

**Review of the National Educational Welfare
Board in the context of the Establishment of the
Child and Family Support Agency**

August 2012

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1. Introduction

This document sets out the terms of reference, methodology, work plan and the findings of the critical review of the National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) which was completed on July 31st 2012. It considers the outcomes of the review group's deliberations and the options for change identified for the consideration of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and the Government.

2. Policy Context

The review of the National Educational Welfare Board is being undertaken in the context of the establishment of the Child and Family Support Agency (CSFA) and in line with the Government Decision of 15 November, 2011 in relation to the rationalisation of state bodies (provided at Appendix 2).

As part of the Public Service Reform Plan, Departments are required to carry out critical reviews of potential State Agency amalgamations. The overall aim of the amalgamations is to achieve savings. However, wider advantages may also include a more citizen focused public service and the development of a more streamlined configuration of administrative structures.

In the course of the review of the National Educational Welfare Board, the recommendations in the Report of the Task Force of the Child and Family Support Agency were also published. The Task Force stated that:

“...the NEWB should transfer to the CFSA. Subject to legislation, budget responsibility should transfer from establishment day. The home school liaison officers should continue to be employed by their schools. However, the CFSA should be provided with an additional budget resource allocation to allow for the commissioning / purchase of HSLO services.”

3. Review Working Group and Terms of Reference

The review was carried out under the auspices of a Review Group chaired by Mr. Jim Breslin, Secretary General of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. The membership of the Group is set out in table 1 below.

Table 1 Membership of Review Group

Organisation	Name
Department of Children and Youth Affairs	Jim Breslin
Department of Children and Youth Affairs	Catherine Hazlett
Department of Children and Youth Affairs	Siobhan Young
National Educational Welfare Board	Clare Ryan

The secretariat for the review was provided by the Educational Welfare Unit of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Relevant supporting information was provided by the National Educational Welfare Board and the Department of Education and Skills

The terms of reference for this critical review are as follows –

- Undertake a critical review of the role of the National Educational Welfare Board in the context of the establishment of the Child and Family Support Agency.
- Form a view with regard to the merger of the statutory and operational functions of the National Educational Welfare Board with the Child and Family Support Agency on its establishment.
- Prepare a report with recommendations as to the future of NEWB and its functions.

In carrying out the review the working group will have due regard to the ‘guiding principles’ which inform the Government’s approach to agency rationalisation. These are set out at Appendix 1.

4. Methodology

The core appraisal analysis adopted by the Review Group is structured around the consideration of different options for the potential merger of the functions of the NEWB with the proposed CSFA. An assessment of each option is made and proofed against the following criteria:

- The guiding principles for agency rationalisation (see Appendix 1)
- Key legal, governance, staffing, shared services and savings/efficiency issues that arise

Achieving savings is an important criterion for the review but conclusions and recommendations of the Review Group also took into account wider issues including the implications of different options for the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. The Review Group also considered the time required for any potential benefits.

The main reference sources drawn on in the Review Group’s deliberations are:

- Financial, staffing and performance information provided by the National Educational Welfare Board
- Relevant legislation, corporate reporting documents and other reviews e.g. “Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes”
- Data and Information provided to the Review Group in relation to the Child and Family Support Agency (Submission provided at Appendix 5 herein), the Department

of Education and Skills and the National Educational Welfare Board (Submission provided at Appendix 6 herein).

- Consultations with the Department of Education and Skills, identifying key policy issues to be raised in the analyses presented in this report.

Data gathering has been undertaken with the assistance of the National Educational Welfare Board, Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Reference sources are provided in the appendices to this document.

5. Timescale for the Review

The deadline for submission of all critical reviews to the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform is the 29th of June. Following consideration of completed reviews, it is intended to bring a Memorandum for Government shortly afterwards outlining the results of the overall review process across all Departments. The work of the Review Group was completed on July 31st. An indicative work plan is set out below in table 2.

Table 2 Key tasks and targeted completion dates

Nr	Task	Timeline
1	Gather evidence and carry out analysis	June 18 th to July 31 st
2	Complete initial draft	July 20th
3	Revise draft following Review Group discussion, submit to D/PER	August 30th

6. Review Process

This section summarises the deliberations of the Review Group with regard to the role of the National Educational Welfare Board in the context of the establishment of the Child and Family Support Agency. The deliberations of the Review Group were informed by the advice and consultations with the Department of Education and Skills, the National Educational Welfare Board and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. The deliberations of the review group are structured as follows:

- i. Potential scenarios for the future of the National Educational Welfare Board with attendant pros and cons for each scenario.
- ii. The critical issues that must be considered in relation to future of the NEWB and its services in the context of the Child and Family Support Agency

The Review Group then presents its conclusions and suggested actions that are required should the government elect that the NEWB should be merged with Child and Family Support Agency¹.

6.1. Potential Scenarios with regard to the future of the NEWB

The review group identified three potential scenarios in relation to the future of the NEWB:

- “As is” scenario: Is there a case for the National Educational Welfare Board to continue as a stand alone agency on its current legislative basis?
- Abolish: Is there any case for the abolition of the NEWB i.e. because its objectives have been adequately achieved, or there is not sufficient priority to merit ongoing expenditure on the activities of the Board or the activities of the Board are not proven to contribute to the achievement of these objectives?
- Reconstitution of functions of the NEWB within CFSA: Could the statutory and/or operational functions of the NEWB be integrated with another state body? In particular, is there potential for rationalisation in the context of the establishment of the Child and Family Support Agency?
 - Full or partial integration?
 - Other options?

6.2. Options Available

The conclusions of the Review Group as to the pros and cons of each scenario are summarised below.

6.2.1. As is scenario – Continued Stand Alone Agency

6.2.1.1. Pros

- Retention of a distinct education welfare remit and focus.
- Lower requirement for change in the short term with benefits for day-to-day operations and the implementation of the integrated service process “One Child, One Team, One Plan”.
- Well established partnerships within the education sector not affected by any perception of greater distance from education policy drivers.
- No requirement for legislative change on account of a merger with the Child and Family Support Agency.

¹ These issues were examined with reference too certain key questions identified at the outset of the process contained at Appendix 4 to this document

6.2.1.2. Cons

- At variance with thrust of Government's agency rationalisation programme and relevant previous recommendations from the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes (the latter recommended the NEWB absorption into DES)
- Likely continued erosion of corporate capacity in context of public service moratorium
- Significant current and emerging constraints in ability to discharge legislative remit unaddressed – including necessity to balance provision for key corporate posts with EWO staffing needs and resource constraints to the achievement of the appropriate delegation by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs of management of School Completion Projects and the progressive integration of HSCL responsibility
- With a 2012 budget of €9.6m and a direct staffing of 99 (72 of which are front line personnel (57 Educational Welfare Officers, 12 Senior Educational Welfare Officers and 3 Regional Managers)) the size of the organisation is such as to be likely to continue to raise questions as to its continued stand alone existence having regard to the Government's strong policy towards agency rationalisation and the continuing budgetary constraints.

6.2.2. Abolish NEWB

6.2.2.1. Pros

- Expenditure and staffing savings available to be redeployed to other high priority activities.

6.2.2.2. Cons

- Loss of focus on educational welfare as a key element to improve children's wellbeing and educational outcomes
- Removal of capacity to deliver on NEWB legislative requirements which have important foundations in Constitutional rights to an education.
- Educational welfare supports to schools, including those in disadvantaged areas, would be significantly diminished.
- School performance and educational welfare outcomes would no longer be monitored and data would not be made available.
- Likely that certain educational welfare functions would fall back on the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and the Department of Education and Skills.
- There would be a requirement for the relevant provisions of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 to be amended by the Oireachtas.

6.2.3. Reconstitute NEWB within new Child and Family Support Agency

6.2.3.1. Pros

- Potential for alignment of educational welfare service model with other activities of the new Agency with consequent improvement in citizen focus.
- Potential improved liaison with key children's services currently delivered by HSE, IYJS, etc as envisaged in Education (Welfare) Act 2000 with consequent improvement to educational outcomes.
- Potential improved access to community support and resources including through the Child and Family Support Agency funded voluntary sector and 107 Family Resource Centres transferred from the Family Support Agency.
- Potential for improved educational welfare contribution to Agency's other child wellbeing objectives e.g. in the areas of child welfare and protection.
- Potential to contribute knowledge and skills to shape the new Agency's interaction with schools and to build collaborative relationships between the Child and Family Support Agency and the education sector generally.
- Improved access to wider corporate resources such as legal, financial, HR, information management expertise and transactional processing with potential to improve efficiency, effectiveness and value for money.
- Potential to reduce overhead costs through sharing of premises where appropriate, etc.
- Streamlining of DCYA day to day governance requirements with potential to shift towards greater performance dialogue, as advocated by the OECD report "Ireland – Towards an Integrated Public Service".

6.2.3.2. Cons

- Potential negative consequences for visibility of educational welfare remit and profile with key educational partners.
- Depending on legislative, governance, organisational and financial arrangements potential for dilution of current educational welfare activities within organization with a wider, high profile mandate.
- Requirement for primary legislation to transfer responsibilities in Educational (Welfare) Act, 2000 to new Agency and incorporate within governance framework for new Agency.

7. Critical Considerations of the Review Group

The Review Group critically examined the case for each scenario. The group considered the statutory remit of the NEWB to support every child's right to an education, the governance and administrative functions of the NEWB; and the coordination and management responsibility the Board has for the Home School Community Liaison and the School Completion Programme.

The Review Group considered the implication of change for the achievements of the NEWB to date, including the well established partnerships with the education sector developed by the Board and the introduction of the integrated educational welfare services ("One Child, One Team, One Plan").

It formed views as to the arguments in support of a merged educational welfare service and Child and Family Support Agency and the critical claims for the NEWB to remain as a stand alone body.

The key considerations of the Review Group in its deliberations are set out hereunder with guiding principles put forward by the Review Group to shape the change management process in any potentially merged service.

7.1. Statutory Functions

- The Educational Welfare Service has a distinct statutory function which defines its focus and purpose. This focus and purpose should not be lost in any potentially merged service.
- Any proposed change to legislation necessitated by a potential merger should not in any way "water down" or compromise the current focus of the Educational Welfare Service.
- The role and purpose of the Education (Welfare) Act in relation to children's participation in education and school attendance would not be diluted if the NEWB is taken in to the CFSA. Furthermore, its functions under the Education Welfare Act would remain intact. Stand-alone school attendance legislation would still be intact in the case of a merger.
- Any benefits accruing since its inception through the maturation of its services should be retained within a potentially merged service.
- The integrity of the work of the NEWB as existing and defined within the Act should be maintained in any new service.
- A level of authority and autonomy is critical to maintaining an objective critical view of provision of service with regard to educational welfare
- A separate standalone structure may not be necessary to the carrying out of core responsibilities e.g. an educational welfare services was carried out under the

auspices of the Local Authorities; the School Completion Programme is currently managed within the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. Other services have been carried out within government Departments and have transferred to statutory bodies and other services have been carried out by statutory bodies and then absorbed into the parent Department.

- Certain functions must necessarily be independent of the Minister such as those of a quasi-prosecutorial nature. The Education Welfare Officers have powers of this nature conferred under the Education (Welfare) Act.
- The ethos surrounding the use of statutory powers would need to be preserved in any potential merged service
- Those parts of the Act not dealing with the creation of the Board and establishing the governance structures can be transcribed without substantive change into the legislation to establish the Agency, subject to any updating that might be considered appropriate for other reasons.

7.2. Cost benefits and Streamlining of Service

- In the current financial environment it is essential that the contribution of available resources to achieving outcomes is maximised and non frontline administration and overhead costs, which can be reduced through appropriate merger, are fully considered.
- Certain corporate costs which are consequent on any agency could be more economically met within an agency with a number of functions relevant to children.
- The existence of multiple agencies places pressures on the Department of Children and Youth Affairs to provide appropriate HR, Governance, Financial and other supports as required by an agency under its remit.
- The governance requirements unique to the Educational Welfare Service could exist as subset of the overall arrangements with a proposed new service.
- A proposed merged structure will consider current premises arrangements and the appropriate continuation of such arrangements in the new structure where required.
- Certain savings would accrue from the provision of any level of shared service. Savings have already been achieved through the provision of shared services across the public bodies. Further savings would accrue arising from the provision of single service structure within a potentially merged agency including the NEWB.

7.3. Operational Functions

- Certain functions in relation to the School Completion Programme are currently maintained within the Department of Children and Youth Affairs but are proper to

- the NEWB (or a proposed merged service), but to date due to capacity issues have been difficult to devolve.
- The Home School Community Liaison Service are employed by individual schools and funded by the Department of Education and Skills; arising from this the potentially merged service would need to bring the education system with it. Relationships with the Education System must be maintained.
 - The integration process within the NEWB across the three strands (EWS, SCP and HSCL) would need to be maintained and supported in any new structure.

7.4. Citizen Focus

- The NEWB provides a system of advocacy for children to the system at large and this role should be maintained.
- An appropriate balance between tailored universalism and individual case management should be maintained in any proposed structure.
- The work of the Child and Family Support Agency necessarily includes an educational dimension as an integral part of the consideration of child and family welfare. The Educational Welfare Service would be enhanced through in-house links with other welfare and support services in potentially merged structure. The work of other welfare services would in turn be complemented by the presence of expertise in educational matters.
- The rollout of the integrated service in the 12/13 school year with its principle of “One Child, One Team, One Plan” could be considered within a potentially merged service and further integrated into a continuum of support as would exist in the Child and family Support Agency.
- The current focus of the NEWB in developing systematic collection, monitoring and development of outcomes would be considered within the overall outcomes framework of a potentially merged service.
- The provision of support for the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) would be maintained within any potential merged service.

7.5. Partnerships

- Relationships between Health and Education must be enhanced and maintained within a proposed integrated service.
- The visibility of the service within:
 - The education partner network
 - The wider communityshould be maintained in any proposed merged structure.
- The Child and Family Support Agency, whether or not a merger occurs with the NEWB, requires insight and expertise in the field of education to enable that agency build appropriate and strong links with a vital sector for children.

7.6. Staffing

- The proposed merged service would provide a greater opportunity for professional development and collaboration considering the extended remit of the Child and Family Support Agency.
- The current staffing complement and the corporate structures in place are strained to meet the needs of the system.
- Any proposed merged service would need to consider the various employment and management relationships and manage these relationships appropriately including:
 - The HSCL Officers who are under the employment of individual schools
 - The School Completion Programme staff that are managed by Local Management Committees and under the employment of VECs, limited companies, schools or education centres.
 - The Education Welfare Officers who are under the direct employment of the NEWB or any proposed merged service
- The change process of the potentially merged service should be managed to take account of the maintenance of the distinct identity of the current educational function within the new Child and Family Support Agency.

7.7. Other Considerations

The report of the Task Force for the Child and Family Support Agency recommended that the functions of the NEWB should transfer to Child and Family Support Agency. The rationale as offered by the Task Force was that:

- Education is a key enabler to help children enjoy their childhood, realise their full potential and make a valued contribution to the economic, social and cultural life of their community.
- Non-attendance at school is a strong indicator of overall child welfare and a determinant of education outcomes. Therefore the functions of the NEWB and its three strands are critical to the work of the Agency, as this service frequently represents the first opportunity for prevention and early intervention in a child's life.
- High levels of absenteeism can lead to poor achievement and poor educational outcomes. Children who leave school early tend not to reengage with education subsequently and therefore remain at a disadvantage throughout their lives. The costs to the State and society can include an increased risk of involvement in antisocial behaviour and crime, and poorer physical and mental health. Maintaining school attendance for children and young people is therefore crucial.

- The focus on educational welfare, as one of the key outcomes for children should be retained in the transfer.

8. Options for Change

The Review has focused on two possible scenarios for the future of the NEWB.

- NEWB remains as a standalone agency
- The statutory and operational functions of the National Educational Welfare Board merge with the Child and Family Support Agency.

Section 6 sets out the deliberations of the Review Group on the challenges that arise for the National Educational Welfare Board and the services it provides in both potential scenarios for its future.

In its deliberations the Review Group has had particular regard to Government policy objectives for the Department of Children and Youth Affairs - to improve the lives of children and young people in Ireland by putting in place a unified framework of policy, legislation and service provision across Government in respect of children and young people; and to wider Government policy objectives to streamline State bodies for better performance, transparency and accountability in the provision of citizen centred services that provide value for money for the taxpayer.

The Review Group has also fully considered the potential impact of any change in the NEWB services provision for education policy objectives. The Department of Education and Skills has highlighted the uniqueness of the statutory role of the NEWB in upholding a child's constitutional right to an education, the significance of the services of the NEWB to achieve the goals of the DEIS programme to combat educational disadvantage and the importance of the strong relationships that the NEWB has developed with schools and the education system.

The Review Group has considered a comprehensive submission provided by the NEWB. The NEWB's concern is to ensure that any decision to reconfigure the responsibilities of the NEWB should be guided by considerations that ensure that the education policy objectives that motivated the introduction of the Education (Welfare Act), 2000 continue to be addressed; that the strengths of the NEWB and its services for children, families and schools are maintained for the benefits of children's learning and educational wellbeing; and that resources for education welfare are ring fenced. The Board expresses a clear preference for retaining the NEWB as a statutory agency with strong links and interface with the CFSA. The NEWB sets out the concerns it has about a change in the status of the Board and its services. These include; the need to maintain a distinct educational focus in any new structures, the need to maintain the educational identity and visibility of educational welfare services as distinctly different from child protection services in the minds of parents, students and schools. The NEWB identifies risks to the considerable progress being made in the integration of the Educational Welfare Service, Home School Community Liaison and School Completion Programme – "One Child, One Team, One

Plan”; and it sets out its advice as to the issues that need to be addressed in any structural change process.

The Review Group has considered too, the rationale put forward by the Task Force on the Child and Family Support Agency for its recommendation to the Minister for DCYA that the NEWB should transfer to the CFSA on establishment day. The Task Force argues that education is a key enabler to help children enjoy their childhood, realise their full potential and make a valued contribution to the economic, social and cultural life of their community. The Task Force cites how non-attendance at school is a strong indicator of overall child welfare and a determinant of education outcomes; and how the functions of the NEWB are crucial to the capacity of the Child and Family Support Agency to deliver on its mandate in terms of prevention and early intervention.

The Review Group has reviewed the information submitted and accepts the arguments of these expert bodies. It has not recommended one option for the future of the NEWB over the other. The Review Group takes the view that the decision as to the future of the NEWB is a matter for the Minister Children and Youth Affairs and the Government. The decision will be made in the context of wider Government policy for children and young people, family support, education and the public service reform programme to achieve optimal structures for the delivery of citizen centred services. The findings of the critical review of the NEWB undertaken by the Review Group are intended to inform the decision making process of the Minister and the Government in this matter.

The Review Group does consider that the merger of the NEWB into the CFSA, if favoured by Government, is workable so long as key legislative, governance and operational arrangements are put in place. In particular, a strong legislative basis for the education function should be maintained; governance and operational arrangements must provide for strong oversight and management of a dedicated educational welfare programme within the agency. These arrangements should also facilitate continuation and strengthening of the relationship with schools and the education sector generally.

The Review Group has documented its assessment of the arguments put to it ‘for’ and ‘against’ a proposal for the integration of the NEWB with the proposed CFSA. It has identified the issues that need to be addressed in an integration process and it has set out the actions that need to be taken to ensure that the core policy objectives with regard to children’s educational welfare and overall wellbeing continue to drive child welfare and education policy in any future reconfiguration of the NEWB and the services it provides. These are summarized in Table 1.1.

9. Summary of the Review Conclusions on key consideration and suggested actions if Government decides to integrate the NEWB with CFSA.

This section sets out the Review Groups conclusions on the key considerations which emerged from the critical review of the National Educational Welfare Board in the context of the establishment of the Child and Family Support Agency. It also sets out the suggested actions that will be required to meet those considerations in the event that the government decides that the national Educational Welfare Board and its functions should be integrated into the Child and Family Support Agency.

In the main the actions suggested relate to securing an enhanced focus on children’s educational welfare with the new integrated structures. Actions concerning enhanced governance and achievement of its core policy objectives are also suggested.

Table 1.1

Considerations	Outcome of Deliberations	Action Required
<i>Statutory Functions and Governance</i>		
The Education (Welfare) Act provides Legal Protection for a Child’s right to an education	The statutory powers provided to an Educational Welfare Officer are fundamental to protect the child’s right to an education.	The provisions of the Educational (Welfare) Act will need to be reviewed in the context of developing the legal framework for the CFSA. The legislative framework for the CFSA will need to be cognisant of the public policy objectives which motivated the introduction of the Education (Welfare) Act.
The Education (Welfare) Act provides power to vindicate the child’s right to an education through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The creation of an 	Certain aspects of the Education (Welfare) Act are essential to vindicate a child’s right to an education including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Placing certain obligations with regard to a child’s education on schools ▪ Assessing whether a minimum education is being 	The provisions of the Educational (Welfare) Act will need to be reviewed in the context of developing the legal framework for the CFSA. The legislative framework for the CFSA will need to be

<p>Education Welfare Officer with attendant powers</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ The power to evaluate and register whether a child is receiving a minimum education ▪ To provide for a register of 16-17 year olds who move into employment after compulsory schooling finishes 	<p>provided</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ Promoting a school environment conducive to attendance 	<p>cognisant of the public policy objectives which motivated the introduction of the Education (Welfare) Act.</p>
<p>The Act creates a Board with 13 members (12 ordinary and one Chairperson)</p>	<p>The necessity for a separate Educational Welfare Board to provide oversight of the responsibilities under the Act is not proven and could with suitable recognition of the Agency’s educational remit be incorporated within the overall governance structures for the new agency.</p>	<p>The provisions of the Educational (Welfare) Act will need to be reviewed in the context of developing the legal framework for the CFSA.</p>
<p><i>Citizen Focus</i></p>		
<p>The potential impact on Educational Outcomes posed by integration with the CSFA and/or of the need to provide for a distinct advocacy remit to support a child’s right to an education as an essential component of a wider set of child wellbeing outcomes.</p>	<p>The Educational Welfare Service would be enhanced through in-house links with other child and family supports. In addition, integrated educational welfare services (“One Child, One Team, One Plan”) has significant contributions to make to both education and child development outcomes as part of the continuum of supports envisaged by the CFSA</p> <p>Co-location of educational and general welfare functions would enhance provision in both respects through coordination of services.</p>	<p>The organisation design of the CFSA will need to delineate in a transparent way the leadership, operational management and resources related to the educational welfare services. The design of the CFSA will need to encompass:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leadership and management responsibilities for educational welfare services • Appropriate and transparent reporting commitments in relation to the educational welfare services.

		The legislative framework and service design plan of the CSFA will need to be cognisant of the public policy objectives that motivated the introduction of the Education Welfare Act.
Potential distancing of child and educational welfare objectives from social inclusion and/or anti-poverty policies including the DEIS Action Plan for Educational Inclusion.	The merger has potential for additional opportunities for early intervention and measures to enhance both child welfare development and educational objectives e.g. health and educational outcomes	Formal mechanisms will be put in place to align the policy roles of DCYA/CFSA in relation to addressing educational disadvantage with the DES. The planning process from the CFSA will need to identify the potential risks arising from the integration of educational welfare within the CFSA.
<p>The ability of the NEWB services to function effectively resides in part in its connection and understanding of the education system. It emerges from relationships with schools, school communities and parents which are founded on highly valued partnerships and processes</p> <p>Inclusion within the CFSA needs to take account of well-established links with educational bodies including:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ▪ National Council for Special Education ▪ National Educational Psychological Service ▪ National Council for Curriculum Assessment. 	This is an important consideration within the NEWB's current consideration and would assume added importance in the context of a merger. Viable leadership would be needed in promoting such partnerships on the part of the DCYA and the CFSA, together with support from the DES and educational stakeholders.	<p>The governance arrangements for the CFSA will need to include a focus on educational welfare and mechanisms to ensure that key educational stakeholders can inform the direction of the educational welfare services</p> <p>The planning process for the formation of the CSFA will be cognisant of the need to maintain the educational identity and visibility of educational welfare services as uniquely distinct from child protection services in the minds of parents, students and schools</p>

<i>Performance</i>		
<p>NEWB services perform a specialised function from a specific skill set.</p> <p>Falling staff resources within the context of the Employment Control Framework and public service reforms reduce the overall capacity of the NEWB.</p>	<p>Positioning the EWS within the CSFA would facilitate developmental opportunities, exchange of information and sharing of skills with other children's services.</p> <p>The HR resources within the EWS would need to be preserved within a potentially merged service.</p>	<p>The HR strategies for the CFSA will need to address the staffing requirements for the provision of educational welfare services</p> <p>The organisation design of the CFSA will need to delineate in a transparent way the resources related to the educational welfare services and encompass:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leadership and management responsibilities for educational welfare services • appropriate and transparent reporting commitments in relation to the educational welfare services
<p>The various employment and managerial relationships throughout the EWS, the SCP and the HSCL are complex.</p>	<p>The HR strategy for the CSFA should give priority consideration to the HR context for delivery of educational services including roles, responsibilities and reporting arrangements.</p>	<p>The governance and service delivery plans need to clearly delineate the appropriate authorities and roles with regard to the three strands of the educational welfare services (EWS, SCP and HSCL)</p>
<p>Focus on disadvantage</p>	<p>The roles and responsibilities within the SCP and HSCL programmes must be considered in the context of the DEIS Action Plan to ensure commitments under that plan are maintained.</p>	<p>Formal mechanisms will be needed in relation to the role of educational welfare services in addressing educational disadvantage including the policy objectives of the Department of Education and Skills and other bodies.</p>

<p>Maximisation of the contribution of staff available within the employment control framework toward the provision of front line services</p>	<p>A combined administrative and corporate support structure within a potentially merged service may serve to mitigate the effects of the moratorium.</p> <p>A single point of contact for other agencies and within a single structure would enhance the performance of certain functions.</p>	<p>An assessment of corporate structures arising from the inclusion of educational welfare services will be required as part of the overall analysis of corporate requirements within the CSFA</p>
<p>The structure and direction of educational welfare services is provided through a dedicated national leadership giving policy direction and strategic management to the EWS, HSCL and SCP.</p> <p>The Task Force report noted that HSCL staff should continue to be employed by their school</p>	<p>The clear educational identity should continue to be expressed through National leadership and clear focus on educational welfare outcomes retained within any wider agency remit.</p>	<p>The organisation design of the CFSA will need to delineate in a transparent way:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • leadership and management responsibilities for educational welfare services • appropriate and transparent reporting commitments in relation to the educational welfare services • Mechanisms to foster partnership and collaboration
<p>Community Support</p>	<p>The proposed merger of the CSFA would potentially allow access by the Educational Welfare Services to broader community support structures such as the CFSA funded voluntary providers and family resource centres</p>	<p>The CFSA service level agreement process should incorporate provision for such interactions.</p>
<p><i>Operational Structures and Cost benefit</i></p>		
<p>The proposed CSFA and the existing NEWB would necessitate duplicate functions given the need to maintain a local HR, Finance and Administrative structure within each organisation.</p>	<p>Economies of Scale and savings would be achieved through the development of will have single corporate functions</p>	<p>An assessment of corporate supports required arising from the inclusion of educational welfare services will need to be undertaken as part of the overall analysis of corporate requirements for the CSFA</p>

<p>Educational Expertise would be valuable within the CSFA</p>	<p>The presence of a dedicated educational function would add value for the CFSA and avoid any necessity to develop a separate expertise in this area.</p>	
<p>The NEWB staff are currently located in offices throughout the country including a number who are located with other educational services</p>	<p>Co-location of staff holds the potential for greater efficiency. It is noted that educational welfare services may be co-located with other educational services and there is a good case for maintaining such arrangements to promote educational linkages.</p>	<p>Co-location must be considered as part of the service design plan for the CFSA in the context of other localised functions and needs in addition to the value of the current collocations with services under the remit of the Department of Education and Skills</p>

10. Conclusion

The above analysis and recommendations are intended to support the Minister in her decision making regarding the further of the NEWB. Key considerations have been identified which will require attention in whatever organisational format is given to educational welfare services. Certain of these issues can be addressed, if considered appropriate, in legislation establishing the new agency while other issues are operational in nature and will need ongoing management and review.

The review group is conscious that significant change is underway within the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and its agencies and a decision to merge the NEWB as a programme within the CFSA would involve further change following the transfer of the Board from the Department of Children and Skills to the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. The implications for staff are appreciated by the group as is the strong track record of commitment to collaborative working to achieve improved outcomes for children which is the overriding objective of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and its agencies.

Appendix 1 Guiding Principles for agency rationalisation

The Government, in its decision of 15 November 2011, adopted guiding principles for agency rationalisation. These form the criteria on which the review of the each proposed rationalisation is to be conducted. It is structured around the criteria agreed by Government, and addresses each in turn.

The guiding principles as agreed by Government are:

1. **Citizen focus:** The relationship between citizens and the State is the key relationship in any democratic society. Proposals should respect and enhance this relationship, in particular by ensuring that bodies are designed to deliver quality public services, and to contribute effectively to the business of public administration whether directly or via their parent Department.
2. **Policy formulation:** In the Irish system of public administration, Government Departments are and should be the primary locus of public policy formulation, evaluation and analysis. Policy evaluation and advisory functions should not, as a general rule, be carried on by external State-funded bodies. Specialist advice and consultancy may be availed of from time to time by Government Departments, subject to the tightened Government strictures on the budgets for external consultancies.
3. **Clear democratic and/or cost benefit:** Merging and restructuring of bodies should have a clear and demonstrable benefit in terms of delivering greater democratic control, improved service delivery and/or real cash savings.
4. **Specialist bodies:** Decisions should take into account whether it is appropriate that a separate agency carry out particular functions in areas where specialist skills may be required, and where independence in the performance of functions requires functional separation from Government Departments.
5. **Streamlining:** Decisions should be cognisant of duplication, overlapping and similarities of functions and roles of bodies, and the synergies from bringing together separate bodies within cognate areas.
6. **Service sharing:** Even where bodies should remain separate from one another, or from a 'parent' Department, the possibility of sharing services, including back-office functions, should be explored to the maximum extent possible.
7. **Agency life cycle:** Government should consider on a regular basis whether the goal for which an Agency was originally established has been achieved (or has been found to be unachievable) and whether the original objective remains relevant today having regard to developments in society, changes in Government priorities, and the much more limited availability of resources.

8. **Performance focus:** Citizens are entitled to expect that every State agency has a clear mandate, clear benchmarks for the level of services that they are expected to deliver with their resources, and an appropriate governance structure that delivers accountability for results and performance.
9. **Respect for staff interests:** Finally, in relation to the staff employed in the various bodies, the Government will abide by the commitments given in the Croke Park Agreement in considering and implementing specific agency rationalisation proposals, subject to the necessary flexibilities, in particular on redeployment, being delivered.

The most relevant principles for the purposes of this review include citizen focus; clear democratic and or cost/benefit; streamlining; performance focus and respect for staff interests.

Appendix 2 Rationalisation of State Agencies / Bodies

- The Programme for Government states that Public Service Reform will require a commitment from the whole of government to become more transparent, accountable and efficient. The radical streamlining of State Bodies will be a key deliverable of the reform programme.
- The Government believes that real benefit will come from a less crowded administrative landscape resulting in greater democratic accountability, less duplication of effort and clearer lines of responsibility for citizens.
- The Public Service Agreement 2010-14 (Croke Park Agreement) gives a commitment that compulsory redundancy will not apply in the Public Service (save where existing exit provisions apply). The Agreement also sets out the redeployment arrangements that will apply under this programme, if required.
- The Government is proposing to:
 - (i) press ahead resolutely with the rationalisation and reduction of State Bodies;
 - (ii) introduce “sunset clauses” when new Bodies are created;
 - (iii) have annual reviews on the continuing business case for all significant State Bodies;
 - (iv) Set a requirement for robust Service Level Agreements between Departments and State Bodies.
- Today the Government has demonstrated its commitment to reform and the pursuit of efficiencies by:
 - Deciding to proceed with the rationalisation of **48** Bodies by the end of 2012; and,
 - Nominating another **46** Bodies for critical review by the end of June 2012.
- These measures can be expected to deliver enhanced service efficiencies and a more focused and democratically accountable Public Service.
- The Government also recognises that Shared Services have the potential to transform the competitiveness of State Bodies, and will actively pursue this issue. Sharing of back-office administrative functions, e.g. HR, payroll, procurement etc. and other services will offer significant long term savings in the operation of State Bodies generally.
- The Government will insist on robust Service Level Agreements between parent Departments and State Bodies being put in place. These agreements will focus on outputs, accountability and efficiencies.

- From now on, all Departments must continually assess the business case for the State Bodies under their aegis.
- In the future, legislation to create a new State Body must include a “sunset clause” ensuring the Body will cease to exist after a predetermined date unless the Body’s mandate is specifically renewed.

The Government is determined that all State Bodies be fit for purpose.

Appendix 3 Report of the Special Group on Public Service Numbers and Expenditure Programmes (excerpt)

“E.3 Absorb National Education Welfare Board (NEWB) into D/E&S

The *National Education Welfare Board* (NEWB) is the national body responsible for school attendance. It employs up to 90 service delivery staff around the country to support school attendance and to discharge the NEWB’s functions locally. The Group considers that the work of the NEWB is central to the mission of the D/E&S and should be more closely aligned with the Department. There is scope for the NEWB to work more closely with other units within D/E&S such as the NEPS, the Social Inclusion Unit and other staff working on educational disadvantage Programmes, particularly on a regional basis. Therefore, the Group recommends that the NEWB be absorbed into the D/E&S. This measure should also lead to efficiencies in board membership fees, professional fees and support costs which are estimated to save €0.5m a year.”

Appendix 4 The review group went on to consider the following questions in this regard².

- a) Are there specific legislative functions that require the current stand alone status of the National Educational Welfare Board to be maintained?
- b) Could the statutory functions of the NEWB be better or more effectively carried out within the Child and Family Support Agency? The provisions of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 which need to be considered include, inter alia, the NEWB's remit to:
- Ensure every child of compulsory school age is attending school or in receipt of an education.
 - Prosecute parents who fail to comply with requirements of the Act to ensure that their child receives an education
 - Assess provision and register children in receipt of an education outside the recognised school system
 - Establish training plans and register young people who leave school to go into the world of work after compulsory school finishes.
 - Carry out research into non-attendance at school and disseminating findings
 - Gather attendance data from all recognized schools.
 - Advise and support schools to develop attendance and behavioural strategies
 - Assist families to secure an education placement including support around issues of enrolment, suspension, and exclusion and providing assistance through the Section 29 appeals process under the Education Act, 1998
- (Citizen Focus, Performance Focus, Streamlining, Clear Democratic and/or cost benefit)*
- c) Can the associated operational and back-office support functions of the NEWB be better and more effectively carried out by the Child and Family Support Agency? Could integration and consolidation within a single agency achieve economies of scale and deliver efficiencies in these areas?
(Streamlining, Clear Democratic and/or cost benefit, Service Sharing)
- d) Are the proposed Governance and Organisational structures of the new CFSA compatible with delivering on the remit of the NEWB? In particular, can a new agency provide the required national leadership and policy direction to ensure a coherent and consistent approach to local delivery of supports for vulnerable children and families?
(Clear Democratic and/or cost benefit, Streamlining, Performance Focus)
- e) Can the additional functions of the NEWB arising from its extended remit be carried out by the Child and Family Support Agency? These being to
-

- Oversee the strategic management of the Home School Community Liaison Service, and
- Provide strategic management, support and direction to the School Completion Programme

Within the context of a strategic national approach to attendance, participation and retention in schools. (*Streamlining, Cost benefit*)

- f) Can the objectives of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 be achieved or enhanced by the Child and Family Support Agency in the context of the broader wellbeing focus of that agency and the potential merger of Educational Welfare functions as a strand within the Child and Family Support Agency? Would a merger provide additional opportunities for early intervention and a prevention focus? (*Citizen Focus*)
- g) Would a potentially merged service bring about greater collaboration and coordination of activities across the educational welfare and the child protection/family support services as suggested in the Report of the Independent Child Death Review Group? (*Streamlining, Performance Focus, Citizen Focus*)
- h) Given the potential for enhanced coordination of services within a single entity, would a potentially merged service better meet the needs of children, families, schools and communities, particularly those at risk. (*Streamlining, Performance Focus, Citizen Focus*)
- i) Is the current model of integrated service within the NEWB (“One Child, One Team, One Plan”), which aims to provide a continuum of interaction on a referral basis, compatible with the service frameworks under consideration within the CFSA. (*Citizen focus and streamlining*)
- j) Are there potential shared outcome measures for children, families and schools within the services of the NEWB and those envisaged for the new Child and Family Support Agency? Could achievement (and assessment) of these outcomes be improved through greater collaboration of services within a unified shared structure?
- k) How would engagement with the schools, school communities and education stakeholders be impacted by the integration of the Board’s functions within an organisation with a broader remit? How could any such risk be effectively managed? (*Streamlining, Performance Focus*)
- l) How would existing inter-agency and inter-sectoral linkages and dependencies be maintained and built upon in a potentially merged structure involving the NEWB functions? Such agencies include:

- The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
- The National Council for Special Education
- The Health Service Executive
- The Department of Education and Skills
- DES Inspectorate
- Vocational Education Committees
- An Garda Síochána
- National Youth Work Advisory Committee
- Local Community and Voluntary Groups

(Performance Focus)

- m) How would a potentially merged service continue to support the delivery of the Department of Education and Skills' programme, "*Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS)*" programme to schools targeted by that plan; particularly in the context of the Home School Community Liaison Service and School Completion Programme strands which form core elements of the School Support Programme within DEIS? (*Streamlining, Performance Focus, Citizen Focus*)
- n) Would a potentially merged service result in the enhancement or a diminution of the availability of the specialised staff skill set which exists within the NEWB? (*Citizen focus, Respect for Staff Interests*)
- o) Would any element of a potential merged service run contrary to any commitments given in the Croke Park Agreement? (*Respect for Staff Interests*)
- p) *Any other key considerations not covered above*

Appendix 5 - Child and Family Support Agency Background Information

Background

The Programme for Government gave an undertaking to “*fundamentally reform the delivery of child protection services by removing child welfare and protection from the HSE and creating a dedicated Child Welfare and Protection Agency, reforming the model of service delivery and improving accountability to the Dáil*”. Following on from this commitment, the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs set up the Task Force for the Establishment of a Child & Family Support Services Agency (CFSA). The Task Force was asked to advise her Department in regard to the necessary transition programme to establish a Child & Family Support Services Agency, and to base its work on best practice in child welfare, family support and public administration.

Work of the Task Force

The Task Force commenced its work in September last. A project team was established to assist the Task Force in its work. Chaired by the Department this included nominees from the HSE Child and Families team; the Family Support Agency and the Centre for Effective Services. This integrated approach allowed for the full incorporation of existing change and reform programmes in the project plan of the Task Force and to ensure no duplication of work strands. This also allowed the Task Force to focus its work around a number of key areas including:-

- A vision and principles for the new Agency
- Governance arrangements
- Organisational Design
- Scope of Services
- Model of Service Delivery

The Task Force prepared an initial report for the Minister regarding a vision and governance arrangements. **A final Report including these and further recommendations in each of the areas listed above has now been received by the Minister.**

Content of the Report

The Report contains a number of recommendations which take a wide-ranging view of the current difficulties being experienced in the successful delivery of safe and effective services for children and families who need a wide continuum of supports and intervention. There is little doubt that the Task Force was particularly mindful of issues raised in a number of reports relating to child protection services and the consistent

themes emerging regarding the need for a more integrated approach to meeting the needs of certain families. Many of these issues were highlighted again in the context of the recent Report of the Independent Child Death Review Group.

The final report of the Task Force was launched on Friday 20th July.

Current Position

- The Minister is currently reviewing all of the recommendations of the Task Force in conjunction with her officials.
- It is proposed that the Agency will assume full statutory responsibility for services for children and families early in 2013.

Other HSE reforms

The commitment to establish a new Child and Family Support Agency is at the heart of the Government's reform of child and family services. The establishment of a single agency underpinned by legislation and incorporating key children and family services, will provide a focus for the major reforms already underway. This reform programme contains a number of critical elements:

- The continued and urgent implementation of a comprehensive change programme to improve the quality and consistency of child welfare and protection services;
- The introduction of legislation to place Children First on a statutory basis;
- The establishment for the first time of a dedicated budget for children and family services, providing transparency and accountability for the use of resources to meet national priorities;
- The transition of existing HSE child protection and welfare and services into the new Agency;
- The merger of the existing Family Support Agency with a budget of over €26 million into the Child and Family Support Agency;

Consideration of the potential for further rationalisation of services for children under the new Agency.

Findings of the Task Force (Extract)

10. National Education and Welfare Board

Description of the Service

The National Educational Welfare Board (NEWB) was established in 2002 under the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000, a progressive piece of legislation that emphasises the promotion of school attendance, participation and retention. In June 2011, the functions of the National Educational Welfare Board transferred to Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

The various strands of the NEWB are the School Completion Programme (SCP), the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCL) and the Educational Welfare Service (EWS).

• School Completion Programme

The School Completion programme (SCP) is targeted at young people between the ages of four and 18 years who are at risk of early school leaving. The SCP is mainly aligned to DEIS schools but there are also a number of non-DEIS schools that also benefit from the service. The objective of the SCP is to provide a range of interventions and supports including breakfast clubs, mentoring programmes, counselling and other out of school initiatives.

• Home School Community Liaison Programme

The Home School Community Liaison programme (HSCL) is a school-based preventative strategy that is targeted at pupils who are at risk of not reaching their potential in the educational system. The underlying policy of the scheme is one that seeks to promote partnership between parents and teachers. The purpose of this partnership is to enhance pupils' learning opportunities and to promote their retention in the education system. It focuses directly on the adults in children's educational lives and seeks indirect benefits for the children themselves. It involves the designation of teachers in schools who take the lead in this work. The two main elements of the programme are:

1. Building partnerships between parents and teachers in the interests of children's learning (home visits, courses, encouraging parental involvement with school)
2. Working with staff in schools to develop / encourage partnership with parents

• Educational Welfare Service

The Educational Welfare Service operates through five regional teams, each of which is headed by a regional manager who leads a number of senior educational welfare officers, who in turn manage a team of educational welfare officers (EWOs). EWOs are located in the most disadvantaged areas and they prioritise children who are out of school and who have no school place. The Educational Welfare Service gives priority to children attending DEIS schools. The Department of Education's DEIS (Delivering Equality of

Opportunity in Schools) initiative is designed to ensure that the most disadvantaged schools benefit from a range of supports, while ensuring that other schools continue to get support in line with the level of disadvantage among their pupils.

Data on the Service

School Completion Programme

The SCP is overseen by a National Coordination Team who advise, monitor and support the local projects and retain oversight of the area-based retention plans. In 2009 there were 124 local projects employing 251 full time project staff and 3,400 sessional and part-time staff. Each of the 124 local SCP projects has a management committee with representatives of the schools principals, HSCL, parents, local community which manages the direction of the project and the use of resources.

Home School Community Liaison Programme

The service is co-ordinated by a National Team comprising three national coordinators who provide leadership, direction, training development and coordination to the 450 Local HSCL coordinators who are employed in DEIS (Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools), primary and second level schools around the country. All members of HSCL are teachers.

Educational Welfare Service

The NEWB's educational welfare service was provided from 31 locations nationwide in 2009, and 90 members of staff are directly involved in service delivery. The Board has currently 109 sanctioned posts.

Task Force Recommendation

The NEWB should transfer to the CFSA. Subject to legislation, budget responsibility should transfer from establishment day.

The home school liaison officers should continue to be employed by their schools. However, the CFSA should be provided with an additional budget resource allocation to allow for the commissioning / purchase of HSLO services.

Rationale

- Education is a key enabler to help children enjoy their childhood, realise their full potential and make a valued contribution to the economic, social and cultural life of their community.
- Non-attendance at school is a strong indicator of overall child welfare and a determinant of education outcomes. Therefore the functions of the NEWB and its three strands are critical to the work of the Agency, as this service frequently represents the first opportunity for prevention and early intervention in a child's life.

- High levels of absenteeism can lead to poor achievement and poor educational outcomes. Children who leave school early tend not to reengage with education subsequently and therefore remain at a disadvantage throughout their lives. The costs to the State and society can include an increased risk of involvement in antisocial behaviour and crime, and poorer physical and mental health. Maintaining school attendance for children and young people is therefore crucial.
- The focus on educational welfare, as one of the key outcomes for children, should be retained in the transfer.

Potential Alternative

NEWB remains under the remit of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs.

Implications of No Change

International best practice indicates that the best outcomes for at risk children are achieved through multidisciplinary working with high levels of communication, collaboration and integration. If the functions of the NEWB do not transfer to the CFSA, the vision for the new agency will be compromised, diminishing the capacity of the agency to deliver on its mandate in terms of prevention and early intervention.

Appendix 6 - NEWB Position Paper

REVIEW OF THE NATIONAL EDUCATIONAL WELFARE BOARD IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ESTABLISHMENT OF THE CHILD AND FAMILY SUPPORT AGENCY

The purpose of this paper is to provide the Working Group with the views and advices of the Board of NEWB regarding the future structures for delivering on the statutory remit of the Board, under the auspices of the DCYA. In offering these views and advices, the Board, as the governance group for the NEWB, is focused on the best ways of securing the educational wellbeing of children, as provided for in the Education (Welfare) Act 2000. The Board fully shares and supports the DCYA and CFSA vision for children and endorses the unequivocal commitment to achieving best outcomes for children and young people.

The Board is of the view that the choice of the best option or options for locating the work and responsibilities of NEWB within the ambit of the DCYA structures should be guided by the following child centred considerations:

- To ensure that the public policy objectives that motivated the introduction of the Education Welfare Act and the setting up of the Board continue to be addressed;
- To maintain the strengths of the NEWB and its services for children, families and schools alongside the benefits for children's learning and educational wellbeing to be achieved from being part of a universal and targeted/tailored network of services for children;
- To manage and minimise any risk to existing service quality and quantum.

The views of the Board, are, of necessity and appropriately, coming from the perspective of wanting to ensure that the educational welfare focus in the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 and in the Board's statutory functions is explicitly embedded in any new structures. The Board will make that case strongly. Equally, the views that are expressed must be taken in the context that there can be no change to the Board, or its functions, unless and until the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 has been repealed and a new statute put in its place. However, there is no essential tension between an educational welfare focus and a wider child wellbeing focus; the Education Welfare Act envisaged active collaboration with agencies whose remit impacted on children's educational outcomes and the Board's services have long been involved in developing collaboration with agencies (HSE in particular) to secure multidisciplinary approaches to addressing the issues of children at serious risk of dropping out of school or experiencing educational failure. The Board naturally welcomes the added scope that new structures can provide to put that collaboration on a strong formal footing.

The Board's views and advices are provided in relation to the following matters:

- The public policy focus of the Education (Welfare) Act 2000
- The role of NEWB services in addressing educational disadvantage
- The educational functions and identity of NEWB
- Service redesign and implementation
- Funding

THE PUBLIC POLICY FOCUS OF THE EDUCATION (WELFARE) ACT, 2000

The Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 gives effect to constitutional provisions for the right of every child in relation to education; it gives statutory effect to the requirement for children's attendance at school or at an approved educational setting. The Act repealed the 1926 legislation on school attendance and radically altered the approach, from one based on penalties to one focused on identifying children and young people who have, or who in the future may have, school attendance difficulties and addressing their needs both in their schools and their communities. In what was generally regarded as very forward looking and child-centred legislation, the Act provides for a continuum of support for attendance and education, from the universal level of promoting education, influencing and advising on education policy, to interventions with chronic non-attendance.

- *Promoting and fostering an environment that encourages children to attend school and participate in school life (s10)*
- *Assisting recognised schools in so far as is practicable to meet their obligations under this Act,*
- *Providing advice and assistance to parents of children with attendance difficulties (s10)*
- *Supporting, monitoring and assessing the effectiveness of strategies and programmes to prevent non-attendance in recognised schools (s10)*
- *Issuing guidelines to Boards of Management of recognised schools for the preparation of school attendance strategies (s22)*
- *Issuing guidelines to Boards of Management of recognised schools for the preparation of Codes of Behaviour (s23)*
- *Taking action to ensure that the activities and policies of the different bodies and services with responsibility for attendance, retention and participation are coordinated and consistent (s12)*
- *NEWB shall establish a register of all children in receipt of education in a place other than a recognised school (s14)*
- *Boards of Management are obliged to submit an annual report on the levels of attendance at the school to the NEWB (s21)*
- *NEWB must be informed in writing by the principal where:*

- *a student is suspended for 6 days or more;*
 - *a student is absent for an aggregate of 20 school days or more in a school year;*
 - *a student is struck off from the school register; or*
 - *where, in the opinion of the principal, the student is not attending regularly.*
- *A student shall not be expelled from a school before the passing of 20 school days following the receipt of notification by the EWO (s24)*

The Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 represents a core element of the State’s response to the research evidence that poor attendance at school and early school leaving significantly diminish young people’s life chances. Poor attendance is associated with poor educational and labour market outcomes among young people; those with poor attendance records are more likely to drop out of school and even when remaining in school are much more likely to do worse in examinations than peers (ESRI, 2007); early school leavers represent a significant cost to the state and this cost is now likely to be higher given recent CSO data on the escalating levels of youth unemployment. The public policy goals underpinning the Education Welfare Act and NEWB will need to be carefully and meticulously aligned with the policy goals and work of DCYA so as to ensure that these are mutually supportive and that one set of objectives reinforces the other.

There must be absolute clarity regarding the **current statutory duties** placed upon NEWB. These duties relate to defined responsibilities to government, parents, schools and service provision, key public policy objectives and constitutional rights of children and parents. In terms of new organizational structures, unless and until there is either a change to primary legislation NEWB must continue to meet its statutory responsibilities regardless of location.

THE ROLE OF NEWB SERVICES IN ADDRESSING EDUCATIONAL DISADVANTAGE

NEWB’s integrated services of the Education Welfare Service (EWS), Home School Community Liaison (HSCL) and the School Completion Programme (SCP) are a core part of the state’s response to educational disadvantage, firmly located within the framework of the Department of Education and Skills DEIS (*Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools*) programme. Three reports³ arising from research in DEIS

3

A Report on the First Phase of the Evaluation of DEIS, Susan Weir and Peter Archer, ERC, 2011
www.erc.ie

• *An Evaluation of Planning Processes in DEIS Primary Schools*, Inspectorate, DES, 2011
www.education.ie

schools, undertaken separately and independently by the Educational Research Centre and the Inspectorate, have been published recently and conclude that “There is clear evidence that the DEIS programme is having a positive effect on tackling educational disadvantage”.

The work of NEWB services (in particular HSCL & SCP) in DEIS schools is linked to DEIS planning frameworks and school self-evaluation/ planning processes. School principals and local committees play a central role in local planning and resource management. A significant organisational challenge falls to be addressed when the policy framework for a critical area such as educational disadvantage is located in one government department while one essential service delivery arm of that policy is located in another government department, or, as in the case of HSCL, straddles both departments, and where contractual and funding arrangements lie in one department, and work practice arrangements in another. The need to align policy, priorities, strategies, and systems, including resource planning and management at local level in relation to educational disadvantage, will require extensive planning and strong formal systems of co-ordination at departmental level.

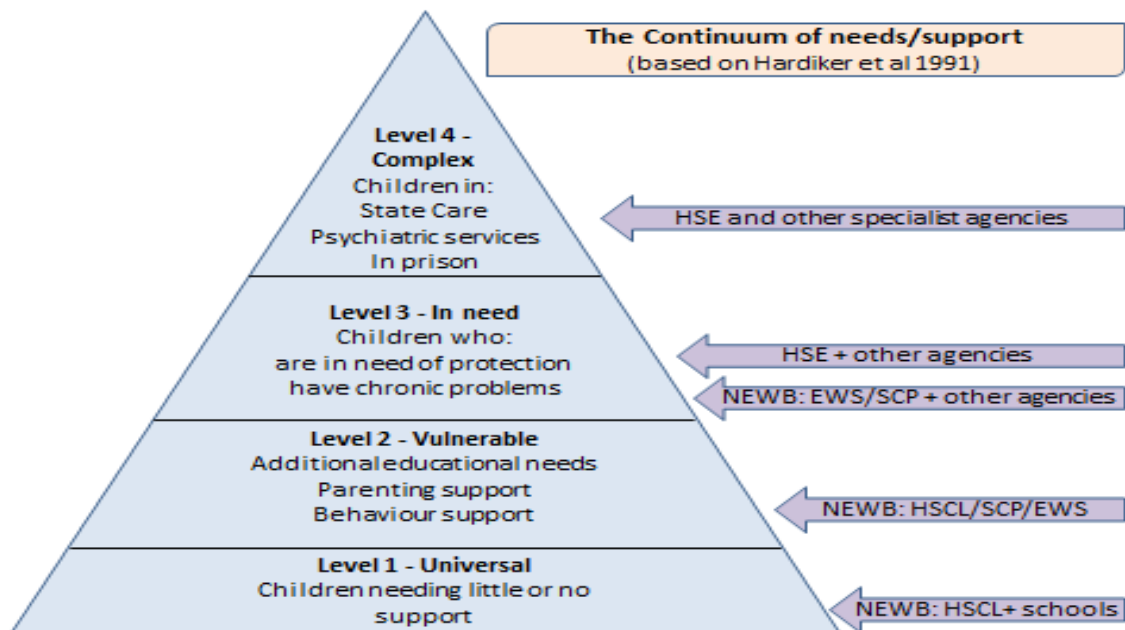
THE EDUCATIONAL FUNCTION AND IDENTITY OF NEWB

The educational focus of the work of NEWB is its clear *raison d'être*. The objectives of the service are to help to improve children's educational outcomes in the areas of school attendance and participation, and to ensure young people stay in school to complete the Leaving Certificate, in line with public policy on school retention. All of the functions of NEWB revolve around these objectives, including accessing a school place for a child where there has perhaps been a refusal to enrol, ensuring a proposed expulsion is notified and recorded as well as providing assistance in the case of a Section 29 Appeal, monitoring non-attendance and intervening where there is a concern, prosecution, ensuring transfer from primary to post-primary, accessing home tuition for a child who may be involved in a Section 29 process, assisting schools to fulfill their statutory remit in relation to school attendance monitoring & reporting and the registration of children who are in receipt of education in places other than recognised schools including the home and, in particular, the preventive and early intervention work of the integrated service. This direct work is supported by research, management of national data collection and provision of policy advice on educational matters. In this context it is critical to note that the NEWB is the only independent statutory body operating within the State with a unique remit to support the rights of **every** child to receive an education alongside statutory power of prosecution to uphold that right for the child. The research evidence clearly indicates that what happens in school has a powerful influence on the decisions children and their parents/guardians make about going to school, engaging in learning and staying on in school. School culture, organisation, curriculum, teacher-

• *An Evaluation of Planning Processes in DEIS Post-Primary Schools*, Inspectorate, DES, 2011
www.education.ie

student relationships are among the factors that influence how children and young people engage with learning and education. While these factors are well beyond the scope of NEWB to manage, it is very definitely part of the work of the board to influence, advocate, advise, support and challenge schools in these areas; the statutory duty of NEWB to provide guidance to schools in relation to codes of behaviour and school attendance strategies and the corresponding legal duties of schools in these matters are core influencing mechanisms, which operate at the critical universal level of engagement with attendance and retention. NEWB has worked assiduously to build its identity and credibility as an influencer with schools. It is essential to maintain the credibility and educational identity of the board's services into the future so as to maximise influence with schools. In the absence of strong capacity in this area, there is a real risk that the work of the integrated service will be concentrated on a very small number of children needing intensive multidisciplinary intervention with the potential loss of the essential scope for preventive work which influences a whole system. NEWB's work with schools in the most part emphasises the establishment and maintenance of close working relationships in order to build the capacity of all schools. Notably, the submission paper from the Department of Education and Skills to the Working Group highlighted the critical importance of the working relationship between the NEWB and schools to ensure positive outcomes. "Key to the effectiveness of the Board's work is its relationship with schools. The core way of ensuring educational welfare is by working with and through the school system to promote, support and demand change. This means building the capacity of schools to accommodate diversity and challenge."

A critical point to note is that NEWB only intervenes with individual children in order to maximise attendance, participation and retention. If none of these factors are an issue, other agencies will intervene without NEWB involvement. It is the focus on educational issues that distinguishes NEWB from other agencies and determines whether it contributes to service delivery. It is also worth noting that the variant of the Hardiker model in use in NEWB is one that applies to the board's specific remit; for example, the universal level of support includes reporting and monitoring of school attendance, helplines, information and research on attendance and participation, guidelines on attendance and codes of behaviour, advice on curriculum and teacher education, advice to government on policy, public awareness initiatives, advice to parents and schools relating to attendance and student behaviour (NEWB Strategic Plan, 2010-2011). It is clear that NEWB services principally intervene and support families at levels 1 and 2 and at the bottom end of level 3. Targeted intervention at level 4 of the adjusted Hardiker model below relates to direct work with individual children with chronic attendance issues, expulsion etc that require intensive intervention.



In the Board's experience, it is abundantly clear that for some children with chronic attendance problems, the root causes of the difficulty lies outside the scope of education services to address, and require a much more broadly based multidisciplinary approach. Our experience, borne out by recent large scale consultations with staff and schools and a dedicated review of the literature, is that intervention from mental health services, social work services and family support services can also be crucial at a preventive stage to address poor attendance and ensure children stay in school. These supports can be extremely difficult to secure. The model in use in other jurisdictions of 'the team around the school', (in addition to the team around the child) would be of enormous benefit to children, families and schools. Formal arrangements for multi-disciplinary team support for schools would represent an excellent outcome of engagement between CFSA and schools.

The critical relationship between NEWB and schools should be promoted and maintained, along with the partnership structures and arrangements that have been put in place over several years with management bodies, trade unions, and parent organisations. The very composition of the Board itself and various representative groups convened to advance particular pieces of work has ensured the cementing of these relationships and as a consequence the successful implementation of policy at local and national level.

This educational identity needs to be retained at all levels, and possibly extended to include new partners. In particular, consideration will need to be given to how parents and schools may respond to referral of children with poor attendance to the service, if there is any risk of conflation of the service in their minds with child protection services.

SERVICE REDESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION

NEWB's resources currently involve 67 Educational Welfare Officers and 3 Regional Managers) and a further 19 staff in management and administrative support work in

headquarters and at regional locations. The Board also has strategic and operational responsibility for 403 frontline HSCL co-coordinators, 250 full-time frontline SCP staff and several hundred frontline sessional SCP personnel which are overseen by 5 Service Managers in the Board.

Since 2009, NEWB has defined responsibility for the management, development and direction of the Home School Community Liaison Scheme and the School Completion Programme in addition to the Education Welfare Service. As directed by DES and reflected in a formal Memorandum of Understanding, the Board has been developing a **single strategic approach** to the governance, management and delivery of the integrated service.

The development of this single strategic approach involves a large scale, evidence informed change management programme. In designing the integrated model of service, the vision of NEWB is to provide excellent services through a *One Child One Team One Plan* approach. This will enable children to experience the NEWB services committed to “maximising student attendance, participation and retention” in a seamless way so that they can be assisted to take full advantage of the education system and, hopefully, reach their potential. Placing children at the heart of the work is our main core value embraced by each of the service strands individually and collectively as a unified support service to schools. The guiding values are in accord with those of DCYA as set out in the Statement of Strategy 2011 – 2014 (March 2012).

The Board approached the work of building an integrated education support service by ensuring it was informed by robust research evidence, clear policy direction and the practice experience of teachers, parents, students, service staff and communities. The research strands provided unequivocal triangulated evidence to support the integration of the three services into a unified practice structure. An integrated practice model, *One Child, One Team, One Plan* incorporating the three service strands will be implemented in the academic year 2012 / 2013. Practice Guidelines, Guidance for schools, an extensive Training the Trainers model of CPD are all virtually complete with the express intention of full implementation on 1 October 2012. The development of the integrated model of service, in which the school plays a central role, is at a critical phase. The introduction of the new service model will require dedicated management by NEWB personnel equipped to support implementation. The implementation strategy will involve on-going CDP, and the capture and use of learning and practice wisdom from the field as part of the Understand - Plan - Do - Review process over a period of time.

The significant investment in and progress towards integration needs to be maintained, managed and supported through the implementation stage in order to be embedded securely as part of service and school practice. Given the significant policy and organisational change NEWB has undergone in the last 3 years, a further restructuring of the NEWB within a new agency has the real potential to militate against speedy advance of the substantial work undertaken to date to integrate the service.

FUNDING

It will be essential that at a minimum, existing resources for the education welfare services are ring fenced in any future structures.

SUMMARY OF THE BOARD'S POSITION

The Board is of the view that there is considerable potential for the alignment of educational welfare provision with the activities of the new Agency and opportunities for better outcomes for children as a result. There is potential for stronger liaison between NEWB services and key services previously delivered by HSE and family support services; this is the case especially for the relatively small number of children needing intensive multidisciplinary support to ensure their retention in education, but also to strengthen support for schools at the level of prevention and early intervention. NEWB can bring benefits to child welfare and child protection work by ensuring that where school attendance or engagement problems are a flag for wider problems, that there are systematic ways of linking and referring to child welfare and protection services. Clarifying methods and points of entry to specialist services, with clear and consistent referral pathways will be welcomed by NEWB staff, given the connectivity between NEWB and other agencies when providing intensive support for children. The One Child, One Team, One Plan model being introduced by NEWB fits well with proposals for formal communication mechanisms between other agencies and social work services, clarity about thresholds for service delivery and structured approaches to assessment.

However, the Board has a high level of concern about potential risk to the current education focus of NEWB; those concerns relate to:

- The need to ensure that the overarching public policy objectives that are the subject of the Education (Welfare) Act, 2000 and the basis of the Board's statutory duties continue to be the subject of legislation, policy, strategy and structures, and that these are not in any way diluted;
- The need for formal mechanisms to align the policy roles of DCYA/CFSA and DES in relation to the role of NEWB services in addressing educational disadvantage;
- The need to maintain the **distinct educational focus** in any new structures at governance and senior management level and by having dedicated structures dealing with the educational remit of DCYA at local area management level; in this regard, the Board has a concern that the general scheme of structures provided in the report of the Task Force (page 24) does not list educational welfare as one of the areas of local accountability; this raises questions about how the universal educational focus will be maintained not only within the CFSA generally but also in area/ local management arrangements.

- The need to ring fence resources for educational welfare activities in the new structures;
- The need to maintain the educational identity and visibility of educational welfare services as uniquely distinct from child protection services in the minds of parents, students and schools;
- The need to maintain the momentum of the work on integrating NEWB's educational welfare services and avoid the risk that this work might be diluted or derailed in a wider integration process.
- The need for the Board to inform the process of transition at every level possible – including the proposed implementation team, the proposed governance structure, and at national, regional and local level.

Against the background of these concerns, the Board of NEWB has a clear preference for retaining the NEWB as a statutory agency under the auspices of DCYA, with strong and appropriate linkages and interface with the CFSA, and the necessary resources to fulfil the statutory obligations contained within the Education (Welfare) Act 2000.

The Board acknowledges the strong policy drive towards agency rationalisation and while there are some very pragmatic reasons for opting to subsume the NEWB into the new CFSA, it is almost certain that to do so would result in erosion of corporate capacity and constraints on the NEWB's statutory remit.

An alternative option to integration with CFSA would be to link the NEWB services with the early years' education work of DCYA, thus having a clear education dimension of the Department's work, alongside and appropriately linked to CFSA.

While not the Board's preference, in the event that NEWB services do become part of CFSA, it will be of paramount importance that this happens in a manner that addressed all the concerns outlined by the Board in this paper.

In terms of new organizational structures, unless and until there is either a change to primary legislation NEWB must continue to meet its statutory responsibilities regardless of location.

The Board is strongly of the view that the sequencing and timing of structural changes is of paramount importance in this major change initiative; the board proposes that NEWB services should continue under the auspices of the Board until the following tasks have been addressed:

- Review of how the statutory remit of NEWB and its public policy objectives are to be managed/maintained in the future;
- Formal agreement with DES as to the structures and strategies for aligning the overlapping policy, funding, strategic and practice arrangements for the commonly held response to educational disadvantage;

- Reasonable time frame to enable the integration of educational welfare services to be completed prior to being part of a wider integration process.

The Board would expect that a reasonable but explicit time frame be allocated to these tasks, following which the appropriate detailed structural arrangements for NEWB services should be determined.

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NEWB Staffing

Table 1 below outlines the current NEWB staffing position in 2011. In summary:

- In 2011 the NEWB counted 97 posts filled with 14 vacancies, before consideration of the 2011 ECF.
- In 2011, 62 EWOs were in place with 10 vacancies counted before consideration of the 2011 ECF.
- In 2012, there are 91 posts filled with a proposal from the NEWB to fill another 10 currently with this Department.
- In 2012, 57 EWOs are in place with a proposal to fill a further five EWO posts.

Table 1:

	Pre ECF Posts	2011 (ECF 110)	
		Vacancies	Staff
Regional Managers	5	1	4
SEWOs	13		13
EWOs	72	10	62
Clerical Officers	5	1	4
CEO	1		1
Directors	2	1	1
Finance Manager	1		1
IT Manager	1		1
HR Manager	1		1
Finance Admin HEO	1		1
IT Officer HEO	1		1
Facilities Manager HEO	1		1
Exec Admin HEO	1		1
Office Manager HEO	1	1	
HR Admin EO	1		1
School Returns EO	1		1
Finance CO	1		1
Research Manager SCP	1		1
Admin SCP	1		1
Communications Manager	1		
Director of Operations			
Legal Advisor			
Data Collection/Analysis			
Total	111	14	97
Communications Manager	1		
	112	14	98

NEWB Management Structures

Reconfiguration of the Integrated Service

The Board is in the process of re-configuring the three services, EWS, HSCL, and SCP nationwide and it is proposed that there will be 3 regions; the North, the South and the greater Dublin area.

NEWB and related services Expenditure overview

Annual Expenditure	NEWB*	SCP**	Schools Business Partnership***	Teen Parents Support Programme
2008	€10,085,000	€28,932,000	€195,000	€401,200
2009	€9,630,000	€31,000,000	€195,000	€401,200
2010	€8,695,000	€30,007,000	€245,000	€401,200
2011	€8,690,136	€28,542,205	€245,000	€401,200
2012 (Budget)	€9,622,000	€28,256,000	€245,000	€401,200

*The pay cost for HSCL Local and National Coordinators is met by the Department of Education and Skills. In 2011 this was estimated to be €25m.

**The figure for SCP includes funding to school cluster projects and related initiatives including the Schools Business Partnership and the Teen Parents Support Programme in the two succeeding columns.

***The School Business Partnership also receives Department funding to cover the cost of its seconded programme manager and matched funding from private sources.

Appendix 7 - DEIS Evaluation and Evidence Base

DEIS Evaluation

Evaluations to date demonstrate clear improvements in retention and attainment since the introduction of additional supports under DEIS. The available data demonstrates an important return on the State's investment and it is important to ensure that the scarce resources continue to be effectively targeted.

For example, the recently published second report on the evaluation of DEIS by the Education Research Centre shows that:

- When comparing the overall average reading in 2007 with its equivalent in 2010 urban schools revealed an overall improvement in average reading and maths achievement.
- The improvements are statistically significant at all grade levels in both English reading and maths.
- Improvements are greatest at lower grade levels, with the largest gain among 2nd class pupils progress appears most marked among pupils with lower levels of achievement.
- Positive change in achievement is most evident among junior grades.

In tandem with the ERC evaluation, the Inspectorate of the Department of Education and Skills carried out an evaluation on the effectiveness of planning and target setting in 18 primary and 18 post-primary DEIS schools. Among the recommendations of the Inspectorate's evaluation is that:

- A systematic planning process comprising target-setting, the implementation of appropriate strategies and interventions to achieve the targets set, the monitoring of progress and the review of targets in DEIS schools is necessary.
- The DEIS planning framework be made available to all schools to assist them in their school development planning and school self-evaluation processes.

With regard to collaborative working of HSCL and SCP, the report indicates:

- Positive engagement with education on the part of parents indicated positive levels of satisfaction in relation to the extent of their involvement in their children's education.
- The promotion of attendance.
- The development of effective transfer programmes with the majority of schools reporting 100% progression from primary to post primary.
- Strategies and interventions to facilitate and maintain optimal progression of pupils were found to be effective in almost all cases.

Research and Attendance Reporting-Analysis of School Attendance Data

The NEWB monitors levels of school attendance to provide baseline data and conducts research into the causes of non-attendance and the interventions which are in place to

addressing the issue. Each year all schools are required to submit four Student Absence Reports at intervals during the school year and under the Education (Welfare) Act 2000 schools are obliged to submit an annual attendance report to the National Educational Welfare Board on the levels of school attendance each year.

The Educational Research Centre (ERC) then produce a report which details the number of days lost through student absence, the number of students absent for 20 or more days each school year, the number of students expelled or suspended each year. This data is a benchmark for school attendance and now constitutes a national data base which can be used to monitor non-attendance, expulsion and suspension in all of the country's primary and post-primary schools.

The latest NEWB report on Analysis of School Attendance Data fro 2009/2010 was published in June 2012. Key findings of the report included,

- Figures for general non attendance are lower for 2009/10 compared to previous years.
- The percentage of student days lost through absence is running at just over 6% (11 school days per year) in primary schools and 8% (13 school days per year) in post primary schools.
- Rates of absence in DEIS schools are higher than in non DEIS schools with student absences over twenty days running at 30% compared to 15.3% in non DEIS schools.
- The report highlighted a scheme run by ten schools in the Dublin 8 area whereby a common policy was agreed between the schools and the NEWB regarding an integrated approach to attendance, participation and retention. The results proved impressive, absenteeism was reduced by 25% within these schools. Chronic absenteeism was reduced by 42%.

Appendix 8 – Extract from the Comprehensive Review of Expenditure with regard to the NEWB

The NEWB has installed new information and financial management systems to reduce costs through shared-services, cost effective procurement and maintenance opportunities, shared hosting services in the LGCSB and Revenue's Data Centre and is part of the Educational Agencies Shared Services Group which procures printing and auditing services and avails of government framework agreements to purchase IT, telephony and stationary items. The 2009 integration of services under the Board has achieved savings over €0.500m as well as facilitating a more strategic direction at local, regional and national level to improve targeting and measurement of educational outcomes for children at risk.