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1. Introduction

This brief report sets out our findings and conclusions in relation to the four following research questions:

1. what are the key areas indicated under the National Children's Strategy?
2. does the strategy forecast the planned level of spend in relevant to these areas? If so, what is the planned level of spend and what period does it cover?
3. if the NCS does not forecast planned spend is it possible to identify planned spend from Departmental Expenditure Forecasts, the Budget Forecasts, the National Development Plan and other relevant publications (e.g. NAPS, RAPID, etc)?
4. is it possible to forecast planned Government expenditure in the area with accuracy from existing reports?

Our method involved a review of readily available reports as indicated above and a number of telephone consultations with relevant organisations such as National Children's Office, the Office for Social Inclusion Department of Social and Family Affairs, the NDP/CSF Evaluation Unit, and the Children's Rights Alliance. The purpose of these consultations was to check if the organisations had compiled figures on actual or planned public expenditure on disadvantaged children.

Section 2 shows our research findings and Section 3 presents our overall conclusion.

2. Findings

2.1 National Children's Strategy

The National Children's Strategy presents 'an opportunity to enhance the status and further improve the quality of life of Ireland's children' (The National Children's Strategy – Our Children – Their Lives page 6). The NCS sets out the following objectives:

- Objective A: Children's early education and developmental needs will be met through quality childcare services and family-friendly employment measures;
- Objective B: Children will benefit from a range of educational opportunities and experiences which reflect the diversity of need;
- Objective C: Children will be supported to enjoy the optimum physical, mental and emotional wellbeing;
- Objective D: Children will have access to play, sport, recreation and cultural activities to enrich their experience of childhood;
- Objective E: Children will have opportunities to explore information and communication technologies in ways which are safe and developmentally supportive;
- Objective F: Children will be safeguarded to enjoy their childhood free from all forms of abuse and exploitation;
- Objective G: Children will be provided with the financial supports necessary to eliminate child poverty;
- Objective H: Children will have access to accommodation appropriate to their needs;
- Objective I: Children with behavioural problems coming before the courts or in trouble with the law will be supported in the least restrictive environment while having their needs addressed;
- Objective J: Children with a disability will be entitled to the services they need to achieve their full potential;
- Objective K: Children will be educated and supported to value social and cultural diversity so that all children including Travellers and other marginalised groups achieve their full potential;
- Objective L: Children will have the opportunity to experience the qualities of family life;
- Objective M: Children will benefit from and contribute to vibrant local communities;
- Objective N: Children will benefit from a built and natural environment which supports their physical and emotional wellbeing.

In relation to each objective the NCS sets out a number of recent initiatives and further actions proposed. In the vast majority of cases the NCS does not indicate how much has been spent or is forecast to be spent in relation recent initiatives or further proposed actions. Table 2.1 shows the NCS provides expenditure figures for only 7 of the 88 recent initiatives listed and for only 1 of the 104 further proposed actions. The main source of expenditure forecasts, i.e. in the few cases where they are provided, are the National Development Plan and the Budget both of which are covered in Section 2.2 and 2.3 respectively.

Table 2.1 also shows that the areas where expenditure figures are provided tend to relate to children overall (e.g. childcare programmes, family-friendly policies and child benefit) as opposed to disadvantaged children per se (with the exception of forecasts for educational disadvantage).

TABLE 2.1 NCS: SCHEDULE OF OBJECTIVES – ACTION AREAS AND FORECAST EXPENDITURE

Objective A: Children's early education and developmental needs will be met through quality childcare services and family-friendly employment measures	
Recent Initiatives	
No. 10	No. with Forecast Expenditure 5
	Areas with Forecast Expenditure
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ NDP £250m for Equal Opportunities Childcare Programme ▪ £40m to the development of childcare ▪ NDP £74m to implement the White Paper on Early Childhood Education ▪ £5m for the provision of out-of-school childcare services by community based groups ▪ NDP £4m for establishment of a national framework for family-friendly policies under the Programme for Prosperity and Fairness
Further Actions Proposed	
No. 8	No. with Forecast Expenditure 0
	Areas with Forecast Expenditure None
Objective B: Children will benefit from a range of educational opportunities and experiences which reflect the diversity of need	
Recent Initiatives	
No. 6	No. with Forecast Expenditure 1
	Areas with Forecast Expenditure
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ £194 m for educational disadvantage at all levels in 2000-02
Further Actions Proposed	
No. 8	No. with Forecast Expenditure 0
	Areas with Forecast Expenditure None

TABLE 2.1 NCS: SCHEDULE OF OBJECTIVES – ACTION AREAS AND FORECAST EXPENDITURE	
Objective C: Children will be supported to enjoy the optimum physical, mental and emotional wellbeing	
Recent Initiatives	
No. 6	No. with Forecast Expenditure 0
Further Actions Proposed	Areas with Forecast Expenditure None
No. 9	No. with Forecast Expenditure 0
	Areas with Forecast Expenditure None
Objective D: Children will have access to play, sport, recreation and cultural activities to enrich their experience of childhood	
Recent Initiatives	
No. 8	No. with Forecast Expenditure 0
Further Actions Proposed	Areas with Forecast Expenditure None
No. 7	No. with Forecast Expenditure 0
	Areas with Forecast Expenditure None
Objective E: Children will have opportunities to explore information and communication technologies in ways which are safe and developmentally supportive	
Recent Initiatives	
No. 5	No. with Forecast Expenditure 0
Further Actions Proposed	Areas with Forecast Expenditure None
No. 5	No. with Forecast Expenditure 0
	Areas with Forecast Expenditure None
Objective F: Children will be safeguarded to enjoy their childhood free from all forms of abuse and exploitation	
Recent Initiatives	
No. 10	No. with Forecast Expenditure 0
Further Actions Proposed	Areas with Forecast Expenditure None
No. 11	No. with Forecast Expenditure 0
	Areas with Forecast Expenditure None
Objective G: Children will be provided with the financial supports necessary to eliminate child poverty	
Recent Initiatives	
No. 4	No. with Forecast Expenditure 1
Further Actions Proposed	Areas with Forecast Expenditure
No. 8	No. with Forecast Expenditure 1
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ £20 increase in back-to-school, clothing and footwear allowances ▪ PPF – Child Benefit will be increased over the next 3 years towards £100 per month for third and subsequent children

TABLE 2.1 NCS: SCHEDULE OF OBJECTIVES – ACTION AREAS AND FORECAST EXPENDITURE

Objective H: Children will have access to accommodation appropriate to their needs		
Recent Initiatives	No. with Forecast Expenditure	Areas with Forecast Expenditure
No. 2	0	None
Further Actions Proposed	No. with Forecast Expenditure	Areas with Forecast Expenditure
No. 6	0	None
Objective I: Children with behavioural problems coming before the courts or in trouble with the law will be supported in the least restrictive environment while having their needs addressed		
Recent Initiatives	No. with Forecast Expenditure	Areas with Forecast Expenditure
No. 6	0	None
Further Actions Proposed	No. with Forecast Expenditure	Areas with Forecast Expenditure
No. 8	0	None
Objective J: Children with a disability will be entitled to the services they need to achieve their full potential		
Recent Initiatives	No. with Forecast Expenditure	Areas with Forecast Expenditure
No. 7	0	None
Further Actions Proposed	No. with Forecast Expenditure	Areas with Forecast Expenditure
No. 8	0	None
Objective K: Children will be educated and supported to value social and cultural diversity so that all children including Travellers and other marginalised groups achieve their full potential		
Recent Initiatives	No. with Forecast Expenditure	Areas with Forecast Expenditure
No. 8	0	None
Further Actions Proposed	No. with Forecast Expenditure	Areas with Forecast Expenditure
No. 9	0	None
Objective L: Children will have the opportunity to experience the qualities of family life		
Recent Initiatives	No. with Forecast Expenditure	Areas with Forecast Expenditure
No. 7	0	None
Further Actions Proposed	No. with Forecast Expenditure	Areas with Forecast Expenditure
No. 5	0	None

TABLE 2.1 NCS: SCHEDULE OF OBJECTIVES – ACTION AREAS AND FORECAST EXPENDITURE

Objective M: Children will benefit from and contribute to vibrant local communities		
Recent Initiatives		
No. 3	No. with Forecast Expenditure 0	Areas with Forecast Expenditure None
Further Actions Proposed		
No. 7	No. with Forecast Expenditure 0	Areas with Forecast Expenditure None
Objective N: Children will benefit from a built and natural environment which supports their physical and emotional wellbeing		
Recent Initiatives		
No. 6	No. with Forecast Expenditure 0	Areas with Forecast Expenditure None
Further Actions Proposed		
No. 5	No. with Forecast Expenditure 0	Areas with Forecast Expenditure None

2.3 Budget Estimates

The budget estimates process provides estimates of government departmental on an annual basis. Each department also produces a three-year Statement of Strategy, the current departmental strategies cover the period 2003-05, but these strategies do not include forecast expenditure.

Examination of the budget estimates reports shows that the presentation of figures is at too high a level to enable estimated expenditure on disadvantaged children. For example, in some cases the headings listed in the reports do not mention children at all (e.g. the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs), in some cases the reports mention children but the headings cover all children and not exclusively disadvantaged children (e.g. Department of Social and Family Affairs) and in some cases although the reports mention disadvantaged children the department spends money on disadvantaged children under other schemes that are not mentioned (e.g. Department of Health and Children and the Department of Education and Science).

TABLE 2.2 REVISED DEPARTMENTAL BUDGET ESTIMATES AND RELEVANT AREAS		
Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform Relevant Area	(‘000) 2004 Estimate 16	% increase 2004 over 2003 -27%
C.12 Central Authorities (Child Abduction, Child Protection and Maintenance Debtors)		
Department of Education and Science Relevant Area B.19 Commission on Child Abuse	2004 Estimate 15,353	% increase 2004 over 2003 174%
Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs Relevant Area None in Budget Estimates	2004 Estimate	% increase 2004 over 2003
Department of Health and Children Relevant Area B.2 Domiciliary care allowances and respite grants for children with Disabilities	2004 Estimate 37,249	% increase 2004 over 2003 8%
Department of Social and Family Affairs Relevant Area D. Child Benefit	2004 Estimate 1,763,700	% increase 2004 over 2003 6%

2.4 National Development Plan 2000-06

The NDP is government's multi-sectoral investment programme for the seven year period 2000-06. It spans a wide variety of areas such as roads, transport and other infrastructure, industrial and enterprise development, regional development, and investment in education and training. Forecast expenditure under the NDP is €59.7mn over the 2000-06 period. The NDP is organised around five Operational Programmes (OPs) and investment schemes under these OPs are referred to as Measures. The five OPs are Economic and Social Infrastructure OP, Employment and Human Resources Development OP, Productive Sector OP, Southern and Eastern Region OP, and the Border, Midland and Western Region OP.

Table 2.3 shows that a number of Measures under the Employment and Human Resources OP involve invest on disadvantaged children.

TABLE 2.3: FORECAST EMPLOYMENT AND HUMAN RESOURCES DEVELOPMENT OP EXPENDITURE ON DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN 2000-06		EMN	
Code	OP/Measure	Measure Description	
4	Early Education	<p>Early interventions to encourage long-term education participation, identify and address literacy and numeracy difficulties at an early stage and prevent subsequent problems giving rise to long-term unemployment, social problems etc. Funding will be directed at key target groups, provided on a devolved basis and integrated within area-based interventions in the case of areas with significant concentrations of educational disadvantage. The recently published White Paper on Early Childhood Education proposes action on a number of levels.</p> <p>The School Completion measure deals with issues of both concentrated and regionally dispersed disadvantage. Schools involved in the initiative are required to operate on a multi-agency basis establishing, where appropriate, cross-community links. The 8-15 year-olds Early School Leavers Initiative (ESLI) has three distinct strands: Projects, Support and Research & Evaluation. With regard to the Stay in School Retention Initiative (SSRI), key elements of each post-primary school's retention plan will be the establishment of a retention target, links with feeder primary schools and co-ordination with local agencies.</p> <p>The programme of activity for 2000, under the Early Literacy measure, included the launch of the 'National Reading Initiative 2000'; in January, to raise awareness in the general public of the importance of reading and to lay the foundation for improving the quality of the teaching of reading in the formal and non-formal sectors.</p> <p>The Traveller Education Measure will seek to encourage each traveller child of school-going age to participate in and benefit from the education system and to enable each traveller pupil to develop to his/her full potential.</p> <p>The School Guidance Service will provide guidance to post-primary pupils encountering difficulties which may hinder their participation in or ability to benefit from the post-primary education system. Regarding education and career options, especially at further and third levels, it will support the School Completion Initiative and Traveller Education measure. The Service will seek to prevent difficulties encountered by students hindering their participation in or ability to benefit from the education system and to provide guidance regarding further education and third-level options.</p>	103.12
05	School Completion Initiative		102.97
6	Early Literacy		16.04
7	Traveller Education		13.48
8	School Guidance Service		134.81
09	Third Level Access	<p>The further development of Third Level Access is necessary to promote the participation of students with disabilities, students from disadvantaged backgrounds and mature 'second chance' students, in third-level and PLC courses. This measure will seek to facilitate and improve access to the labour market for the beneficiaries whilst improving their long-term employability, through enhancing their educational qualifications. This fund will be used to: Meet the specific needs of students with disabilities, in terms of equipment and additional support services; Provide financial support to disadvantaged students by way of additional support to the existing maintenance grants scheme; Develop outreach initiatives currently undertaken by a number of colleges which involve links with post-primary schools in disadvantaged areas.</p> <p>FAS have developed a series of measures to meet the needs of early school leavers. These include increased foundation-training places, new bridging training programmes for access to higher skills training, advisory supports to assist progression and more flexible part-time and work-based options. Improved literacy/numeracy provision is being developed. The intention is to continue to develop provision, at foundation and progression phase, along the present lines.</p>	129.07
11A	Early School Leavers Progression		313.39
11B	ESL- Youthreach and Travellers	<p>This measure is part of the wider Back to Education Initiative (BTEI) – i.e. Measure 21 – and provides for the continuation of existing full-time provision under the Youthreach and Senior Traveller Training programmes 1. This measure plays a key role both in addressing the needs of early school leavers and travellers with minimal or no educational qualifications.</p>	324.67
	Total		1,137.55

SOURCE: EHRDOP OPERATIONAL PROGRAMME AND PROGRAMME COMPLEMENT

Table 2.4 also shows that the two regional OPs (i.e. the Border, Midland and Western Regional OP and the Southern and Eastern Regional OP) provides forecasts for Measures targeted at disadvantaged children and broader Measures target at children overall or at disadvantaged people overall (i.e. not just children).

TABLE 2.4: FORECAST REGIONAL OP EXPENDITURE ON DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN 2000-06

		S+E (€MN)	BMW (€MN)
<i>Childcare Capital</i>			
1. Childcare Infrastructure	Capital grants to improve or upgrade childcare facilities, particularly in disadvantaged areas.	107.021	42.083
<i>Childcare Staffing and Support</i>			
2.1 Support for Staffing Costs	Grants to fund the staff costs of childcare workers in community-based projects in disadvantaged areas.	145.953	60.79
2.2 Quality Improvement Programme	Grants to support training and education of childcare workers and childcare networks. Overseen mainly by County Childcare Committees.	28.34	16.151
<i>Community Development and Family Support</i>			
4.2 Family Services Project	Support for the provision of information services to families in disadvantaged areas.	1.27	4.417
<i>Crime Prevention</i>			
5.1 Prison Services Training and Development	Re-integration of offenders into the community through in-custody training and post-release support.	41.605	10.106
5.2 Probation and Welfare	Re-integration of offenders into the community through community supports.	25.937	6.166
<i>Youth Services</i>			
6.1 Youth Service Grant Scheme	Grants to national and major regional organisations to support the development of young people.	74.024	0.146
6.2 Special Projects for Disadvantaged Youth	Funding for out-of-school projects for disadvantaged young people.	62.62	14.326
6.3 Youth Information Centres	Funding for information centres for young people, particularly in disadvantaged areas.	7.385	2.816
6.4 Young People's Facilities and Services Fund	Funding for facilities and services in areas affected by drug use.	111.799	24.644
6.5 Garda Youth Diversion Programme	Support projects in disadvantaged areas for young people at risk of becoming involved in crime.	13.37	6.109
<i>Local Development</i>			
7. Local Development	Support for partnership-type organisations to promote local development in disadvantaged areas.	202.933	111.83
Total		822.251	299.584

SOURCE: REGIONAL OPERATIONAL PROGRAMMES AND PROGRAMME COMPLEMENTS

While the NDP outlines forecast public expenditure on disadvantaged children in a number of areas there are a number of important investment areas that take place outside the NDP framework. This includes for example expenditure by health boards (funded by the Department of Health and Children) on disadvantaged children and the programme to Re-Vitalise Areas by Planning, Investment and Development (the RAPID programme) and the CLÁR programme (Ceantair Laga Árd Riachtanais), and expenditure by partnership and community groups. Furthermore, forecast expenditure under these areas on disadvantaged children is not readily available from published material.

2.5 Information Available from Other Key Stakeholders

In addition to reviewing the reports identified in the previous sections we also undertook a number of telephone consultations with relevant organisations to see if they had compiled figures on actual or planned public expenditure on disadvantaged children, i.e. if these organisations had compiled figures on expenditure directly from providers of services e.g. health boards etc. Table 2.5 shows that none of the organisations contacted had compiled expenditure figures (actual or forecast) from the various publicly funded bodies involved in supporting disadvantaged children.

TABLE 2.5: FORECAST NDP EXPENDITURE ON DISADVANTAGED CHILDREN 2000-06

	Compiled data on expenditure on disadvantaged children from publicly funded bodies?	
	Actual expenditure	Forecast expenditure
National Children's Office	No	No
Office for Social Inclusion, Department of Social and Family Affairs	No	No
NDP/CSF Evaluation Unit	No	No
Children's Rights Alliance	No	No

SOURCE: TELEPHONE CONSULTATIONS WITH VARIOUS ORGANISATIONS

3. Conclusions

Our overall conclusion is that it is not possible to forecast public expenditure on disadvantaged children for the next ten years from readily available information. This is because it is not possible to easily establish the current or past level of public expenditure on disadvantaged children and so there is no base level upon which forecasts could be formulated. In addition forecasts of expenditure on disadvantaged children over the next ten years are not readily available from the various publicly funded bodies involved in supporting disadvantaged children.

Further research could be undertaken to produce rough estimates of likely public expenditure over the next ten years on disadvantaged children. However, any such estimates would have to be treated with considerable caution and a considerable amount of work would be required (including surveying of providers) to produce these estimates due to the following issues:

- while the National Children's Strategy provides a single framework to achieve the government's objective for children and a list of actions to be undertaken to achieve these objectives it rarely presents figures on the planned level of expenditure to be associated with these actions;
- published departmental budget estimates, which provide expenditure estimates one year in advance, are too general to allow the identification of expenditure on disadvantaged children and departmental Statements of Strategy, which typically cover a three year period, do not include the required expenditure forecasts;
- while the NDP provides forecast expenditure over the six year period 2000-06 and provides forecasts at a level that allows the identification of expenditure on disadvantaged children there are a number of important investment areas that take place outside the NDP framework (e.g. expenditure by health boards);
- while in some cases more detailed information on expenditure on disadvantaged children could be obtained directly from the relevant funding department (e.g. the Department of Education and Science) in other cases the level of detailed information required would not be available from the funding department (e.g. while the Department of Health and Children would hold data on expenditure allocations to health boards it would probably be necessary to approach the health boards to determine how much of their overall allocation is being spent on disadvantaged children).