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OCO Panel of Experts 2026-2029

Title:	Establishment of a Panel of Investigation & Research Experts for the Ombudsman for Children’s Office (2026-2029)	
Description of Panel:		
<p>The establishment of this Panel of Experts for the Ombudsman for Children’s Office under Section 7, 8 and Section 9 of the Ombudsman for Children’s Act. There will be two lots for which experts can submit an Application Form for:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Investigation Services 2. Research Services 		
Key Dates:		
Issue Date	21/04/2026	
Closing Date/Time for Queries	01/05/2026 @12:00pm	
Closing Date/Time for Applications	15/05/2026 @12:00pm	
Contact for Queries: Tricia Keilthy		
Email : ocotenders@oco.ie		
Format for submission of Applications – use the Application Form provided ONLY and return via:		
VIA OCO Email - ocotenders@oco.ie		

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Part One: Overview of the OCO

1.1. The Contracting Authority

The Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) is a human rights institution that promotes the rights and welfare of young people under 18 years of age living in Ireland. <https://www.oco.ie/about-us/>

The Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) was established in April 2004 under primary legislation, the Ombudsman for Children Act, 2002. The Ombudsman for Children promotes and safeguards the rights and welfare of children and young people up to eighteen years of age. The Ombudsman for Children is independent of Government and public bodies, and accountable only to the Oireachtas.

The main functions of the office are:

- to provide an independent and impartial complaints handling service regarding the actions of public bodies that concern children
- to promote children's rights, through participation and communication activities
- to monitor and review legislation concerning matters that relate to the rights and welfare of children
- to advise any Minister on matters relating to the rights and welfare of children
- to ensure that law, policy and practice meet the highest standards and obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child.

Dr Niall Muldoon was appointed as the Ombudsman for Children in February 2015.

Further information about the OCO is available at www.oco.ie. Please see the following link:

[OCO-Our Path Forward-Strategic Plan-2025-2027.pdf](#)

1.2. Mission

The Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) is an independent statutory office. Under the Ombudsman for Children Act 2002, they have two main roles:

- i. To deal with complaints made by, or for, children about the actions of public organisations
- ii. To promote the rights and welfare of children under 18 living in Ireland

The Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) investigates complaints about services provided to children by public organisations. The Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) is a human rights institution that promotes the rights and welfare of young people under 18 years of age living in Ireland.

1.3. Vision

The Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) vision is designed to encapsulate the OCO view of what they want to achieve for children - the kind of future to which our Office aspires.

The OCO utilises their independence and powers to bring about an Ireland where the whole of society actively hears and respects all children and supports them to be safe and fulfilled in their lives.

The Ombudsman for Children Act, which sets out the role and powers of this Office, was agreed by the Dáil and the Seanad in 2002. The Ombudsman for Children is a presidential appointment and reports directly to the Oireachtas. Originally Ombudspersons for Children's Offices were set up to independently investigate complaints against public organisations. However, after the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child was agreed in 1989, Ombudspersons for Children's Offices also began working hard to promote the rights of children.

Part Two: Requirements & Specifications

2.1. Background

The Ombudsman for Children's Office (OCO) is seeking to establish a **Panel of Qualified Investigative and Research Experts** to support its statutory functions. The OCO investigates complaints made by or on behalf of children and young people under the age of eighteen about the administrative actions of public bodies. The Office also carries out research, policy development, and advocacy work to advance the rights and welfare of children in line with Ireland's obligations under the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child and other international human rights instruments.

The Panel will provide access to a pool of experts who can be engaged on an as-needed basis to contribute to investigations, research projects, policy papers, and the preparation of briefing materials. Panel members will be expected to work to high professional standards, demonstrate strong verbal and written communication skills, and operate with integrity, impartiality, and a clear child-rights focus.

2.2. Scope of Services Required

Applicants are invited to submit a single Application Form for consideration under one or both of the following Lots:

1. **Lot 1: Investigation Services**
2. **Lot 2: Research Services**

Lot 1: Investigation Services

OCO receives complaints that are often **complex and sensitive**, involving multiple public bodies, schools, health and social care agencies, and extended family circumstances. Investigations are carried out in line with statutory powers, established procedures, and principles of natural justice.

Panel Experts engaged under this Lot will be expected to:

- Conduct impartial, thorough investigations into complaints concerning children and young people, ensuring that the rights and best interests of the child are at the centre of all work.
- Analyse complex case files and documentation, identify key issues, and apply sound judgment to evidence evaluation.
- Gather and assess information from a variety of sources, including official documentation and interviews, and identify inter-relationships and linkages between issues.
- Engage empathetically and professionally with all parties, including children, complainants, and representatives of public bodies, while being able to manage conflict constructively.
- Draft clear, plain-English investigation reports and maintain accurate and comprehensive audit files.
- Apply relevant legislation, policy, and practice frameworks in the course of investigations.
- Communicate effectively with children and young people to elicit their views in a child-sensitive and rights-based manner.
- Uphold confidentiality, data protection requirements, and ethical standards at all times.
- Work effectively as part of the OCO's complaints and investigations team, while also being able to operate independently where required.

Experts under this Lot should demonstrate:

- Significant experience (minimum five years) in evaluating or analysing complex issues within a complaints, regulatory, or human rights setting.
- Strong judgment and decision-making skills that are fair, proportionate, and rights-centred.
- A proven commitment to promoting the rights and welfare of children.

(See Section 2.3 for detailed qualifications and mandatory criteria.)

Lot 2: Research Services

The OCO undertakes **policy-oriented and rights-based research** in order to inform its work, contribute to public debate, and influence national and international policy development concerning children's rights. Research outputs are used to support investigations, produce policy papers, respond to consultations, and prepare briefing documents for national and international stakeholders.

Panel Experts engaged under this Lot will be expected to:

- Design and carry out high-quality qualitative and/or quantitative research projects relevant to children's rights and welfare.
- Conduct desk-based research, literature reviews, comparative policy analyses, and stakeholder interviews.
- Source, analyse, evaluate, and synthesise information and evidence from multiple sources to prepare evidence-based positions.
- Draft policy papers, submissions, and briefing documents tailored to audiences such as government departments, parliamentary committees, NGOs, and international monitoring bodies.
- Present complex information in a clear, concise, and accessible style using plain English.
- Monitor and analyse developments in children's rights, welfare policy, and relevant national and international legislation.
- Work collaboratively with OCO staff to ensure that research outputs align with the Office's strategic objectives and statutory remit.

Experts under this Lot should demonstrate:

- At least five years' relevant experience in conducting and publishing research or policy projects in the field of children's rights, welfare, or related areas.
- Proven ability to write clear, concise, and accessible reports that are accurate and evidence based.
- Understanding of children's rights principles and the wider policy and legislative landscape affecting children and young people.
- A demonstrated commitment to advancing the rights and welfare of children.

(See Section 2.3 for detailed qualifications and mandatory criteria.)

2.3. Mandatory Qualifications of Panel Experts

All applicants must demonstrate that, at the time of application, they meet the following requirements:

Minimum Qualifications

A qualification of at least Level 8 on the National Framework of Qualifications (or equivalent) from a recognised university or third-level institution in a relevant discipline.

Essential Experience

- A minimum of five years' relevant professional experience in the evaluation or analysis of complex issues in areas relevant to the role of Investigator/Researcher and to the work of the Ombudsman for Children's Office.
- Proven experience in undertaking policy and/or research projects in fields related to children's rights, welfare, or public administration.
- Demonstrated ability to source, analyse, evaluate, and synthesise information and evidence from multiple sources, including documentation review and interviews.
- Experience in drafting reports and presenting complex information in a clear, accessible format suitable for publication and diverse audiences.

Core Competencies

- Comprehensive understanding of relevant legislation, policy, and practice affecting children and young people in Ireland.
- Strong knowledge of the principles of children's rights and their application in practice.
- Proven ability to make fair, proportionate, and timely judgments on complex issues.
- Effective communication skills, including the ability to:
 - Communicate with children and young people in a child-sensitive manner to elicit their views.
 - Engage empathetically, fairly, and impartially with all parties to a complaint, including complainants and public bodies.
 - Present findings in both written and oral form to professional standards.
- Ability to manage conflict constructively and uphold principles of impartiality and fairness.
- Capacity to work effectively under pressure, independently, and as part of a team.
- Strong commitment to confidentiality, ethical conduct, and data protection obligations.

Desirable Experience

- Previous experience in a similar role investigating complaints about public services affecting children, including schools, healthcare, or social services.
- Experience in carrying out research or policy analysis on children's rights issues.
- Demonstrated ability to contribute positively to a multidisciplinary team environment in pursuit of organisational objectives.

Commitment to Children's Rights

Evidence of a personal and professional commitment to the promotion of the rights and welfare of children and young people, consistent with the statutory mandate of the Ombudsman for Children's Office.

2.4. The Process of Establishing A Panel of Experts

This constitutes an open panel that will accept new applicants till its termination.

A PIN notice is published on e-tenders and will be published annually for the three (3) year duration of this panel.

New applicants will be able to apply via the OCO website (<https://www.oco.ie/about-us/vacancies-and-tenders/>) at any stage. OCO will select panellists to deliver programmes based on their track record, location, availability and competency.

New Panel Experts will be asked to undergo Garda Vetting and, where appropriate, sign Non-Disclosure Agreements.

2.5. Application Form

To apply as either an Individual Expert, or to nominate an Expert from your organisation, you must complete the Application Form, available on <https://www.oco.ie/about-us/vacancies-and-tenders/>

Applicants must return a completed Application Form via email to ocotenders@oco.ie, with the subject line: **OCO Panel of Experts Application Form.**

Initial applications must be completed and submitted by 12:00 hours (Irish Standard Time) on 15/05/2026.

The Panel will reopen to new admissions and remain open from then on.

2.6. Fees/Payment

OCO has budgeted for fees in the range of between €350 and €550 (exclusive of VAT) per day. Applicants are required to submit a proposed a daily fee for their services that lies in this range. The applicant's proposed fees are fixed for this contract at a successful applicant's submitted fee per day for the first year. Inflation from year two onwards will be tied to the Harmonised Index of Consumer Prices (HICP) for Ireland. The fees may be adjusted annual on the anniversary of the date on which the contract was signed. Costs such as travel, administration, and insurance, are all included in this fee. Travel expenses (time spent travelling to locations the services take place in) is not payable as an additional fee. Any additional expenses required in exceptional circumstances will be subject to agreement and approval in advance with the OCO team.

Please note that a single successful Applicant can be allocated work up to a maximum of €50,000 (excl. VAT) for the duration of the contract resulting from this Application process.

2.7. Location & Travel

Panellists will be required to travel to the regions the services will be required to take place in and to meet with staff from OCO as required from time to time.

OCO HQ: Ombudsman for Children's Office, Millennium House, First Floor, 52-56 Great Strand Street, Dublin 1, DO1 F5P8, Ireland.

2.8. Expert Engagement/On-Boarding Process

I. Service Contract

Those selected to provide services will be required to enter into a Services Contract with OCO prior to the commencement of any assignment.

In the case of an organisation nominating an individual to provide these services, the Director of the organisation will be asked to sign and return the Service Contract. They will also be required to confirm that they have board/management committee approval for the nomination of the individual and authorisation for the Director to sign the Service Contract.

II. Publishing of Successful Panel Member

The names of successful applicants will be published on the OCO's website.

III. Awarding Quotes & Purchase Orders

Qualifying for a place on the Panel does not constitute an award of a contract. It is the intention of OCO to establish a Panel with a wide range of expertise. Projects will be assigned by the OCO taking into account:

- Relevant experience (by reference to the Panel member's original application submission)
- Availability to meet delivery time

On this basis the most appropriate Panel will be approached and offered the assignment, where they are not in a position to fulfil the requirement the next appropriate Panel Member will be contacted and offered the assignment.

Individuals/Organisations will then be issued with a purchase order number, which must be quoted when reporting and invoicing for services delivered.

Please Note: Applicants are advised to note that if the total value of services received by an individual/organisation exceeds €10,000 or more from OCO in any 12-month period, then a tax clearance certificate or tax clearance access numbers will be required.

IV. Confidentiality and Social Media Agreement

Successful Panel Members may be required, upon request, to complete and sign a Confidentiality and Social Media Agreement prior to or during specific assignments.

Part Three: Selection & Award Criteria

3.1. Selection Criteria

Applicants will either pass OR fail each of the Selection Criteria identified below.

An Applicant who fails a selection criterion will be excluded from participating in this Competition.

3.1.A. Economic & Financial Standing

- I. Applicants will be asked to supply a current Tax Clearance Certificate if payments to them exceed €10,000 in a calendar year.
- II. Applicants must confirm their availability to deliver the services during the term of the contract.
- III. Applicants will be asked to put the following levels of insurance in place if they are successful in being admitted to the panel.

Insurance policies in place for **Individual Applicants**:

<u>Type of insurance Indemnity Limit</u>	
Public Liability	€2.6 million limit for any one claim or series of claims arising out of a single occurrence
Professional Indemnity	€100,000 limit for each and every claim excluding defence costs

Insurance policies in place for **Organisation Nominated Applicants**:

<u>Type of insurance Indemnity Limit</u>	
Employer's Liability	€13 million limit for any one claim or series of claims arising out of a single occurrence
Public Liability	€2.6 million limit for any one claim or series of claims arising out of a single occurrence
Professional Indemnity	€100,000 limit for each and every claim excluding defence costs

**Successful applicants will be required to submit a copy of a letter from their Insurance Brokers or copies of their current insurance certificates showing the above levels of cover, if awarded work under this agreement.*

3.2. Award Criteria

Only Applicants that have passed all the selection Criteria set out in part 3.1 shall be evaluated against the Award Criteria. Admission to the Panel will be awarded on the basis of the most economically advantageous tender(s) (MEAT Award Criterion) in accordance with the Award Criteria criteria laid out in the table below.

Attention should be paid to minimum qualifying thresholds for responses.

Criterion A	Weighting	Maximum Marks	Minimum Marks
	20%	200	120
Title	Understanding the Requirements		
Description	Please provide your insights into and understanding of the requirements and specifications outlined in Part 2 of the Panel Overview.		
Criterion B	Weighting	Maximum Marks	Minimum Marks
	40%	400	240
Title	CV of Proposed Panel Expert		
Description	Applicants must provide one CV using the template issued within the Application Form. The CV must demonstrate their experience delivering these requirements.		
Criterion C	Weighting	Maximum Marks	Minimum Marks
	20%	200	120
Title	Communications & Reporting Management		
Description	<p><i>Applicants must outline their approach to:</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. Managing Communication with OCO ii. Managing outstanding requests, queries and complaints iii. Reporting on KPIs, contract management etc. 		
Criterion D	Weighting	Maximum Marks	Minimum Marks
	20%	200	N/A
Title	Fees		
Description	<p><i>Applicants must submit their proposed daily fee.</i></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> i. A daily fee is the fee for seven hours of services in line with the conditions set out in part 2.6 of this document. 		

	<p>ii. OCO has budgeted for fees in the range of between €350 and €550 per day (inclusive of travel and subsistence and all out-of-pocket expenses but exclusive of VAT). Applicants are required to submit a proposed a daily fee for their services that lies in this range.</p>
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<p>Total Available Marks</p>	<p>1000 (100%)</p>
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