

Summary

There have been several major programmes aimed at modernising the Irish Civil Service over the past three decades. These have been interspersed with initiatives directed at bringing about improvements in efficiency and effectiveness in various activities. Some legislation was also enacted to strengthen accountability systems.

The current programme of change, which in part has been built on these past developments, was launched in 1994 as the Strategic Management Initiative and resulted in *Delivering Better Government*, a comprehensive programme of change for the public service. This programme is primarily directed at modernising the workings of the public service with a view to it being a provider of excellent services to all its “customers”, including Government, and to citizens at large.

This paper outlines the background to the development of the programme, its key elements and the strategies pursued in progressing it.

OECD: Strategic Review and Reform

Ireland

Modernising the Public Service

Context

1. Several drivers and pressures combined in the late 1980s and early 1990s to put modernisation of the Irish public service firmly back on the agenda. These may be broadly categorised as external, internal and international.

External factors include:

- the escalating cost of the public service leading to an unacceptable and, in the long run, unsustainable level of expenditure; severe budgetary constraints, involving a reduction in the number of public servants through a voluntary early retirement scheme, were imposed in the late 1980s and this prompted renewed concerns about efficiency, effectiveness and value for money;
- changing public expectations - the public were increasingly critical of the performance of the public service and its standards of service; successive Governments were putting more emphasis on improving the quality of service delivery;
- many of the administrative demands arising from the pressures, complexities, and scope of modern government pointed to a need for better cohesion between government departments (i.e. ministries) and agencies in addressing cross-cutting issues and delivering more flexible and responsive services;
- the importance of the role played by the public service in the economy generally and its contribution to economic performance and competitiveness.

Internally,

- senior management were more aware of the need for change;
- human resources and financial systems and procedures were regarded as outmoded;
- initiatives, such as the introduction of a three-year administrative budget system in the civil service (i.e. central government administration) and the extension of the role of the Comptroller and Auditor General (the Government Auditor) to include value-for-money audits, were adding to pressures for better management systems and improved management of resources;
- the increasing use of, and dependence on, information technology in the day-to-day work and delivery of services highlighted the need for complementary changes in working processes and procedures; and
- there was a growing awareness of reform initiatives in other countries.

International factors which had an effect included:

- the growing internationalisation of government activities and economic globalisation which were putting new pressures on public administration;
 - membership of the EU and the promotion of reform by international bodies such as the OECD.
2. These factors promoted a debate within senior management ranks, particularly in the civil service, and resulted in an informal initiative to promote a more structured and planned approach to the management of the civil service. The informal initiative gained momentum in the early 1990s and provided the foundation for the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI), which was formally launched in early 1994, and the subsequent *Delivering Better Government* programme of change.

PART I

Role and Functions of Government

Current Focus and Developments

3. The focus of the SMI/*Delivering Better Government* programme is not the role and functions of Government. The initiative has its roots within the civil service and was driven by management concerns about how well the civil service was performing and met the needs of Government and its many other clients and customers. As a result, the focus was, and is, on the quality of service delivery and the more effective and efficient management of resources to this end. The process that led to the programme evolved in the late 1980s and early 1990s following the demise of a major reform programme - *Serving the Country Better* - which has been launched in 1985. This programme, though it left its mark in the areas of top management appointments and information technology, was generally not well received and, following a change of Government in 1987, was not pursued thereafter with any great vigour or conviction. Politically, it was seen as closely associated with the previous Government and the new Government, in the context of the then very adverse budgetary situation, did not give high priority to its implementation. Management, for the most part, had not welcomed the programme and were not wholly committed to its advancement. Insufficient involvement in its development and a widespread feeling that it was being imposed from the centre are generally accepted as the reasons for the relative lack of support.
4. Given this context and the experiences of previous reform initiatives, which invariably lacked adequate support from across the political spectrum and thus petered out when the promoting Government went out of office, the approach on this occasion was designed to win both widespread political and management support for a process deliberately aimed at improving service delivery and the internal workings of the civil service. The role and functions of government were not primary considerations and thus greatly reduced the potential for political controversy. As a result, unlike previous reform programmes, the SMI/*Delivering Better Government* programme has retained the support of successive Governments and parliamentary oppositions.
5. *Delivering Better Government*¹ acknowledges the inevitability of reallocating resources to priority needs to reflect, among other things, "*the changing needs of the economy and society*". It acknowledges also that reconciling improvements in service delivery with public expenditure restraint requires that priorities be established over the range of spending programmes. This is seen as "*a key element of strategic management and involves the deployment of resources to priority issues*", and, if necessary, "*programmes having a lesser priority must be cut back*". The proposed development of Strategic Results Areas, which would focus on key areas of government policy and the means of achieving the related objectives and outcomes, could be expected to reinforce the need for such considerations. To ignore the critical issues of priorities and resource allocation, and the role of the public service in meeting changing economic and societal needs, would inevitably retard, and reduce the potential impact of, the modernisation programme.

¹ *Delivering Better Government*, A Programme of Change for the Irish Civil Service

6. Notwithstanding the central themes of the programme of change, the role and functions of government, particularly those exercised by the wider public service, continue to evolve and change. Public service organisations engaged in commercial type activities are increasingly being laid open to competition because of EU rules and market focus generally. This has resulted in several such organisations being reconstituted through corporatisation or privatisation. This has been an ongoing feature of the commercial state sector in which many bodies have been restructured and given strong commercial mandates. At present, several bodies are adjusting to such changes, most notably Telecom Éireann (the national telecommunications company) which, following a strategic alliance, is now being privatised. In the case of the non-commercial state sector, for example the local government and health sectors, certain services, which had traditionally been provided from within, are now contracted out. More such services are likely to be outsourced in the future as organisations focus more on their core activities. Similarly, the development of joint public-private funding of major infrastructural and other key investments is being pursued. Public Private Partnership (PPP) Units have been recently set up in key areas such as local government and public enterprise to develop joint investment initiatives. This can be expected to renew the focus on investment and development priorities and the role of Government in their funding.

PART II

Administrative Modernisation

Strategic Management Initiative (SMI)

7. The SMI was initiated by the then Taoiseach (Prime Minister) in February 1994. The process which led up to this is described below. The objectives of the SMI, which was originally directed at the civil service, are to ensure that on an ongoing basis the public service would:
- make a greater contribution to national development;
 - be a provider of excellent services to the public, and
 - make effective use of available resources.

Central to these objectives is the achievement of value for money, thus ensuring that the public service does not unnecessarily impair economic competitiveness.

8. For purposes of the SMI, strategic management is defined as a process by which an organisation
- maintains a considered and coherent view of the likely developments in its internal and external environment in the medium to long-term;
 - develops plans designed to maximise its effectiveness and efficiency in the expected circumstances; and
 - implements these plans and continually reviews progress and makes any necessary adjustments.

To these ends, each organisation² developed a *Statement of Strategy* setting out its strategic objectives, the strategies for achieving them, and how it would use its resources in so doing. A standard process of strategic analysis and planning was followed; this was developed from the approach normally used in the private sector modified to the civil service environment, e.g. terminology, some truncating of stages. Management, in most cases, availed of the services of an external consultant/facilitator with expertise in strategic analysis and management in drawing up such strategy statements. The cost of engaging external expertise was co-funded by means of a specially established central fund.

9. The result was the production, the first time ever, of formal strategy statements setting out, more clearly than was traditionally the case, each organisation's mandate, its high-level objectives and, in many instances, lower divisional objectives, and, in some cases, detailed strategies to guide future actions and activities. While marking a good start to the process of introducing a strategic management approach, shortcomings were evident and, given the novelty of the approach, were perhaps inevitable. These arose largely from a less than critical questioning of the "status quo", resulting in descriptions of existing activities rather than setting new directions and addressing challenges.
10. A key feature of the initiative within the civil service was the establishment of a Co-ordinating Group of Secretaries General (i.e. permanent heads of Departments) drawn from 9 Departments with a mandate to oversee and direct the process and to report to Government on progress. Crucially, this Group was given a mandate also to identify the barriers to better management of the civil service and to make recommendations to Government on how best to address them. The

² Organisation is used hereafter to mean central government departments and offices and non-commercial agencies in the wider public .

Group's report to Government on the latter was *Delivering Better Government - A Programme of Change for the Irish Civil Service*, which was approved by the Government and launched in May 1996.

11. *Delivering Better Government (DBG)* outlines a series of initiatives aimed at "better government" through quality services and "delivering better government" through internal improvements. It comprises an integrated set of recommendations, making for a holistic approach to administrative modernisation.

Initiatives being pursued under SMI/DBG include in the case of service delivery:

- quality services;
- regulatory reform;
- open and transparent service delivery;
- effective management of cross-cutting issues; and

in the case of internal improvements:

- devolving authority and accountability;
- new approaches to human resource management;
- more effective financial management; and
- improved use of information technology to meet business and organisational needs.

12. While the SMI/DBG programme was initially focused on the civil service, it has been extended to the wider public service. As a result SMI/DBG has informed various sectoral strategies, i.e. health services, local government, education, the Gardaí (police), etc.. The process is now underpinned by the national agreement - *Partnership 2000*³ - which provides for participative structures to involve management, unions and staff in each organisation in the development and implementation of action plans to progress the modernisation programme.

13. The SMI/DBG programme was in some respects the culmination of a series of earlier modernisation initiatives. Since the mid 1980s a number of initiatives designed to improve the performance of the civil service was introduced by the Department of Finance. These include:

- the establishment of the Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC) through which vacancies in the two top management ranks in each Department are filled by competition within the civil service and under which the top-most positions are held for a maximum of seven years;
- the introduction of three-year Administrative Budgets, under which Departments are allocated their administrative or running costs over a three year period with a facility for carryovers, within certain limits, from one year to the next;
- a concerted effort, through strategic planning for IT and increased budgets, to promote the use of information technology to meet business objectives;
- deconcentration of certain civil service functions to provincial centres;
- extended powers for the Comptroller and Auditor General (Government Auditor) to undertake value-for-money audits and review efficiency, economy and the adequacy of management systems to evaluate their effectiveness;
- a limited restructuring of certain civil service grades at lower to middle management levels.

³ *Partnership 2000 for Inclusion, Employment and Competitiveness* (December 1996); see in particular Chapter

14. There was also greater recourse to interdepartmental competitions to fill agreed quotas of vacancies in key lower, middle and upper management grades resulting in higher levels of mobility between Departments/Offices. A performance-related pay scheme for Assistant Secretaries General (the second layer at the top level) was also introduced; this subsequently was converted to a bonus scheme.
15. These initiatives were pursued despite the limited success of the 1985 reform programme. This had followed an earlier unsuccessful attempt at major reform in the early 1970s on foot of *The Report of the Public Service Organisation Review Group*. The latter was a seminal report in the context of modern day administrative reform programmes. It advocated separation of policy making from its execution in what is now the "executive agency" model together with major organisational changes designed to improve and professionalise the approach to managing the civil service, which are a major theme of the SMI/DBG programme. There was a lack of support among management and politicians for the measures proposed then with the result that little progress was made towards implementing the key recommendations.
16. The approach to the SMI/DBG programme was influenced by these previous experiences which showed that centrally devised and driven programmes can meet with strong opposition, primarily because of a view of reform being imposed. The approach on this occasion was, and remains, characterised by extensive consultation with and involvement of management across the public service. In the civil service, the development of the initiatives was undertaken by interdepartmental Working Groups (there was six such groups) and involved civil servants at all levels as well as private sector people. The process of implementation is participative, and is now underwritten by the partnership approach being developed under the *Partnership 2000* agreement. The Co-ordinating Group has also been extended to include union, private sector and academic interests.

Decision-Making Framework

17. The formulation and development of initiatives involved a number of stakeholders, viz.:
 - The Government which mandated the Co-ordinating Group of Secretaries General to draw up an integrated programme of change to address the barriers to better management of the civil service;
 - The Co-ordinating Group of Secretaries General, which formulated the programme of change, and oversees and reports to Government on its progress;
 - Secretaries General of Departments and Heads of Offices, who regularly meet to discuss the proposals for change;
 - Assistant Secretaries General who through network meetings and involvement in working groups contributed to the development of the programme;
 - Senior management who through special interest networks and working groups participated in the development process;
 - The unions, which contributed through involvement in working groups, project teams and the Co-ordinating Group;
 - Other public and private sector interests which participated through membership of Working Groups and, since the formal launch of the programme, the Co-ordinating Group whose membership was reconstituted to include such interests..

18. The decision-making process for implementation is based on formal submissions to Government, through the Co-ordinating Group, by an Implementation Group of Secretaries General (set up in July 1997 to give an added focus to implementation within the civil service). These submissions include proposals for action and are generally endorsed by Government which, in some instances, modify the proposals.

19. The thrust and content of the SMI/DBG programme were the outcome of the following process:

- The need for modernisation was fostered in the main by the Department of Finance in the period 1989-1993, and it was principally on the basis of the discussion papers prepared by that Department that the SMI and, ultimately, the change programme came into being.

- A key element of the fostering process was the role played by networks of senior managers from across the civil service. These networks were organised and supported by the Department of Finance with the expressed purpose of providing fora at which senior managers could discuss common issues and problems and promote solutions. It was through these networks that the need for, and the approach to, modernisation were articulated leading to discussion papers and proposals which, in turn, were endorsed by Secretaries General.

- The Co-ordinating Group of Secretaries General set up in 1994 to oversee the SMI considered that, in light of their own experience and knowledge and their examination of the initial Strategy Statements prepared by each organisation, many generic problems existed which could only be tackled through a cross-departmental change programme. The Government supported this view and mandated the Group to prepare proposals for its consideration.

- On being mandated by Government in February 1995 to bring forward proposals for administrative modernisation, the Co-ordinating Group of Secretaries General commissioned teams within the Department of Finance to prepare papers on a series of public service management issues. These teams were supplemented by civil servants from other Departments. The Group also invited submissions from the public, including the trade unions. A review was made of reforms in other countries, focusing on the "how" and the "what" of their reform initiatives, and particularly measures which mirrored those being considered in Ireland.

20. The resulting programme is a far-reaching one which can only be implemented over a period of years. In so doing, a balance has to be struck between, on the one hand, the need to implement key initiatives as quickly as possible and, on the other hand, the capacity both at the centre and in individual organisations to support and implement them effectively. In this regard, it should be noted that, following the reform initiatives of the 1970s and 1980s, many of the issues which the change programme is designed to tackle were already well known and understood. The principal task therefore was to devise a coherent, programme which would link the various elements together in a rational, pragmatic way.

21. To date, the key implementations steps have been:

- development of the initial Statements of Strategy in 1994;

- introduction of multi-annual budgeting over a three-year period commencing with the first step in 1996, the second in 1997 and the third and final step in 1998;

- on government instructions, the redevelopment and publication of the Statements of Strategy in 1996/97;

- enactment of the Freedom of Information Act, 1997 followed by its coming into effect in April 1998 for the civil service and October 1998 for the wider public service (this was the essential underpinning of a new openness and transparency in public administration);

- enactment of the Public Service Management Act 1997 providing for a new management framework within the civil service; this led in turn to the preparation of updated Statements of Strategy which were

published in May 1998 and which provide the basis for a new performance management system to be introduced later in 1999;

- enactment of the Committees of the Houses of the Oireachtas (Compellability, Privileges and Immunity of Witnesses) Act 1997 which gives parliamentary committees the powers to compel witnesses to appear before them and to seek documents and gives high court privilege to witnesses - this Act put in place an important element of a strengthened accountability framework;
- introduction in 1997 of a Quality Customer Service Initiative under which each organisation issued a statement of service standards and published an action plan setting out a programme of improvements to be completed by end 1999;
- the initiation in mid 1997 of a three year programme of expenditure reviews;
- the development in 1998 of partnership structures in each organisation to involve management, unions and staff in the change process in particular;
- the Government decision in July 1998 to proceed with the next phase of the SMI/DBG programme centring on the implementation of a new performance management system and related human resource management change;
- the introduction later in 1999 of initiatives in relation to financial management and accounting, regulatory reform, information technology and electronic government, and the management of cross-cutting issues.

22. Progress to date with implementation has been mixed. Where there is a dynamic for change at work and where management commitment is evident, the degree of progress is greater. In the case of resources, change management budgets are now being put in place in each organisation, backed up by a central Change Management Fund which will be used to subvent local budgets. The Fund, which will be overseen by the Implementation Group of Secretaries General, will operate for a five-year period, acknowledging the fact that the modernisation programme is a long-term process.

The Review Process

23. The review process essentially operates at two levels - at an overall level through the Implementation Group of Secretaries General and at individual organisation level. The Implementation Group submits reports to Government on progress, issues and new initiatives. These reports are submitted through the Co-ordinating Group whose comments and recommendations on them are conveyed also to the Government. In addition, the Implementation Group reviews on an ongoing basis the key developments, for example, progress in each organisation with the development of business planning, customer service plans, and partnership structures and the assignment of responsibility and accountability under the Public Service Management Act. The Group's reviews are based on information collected from each organisation by the SMI Team in the Department of the Taoiseach (i.e. Prime Minister) which has a general support and monitoring role (see paragraph 28).

24. Management in each organisation is responsible for implementing and monitoring the strategic management process and the initiatives arising from the programme of change. The monitoring and feedback arrangements in place at this level are seen as critical to institutionalising the strategic management approach and the change programme. Organisation-level monitoring structures continue to evolve, and are increasingly being informed by the business planning process, the formal assignment of responsibility and accountability and the partnership structures. To date, the feedback while largely focussed on local issues, has highlighted communication, management skills, resources and staff training as key issues to be managed.

25. There is also the All-Party Oireachtas (Parliamentary) Committee on the SMI/DBG. The Committee has a remit to consider, and report to both Houses of Parliament on, the progress

being made in the civil service. To date, the Committee has concentrated on the customer service plans of selected organisations. It has reviewed also the overall progress of SMI/DBG with the central Departments (Finance and Taoiseach). The Committee published its first report in April 1999 - this dealt with the customer service standards of the Department of Agriculture and Food.

26. No formal review of the overall impact of the SMI/DBG programme as a whole has been undertaken. Nonetheless, the review process has enabled key issues and concerns to be identified and action taken to address them. For example, as indicated above, resource needs are now being formally assessed through the establishment of change management budgets in each organisation with provision for assistance from the newly-established central Change Management Fund. The expansion of training budgets is also being actively promoted.

Capacities for Change Management

27. The central Departments, Finance and Taoiseach (Prime Minister), have played, and continue to play, key roles in the development and implementation of the change programme. This arises from their traditional policy co-ordination function and, in the case of the Department of Finance, its responsibility for the overall management and development of the civil (and public) service. Hence, as outlined above, the development of the strategic framework governing the thrust of the SMI/DBG programme was largely undertaken at the centre.
28. The Department of the Taoiseach plays a major co-ordinating role, providing support to the Co-ordinating and Implementation Groups and monitoring progress; its Secretary General chairs the both Co-ordinating Group and the Implementation Group. A special team, the Cross-Departmental SMI Team, was set up in the Department of the Taoiseach to support the process.
29. The Department of Finance has particular responsibility for human resource and financial management initiatives and for progressing the legislative changes deemed necessary to underpin and advance the change programme. The Department also restructured the delivery of its support services by setting up the Centre for Management and Organisation Development to provide better co-ordinated and focussed services to line organisations in the areas of organisation development, training and information technology.
30. SMI Facilitators were appointed in each civil service organisation and have the task of supporting and co-ordinating SMI activities and promoting awareness of the change programme in their organisations.
31. At individual organisation level, implementing and sustaining the modernisation programme requires the capacity to lead and manage major change. The relative lack of change management skills poses particular problems and requires targeted training of key personnel. This is an ongoing process and one that is steadily gaining momentum.
32. The feedback mechanism inherent to the strategic and business planning process is central to creating and maintaining the capacity of the support systems and structures. Capacity in this regard is more concerned with creating an approach and systems that promote constant reviewing of the effectiveness of the organisation in delivering its objectives and meeting the needs of its clients. The extent to which each organisation is managing this varies, reflecting management commitment to the SMI process.

Role of Various Players

Ministers and the Legislature

33. Successive Governments have supported the SMI process, established the necessary framework to promote, oversee and drive it, and introduced new legislation as necessary. There has been, and continues to be, support from across the political spectrum for the programme. There is also the All Party Parliamentary Committee - see paragraph 25.
34. The extent to which politicians engage in the process varies. There is active engagement during their time in government, though the opposition frequently put down parliamentary questions to seek information on progress and/or on particular initiatives.

Public Servants

35. The input of public servants has been, and remains, a critical factor in advancing the change programme. The involvement of senior managers in the articulation and formulation of the programme ensured that real issues were being identified and addressed. In turn, this ensured a high level of support for the change programme. Subsequently, management support may be said to have fluctuated given the demands that implementation places on them and the competing demands arising from the day-to-day pressures of work generally. Notwithstanding this, the overall level of support for the programme has ensured substantial progress in implementing a series of initiatives (see paragraph 21).
36. The Irish experience would indicate, that
 - Successful implementation requires the input and support of managers and staff at all levels combined with an understanding of what the change is intended to achieve, what will be better as a result and how it should be implemented.
 - A certain critical mass of senior and middle managers must be convinced of the need for change and willing to champion its cause actively to overcome the inertial forces in a traditional bureaucracy.
 - Management must show visible commitment and be prepared to devote the necessary time to supporting and promoting the process. It is evident that where such commitment is present, greater progress with the SMI/DBG process is being achieved. Management must also act as they want others to act - "walk the talk" so to speak.
 - There is a stage in the implementation process where a dedicated resource, with the needed capacity and expertise, is essential to help maintain momentum, disseminate best practices and provide support for, and assistance with, organisation-wide issues and problems, e.g. development of pragmatic and workable performance indicators/measures.
 - An effective monitoring/feedback system must be in place to ensure that the process of change is managed with sufficient rigour, to provide visible evidence of management commitment, and to facilitate feedback and participation by staff. This has to be underpinned by relevant information systems.
 - Devolving high-level goals and strategies into lower-level objectives and activities and related performance indicators/measures to inform the day-to-day work of staff, and thus internalising the process is critical to underpinning the change programme. This requires considerable effort on behalf of management at every level. In turn, it requires effective consultative and participative structures so that there is a top-down and bottom-up approach through which all staff "own" the process and become involved in developing and progressing the change programme, and setting objectives and performance indicators/measures.
 - The bureaucratic tendency to produce paper must be curbed in the interests of maintaining the focus on the essentials, that is on the key objectives and the factors critical to their successful achievement.

This enables small successes to be more clearly identifiable - successes which might otherwise not receive the recognition they merit.

- Training and development must be provided as the process evolves and becomes a driver for day-to-day activities. Training is often a major incentive for staff, and seen by them as a visible sign of management commitment.
- No change initiative is perfect so there is a need for an iterative approach. It is important to allow for and encourage such iteration within the overall process so that ongoing refinements and corrective adjustments are seen as acceptable and can be more readily accommodated. In essence, change must be amenable to being "crafted" rather than pre-designed.
- Above all, a critical mass of staff at every level must be aware of the benefits to be achieved. In short, it must be clear that the changes sought will lead to acceptable improvements in the way things are done, in results, efficiency, effectiveness, or whatever. Otherwise, the process will lose support.

Other Players

37. Given the origins of the SMI/DBG programme, the input of non-public servants was limited in the early stages of the process. Subsequently, in developing the initiatives set out in *DBG*, academic, trade union and private sector interests were enlisted to

serve on various working groups and project teams. There have been occasional articles by academics on aspects of the reform programme - these have largely been critiques of the programme.

38. While the Comptroller and Auditor General (i.e. the Government Auditor) has not played a central role in the formulation and development of the *SMI/DBG* programme, it may be noted that the Office was given extended powers in 1993 under the Comptroller and Auditor General (Amendment) Act to examine economy, efficiency and effectiveness and undertake value-for-money audits. As indicated previously (paragraph 1) this was a factor contributing to the belief that improved systems were required.
39. The extent to which international experiences were drawn on is highlighted above (paragraph 19).

Communication/Consultation with the Public

40. There was little direct communication or consultation with the public. Occasional articles were published in the national press, principally prompted by the formal launch of the *DBG* programme. Neither has there been any overall evaluative information collected on public perception of the programme or its effects on them. There was, for the first time, a survey of the public undertaken in 1997 to assess their view of their dealings with the civil service. The results showed a high level of satisfaction though there is room for improvement. The Quality Customer Service Initiative, launched in 1997, requires each organisation to conduct regular surveys of their customers/users. To date, some organisations have conducted such surveys and all now make customer comment cards available in public offices and reception areas.
41. In the formulation of the *SMI/DBG* programme, public advertisements were placed inviting submissions from the public and other interested groups. Submissions were not received directly from the public; the trade unions and private sector employer groups were the principal respondents.

Strategies for Managing Change

42. The principal strategy underpinning *SMI/DBG* is winning support for changes which can be seen as needed and logical next steps in the evolution of the public service. In this regard, the emphasis has been and remains firmly focused on addressing real problems. Particular emphasis has been placed on three central themes with which all public servants can associate, viz.:
 - the delivery of quality, value-for-money services underpinned by improved management systems aimed at enabling performance to be continuously raised and better managed;
 - improved policy formulation through better quality advice and analysis and more integrated approaches to the management of cross-cutting policy issues; and
 - the devolution of authority and accountability for the achievement of outputs and results; the Public Service Management Act 1997 was enacted to provide a strengthened system of accountability.
43. Senior management involvement is outlined above. The key elements in gaining wider understanding of, and involvement in, the change process include:
 - Briefing sessions were held for all (some 30,000) civil servants throughout the country at the launch of the programme. The sessions were delivered by top management and were designed to inform civil servants at all levels of the purpose, thrust and details of *DBG* programme. A summary of the *DBG* report and information leaflets containing both general and organisation-specific information were distributed to all staff. A specially prepared video was shown at each session.
 - Six Working Groups comprising management in the civil and public services and private sector experts were established to develop each of the component initiatives. Frontline groups comprising staff from all grades were set up to consider customer service, information technology and training.

- The participative arrangements put in place under *Partnership 2000*.
 - The engagement of external consultants, as necessary, to advise and assist in relation to change management issues and the development of systems (e.g. performance management).
44. Considerable importance is attached to training and development to prepare management and staff for the initiatives being implemented. Currently, some 2 per cent of payroll is spent on staff training and development; the target is to reach 3 per cent over the short term. A Masters' Degree programme on Strategic Management in conjunction with the University of Dublin, Trinity College, is run for Assistant Secretaries General - the fourth such two-year programme is underway. This programme is designed to equip top managers with the knowledge and understanding of state-of-the-art management practices.
 45. A number of networks are also maintained (e.g. for Assistant Secretaries General, HR Managers, Financial Managers, Women Managers, SMI Facilitators, etc.). The management networks were influential in the development of the SMI/DBG programme and the strategy underpinning it, and continue to be important means of promoting and supporting the change process.
 46. Informed debate on public management issues and challenges is deemed important in promoting greater understanding and appreciation of the need for modernisation and the approach to it. Consequently, a more active approach to researching issues and developments was adopted through the setting up of the Committee for Public Management Research (CPMR) in 1998. The Committee, which is chaired by the Department of Finance, includes members drawn from the Department of the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) and those departments with overall responsibility for key areas of the public service (local government, public enterprises and health) as well as the university sector. To date CPMR has largely concentrated on producing discussion papers on key issues (e.g. partnership, programme evaluation, managing performance, service delivery, governance, etc.)⁴.

Evaluation of Impacts

47. A formal evaluation of impacts has not been undertaken to date. The Implementation Group of Secretaries General is considering how such an evaluation could be carried out. The CPMR is also likely to take this up in its 1999 research programme. The CPMR has evaluated, in part, the customer service action plans of central government organisations in a recent discussion paper - *Improving Public Service Delivery*. Reviews of the Strategy Statements have been undertaken by the University of Limerick⁵.

Strategic Review and Reform

48. The SMI process evolved from what can be considered a strategic review, of the role and management of the Irish Civil Service, the challenges it faces, the changing environment, national and international, in which it functions, its past performance and the need for change. The process for strategic management adopted entails a strategic or forward-looking approach designed to ensure ongoing scanning of the environment and the effectiveness of the services of all kinds delivered by each organisation.
49. The resulting change programme, both at the overall and individual organisation level, is designed to provide the long-term structures and supports in which the civil and public service can operate to optimum effect in meeting the changing needs and priorities of government,

⁴Papers published to date may be accessed on the CPMR's web site at <http://www.irlgov.ie/cpmr>

⁵*Making Sense of Strategy Statements: a User's Guide* (Administration, Vol. 45, no. 3, 1997) and *Another Set of Strategy Statements: What is the evidence of implementation* (Administration, Vol. 47, no. 1, 1999); Institute of Public Administration,

customers and society at large. In this regard flexible and responsive structures are seen as an essential strategic goal.

50. Maintaining a strategic approach, however, is difficult and requires ongoing attention. The nature of organisations is such that a preoccupation with day-to-day activities will predominate; the public service displays this characteristic even more so given the many short-term concerns that can and do dominate the political environment. Moreover, changes to longstanding structures and processes invariably meet with resistance. Hence, the need to gain the support of a critical mass of senior and middle management. This is not unique to public service organisations but the imperatives driving change often lack the immediacy of those to be found in the private sector. Hence, other incentives to change that have an appeal, such as meeting customer and citizen needs, serving the political process effectively, greater job satisfaction and “doing a good job better”, have to be brought to the fore.

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