



An Roinn Leanáí  
agus Gnóthaí Óige  
Department of Children  
and Youth Affairs

# The Affordable Childcare Scheme

## Communications and Engagement Strategy

*Version 1.0*

# Table of Contents

## **SECTION 1 – PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES**

1.1 STATEMENT OF PURPOSE	2
1.2 SCOPE OF STRATEGY	2
1.3 BACKGROUND AND CURRENT LANDSCAPE	2
1.4 COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT OBJECTIVES AND PRINCIPLES	3

## **SECTION 2 – IMPLEMENTATION APPROACH**

2.1 IDENTIFYING STAKEHOLDERS	5
2.2 DEFINING OUR MESSAGES	9
2.3 COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT APPROACH OF THE PROJECT	11
2.4 COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT CONSTRAINTS	11

## **SECTION 3 - EVALUATION**

3.1 WHAT WILL SUCCESS LOOK LIKE?	12
3.2 DELIVERY MECHANISM	14

## **APPENDIX TO COMMUNICATIONS AND ENGAGEMENT STRATEGY**

I. INTRODUCTION	15
II. PROGRAMME GOVERNANCE AND REPORTING	15
III. COMMUNICATION ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES	18
IV. RISKS AND MITIGATION	19
V. CHANGE CONTROL MANAGEMENT	20
VI. CONTINGENCY COMMUNICATIONS MANAGEMENT	21
VII. ACS PROJECT TEAM DIRECTORY	22

## Section 1 – Purpose and Objectives

### 1.1 Statement of Purpose

The Affordable Childcare Scheme is a new national scheme of financial support for parents towards the cost of childcare. The scheme is being developed by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs in partnership with Pobal who will assume the role of Scheme Administrator.

This Communications and Engagement Strategy will outline **how communications relating to the development and implementation of the Affordable Childcare Scheme will be managed.**

The Communications and Engagement Strategy is intended to be a **‘living document’** that informs and guides the communications aspects of the Affordable Childcare Scheme programme of work on a daily basis and that will be revised and updated as necessary to remain reflective and relevant to any wider changes to the programme throughout the period of its development and implementation.

### 1.2 Scope of Strategy

This strategy is intended to guide communications during the **development, launch and initial implementation period** of the Affordable Childcare Scheme.

A separate strategy will be developed for onward operational communications and will commence once the scheme is fully established.

The strategy focuses on external communications and engagement. However, in acknowledgement of the fact that effective external communications are dependent upon effective internal communications, the work underlying the strategy has encompassed both dimensions of communication. Accordingly, our strategic approach to internal communication is set out at appendix A.

### 1.3 Background and Current Landscape

The early years sector has experienced considerable change over the past decade; a process that has accelerated in recent years. Whilst many of the changes can demonstrably be described as positive (the increase in overall investment; the success of the ECCE scheme; the training of staff in Children First and the major increases in minimum and graduate qualifications to name but a few) the pace of change has presented many challenges to both the existing models of childcare that have operated for many years (private and community) and to the practitioners working within those settings.

The department is mindful that the sector may be suffering from a measure of **‘change fatigue’** and that, whilst each of the changes in isolation represents improvement, as a whole these changes can present a challenge to organisations, many of whom are small operators and not of sufficient scale to support a separate administrative function. The introduction of the ACS is another significant change for parents and childcare services. However, once established the scheme should bring benefits in terms of **simplicity and reduced administrative burden for users.** It will also provide a

flexible infrastructure to support future investment in early years, thus ensuring that future change will hopefully be less onerous for all parties.

That said, communications surrounding the scheme must manage expectations carefully so that both parents and childcare providers are clear on what benefits the ACS will deliver and how these might manifest themselves.

It must also pay particular attention to the on-going public discourse regarding data protection given the programme of work's use of the government's newly introduced **MyGovID platform**.

Above all, it is clear that there is no 'one size fits all' communications approach suitable for this programme of work and the diverse and complex landscape of the early years sector must be given due consideration at all times.

#### ***1.4 Communications and Engagement Objectives and Principles***

In setting objectives for our communications and engagement strategy, it is vital that these align with the overall policy goals for the scheme. Our starting point, therefore, must be the objectives of the new Affordable Childcare Scheme for Ireland to:

- ✓ Replace the existing targeted schemes with a single, streamlined scheme which is more accessible for both parents and providers,
- ✓ Provide a fair and consistent system of progressive financial support towards the cost of childcare, with a particular focus, at least initially, on low income families but also incorporating universal supports, and
- ✓ Provide a robust and flexible platform for future investment in childcare in Ireland.

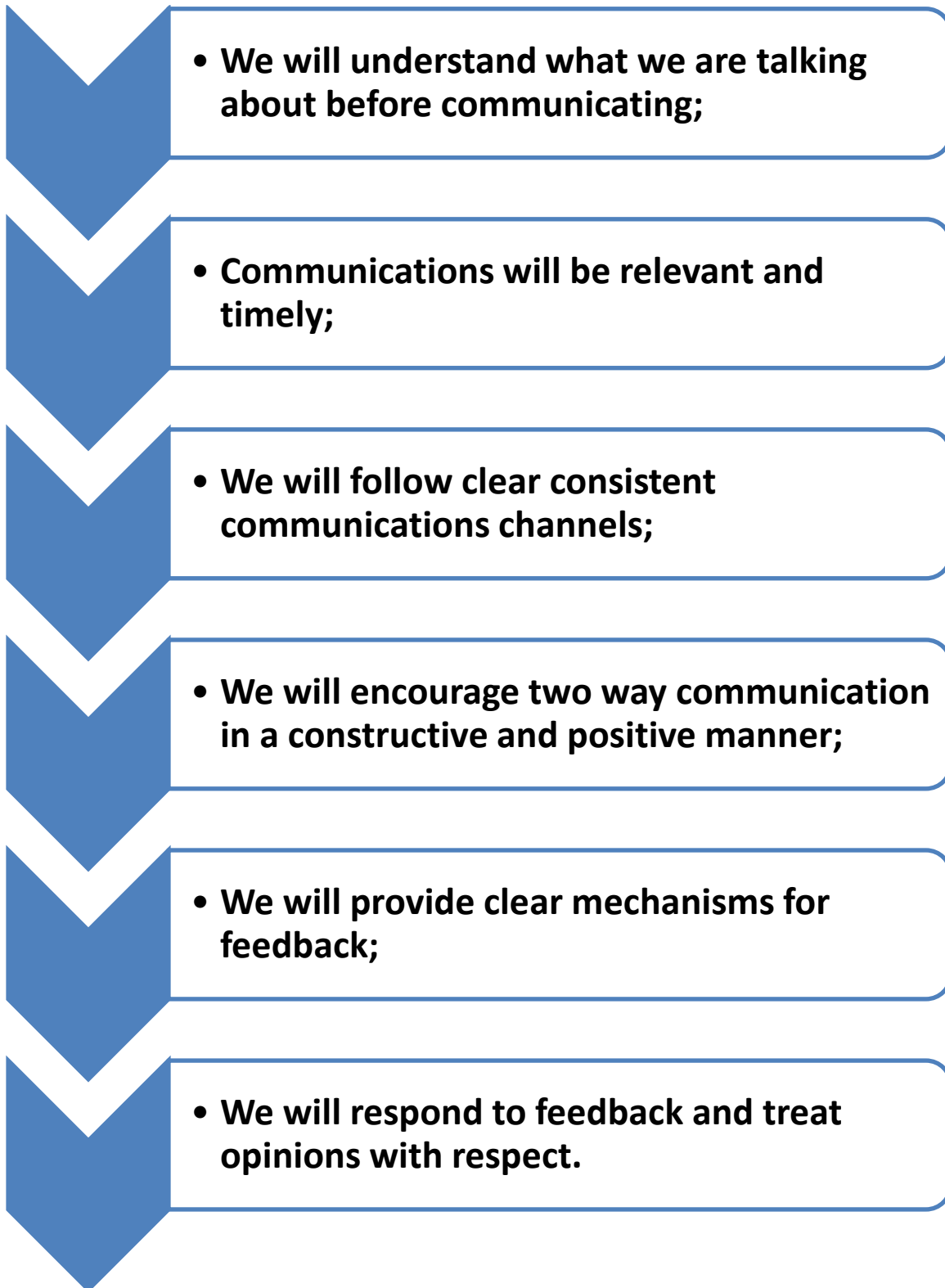
By achieving the above aims, it is envisaged that the scheme will contribute to the higher-level and inter-related objectives of promoting:

- (i) a reduction in child poverty,
- (ii) positive child development outcomes,
- (iii) labour market activation and
- (iv) improved quality.

Aligned with the above objectives, the primary goal of the Communications and Engagement Strategy is **to communicate the key messages of the ACS** in a manner that:

- is **clear, timely and consistent**;
- is **accessible** to all audiences and stakeholders;
- meets the DCYA/Pobal's **responsibilities** and duties;
- meets the **identified needs** of key stakeholders, including **hard to reach groups**;
- Assists in achieving the **identified targets and outcomes** required to develop and launch the scheme successfully.

The execution of this Communications Strategy will be conducted using the following **guiding principles**:

- 
- **We will understand what we are talking about before communicating;**
  - **Communications will be relevant and timely;**
  - **We will follow clear consistent communications channels;**
  - **We will encourage two way communication in a constructive and positive manner;**
  - **We will provide clear mechanisms for feedback;**
  - **We will respond to feedback and treat opinions with respect.**

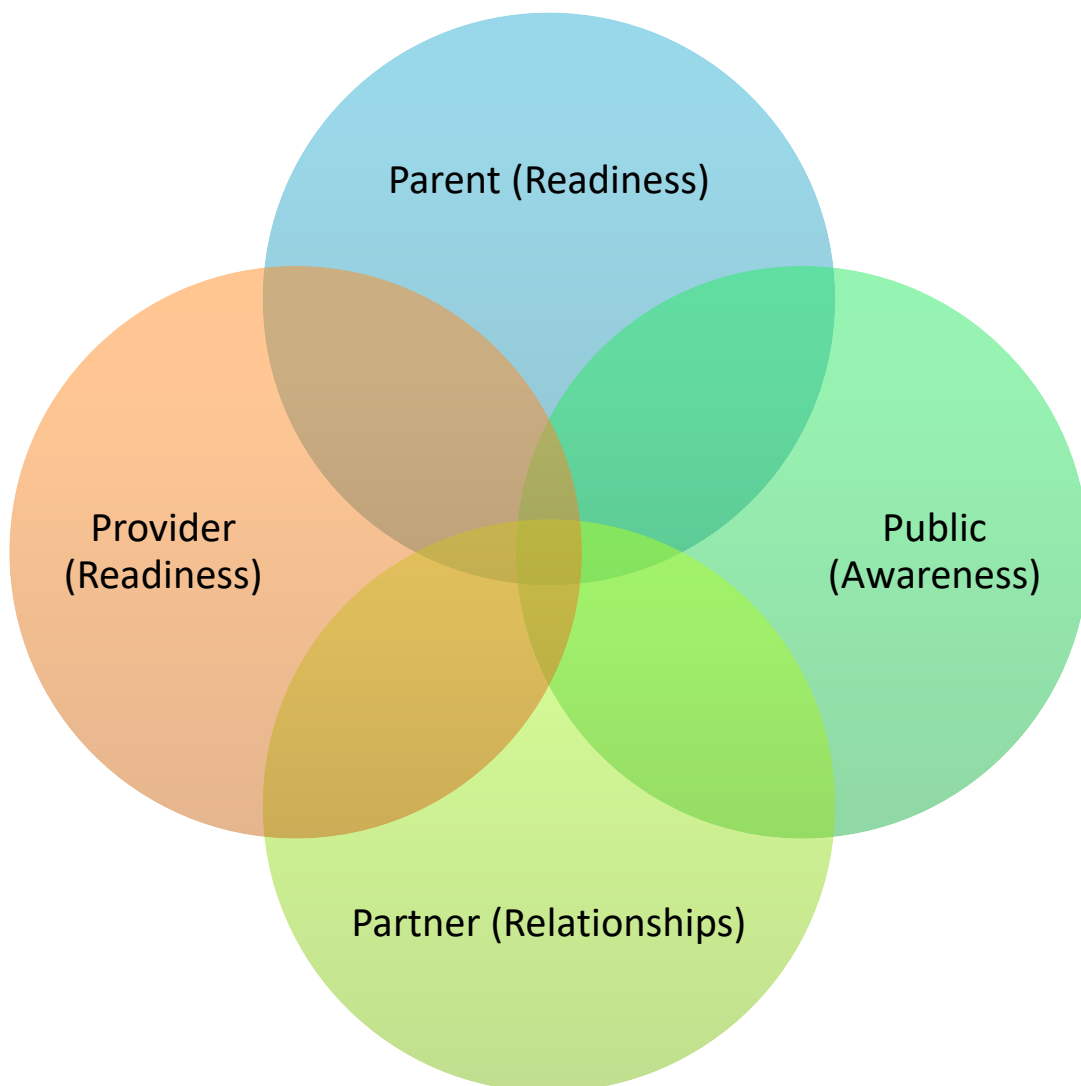
## Section 2 – Implementation Approach

### 2.1 Identifying Stakeholders

The following definition of **stakeholder** is being used for the purpose of this Communications Strategy:

*'any group or individual who can affect or is affected by the achievement of the organisation's objectives' (1984: 46).<sup>1</sup>*

Four key classes of external stakeholders have been identified:



---

<sup>1</sup> Freeman, R. E. (1984) Strategic Management: A Stakeholder Approach, p46, Boston, MA: Pitman.

Each of these four stakeholder classes, in turn, comprise of different subgroups. In overall terms, these can be categorised as follows:

Stakeholder Type	Sub-group	Need
Parent	Parents with children in childcare	Need to know how their childcare costs will be lowered; what they need to do to apply for the scheme
	Parents that experience barriers to returning to work or education due to challenges in accessing affordable childcare:	Need to be made aware of the supports available; what steps are required to avail of these supports and where these supports are available.
	Grandparents and relatives:	May or may not be involved in the formal care of children but are in a position to relay information to parents who may be in full time work.
Provider	Childcare service owners:	Require detailed information on how the scheme will operate in practical terms, how it will impact on their business, how to join and where to find enough information to be confident in their ability to deal with questions from parents.
	Childcare Practitioners:	Require information on how the scheme will work and where to direct parents for further information.
Public	Elected Representatives:	Must receive briefings as appropriate or requested, answers to PQs and regular update on progress on the development and implementation of the ACS.
	Press and Media:	Local and national, online and print. All channels which can potentially influence all of our other audiences both positively and negatively.

Partner	Partner Organisations and Interest Groups	Tiered, tailored messages for various groups dependent on their reach and audience. For example, suitable information for parents via the National Parents Council, more detailed process orientated information via Early Childhood Ireland.
	Unions:	Two unions (SIPTU and IMPACT) are currently engaged with the early years sector and must be kept updated on progress on the development and implementation of the ACS.
	Sponsor Organisations:	Sponsor organisations (for example Tusla) play a very important and particular role in the ACS. We will be engaging closely with each sponsor organisation in relation to the development and approval of Sponsor Agreement and in relation to all related communications issues.

Clear and effective communication with the above stakeholders is dependent upon clear and effective communication within our own internal team and governance structures. A range of governance and communications arrangements are in place to ensure the effectiveness of this element of the programme of work. The ACS programme is overseen by Project and Executive Boards that meet every four weeks and receive ongoing progress reports and communications. More widely, the DCYA is subject to wider governance and communications arrangements and protocols; such as those relating to responding to Parliamentary Questions, Joint Oireachtas Committees and updates for other government departments as appropriate, and in managing and maintaining relationships and reporting duties at interdepartmental and Government level, including the requirements of the Strategic Communications Unit recently established by the Department of An Taoiseach. Further detail on the internal aspect of the project’s communications can be found in Appendix A.

As already noted, different stakeholder groups will have different information needs and may wish to engage in different ways, at different times and on different issues. Respecting and reflecting this, a tiered system of communication and engagement will be applied to differentiate the level of detail supplied, timing of information released, level of consultation and influence over policy issues etc.



It is proposed that the following tiered model<sup>2</sup> will be used to identify and stratify the appropriate level of communication and engagement with the various stakeholder groups. It should be noted that a stakeholder could fall under different categories with regard to different issues or aspects of the programme of work. Stakeholders could also require multiple levels of engagement across a range of issues.

<b>Partnership</b>	<p>Shared accountability and responsibility. Two-way engagement, joint learning, decision making and actions</p> <p><i>For example, Pobal</i></p>
<b>Participation</b>	<p>Part of the team, engaged in delivering tasks or with responsibility for a particular area/activity. Two-way engagement within limits of responsibility.</p> <p><i>For example, Tusla</i></p>
<b>Consultation</b>	<p>Involved, but not responsible and able to influence within the consultation boundaries. Limited two-way engagement: parties may seek to connect on particular issues to influence, to input or to obtain information.</p> <p><i>For example, National Voluntary Childcare Organisations and their members.</i></p>
<b>Push and Pull Communications</b>	<p>One-way engagement. Organisation may broadcast information to all stakeholders or target particular stakeholder groups using various channels e.g. email, letter, webcasts, podcasts, videos, leaflets.</p> <p><i>For example, the general public, the media etc.</i></p>

<sup>2</sup> Source: Engaging Stakeholders - A strategy for Stakeholder Engagement <https://www.stakeholdermap.com/stakeholder-engagement.html#stakeholder-engagement-approaches>

## 2.2 Defining our messages

We are cognisant of the fact that the four key stakeholder groups may hold differing and sometimes competing concerns and expectations of the scheme and this insight must be actively borne in mind when forming messaging as part of the communications campaign.

Below is a matrix of the key concerns and motivations of each of these four audiences and the key identified messages that must be successfully communicated to these groups.

	Key concerns	Key Messages	Communications Mechanisms
<b>Parents</b>	<p>When will the scheme launch?</p> <p>What level of subsidy will be available?</p> <p>How will I find out if I am eligible?</p> <p>Will my childcare provider participate?</p> <p>How can I find a participating childcare provider?</p> <p>Where can I get more information or answers to my questions?</p> <p>What are the rules?</p>	<p>i) ACS will provide a financial benefit for families utilising registered childcare in Ireland.</p> <p>ii) The supports will be designed to give more to those who need it most; reducing poverty, increasing access and assisting people back to work and education.</p> <p>iii) Accessing these supports and information about ACS will be simple and, if additional assistance is required, support will be available locally and consistently throughout the country.</p>	<p>Website, online content, print media, outdoor advertising, radio, posters, presence at public events, leaflets, booklets and in local libraries, HSE primary care centres, family support/ outreach centres, Intreo offices, Citizens Information website and offices, Scheme helpline etc.</p> <p>Collaboration with other stakeholders to signpost information to parents and hard to reach groups</p>
<b>Public</b>	<p>What is the scheme about/ What is it trying to achieve?</p> <p>When will the scheme launch?</p> <p>Will the scheme work?</p> <p>Is the scheme a success?</p> <p>Is the scheme having an impact?</p> <p>Is the scheme value for money?</p> <p>Is it reaching the right people?</p> <p>Is this the best method of</p>	<p>i) ACS will lower the burden of the cost of childcare for families in Ireland and remove a key barrier for returning to work or training for many.</p> <p>ii) ACS is income based and provides additional supports to families that need it most.</p> <p>iii) The new scheme is underpinned by legislation and built on state of the art IT infrastructure and will facilitate future investment in early years care and education for years to</p>	<p>Website, online content, print media, outdoor advertising, radio, posters, presence at public events.</p>

	making childcare more affordable?	come an  iv) The scheme reflects evidence that supply-side measures (such as ACS) offer better capacity to drive quality improvements	
<b>Childcare providers and practitioners</b>	When will the scheme launch? How will it work? How much will my service be paid? Will my wages rise? What steps do I have to take to participate? Where can I learn more about the scheme? Who will answer the queries from parents? How will this affect my business? What are the rules? How much administration is this going to involve?	i) ACS will simplify childcare subvention for both parents and childcare providers.  ii) Support and information will be available in the lead up and implementation period of the launch of ACS to ensure that childcare providers are fully comfortable with the system and how it works in time for its launch  iii) Childcare providers will be consulted throughout the development and implementation phase of ACS and their views will inform execution of the best possible system.	Website, Helpline, Email, Consultative Forums, Newsletter, Booklets, leaflets, posters, provider information sessions/training
<b>Other Stakeholders</b>	When will the scheme launch? How will it work? Where can I learn more about the scheme? Who will answer the queries from providers, practitioners or parents? How will it assist different vulnerable children/ population groups? How will it affect the childcare industry and childcare profession? Will my voice be heard? Sector specific queries	i) ACS will deliver a robust platform for the delivery of subsidised childcare for families in Ireland.  ii) Information on ACS will be available widely (inc. on detailed aspects of the scheme such as legislation, data protection, consultations, etc.)  iii) ACS will demonstrably improve access to affordable childcare for families in Ireland; reducing poverty, increasing access to quality childcare and assisting people back to work and education.	Website, Email, Meetings, Consultative Forums, Newsletter, Briefings where appropriate (e.g. Elected Representatives)

The overarching messages of this Communications and Engagement Strategy can be summarised as follows:

- A. ACS will provide financial benefits for families that use registered childcare in Ireland.
- B. The scheme provides a clear, consistent and fair basis for providing financial support based on need, with enhanced supports for families that need it most.
- C. ACS is about investing in our future. It will provide a long-term, flexible and sustainable platform for investment in the childcare sector, underpinned by a robust legislative and IT framework.
- D. ACS aims to improve access to quality childcare; reduce poverty and support families to return to work and training.

### ***2.3 Communications and Engagement Approach of the Project***

In executing this strategy, the ACS programme will adopt the following overarching approach:

- We will utilise **case studies** as the key mechanism for communicating our desired futures.
- We will utilise a **multi-tiered approach** that is mindful of the differing levels of information and detail required by our identified audiences.
- We will use **‘Plain English’** and will strive to ensure that our communications adhere to the principles of Equality, Diversity and Inclusion at all times, as well as ensuring that all key information is made available in the Irish language.
- We will strive at all times, where it is within our control, to deliver our key messages in a **consistent** fashion across all channels.
- We will communicate at all times in a considered, **professional** manner, in accordance to our duty and obligations as public servants.

### ***2.4 Communications and Engagement Constraints***

Whilst striving at all times to adhere to the Communications and Engagement approach outlined above, the following constraints must be borne in mind by all individuals involved in the programme, particularly in relation to communication;

- Information sensitive to the programme (incl. Projected deadlines, budgets, challenges, etc.) must not be shared without prior agreement;
- Even within the four defined stakeholder groups there are many disparate sub-groups, actors and individuals, each of which may have legitimate but competing agendas that may not correspond to the desired outcomes of the ACS;
- We can control how we communicate our messages but we cannot control how those messages are perceived;

- As a Government led project, our strategy may sometimes be affected by unplanned communications of others;
- We will not always get our message right and our audiences will not always be pleased with our message but, in maintaining fidelity to our outlined Communication Management Approach and Communication Principles, we will deal with such instances in an appropriate and professional manner.

## Section 3 - Evaluation

### 3.1 What will success look like?

Successful implementation of this Communications and Engagement Strategy will demonstrate the following characteristics:

#### **Clear communication of our vision for the Affordable Childcare Scheme**

We will know what messages are required to be communicated and will be clear and consistent in the delivery of these messages.

#### **DCYA led consultation**

The DCYA shall take the lead role in seeking, organising and defining the Terms of Reference and scope for consultation relating to the scheme. We will strive to adopt an open, inclusive approach to consultation and engagement.

#### **DCYA as lead communicator**

DCYA shall take active ownership of the direct dissemination of Key Messages. This will include working closely with organisations to ensure consistency of messaging.

#### **ACS Project Team as repository of all ACS related material**

All material relating to the ACS programme of work should be developed and disseminated only with the approval of the ACS project team and its associated governance structures.

#### **Established expectations**

DCYA will seek to minimise ambiguity regarding roles and messages by establishing clear expectations with all relevant stakeholders.

#### **Measured feedback**

Whilst DCYA is committed to value of consultation and collaboration, it is critical that such activities are measured on ongoing basis to ensure that these processes are meaningful for stakeholders and productive to the delivery of the scheme's goals.

The ACS Communications and Engagement Strategy is intended to be a 'living document' and as such will be reviewed, evaluated and amended periodically to ensure its on-going effectiveness and

relevance to the goals and objectives of the wider project and against the changing landscape of the sector.

The key performance indicators for successful implementation of this Communications and Engagement Strategy are as follows:

	Indicator	Measurement Tools	KPI
A	Stakeholders will be clear about their roles within the communication process and of any other tasks or expectations agreed with them or others throughout the project lifecycle;	Prompt reply for requests for information through the designated channels. Positive feedback via the designated consultation mechanisms.	No. of Engagements with collaborative partners (e.g. Tusla, DEASP, Citizens Information etc.  Meetings of consultative groups  Sample surveys of stakeholders to gauge satisfaction with delivery of communications element of the scheme
B	Childcare providers and practitioners will have sufficient information and clarity regarding their role in the development and delivery of ACS; will have clearly defined pathways for feedback, further information and resources and will have clarity regarding any actions required of them with regards to delivery of ACS (i.e. contracts, registrations, etc.);	Sign up rates for the new scheme will meet required targets. Engagement by childcare providers and practitioners will be high (road shows, consultation meetings, engagement with CCCs etc.)	Participating childcare services in excess of 3,000 No. of training and information events hosted by DCYA or its partners  Pageviews of ACS website in excess of 500,000
C	Parents will be aware of the supports available to them via ACS; their eligibility for such supports and of any steps required of them in order to access the above supports;	Registration by parents of their children for the new supports will reach agreed targets. Parents will be able to easily access the information they require (website visits etc.) and any additional supports they need (email, telephone queries)	Universal registrations in excess of 30,000  Targeted registrations in excess of 70,000  Total registrations in excess of 100,000  Development and dissemination of parent specific materials

<b>D</b>	The public and all other relevant agencies should be aware of the ACS, how and why it operates and its relevance to wider society and/or the clients they serve.	Public awareness and understanding of the scheme will be high through an information campaign that will be inclusive in its nature and will deliver across urban and rural regions, in both English and Irish languages.	<p>Pageviews of ACS website in excess of 500,000</p> <p>Public materials disseminated in digital and hard copy (i.e billboards, buses, etc.)</p> <p>Coverage of scheme in print media</p>
----------	--	--	---

### 3.2 Delivery mechanism

The ACS is being executed using a combination of the PRINCE II and Agile project management methodologies. A key to solid implementation of this strategy is that all stakeholders, particularly at the Partnership and Collaboration Levels are clear about their roles and responsibilities with regards to communication. Resources have been dedicated to the execution of the ACS Communications and Engagement Strategy. A separate Appendix has been produced outlining in greater detail the internal structures and processes put in place to support effective programme management of ACS and, as part of this strong communication and successful execution of this Communications and Engagement Strategy.

The following schedule is indicative of the Work Packages associated with implementation of the Communications and Engagement Strategy.

Work Packages of the Communications and Engagement Strategy
Management of Creative and Digital Output / Media Buying
Website Content/UX Design
Content Management
Public Awareness Materials and Public Awareness Campaign
Parent Readiness Materials and Parent Readiness Campaign incl. MyGov ID Awareness Campaign
Provider Readiness Materials and Provider Readiness Campaign
Stakeholder Relationships (VCOs, CCC's, Other Departments) Materials and Campaign
Oversight and collaboration on development of training strategy, materials and delivery plan

## Appendix A

### ***I. Introduction***

Efficient internal communications processes are a feature of successful project implementation. Strong and effective communication is a key to mitigating risk, avoiding confusion and duplication and ensuring the most efficient delivery of the scheme and its stated goals.

The Affordable Childcare Scheme has put in place the following structures and processes which will support ensure the successful implementation of the Communications and Engagement Strategy.

### ***II. Programme Governance and Reporting***

Across all levels of the programme, governance structures have been established to ensure robust communications channels are in place.

The programme is overseen by an Executive Board, chaired by the DCYA Secretary General and comprising relevant DCYA senior officials. Below the Executive Board, an inter-departmental, inter-agency Project Board, chaired at Assistant Secretary level, has delegated programme oversight responsibility, thereby ensuring regular and structured inter-agency communication and collaboration, and shared ownership of the programme.

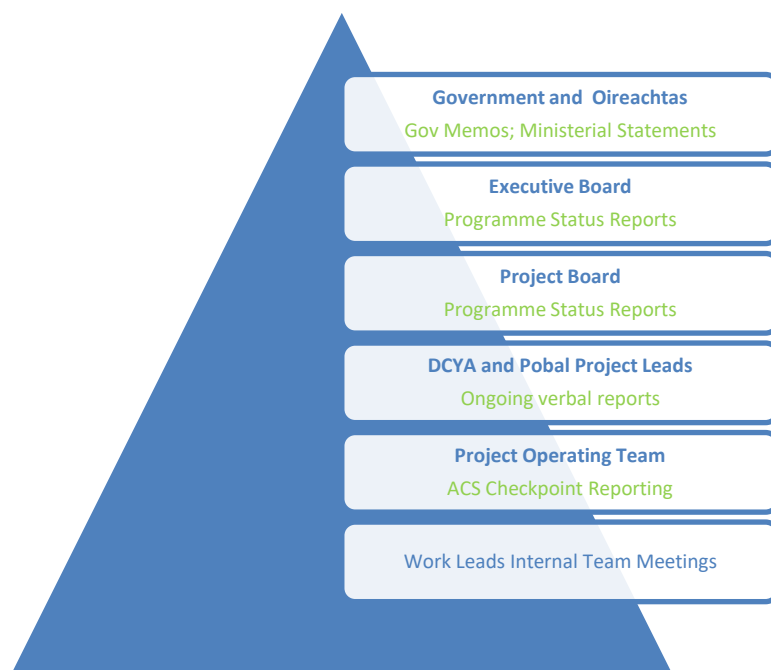
The Project Board is supported by a Project Operating Team, chaired at PO level, which has day to day management responsibility for co-ordinating and driving the various workstreams and work packages which comprise the programme.

In addition to the above structures, DCYA has demonstrated its strong commitment to effective communications and engagement between the main programme partners (DCYA and Pobal) by assigning a dedicated Principal Officer to provide leadership to the project and to liaise with a similarly dedicated senior lead within Pobal; appointing a dedicated programme manager who works alongside a dedicated Pobal project manager; co-locating a team of DCYA officers to an off-site location with staff from Pobal and committing a number of staff to the dedicated task of delivering the ACS Communications and Engagement Strategy.

*These structures are listed in blue below, while the core reporting tool used to communicate progress on the programme at each level is listed underneath in green.*



*Table 1: Governance Structure and Communications Hierarchy*



Within the programme structures, each reporting tier has defined terms of reference which include protocols for the regular upward and downward flow of information, including defined protocols for the identification and mitigation of risk and the escalation of issues to the relevant decision makers in a timely fashion.

Below is an outline of the key reporting relationships relevant to the successful flow of information within the scheme.

*Table 2: Reporting Relationships*

Communication Level	Purpose	Frequency	Communication Method	Attendees
<b>Executive Board</b>	The Executive Board has ultimate oversight and governance responsibility for the ACS. The Executive Board will manage ‘by exception’, delegating responsibility for the steering, oversight and interagency coordination of the ACS project to the ACS Project	Every four weeks	Programme Status, Budget and Risk Report (every four weeks)	DCYA Secretary General and senior officials

	Board, while ensuring oversight over the project delivery			
<b>Project Board</b>	While the DCYA have overall project responsibility, the Project Board has delegated responsibility for the steering, oversight and interagency coordination of the ACS project, providing a structure and working arrangements reflecting all key project partners and shared ownership of the project. The Project Board will provide the Project Operating Team with the necessary decisions and direction for the project to proceed and to overcome any problems. The Project Board will also identify material issues, changes and risks which need to be escalated to the Executive Board.	Every four weeks	Programme Status and Risk Report (every four weeks)	Senior Officials from DCYA, DES, DEASP, Revenue, DPER, Pobal (inc. the Pobal CEO) and independent representatives and experts
<b>Project Leads</b>	Designated senior officials within DCYA and Pobal will provide day to day leadership, maintain ongoing contact throughout the project and will act as the conduit between the senior management teams of both organisations	As required, at minimum weekly.	Telephone, email, face to face meetings.	As required.
<b>Project Operating Team</b>	The Project Operating Team (Operating Team) leads out on the project work-streams specification, planning and implementation oversight.	Weekly	Checkpoint Reports	ACS PO, Programme Manager and DCYA Working Group Leads; the Pobal Programme Manager and the Pobal Working Group Leads;. independent ITEF member

All external communications relating to the Affordable Childcare Scheme project will take place in compliance with the Communications and Engagement Strategy adhering to its objectives, principles, process and approach.

Ad hoc communications will be avoided where at all possible and communications with external stakeholders, the public and childcare providers and practitioners should happen via, or in close collaboration with, the Communications Project Team.

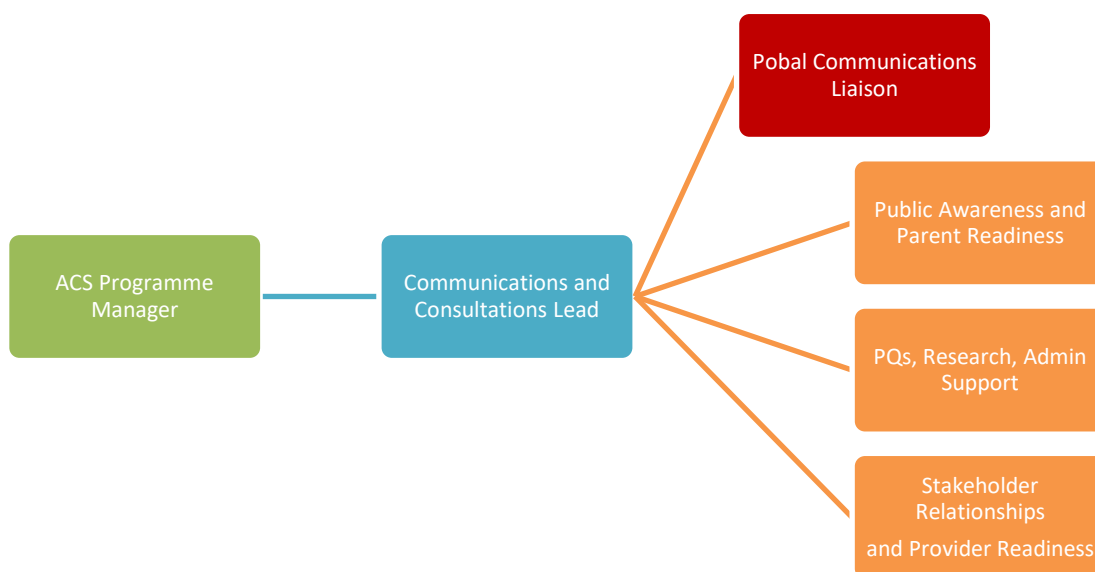
### III. *Communication Roles and Responsibilities*

A key to solid implementation of this strategy is that all stakeholders, particularly at the Partnership and Collaboration levels of the project are clear about their roles and responsibilities with regard to communication.

At Project Team level, dedicated members of staff- the Communications Team- have been assigned to leading on communications functions, including lead responsibility for the successful delivery of the Communications and Engagement Strategy.

The division of labour within the Communications Team has been delegated based on the identified four audiences and key messages, while acknowledging the intersection of these audiences and messages.

*Table 3: The ACS Project Communication Team*



Within the Project Operating Team structure, any person with a query, question or need with regard to communicating with stakeholders (internally or externally) should in the first instance approach the individual with the relevant work responsibility aligned to the four identified audiences: Provider, Parent, Public, and Stakeholder (see Section 4: Ensuring Good Quality Communications and Engagement).

There should be regular liaison between the DCYA Communications Lead and Pobal Communications Liaison with regard to all ACS communications so as to ensure consistent internal communication to

all DCYA and Pobal staff working on the programme, as well as ensuring that a single, consistent and clear message is communicated to other stakeholders and programme partners.

Within DCYA, external communications are subject to wider pre-existing procedures, checks and balances dependent on their intended audience, e.g. PQs, Ministerial Representations, and Press Release etc. As a programme of the DCYA, ACS communications are subject to the same conditions and sign off at appropriate level sought in all instances.

The Communications Team is on hand to assist with driving all aspects of the project’s communication and, therefore, if any member of the project team identifies a communications need or risk it should be brought to the attention of the team. The Communications Team reports directly to the Principal Officer of the Early Years Project Unit. It also reports to the ACS Programme Manager in relation to progress against work package deliverables, utilising the project’s Checkpoint Reporting system and Prince II methodology.

#### **IV. Risks and Mitigation**

Many of the contextual internal and external risks associated with the delivery of this strategy are already captured and regularly reviewed in the DCYA ACS Risk Register. However, as we increase our communications activity with the identified audiences, there are three overarching communications related risks which must be kept constantly in our line of sight and which merit mention within this strategy. These are outlined in the table below along with their associated mitigating actions.

*Table 4: Communications Risks and Mitigation*

Risk	Mitigation
<p>Unknowable reactions from stakeholders and other audiences that may damage the reputation of the ACS project and/or the DCYA.</p>	<p>By consulting meaningfully and effectively with Stakeholders we should be able to forecast impending challenges to allow sufficient time for an appropriate response.</p>
<p>The evolving nature of childcare sector and the wider political landscape and the need to respond quickly to emerging issues.</p>	<p>By utilising the expertise of the Project Board, our programme partners and our consultative stakeholder groups, and by maintaining a dedicated Communications Team, we should be well placed to respond in a timely and appropriate fashion to emerging issues.</p>
<p>The difficulty in fully forecasting the total cost of implementing this strategy successfully given the dynamic nature of communications management and the requirement to respond to unforeseen events (see above)</p>	<p>The unpredictable and responsive nature of communications means that it is essential that a level of contingency is factored into the resource allocation for the project.</p>

In the event of any of the above causing a delay to the project, the Change Control and or Contingency Communication Plan should be followed.

## V. Change Control Management

All deviations from the Communications and Engagement Strategy will be managed and executed according to a formal process.

Any changes must take into account how any of the following features will be impacted as a result of the requested change;

*Table 5: Change Control Management for Communications*

Change Type	Definition
Scope	Any change that affects the scope of the ACS Communications and Engagement Strategy
Quality	Any change to that will cause an effect on the quality of outputs
Cost	Any change to a Work Package budget beyond the agreed tolerances
Schedule	Any change to a activity's schedule or deliverable completion date
Resources	Any change to activity's resource which could impact cost and/or programme timelines.

All changes should be given a priority for implementation.

The following table outlines the respective priorities:

*Table 6: Communication Change Control Priorities*

Priority <sup>3</sup>	Definition	Target Period	Implementation
Urgent	A request is considered urgent if failure to immediately address the change will result in failure to meet a key milestone or target for the project	1 to 2 days	
High	A high priority change request is considered to be important to the success of the project.	Within a week	
Medium	A medium priority change request has the potential to impact successful completion of the project but is not an immediate help nor hindrance	One week to a month	
Low	Low priority change requests need to be addressed if the time and budget permit. Low priority changes requests are managed, as resources are available.	Over one month	

Dependent on the level of breach of tolerance the change request will require approval by the Communications Lead, Project Lead, Programme Manager or Project Board as appropriate.

<sup>3</sup> NB. The above target times are for the requestor to indicate the urgency of the request. The actual time for implementation may differ from the above once the assessment has been made as to the effort required to implement the request.

## VI. Contingency Communications Management

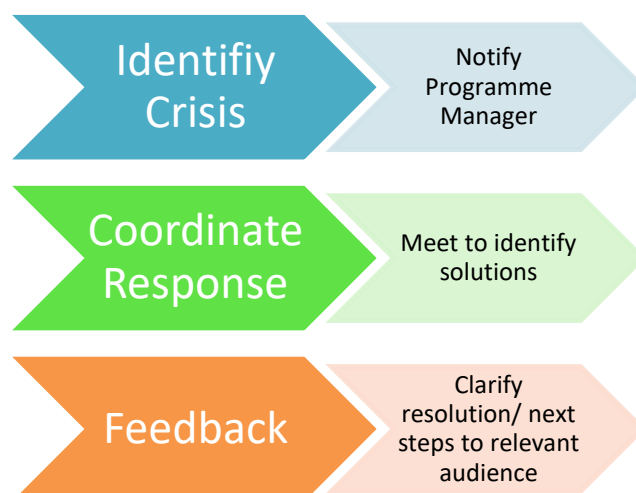
As identified in the Risks and Mitigations section, sometimes unexpected events beyond the control of the programme can occur. For the purposes of this Communications and Engagement Strategy, we shall define such an event as:

*Any event that may have a significant detrimental effect on the successful development and implementation of the Affordable Childcare Scheme*

If a member of the ACS becomes aware of such an event, they should notify the ACS Programme Manager who will in turn discuss with both the relevant senior management and the Communications Lead to formulate an appropriate response.

The process flow for such events should be as follows:

*Table 7: Process Flow for Contingency Communications Management*



If the above response will adversely affect the delivery of the Communications and Engagement Strategy in terms of resources, timescales, budget or quality then a parallel process following the Change Control process should take place to authorize the above.

Finally, having followed the steps involved in contingency communication management as outlined above, relevant staff members should reflect on the process, its outcome and the record the lessons learned.

***VII. ACS Project Team Directory***

An ACS project team directory is available on request. Queries relating to the Affordable Childcare Scheme may be directed to [affordable\\_childcare@dcya.gov.ie](mailto:affordable_childcare@dcya.gov.ie) or by visiting [www.affordablechildcare.ie](http://www.affordablechildcare.ie)