

Legislation	Overview
Children First Act 2015	The Children First Act puts elements of 'Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children' on a statutory basis. Purpose of the Act: • To raise awareness of child abuse and neglect • To provide for mandatory reporting by key professionals • To improve child protection arrangements in organisations providing services to children • To provide for inter-agency working and information-sharing in relation to assessments by the Agency. The Criminal Justice (Withholding of Information on Offences against Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 and the National Vetting Bureau (Children and Vulnerable Persons) Act 2012 are additional key pieces of complementary legislation designed to improve child safety and protection.
Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill	Adoption (Information and Tracing) Bill provides for structured and regulated access to adoption information and tracing services for adopted persons, birth parents and others affected by adoption. Yet to be approved.
Children (Amendment) Act 2015	Amends the Children Act 2001 and is intended to provide for the amalgamation of the detention schools, remission of sentences in the detention schools and a revised policy approach for children reaching the age of 18 in the detention schools.
The Childcare Amendment Act 2015	The main purpose of this legislation is to strengthen the legislative provisions for aftercare by amending the Child Care Act 1991 to place a statutory duty on the Child and Family Agency (Tusla) to prepare an aftercare plan for an eligible child or eligible young person.
Adoption (Amendment) Bill 2016	The Adoption (Amendment) Bill 2016 provides for changes to the adoption laws, which will allow for new arrangements for adoption of a child of marriage. This Bill also proposes to amend the Adoption Act 2010 to reflect the adoption provisions provided for in the Children and Family Relationships Act 2015 as well as provide for sole step-parent adoption. The Bill was published on 5 May 2016 and is currently being progressed through the Houses of the Oireachtas.
Child Care Act 1991 (Early Years Services) Regulations 2016	The revision of Regulations will introduce a number of changes to Early Years Services. These regulations will change the way Early Years Services are registered and managed as well as the staffing qualifications required for employment in this area.
Special Care Regulations	The Special Care Regulations will provide for the registration of Special Care Units, as well as for the care and welfare of children detained in Special Care Units. These regulations amend the Child Care Act 1991 and the Child Care (Amendment) Act 2011.
Education (Admission to Schools) Bill 2014	Gives power to the Child and Family Agency, through its statutory educational welfare service, to designate a school or centre for education for a child where no school place can be found and where the child does not have a special educational need.

Legislation	Overview
Thirty-First Amendment of the Constitution (Children) Act 2012	• Provides for state intervention in the family where the welfare or safety of the child is negatively affected; • Enshrines the state's duty to pass laws to make adoption available to all children; • In judicial proceedings it makes the best interests of the child paramount and ensures that the child's views are heard.
Education (Admissions to School) Bill 2016	Is aimed at making school enrolment more structured, fair and transparent. Among other things the new law will: • Ensure that schools admit all students applying • Ban waiting lists • Ban fees relating to admissions • Require all schools to publish their admissions policies • Explicitly ban discrimination in school admissions • Provide for a situation where a child (with special needs or otherwise) cannot find a school place, and allow the National Council for Special Education or Tusla to designate a school place for the child.

Table 10: Recent Legislation and Draft Legislation Pertinent to Tusla

Findings from this study show that the impact of certain legislative changes requires a research focus, particularly Children First and the Children's referendum.

6.3.3 Methodological Approaches
Consideration also needs to be given to the best methodological approaches to achieve the research goals of Tusla. Examination of the gaps in research identified by this study suggests that some could be filled through small-scale research projects using secondary data analysis, for example creating a directory of services or needs assessments in some areas, or large-scale desk research in the form of literature reviews on international comparative research. Longer-term, large-scale empirical research may be required for areas such as cultural diversity and long-term outcomes.

6.3.4 Literature
As is evident from the literature reviewed throughout this report, the findings in this study largely concur with gaps and priorities for research identified in other jurisdictions, particularly in areas of interventions, assessment and evaluation, and outcomes. Conversely, there are areas of research focus internationally that were not identified as gaps or priorities in this study. Given the scale of Tusla's service delivery areas, it is recommended that comprehensive reviews of the literature covering each service delivery area be conducted, which was beyond the scope of this study.

6.4 Links between Tusla's Corporate Objectives and Study Findings

Addressing these priorities and requirements 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
1. Improve the quality and focus of the delivery of services for children and families.	→	Needs assessments in each area of service delivery. Assessment of services tendered to determine suitability in respect of target group, taking account of demographics and social need. Measuring outcomes across interventions and services to determine what works, leading to a framework for outcome measurement. Longitudinal research to measure sustained outcomes. Comparative research on international models of practice across service delivery areas to identify alternative approaches that may be successful in an Irish context. Identifying what has been achieved in respect of the National Service Delivery Framework.
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.	→	In respect of developing a research capacity: supporting infrastructure is required in areas of Finance, HR, Communications, ICT and Quality Assurance.[41] Whole-organisational approach to research.
3. Establish a new and distinct values-based culture that empowers children and families through high quality services.	→	Research on methods of engagement with children and families across all areas of service delivery, with a focus on participation in planning and delivery. Experiences of children and families involved in Tusla's service delivery areas. Examination of cultural competence in the context of service practice. Research on staffing issues that promote an empowering culture, with a focus on skills and competencies.

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[41] See section 3.4 for further explanation.

Corporate Objective	Study Findings
4. Develop an organisation that lives within its means and utilises its resources in an efficient and cost-effective manner.	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. Collaborative research relationships could lead to increased cost-effectiveness. Taking account of previous research recommendations can inform both practice and future directions for research, which is an efficient use of resources. Consideration given to the best methodological approaches to achieve the research goals of Tusla will assist with cost-effectiveness.
5. Develop a workforce that is valued and supported within a learning organisation.	Findings show that HR as part of workforce development needs to support research production, participation, collaboration and utilisation of research.[42] 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. Comprehensive literature reviews based on each service delivery area would support staff and assist in learning development.
6. Position the agency as a responsive, trustworthy and respected body with its own unique identity.	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.
7. Build our research strategy to develop policy and enable evidence-based decision-making and high-quality service delivery.	An evidence-informed decision-making framework for research is required, taking a whole-organisation approach.[43] Research on developing an organisational research culture. Research on building a learning organisation.
8. Ensure a strategic approach to quality assurance, information management and risk management that supports continuous improvement and good governance.	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. In relation to developing a strategic approach to information management the current capacity of ICT operations requires further investigation.[44]

Table 11: Links between Tusla's Corporate Objectives and Study Findings

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[42] See section 3.4.2.1 for further detail.
[43] See section 3.2 for more.
[44] See section 3.4.4.

6.5 Concluding Comments

This report shows that there are three overarching categories that need to underpin consideration of the research and research development needs of the agency: first, the requirements needed to develop a research capacity in the organisation; second, the gaps in and priorities for research identified in each of Tusla's service delivery areas; and third, 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. This 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. Highlighting how these requirements reflect and inform Tusla's corporate objectives will also assist in the future planning of the agency.

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Appendix 1: Literature Review

1.1 Search Terms Used

Search terms for the literature review consisted of four predominant phrases:

- Future needs and concerns in child protection research;
- Future research needs and concerns in child protection research;
- Gaps in child protection research;
- Priorities in child protection research.

Each of these phrases was altered to reflect each of Tusla's service delivery areas: child protection as per example above, alternative care, family support, educational welfare, early years, and domestic violence.

1.2 Searches Conducted

The scoping review utilised in this study consisted of searching for a range of academic literature, which was sourced through a series of child-welfare-relevant, high-impact-factor journals, as well as through a comprehensive academic database. Search engines were also used, all of which are listed below:

Journal Name	Journal Impact Factor
Child Abuse and Neglect	2.574
Child Maltreatment	2.373
Journal of Social Issues	1.529
Research on Social Work Practice	1.375
British Journal of Social Work	1.335
Database Searches	**Other Searches**
Academic Search Complete	Google Google Scholar

Table 12: Searches Conducted

Grey and specialist-organisation literature was accessed through specialised websites, including national and international government websites as well as those of support and advocacy organisations which were included in the review. Cross-referencing within the literature was also used in an effort to identify pertinent material.

UK	USA	Australia	New Zealand	Canada	Europe	Nordic Countries
Department for Education	US Department of Health and Human Services	Australian Institute for Health and Welfare	Ministry for Social Development	Employment and Social Development Canada	European Agency for Fundamental Rights	Ministry of Children, Equality and Social Inclusion Norway
JR Foundation Nuffield Foundation	Child Welfare Information Gateway	Australian Childhood Foundation	Child Youth and Family	The Canadian child welfare research portal	International Society for the Prevention of Child Abuse and Neglect (Global) UNICEF	Ministry of Health and Social Affairs Sweden
NSPCC	Child Trends US		Social Policy Evaluation and Research Unit		European Commission European Research Area	Ministry of Social Affairs and Health Finland

Table 13: Websites

Appendix 2: Tusla Staff Views

2.1 Constraints in Engaging in Research

Constraints	n[45]	% (of 58 responses)
Lack of time	38	65.5%
Difficulty in accessing appropriate research (e.g. online journals)	20	34.5%
Lack of research skills	15	25.9%
Lack of clear collated information	14	24.1%
Difficulty in accessing research (e.g. limited access to computers with internet)	13	22.4%

Table 14: Constraints in Engaging in Research

2.2 Areas of Research Skills Development

Areas of Research Skills Development	N	% (of 43 responses)
Implementation of research findings	30	69.8%
Evaluation methods – process, outcomes and cost-benefit evaluation	29	67.4%
Knowledge around interventions in terms of identifying what works	28	65.1%
Writing a research paper for publication	24	55.8%
Legal and ethical issues in research	18	41.8%
Quantitative research methods (Advanced)	16	37.2%
Research study design	15	34.9%
Systematic/Literature review skills	15	34.9%
Qualitative research methods (Advanced)	14	32.6%
Qualitative research methods (Introduction)	12	27.9%
Quantitative research methods (Introduction)	12	27.9%
Meta-analysis	12	27.9%
Introduction to research methods	10	23.3%

Table 15: Areas of Research Skills Development

2.3 Levels of Staff Participation in Research Training

Staff Participation in Research Training	n	%
No research-specific training	13	22.4
Research-specific training	36	62.1%
Master's degree	25	43.1%
Undergraduate degree	15	25.9%
Research training courses provided by a professional body	06	10.3%
Over five years since research training	17	29.3%
Two years or less since research training	14	32.8%

Table 16: Tusla Staff Research Training

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[45] Total number of respondents for the Tusla staff survey was 59; however, due to the incomplete nature of one response, 58 were included for analysis, therefore n = 58 = 100%.

62.1% of respondents (n=36) had undertaken some research-specific training in research methods courses or modules, compared to 22.4% (n=13) who had not. Research training occurred most often as part of a master's degree, which was the case for 43.1% of respondents (n=25). 25.9% of respondents (n=15) received research training as part of their undergraduate degree, 10.3% (n=6) on training courses provided by a professional body. For 29.3% of respondents (n=17), it has been over five years since they last participated in research training. Almost one third of respondents (32.8%, n=14) indicated that they have participated in some form of research training in the past two years (24.1% of respondents replied 'not applicable' or did not respond).

2.4 Ways to Promote Research in Tusla

Ways to Promote Research	n	%
Access to high-quality online and hard-copy resources	37	63.8%
Easy-to-use practical tools and guides	32	55.2%
Online and face-to-face learning events	33	56.9%
Online networking and exchange forums (with other practitioners)	25	43.1%
Regular research and policy updates	33	56.9%
Tailored support for specific needs	29	50%
Training in research skills	26	44.8%
Dedicated research bank tailored to my area of work	28	48.3%
Other	17	29.3%

Table 17: Ways to Promote Research in Tusla

Appendix 3: Government Departments

3.1 Government Department Research Pertinent to Tusla

Department	Research Pertinent to Tusla
Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS)	• Growing up in Ireland Research looking at children across spectrums as part of a longitudinal study. • Young people in detention or young people on the criminal path. Information from the IYJS side on what interventions that have been tried and not found to be working with young people would be of benefit to Tusla. • Diversion programmes – the welfare side of Tusla can pick up on the information pertaining to the diversion programmes and perhaps influence what they need to do or what needs to be done in relation to prevention.
Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA)	• Growing up in Ireland Study – a significant amount of work has been done on surveying children and parents. The research outputs range from childhood obesity to parenting style and other quantitative data. • Value-for-money review – identifies outcomes which the DCYA wants the service provider to deliver. These outcomes are evidence-based and can easily translate from voluntary service providers to statutory service providers. The department has also identified methodologies for trying to evaluate human services. The literature collected in relation to the Growing Up in Ireland Study can also translate to what occurs at a practice level in Tusla.
Department of Education and Skills (DES)	• Review of the DEIS Programme which includes the development of a new methodology for identifying schools – and an updating of the School Support Programme under which additional resources are made available to schools to address educational disadvantage. • DES Cross Divisional Social Inclusion Project – mapping of the linkages, inputs and joined-up work or lack thereof on the part of the State, in relation to social inclusion on the educational disadvantage front. May be of use to Tusla.

Department	Research Pertinent to Tusla
Department of Social Protection (DSP)	• There is a government commitment to conduct a rolling programme of counterfactual impact evaluations (CIE) of Pathways to Work reforms from 2015, many of which will also utilise mixed-methods approaches (including JobBridge, Intreo process reforms, JobPath, JobsPlus). From 2015 a Jobseeker Customer Satisfaction Survey has also been implemented; from 2016, this will also include a JobPath Customer Satisfaction Survey. Results of these evaluations/survey can be disaggregated for young jobseekers under 25, in terms of satisfaction ratings or the direct impacts of programmes/process on their outcomes (on/off the Live Register; in employment; in education/training; other) at specified periods. This information could be of benefit to Tusla. • The Department plans to produce a number of short, focused evaluations and position papers on key policy questions, documenting profile information, descriptive statistics, and impacts using CIE and mixed methods. The department will work with Tusla if there are particular queries on specific policy questions with respect to young people. • The department produces an annual Social Inclusion Monitor to report officially on progress towards the National Social Target for Poverty Reduction (NSTPR). A section of the Monitor reports on the child poverty target and related indicators on children and young people. • The department has a research programme for the Analysis and Measurement of Poverty and Social Exclusion (AMPSE) with the Economic & Social Research Institute (ESRI). The purpose is to analyse national data on income and deprivation from the annual CSO Survey on Income and Living Conditions and to inform the National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2007–2017 (NAPinclusion), particularly progress towards the NSTPR. As children are a life-cycle group monitored under NAPinclusion, the annual AMPSE programme output includes a profile on children's experience of poverty as standard. Other research outputs of relevance include Understanding Childhood Deprivation in Ireland and the recently published *Poverty and Quality of Life of Social Risk Groups and Social Classes* report. • The department undertakes ex-ante and ex-post social impact assessments (SIA) of the main welfare and direct tax budgetary policies. This assessment uses a tax-welfare simulation model known as SWITCH, which was developed by the ESRI, to measure the distributive and poverty impacts of policies on family types, life-cycle groups and gender.

Table 18: Government Department Research Pertinent to Tusla

3.2 Tusla Research Pertinent to Government Departments

Tusla Research	Government Departments
• As Tusla would be dealing with young persons from age zero, they would have information on young people's families, issues involved in family breakdowns and the family situation generally which influence what a young person may do in the future. From Tusla's previous involvement and intervention, this information would indicate what has not worked and should not be repeated by the IYJS when children reach them. Thus, having the correct, pertinent information and correct data this prevents time and resources being wasted.	Irish Youth Justice Service (IYJS)
• From a departmental point of view there is an interest in finding out 'what works or what has been working' and how the international evidence base has impacted the work that's been conducted. • Designing policy approaches – rather than being solely a recipient of international knowledge, departmental policy should be 'contributing to it'. For instance, the knowledge behind advances or breakthroughs in technologies in terms of working with children is perceived to be more likely generated through the local professionals than through a meta-analysis of literature reviews.	Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA)
• School attendance – Tusla produce annual figures on school attendance. These are aggregated figures and can only inform to a certain extent. However, more can be revealed if more granular school data collected by Tusla can be combined with the Early School Leavers, What Next? Thus in combination, it is believed that the data becomes much richer. • Type of data – data which can be collected from practitioners on the ground surrounding (a) the numbers of children with whom the organisation is engaging; and (b) what the issues are (i.e., is it school attendance, lack of engagement, poor parental engagement, all of which contribute to creating difficulties in schools.). This in turn would allow the DES to target particular issues e.g. teacher CPD and allocation of DEIS SSP resources.	Department of Education and Skills (DES)
• Tusla can act with the DCYA, as a central repository and knowledge broker for the wealth of research being conducted with, for, or on children and young people. This will allow government departments to ensure that there are no missing gaps in the evidence base, while also ensuring that there is no duplication of efforts. • Tusla research can provide policy insights into the experiences of young people aged 18–24 that may help to inform the DSP's approach to young jobseekers, for example in respect of activation and engagement processes.	Department of Social Protection (DSP)

Table 19: Tusla Research Pertinent to Government Departments