OECD Public Governance Reviews

Strengthening Policy Development in the Public Sector in Ireland



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Foreword

The current multi-faceted and global crises that governments are facing, from the pandemic to climate change to the impact of Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine, have put into question traditional ways of undertaking policy development in many countries around the world, including Ireland. Addressing these challenges requires rethinking the ways in which policies are designed, co-ordinated, implemented and evaluated. Reflection and innovation on policy development is needed to not only develop good policies but also ensure that these are legitimate to different audiences from ministers to citizens and sustainable in their implementation. Governments need to have the right tools at hand so that their policy development systems are able to adapt and change at pace and deliver policy solutions that have a real and immediate impact on societal well-being.

It is in this context that Ireland requested support from the European Commission Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support and the OECD to increase the government's ability to develop and deliver on complex policies relating to climate change, digitalisation, demographic changes, housing and homelessness, globalisation, and long-term healthcare and to contribute to future-proofing such policies through strategic foresight. The *"Strengthening Policy Development and Foresight in the Irish Public Service"* project contributes to this goal by providing public servants with the tools, knowledge and skills to strengthen their policy development and implementation capacities.

This assessment report is a core output of this project and analyses the policy development process in Ireland. It focusses on three main areas: evidence, implementation, and legitimacy. It also discusses the skills, capacities, methods and tools that are currently in place in the Irish public sector and which support effective policy development. The report highlights Ireland's strengths, identifies gaps, provides examples of good practices, and suggests a number of areas of opportunity and action to bolster the policy development system and improve policymaking.

This report was prepared under the auspices of the OECD's Public Governance Committee and forms part of the Public Governance Directorate's engagement with Ireland. It draws on the OECD's expertise on public governance, including its work on centres of government. The evidence and data collected for this report contributes to the OECD's broader programme of work on effective, innovative, fit-for-the-future and digitally-enabled government and citizens-centred services, and on reinforcing trust in government. The OECD stands ready to further support Ireland's ambition to build an innovative, professional and agile civil service that improves the lives of the people of Ireland through excellence in service delivery and strategic policy development, notably through the implementation of the recommendations of the report.

The project *"Strengthening Policy Development and Foresight in the Irish Public Service"* in Ireland was funded by the European Union via the Structural Reform Support Programme (Project 21IE08 - REFORM/IM2021/005). The action was funded by the European Union via the Technical Support Instrument, and implemented by the OECD, in co-operation with the Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support of the European Commission. The views expressed herein can in no way be taken to reflect the official opinion of the European Union.

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The report was drafted by Jeroen Michels and Johannes Klein with the help of Ismail Bazine, Giulio Iacobelli, Teresa Lazzaroni Andina and Julia Staudt. The report benefitted from inputs and comments from Axel Mahot, Brian Finn, Karine Badr and Richard Alcorn. Sally Washington played an advisory role on the project and provided substantive inputs and comments. Jennifer Allain provided editorial support. Ciara Muller prepared the manuscript for publication. Gabriella Scaduto-Mendola provided management and administrative support.

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Table of contents

Foreword 3

Acknowledgements 4

Executive Summary 8

Improving the Policy Development System in Ireland – Policy Challenges and Civil Service Reform 10
References 13
Note 13

Part I Strengthening the Three Pillars of Policy Development in Ireland: Evidence, Implementation and Feasibility, and Legitimacy 14

1 Ireland's Policy Development Vision and Landscape 15
Building on current strengths in policy development 21
Challenges in the area of policy development in Ireland 21
References 22

2 Using Evidence, Data and Strategic Foresight for Policy Development and Long-term Policy Issues in Ireland 24
Strengthening the evidence base to address long-term policy issues 28
Enabling strategic foresight in support of policy development 31
Collaboration with academia 34
Areas of opportunity to strengthen the use of evidence and data for policy development 39
References 41

3 Closing the Policy Development and Implementation Divide in Ireland 43
Project management 48
Regulatory oversight 49
Cross-departmental collaboration 51
Areas of opportunity to support better linkages between policy development and policy implementation 54
References 56

4 Strengthening the Legitimacy of Policy Development in Ireland 57
Navigating the interface between the civil service and politics 59
Stakeholder engagement, digitalisation and user-centric policy development 62

Areas of opportunity to improve legitimacy in the policy development process 69
References 70

Part II Key Enablers for Policy Development 72

5 Skills and Capabilities for Policy Development in the Civil Service in Ireland 73
Frameworks and practices to support policy development skills 74
The training ecosystem 79
Additional capacity-building formats and a culture of evidence-based policy development 86
Areas of opportunity to support skills and capabilities 90
References 91

6 Policy Methods and Tools in Ireland 93
Existing requirements, guidance and tools for policy development 94
Improving the use and implementation of policy development tools, instruments and methodologies 97
Ex ante regulatory impact assessment 98
Areas of opportunity to strengthen policy tools and frameworks 100
References 101

Part III Towards a Modern Policy Capability Infrastructure 102

7 Towards a Modern Policy Capability Infrastructure and Policy Toolkit in Ireland 103
Areas of opportunity for a modern policy capability infrastructure and policy development toolkit as part of a broader good practices hub 107
References 107

Table

Table 7.1. Dimensions of a Policy Capabilities Infrastructure 105

Figures

Figure 1.1. Civil Service Renewal 2024: Action Plan to deliver the Civil Service Renewal 2030 Strategy 17
Figure 1.2. Civil Service Management Board framework “Strengthening Policy Making in the Civil Service” 18
Figure 2.1. Sources feeding into policy development in Ireland 28
Figure 4.1. Minister-department relationships: Key components to negotiate 61
Figure 4.2. Changes experienced by centres of government since the COVID-19 outbreak that will remain when planning the recovery from the crisis, 2021 62
Figure 5.1. Skills and capabilities for policy development at the organisational level in Ireland 75
Figure 5.2. Pillar 2 “Innovating for Our Future” of the reform plan Our Public Service 2020 77
Figure 5.3. Training options: A mix of light to heavy interventions 86
Figure 5.4. Sources of capacity for the civil service in Ireland 87
Figure 6.1. Use of tools and instruments for policy development 96
Figure 7.1. Policy Capability Infrastructure 105

Boxes

Box 2.1. Impact assessments for social protection in Ireland 27
Box 2.2. Long-Term Insights Briefings in New Zealand and Australia 30
Box 2.3. Strategic foresight in Canada, Finland and Singapore 32

Box 2.4. Network of science advisors in New Zealand 37
Box 2.5. The United Kingdom government connecting policy practitioners with researchers 38
Box 3.1. Ireland's National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026: Evidence-based care for patient-centred cancer services 47
Box 3.2. A new funding model in Ireland for early learning and care and school-age childcare 48
Box 3.3. Examples of regulatory oversight bodies in Australia, Germany and the Netherlands 50
Box 3.4. Ireland's First 5 Strategy 52
Box 3.5. Ireland's Water Policy Advisory Committee 53
Box 4.1. Local public consultation on Marine Spatial Planning in Ireland 65
Box 4.2. Eight ways to institutionalise deliberative democracy 67
Box 4.3. Consultation with citizens: "The Citizens' Assembly of Ireland" 68
Box 4.4. Systematic follow-up on stakeholder consultations in selected OECD countries 68
Box 5.1. Policy standards and skills frameworks in New Zealand and the United Kingdom 76
Box 5.2. Central evaluations portal in Norway 79
Box 5.3. Developing skills of civil servants: The Australian Public Service Academy 84
Box 5.4. Developing skills of civil servants: The United Kingdom Campus for government skills 85
Box 5.5. The policy workforce and pathways to improved capability in New Zealand 85
Box 5.6. Public sector communities of practice in Australia and New Zealand 88

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Executive Summary

The current multi-faceted challenges that governments are facing have increased demand for better policy design, co-ordination, implementation, and evaluation to address crises more effectively. Government decision making must be agile and robust, based on reliable real-time data and effective policy design and development processes, and supported by a cadre of highly skilled policy professionals. In this context, the Government of Ireland is working to increase the public service's ability to develop and implement complex policies and to ensure better outcomes for citizens. This OECD Assessment Report analyses the current policy development process in Ireland, highlights its strengths, and identifies current gaps. It takes as its starting point a framework for policy development that has been endorsed by the Civil Service Management Board in Ireland. This framework comprises three inter-linked pillars of evidence, feasibility and legitimacy and seeks to build upon the work to date and establish further coherence among them. It offers examples of good practices and suggests areas of opportunity and action that can further bolster the policy development system.

Strengthening the three pillars of policy development in Ireland: Evidence, implementation and feasibility, and legitimacy

The report highlights the numerous initiatives underway in areas falling under the three pillars of Ireland's framework for policy development. While there is currently no single model or vision for policy development in Ireland, a number of strategies guide and frame the Irish vision for policy development in the civil service and in the public sector more broadly.

Policy development relies on the availability and use of relevant evidence and data. Ireland has demonstrated significant progress in using evidence and data for policy development at the department and agency levels. The Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) and the Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS), for example, are key elements of the strategic policy infrastructure. Strategic foresight is being incorporated into policy analysis in a more sustained way. Links between researchers and policymakers are being forged through the establishment of a Civil Service Research Network. However, Ireland's public administration could benefit from stronger attention to data-based reform initiatives. Developing data-sharing networks through external partnerships and strengthening data skills across the civil service would allow Ireland to harness the potential of both data and evidence-based decision making. Furthermore, there is a clear, growing appetite for strategic foresight in Ireland that underscores the civil service's ambition to strengthen strategic policy discussions.

The quality and impact of policy advice and decisions are determined by how effectively they are implemented. A number of good practices have emerged in Ireland to reflect implementation in the policy development process and help make policies easier to implement, such as co-designing policy with civil servants charged with implementing; integrating implementation criteria, monitoring practices and feedback loops into policy design; and using insights from policy evaluations, pilot projects and behavioural evidence. In the area of feasibility, the government is helping public organisations provide user-centred services by sharing design principles. A Programme for Government commitment will create Strategic

Policy Units across Departments to ensure data insights influence policy decisions. The Irish civil service has recognised the importance of programme and project management skills for policy delivery, but still struggles with conducting impact assessments across policy sectors and departments and modelling impacts across different policy dimensions. Implementation can also be supported by collaboration among departments to ensure feasibility is considered at the design stage. While there are numerous examples of good practices, the culture of collaboration across departments could be strengthened, particularly to increase cross-departmental communication, visibility, and the consideration of the impacts proposals might have in other policy areas.

The legitimacy of public policy is also grounded in the support that a government has from stakeholders and citizens. The nexus between the civil service and political actors in relation to policy development has become increasingly challenging to navigate, given the 24h news cycle and increased stakeholder engagement. The legitimacy of policies – whether they reflect the public interest -- has been under increased scrutiny in Ireland. The Government Information Service has played a pivotal role in public communication around key government priorities and has earned a reputation as a trusted source of public information. Work is underway to clarify the role of the civil service in policy development and it is recognised that it is timely to review how public engagement is conducted across departments to improve consistency. However, additional training and support in public engagement and communication is needed across the civil service, as well as standardised guidance and rules of engagement among politicians, political advisors and civil servants.

Key enablers for policy development

Effective policy development cannot be achieved without the right set of skills and capabilities in the public administration; these include technical skills as well as expertise in project management and political achievability. Ireland's civil service is well equipped in general skills and knowledge but could develop stronger skills and capabilities in areas such as data, strategic and systems thinking, foresight, external communication, monitoring and evaluation, economic/impact modelling, legal drafting, and regulatory impact assessment. Despite rich training and development programmes, there is a high demand within the civil service for additional training and capacity development activities for new and highly technical skill profiles. Ireland could further streamline the training and professional development offerings and nurture a culture of evidence-based policy development across the system.

A policy development system must be supported by standard processes and practical tools to assist policy practitioners in their day-to-day work. While Ireland does not have a benchmark instrument for policy development, a range of process requirements, formal guidance and tools for policy development are employed by policymakers across government. Closing gaps in support and guidance for areas such as behavioural insights, user-centric insights and design methods, planning tools for policy development, foresight, and stakeholder consultation and adopting a consistent, repeatable and scalable approach for policy design can help ease cross-departmental work and clarify quality standards.

The report provides findings and recommendations that can be translated into structural improvements in policy development. It highlights that civil service leadership is important to maintain momentum for strengthening policy development in Ireland. The establishment of the CSMB is an example of Ireland's efforts to build sustainable and comprehensive leadership in this area. The report also proposes that Ireland could make the most of its policy development strengths and address gaps by developing a broad policy capability infrastructure and vision underpinned by relevant tools and processes, including a supporting toolkit and a community of practice bringing stakeholders together from across government.

Improving the Policy Development System in Ireland – Policy Challenges and Civil Service Reform

This chapter introduces the context and discusses the policy development process in Ireland. The report focusses on three main areas that shape policy development: evidence, implementation, and legitimacy. It also discusses the skills, capacities, methods and tools in the Irish public sector that support effective policy development. The report highlights Ireland's strengths, identifies gaps, provides examples of good practices, and suggests a number of areas of opportunity and action to bolster the policy development system and improve policymaking.

The current multi-faceted and global challenges that governments are facing, from the pandemic to climate change to the impact of the war in Ukraine, have highlighted the importance of better designing, co-ordinating, implementing and evaluating policies to more effectively address crises, ultimately contributing to an increase of trust in government as well. As highlighted by the 2021 OECD Trust Survey, the trust in government is closely linked with the legitimacy of public policies (OECD, 2022[1]). The results from the 2021 OECD survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (OECD, 2022[1]) indicate that there is a need to better disseminate the results of government action to citizens in order to increase these trust levels.

The COVID-19 pandemic has intensified the imperative for robust policy development systems and for governments to be able to adapt and change at pace and to deliver policy solutions that have a real and immediate impact on societal well-being. The pandemic has challenged the capacities of governments around the world to both anticipate and respond to crises without losing their focus on longer-term policy goals, all the while maintaining a steadfast commitment to the principles of democratic governance. Responding to and recovering from crises require decision making to be agile and robust, based on reliable real-time data and evidence, effective policy design and development processes, and underpinned by institutional capabilities including a cadre of highly skilled policy professionals. Responses and recovery are also dependent on greater co-ordination across the government in the development of policies as well as more effective public communication[1] and greater stakeholder engagement in the decision making and policy-making processes. While the pandemic brought new challenges to the fore, it also allowed governments to review their current practices and focus on "building back better" rather than reverting to business as usual. Anticipating and preparing for future policy challenges require ensuring strategic foresight capabilities and building a future-focus into holistic policy design.

Senior Civil Service management in Ireland had recognised, even before the pandemic, the need to strengthen their capabilities in policy-development and strategic foresight. The Civil Service Management Board (CSMB) had approved a suite of documents that represented best practice. In particular, a three-framework for policy-development – consisting of the three inter-linked pillars of evidence, feasibility and legitimacy – has been endorsed by the Civil Management Board to build upon the numerous initiatives already underway in areas falling under the three pillars and establish further coherence between them. It had been intended that this framework would be relied upon in everyday practice but it was also recognised that there would be a challenge in embedding a fully coherent approach to strengthening policy-making in a consistent and connected way across the system.

It is in this context that Ireland requested support from the European Commission Directorate-General for Structural Reform Support and the OECD to increase the government's ability to develop and deliver on complex policy in areas such as climate change, digitalisation, demographic changes, housing and homelessness, globalisation, and long-term healthcare and to contribute to future-proofing such policies. The project aims to do this by providing public servants with the tools, knowledge and skills to strengthen their capacities to develop and successfully implement policy and to reinforce the integration of strategic foresight into the design and implementation of public policies.

This assessment report is a core output of this project and analyses the policy development process in Ireland. Taking as its starting point the CSMB framework for policy development, it focusses on three main areas that shape policy development: evidence, implementation, and legitimacy. It also discusses the skills, capacities, methods and tools in the Irish public sector that support effective policy development. The report highlights Ireland's strengths, identifies gaps, provides examples of good practices, and suggests a number of areas of opportunity and action to bolster the policy development system and improve policymaking.

It reviews the current policy development process in Ireland, which occurs within a context of a significant and wider reform programme. The programme, Civil Service Renewal 2030, includes an ambitious commitment to "develop a rigorous, professional, and evidence-informed approach to policy development" (Republic of Ireland, 2014[2]). The strategy anticipates "strengthening the whole-of-government approach

to policy development", drawing on the "breadth of experience and expertise from across the Civil Service" to "enable a consistent and collaborative model for addressing local, national and global challenges".

The Civil Service Management Board identified improved strategic policy development and strategic foresight as priorities in CSR2030. For its part, the Public Service Leadership Board has mandated the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform to ensure that the next phase of Ireland's public service reform "Better Public Services" meets the goal of a public service that is fit for purpose to 2030 and beyond (OECD, 2021[3]). The next phase of reform will be guided by lessons from the previous one (OPS2020) and the COVID-19 response.

The current Programme for Government requires an effective "policy infrastructure" with consistent and robust policy development processes and a skilled and empowered cadre of policy professionals working in a wider joined-up policy ecosystem. Such an ecosystem will increase the Irish government's ability to address current and future policy challenges and meet the objectives that the Programme set out (Government of Ireland, 2021[4]).

Using the lens of the three-pillar approach, this report aims to:

- assess the current state of policy development activities in the Irish government, including the role of strategic foresight as an input to policy
- identify strengths and weaknesses, gaps, and possible synergies between initiatives to improve policy development efforts to date
- offer suggestions and examples of good practices for enhancing the policy development framework or infrastructure.

The report is based on desktop analysis of relevant policy documents and reports; workshops and interviews with key stakeholders from across the government and the wider policy ecosystem (quotes are set out throughout the report in italics); in-depth engagement with key officials from the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform; and a survey of 168 civil servants on the policy development and strategic foresight tools and methods currently in use. The report also builds on the meetings and interviews held during the fact-finding mission in May 2022 with ministers, members of parliament, senior civil servants, and representatives of agencies, advisory councils, civil society, training institutions and academia.

The report is divided into three parts. **Part I** focuses first on the context and rationale followed by an assessment of the characteristics and **drivers of policy development** in Ireland. Part I then examines a number of key issues and challenges that shape policy development around the themes of evidence, implementation and feasibility, and legitimacy as reflected in the Civil Service Management Board report "Strengthening Policy Making in the Civil Service".

Part II addresses the **key enablers** for policy development: the skills and capacities in the Irish public service and the methods and tools for policy development. Part II highlights a number of suggestions for a policy development framework and policy platform, including recommendations on how the framework can be leveraged to consolidate, develop and share consistent uses of existing networks, techniques, tools, training and development to underpin the key role of the civil service: to provide impartial, independent policy advice to the government.

Part III provides a number of insights and pointers to develop a **policy capability infrastructure** and a toolkit as part of a broader good practices hub.

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Note

[1] The OECD defines public communication as "the government function to deliver information, listen and respond to citizens in the service of the common good and of democratic principles. It is distinct from political communication, which is linked to partisan debate, elections, or individual political figures and parties." (OECD (2021), OECD Report on Public Communication: The Global Context and the Way Forward, OECD Publishing, Paris, https://doi.org/10.1787/22f8031c-en.

Part I Strengthening the Three Pillars of Policy Development in Ireland: Evidence, Implementation and Feasibility, and Legitimacy

1 Ireland's Policy Development Vision and Landscape

This chapter outlines the different strategies that guide and frame the Irish vision for policy development in the civil service and public sector and presents an overview of the institutional framework for government reform and policy development. It highlights current strengths in policy development and concludes with an assessment of how current reform initiatives could be enhanced, leveraged and joined up to improve the overall policy development system.

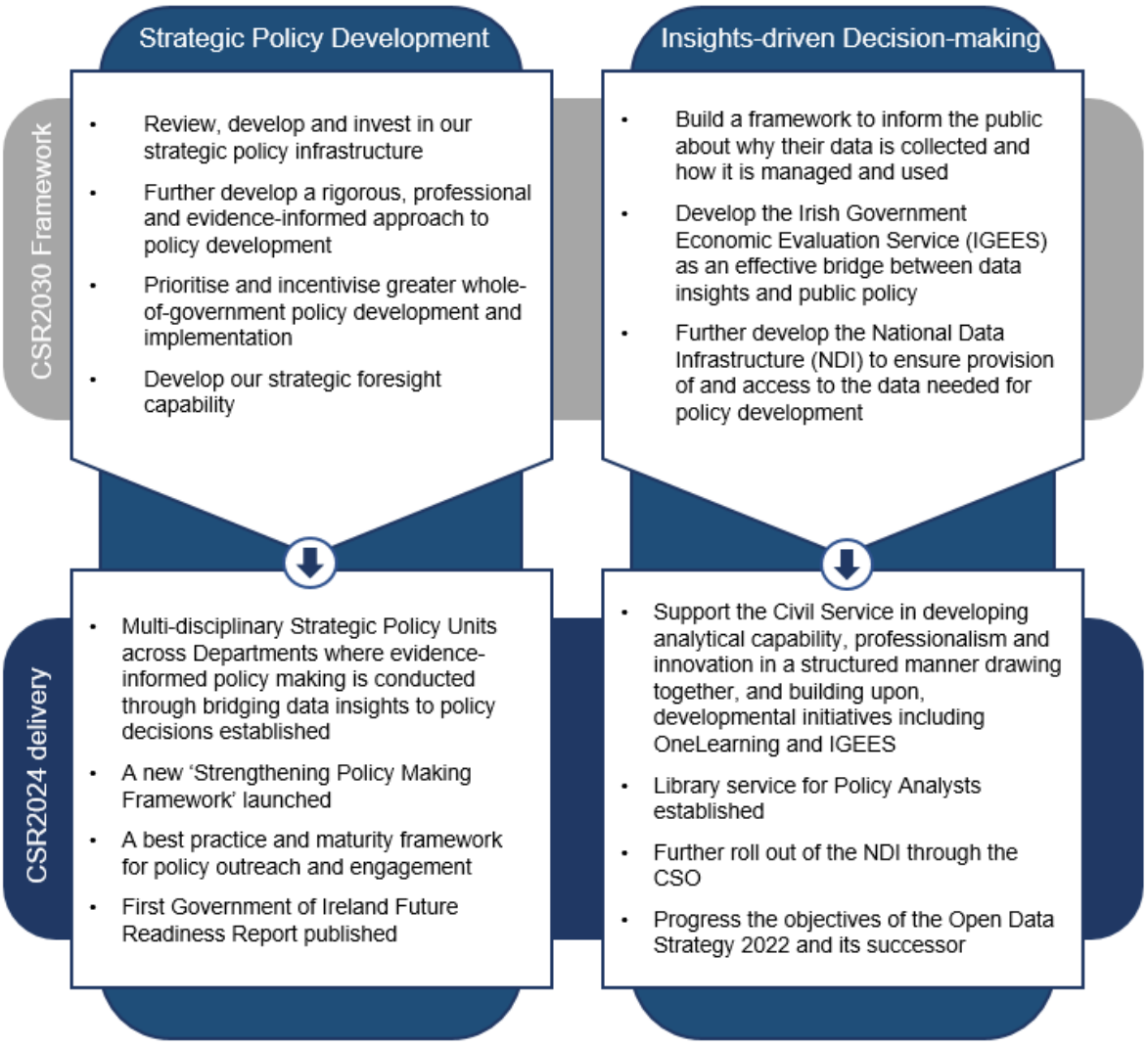
A number of strategies guide and frame the Irish vision for policy development in the civil service and in the public sector more broadly.

Civil Service Renewal 2030 (Government of Ireland, 2014[1]) is an ambitious strategy that builds on the strengths of the Civil Service and the achievements under the previous Civil Service Renewal Plan and related reform programmes. It is underpinned by a commitment to achieve the vision to be an "innovative, professional and agile civil service that improves the lives of the people of Ireland through excellence in service delivery and strategic policy development". The strategy is informed by the findings of the Civil Service Employee Engagement Surveys; learnings from the response to the COVID-19 pandemic; the overall strategic context in which the civil service operates; experience with previous reform programmes; and the lessons learned from the Organisational Capability Review Programme. The strategy was developed to ensure that the civil service can build on its strengths to respond to today's environment, address future challenges and continue to deliver for the government and the people. It has three core themes:

- delivering evidence-informed policy and services
- harnessing digital technology and embedding innovation
- building the civil service workforce, workplace and organisation of the future.

Civil Service Renewal 2030 was developed collaboratively and is expected to also be delivered collaboratively. The strategy is implemented through a series of three-year action plans. The first of these action plans, **Civil Service Renewal 2024 (CSR2024)**, "aims to ensure that the Civil Service makes better use of data, further develops analytical skills and capacity of the Civil Service and invests in our policy development infrastructure" (see Figure 1.1) (Government of Ireland, 2014[1]). It sets out actions related to both strategic policy development and insights-driven decision making to develop and leverage data as an input to policy. The plan refers to a "Policy Development Infrastructure" designed to "facilitate a joined-up approach to evidence informed policy development through Strategic Policy Units and stakeholder engagement".

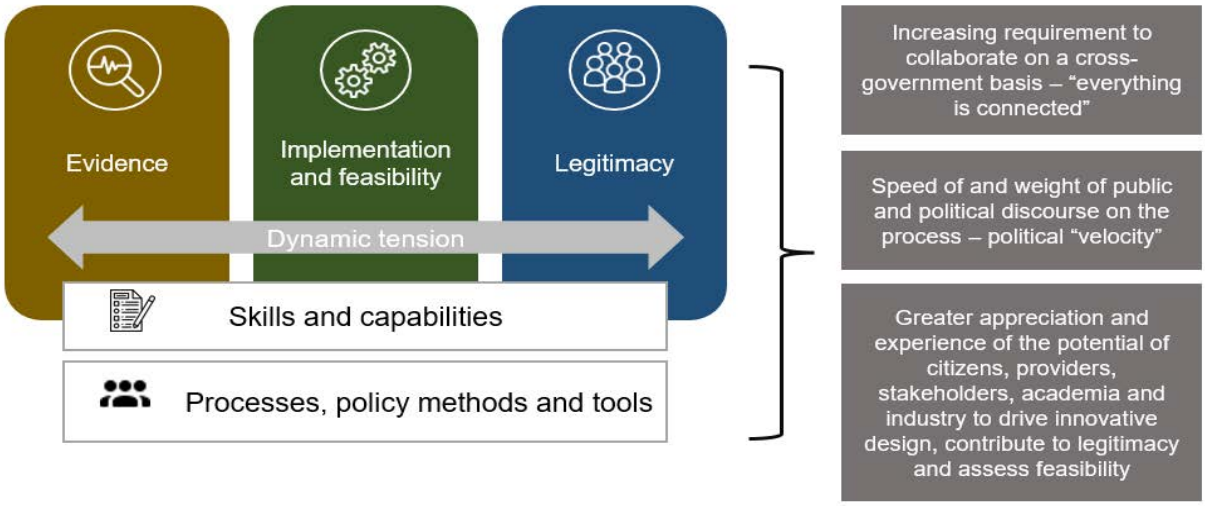
Figure 1.1. Civil Service Renewal 2024: Action Plan to deliver the Civil Service Renewal 2030 Strategy



Source: Adapted from (Republic of Ireland, 2014[2]), *Civil Service Renewal 2024: Action Plan to deliver the Civil Service Renewal 2030 Strategy*.

The report "Strengthening Policy Making in the Civil Service" takes a unified and joined-up approach to policy development. The report is structured around the interrelated pillars of evidence, implementation and feasibility, and legitimacy (see Figure 1.2) and offers guidance on enablers and best practices for policy development. Central to the "Strengthening Policy Making in the Civil Service" report is that the three pillars are mutually reinforcing. For example, the Civil Service would find it difficult to gather and analyse and share data if there isn't sufficient legitimacy; feasibility depends in part of the availability of good data; and legitimacy depends, in part, on government being able to show they can deliver. As this stage, however, although the framework has been endorsed by the CSMB, it has not yet been launched or shared widely across the civil service. The implementation of the framework is pending the development of a strategic, structured and well-supported plan to ensure the promulgation, capacity-building and embedding of the approaches, skills and competences it proposes.

Figure 1.2. Civil Service Management Board framework "Strengthening Policy Making in the Civil Service"



Source: Adapted from figure provided by the Department of the Taoiseach, Government of Ireland.

The Public Service Reform Plan aims to make the work of the public service more transparent, decision making more accountable and service delivery more effective. Our Public Service 2020 (Government of Ireland, 2019[3]) is the most recent framework for reform. It is the government's framework for development and innovation in the public service and contains 18 actions, including new initiatives and actions focused on building on reforms already in place. There are three pillars: Delivering for Our Public, Innovating for Our Future, and Developing Our People and Organisations.

The implementation of these strategies is guided by a rich institutional framework, support structures and co-ordination bodies. In relation to government reform and policy development, the following play an important role:

- The government establishes **cabinet committees** to assist in addressing government-wide policy issues, such as COVID-19, environment and climate change, housing, and accommodation and support for Ukrainian refugees. Cabinet committees, of which there are currently 11 in place (Government of Ireland, 2022[4]), comprise two or more members of government and may also include the attorney general and ministers of state.
- The **Department of the Taoiseach**, in particular its Social Policy and Public Service Reform Division (Government of Ireland, 2021[5]), supports the Taoiseach on social policy and public service reform and related matters, including the work of a number of cabinet committees; assists with the Civil Service Renewal programme, including providing the secretariat to the Civil Service Management Board; and has the departmental oversight role for the National Economic and Social Council.
- The goal of the **Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform** (DPENDR) is to serve the public interest through sound governance of public expenditure and by leading and enabling reform across the civil and public service. The DPENDR Transformation Division (Government of Ireland, 1997[6]) is responsible for developing, driving, co-ordinating, supporting and evaluating the government's programme of Public Service Reform and Innovation and Civil Service Renewal. It is also responsible for legislative and other government reform commitments to promote and support open, accountable and transparent government. The implementation of Our Public Service 2020 (Government of Ireland, 2019[3]) is a key priority, as is the development of a culture of evaluation across the public service. An important part of the work of the

Transformation Division in driving reform is implementing the Civil Service Renewal Plan and supporting the Civil Service Management Board, which has collective responsibility for delivering the plan. It also has responsibility for managing the Civil Service wide Employee Engagement Surveys, the Annual Civil Service Excellence Awards and for the Organisational Capability Review Programme.

- The Civil Service Management Board (CSMB) oversees the implementation of the priorities set out in the **Civil Service Renewal Plan**. The CSMB is made up of all secretaries general and heads of offices and is chaired by the Secretary General to the Government.
- To promote shared ownership of the Public Service Reform Plan across the public service, both civil service and public service leaders and managers are directly involved in the public service reform governance structures. The **Public Service Leadership Board** (Government of Ireland, n.d.[7]), with Secretary General/CEO-level participation drawn from the Civil Service Management Board and representatives from a broad range of public service organisations, provides overall leadership and is supported by the **Public Service Management Group** (PSMG). PSMG membership comprises assistant secretaries and equivalents from across the civil and public service.

Enabling institutions and bodies within the civil service include the following:

- The **Central Statistics Office (CSO)** is Ireland's national statistical office, and its role is to impartially collect, analyse and make available statistics about Ireland's people, society and economy. CSO's mandate under the Statistics Act 1993 (Government of Ireland, 1993[8]) is "[t]he collection, compilation, extraction and dissemination for statistical purposes of information relating to economic, social and general activities and conditions in the State". At the national level, CSO official statistics inform decision making across a range of areas including construction, health, welfare, the environment, and the economy. The CSO offers, for instance, access to a "Data Room" for policymakers and researchers, to meet the data needs of policy departments. At the European level, the CSO provides an accurate picture of Ireland's economic and social performance and enables comparisons between Ireland and other countries. The CSO is also responsible for co-ordinating the official statistics of other public authorities.
- The **National Data Infrastructure (NDI) Champions Group**, chaired by the CSO with representatives from all departments and agencies with high-value data, monitors and promotes coverage of unique identifiers across public sector data holdings. The Group identifies gaps in the coverage of unique identifiers while also acknowledging the value of the NDI in meeting known and emerging data needs in the public service.
- The **Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES)** (Government of Ireland, 2022[9]) is an integrated cross-government network, also anchored in DPENDR, to enhance the role of economics and value-for-money analysis in public policy development. Created in 2012, IGEES demonstrates the strong commitment of the government to a high and consistent standard of policy evaluation and economic analysis throughout the Irish civil service. In that regard, IGEES has an important role to play in the reform and strengthening of the civil service and in supporting the government in progressing major cross-cutting policy challenges such as economic growth, social inclusion, service delivery and policy design. IGEES goals include: (1) to develop a professional economic and evaluation service that will provide high standards of economic and policy analysis to assist the government decision making process; (2) to ensure the application of established best practices in policy evaluation in support of better value for money and more effective policy and programme interventions by state authorities; (3) to facilitate more open policy dialogue with academia, external specialists and stakeholders across the broad socio-economic spectrum. The IGEES network comprises approximately 200 economists and public analysts working within departments across the civil service to instil a culture of and expertise in policy development across the government.

- **OneLearning**, the Irish Civil Service Learning and Development Centre, is situated in the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform. It is responsible for the provision of learning and development, which supports the improvement of skills and competencies across the civil service. The Centre seeks to enable a high-performing workforce by encouraging new skills and behaviours, facilitating ongoing professional development and ensuring that staff have access to learning and development when required. It was established in September 2017, with new courses becoming available on an incremental basis over the years.
- The **Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO),** anchored in DPENDR, has the leadership role for the digital agenda across government. OGCIO works in collaboration with organisations across the civil and public service and has a growing involvement in supporting sectoral digital development such as increased cyber security, the Contact Tracing App and the COVID-19 vaccination roll-out. OGCIO also leads the implementation of a number of strategies, legislation and European Union Regulations.
- The **Government Information Service (GIS)** is based in the Department of the Taoiseach and works to foster strong collaboration and co-ordination among press and communication officials in other government departments and agencies. It co-ordinates, supports, and amplifies communication around key government priorities such as Housing for All, Brexit, the Shared Island initiative, Climate Action, COVID-19 and Ukraine. It also supports and encourages capacity-building in the area of communication and engagement across the civil and public service (including through the Government Communications Network) and manages the "Government of Ireland" identity and unified web presence of gov.ie.

Policy development also benefits from a number of prominent independent institutions. They include the following:

- The **Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)** produces independent, high-quality research with the objective of informing policies that support economic sustainability and promote social progress. To this end, the ESRI brings together leading experts from different disciplines who collaborate across a number of research initiatives, focusing on a broad range of topics ranging from macroeconomics to taxation, education and social inclusion.
- The **National Economic and Social Council (NESC)** was established in 1973 and advises the Taoiseach on strategic policy issues relating to sustainable economic, social and environmental development in Ireland. The members of the NESC are representatives of business and employers' organisations, trade unions, agricultural and farming organisations, community and voluntary organisations, and environmental organisations, as well as heads of government departments and independent experts. The composition of the NESC plays an important and unique role in bringing different perspectives from civil society together with government. This helps the NESC to analyse the challenges facing Irish society and to develop a shared understanding among its members of how to tackle them. The Secretary General of the Department of the Taoiseach chairs the NESC meetings. At each meeting, the NESC discusses reports drafted by its secretariat. The NESC decides its work programme on a three-year basis, with inputs from the Department of the Taoiseach.
- The **Institute of Public Administration (IPA)** is Ireland's public service development agency focused exclusively on public sector development. It delivers its service through:
  - education and training – building people's capability to meet challenges
  - direct consultancy – solving problems and helping plan, and shape the future
  - research and publishing – understanding what needs to be done and making these findings readily available
  - international projects and co-operation.

Building on current strengths in policy development

The policy development ecosystem in Ireland, as evidenced by its institutional framework, is well developed. The interviews and survey undertaken for this assessment report highlighted a number of ongoing good practices in the country's policy development process, including in relation to:

- collaborative approaches for policy development across departments and agencies
- stakeholder engagement (both ad hoc and permanent/institutionalised)
- organisational culture for evidence-informed policy-making development
- policy co-ordination at the departmental level.

Some of the evidence of good practices has emerged during times of crisis. The response to the global financial crisis was mentioned as an example of how evidence and lessons learned helped Ireland be better prepared in facing the COVID-19 pandemic. Civil servants interviewed for this project felt that the COVID-19 response showed the system working at its best, with various parts of the system coming together to address the common challenge and displaying agility, responsiveness and resilience. The COVID-19 response also led to significant progress in the area of digitalisation. In particular, digital connectivity served to fast-track delivery of elements of the Civil Service Renewal programme, including in relation to digitalisation and remote working. For both crises, interviewees mentioned the following as key to this success: strong central leadership and direction, a joined-up political-administrative interface (the political and official sides working as one) supported by whole-of-government structures for providing decision making advice and for monitoring and reporting progress, alongside the use of "special" cabinet committees in tackling complex, cross-cutting policy issues (such as dealing with the challenges associated with Ukrainian refugees).

> *"Back in 2008 with the financial crash, unemployment escalated rapidly in Ireland. Government brought an action plan for jobs which cut across all departments. It was driven by the centre, by the prime minister. There was a real drive and focus on delivering the actions. Unemployment lowered in a relatively short period."*
>
> *"I think our reaction to the pandemic showed that we had a policy system that was able to come up with proposals to deal with this unprecedented crisis in a very short order. And I think it probably did so more effectively than a lot of other countries in terms of protecting public health, but also in terms of protecting the economy."*

Interviews and surveys report numerous examples of sound policy processes for the preparation of this assessment report, including in areas such as well-being (A Wellbeing Approach for Ireland), a strategy for children (First 5), health policies (National Cancer Strategy), rural development policy (Our Rural Future), employment (Action Plan for Jobs), housing (Housing for All) and water policies (River Basin Management). A number of good tools and methods were also highlighted, for instance, in the evaluation at the Department for Social Protection and the Environmental Protection Agency Research Programme. All these demonstrate where the civil service has successfully developed and delivered effective policy. Some span across different departments and policy areas, highlighting the capability for effective cross-departmental collaboration. They provide insights into the critical factors for successful policy development.

Challenges in the area of policy development in Ireland

Despite current reform initiatives, strategies and examples of good practice, this assessment has revealed a number of areas of opportunity to further strengthen policy development practices and tools in Ireland. These include how current reform initiatives could be enhanced, leveraged and joined up to improve the overall policy development system. Although there are many good practices (or examples of "positive deviance"), these are not always widely known or shared, and not all are mainstreamed across

departments. There are also a number of gaps and duplications that appear as a result of inconsistency in applying policy development practices and tools.

These challenges resonate with "areas for further improvement" identified by the CSMB (Government of Ireland, n.d.[10]):

- ensuring a **consistent and measured approac**h to develop and manage **policy skills** to meet the needs of the civil service
- promoting greater **innovation and openness** to new ideas or alternative solutions that may involve a risk of failure but could lead to useful learning
- providing opportunities for enhanced **engagement with co-production partners in policy design**, where such stakeholders are integral to implementation and delivery
- developing a **centralised approach to commissioning research** and best practice mechanisms for engaging with research bodies and academics, helping to increase the quality of inputs and evidence during policy development
- creating **cross-government policy network supports**, similar to other professional networking initiatives that are being advanced across government.

Overall, several themes – both good practices and areas of opportunity – emerged in the context of this research and are discussed further below in this report. They include:

- further strengthening the **evidence base** for policy development, including balancing short-term demands for quick solutions to problems against working towards long-term policy priorities and the use of strategic foresight
- continuing to bridge the **policy and implementation divide**
- further improving the **legitimacy** of policy development both with respect to the political and technical interface and with respect to stakeholder engagement, including mechanisms for the co-creation and co-design of policies
- articulating and developing the necessary **skills for policy practitioners and collective capabilities** across the system
- ensuring that policy professionals have access to **tools, methods and data** for policy and effectively use them in their day-to-day work.

The subsequent chapters in this report will discuss these topics in more detail.

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2 Using Evidence, Data and Strategic Foresight for Policy Development and Long-term Policy Issues in Ireland

This chapter examines the availability and use of relevant evidence, data and strategic foresight for policy development purposes and includes an analysis of the public sector's collaboration with academia. It highlights a number of progress areas in leveraging evidence and data for policy development and points to several areas that can benefit from further improvement.

The collection and use of evidence to inform policy is the first pillar of the "Strengthening Policy Making in the Civil Service" framework for policy development. Policy development relies on the availability of the right sorts of evidence and data – including real-time data, to enable prompt decision making and action – and the use of them for policy purposes. Their use requires the capacity to properly understand and assess available evidence and to translate it into policy insights. Moreover, systems, standards and protocols must be in place to allow for understanding, leveraging and sharing the available data, as demonstrated by the recent work on Ukrainian refugees. As highlighted by the "Strengthening Policy Making in the Civil Service" framework (Government of Ireland, n.d.[1]), "[e]vidence alone does not make policy. But it is an enabler and key starting point for analysis, appraisal and the weighing up of policy options and priorities which is the responsibility of policy-advisers."

Efforts to enhance the evidence base to inform policy are an important addition to the good policy equation. Thanks to the introduction of the Open Data Strategy in 2017 and the Data Sharing and Governance Act 2019, Ireland has significantly improved its policy and governance framework for open data, which has greatly increased data availability since 2017. This includes generating a substantive evidence base (such as the Growing Up in Ireland Longitudinal study) as well as mechanisms to ensure that information from a variety of sources – data, evaluation, and insights from stakeholders, civil society and citizens – is made accessible and able to inform policy design and development. Interviewees for this project reported benefits stemming from better guidance and practices for stakeholder consultation and a greater awareness of the need to draw on user or citizen insights in the policy development process (this is discussed in more detail in Chapter 4 on legitimacy).

Another important step is to continue leveraging existing good-quality administrative data for policy development. Better use of experience from policy implementation (see Chapter 3) as well as the involvement of the people likely to be affected by policy (see Chapter 4) will enhance the effectiveness of policy solutions. Interviewees reported improvements in the availability and use of data for policy development in departments. The current discussions on the development of consistent data models could further support the availability of multidimensional data across government. In that regard, the 2021 OECD Recommendation on Enhancing Access to and Sharing of Data recommends that governments "strive to ensure that data are provided together with any required meta-data, documentation, data models and algorithms in a transparent and timely manner, supported by appropriate data access control mechanisms" (OECD, 2021[2]). A uniform model across the Irish public sector should be based on an agreement on how dataset properties, structure and inter-relationships are displayed.

To further increase the availability and use of data, as well as data accessibility, in the public sector, it is necessary to also focus on data generation. Data mining may require particular skills, and not all data assets are easily discoverable and accessible. In relation to the type of data used, data on inputs is often more readily available than data on outcomes, which can lead to imbalance and an incomplete capture of the impact of policies. Furthermore, the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have shown a growing need for the use of real-time data on daily or weekly developments to formulate appropriate policy responses.

Regarding data-sharing, government data are not naturally harmonised in many OECD countries, because government entities have different datasets and formats. Moreover, a lack of standards and guidelines – e.g., on data security and stability, data disclosure, data link and exchange, data confidentiality, open data, personally identifiable information, data innovation design, and data governance assessment – in addition to limited human resources capability can make the process of data management and analysis challenging. A comprehensive and coherent approach towards organising, classifying, categorising and integrating government data with common standards and protocols could help overcome challenges related to the heterogeneity of data and the complexity of data integration. It could thus provide the leverage to develop data sharing and reinforce collaboration across the government.

> *"There's been much better use of data over the last number of years and I also think that there's better multi annual analysis as well."*

Interviews for this project consistently mentioned the availability of quality data facilitated by the National Data Infrastructure (NDI), led by the Central Statistics Office, as an important element of the policy infrastructure, especially when combined with developing mechanisms to share data across public organisations. The design and implementation of the NDI and the Public Service Data Strategy 2019-2023 (Government of Ireland, 2019[3]) are supporting a stronger data ecosystem with better information for policy professionals.

The NDI is a work in progress. A number of data-linking initiatives have already begun across areas including housing, incomes and educational outcomes. The presence of skilled data-savvy and statistical staff at the departmental level allows for full exploitation of the departments' statistical resources, although significant challenges remain in accessing data across departments and in obtaining linked files. While coverage of common identifiers to merge datasets was low in the past, today's Personal Public Service Number (PPSN) coverage is relatively high, and the Eircode coverage is improving. A common identifier for citizens already exists with the PPSN; however, the Unique Business Identifier has not yet been fully rolled out across the system, beyond its use in the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and in the Office of the Revenue Commissioners.

The Public Service Data Strategy 2019-2023 has helped establish a data ecosystem to improve the availability and use of data across government activities. First, it led to the creation of an application programming interface-led (API) interoperability platform based on a service-oriented architecture to enable public service bodies to co-operate in sharing and reusing data. Second, it promotes a structured approach to data analytics to encourage evidence-based policy development. Third, by supporting data-sharing agreements accessible to citizens in the public domain and a Data Portal for citizens and by publishing open datasets, it promotes a culture of transparency.

A good co-ordination practice related to the NDI is the National Data Infrastructure Champions Group, which spans the civil and public service, and has been expanded to include agencies with high-value data. The Group developed a dashboard to measure NDI maturity for public sector entities. The dashboard allows the assessment of key data holdings for departments and agencies and highlights opportunities for further improvement.

The NDI and Public Service Data Strategy, coupled with better legislation to promote and encourage data sharing between public bodies (the Data Sharing and Governance Act 2019), have driven greater and more in-depth, innovative use of data across the public service, and they will allow the public service to further enhance its data infrastructure.

Ireland intends to be a leader in using open data and in creating an environment that recognises its economic, social and democratic benefits of Open Data are recognised. To this purpose, the Open Data Initiative, which is another key element of the public service reform agenda, has involved significant engagement with the public, businesses, researchers and public bodies and has worked towards greater outreach and closer collaboration with all stakeholders. This has been done via several conferences, seminars, workshops and competitions as well as with traditional means of communication and social media. The Open Data Governance Board, established in 2016, provides leadership on how to improve the capacity and capability of public bodies in implementing open data and makes recommendations to the government on how this can bring about long-term economic, social and democratic benefits. As such, the Open Data agenda can be considered a contribution to greater policy legitimacy.

Interviews consistently highlighted the improvement in evaluation and economic analysis. They attributed it to the work of the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES), the subject of previous OECD analysis and recommendations (Government of Ireland, n.d.[4]). How its expertise can be employed

further is discussed later in this report in relation to policy skills development and developing centres of expertise.

There are a number of excellent case examples at the department and agency levels, such as the use of impact evaluation data at the Department of Social Protection of Ireland (see Box 2.1).

Box 2.1. Impact assessments for social protection in Ireland

The Department of Social Protection of Ireland plays a fundamental role in promoting two types of impact assessment of policy proposals: poverty and social impact assessments. Impact assessments are a crucial component of policy design and implementation and contribute to the well-being of the citizenry through three main channels. First, they highlight which policies are capable of having the intended impact on the targeted population, their possible spill overs and which components of wide policy programmes are most effective. This informs ex ante programming for future interventions, provides evidence for debate in the legislative arena and highlights directions for better targeting. Second, impact assessments allow for better spending by reducing the waste of resources in ineffective or counterproductive policies and by maximising investments in beneficial activities and policies. This permits more cost-effective planning and budgeting. Third, they contribute to the replication of good practices by identifying specific characteristics of successful policies, e.g. delivery methods and partnerships.

Poverty impact assessment

Poverty impact assessments (PIAs) are required by several official documents of the Irish government, such as the Updated National Action Plan for Social Inclusion 2015-2017, the Revised Regulatory Impact Assessment Guidelines 2009 and Section 3.4 of the Cabinet Handbook for preparing Memos for Government.

As highlighted by the Cabinet Handbook, PIAs are necessary before submitting memoranda to the government, as they clearly indicate the impact of such proposals. All departments, even those not directly involved in service delivery, undertake these assessments. PIAs are also carried out in the preparation of strategies, plans and reviews at the departmental, state agency and local levels. These include, for instance, the Strategic Management Initiative Statements of Strategy, the National Development Plan, European Union plans and programmes, and County Development Plans and Strategies. Finally, they are completed in all stages of policy proposals and changes, and they should always be performed as an integral part of the development process.

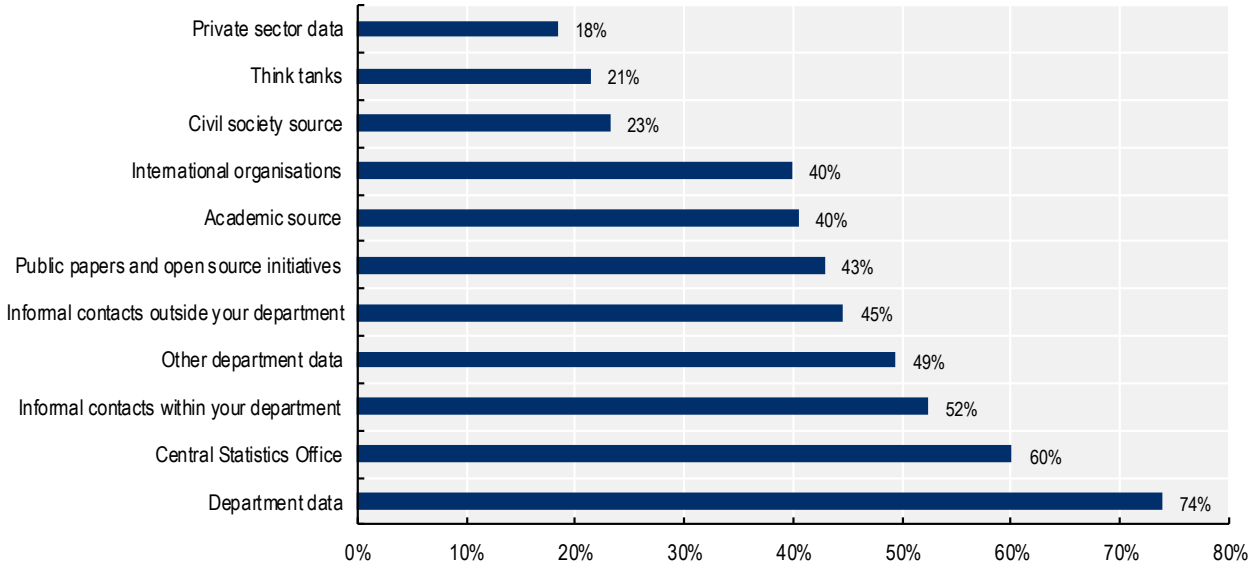
Social impact assessment

The social impact assessment (SIA), unlike the PIA, takes a holistic view of the possible impact of policies on household incomes, families and poverty. SIAs have tested the distributive impact of changes in certain crucial policy areas, e.g., welfare and income tax. They have used a sample of around 5 000 households drawn from the latest (2019) CSO household survey, complemented by more up-to-date data about population, employment and incomes. SIAs have been conducted on all fiscal policies proposed in the budget laws since 2013. The related research briefings have been published in an easy-to-read format to inform the public about the cumulative effect of budgetary policies on income, wealth and social inequalities. The most recent SIA was carried out for the tax measures proposed in the Budget Law 2022.

Source: (Government of Ireland, 2022[5])

The OECD survey undertaken for this project looked at the sources policy practitioners use for thematic data, evidence and insights to feed into policy development. Responses highlighted that the mainly used sources are department data, data from CSOs, and informal contacts within one's department, while the least used are private sector data, academic insight, and evidence from think tanks and civil society sources (see Figure 2.1). As part of department data, audience insights as collected by public communicators can be a source of regular, updated and easy to get insights on the motivations, impeding factors, fears or barriers citizens have, as well as their understanding of particular subjects and their media consumption habits.

Figure 2.1. Sources feeding into policy development in Ireland



Note: n=168. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked, "What are the sources you use for thematic data, evidence and insights to feed into policy development?".
Source: (OECD, 2022[6]), OECD Survey on Policy Development in Ireland (unpublished).

Strengthening the evidence base to address long-term policy issues

The Irish response to the COVID-19 crisis was seen by interviewees as a good example of the administration's ability to respond quickly to immediate policy demands. However, many felt that they were reacting rather than shaping the response to the crisis or to ministerial demands for advice, with little bandwidth and sometimes little incentive to focus on the medium- and longer-term policy challenges outlined above.

There are a number of strategies or statements of strategic direction across the government. Project Ireland 2040 covers the National Planning Framework, the National Marine Planning Framework and the National Development Plan 2021-2030, which can ground the work on long-term priorities. Project Ireland 2040 is the government's long-term overarching strategy to make Ireland a better country for all and to build a more resilient and sustainable future. It sets out the national strategic policy objectives for the next two decades. However, it is challenging to operationalise these strategies into specific policies and work plans for each of the departments involved, as well as to ensure that new policies are aligned with those strategies (as they are often the result of departmental work).

OECD analysis (OECD, 2018[7]) suggests that this is a challenge shared by most jurisdictions, noting common weaknesses in developing whole-of-government strategies and strategic planning and in

embedding futures thinking and risk management in planning and policy processes. Even agencies at the centre of government (prime minister's/president's offices) with the most influence over priority setting and strategic alignment tend to have more of a co-ordination and oversight role than one of helping to set a strategic policy agenda. Few governments have developed the institutions, processes and practices to focus on the long term, including the necessary frameworks, methodological tools and institutional capabilities to assume a longer-term stewardship role while at the same time respecting the strategic direction of their elected governments. Futures thinking and a focus on the long-term become all the more important for finding responses to multi-faceted 'polycrises' such as COVID-10 or the war in Ukraine that simultaneously affect several policy domains.

The Irish government has some important mechanisms for highlighting and investigating issues that would form part of medium- and long-term policy agendas.

The National Economic and Social Council (Government of Ireland, n.d.[4]) is a representative body that advises the Taoiseach on strategic policy issues relating to sustainable economic, social and environmental development in Ireland. Its current work programme includes deliberations on the Shared Island initiative (Government of Ireland, 2022[8]), sustainable development and climate change, and Ireland's well-being framework. It has also considered digital inclusion, challenges and opportunities for rural Ireland, the agricultural sector, and the future of the welfare system. Having the Department of the Taoiseach chairing the National Economic and Social Council and ring-fencing it to protect it from responding to urgent demands was seen by interviewees as strengthening its ability to deliver on longer-term issues. However, on a number of occasions, interviewees mentioned its historical link with the social partnership during the global financial crisis as limiting its ability to influence across government departments and the political cadre.

To strengthen data stewardship in relation to the evolving data needs of the civil and public service, the CSO has already delivered 37 seconded professional statistical staff (from the Irish Government Statistical Service) to 16 departments and offices across the system. This support has in turn created a demand for further data linkage and integration of services and the expansion of the Data Rooms for policymakers, supported by their internal data science, quality, and methodology support functions. The recent creation of a dedicated Data Science and Statistical Support Unit, comprised of a team of data scientists and analysts who will initially focus on Housing, Healthcare and Climate Change data priorities, will help to meet departmental data needs and can advise on data strategy development, data acquisition and linking, data engineering and data science, methodology, and quality supports.

Also, a number of academic partners are working on mid- and longer-term policy issues. For example, researchers at the University of Galway are addressing issues of disability rights under the United Nations Convention for Persons with Disabilities and have a long-term working relationship with policy practitioners in government departments responsible for the implementation of the Convention. A recent outcome relates to the Assisted Decision-Making (Capacity) Bill 2021, which is being examined by the Oireachtas at present and is sponsored by the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth. Furthermore, the Campus Engage initiative (Government of Ireland, 2023[9]) of the Irish Universities Association fosters research and innovation that aim to improve, understand or investigate societal challenges; community partners and policy practitioners are helping to advance the initiative. Co-creation is central to the Engaged Research approach of the initiative.

Respondents to the interviews and surveys mentioned processes to assess national risk, including national risk assessments conducted by the Department of Taoiseach (which, in 2015, anticipated and considered the potential risk of a future Brexit) and other processes curated by the national defence department which cover events such as natural disasters and pandemics. While a national risk assessment is predicated on the assumption that a lead department will manage the assessment strategically, interviewees noted that, despite the risk register and the risk assessment, there is currently no mechanism to feed those risks into a strategic policy agenda or to help them influence current policy processes.

Developing mechanisms to connect the various parts of the system already focused on longer-term and cross-cutting strategic issues and finding ways to translate those insights into a whole-of-government strategic policy agenda would give the civil service more clarity on where to put their policy efforts. While government develops policy and sets the agenda, this connection would also enable the civil service to take a more strategic rather than reactive approach to policy development to help identify policy gaps or inadequacies, communicate the urgency or need for prioritisation of policy or resourcing decisions, and respond to immediate demands from ministers. The civil service itself should have a more proactive approach to policy work, including anticipating demands for policy analysis and advice.

Civil servants consulted for this project mentioned the lack of time and resources for in-depth policy development as a challenge, citing limited space for identifying problems, for testing policy options with stakeholders to avoid technocratic approaches, for conducting early policy experiments before rolling out programmes, for carrying out in-depth impact assessments, and for collaborating and/or co-creating with other departments or people likely to be affected by policy decisions. The latter is of particular importance, as direct input into policy design by or on behalf of vulnerable communities is uneven at present. It is vital that outcomes of policies, often having an impact on vulnerable parts of the population, are incorporated coherently into review and evaluation. The quality of policy development work was deemed to suffer as a result of perceived time and resource constraints. Examples in some countries include the development of Long-term Insights Briefings, which try to bring some accountability to delivering long-term priorities across departments (Box 2.2). As time and resources for policy development may not increase in the short or medium term, policymakers will have to think about how to adapt to be better prepared and to have better developed and agreed processes and mechanisms before finalising policy advice.

Box 2.2. Long-Term Insights Briefings in New Zealand and Australia

New Zealand's Public Service Act 2020 requires chief executives of government departments, independently from ministers, to produce a Long-term Insights Briefing (LTIB) at least once every three years, where they should explore future trends, risks and opportunities. LTIBs are expected to provide information and impartial analysis, as well as policy options for responding to risks and seizing opportunities. The development of such LTIBs is based on eight high-level steps, which include engagement with citizens both on the subject matter and on the draft briefing itself. The first LTIB was presented to a parliamentary select committee in mid-2022. After parliamentary scrutiny, it was made available in the public domain. Public consultation on draft briefings is a requirement of the process.

Prior to the Public Service Act 2020, New Zealand's senior policy community had discussed the challenges of building long-term issues into policy formulation, including the relative dearth of foresight capability across the public service. Under the auspices of the policy project, Tier 2 policy leaders held workshops on a future policy heat map in 2015 and on policy stewardship in 2017. While there is no associated programme to build capability in strategic foresight, the LTIB requirement process may catalyse demand for strategic foresight capabilities.

In order to strengthen policy development and planning, the government of Australia has also expressed its intention to start a process of developing long-term insights. Overseen by the Secretaries Board, these briefings will connect experts from across the public service and will include public consultations with various stakeholders such as citizens, academia, industry and NGOs on specific longer term policy challenges to help identify solutions.

Source: (Government of New Zealand, 2022[10]); (Washington, 2021[11]); (Government of Australia, 2022[12])

Strategic policy units have been set up in a number of departments in order to improve policy development planning at the department level. However, these units have not been rolled out in every department. In addition, their mandate or capacity, which may vary from one department to another, to support government capability across the civil service is not well understood by many stakeholders. It also remains unclear to what extent these units are beneficial to cross-departmental policy development (as opposed to developing sectoral strategic policy frameworks), as there does not appear to be any central co-ordination nor active exchange among them. It may be helpful to identify and map these units in more detail, to shed light on their composition, activities and added value.

Enabling strategic foresight in support of policy development

In this context, the capability of the civil service in strategic foresight deserves particular attention, as it represents important information (rather than evidence or data) contributing to the policy development process. To provide proactive advice to governments and to include future considerations in current policy analysis and advice, the civil service requires enhanced capabilities in perceiving emerging future changes in the present, then making sense of them and using them to shape policy, a discipline known as strategic foresight. While all governments are doing this to some extent, there is great variation in the resources, time and influence devoted to strategic foresight as an explicit discipline, rather than an implicit intuition.

The discipline of constantly perceiving, making sense of and acting on future developments as they emerge is the definition of strategic foresight as used in this project. Times of rapid change, unpredictable uncertainty, novelty and ambiguity highlight the limitations of traditional forecast-based planning. Foresight helps policymakers to challenge and overcome current assumptions about the future and prepare for a broader set of possibilities (OECD, 2021[13]). The value of strategic foresight comes from challenging assumptions, broadening what is considered and inspiring new actions. Like any skill or discipline, it must be practised and developed for individuals and organisations to realise the benefits. Simply reading about how strategic foresight works, or passively studying documents about the future, should not be expected to give an appreciation of these benefits.

In Ireland, there is potential to further develop these capabilities and connect them with the policy development process. The Irish government has already identified this as a capability to be developed.

This project has a parallel focus on embedding strategic foresight in decision making. Futures exercises have been undertaken in the past in Ireland (OECD, 2021[13]), including population projections informed by megatrends analysis, the National Economic and Social Council's work on Approaches to Transition and Just Transition on technology and climate, and the involvement of Irish academia and public servants in the European Commission's IMAJINE scenarios project on territorial justice. While people interviewed for this assessment considered them “useful” or “informative”, the resulting insights did not translate into strategic directions or influence policy development. Strategic foresight is not an end in itself. It is only useful if it is used to inform future vision, strategic directions and policy.

Interviews suggested a growing appetite for strategic foresight as an aid for strategic policy discussions and a “way to get people to talk about trade-offs and choices”. The next phase of this project, specifically the complementary component on strategic foresight, will recommend ways to build capability in strategic foresight across the Public Service. This will include a focus on strategic foresight, especially for policy practitioners, and a policy development framework and policy platform that recognises the benefits of foresight to policy design and development. In accordance with the above-mentioned need to connect strategic foresight with policy outcomes, these capability-building efforts will target examples of policy areas to make for an applied learning experience.

Resources and good practices are currently limited. No interviewees or any other public servants involved in the project indicated spending all or most of their time on strategic foresight. A negligible number of

public servants had participated in an actual strategic foresight exercise or knew a colleague who had. There are no known analyses carried out by or for any Irish public service with explicit use of exploratory scenarios, horizon scanning, or visioning and backcasting – three of the main methods of strategic foresight. A majority of survey respondents indicated never using these methods or deemed them not applicable to their functions. The methods typically applied in strategic foresight – visioning and backcasting – were among the least frequently used among survey respondents.

Interviewees and focus group participants in OECD interventions prior to this project expressed views about the nature and practice of strategic foresight that do not correspond to the actual discipline as used by the OECD and other leading organisations. For example, there was an unreasonable expectation that strategic foresight would have been able to predict and avoid the 2008 financial crisis; or that producing a risk assessment would suffice to consider the work of strategic foresight fulfilled. A more subtle misconception was that technology foresight and road mapping served the same purpose as strategic foresight.

Strategic foresight interventions that respondents had undertaken in the past were understood to be useful "informative" tools; however, the outputs of these interventions did not clearly translate into policy development. Therefore, there is a need to equip the public service with strategic foresight skills and practice systems that can stimulate iterative processes for policy development through to implementation.

In spite of the paucity of direct experience and concrete use of strategic foresight in the Irish public service, respondents generally indicated intuitive support of its principles and agreed that it would be in the interest of Ireland's system of governance to increase the use and effectiveness of strategic foresight.

One particular area of note where interviewees identified an important potential for strategic foresight to add value was in fostering interdepartmental and interdisciplinary exchange, with the intention of creating shared language and plans for concerted action. Furthermore, when asked questions relating to the strategic direction and contextual environment of their organisations, interviewees tended to revert to considerations of their present-day problem-solving and their existing agendas, indicating that the cognitive switch needed to create strategic foresight dialogue was not readily accessible to them.

Given both the limited exposure of individuals to strategic foresight thinking and the system's limited experience with it, interviewees understandably had difficulty speculating on details of how and where strategic foresight could be used in practice or how the public service could embed it in its institutions.

A number of other countries have strengthened their ability to embed strategic foresight in policy planning and development (see Box 2.3).

Box 2.3. Strategic foresight in Canada, Finland and Singapore

Strengthening the capacity of the civil service to embed strategic foresight in policy planning activities is crucial to build institutional resilience and adaptability to rapidly evolving scenarios and can empower the public sector to anticipate challenges and analyse policy trade-offs. Several countries use strategic foresight to build stronger policies in the face of an uncertain future.

Canada

In 2010, Canada transformed the Policy Research Initiative into Policy Horizons, a federal government organisation that conducts strategic foresight to help the government develop future-oriented policies and programmes. The organisation reports to the Minister of Employment, Workforce Development and Disability Inclusion and receives oversight from a deputy minister steering committee. Policy Horizons focuses on three main lines of foresight – Economic Futures, Social Futures and Governance Futures,

– and works along several dimensions. First, it analyses the emerging policy landscape with its challenges and opportunities. Second, it engages in dialogue with public servants and citizens. Third, it builds foresight literacy and capacity across the public service. For this last dimension, it developed a series of Foresight Training Modules for civil servants and is continuously engaged in building the foresight capacity across departments. Departments throughout the government can draw on Policy Horizons' foresight capacity, and it supports discussions and workshops at high-level meetings across the government.

Finland

Strategic foresight is strongly embedded in Finland's government systems. Firstly, there exists a legal requirement for regular foresight studies and the Prime Minister's Office leads the whole-of-government efforts of strategic foresight. At least once per term, the Prime Minister's Office publishes a report on long-term futures, setting out the main challenges and the government's targets. The institutional setting for this exercise brings together several entities. All ministries are involved in foresight activities through the ministries' joint foresight group, which provides a co-operation network for preparing the "Government Report on the Future". In addition, a group of experts, the Government Foresight Group, supports foresight activities to strengthen the links to decision making processes. Finally, the National Foresight Network brings together foresight data producers and serves as a co-ordination forum for foresight operators.

Singapore

The Centre for Strategic Futures of Singapore plays a key role in conducting and co-ordinating regular cross-government foresight analyses to inform the overall strategic planning. Established in 2009, it is located in the Prime Minister's Office, and it is tasked with building capacities and tools for strategic anticipation in the whole public service, developing insights with innovative methodologies and frameworks, and communicating insights to decision makers. Other individual agencies have set up foresight agencies that build on the role and expertise of the Centre of Strategic Futures. It is common practice to place officials in the central foresight institution to gain experience, and then deploy them across the government. The Centre has an innovative approach to strategic foresight, which revolves around Scenario Planning Plus (SP+) and taps into a set of tools broader than that used in traditional scenario planning. The Centre shares the SP+ toolkit across government through a series of workshops and courses at the Civil Service College and leads a series of conversations bringing together leaders across the public service to strengthen their anticipatory capabilities.

Source: (Government of Canada, 2022[14]); (Government of Singapore, 2022[15]); (Government of Finland, 2022[16])

In order to further mainstream strategic foresight across the policy development system, a pilot programme on strategic foresight has been developed from a number of options presented by the OECD. The options were:

- strategic foresight alongside: a minimum viable setup for strategic foresight, consisting of ad hoc futures practice that nonetheless aims for successful impact on policy development processes and opens the gateway for further expansion
- strategic foresight on demand: a regular foresight function with a mandate from the centre of government that can be readily drawn on to inform work and promote a certain degree of cross-departmental collaboration
- strategic foresight built in: a set of practices systematically embedded in the public service that regularly generates must-have knowledge that is consistently used in decision making.

Throughout the policy development process, it is important to identify users and use knowledge-creation processes, engagement opportunities, leadership buy-in, and management and feedback interventions. These are necessary to implement greater use of strategic foresight in policy development.

Above all, this strategic foresight upgrade depends on a concerted undertaking of strategic foresight work: activities and practices that observe emerging future changes, consider their significance, and apply them to policy development. Getting started with these activities is the only way to test and improve the way strategic foresight will be implemented and valued within the Irish public service.

Collaboration with academia

As highlighted above, no government has the monopoly on policy ideas, and insights for policy can come from the wider policy ecosystem, especially from academia, civil society and the public. In complement to the actions that the civil service can take to further build up its internal data infrastructure, this section addresses the collaboration with academia in more detail.

The university sector and academics are an important part of the policy ecosystem, both in terms of their capacity to produce research insights and their capability to build the evidence base. Academics are also fundamental as sources of intellectual innovation in substantive policies and can act as teachers of innovative research methods (as discussed above).

One significant opportunity cost of quality research is not achieving its deserved impact. Public funding is often used to commission or otherwise support valuable research with significant findings, but the impact on the development of final policy options and/or decision making is variable. This constitutes a waste of both taxpayer resources and the work of academia, which we need to address.

Interviews revealed a wide spectrum of relationships between academia and the civil service. On one side of the spectrum, some departments regularly turn to academia to commission research and evaluations, engage academics in joint research projects to identify policy challenges and involve them in peer learning workshops or other events. Similarly, some departments established structural forms of collaboration between civil servants and academia. These include arrangements such as joint boards, joint advisory councils, quarterly “mixed” meetings and expert groups around certain policy issues.

A valuable example of long-term policy collaboration between academia and the civil service is the bilateral research programmes agreed between the Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI) and individual government departments and agencies. There are some 30 such programmes in 26 departments and agencies at present. They generally run for a period of about three to five years and contain an agreed set of research projects on specified policy issues. These allow for regular and ongoing interactions between researchers and departments at different stages of policy design and delivery, rather than being confined, for example, to a specific tender for a once-off policy project. Continuing dialogue as the policy develops is key; regular ESRI/departmental meetings can help to ensure the effective review of progress and to identify potential future collaborative work in the policy area. It is worth noting that the ESRI’s ability to conduct this work is heavily based on access to Research Microdata Files compiled by the CSO. Data analytics and research, irrespective of who undertakes the research, depend on the availability of high-quality source data that require skillsets beyond data analytics.

Another example of collaboration is a strategic framework of the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS), which is working to promote close engagement between policymakers and the public research system. DFHERIS is developing a cohesive strategic framework which will frame activity across policy development in the Irish civil service as a whole, as well as with sectoral agencies and organisations in the higher education sector. A key interim objective is to establish a co-ordinated programme of work to deliver coherent messaging to both the policy and research sides pending the finalisation of the framework.

Within this context, the Irish Universities Association is running the Campus Engage initiative, aimed at helping academic researchers engage effectively with the development of public policy, in terms of agenda setting, policy formulation, implementation and evaluation. The initiative seeks to develop a comprehensive framework and suite of metrics to underpin how research can feed into policy development in Ireland. To date, the project has identified a series of barriers to and enablers for effective collaboration and engagement between academic researchers and policymakers in Ireland. The project is developing a framework and guidelines for helping researchers and policymakers to collaborate effectively so that the impact of research is maximised and becomes an integral part of public policy development.

Some departments have research managers or designated research units that can bridge the gap with academic research and can support the setting of policy agendas, commission research or spur knowledge-sharing activities. For instance, the Department of Justice has a well-functioning research infrastructure, with a "research advisory group", a Research and Data Analytics team and a departmental research programme. The Research and Data Analytics team undertakes research and produces reports and statistics in several relevant areas, such as criminal justice, civil justice, equality and immigration. In addition, it regularly publishes datasets collected by the Department of Justice and works to continuously implement open government initiatives. Other examples include departments with designated roles, such as research managers or designated research units, designed to commission research, engage with academics and academic research, and translate the research for use by practitioners.

On the other side of the spectrum, other departments have more ad hoc relationships often built on personal connections between civil servants and individual academics, which may disappear because of turnover. Thus, these departments lack a system of continuous exchange and feedback with academia.

Overall, the interviews highlighted a strong interest from senior and mid-level officials but also from the civil service leadership and from academic interlocutors to strengthen the relationships between the civil service and academia and the research community in more formally structured ways.

While they acknowledged the importance of academic research for policy development, the interviews also underlined that the civil service and academia operate under different incentive structures and under different timeframes and that the cultural divide ("different language") between the two worlds hinders closer and more efficient collaboration mechanisms. The incentive structures for researchers stress the importance of generating research funding and of publishing in peer-reviewed media, rather than working with policymakers on priority issues. Unsurprisingly, these issues are not confined to the Irish experience (Institute for Government, 2018, 2019, 2020).

Towards a stronger architecture of research for public policy and society

Interviews underscored the main findings of a recent report (Doyle, 2021[17]) and of the Engaged Research policy brief (Campus Engage, 2020[18]) from the Irish Universities Association's Campus Engage initiative on how to build a stronger architecture of research for public policy and society, which spell out clearly some fundamental issues in this regard. A core theme of the papers is the importance of developing a framework of actions to support more aligned activity in the national research ecosystem. As mentioned above, the COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted the need for reliable research and evidence that can inform public debate and help decision makers to take evidence-based decisions. The complexity of today's challenges requires that Ireland further enhances the connectivity between the research and policy communities and broadens the expertise base. Important steps in this direction are represented by the Public Service Reform and the Civil Service Renewal frameworks, as well as by the higher education System Performance Framework and the national research and innovation strategy. It is, however, necessary to further strengthen the existing structures, as they should be underpinned by clear leadership, roles, objectives and tools.

Actions should target three distinct yet overlapping spaces: the research community itself, government institutions (specifically the Oireachtas and departments), and public research funders. First, it would be beneficial to consider how the Researcher Career Framework can include a specific focus on policy development relationships and support academics across their careers to engage with the policy development system through induction, coaching and mentoring by (senior) academics. Communication of typical policy processes and practices would be beneficial in this regard, particularly if offered by senior policymakers having a strong background in the realities facing government and policy advisers. Moreover, it would be useful to consider the design of incentives and rewards for academics in the higher education system as well as to reinforce the competency framework for policy practitioners, outlining various types of research skills needed by civil servants.

Second, government departments may include in their strategies a short statement on their areas of research interest, which will facilitate the research community's understanding of what are the most pressing sectoral policy questions. Building on the work of the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Services, more efforts could be directed towards developing policy capacity and towards two-way secondment pathways between policy and academia. This could be done by scaling up existing mobility and exchange programmes between higher education, the political system, and policymakers, such as the RIA Oireachtas Science Pairing Scheme, the IRC Oireachtas Shadowing Scheme and Science Foundation Ireland's Public Service Fellowship.

Third, the next review of the System Performance Framework of the Higher Education Authority should include specific material and objectives to support the link between policy and research. For instance, existing arrangements such as the Public Appointments Service graduate recruitment process and the civil service secondment policy could be further developed, since having in-house academics can help improve the access to and the understanding of evidence.

In this context, it may be useful to look at examples in other jurisdictions that have sought to draw on academic expertise and literature to inform public policy. Both the United Kingdom (UK) (Government of the UK, 2022[19]) and New Zealand have a network of chief science advisors that are appointed to individual departments but form part of a cohort that can work together on overall government priorities (the New Zealand science advisors have scrutinised budget proposals, for example). Among other roles, they are charged with ensuring that government departments individually and collectively improve the evidence base underpinning their policy development and advice to ministers (see Box 2.4). Another example is the UK government's What Works Network, which ensures that the best evidence on "what works" is available for decision makers working on public administration. Furthermore, the Open Innovation Team in the UK Cabinet Office, which is a cross-government unit, works with academics to generate analysis and ideas for policy. It pairs academics with civil service teams to help officials have better-quality discussions about their policy areas (see Box 2.5).

Box 2.4. Network of science advisors in New Zealand

The Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor

The role of New Zealand's Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor (PMCSA), originally created in 2009, is established constitutionally and consists of a single member reporting directly to the prime minister. The PMCSA is seconded from an academic institution, which also physically hosts its office, but it has direct contact with the prime minister and the cabinet. Its responsibilities include strengthening the role of science in policy development, promoting education in sciences, technology, engineering and math, providing scientific advice to the prime minister and commissioning deliberative advice on selected topics.

The Chief Science Advisor Forum

The Prime Minister's Chief Science Advisor brings together chief science advisors (CSAs) and departmental science advisors (DSAs) from across government agencies and institutions to create the Chief Science Advisor Forum. CSAs and DSAs, which have been appointed in major ministries and report to both their chief executive and to the PMCSA, provide strategic inputs on the development of evidence-based knowledge for public policy and assure the quality of internal research. In addition, they are engaged in the scientific review of specific budget bills through the Science Committee of Central Agencies. These scientific advisors are typically contracted by a government entity, or they may be seconded from a research institution into the role to provide senior independent advice. Regular meetings usually also include the government chief statistician, the chief economist (Treasury) as well as the president of the Royal Society of New Zealand and a deputy head of the State Services Commission representing the authority of the civil service.

The Chief Science Advisor Forum is a community of practice for science advisors that promotes the use of science to inform policy formulation, implementation and evaluation, and it provides a bridge between research and government policies. Sub-committees of the Forum typically co-ordinate research projects and advice, and research reports are published under the Forum's label or that of the PMCSA. The Forum advises the government on selected opportunities and risks highlighted by the research community and ensures both that advice from DSAs and the PMCSA is embedded in decision making processes and that the advice is founded on the latest research projects and insights from science and technology. The Forum also works to address the priorities of minority groups by supporting diversity in the scientific system and by including Māori approaches as part of the evidence base.

Source: (Government of New Zealand, 2022[20])

Box 2.5. The United Kingdom government connecting policy practitioners with researchers

The What Works Network, launched by the UK government in 2013, ensures that decision makers working on public administration have access to the best evidence on successful practices. It brings together 13 independent centres that assess the existing evidence base in specific policy areas and offer advice on effective practice. The Network is co-ordinated by a team in the Cabinet Office, which is active across government to embed a culture of evidence in the design of policy and service delivery. In 2015, a Cross-Government Trial Advice Panel was set up in partnership with the Economic and Social Research Council. The Panel offers the opportunity of sharing expertise, to allow departments with limited knowledge in performance measurement and evaluation to collaborate with departments that regularly work on it, as well as with top academic experts. In so doing, the Panel aims to reduce the barriers that departments face in commissioning and conducting evaluations and to use the resulting evidence to improve public policies.

In addition, the Open Innovation Team established in 2016 in the UK Cabinet Office, is a cross-government unit that works with academics to generate analysis and ideas for policy. It pairs academics with civil service teams to help officials have better-quality discussions about their policy areas. The Open Innovation Team works on a project basis. Departments engaging with it have contact with a more diverse range of external experts that bring fresh thinking, creative approaches and innovative ideas. The departments get a better understanding of the evidence base for their policy areas and receive support in framing their problems and defining solutions using the latest available evidence.

Source: (Government of the United Kingdom, 2022[21])

Aligning academic research with policy priorities

Interviews highlighted several additional solutions that can be put in place to further bridge the gap between the civil service and academia. One way to do this could be to commission academics in relevant research areas to regularly provide translations of research findings for policy purposes. These could take the form of research briefs, dedicated podcasts or a series of informal workshops.

Regarding international practices, Flanders (Belgium) and the Netherlands were cited by interviewees as interesting models. The Flemish model of “sectoral centres for policy research” is run by the Department of Economy, Science and Innovation. These centres, often consortia of universities, research centres and think tanks, are created by multi-year framework agreements awarded through a competitive bidding process. The centres conduct policy research on a set of agreed sector-specific topics (short-term and longer-term) and also respond to new research needs of the public administration. A critical success factor is the alignment of incentives for the civil service and for academia: outputs are defined both in terms of peer-reviewed academic articles, PhDs, policy notes, knowledge-sharing events and platforms.

Ireland’s Institute of Public Administration, beyond offering training and degrees, provides a range of public management consultancy services designed to assist public organisations in their goals. These include governance services such as governance briefings for senior managers and boards, risk assessments and management, coaching and mentoring for board members, as well as advisory services in human resources management and organisational development. In addition, the Institute’s consultancy branch brings together a network of professionals by organising forums, conferences and customised in-house training on various topics ranging from housing to pensions to risk management. The Institute also has the only dedicated public management research resource in the country, which offers several products, such

as Insight Briefs, annual reports on the state of the public service, a Local Government Research Series and the biannual Local Authority Times. In addition, the Institute has been publishing its own peer-reviewed research journal, "Administration", which seeks to combine original and multidisciplinary scholarship on Irish public administration with insights and experiences of practitioners. In addition to research articles, the journal publishes comments on articles, reports and letters.

From a civil service perspective, another good example of collaboration with academia is the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). It has a significant research budget and looks specifically to fund research that is relevant to policymakers and to ensure that this learning is drawn out by researchers in an accessible way. The EPA manages an environmental research programme that delivers essential scientific support for environmental policy development, and its outputs have increased the national understanding of the environment and of the challenges it faces. On a three-year cycle, the EPA carries out a comprehensive consultation to identify key research areas and required actions to inform the thematic direction of its research awards for the consecutive years. The Agency's work is based on the EPA's Research 2030, a ten-year high-level framework for its research programming, which has the explicit goal of generating in-depth knowledge that will underpin environmental policies. The Agency makes Annual Research Calls and supports thematic Research Areas Assessments in collaboration with key stakeholders ensuring continuous relevance. The research budget of the EPA is relevant, and the funding is provided under its four interconnected hubs: addressing climate change evidence needs, facilitating a green and circular economy, delivering a healthy environment, and protecting and restoring the natural environment. Beyond the main EPA Research calls, the Agency offers other funding opportunities for policy-relevant research, such as the EPA Green Enterprise Scheme, PhD scholarships, Strategic and Collaborative Awards, and Fast-Track to Policy Funding opportunities to respond to identified urgent policy questions.

Areas of opportunity to strengthen the use of evidence and data for policy development

This chapter highlighted a number of progress areas in leveraging evidence and data for policy development in Ireland, as exemplified by various excellent case examples of data-driven policy development at the department and agency levels. The National Data Infrastructure and IGEES continue to play a prominent role in building a data-driven culture across the Irish civil service, and the presence of IGEES economists and policy analysts within government department teams is recognised as a good practice beyond the Irish context. In terms of longer-term policy, important policy levers have been identified, such as the risk register led by the Department of the Taoiseach, the National Risk Assessments, the programmes of the National Economic and Social Council, and the futures work of academic institutions. The progressive creation of strategic policy units across departments is a promising way to improve policy development planning at the department level. A growing appetite for strategic foresight underscores the ambition level of the civil service to strengthen strategic policy discussions.

Despite significant progress in the use of data for policy design and for the evaluation of policies, interviews and surveys with public officials pointed to several areas that can benefit from further improvement in line with OECD practices.

- Capitalising on the **lessons learned from COVID-19 and the war in Ukraine** to ensure that a government-wide approach to data engineering and architecture and to data governance is found and systems, standards and protocols are put in place to allow for understanding, leveraging and sharing available data. This applies also to the growing need for real-time data, to enable prompt decision making and action.
- Applying a more holistic approach to **cross-departmental impact measurement and integrated systems modelling,** as policy development often does not factor in impact and implications in

other domains (e.g. housing and environment). Reinforcing the **multi-disciplinary character of policy development** and encouraging a more systematic approach based on "**system thinking"** (Hynes, Lees and Müller, 2020[22]) would be beneficial for better policy formulation, as public policies have a dynamic and interactive relationship with their environment. This is crucial to **understand how parts of a policy interact with each other, with the environment and over time**.

- Identifying and mapping **strategic policy units** in more detail across the civil service and shedding light on their composition, activities and added value.
- Effectively communicating data and data needs internally, sharing them between organisations and knowing how to generate new, insightful data to fully harness the potential of data and support evidence-based decision making. In order to tap into **data sources in academia, civil society and the private sector**, **a partnership approach** can be beneficial. As highlighted by the Strategic Priorities of the National Statistics Board 2021-2026, the growing demand for data and the falling survey response rates require accessing private data sources and further developing the use of administrative data. A network of policymakers involved in research and evaluation techniques could thus help to foster the exchange of knowledge and to consolidate current practices. In addition, incorporating other forms of evidence, such as **user insights**, audience insights gathered by public communicators, stakeholder views and various qualitative information, can give a different perspective on the system's performance and highlight blind spots in the process of policy formulation.
- **Strengthening data skills** across the civil service, as highlighted by interviewees. "Often the data is there. The challenge is to understand what it means for policy-making." As policy professionals need better data literacy, part of this need can be met through ad hoc training within a skills framework, which is crucial to make policy professionals "intelligent customers" of data analytics. This can also be achieved by identifying where good capability sits in the public sector system, facilitating the access of professionals to these centres of expertise and capability, and encouraging knowledge-sharing and peer learning.

Areas of opportunity to strengthen strategic foresight and long-term priorities could include:

- **Better articulating the overall strategic direction and whole-of-government policy priorities**, including translating political priorities, joined-up risk assessment processes, and future opportunities (strategic vision) into current policy processes.
- **Improving capability in strategic foresight** that complements the National Risk Assessment processes across the government and identifying techniques to deepen how foresight analyses are fed into policy considerations to improve the ability of the public service to quickly perceive, make sense of and act on emerging developments.
- **Investigating ways to articulate an effective "authorising environment" at the political-administrative interface** so that officials are enabled to provide, and so that ministers invite and expect, policy advice that is future-focused, evidence-informed and courageous. This might centre around discussions about "legitimacy" or understanding the political and public context and including them in policy processes.

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3 Closing the Policy Development and Implementation Divide in Ireland

This chapter examines how the implementation perspective is reflected in policy development processes and presents how project management, regulatory oversight and cross-departmental collaboration can help make policies easier to implement. It highlights various factors such as co-designing policy with civil servants charged with implementing; integrating implementation criteria, monitoring practices and feedback loops into policy design; and leveraging using insights from policy evaluations, pilot projects and behavioural evidence and presents areas of opportunity to support better linkages between policy development and policy implementation.

The second pillar of the "Strengthening Policy Making in the Civil Service" framework for policy development focuses on the implementation and feasibility of policy. The quality and impact of policy advice and policy decisions are determined by the extent to which they are effectively implemented. Good policy advice includes how it will be delivered and how it will be monitored, evaluated and adjusted in the light of new evidence about whether it is working or not. Traditionally, policy professionals have "closed off" policy projects once political decision making is complete. This may be because the implementation is moving to a different part of the organisation or to a delivery agent outside of the system and/or because policy professionals are moving to new policy projects. This view has changed considerably in more recent times, with a realisation that implementation is a critical part of the policy cycle and that reporting on progress on implementation or follow-on action planning is an integral part of the policy or strategy.

However, it is also important that policy designers keep an ongoing involvement in the policy to ensure the intent is maintained. The civil service generally relies on the wider public service to implement policies and programmes, although it has a number of significant operational/delivery arms itself too. This requires a deep understanding of conditions at the operational level and effective relationships between the sectors, especially on the part of the civil service policy developers. Policy development professionals need to ensure that implementation, and the people charged with implementation, are included in policy design and that feedback loops from frontline operations and users/citizens/stakeholders (what is working and what is not) are deliberately and systematically captured and built into future policy.

The "Strengthening Policy Making in the Civil Service" framework (Government of Ireland, n.d.[1]) identifies a number of causes that may lead to failures in policy implementation in Ireland:

- Design stage
  - incomplete risk assessments conducted, failing to identify correct challenges and policy outcomes
  - incorrect assumptions around human behaviour in response to policy enactment
  - poor design testing/assessment of whether the policy design is realistic and fit for purpose.
- Decision and implementation stage
  - lack of resources (including headcount) provided to support implementing policy procedures
  - poor planning and co-ordination: unrealistic timescales for legislative or programme implementation
  - lack of monitoring protocols or evaluation mechanisms; lack of ownership and accountability from parties, regarding various aspects of policy implementation
  - overspending due to incomplete/ineffective budgetary assessments versus actual costs incurred during the implementation phase
  - lack of arrangements to report "early warning" difficulties and/or the flexibility to respond early to stop delivery from going off-track
  - non-delivery of information and communication technology requirements during the implementation and reporting stages
  - unexpected changes in the external environment, deeming the policy partly or wholly ineffective.

Furthermore, interviewees and survey respondents for this project highlighted a policy-implementation gap but also recognised that this could be bridged and offered some solutions.

> In the area of local government, one interviewee highlighted: *"We write very good strategies and policies but where they fall down is they're never delivered. Most of the policies are delivered through the local authority system. That in itself is a challenge. They are independent and democratic institutions. You can't direct them to do something per se."*

> *"In the design stage, if you're bringing regulations, you would do a public consultation exercise. Draw their attention to that and seek their input on regulations where they worked and didn't and why didn't they work. "*
>
> Concerning the link from implementation to evaluation and back into future policy, an interviewee said: *"We have to be able to come back around and ask what's working and what isn't working, and what difference that makes".*

There has been an assumption that the Irish civil service is "good at policy and poor at delivery". However, the problem is more complex than good policy falling apart. A first question arises: Is the policy actually good if it struggles with implementation? Indeed, problems with delivery often stem from poor (or rushed) policy development. And what about the efficiency of management methods or delivery expertise? Usual project management methodologies, typically designed for more linear projects, do not lend themselves to the iterative and "messy" nature of policy design and delivery.

Part of the issue is that a deep understanding of policy feasibility usually sits with the implementing agencies, the subnational partners or the community and voluntary sector and that policy proposals are developed by the civil service. Various interlocutors mentioned the "implementation gap" as a result of the lack of institutional channels to assess the implementation feasibility at an early stage and how that affects decision making, the lack of time to test-run the implementation, or the unavailability of ex post evaluation insights or data.

Good practices to strengthen the feasibility of policy options also emerged from the interviews and include the following:

- Ensuring that **people charged with implementing a policy are involved in the upfront design** of the policy. This includes bringing in agency staff and external experts in the early stages of the policy discussions, as early as the discussion and definition of the policy "problem".
- Bringing in **public communicators in policy development** help develop a holistic and realistic understanding of the intended beneficiaries of a policy through insights from social listening, knowledge of public attitudes or analysis of public discourse. Involving communicators early on in the design of the policy can also help ensure it is more inclusive and facilitate its implementation or the compliance of citizens. The gathering of increasingly more sophisticated insights and listening is a key way in which communication can channel citizens' voices to policy.
- **Checking assumptions** in the policy design phase, through the use of focus groups or expert interviews. This may result in specific mitigation measures for unintended consequences. It entails bringing the views and lived experience of people for whom the policy is designed into the policy process, either directly in a co-design or consultation process, or by using user-centred design methods to understand how the policy will work "on the ground". This can also help surface and mitigate unintended consequences.
- Applying various lenses to **test the desirability and feasibility** of policy options ("design testing and troubleshooting from various perspectives") – legal, financial, socio-economic, behavioural and differential impacts on different population groups (gender, age, ethnic analysis).
- **Good governance and effective project management** are essential for end-to-end policy, from identifying the problem or opportunity to designing possible options to ensuring decisions taken are implemented and have the desired impact. Implementation criteria need to be part of policy design.
- **Performance indicators and monitoring and evaluation** need to be built into policy design, and adequate resources need to be foreseen. (At the same time, a number of interlocutors mentioned that an overemphasis on monitoring and reporting has a negative impact on the time and resources for implementation, which can be understood as an incentive to make monitoring and reporting systems as user-friendly and efficient as possible).

- Ensuring **feedback loops from policy evaluations**, by conducting a policy evaluation or taking forward the lessons learned from previous evaluations. In the long run, enhancing evaluation expertise may be needed.

> *"A key challenge is to feed the results of ex post evaluations back into the ex-ante rationale of policy development."*
>
> *"I think that takes courage. It takes bravery and commitment to say, 'Well we set out the policy at the outset. Our intentions were justified, and our objectives were very clear. We implemented it. We learned from that implementation what went right and what went wrong. And we're prepared to iterate the policy and accept that just when you set something that it isn't set in stone, but that there is an opportunity.' Now I just don't think our mindset has shifted into that space."*

- Ensuring **realistic planning for programme implementation and legislative processes**, to avoid over-optimistic timelines and public expectations.
- Providing **realistic budgetary assessments**, as the costing of policy options can be considered as a partial feasibility exercise. Similarly, the budget expenditure framework is an important implementation tool.
- Building **implementation alliances**, bringing together departments, agencies, political parties, and end-user organisations, to shape a broad consensus around the policy options and to be able to adjust where needed while being still in agreement about the broader policy direction; This is conducive to both implementation and legitimacy of policy (to be discussed in more detail in the next chapter).
- Ensuring **monitoring arrangements** that allow for spotting implementation issues ("early warning system") and for adjusting where needed.
- Understanding the **political implications** and dynamics of policy options (discussed in more detail in Chapter 4).

A number of tools and methodologies exist to assess the context and preliminary conditions for feasibility. In particular, the Public Spending Code provides guidance on methodologies such as cost-benefit analysis, economic appraisal parameters and regulatory impact assessments. With these methodologies, a number of implementation risks, constraints and unintended consequences can be identified before rolling out the policy. A remaining challenge relates to conducting impact assessments across policy sectors and departments. Modelling impacts across different policy dimensions was highlighted as a specific challenge, but cross-departmental collaboration (discussed below) can offer part of the solution.

To improve feasibility, the government is also assisting public organisations to deliver user-centred services by developing and embedding design thinking through the publication of Government Principles (Government of Ireland, 2022[2]) (starting with service design and moving to system design) based on good practices in academia as well as in the public and private sector in 2022. The government is currently also development life events to test out the prototyped principles through active delivery as well as the development of a design action plan.

Various policy examples underscore the value of broad stakeholder consultation and dialogue to bring the implementation and feasibility perspective into the design process. A good example of policy "fit for implementation" is the National Cancer Strategy 2017–2026 by the Department of Health (see Box 3.1), with a multi-stakeholder consultation in the design (e.g. Cancer Patient Forum) and implementation phase (e.g. Cancer Strategy Steering Group) as well as the use of annual monitoring reports.

Box 3.1. Ireland's National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026: Evidence-based care for patient-centred cancer services

The National Cancer Strategy 2017-2026 was established following a comprehensive process involving policymakers, scientists, researchers, organisations working on cancer services and the public. In 2015, the Department of Health established a steering group under the guidance of academics to provide direction in the development of the new cancer strategy. The Evaluation Group supported the steering group with a special report (2016), as it was meant to inform the development of the new strategy. In 2015 a Cancer Patient Forum was established to represent the views of patients in the development of the strategy. In particular, the Forum and its members, who represented patients or organisations specialised in cancer-related services, were expected to contribute to the steering group and facilitate the input of front-line perspectives into the development of the strategy, while informing members of the forum. This is an example of how end-user views and evidence were captured and used to shape policy.

The National Cancer Strategy takes a co-ordinated and holistic approach to step up efforts to improve the quality of cancer health services across functions and systems. This is made possible due to an articulated plan to strengthen the governance of the sector in several dimensions and by supporting an evidence-based approach across all activities. First, the Strategy reinforces the governance and management of the National Cancer Control Programme (NCCP), which was established in 2007 in the Health Service Executive, the publicly funded healthcare system of Ireland. The NCCP works with a variety of entities, such as the Department of Health and Hospital Groups, to adopt and implement an effective approach and harness research and data to deliver policy responses, ensure the equity of and quality of services, and deliver improved care for all. The Strategy reinforces the central role of the NCCP to support its implementation across the health service, using service-level agreements and through a more direct financial role towards hospital groups. Moreover, the NCCP will be further supported and incentivised to co-operate with the private sector to collect more quality data on cancer, as well as reporting of outcomes.

Source: (Government of Ireland, 2017[3])

A second example relates to the funding model in Ireland for early learning and care for children, which has been developed through an extensive consultation process with service providers, front-line staff and parents (see Box 3.2).

Box 3.2. A new funding model in Ireland for early learning and care and school-age childcare

In December 2021, the Minister for Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth published the Expert Group's report "Partnership for the Public Good: A New Funding Model for Early Learning and Care and School-Age Childcare", following acceptance of its recommendations by the government.

The Expert Group was independently chaired and included national and international experts in early learning and care, funding and quality, and economics, along with relevant policy experts from the government departments involved in implementing the new funding model. During its work, the Expert Group engaged in an inclusive consultation and engagement process to take account of the voices of providers, the workforce, parents and other stakeholders within the sector. Research to inform the Group's work was undertaken by an external research partner. The outputs from these processes are publicly available on the webpage of the department.

The Expert Group also drew on national and international evidence from a wide range of sources and bodies to inform its report and recommendations.

Source: (Government of Ireland, 2018[4])

A third example is the Local Government Management Agency (LGMA), which represents all 31 local authorities and the local government sector in Ireland and provides support to and acts as a point of contact for the County and City Management Association. The LGMA advises on and supports strategy and policy development across the local government sector, addressing policy issues from rural development to waste management to libraries. The LGMA actively engages with local authorities and service providers to solve implementation problems and to offer advice to policymakers based on implementation experience. The LGMA participates in various committees (including parliamentary committees) on policy development (e.g., housing, waste management) to provide a local governance perspective. For example, the LGMA gives feedback on draft circulars.

Project management

Part of the work to ensure successful policy implementation rests on an effective approach to project management and delivery from the beginning of the policy development process. The Irish public service has recognised the need to embed programme and project management skills in the system, both as a profession and as an integral part of the work of all involved in policy implementation. From a broader perspective, sound project management skills are not only helpful for policy implementation but for the entire policy development process. They offer a deeper understanding of critical aspects throughout the project life span, including resources, communication, stakeholder engagement, ownership, co-ordination, risks, and monitoring and evaluation.

There are a number of resources to support project management, including the Project Management Network (PMN) which was originally established under the 2014 Civil Service Renewal Plan and has since broadened to the wider public service. The PMN promotes the practice of project management within the civil service and public service and provides opportunities for both practising and potential new project managers to connect with peers and forge connections across the system. In addition, OneLearning provides foundation-level training and a practical project management training course. Civil servants can also pursue accreditation from the Project Management Institute and the Institute of Project Management. The Public Service Project Management Handbook provides a detailed guide to project management in

Ireland. There are also programme management offices (PMOs) in government departments and agencies, whether for individual projects or for major programmes of activity. PMO structures exist across the civil and public service but with differing levels of maturity and operation.

The challenges of project management delivery relate to how well-embedded the processes and structures are in different government departments and agencies; how well-developed the culture of programme and project management is; and the availability of resources to commit to this area. Interviewees also highlighted the disconnect between those with project management skills and those who are developing policies, which could be reduced, as well as the need to consult with project implementation specialists early on in policy development. As an example, the importance of a project management discipline has been highlighted by the Public Spending Code for major public investment projects.

Regulatory oversight

Feasibility, also, means a good fit within the existing regulatory and legal framework. The 2012 OECD Recommendation of the Council on Regulatory Policy and Governance calls for countries to "establish mechanisms and institutions to actively provide oversight of regulatory policy procedures and goals, support and implement regulatory policy and thereby foster regulatory quality". It defines the core functions of regulatory oversight (these do not necessarily have to be carried out by the same body) as including:

- **Co-ordination of regulatory policy:** Promoting a whole-of-government approach to regulatory quality and ensuring internal co-ordination across departments in the application of regulatory management tools.
- **Quality control:** Monitoring compliance with guidelines for RIAs, stakeholder consultations and ex post reviews. Reviewing the quality of those regulatory management tools.
- **Guidance, advice and support (capacity-building in the administration):** Issuing guidelines, offering guidance and providing training.
- **Systematic improvement of regulatory policy (scrutiny of the system):** Monitoring and reporting, including reporting progress to parliament/government to help track the success of the implementation of regulatory policy.

There are a number of areas where regulatory oversight could be improved in Ireland for policy proposals requiring legislative expression (through primary legislation, changes to the regulatory framework, significant statutory instruments, and proposals for European Union regulations and directives). Since the Better Regulation Unit (BRU) in the Department of the Taoiseach was abolished, and the different aspects of regulatory policy split between different departments, the Irish civil service lacks a strong centre-of-government body to co-ordinate the regulatory process. In addition, there are few quality control mechanisms for RIAs, stakeholder consultations or ex post reviews – other than the traditional clearance processes within departments – to report on whether departments are actually following the various requirements and check on the quality of the RIAs. Furthermore, whereas training and guidance used to be co-ordinated by the BRU, including a two-day training course on RIA, it is not apparent that such training is available nor systematically taking place at the present time. The RIA system is also missing a reporting function, whereby reports are compiled of the performance of the whole RIA system over the year, setting out data on compliance rates per department and the quality of the RIAs produced.

In response, Ireland may consider strengthening the regulatory oversight function to carry out core oversight roles, such as co-ordination and quality control of ex ante RIA, stakeholder management and ex post reviews. Some countries have placed this oversight function in an arms-length regulatory oversight body; examples of regulatory oversight bodies from across the OECD are set out in Box 3.3. The regulatory oversight function could publish opinions on whether due process and the core steps of the RIA/consultation/ex post review process have been followed. The regulatory oversight function could also

produce publicly available advice on the quality of the RIA documents. Annual reports could be published on compliance rates and the quality of RIAs by department to gently incentivise the enhancement of RIAs. Departments could potentially be prevented from taking a draft legislative proposal to cabinet if an RIA is deemed to be of poor quality or if the department has failed to publish an RIA for stakeholder consultation. Furthermore, the body could co-ordinate RIA training across the government, ensuring a regular programme of RIA training for new and existing civil servants. There are different ways in which this body could be established:

- **Within the centre of government by effectively re-establishing the BRU in the Department of the Taoiseach** with the same functions as before – although potentially with an additional power than previously, to prevent RIAs deemed low quality from going to cabinet.
- Give certain **oversight functions such as quality control to an arms-length body** with a degree of operational independence, to verify and publish publicly available opinions on the quality of the RIA/consultation/ex post review process for draft regulations. It should be highlighted that the External Assurance Process has been added to the Public Spending Code for major public capital projects in excess of EUR 100 million involving Independent Expert Reviews focused on issues such as cost, risk and ability to deliver at two key decision gates in the project lifecycle.
- The Law Reform Commission of Ireland has previously made a recommendation for the government to establish a **Regulatory Guidance Office** with membership drawn from government departments and regulators, to be established with a remit to provide guidance and information on regulatory matters, including national and international best practices in economic regulation, the content of RIAs (or comparable documents) and lessons learned from relevant case law.
- **Other key public institutions could play a role**. These include the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, which could carry regular evaluations of the RIA process, for example. The Law Reform Commission, an independent body which was set up to examine specific areas of the law as directed by the government and to make practical proposals for its reform, carries out necessary underlying work (including statute law restatement) to ensure that the Irish Statute book is effectively reformed.

Box 3.3. Examples of regulatory oversight bodies in Australia, Germany and the Netherlands

Oversight body located in the centre of government

Australia – Office of Best Practice Regulation (OBPR): The OBPR is located at the centre of government, in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, and reviews about 1 500 policy proposals every year. OBPR focuses on two areas: scanning efforts to identify upcoming proposals that require RIA, as well as proactive engagement with ministries on the benefits of RIA. It uses information flows, decision making processes of government, and its central position to assess if RIA is required for new proposals. However, much more effort is dedicated to the OBPR's capacity-building focus. In 2019-20, it delivered over 2 250 structured training hours to public servants on how to conduct robust impact analysis and evidence-based decision making – in addition to emails, calls and meetings to provide agencies with the support and skills to produce high-quality impact analysis. The OBPR is also developing a bespoke information technology system for RIA aimed at improving workload management related to overall RIA scrutiny as well as the quality of impact analysis advice. In addition to standard consultation processes related to RIA, OBPR meets with stakeholders on a regular basis to gather feedback on RIA processes as well as on policy areas facing challenges in bringing together high-quality evidence or analysis.

Oversight bodies located at arms' length

Germany – National Regulatory Control Council (NKR): The NKR, established by law in 2006, scrutinises draft impact assessments accompanying primary and secondary law proposals, with regard to underlying assumptions on compliance costs. It normally provides initial advice at the pre-consultation stage during the inter-service consultation with all ministries. The final opinion is released after the post-consultation (final) stage, when the proposal is ready to be tabled at and adopted by the cabinet (council of ministers). In between these stages, there is a working-level exchange between the NKR Secretariat and lead ministries. The parliament may request the NKR's opinion on the quality of an impact assessment for a parliamentary proposal, even if the initiation of laws by the prime minister is rare. The NKR has other functions including the "one in, one out" approach, Cutting Red Tape efforts and the scrutiny of evaluation clauses in the legal acts (obligatory for all regulations that induce compliance costs of over EUR 1 million). The NKR also publishes an annual report that provides a comprehensive view of the Better Regulation policy. The members of the NKR are nominated by the federal government and appointed by the Federal President. The chancellor of the federal government designates the chair of the NKR. The NKR committee is supported by a 15-civil servants' secretariat and a EUR 1.5 million budget.

Netherlands – Dutch Advisory Board on Regulatory Burden (ATR): The ATR is an independent advisory body established by law with budgetary autonomy. The board consists of three members, who are supported by a director, eight senior policy advisors and two supporting staff. The body decides what it advises on (within its mandate) as well as the content of these opinions. Both government and parliament can approach the body for advice. The ATR advises ministries mainly in the early stages of the policy process, i.e., problem identification. It does not operate according to a proportionality principle but assesses the regulatory consequences on business of all primary legislative proposals and administrative measures. It also scrutinises ministerial decrees with substantial compliance costs. Recently, the ATR has taken on a new role of scrutinising the country's new small and medium-size enterprises (SME) Test.

Source: (OECD, 2018[5]); (OECD, 2018[6])

Cross-departmental collaboration

A recurrent theme supporting implementation is co-operation between departments and between departments and agencies. While there are numerous examples of good practices, OECD interviews and responses to the survey suggest that the culture of collaboration across departments and co-ordination of work programmes could be further strengthened. Cross-sectoral and cross-departmental communication and collaboration is needed or even required to address most policy issues nowadays, as their impacts and implications go beyond one particular sector or one institution. In times of multi-faceted 'polycrises' such as COVID-10 or the war in Ukraine that affect not only single sectors, but have an impact on a number of policies, it is further important to see across all different policy domains. In Ireland, the Civil Service Management Board, Public Service Leadership Board, Senior Officials Group and many departments are championing this collaborative approach.

As such, this project encountered several examples of cross-departmental policy development work to address government-wide policy issues such as Brexit, COVID-19, the environment and climate change, and accommodation and support for Ukrainian refugees. Some of these policy issues have been driven by specific cabinet committees. Further examples include First 5, a whole-of-government strategy for babies and young children spanning across policy issues including childcare, health and education (see Box 3.4), "Housing for All", on housing supply, affordability and inclusion, "The Access and Inclusion Model" fostering

an inclusive environment in pre-schools, and "A Well-being Framework for Ireland", bringing economic, societal and environmental impacts together in one well-being framework. Also, the Water Policy Advisory Committee (Box 3.5), a multi-stakeholder council for water policies, is a notable example of whole-of-government collaboration. These examples demonstrate the ability of the civil service to effectively collaborate across sectors and departments and were generally driven by a combination of leadership, a recognition of a joint problem and joint objectives, and a strong collaborative mindset at the senior management level. A clear political impetus, dedicated resources, and realistic timelines were also reported to be conducive to improved collaboration.

Box 3.4. Ireland's First 5 Strategy

First 5 is a national strategy spanning a ten-year time horizon from 2019 to 2028 to improve the early lives of babies, young children and their families. It is the first national strategy for early childhood in Ireland that develops a cross-departmental approach to support children's development in their first five years of life. The Strategy recommendations and guidelines, stemming from extensive research and multi-disciplinary evidence, set out how to create a holistic system of services that will support babies and their families. Moreover, it articulates a plan for development, funding and operation to address challenges at multiple levels. Given that the Strategy spans various dimensions, a number of departments participate and foster cross-government collaboration.

The strategy builds on and reinforces a pre-existing national policy framework, "Better Outcomes Brighter Futures" (2014-20), which aimed to improve outcomes for children and youth.

The Strategy is based on a whole-of-government, complex structure. The core of the strategy lies in the Children and Young People's Policy Consortium, which oversees the cross-government implementation of the strategy and prepares an annual progress report to be submitted to the Cabinet Committee on Social Policy and Public Services. The Consortium gathers input from and oversees several working groups. For instance, the children and young people's services committees' national steering groups ensure representation and reporting, while the European Union structured dialogue-working group is committed to providing structured engagement. Most importantly, the Sponsors Group drives the implementation of the commitments by proposing priorities and approving programmes of work and receives input from the implementation team which is tasked with the co-ordination and monitoring of implementation. More specifically, the implementation team ensures support and interaction with thematic working groups, establishes the alignment of constituent strategies and implements monitoring and reporting.

Source: (Government of Ireland, 2018[4])

Box 3.5. Ireland's Water Policy Advisory Committee

The Water Policy Advisory Committee (WPAC), as provided by the European Union Regulations 2014 on water policy, is a multi-stakeholder committee in charge of providing advice to the Minister of Housing, Local Government and Heritage on the implementation of the Water Framework Directive and, more broadly, on water issues. The Committee is a successful example of multi-stakeholder involvement and co-ordination. Members of the Committee consist of nominees from five different departments, including those of the Environment Climate and Communications, of Agriculture, Food and the Marine and of Health, among others. In addition to government departments, members of the Geological Survey of Ireland, the Office of Public Works and the Local Authority Waters Programme are nominated to participate in the Committee, making it a truly cross-governmental institution. For meetings on specific issues, the Committee may also invite additional participants as representatives of other organisations, and sub-groups can be created to investigate and discuss specific topics.

The Committee meets regularly, four times a year at least, and meetings are chaired by the Water Division of the Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, and the secretariat is held by the same institution. WPAC has three specific objectives related to plan-making, funding and resources, and implementation. In particular, the multi-stakeholder nature of WPAC endows it with the capacity to resolve conflicts between local and national priorities as well as between inter-governmental and sectoral priorities, in order to make sound and evidence-based recommendations to the Minister of Housing, Local Government and Heritage.

Source: (Government of Ireland, 2021[7])

Despite these good practice case examples ("positive deviance"), interviews revealed that more could be done to reduce silos across the Irish civil service, in particular to address limited communication across departments (apart from ad hoc meetings and informal contacts), limited visibility and the consideration of the impacts (or potential synergies) policy proposals might have in other policy areas.

> *"Challenges are that silos still exist – within Departments and across the civil service."*
>
> *"Departments can be "silos" and too often concerned with the urgent rather than the important leading to a lack of 'joined-up' thinking."*
>
> *"There is a need to break down the silos that still exist within Departments."*
>
> *"The challenge is ensuring that Departments are not working in silos and, from early in the process, consult with each other."*

While there are good examples of strong co-operation, there is insufficient development of a culture of collaboration across departments and co-ordination of work programmes. Contacts across departments are often informal and through personal networks rather than organised or structured. This sentiment was particularly strong with more junior civil servants and with civil servants working deep in their departments (e.g., in highly technical roles).

This lack of systemic and systemised collaboration is a risk to policy effectiveness when policy challenges increasingly cut across the remits of individual departments and require action on multiple fronts. Addressing the lack of economic opportunities in many cities and towns across the country will, for example, require a coherent strategy that brings together policies on education, welfare, business, housing and many other areas that are simply beyond the reach of any one department no matter how well

resourced. Reaching net zero carbon emissions is a similarly transformative aim and will also rely on co-ordinated action across the entire economy.

Interviews suggested that there are few formal and institutional incentives for collaboration with other departments, both at the individual level and at the institutional level. While senior-level civil servants are evaluated as part of their performance assessments on their participation in inter-departmental initiatives and committees, in general incentive structures encourage a focus on the department and its work programme.

> *"There is the program for government that is agreed every time a new government is formed. Following out of that you have the performance management structures. Each of the departments has to do a statement strategy within 6 months of the programme for government being adopted. Following on from that all of us without exception have to do a goal-setting form at the start of each year which sets out each individual's broad priorities for that year. That falls outside of the business plan, strategy, role profiling and annual review. In addition, there is a reporting template to be filled out. Within your own department, you can see who is doing what and what goals fall within the remit of other departments.*
>
> *"Inquiries from other departments are typically what someone does on top of the actual job."*

Moreover, budgets are set at the level of the department with no budgetary incentives for cross-departmental work. Joint targets or policy objectives do not appear to be utilised to encourage cross-departmental work.

> *"There is a perception that problems are solved by people and policies, and that there is a lack of will to fix the system through investments in shared services."*

Success stories of where departments worked together well – such as the response to COVID-19 and the global financial crisis – depended on high-level leadership from ministers, as well as public acceptance of the need to act.

> *"In general, if Ministers lead a working group, things move faster."*

The quality of collaboration is also a point of attention. According to a number of interviewees, too often co-ordination meetings serve as a platform for sharing information on what the departments are doing, after which participants go back to work in their departmental silos.

Areas of opportunity to support better linkages between policy development and policy implementation

This chapter discussed how the implementation perspective is reflected in the policy development process and highlighted various factors that may contribute to bridging the "implementation gap", such as co-designing policy with civil servants charged with implementing, integrating implementation criteria, monitoring practices and feedback loops into policy design, and leveraging insights from policy evaluations, pilot projects and behavioural evidence. Successful implementation also rests in project management and delivery capabilities. Programme management offices exist across the civil and public service but with differing levels of maturity and operation.

There are also a number of good practices that have emerged to ensure the feasibility of policies once they have been developed in the implementation stage, namely with the Cancer Strategy and the Local Government Management Agency's work to link policies with the implementation at the local level.

Several potential areas of opportunity could be highlighted, namely:

- strengthening and bringing **greater consistency about current and new techniques for co-designing policy options** with those charged with implementation, civil servants, public servants, other front-line service providers (including at the subnational level) and with end-users;
- leveraging the **use of performance information** from schemes, programmes and services;
- integrating **implementation criteria, monitoring practices** (including data capture and other sources of evidence) **and feedback** loops into policy design and review;
- **leveraging insights from policy evaluations, pilot projects, public communication and behavioural evidence;**
- integrating **good practices from project management and delivery capabilities at the beginning of the policy development cycle**;
- **improving accountability and regulatory oversight** by strengthening the regulatory oversight function.

This chapter further highlighted that cross-departmental collaboration has increasingly become the norm to address policy issues in the Irish civil service, and as a result, many excellent examples of collaboration can be found across the system. Yet, there is insufficient development of a culture of collaboration across departments and co-ordination of work programmes, contacts across departments are often informal. Collaboration could be enhanced by setting up joint policy objectives, creating budget incentives for joint work and building a broad *esprit de corps* through staff mobility, communication ("one government" messaging) and public recognition of cross-departmental policy work.

In particular, a number of mechanisms (Scott and Boyd, 2022[8]) can help break down departmental silos to encourage, enable and support departments to work together:

- **Mandates and expectations** – decision makers and senior leaders setting expectations and the authorising environment for joint work and collaboration. This might take the form of joint policy targets (for example, overall outcome targets such as the Scottish government's national performance targets (Government of Scotland, n.d.[9]).
- **Budgets** as incentives (or the removal of disincentives) to joint work, whereby a budget for a specific purpose can be jointly administered by more than one department.
- Building relationships and **relationship capital across the government**, such as finding ways for officials to engage across their departmental boundaries, including to discuss whole-of-government strategic priorities and overall public service capability. For example, in New Zealand the top three tiers of the public service meet collectively several times a year to hear from the public service commissioner and discuss cross-government challenges. More regular weekly sessions are held between the chief executive/Secretary cohort, described collectively as the Public Service Leadership Group. Moreover, **staff mobility schemes** and joint training courses can strengthen networks across departments and can contribute to an organisational culture in favour of collaboration. Communities of practice around specific themes can also strengthen these ties.
- **Structures** are a last resort for driving collaboration. They can be costly and typically require a lot of governance (e.g. joint ventures, interdepartmental boards).
- Messaging from the centre of government to encourage civil servants to see themselves as "**one government**" – engendering a collaborative rather than competitive mindset and culture across the government.
- **Recognition** of cross-departmental policy work, for example through the Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards, may also strengthen the collaborative culture.

It is important to learn from good examples of collaboration (some mentioned above) and build on the drivers (e.g. leadership, joint objectives) for collaboration.

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4 Strengthening the Legitimacy of Policy Development in Ireland

This chapter assesses the nexus between the civil service and the political space in relation to policy development and the processes and practices for stakeholder engagement, digitalisation and user-centric policy development. It concludes with areas of opportunity to clarify the role of the civil service in policy development and improve legitimacy in the policy development process.

The third pillar of the framework focuses on the legitimacy of policy development, which relates to the democratic basis of support throughout the policy development process. As highlighted by the 2021 OECD Trust Survey, the trust in government is closely linked with the legitimacy of public policies (OECD, 2022[1]). In recent years the legitimacy of policy choices has been under increased scrutiny across OECD countries and beyond partly in relation to the COVID-19 response (OECD, 2020[2]). Important questions emerge about how the public interest is integrated into the policy decisions, design and implementation. Or as the Civil Service Management Board (CSMB) has phrased it, reflecting on the context in Ireland: "In more recent years there has been a considerable challenge to the legitimacy of certain policy choices. This raises the question as to whether the debate on complex issues is sufficiently robust which raises the question as to whether public views, understanding and engagement are being sufficiently factored into the design and implementation processes (Government of Ireland, n.d.[3])."

Although public policy development is essentially part of a broader democratic mandate, the legitimacy of public policy goes beyond the electoral cycle and the related political commitments; legitimacy is also grounded in the underlying support that a government or public body has for the policy or programme that it is proposing to deliver. This includes necessary engagement with the Oireachtas to build broad political support over the entire political cycle effective public communication, based on audience insights and social listening as well as consultation with and ownership from stakeholders and citizens, as end-users of public policy. Understanding the views and demands of the public is vital for ensuring policies are supported, complied with and ultimately considered legitimate. Mark Moore offers an analytical framework, the strategic triangle, as a guide to public sector leaders for optimal delivery of public value (Moore, 1995[4]). Legitimacy and support are a key element of this strategic triangle. Policy challenges that require action over medium to longer-term horizons and span election cycles will require the civil service to develop ongoing deep engagement with the community, sector groups and the wider public as well as with elected representatives. Ultimately, as also noted by the CSMB (Government of Ireland, n.d.[3]), "[t]he [other] essential component of legitimacy is public confidence; the trust displayed by the wider population in government to act in the general interest."

Indeed, results from the 2021 OECD survey on Drivers of Trust in Public Institutions (OECD, 2022[1]) indicate that there is a need to better communicate the results of government action to citizens. In this context, the OECD trust survey finds that people in OECD countries see access to government information positively: almost two-thirds (65.1%) feel that information about administrative procedures is easily accessible. Governments should strengthen and consolidate information-sharing, making information and data publicly available and encouraging re-use and feedback. Yet people are far less satisfied with opportunities to engage in the policy-making process and with the government's accountability to public feedback and demands. Around 40% of respondents believe they could voice their views about a local government's decision concerning their community. And fewer than one-third (32.9%) of respondents believe that the government would adopt opinions expressed in a public consultation.

Yet, policy choices are often debated in public, which is a sign of a healthy democratic tradition, strengthening government accountability. Partly due to the social media culture, the public debate has accelerated in the last decade, with short life cycles of trending topics. Citizens expect instant information and answers, including from the government. This puts pressure on politicians to give an immediate response sometimes with little time for them (or their advisors) to reflect. Being responsive without simply being reactive is a constant challenge (OECD, 2018[5]). As the political dynamics are influenced by the headlines of the day (and aim to influence the debate at the same time), it can be challenging for the civil service to navigate and keep the set course.

The civil service is no longer a neutral actor or bystander in the public debate and can apply a number of approaches to contribute to the public debate in a constructive way. As demonstrated by the award-winning COVID-19 Lockdown Communications 2020 programme – jointly delivered by the Department of Health, the Government Public Information and Communications response to the COVID-19 pandemic, and the Department of the Taoiseach in collaboration with other government departments and agencies –

transparency about decision making is critical, as is explaining why decisions were taken. Transparency includes recognising that evidence is incomplete and evolving and that mistakes are possible yet contribute to improving policies. The civil service may mitigate the risk of counterproductive public debates by helping shape the narrative, by defining what the key problem is (problem definition), by clarifying what the evidence says and does not say, and by using language that is clear, accessible and apolitical. Moreover, genuinely engaging stakeholders and citizens in the "problem-solving" process in an open way may further deepen the public discourse and pursue transparency and accountability. This would also contribute to building trust, as highlighted by the recent roundtable (Rafter et al., 2022[6]) in Ireland on assessing government communication.

A good example of legitimacy-building through broad dialogue is the Shared Island Unit, created in 2021 by the Department of the Taoiseach. It acts as a driver and co-ordinator of the whole-of-government initiative called Building Consensus on a Shared Island, which was defined as a strategic priority of the department over the period of 2021-23 (Government of Ireland, 2022[7]). The work of the Shared Island Unit involves supporting the delivery of commitments regarding this key priority across the government and fostering dialogue with other government departments, as well as civil society.

Furthermore, legitimacy is also derived from the ability of the government to transpose international commitments into domestic policy. The integration with the European Union (EU) in the context of legislative proposals and the development of Ireland's policies is an ongoing challenge. EU timeframes and agendas do not always align with local timeframes and agendas. While Ireland can often rely on EU collective analysis, regulation and legislation, there are times when local issues demand more urgency, including the development of regulation and legislation which require significant resources.

This section will address the nexus between the civil service and the political space in relation to policy development and the processes and practices for stakeholder engagement.

Navigating the interface between the civil service and politics

Political-technical interface and the update of policy advice

The increased complexity of the policy development environment, given recent crises coupled with the 24-hour news cycle, has made it more challenging to co-ordinate across the government, bring in additional stakeholders and provide policy options to resolve multi-faceted problems. In Ireland, this also in turn, as was mentioned in a number of interviews, has led to challenges in the uptake of policy advice by politicians if they are expected to respond to immediate questions from the press. This may also crowd out the possibility of long-term issues being given the attention they need. The interviews at the political level highlighted the importance of focusing on a "band of outcomes" so that politicians can make informed choices in the public interest. This includes presenting data in a format that enables decision makers to take the appropriate decisions.

From the perspective of civil servants, interviews suggested there is pressure at times from ministers to fast-track policies without adequate analysis and advice which end up being hard to implement and/or have undesired side effects (see the section below on challenges of implementation). Other short-term demands as part of the democratic system, such as Freedom of Information requests, Parliamentary Questions and ministerial briefings, can also leave less time for focusing on longer-term strategic policy work. Interviewees also reported that in certain instances they had a concern that the advice provided was not accorded the weight it might have by ministers, i.e., rather than seen as an effort to sift, analyse and assess a range of evidence and advice from a variety of quarters, it was simply one other view alongside others within and outside the system proffering advice. Some officials felt they were not always able to influence priority setting, seen as a "very political process" as exemplified also by the responses of some at the political level.

> *"One of the things that drives so much behaviour within government departments is the freedom of information requests and the parliamentary questions – it is phenomenal the amount of work that that generates."*
>
> *"The political system wants stuff done immediately. So the demand, if you're a senior civil servant, is that the system wants you to do stuff in relation to x or y or z and work on and develop proposals now. They don't really want you disappearing off to do excellent work."*

Uptake of policy advice is also variable across ministries, and formats and timing for providing that advice vary – with the political level demanding advice and policy options that are politically realistic and reflecting the interest of citizens. Interviews at the political level showed very different approaches to the evidence used but also when and how it is gathered. Some preferred the use of more informal networks (business breakfasts), whereas others consulted under the auspices of more formal processes, networks/commissions or councils (including the National Economic and Social Council).

As in many countries, the context of a coalition government adds additional dynamics and layers of complexity, including in terms of following quality assurance processes on policies or procedures (time needed for review before placing an item on a cabinet meeting's agenda, for example). It was also noted that at times trade-off decisions were made during the budgetary process which involve unrelated policy choices. In this context, it is helpful to strengthen practices that build ownership beyond the political cycle and beyond the traditional party lines, such as building alliances early on, to create broad buy-in and co-create with the political level. Policies such as First 5 and the National Cancer Strategy are a testimony that investing in a broad ownership base can yield comprehensive multi-year policies.

These issues at the political interface are not unique to Ireland. However, there are ways in which officials can manage the "authorising environment" to better navigate relationships with elected officials and politicians to have influence over policy agenda. Officials can support ministers in prioritising and using advice. As one interviewee noted, officials needed "to build up credibility with evidence-based policies and policy advice". Officials can build trust by understanding the operating environment ministers work in (try to "walk in their shoes"), anticipating and being ready for future demand, and being proactive in their advice with a focus on opportunities for improvement, not just problems to be solved. Being able to have courageous conversations with ministers, including highlighting the longer-term impacts of policy that might eventuate outside the term of their government, also requires a certain type of skill from those working at the juncture between the civil service and the political system (political astuteness), as the political level demands advice and policy options that are politically realistic. Understanding the political achievability of policy options are policy skills that can be learned and developed and may be included in any future policy skills framework.

Examples from other OECD countries as well as good practices in Ireland could be included to guide civil servants in the future policy development platform. These examples could include quality assurance processes, having criteria related to ministerial satisfaction with advice from officials and processes for ensuring advice is presented in a way that resonates with and meets the diverse needs of decision makers (the customers of advice). It might also include guidance on how to establish trusted relationships and an agreed operating model with ministers, such as agreed ground rules on what policy work is undertaken and when, and some mechanisms for negotiating space in work programmes and budgets for longer-term policy stewardship.

In addition to the relationship between ministers and officials, the political-technical interface is also characterised by relationships between officials and political advisors, between advisors, including chiefs of staff, and between government ministers and senior officials on the one hand and members of parliament on the other, be it from coalition parties or from the opposition.

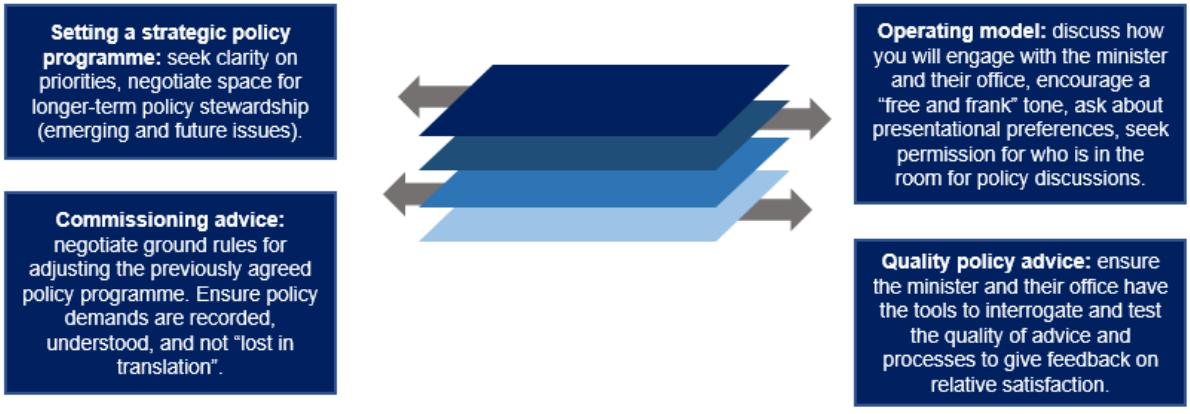
The role of political advisors in policy development is currently unclear, although the role of advisors is provided for under the Public Service Management Act (1997) (Government of Ireland, 1997[8]). The Act stipulates that special advisors shall assist the minister or minister of state by "providing advice" and

"monitoring, facilitating and securing the achievement of Government objectives that relate to the Department". Both the selection and performance of advisers continue to be regarded critically, as there is an expectation that this staffing complement should demonstrably bring added value, relevant expertise to the policy development process and an ability to learn "how government works" in a short period of time (Connaughton, 2017[9]).

The OECD's interviews showed that the skills of political advisors are increasingly focused on political communication and achievability rather than policy. As in other OECD countries, the key could be to develop a collaborative relationship between the civil service and political staff, characterised by a responsive and proactive civil service that engages in regular, informed discussions and interactions with the minister and the minister's office. Guidance for political staff may support this partnership approach. For example, Australia has issued guidance on the roles and responsibilities of political staff vis-à-vis civil servants (Government of Australia, 2021[10]). New Zealand has developed a code of conduct for political advisors and political office staff (Government, 2022[11]). The responses to the survey highlighted some areas of opportunity in this regard. The Senior Official's Group (SOG) meeting was referenced as a safe space where senior officials take on board the views of political advisors on the achievability and saleability of proposals. Equally, the SOG meetings provide an opportunity for the administrative system to relay to the political side what is feasible and what is not.

In this context, the Australia and New Zealand School of Government has recently laid out measures that can support ministers to prioritise and use policy advice and ways that departments can support them, focusing on some key components of the relationship between ministers and their departments (Figure 4.1). This could provide a framework for discussing relationships between departments and between ministers and their offices and how those relationships can be improved.

Figure 4.1. Minister-department relationships: Key components to negotiate



Source: Adapted from (Washington, 2021[12])

Research also showed that the uptake of policy advice can be variable across departments in Ireland and that the formats and timings for providing that advice also vary. The use of evidence/data in influencing the political discourse also depends on the ability to centre it within a broader narrative used by politicians and the general public. There are nonetheless good practices and examples in this area from within Ireland and in other OECD countries that could populate the future policy development platform.

Stakeholder engagement, digitalisation and user-centric policy development

New forms of citizen engagement, representation and public participation are emerging in all OECD countries. In this context, digitalisation has provided a new medium for engagement with citizens on various sides of the policy debate. Ireland ranks 5th of the 27 EU Member States in the 2022 edition of the Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI 2022 Ireland Country report). Ireland's average yearly relative growth of its DESI score between 2017 and 2022 is approximately 8.5%, one of the highest in the EU. Ireland performs well regarding the human capital dimension, as the share of people with basic digital skills and digital content creation skills, as well as the share of ICT specialists, including female ICT specialists, is above the EU average. Ireland is a top performer for mobile broadband take-up.

The commitment of Ireland to drive the digital agenda is also demonstrated in the "Connecting Government 2030: A Digital and ICT Strategy for Ireland's Public Service", which sets out an approach to deliver digital government for all, benefitting both society and the broader economy. The Public Service in Ireland aims at harnessing digitalisation to drive a step-change in how people, businesses, and policymakers interact, ensuring interoperability across all levels of government and across public services. A key objective is to ensure that in digitalising public services a "user first" and "business first" approach is taken. As a key reform initiative of the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, delivering on Connecting Government 2030 will help achieve these ambitions. It will also drive the wider GovTech priorities as well as bring significant public value benefits.

The COVID-19 crisis has only served to increase expectations from citizens about bringing them to the decision making table as evidenced by the OECD Centre of Government Recovery Survey in 2021 (Figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2. Changes experienced by centres of government since the COVID-19 outbreak that will remain when planning the recovery from the crisis, 2021



Note: Based on OECD (2021), "Survey on Building a Resilient Response: The Role of Centres of Government in the Management of the COVID-19 Crisis and Future Recovery"; Data for Australia, Greece, Japan, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States are not available.
Source: (OECD, 2021[13])

At the same time, these developments have expanded the expectations that citizens participate more fully in policy development within the overall framework of representative democracy. Citizens are increasingly demanding greater transparency and accountability from their governments and want greater participation in shaping policies that affect their lives (OECD, 2016[14]). Citizens expect governments to take their views and knowledge into account when making decisions on their behalf. As highlighted by the OECD Recommendation of the Council on Open Government, engaging citizens in policy development allows governments to respond to these expectations and, at the same time, design better policies and improve their implementation (OECD, 2017[15]) (OECD, 2022[16]). While the information and consultation of stakeholders and citizens are initial levels of participation, governments should also promote innovative ways to effectively engage with stakeholders to source ideas and co-create solutions during all phases of the policy-cycle and in the service design and delivery (OECD, 2017[15]).

This perspective is recognised by the civil service in Ireland and articulated as part of the legitimacy pillar in the document "Strengthening Policy making in the Civil Service" by the Civil Service Management Board (p.12): "Two [other] features, which have been highlighted both within the Irish context and internationally as an element of policy making that needs to be strengthened, are necessary. The first is stakeholder engagement whereby policymakers understand the role and perceptions of interested parties and how they might assist in ensuring that policy objectives are translated into concrete action. The [other] essential component of legitimacy is public confidence; the trust displayed by the wider population in government to act in the general interest." Past policy "failures" have frequently not engaged and obtained buy-in from stakeholders and customers or have missed to develop a more sophisticated debate to avoid widespread public opposition.

Interviewees pointed out that public consultation processes to capture views of citizens have been strengthened significantly in recent years.

> *"I think there is better engagement with citizens. The strength of the citizen's assembly and the strength of consultation have substantially increased in my understanding over the last number of years, so there's a better recognition across various different organizations that there is a need to consult not just for the sake of it but to listen and to take all of that on board and into account when developing the policy."*

However, despite recognition that consultation practices have increased and matured, the OECD's project survey highlighted mixed views on stakeholder engagement. Some respondents stated that this capacity is not developed within their department, while others stated that stakeholders are indeed largely involved in policy development. Others referred to the consultation process as an exercise often biased towards well-established/organised stakeholders and engagement happening mostly in urban and less in rural areas. And still others viewed stakeholders as mostly "being involved only after decisions are taken" and found co-creation limited. While these represent a snapshot of diverse views, they also highlight areas where there are expectations for improvement and where the sharing of good practices across the government (see below) could be beneficial. Stakeholder engagement should not be considered a checkbox exercise but be purposefully designed and conducted with adequate time and at minimal cost for the participating stakeholders, while avoiding duplication to minimise consultation fatigue. It is also important that participation opportunities are adequately communicated, and that communication is inclusive, accessible and compelling, while also ensuring adequate communication around the results of these engagements. Moreover, the sharing of good practices may enhance the number of instances where stakeholders are given the opportunity and the necessary resources (e.g. information, data and digital tools) to collaborate during all phases of policy development and not only after decisions are taken. Further, specific efforts should be dedicated to reaching out to the most relevant, vulnerable, underrepresented, or marginalised groups in society, while avoiding undue influence and policy capture.

Interviewees also raised the issue of whether expectations are created that may not be met given political realities or practical implementation challenges. Listening to the views of citizens does not mean automatically that these views will be taken forward in the process. Moreover, policymakers are confronted

with the challenge that suggestions from citizens may be contradictory (by different interest groups of individuals, raising the question of which suggestion has more legitimacy than others), in conflict with the available evidence, or unrealistic, as they may not take into account other perspectives nor the legislative processes that can implement these policy expectations. Therefore, when not carefully curated, citizen consultations may paradoxically further erode trust in government instead of restoring it. Therefore, the civil service needs clarity about when and how to involve the public and about how much input/influence they are going to have.

In Ireland, guidance on public consultation was previously developed by the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDR) (Government of Ireland, 2016[17]) as part of the objectives of the first Civil Service Renewal Plan 2014, which aims to "promote a culture of innovation and openness by involving greater external participation and consultation in policy development". This "Consultation Principles & Guidance" document dates from 2016, and since then new initiatives have been taken (such as The Citizens' Assembly). In line with a commitment under the Open Government Partnership National Action Plan, the public consultation guidelines are currently being updated by DPENDR with the support of IPA, who are undertaking public consultations in this regard. Various departments have also developed guidelines and tools for staff on citizen engagement.

In terms of a more developed and systemic approach to government communication and citizen engagement, the Government Information Service (GIS) – which is based in the Department of the Taoiseach – works to foster strong collaboration and co-ordination among press and communication officials in other government departments and agencies. It co-ordinates, supports and amplifies communications around key government priorities such as Housing for All, Brexit, Shared Island, Climate Action, COVID-19 and Ukraine. It also supports and encourages capacity-building in the area of communication and engagement across the civil and public service (including through the Government Communications Network) and manages the "Government of Ireland" identity and unified web presence of gov.ie. Gov.ie went from strength to strength during the COVID-19 pandemic and came to be regarded as a trusted source of authoritative public information on COVID-19. For example, in 2019, gov.ie had just over 6 million page views whereas this figure grew to just over 117 million in 2020. More recently, GIS has been able to use the gov.ie platform to provide coherent information to the public on Ireland's response to the war in Ukraine, and there will be other opportunities in the future to do likewise.

Communicating relevant, timely and accessible information to citizens is a pre-requisite for stakeholder engagement. Today, digital technologies have made communicating easier than it has ever been, but many governments are often missing the opportunity to effectively engage with their citizens and face multi-faceted challenges as they attempt to do so (OECD, 2021[18]). In particular, radical transformations to the information ecosystem have upended traditional communication methods and enabled the spread of mis-and disinformation at an unthinkable scale. The dominance of online channels, where every individual can be both a producer and consumer of content, means that governments face greater competition for the finite attention of citizens. At the same time, constructive public debates and well-informed engagement from stakeholders are needed in order to address the climate emergency and other pressing reform agendas.

Public communication plays an important role in this regard. It can increase the reach and visibility of engagement opportunities, such as consultations or deliberative processes on specific policies. It can also multiply the occasions and avenues that citizens have to provide feedback and participate in shaping policies and services through online and offline channels. Developing better capacities to turn such feedback into insights for policy-makers, and responding to it, is essential in achieving stronger engagement and a greater dialogue between governments and citizens. The latter also requires communications that is more targeted and compelling, based on audience insights that provide communicators with a real-time understanding of public concerns and sentiment. Beyond simple demographic traits, understanding the habits, attitudes and information consumption patterns from different

segments of society is key to designing communications that are more effective, especially for vulnerable or hard-to-reach groups.

In Ireland, individual departments have some well-developed engagement and communication approaches at a sectoral level, e.g., the Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications, for instance, has a well-developed system of citizen and stakeholder engagement, which are also a central part of the Civil Service Renewal Plan and the Open Government Partnership National Action Plan. The department has created a guidance document for staff on stakeholder engagement, which outlines how to create a five-step stakeholder engagement plan by defining the purpose of the engagement, identifying the stakeholders, carrying out the analysis, communicating well and doing a risk assessment as well as a contingency plan. The document also offers case studies and a detailed guide on the implementation process.

The Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage has also conducted an extensive public consultation on the National Marine Spatial Planning Framework, an exercise that has been praised by the European Commission (Box 4.1). To support government departments, public bodies and local authorities to effectively engage with disabled people in decision making processes, the National Disability Authority published updated participation guidelines in 2022 (National Disability Authority, 2022[19]).

DPENDR and the National Adult Literacy Agency also developed a communication toolkit "Customer Communications Toolkit for the Public Service - A Universal Design Approach" to inform the design and procurement of customer communication in the Public Service, and as a support to those working in contact with the public (Government of Ireland, 2019[20]). This toolkit complements the Plain English Style Guide for the Public Service.

Box 4.1. Local public consultation on Marine Spatial Planning in Ireland

Ireland held a three-month public consultation on its Marine Spatial Planning (MSP) baseline report. This was part of the broader consultation process that resulted in Ireland's first MSP. The MSP team hosted public engagement events in almost all coastal counties across Ireland.

These events were aimed at raising awareness of:

- the concept of MSP
- the Irish government's plans to develop a marine plan for the country
- how people could engage with the plan-making process
- the timeframe for the various phases of this process.

During the consultation period, five regional public engagement events were held across coastal communities. In total, over 170 responses on the baseline report were received, and these had a significant impact on the content of the draft MSP. This consultation process was also expanded and repeated for Ireland's draft plan. This practice focuses on a participatory and transparent process, enabling the public to engage in the MSP process and to provide their views on the report and the MSP draft.

Source: (European Commission, 2022[21])

Civil society organisations (CSOs) can be characterised as diverse and proactive actors engaged with the public policy development process in Ireland. The ability of Irish CSOs to mobilise public opinion and influence policy development on a wide array of issues depends to a large degree on their analytical capacities and resources. Irish CSOs' success in inducing societal change derives in part from their resilience and agility, which enables them to adapt to evolutions within the Irish public policy process (Hogan and Murphy, 2021[22]).

Changes in the Irish political environment, or "political opportunity structures", have inevitably influenced CSOs' engagement practices, leading to new challenges and opportunities. While the 2008 global financial crisis inherently shrunk the overall space and legitimacy of some public policy actors, including CSOs, this post-crisis era can also be characterised by a new political environment where inclusive and consultative processes are increasingly integrated into policy formulation and analysis. This shift in political culture required transformative changes in CSOs' models of action and policy-analytical capacities – resulting in increased levels of formalisation and professionalisation, as well as new avenues of engagement for CSOs to shape policy development processes in Ireland.

Recent evidence demonstrates the growing influence of CSOs on Irish public policy processes, such as the successful 2018 referendum to repeal the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution Act 1983. Besides investing significant time and resources in policy influencing, CSOs are often acclaimed for their capacity to translate lived experience into policy analysis. This success of CSOs' engagement and policy contribution, however, lies in their capacity to set agendas, frame narratives, collaborate with other CSOs and raise the public interest to build rational argumentation and persuasive capacity. For this purpose, CSOs increasingly examine innovative avenues for public participation such as electronic survey instruments as a way to gather relevant cross-cutting data, provide critical analysis and hence gain tactical political traction. Among others, the successful 2018 referendum highlighted the instrumental role of CSOs – and their capacity to collaborate with each other – in the provision of facts and comprehensive evidence, personal testimony and international perspectives.

However, several challenges remain for their involvement in the policy development process, including funding, capacity, skills and staffing, regulation and compliance, public perception, and innovation. Despite funding pressures and regulatory constraints, CSOs remain committed to advocacy and influencing public policy, although they do not always feel heard despite the consultation process – in particular in some cases for social partners' not seeing their comments reflected or responded to formally. Their influence on public policy formulation in Ireland will notably depend on their ability to develop advanced policy capacity and to demonstrate best-practice innovation, responsiveness and effectiveness to public authorities and civil society actors, in line with political opportunity structures that may emerge in the future.

Another participatory methodology to further engage CSOs in policy development is co-creation. A common example of this kind of methodology is the Open Government Partnership (OGP) Action Plans, which are the result of a co-creation process in which government institutions and civil society work together to design commitments that aim to foster participation, transparency, integrity and accountability (Open Government Partnership, n.d.[23]). Launched in 2011, the OGP has 77 member countries and 106 local governments, including Ireland which joined in 2013 and is currently implementing its co-created 3rd OGP Action Plan (2021-23) (Open Government Partnership, n.d.[24]). While good examples of this new form of collaboration between government and stakeholders from across society in the co-design and co-creation of policies exist, the concept has also been misunderstood in some cases, where groups may see it as determining policy rather than seeking to influence it, alongside evidence and other considerations that government may have to consider such as resourcing, prioritisation and unintended consequences. And while deepened co-operation is redefining roles and the relationship between government and stakeholders, co-creation does not replace applying formal rules and principles of representative democracy (OECD, 2016[14]). It thus does not take away the responsibility and the authority/agency of government to decide on difficult policy choices, to assess all of the evidence and wider implications, and ultimately to decide on both the direction and pace of policy implementation. Proper rules of application

and a shared consistent approach to how this type of collaboration with society can work and where its use is appropriate and necessary for sound policy are thus needed.

Increasingly, public authorities are reinforcing democracy by making use of deliberative processes in a structural way, beyond one-off initiatives that are often dependent on political will. Structural changes to make representative public deliberation an integral part of countries' democratic architecture is a way to effectively promote true transformation, as institutionalisation anchors follow-up and response mechanisms in regulations. Creating regular opportunities for more people to have the privilege to serve as members in citizens' assemblies not only improves policies and services, but it also scales the positive impact that participation has on people's perception of themselves and others, strengthening societal trust and cohesion (see Box 4.2).

Box 4.2. Eight ways to institutionalise deliberative democracy

The OECD has developed a guide for public officials and policymakers outlining eight models for institutionalising representative public deliberation to improve collective decision making and strengthen democracy. The guide provides examples of how to create structures that allow representative public deliberation to become an integral part of the way certain types of public decisions are taken.

Eight models to consider for implementation:

1. combining a permanent citizens' assembly with one-off citizens' panels
2. connecting representative public deliberation to parliamentary committees
3. combining deliberative and direct democracy
4. establishing standing citizens' advisory panels
5. sequencing representative deliberative processes throughout the policy cycle
6. giving people the right to demand a representative deliberative process
7. requiring representative public deliberation before certain types of public decisions
8. embedding representative deliberative processes in local strategic planning.

While each of these models has its strengths and weaknesses to be considered, they can yield important benefits, such as allowing public decision makers to take more complex and difficult decisions better, enhancing public trust, increasing public ownership and support, and strengthening society's democratic fitness.

Source: (OECD, 2021[25])

A notable Irish example of capturing views of citizens is the Citizens' Assemblies (Citizens' Assembly, n.d.[26]), a deliberative democracy model reporting to parliament. Citizens' Assemblies bring longer-term issues into the present, with deliberations on issues such as biodiversity loss and gender equality, constitutional issues such as the length of parliamentary terms, and areas such as ageing populations and climate change (see Box 4.3).

Box 4.3. Consultation with citizens: "The Citizens' Assembly of Ireland"

The Citizens' Assembly is a body formed by common citizens to deliberate on important issues. It was established in 2016 as a successor to the Constitutional Convention, which was originally conceived to discuss amendments to the Irish Constitution. The Assembly is a form of participatory and deliberative democracy that directly engages citizens who are called to vote on a specific topic. The Assembly's primary objective is to gather a representative and random group of citizens to discuss important policy and legal issues and then make recommendations reporting to the Oireachtas. It is composed of 99 citizens and a chairperson.

The Assembly gathered 12 times between 2016 and 2018 to discuss 5 main issues. The first was the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution, as set out in the Resolution of the Houses of the Oireachtas approving the very establishment of the Assembly. After the first Assembly about the Eighth Amendment of the Constitution, 4 other issues were considered between 2017 and 2018. These included sessions on how to best respond to challenges and opportunities of an ageing population, fixed-term parliaments, the structure and modalities of referenda, and climate change.

Source: (Government of Ireland, 2022[27])

How these processes translate into cross-government policy goals and shape the priorities of civil service policy efforts is less evident. Responses in interviews with civil servants suggested these were only truly useful when dealing with very circumscribed yes/no issues rather than complex policy problems. Using them to drive policy in such areas would create expectations that would be hard to meet.

The results from the survey also suggest that, although there are good examples of co-creation, tools to support these practices are not always well known across the government. Innovative tools such as behavioural insights are not widely used, and if they are, the results and impact of their use are not widely shared across departments. And yet, there is a demand for these lessons learned, as some respondents to the survey placed the focus on the need to strengthen "meaningful cross-departmental collaboration with customer-centric service design at its core. Impact on end users must be the focus of policy-making decisions".

Various countries have processes in place to ensure that feedback from stakeholders has been enacted and followed up on, closing the feed-back loop through effective communication (see Box 4.4).

Box 4.4. Systematic follow-up on stakeholder consultations in selected OECD countries

Colombia

The Colombian Environment Ministry publishes responses to stakeholders' comments online. If a comment is rejected, the website provides an explanation as to the decision. If a comment is accepted, it explains how the comment is taken into account in the regulatory proposal.

Iceland

Icelandic policymakers publish consultation conclusions on the government's consultation portal. A report highlights the main points raised by stakeholders as well as their suggestions for improvement and areas of concern.

Slovak Republic

After a comment on a draft regulation open for public consultation in the Slovak Republic reaches 500 reactions from other stakeholders, the regulator is required to react to the comment and, furthermore is required to talk to these stakeholders. In addition, policymakers indicate for every comment whether it is major or minor and whether it has been accepted, rejected or partly accepted with the corresponding reasoning for the decision.

Source: (OECD, 2018[28])

Areas of opportunity to improve legitimacy in the policy development process

This chapter articulated the changing role of the civil service in driving the public policy debate and in steering the policy dialogue in the technical-political interface in a context that is often shaped by the 24-hour news cycle and, as in other OECD countries, a focus on the short term in response to political calendars rather than on sustainability and longer-term challenges. It also identified various innovations and excellent case examples of structural collaboration with citizens and other stakeholders, underscoring the relevance of co-creation practices and tools such as behavioural insights, which may contribute to a more grounded legitimacy of public policies. This chapter also highlighted the pivotal role of the Government Information Service in public communication around key government priorities, as well as the added value of regulatory oversight for the legitimacy of proposals requiring legislative expression.

Despite a number of good practices that were shared, including the building of broad alliances to support the development of policies (such as First 5), consultations and interviews with public officials pointed to several areas that can benefit from further improvement:

- A **clearer articulation of the specific policy advice role** of the civil service.
- While there are **tools and processes** in place to support a clear technical-political interface, a number of these **could be updated or reviewed**, including the Cabinet Handbook and the DPENDR “Consultation Principles & Guidance” (currently being updated).
- A **partnership approach with political advisors**, formalising rules of engagement and strengthening skills to understand the political achievability of policy options, may render the civil service more effective in navigating the complexity of policies in the current environment.
- **Additional training and support could be given to the civil service in public engagement** and communication by articulating a clear narrative and defining the key problem, by clarifying what the evidence says and does not say, and by using language that is clear, accessible and apolitical.
- **Improving the ways in which stakeholders are consulted** and what they should be consulted for, alongside better use of co-creation practices and tools such as behavioural insights, may also contribute to a more grounded legitimacy of public policies.

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Part II Key Enablers for Policy Development

5 Skills and Capabilities for Policy Development in the Civil Service in Ireland

This chapter assesses the existing skills and capabilities in the Irish public service and presents frameworks and practices to support skills development in the public administration. It concludes with a number of areas of opportunity to further strengthen existing good practices, streamline the training and professional development offerings and nurture a culture of evidence-based policy development across the system.

In setting out the enabling environment for sound policy development, each stage of the policy cycle requires support from key enablers, such as government structures and processes, organisational capacity and support, policy skills, and tools and instruments for policy development. Part II of this report focuses on strengthening the organisational capacity and support in terms of policy development skills and capabilities (Chapter 5) and tools and instruments for policy development (Chapter 6). A number of enabling governance arrangements strengthening the pillars of evidence, implementation and feasibility, and legitimacy were discussed in Part I.

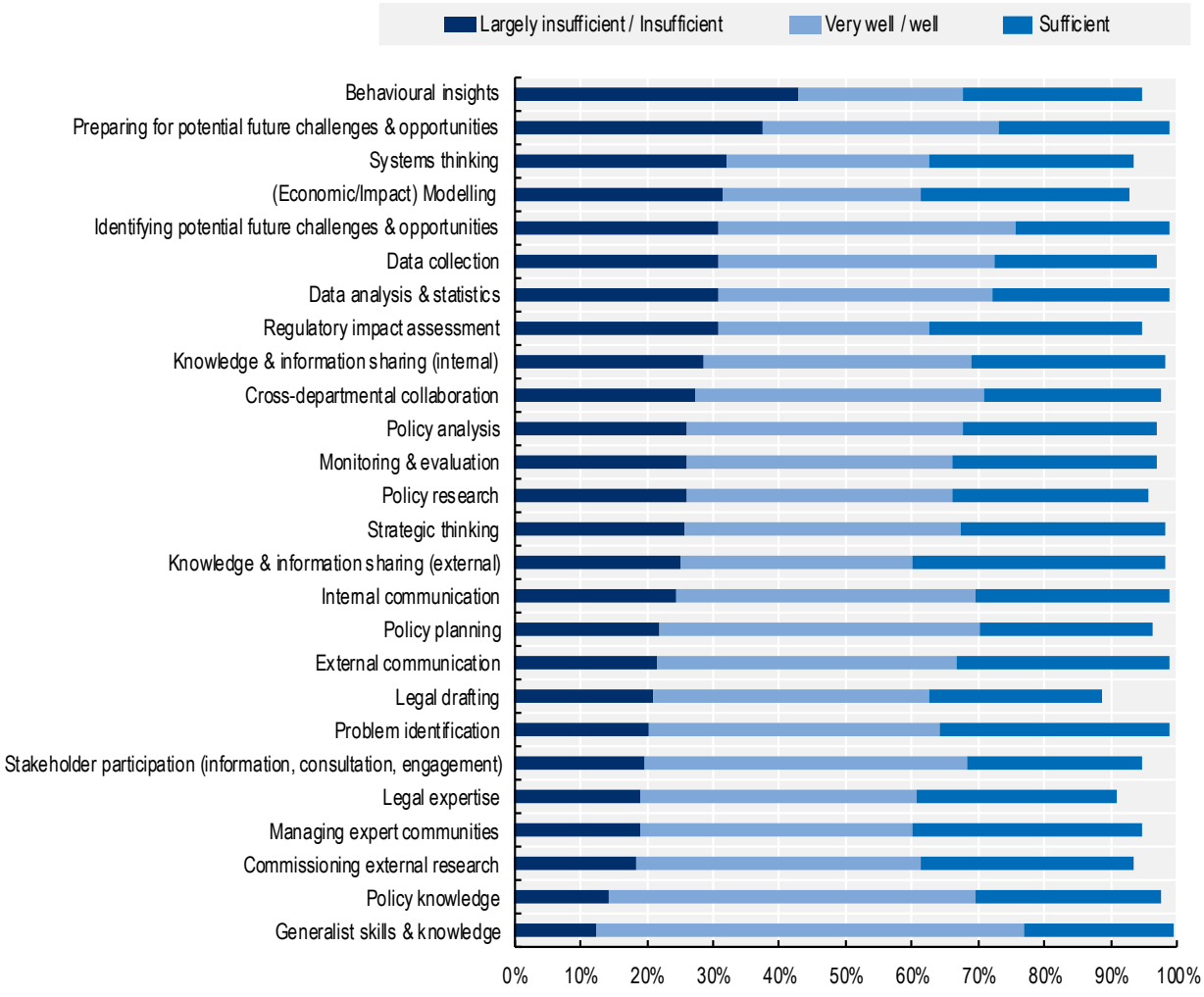
Effective policy development cannot be achieved without the right set of skills and capabilities across the civil service. These include technical skills in the use of evidence and data or the specific issue at hand but also know-how to bring in project management experience and political achievability. In short, skills and capabilities are key enablers for policy development. This chapter assesses the current frameworks and practices to support skills development, provides an examination of how best to streamline the training and professional development offerings and how a culture of evidence-based policy development can be nurtured across the system.

Frameworks and practices to support policy development skills

Policy development skills and capabilities: Perceived strengths and weaknesses

A survey of 168 civil servants as part of this project highlighted that the civil service was perceived to be well-developed in general skills and knowledge for policy development (see Figure 5.1). Respondents considered that skills were well developed in areas like problem definition, understanding the policy context, internal communication, and stakeholder engagement (although there were mixed views on how well policy practitioners engage stakeholders in policy processes). However, practitioners and the civil service in general were thought to be lacking in areas such as the use of data for policy, strategic and systems thinking, anticipating future challenges, external communication, monitoring and evaluation, and the ability to apply relatively new methods like behavioural insights and user-centred design to policy processes. Other, more technical areas like economic/impact modelling, legal drafting or expertise, and regulatory impact assessments were also cited as requiring a boost in skills and capability.

Figure 5.1. Skills and capabilities for policy development at the organisational level in Ireland



Note: n= 168. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked, "In your view, how well is your department/organisation equipped with the following skills and capabilities for policy development?". Response options included "largely insufficient", "insufficient", "sufficient", "well", "very well" and "not applicable".
Source: (OECD, 2022[1])

A number of interviews undertaken for this project highlighted in particular that the generic set of competency levels for the civil service ("competency framework") does not at the moment reflect the increasingly specialised skills required for policy development. There is also currently no overarching articulation of the specific skillsets and competencies required of policy professionals at various levels of their careers. The renewal of the Irish competency framework for the civil service (as included in the Civil Service Renewal 2024 Action Plan) offers an opportunity to further articulate policy development skills and competencies at various professional levels, either as a specific policy speciality or as a subset of the overall competency framework. Efforts in other jurisdictions to define key skills for policy offer some pointers on skills needed for a modern policy professional. In terms of process, attempts in Ireland to define and develop skills and capabilities in other parts of the civil service such as the ICT Professionalisation strategy would offer insights into how to develop a specific cohort of the civil service (even if this would not go as so far as the Policy Profession Standards in the United Kingdom). It is difficult to assess if officials have the right policy skills without defining what the necessary skills are.

Towards a systematic articulation of policy skills

A few jurisdictions have articulated the range of skills required for policy, such as the United Kingdom's Policy Profession Standards and New Zealand's Policy Skills Framework (see Box 5.1), with a strong focus on team and system capabilities rather than individual qualifications or specialisms. New Zealand's Policy Skills Framework includes non-technical skills like strategic thinking, political savvy, understanding political context and priorities, designing for implementation, and advising and influencing (this framework was showcased in an OECD report on skills for a high-performing civil service) (OECD, 2017[2]).

Box 5.1. Policy standards and skills frameworks in New Zealand and the United Kingdom

New Zealand's Policy Skills Framework

The Policy Skills Framework describes the knowledge, applied skills and behaviour expected of good policy advisors. Descriptions are broken down into levels from "developing" to "practising" to "expert/leading". It includes skills that are often mentioned as important to policy processes but rarely defined (such as "strategic thinking" or "political savvy"). Supporting tools enable individuals to articulate their policy skills profile or credentials and allow managers to map the skills makeup of their teams to identify any gaps or overlaps. The framework and tools can be used in recruitment, performance and development processes or organisational workforce planning. The specific policy skills components are underpinned by public service-wide foundation skills and knowledge that include an understanding of the machinery of government, key legislation and the code of conduct.

The Policy Skills Framework is one of three key policy improvement frameworks designed to support government agencies in delivering effective policy advice and promote a more consistent approach to policy design and delivery. The policy improvement frameworks were launched by the New Zealand prime minister in 2016. They are supported by a dedicated group within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet – the Policy Project – as well as a head of the Policy Profession (the chief executive of the department) and a Policy Profession Board made up of senior policy leaders (chief executives and deputies) as overall governance of the policy improvement programme.

United Kingdom's Policy Profession Standards

In 2018, the United Kingdom developed Policy Profession Standards, setting out the expectations of all policy professionals. This was part of a wider programme to improve policy development. The Standards are arranged around three pillars.

1. Ensuring civil servants are able to use evidence and analysis to understand and develop new strategies: It focuses on competencies to understand policy context, the application of research methods to improve solutions, to enable participation by stakeholders and facilitate work internationally.
2. Developing the capacity to produce robust advice to support democratic governance and accountability: It includes a framework for working effectively with ministers and the parliament, develops skills for integrating value-for-money considerations in decision making and highlights the implications of multilevel governance in the United Kingdom.
3. Strengthening the delivery of policy and systems, including the evaluation of policies: It explores the need for using data for better policy targeting and continuously improves policy delivery, highlighting a better understanding of commercial and procurement options.

The Policy Profession Standards provide a tool for civil servants to self-assess their skills and highlight areas for self-development. It also serves as a diagnostic tool in support of developing the skillset of

teams and adapting strategic planning and recruiting. It also informs the creation and dissemination of learning material for specific departments and for the whole civil service.

Source: (Government of the United Kingdom, 2022[3]); (Government of New Zealand, 2019[4])

The Civil Service Renewal plan sets out a vision for the civil service as "an innovative, professional and agile civil service that improves the lives of the people in Ireland through excellence in service delivery and strategic policy development" (Government of Ireland, 2021[5]). In particular, the areas listed under Pillar 2 on "Innovating for Our Future" of the Our Public Service 2020 reform plan (see Figure 5.2) address the need for the public service to be both increasingly innovative and collaborative and are highly relevant to policy development; they should thus be referenced and leveraged in all policy skills and capability development programmes.

Figure 5.2. Pillar 2 "Innovating for Our Future" of the reform plan Our Public Service 2020



Source: Adapted from (Government of Ireland, 2019[6])

In terms of institutional anchorage, the Civil Service Management Board (CSMB) may play a leading role in articulating the policy skills and validating the policy skills framework, given its broad representation, its impartiality and its guardian role for related policy reforms.

A curriculum for policy professionals

The development of a skills or competency framework for policy development may be combined with a connected curriculum for policy professionals. This policy curriculum can serve as a support for training and competency development and is discussed in more detail in the section on training.

Beyond the more formal skills frameworks and standards, however, interviews and research for this report highlighted that the skills and capabilities ecosystem for policy development of Ireland is also shaped by more informal or cultural practices.

Informality of the Irish system

At times, the moments of informality of the Irish system, partly driven by the small size of the civil service, is both a strength and a weakness. Commentators have noted that, in Ireland, informal agreements, discussions and decisions taken at meetings are not always consistently recorded (MacCarthaigh, 2021[7]). This feature of informality was echoed by various interviewees, noting that many public officials, especially in senior roles at the centre of government and in central departments, work well together at an informal level.

This has advantages in terms of a fast exchange of information and checking the feasibility of actions (testing policy ideas and options with the right people) and may mean that decisions can be taken quickly – an asset in the fast-paced environment of today. However, a lack of formal structures and guidelines has disadvantages, especially related to a loss of institutional knowledge when individuals change functions. Moreover, a lack of official records also poses a risk in the event of future judicial reviews of decisions taken. This is a particular risk in an ageing civil service, with a significant cohort close to retirement (the "retirement cliff").

Bringing in skills from outside

Despite the fact that recruitment has been open for all levels for years, the civil service was also perceived as largely looking internally for skills – with a historical preference for bringing in talent at the graduate level (often with an economics background) and with little outside recruitment or mid-career recruitment appears to occur in practice. In recent years, external specialist profiles have been recruited for functions such as human resources, information and communications technology, finance, and communication alongside traditional recruitment of economists, statisticians, social scientists and accountants, for example. Most staff at all levels are now predominantly qualified to third-level standard.

For senior-level positions, however, internal candidates often still outperform external candidates. Civil service salary levels may be part of the reason why external profiles are less attracted to join.

> *"In theory, the system recruits and does open recruitment from both within and outside the service. Very few seem to come from outside the service. I don't believe that's because our wisdom is actually held within the service. Salary is part of this."*

The Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) is seen as being effective at building skills inside the civil service (OECD, 2020[8]). Continuous improvement and upskilling is a core focus ofr the IGEES network, with training provided on relevant technical issues, including evaluation techniques and econometric analysis. IGEES is credited with bringing more evaluation and economic analysis skills into the civil service, and the IGEES network across departments is seen as an asset to the policy system, especially when IGEES staff work directly with policy development staff, creating a culture of peer learning.

In order to further leverage the IGEES skillsets across the civil service, a number of interviewees encouraged IGEES to be as "outward-looking" as possible, for example through further mainstreaming IGEES competences in the departments. The latter has been a challenge over the years.

> *"We brought in mostly economists at the time, but they were really based mostly in the centre of government, mostly in the Department of Public Expenditure, Department of Finance, and the Department of the Irish Prime Minister…[T]he capacity was planned as far as building from that central position. So, the challenge then was to actually broaden and to get capacity building across all other government departments."*

Increasing the awareness of IGEES outputs and studies across the civil service may also lead to a fruitful collaboration with departments, some of which currently turn to external partners (typically consultants) to meet certain technical needs.

> *"One of the challenges is the weaknesses of some departments and the use of private consultants rather than government agencies such as IGEES."*

Greater collaboration on policy development between IGEES personnel and policy teams within government departments, through appropriate structures, shared work programmes or engagement models (e.g. an internal consultancy model), would create opportunities for skills transfer from IGEES to colleagues within their departments, and help with training and capability building.

The IGEES network of economists and policy analysts is well placed to further support the evaluation of programmes within government departments, and the development of guidance on evaluation

methodologies to departments, for example through guidance materials or short-term project-based collaboration. It could also support the uptake of findings from policy evaluations into policy development in a more systematic manner, including emphasising the importance of an evaluation mindset in policy design and development. In terms of raising awareness of evaluations, the Norwegian practice of a central evaluation portal could be a helpful example (see Box 5.2).

Box 5.2. Central evaluations portal in Norway

In Norway, the Directorate for Financial Management and the National Library of Norway maintain and manage a centralised evaluations portal (www.evalueringsportalen.no). All the studies and evaluations are made available on the portal as soon as published. Moreover, they are easily searchable and categorised. One can search based on topic, commissioning institution, conducting institution, type of evaluation (ex post evaluation, socio-economic analysis, etc.) or based on the underlying method of the study (questionnaires, public datasets, literature review). The portal contains the studies conducted by the government and agencies since 2005 as well as some selected earlier governmental studies. Finally, on the portal one can find various evaluation guidelines as well as evaluation agendas and relevant professional and news publications. Such a centralised platform helps to build and enable the reuse of knowledge. Moreover, since it is easily searchable and updated by default, the portal increases the transparency of public sector analysis.

Source: (OECD, 2020[9])

Looking ahead, IGEES can further maximise its contribution as part of a strengthened policy development system by gradually looking more into future policy and bringing lessons from the past. IGEES may cultivate this potential by increasingly working alongside and with policy practitioners who are developing policy proposals. In this way, the lessons from policy evaluations can directly feed into the design and the monitoring and evaluation framework of policy proposals, and peer learning can be encouraged during this process.

Further suggestions to strengthen the role of IGEES and increase the uptake of policy evaluations can be found in the 2020 OECD report “The Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service: Using Evidence-Informed Policy-making to Improve Performance”.

The training ecosystem

Learning needs

A learning needs analysis has already been conducted by OneLearning, the Irish Civil Service Learning and Development Centre, to map the demand for learning and training. It aimed to highlight learning needs for the civil service as a whole and for departments more specifically.

The process was a comprehensive one, involving engagements with learning and development business partners across the civil service; workshops with small and medium-sized enterprises and with learning and development professionals; local work with learners and a learner survey; significant input from senior management; and engagement with the human resources community. Following this process, OneLearning developed a series of themes and used a subgroup structure to plan the response required in each area. It identified the high-level topics and courses relevant to each theme, and the work ultimately

helped to specify the training requirements set out in a major request for tender that was issued in May 2021.

The training needs identified were wide, but among those most relevant to policy development were policy analysis, project management, managing programme and project budgets, innovation and delivering change, data analytics, design thinking, system thinking, and business process improvement.

Following the learning needs analysis, the six categories of training tendered for comprised communication and customer service; innovation, data and project management; people management; personal and team building; finance and governance; and the Irish language. The contracts now in place as a result of this process form the basis for the key elements of training overseen by OneLearning in the Irish civil service.

Respondents to the OECD survey expressed a very strong demand for training and capacity development activities in a range of learning formats, including internal training (virtual/in-person); external training (virtual/in-person); learning from others (opportunities to shadow more experienced colleagues), opportunities to "learn by doing" by being able to take on a new type of work or challenging policy project, and having access to a community of practice on policy development. In contrast, staff mobility schemes were the least popular for skills development.

Link with performance assessment and competency frameworks

The learning opportunities identified by OneLearning should be connected with the current performance assessment framework and the current and future competency framework in the civil service, to further embed policy skills development in human resources processes and in the way civil servants are trained and developed over their careers. Moreover, the Irish government has a sound understanding of the emerging institutional learning needs as a result of the upcoming retirement cliff, i.e., which skills are likely to disappear and need to be replaced. Various initiatives are already underway to upskill the civil service as part of the civil service renewal. Some of those skills are highly relevant to policy roles, such as the work of IGEES, which could be used as a prototype for developing other centres of expertise across the civil service.

Training offer by OneLearning and the Institute of Public Administration

Various delivery options for training already exist, and the ecosystem for capacity development is rich, albeit not entirely joined-up, both within and outside the civil service.

OneLearning and the Learning Management System were established in 2017 within the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDR) as one of the flagship measures of the Civil Service Renewal Plan. OneLearning was established relatively recently for the provision of learning and development across the civil service. OneLearning is responsible for all training that is common across the civil service and offers a wide range of training programmes and "learning paths", including in relation to policy development. For example, the Data, Innovation and Management Learning Path provides modules on data analysis, design/systems thinking, policy development and analysis. A number of these courses are being developed in-house, such as in co-operation with IGEES, a collaboration that serves as a pertinent example of mainstreaming technical knowledge across the civil service.

Bringing in civil servants as faculty in training programmes was mentioned as a good practice by interviewees, as it supports and leverages internal competences; students get to hear and learn from real experience rather than academic theory. The United Kingdom also draws on senior practitioners for policy training, as does the Australian Public Service Academy (see Box 5.3).

A number of interviewees encouraged OneLearning to open its training offer beyond the civil service and gradually allocate slots for participants from the public sector more broadly and from subnational institutions in particular. This would help with the cross-fertilisation of ideas, improve mutual understanding

and networks across levels of government and between policy and delivery and could broaden the potential talent pool for the civil service.

The Institute of Public Administration (IPA) also offers development and training for civil servants and for the wider public service too. IPA's Training and Development Division provides an extensive range of executive development and professionally accredited programmes, short training courses and organisational development supports for new and experienced managers, administrators and technical staff across the public sector. For example, the IPA offers policy-related courses including a diploma in local government studies, which is well received, as well as a Master's degree in policy analysis. The latter is a two-year, part-time programme designed to address tangible needs of policy analysis skills across the public administration. By including civil servants as guest lecturers in its faculty, it helps ensure that curricula are relevant, practical and applicable to everyday policy work. In the Master's course, students explore subjects such as project management, economic and financial analysis, social policy analysis, and cost-benefit analysis. The Master's provides a flexible teaching structure with both in-person and remote learning options. Several specialisations are offered, including public management, criminal justice, financial management, healthcare management, human resources management and local government management.

Skills for the future

A key challenge for all agencies that propose training for policy development is to ensure that it is up to date and relevant to the most modern needs of the public service. The responses to the OECD's survey offer some broad reflections on what skills and capabilities policy practitioners in Ireland think will be needed in the future.

Both internal communication across the government and external communication with different stakeholders, the media and the public require new skills and capabilities. Digital technologies and social media have increased the velocity of decision making, had a profound impact on public communication and have produced a complex information ecosystem that has made it more challenging for policymakers to communicate (OECD, 2021[10]). Information consumption has been transformed by rapid digitalisation and the proliferation of communication platforms across connected devices, while information production has also shifted as each individual can now publish content or produce data. COVID-19 has also been a catalyst for change and acceleration of innovative practices in the field of public communication, as seen in many OECD countries including Ireland.

In the future, inclusive, responsive and compelling communication may thus require considerable adjustments to how communication is organised and the mandate is serves, as well as to the skills of public officials and communicators alike (OECD, 2021[10]). Irrespective of the changes due to digitalisation, inclusiveness considerations may also have an impact on communication and could require new drafting and writing skills, for example to make sure government documents also exist in simple language.

Emerging technologies have opened new possibilities for public communicators to gather and analyse evidence. For example, big data, cloud computing, smart algorithms and analytical software have unlocked a vast trove of insights and diminished the cost of acquiring and processing relevant information. Embracing these technologies will require building capacity across departments. New practices and competencies have given life to a wide range of specialisations within the profession itself, as well as increasing its reliance on expertise in other related disciplines ranging from data science and artificial intelligence, to behavioural science, to search engine optimisation (SEO), and user experience (UX), web and graphic design. This points to the need for specific skillsets and expertise. In particular, interventions should target digital, analytical and data science skills; access to behavioural science expertise; and professional training across essential communication competencies.

The digitalisation of communication channels and the data revolution has sparked the proliferation of a range of sub-domains across social media, websites and apps, analytics, and beyond. Each of these sub-domains comes with a specialisation that government communication units need to acquire in order to effectively leverage the opportunities of these new channels.

As the field continues to evolve rapidly, investing in regular training and professional development of communicators, both on core skills and according to a set of specialisations, will remain highly important to empower them to embrace innovations and new practices for a more impactful function. Building a strategic and innovative outlook for public communication, in tandem with efforts to upskill teams and units to carry this out in practice, ought to go hand-in-hand with a focus on ethics. This is fundamental to ensuring that opportunities for inclusive, responsive and compelling communication that come with innovations in the field are compatible with the public interest and do not erode public trust.

The growing availability of data allows governments across the OECD to make more informed and evidence-based decisions for policy development. However, creating a data-driven public sector requires recognising data as a strategic asset and having the skills necessary to help reap the benefits of evidence-based decision making (OECD, 2019[11]). In addition to the knowledge of information technology systems and tools, the area of skills to be strengthened that was the most frequent mentioned in the OECD survey relates to data collection, analysis, and evaluation. Determining data needs, collecting the necessary information and additional data points, and accessing already existing databases as well as data management require enhanced data literacy across the civil service to inform policy analysis and development. In particular, as data analysis depends on the availability of high-quality source data, governments require skillsets related to data engineering and science. Moreover, statistical analysis and interpretation of available data assets and statistics (e.g. through modelling and forecasting) will likely become more important in the future, not just for specialists but also for policymakers with generalist profiles. This is closely linked to the ability to present and visualise data. In the same vein, greater knowledge of data protection is becoming more important.

Evermore complex policy challenges and increasing uncertainty could render skills related to systems thinking, risk and resilience assessment as well as strategic foresight more important in the future. As described in Chapter 2, the civil service could consider equipping policymakers with strategic foresight skills and practice systems that can stimulate iterative processes for policy development through to implementation.

Momentum for optimisation and for advancing a policy curriculum

With these modern skills in mind, the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) is currently finalising its Corporate Strategy 2022-2027. It will set out a transformation agenda aimed at meeting the new and evolving education, training, development and skills needs of the civil and public service. There will be a particular emphasis on expanding and updating the training and development of senior management across the civil service, state agencies and local authorities.

One of the goals will be to identify and address the current and evolving professional learning and development needs of the public service. Among the actions it commits to for this purpose will be to establish a dedicated business development function to engage with and systematically identify the professional learning and development needs of all its stakeholders, including government departments, agencies and individual sectors. The Institute will seek to ensure that its course content and design reflect leading practice and stakeholder requirements, including those of the public service. In particular, it will seek to link the policy development skills training with a renewed and updated competency framework for the civil service.

The Institute is placing particular emphasis on identifying expert delivery partners and building strategic alliances to respond to training and development needs, including the more specialised needs of senior

civil and public servants. It will also review, benchmark and streamline existing courses and programmes to optimise their relevance, and it will seek to eliminate unnecessary overlaps within programmes. In this regard, it will link to the programmes offered by other agencies, including OneLearning.

More widely, the IPA is seeking collaborative research opportunities and partnerships that support knowledge creation and advance thought leadership. This will be a significant feature of the Institute's work to meet the skills and training needs of the public service. Finally, the IPA will seek to add to its contribution of learning and development in the public service by developing itself further as a learning organisation.

Both OneLearning and the IPA offer short training courses for the civil service on the same or related topics, such as project management, change management, human resources and leadership skills. In order to avoid overlap and ensure efficiency (the IPA is partly funded by a grant administered by DPENDR), there is a need to streamline the training offer. The IPA's forthcoming Corporate Strategy brings an opportunity to promote this streamlining in collaboration with OneLearning. There is scope for the two organisations to work closely together in developing a joint understanding of civil service training needs, including in respect of policy development and strategic foresight.

In addition, there is scope for DPENDR to specify its priorities in the context of its periodic funding discussions with the IPA and ensure that the Corporate Strategy 2022-2027 reflects the skills needs of the civil service. Training offerings and the connections between them (and the relevant student cohorts) may need to be made explicit. A package of offerings related to policy that includes areas like project management, policy leadership and people management could be articulated as an overall "policy course", akin to a mini curriculum. The IPA has identified a number of training priorities in new and evolving areas such as strategic transformation and new ways of working, as well as digital, climate, innovation, data and communication. The IPA has also committed to developing training in the areas of benefits modelling, data analytics, human-centred design, programme management and agile project management skills.

The new IPA strategy is an opportunity to enable the development of a policy curriculum based on required skills and then deliberately commission the necessary training offering. This approach could perhaps be best achieved by fostering close collaboration between the IPA and DPENDR's own training and development body, OneLearning.

As mentioned earlier, this policy curriculum may reflect the structure and priorities of a skills and competency framework for policy development, to allow for a coherent match between skills needs and the training offer. The curriculum may also result in the better harnessing of existing resources already devoted to training needs analyses and to training and development in both IPA and OneLearning.

In addition to the courses offered by OneLearning and the IPA, various other academic institutions, in Dublin, Galway, Limerick and Cork, offer public service-oriented programmes focusing on political science and on public management and governance. Academia could be more involved in the training of civil servants outside the usual degree-based offerings. This might include specific offerings on policy-related research methodologies, such as statistical analysis, policy analysis and economic modelling, and could be commissioned as a collective offering for the civil service and delivered in-house by departments. A broader role for academia in policy development, in particular in relation to research, is discussed later in this report.

Whichever institute delivers the training, information about the offerings could be set out in one place (OneLearning) so that potential students and their managers can assess the most appropriate offering for their policy development needs. Some sort of assessment criteria could also be designed that would enable either a centralised assessment of the quality of offerings or a system for departments and students to rate the quality of courses (a trip advisor for training offerings).

Other jurisdictions are creating comprehensive approaches to developing the skills of the civil service. The Australian Public Service has recently launched the Australian Public Service Academy which has specific programmes related to policy training (see Box 5.3). The United Kingdom's policy curriculum and campus

also include policy skills such as a Master's in public policy in collaboration with the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) (and includes senior civil service practitioners as faculty) (see Box 5.4). In contrast, New Zealand does not have a centralised public service training or policy training offering. Its approach to whole-of-government policy skills development, building on the Policy Skills Framework, is described below (see Box 5.5).

Box 5.3. Developing skills of civil servants: The Australian Public Service Academy

The Australian government created an Australian Public Service Academy in 2021 to strengthen the capacity of the public administration and support a more holistic and cross-sector approach to building skills for policymakers. Over the last ten years, three reviews of the public service – the "Ahead of the Game" report, the McPhee Review and, the most recent, the Theodey Review (in 2019) – highlighted that skills and capacity in the public service was the single most important element to strengthen the effectiveness of the public sector.

The latter review underlined, however, the fragmentation of skills development initiatives, material and guidelines across the public service and stressed the lack of guidance on the essential features that characterise a good civil servant. As a result, the Australian Public Service Academy was created to respond effectively to these challenges.

One of the unique characteristics of the Academy is that it is a networked organisation with a central hub and different services, which are designed and delivered by the agencies that have a comparative and known advantage in these areas. For instance, Services Australia might provide support in developing skills in the delivery of social protection support.

- The core element of the Academy is the Australian Public Service Craft and Value, a set of six fundamental capabilities at the foundation of an effective public sector. These include:
- integrity
- working in government
- engagement and partnership
- implementation and services
- strategy and policy evaluation
- leadership and management.

Each of these capabilities includes access to a specific online toolkit and links to related courses, which are differentiated according to the level of expertise (foundation, practitioner and lead).

In addition, the Academy offers a Graduate Development Program, which scales up the approach and uses a whole-of-government approach with a focus on the Australian Public Service Craft.

Source: (Government of Australia, 2022[12])

Box 5.4. Developing skills of civil servants: The United Kingdom Campus for government skills

To deliver on the government priorities as set out by the Declaration on Government Reform of 2021, the government of the United Kingdom supported the creation of a Government Campus and a new curriculum for all civil servants. The curriculum was developed by the newly created Government Skills and Curriculum Unit, hosted by the Cabinet Office and the civil service. The new training programme aims to improve the public servants' general and specialist expertise, strengthening their creativity and their networks. Training courses bring together all civil service training bodies, such as the Civil Service Leadership Academy, and include profession-led training, including the Intelligence Assessment Academy and the Government Commercial College. In addition, it will also bring together business-specific training, such as the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's (FCDO) International Academy and various schemes for accelerated development.

The training provided by the Government Campus programme is not centralised but rather is offered in a decentralised way across the civil service by departments, agencies and professions. The Campus is expected to unite all government training and make it accessible to all public servants.

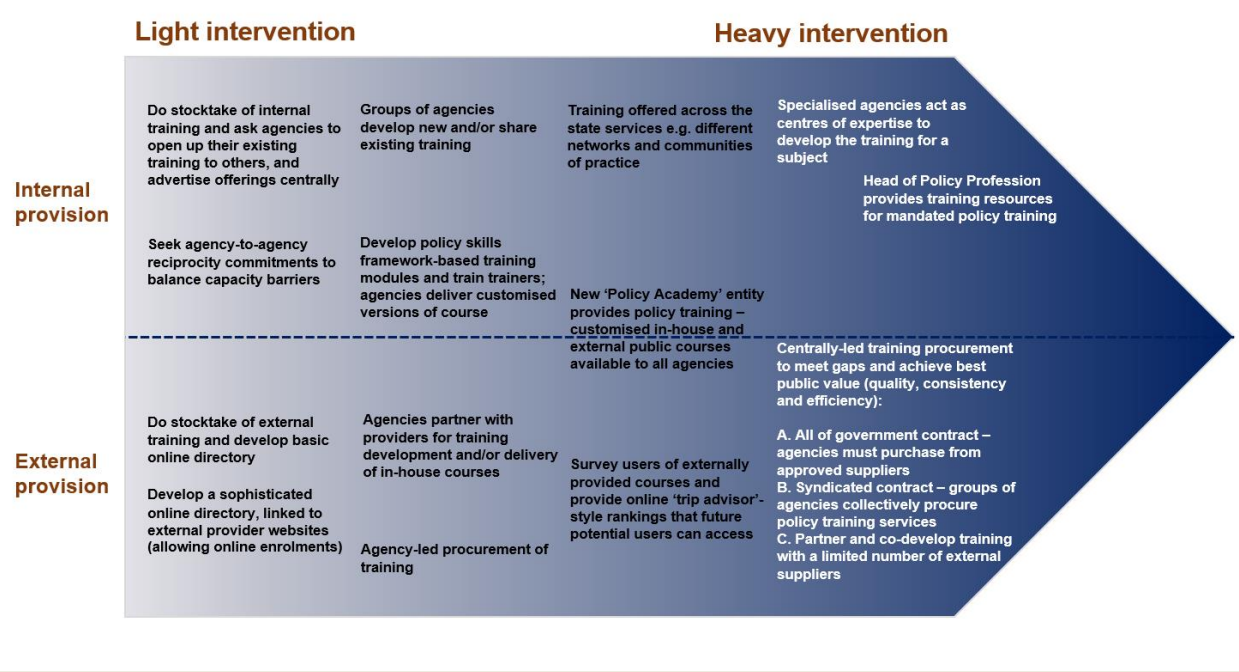
Source: (Government of the United Kingdom, 2021[13])

Box 5.5. The policy workforce and pathways to improved capability in New Zealand

The New Zealand policy skills framework articulates the skills required of policy professionals across the government. However, the New Zealand public management system is characterised by relatively autonomous departments, making any whole-of-government capability-building effort difficult. As a result, the "Pathways to Policy People Capability" report was published. It analysed policy workforce issues, described key trends and perceptions related to recruitment, retention, development and deployment of policy staff across the government, and offered potential collective policy workforce development initiatives. Policy training strategies were set out from light to heavy intervention (centralised procurement) and provision of policy training.

The options for action (see Figure 5.3) were plotted on a matrix to support strategies for training policy staff, sharing training between departments and developing centres of expertise.

Figure 5.3. Training options: A mix of light to heavy interventions



Developments in New Zealand include communities of practice in specific policy areas (behavioural insights, futures), some training by the Policy Project (training of the trainers) and the launch of the development pathways tool (to support individuals seeking training and development aligned with skills in the Policy Skills Framework).

Source: Adapted from (Government of New Zealand, 2022[14])

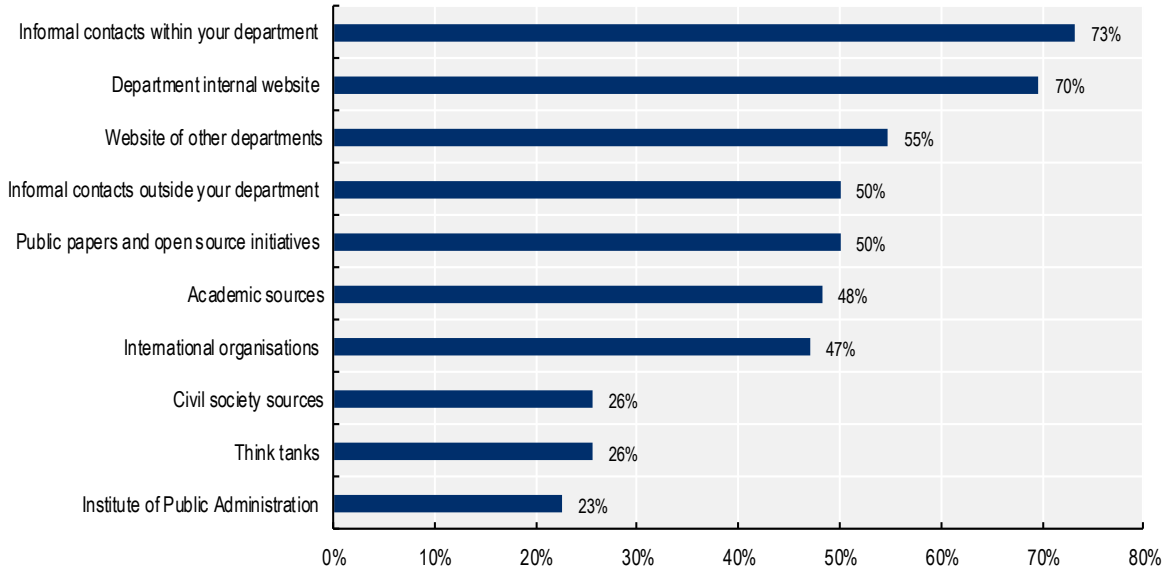
OneLearning does not use a credit system, and there is no specific curriculum on policy development. A policy curriculum would be a useful organising framework for policy training. As noted above, the United Kingdom has developed a policy curriculum with various levels of training up to the Master's level (see Box 5.3), linked to the Policy Standards. While formal training is important, a survey of policy professionals in the United Kingdom conducted in 2019 suggested that formal training and credentials were less important than informal development and training for career progression: "Less than a quarter (23%) felt that a professional qualification had helped to improve their performance in policy making, suggesting that other forms of development including on-the-job experience were relatively more important. Indeed, around two-thirds (66%) cited departmental learning as the means by which they kept up to date as a policy professional" (UK Policy Profession Board, 2019[15]).

Additional capacity-building formats and a culture of evidence-based policy development

Formal training is only part of the development equation. Most people learn on the job. The human resources management literature (Lombardo and Eichinger, 2000[16]) refers to this as a ratio of 70% "learning by doing" on the job, 20% learning from others (including mentoring, support and feedback from more senior colleagues) and 10% formal training. The survey of civil servants conducted for this project

largely confirmed that this ratio applies to the Irish civil service (Figure 5.4). Results showed that informal contacts within one's department are considered the main source of policy development information in the civil service (73% of respondents), followed by the department's own website (70% of respondents). 50% of the respondents also rely on informal contacts outside their departments. This type of informal on-the-job learning can be leveraged by more formal approaches, such as shadowing more senior colleagues, buddy systems, mentoring and on-the-job coaching. Performance management practices, especially performance conversations with line managers, are critical in this context. These conversations offer regular opportunities to discuss strengths and gaps related to specific policy development skills and to determine training needs or development opportunities (to take on different skills-enhancing projects or types of policy work).

Figure 5.4. Sources of capacity for the civil service in Ireland



Note: n=168. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked, "What are the sources you use to consult or learn more on policy development tools, instruments and methodologies?".
Source: (OECD, 2022[1])

Another way to build policy capability and drive a culture of evidence-based policy development across the system is through skills and knowledge exchange in communities of practice. These collaborative platforms both strengthen technical exchange and build an active network within and across departments. For example, the United States Federal Government has a well-established Federal Foresight Community of Interest involving members from across the federal government as well as non-governmental and private sector partners. Examples related to policy can be found in Australia and New Zealand, where some specific communities have developed in particular areas, such as behavioural insights, futures and foresight. Both Australia and New Zealand also have well-established communities of practice for regulators: the National Regulators Community of Practice across Australia (supported by the Australia and New Zealand School of Government) and the New Zealand Government Regulatory Practice Initiative. These two communities of practice collaborate, including in a joint webinar on "What the Aussies can learn from the Kiwis" looking at the development of a curriculum, training offerings and certification regimes.

Furthermore, communities of practice on evaluation are seen to be useful as in the cases of Canada and the United Kingdom. In the health sector in Canada, for example, the public health network is composed

of all chief evaluation officers of health, who share knowledge and expertise. Heads of evaluation of different departments have a network as well and organise periodical consultations to share expertise and insights about their job. Smaller departments benefit from bigger ones and vice versa, as the former are smaller and more flexible, and the latter have greater economic and human resources. At the international level, international contacts can be leveraged to learn about best practices and improve capacities. Health Canada, for example, has strong connections with entities in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

In the United Kingdom, the Cross-Government Evaluation Group is a cross-disciplinary group composed of analysts and evaluation managers from different government departments. Its objective is to improve the supply of, stimulate the demand for and encourage the use of good-quality evaluation evidence in government decision making. For instance, the Cross-Government Evaluation Group steered the rewriting of the Magenta Book in 2020. The Cross-Government Evaluation Group acts as an informal network that allows people in charge of evaluation in the different government departments to share good practices and work together on joint projects. Its members meet four to five times per year.

More detailed examples of communities of practice can be found in Box 5.6 below.

A community of practice on policy development in Ireland is foreseen as an outcome of this project and will be supported by a mission statement as a concrete output of this project. An international community of practice could also be envisaged to encourage international peer learning and exchange.

Box 5.6. Public sector communities of practice in Australia and New Zealand

Communities of practice can be instrumental in raising the productivity of the public sector by increased communication of knowledge or by reinforced collaboration networks across government entities.

New South Wales government, Australia

The public sector of New South Wales (NSW) in Australia has several communities of practice that all civil servants can join freely. These communities of practice are important tools to promote innovative methods and tools, share good practices, create new collaboration networks and improve formal or informal capacity-building from peers. There exist 11 communities of practice created according to specific sectors and functions, e.g., those of policy professionals, procurement professionals or workforce analytics professionals.

The community of practice of policy professionals, for instance, provides opportunities for policy professionals from the whole New South Wales government and offers good practice examples, technical training, case studies of innovative activities, policy tools, and policy guidelines and frameworks. It supports its members through several initiatives. For example, it has produced a free webinar programme sharing expertise and insights from senior leaders and experienced practitioners, and it is now developing a policy toolkit of templates and resources for optional use across the sector, drawing from good practices and resources available in different agencies.

New Zealand

New Zealand's Policy Project, in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, includes several supporting policy-related communities including a Policy Leaders Network (a key community for the Policy Project) and a group of policy capability leaders (who meet to discuss policy improvement work in their departments). Other self-generating communities of practice have developed and are led by

interested volunteers. Contact details are housed on the Policy Project's website and linked to the Policy Methods Toolbox. They include:

- The New Zealand Behavioural Insights Community of Practice brings together practitioners specialised in behavioural insights. It promotes and supports the use of behavioural insights to inform policy design and interpret policy outcomes. It involves several institutional centres of expertise, such as the Behavioural Science Aotearoa, hosted in the Ministry of Justice.
- The Service Design Network is an informal network of practitioners interested in design thinking that meets on a monthly basis. This community of practice is supported by the Auckland Co-design Lab, a collaboration project between local and central governments focused on building and promoting social infrastructure based on the co-design of social services with users.

Source: (Government of New South Wales, n.d.[17]); (UK Policy Profession Board, 2019[15])

Various interlocutors indicated that the organisational culture within their departments did not sufficiently emphasise, enable or support the provision of evidence-informed policy advice that would require significant upskilling in working with evidence and data. Critical success factors to nurture an evidence-driven approach to policy development are:

1. Senior leaders setting expectations that all policy advice should be based on the best available evidence (with evidence broadly defined as data, evaluations of past policies, and insights from stakeholders and those likely to be affected by policy); this includes consistent and overt use of evidence and research to inform policy advice to ministers.
2. Backing up those expectations with resources and tools to support the development of evidence-informed policy.
3. Ensuring quality standards for policy are set as benchmarks that include evidence and engagement as essential ingredients of good policy advice and are referenced in departmental or civil service-wide quality assurance processes.
4. Senior leaders and managers recognising and showcasing exemplars of evidence-based work with tangible impacts.
5. Socialising an organisational culture based on organisational vision and strategic goals that include evidence-informed policy as fundamental to achieving organisational excellence. Opportunities for staff to present work, especially work in progress, for the cross-fertilisation of ideas and approaches, and for reflection on what works, when and why, in terms of policy design. An organisational culture that offers opportunities for sharing and reflection is likely to be more innovative, informed, co-ordinated and successful in terms of delivering quality policy advice to decision makers.
6. Including policy development skills in performance conversations with line managers.
7. Strengthening collaborative links with academia to inform research and policy options.
8. Determined action to support cross-departmental and cross-sectoral collaboration (discussed in more detail later in the document).
9. Supporting all aspects of training and development, including overt identification of training gaps and training needs throughout the organisation.

Areas of opportunity to support skills and capabilities

This chapter highlighted a number of key findings from the OECD survey and interviews related to skills and capabilities for policy development in Ireland, such as the demand for new and highly technical skill profiles, the pivotal role of IGEES in mainstreaming evaluation and economic analysis skills across the system, and the rich training ecosystem. It underscored the ambitious strategic orientation of the civil service renewal package and discussed drivers of excellence in the civil service, highlighting a momentum for the optimalisation of training offerings and for advancing a policy curriculum with a connected policy skills framework. Finally, this chapter addressed ways to nurture a culture of evidence-based policy development across the system.

A few areas of opportunity to further strengthen these good practices are as follows:

- Deliberately **articulate the skills required of policy professionals** – what they need to know, what they need to be able to do and how they should behave at different levels of their policy careers. This could take a number of forms, from a **policy skills framework** to a separate policy rubric in the overall civil service competency framework (noting that there are skills common to policy and other functions in the civil service). Ideally, this would be a co-design process whereby the policy community would define skills required for their work, both traditional and cutting edge, and any related definitions, practice standards and levels of expertise. It might also include archetypes of policy professionals that would form sub-specialities in the policy cohort, especially in areas where expertise is currently in short supply (e.g., deep-data experts, specialists in user-centred design/behavioural insights, strategic foresight). This could be led and validated by CSMB.
- Develop a process or tool whereby individuals can **map their policy skills** and managers can map the skills of their teams, as the foundation for intentionally developing policy staff (as individuals, in teams, organisations, across the civil service).
- Create a **policy curriculum** (starting with mapping and assessing existing offerings and building on the work underway by OneLearning) connected to the policy skills framework and commission development and training offerings where there are gaps in current offerings.
- Examine how best to **streamline the training and development offerings** of existing agencies (primarily OneLearning and the Institute of Public Administration) for the civil service, with particular reference to policy development and strategic foresight.
- Build programmes to encourage **on-the-job learning** from others, based on existing good practices from across the civil service. This might include both guidance on setting up processes for buddy systems, mentoring and shadowing and explicit responsibility for seniors to support the development of more junior colleagues (included in performance agreements and recognised in performance discussions).
- Envisage possible **centres of expertise** (in different methods or policy expertise) with outward-facing roles and a mandate to build capability in their particular areas of expertise (such as the system leaders/functional leaders in New Zealand and the United Kingdom). This could build on existing structures in place such as IGEES, the hub-and-spoke arrangements of the Central Statistics Office and the Office of the Attorney General's secondment programmes. It might be possible to experiment with different operating models to test the success of various approaches (e.g. twinning programmes, internal consultancy model, and explicit remit to build capability across the civil service as has been effective in the areas of innovation and government communication).
- Once the **strategic policy units** have been mapped and their composition, activities and added value have been assessed, explore the possibility of a network of strategic policy units with a hub at the centre of government feeding into a whole-of-government strategic policy agenda. The units could include mechanisms for how they work together (joint policy teams on cross-cutting goals and challenges) and how they can be deployed (to where the demand is greatest).

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6 Policy Methods and Tools in Ireland

This chapter discusses existing requirements, tools and guidance instruments used in policy development processes to assist policy practitioners in their day-to-day work. It provides suggestions on how to close gaps in support and guidance and increase the use and implementation of policy development tools, instruments and methodologies.

A policy development system needs to be supported by generic processes and practical policy tools – including for quality assurance – to assist policy practitioners in their day-to-day work and to avoid continually reinventing the wheel. These tools typically support one aspect of the policy development process, such as impact analysis, public engagement or data modelling. The quality, availability and socialisation of tools reflect the ability of the civil service to enable and support policy development and to deliver on the three pillars of evidence, implementation and feasibility, and legitimacy. This chapter critically discusses the existing tools and guidance instruments and provides suggestions on how to increase their use and implementation. The tools discussed in this chapter will contribute to the forthcoming policy development toolkit, as part of a broader good practices hub, as an output of this project.

Existing requirements, guidance and tools for policy development

While Ireland does not yet have an integrated standard, benchmark or guidance instrument for policy development, a range of separate process requirements, formal guidance and tools for policy development exist in the Irish system and are used by policymakers across the government (see Figure 6.1).

In addition to the Cabinet Handbook, a detailed guide to the legislative process from the Revenue Legislation Services exist. For project management, the new Public Service Project Management Handbook builds on the Civil Service Project Management Handbook to support managers by giving them an easy reference guide to the core principles and methodologies of project management and to promote a standardised and consistent approach to the governance of project management across the public service.

With regard to the requirements related to public spending and regulatory impact, a number of formal documents and processes are in place. The most frequently mentioned document in the OECD survey is the Irish Public Spending Code. It includes a set of rules and procedures to ensure that the best possible value for money is obtained whenever public money is being spent or invested across the Irish public service. It is frequently used by 30% of the surveyed policymakers. The Code provides guidance related to evaluating, planning and managing public investment and current expenditure and to the use of public-private partnerships. Its Technical Guidance Series further offers guidance and tools to assist departments and agencies inter alia with the efficient management of public investment through reviews of past practice; to support programme evaluation methodologies (such as value-for-money reviews and focused policy assessments) used across the civil service; to share appraisal methods and techniques; and to foster cost-benefit analysis. A Financial Appraisal document further provides a guide to carrying out a financial analysis as part of the Public Spending Code. It provides supplementary guidance for public sector bodies conducting the financial appraisal element of the Preliminary and Detailed Business Case stages of a public investment proposal.

The Public Spending Code also includes detailed guidelines in relation to regulatory impact assessments (RIAs). The requirement to undertake RIA for new regulations was first introduced in 2005 through formal guidelines that were integrated into the Cabinet Handbook and procedures for the development of regulations.

In June 2009, the Department of the Taoiseach published a set of revised RIA Guidelines that made minor changes to the process, including the removal of separate advice on screening and full RIA processes and providing a more detailed consideration of methodological issues, particularly where qualitative data are involved. However, there have not been any updates to the RIA Guidelines since then and none appear to be planned in the near future. Since 2011, the RIA Guidelines have formed part of the Public Spending Code overseen by the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDR), as part of the Technical Guidance Series – alongside guidance on Value for Money and Policy Reviews, Focused Policy Assessments, a Spending Review, Performance Reporting, and Tax Expenditure Evaluation Guidelines (which may provide a useful model for developing guidelines on similar issues). Importantly,

the RIA Guidelines cover the legislative activities of the executive but do not formally cover regulatory agencies or local authorities, although these agencies and authorities are encouraged to conduct RIA where appropriate.

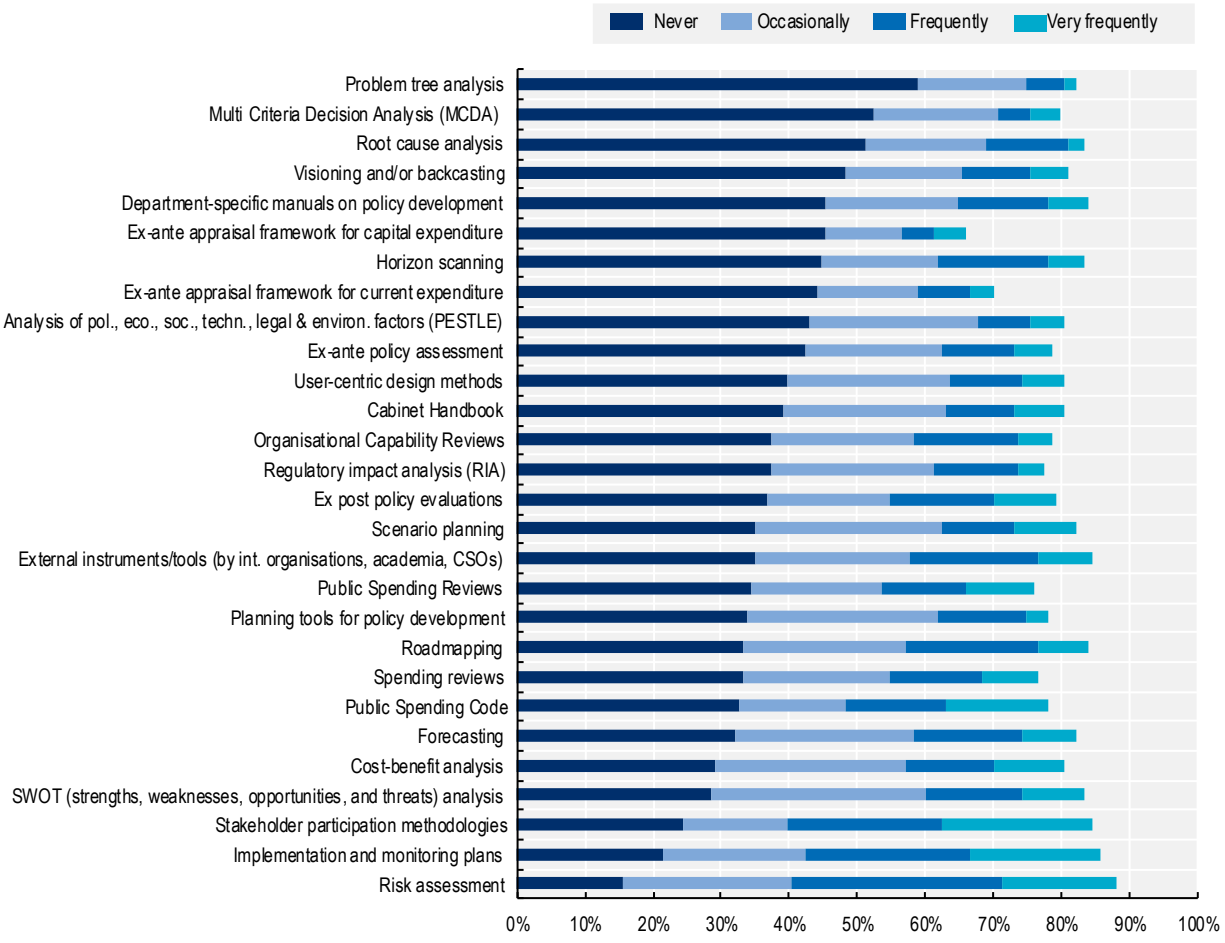
The Capital Works Management Framework (Government of Ireland, 2023[1]) is a structure that has been developed to deliver the government's objectives in relation to public sector construction procurement reform. The Framework consists of a suite of best practice guidance, standard contracts and generic template documents.

DEPR also provides guidance for public bodies that are considering carrying out a public consultation. The "Public Consultation Principles & Guidance" offer a detailed overview of different forms and steps of consultation processes. As mentioned earlier, this document dates from 2016, and a number of innovations and initiatives for public consultation have been adopted since (such as the Citizens' Assembly). While no specific data exist for the uptake and use of these guidelines, 45% of the surveyed policy practitioners reported the frequent use of different stakeholder participation methodologies.

Aside from general cross-departmental guidance documents such as the Cabinet Handbook, the Public Spending Code and the Capital Works Management Framework, some departments have also developed sector-specific guidance tools, for example to apply the Public Spending Code to business cases from cultural institutions and sports organisations that are applying for funding. A total of 39% of the surveyed policymakers said that they occasionally or frequently deploy department-specific manuals for policy development.

In terms of uptake of tools, 50% of the surveyed policy practitioners also reported making occasional or frequent use of instruments and tools provided by external stakeholders such as international organisations, academia or civil society (Figure 6.1).

Figure 6.1. Use of tools and instruments for policy development



Note: n=168. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked, "In your current role, how frequently are you currently using the following tools and guidance instruments for policy development?". Response options included "never", "occasionally", "frequently", "very frequently" and "not applicable for my function".
Source: (OECD, 2022[2])

Interviews and research also highlighted a number of tools that were perceived as useful in the policy-making process. For example, the National Risk Register led by the Department of the Taoiseach is perceived as a helpful tool for enhancing policy development, as are the National Risk Assessments led by the Department of Defence. Both exercises provide a basis for establishing priorities for mitigating key risks identified at the national level and inform government decisions regarding resource allocation.

A number of other relevant policy development tools and instruments (beyond the Cabinet Handbook) were mentioned during the interviews. For example, the detailed drafting guidelines on the preparation of Statutory Instruments from the Office of the Attorney General and the Department of Public expenditure with quite detailed guidance in relation to the preparation of regular RIAs. Other policy development tools and instruments include spending review papers, Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) analytical papers, IGEES-led policy discussions, ex post policy evaluations, the Prevention & Early Intervention Series, Focused Policy Assessments, stakeholder analysis, as well as department-specific manuals.

All these instruments and guidance tools are relevant and useful to some extent and may help bolster a more overarching policy infrastructure and platform for policy development.

Improving the use and implementation of policy development tools, instruments and methodologies

Despite the existence of cross-departmental policy development tools and guidance, interviewees and survey respondents described their application and use as uneven across departments and sometimes inadequate. In some cases, formal policy analysis is overridden by political or administrative imperatives, potentially compromising policy development processes. Informal or ad hoc practices are often used across the government, which while helping to deal with issues at short notice, may undermine the longer-term use and mainstreaming of tools. This may be exacerbated by the loss of institutional memory as a result of the near-term ”retirement cliff”.

The OECD survey findings (OECD, 2022[2]) show uneven levels of awareness of what guidance and tools exist and where to find them. Asked about standards, benchmarks and guidance instruments for policy development in different departments and organisations, many responses to the survey highlight that staff are unaware of guidance documents or find them difficult to locate, underscoring the need for an overview (or one-stop shop) for guidance materials and for increasing awareness of existing tools. Knowledge of policy development tools, instruments and methodologies is mainly transmitted within departments; staff members often rely on institutional knowledge being shared informally with many standards implicitly learned from colleagues. Seventy-three percent of the surveyed policymakers use informal contacts within their departments to consult or learn more about policy development tools, instruments and methodologies.

Despite the existence of these tools, the interviews highlighted the lack of an overarching approach to policy development in the tools available to civil servants. While there are sources of guidance, including requirements included in the Cabinet Handbook, the Public Spending Code and other accountability tools and while some departments have their own bespoke manual for policy development or have piloted a policy oversight committee (such as the Department of Health), there is currently no well-socialised whole-of-government model or framework of policy development. The Civil Service Management Board has recently taken steps to fill this gap. The report “Strengthening Policy Making in the Civil Service” is structured around the pillars of evidence, implementation and feasibility, and legitimacy and offers guidance on enablers and best practices for policy development. However, although the framework has been endorsed by the Civil Service Management Board (CSMB), it has not been implemented or shared widely across the civil service.

A number of responses stress the added value that general guidance documents could bring to the work in the different departments. In that regard, a policy framework, handbook or platform on policy development that is accessible to all civil servants and includes both standard guidance (cabinet requirements, public spending code requirements, regulatory impact analysis, etc.) as well as a number of innovative methods (behavioural insights, design thinking, system thinking, data analytics, participatory processes, co-design methods, strategic foresight tools and methods) can help raise awareness and ensure quality throughout the policy development process. The guidance document(s) could propose suggestions on navigating the political-administrative interface, including how to present advice to decision makers, and would ideally be linked to the overall public policy cycle mode. It could also offer guidance on when to use the various methods (at which stage of the policy cycle) and how.

Respondents to the OECD survey (OECD, 2022[2]) highlighted the existence of gaps in support and guidance for areas such as behavioural insights, user-centric insights and design methods, planning tools for policy development, foresight tools, and stakeholder consultation. A policy framework could cover these areas and provide guidance for policymakers.

For areas where guidance documents may exist, e.g., in the case of stakeholder participation, respondents mentioned that more practice-oriented handbooks that also detail how to operationalise high-level guidance could be helpful. For instance, one respondent stressed that the Public Spending Code is useful for outlining the process but found that many elements of it do not give sufficient detail on how one should

implement it when faced with a spreadsheet. Overall, respondents underlined the importance of operational documents, e.g., in the form of checklists, rather than lengthy documents that require time and in-depth knowledge to navigate.

Against this background, many respondents suggested more targeted training and specific capacity-building and upskilling on policy development in general and certain policy development tools, instruments and methodologies in particular. The importance of sharing good practice examples to illustrate the use and potential of tools and instruments was proposed by policymakers. There is thus a documented interest for the leadership to share good practices and take them to scale. In addition, some policymakers also wish to receive, as learning opportunities, examples and honest appraisals of situations where something went wrong.

One frequently mentioned element for improving the use of policy development tools, instruments and methodologies was the need for easy access to information and documents. A single website with easily accessible information, guidance and activity tools could be useful to spread awareness and enhance consistency across departments. A further collation of standards and best practices of policy development and implementation from across the civil service was also suggested by a number of respondents.

A common form of sharing guidance on policy development in different departments takes place through coaching and mentoring from colleagues and line managers, in addition to formal guidance tools and the Cabinet Handbook. Providing peer exchange and learning opportunities both within departments and between different departments through mentoring and informal networks of policymakers can also help foster knowledge about policy development; cross-pollinate tools, instruments and methodologies; and share best practices on what has worked well. To create greater opportunities for on-the-job learning, adequate overlap with previous post holders and policy development manuals from former incumbents could also be helpful.

Ex ante regulatory impact assessment

Regulatory management tools, including ex ante RIAs, stakeholder consultations and ex post evaluations of regulations, play an important role in supporting evidence-informed policy development. The 2012 OECD Recommendation on Regulatory and Policy Governance (OECD, 2012[3]) states that an RIA should be integrated into the early stages of the policy process for the formulation of new regulatory proposals.

The fundamental infrastructure of a functioning RIA framework remains in place within Ireland's policy-making process. The requirement to undertake an RIA for new regulations was introduced in 2005, through formal guidelines which were integrated into the Cabinet Handbook and procedures for the development of regulations. From that point on, the guidelines stipulated that all government departments and offices were required to conduct an RIA when undertaking the following legislative processes:

- proposals for primary legislation involving changes to the regulatory framework
- significant statutory instruments
- proposals for European Union directives and significant regulations when they are published by the European Commission
- policy review groups bringing forward proposals for legislation.

In June 2009, the Department of the Taoiseach published a set of revised RIA Guidelines that made minor changes to the process. However, there have not been any updates to the RIA Guidelines since and none appear to be planned in the near future.

According to the Guidelines, the RIA process should be started as early as possible in the regulatory proposal development process and be used as the basis for consultations, where possible. Specifically, an RIA must be attached to the draft memorandum and outline of the bill on its way to the cabinet for

approval prior to the stage of drafting the bill itself. It stresses that the RIA is a "living document" subject to continuous change and that there can be numerous drafts before the final version of the RIA is complete. The following eight steps are conducted in the RIA process – as per OECD best practice:

1. summary of the RIA
2. statement of the policy problem and objective
3. identification and description of options
4. analysis of costs, benefits and other impacts for each option
5. consultation
6. enforcement and compliance
7. reviews
8. publication.

The Guidelines also draw attention to the relevant analytical techniques – multi-criteria analysis and cost-benefit analysis – as well as signposting readers to more detailed technical guidance in the Public Spending Code. Importantly, the level of analysis undertaken should be proportionate to the significance of the proposal, i.e., a formal cost-benefit analysis should be conducted in respect of the most significant proposals, whereas the vast majority of RIAs are expected to comprise a qualitative multi-criteria analysis approach. Exceptions to the RIA obligation are also stipulated, e.g., it is not compulsory to apply an RIA to the Finance Bill or to emergency, security and certain criminal legislation.

The issue of proportionality is prominent in the guidelines, which point out that, for each stage of the RIA, the exact analytical approach and level of detail required have to be decided on a case-by-case basis, having regard to the significance of the proposal – the greater its importance, the more analysis will be required. Information is provided on how to analyse the impacts of draft options and how to estimate the costs and benefits of each. It is stated that where possible impacts should be monetised, and where this is not possible, they should be quantified (expressed numerically, e.g., number/proportion of lives saved, reduction in traffic volumes).

In 2016, DPENDR published a "Consultation Principles & Guidance" document. Furthermore, Ireland is developing, and currently trialling as a prototype, a single central government website on which some of the ongoing consultations are published. However, it is not apparent that Ireland's consultation practices operate on a systematic basis across government departments, particularly for statutory instruments – the evidence from the OECD's survey and interviews was mixed on this point. However, there is a problem with the transparency of the RIA system, as many regulatory proposals are being published online without an accompanying RIA document being published (although there are occasions where RIAs are not required, in light of the exceptions referred to earlier).

The RIA Guidelines also encourage departments to undertake periodic reviews (or ex post reviews) of regulatory measures to evaluate the extent to which they are achieving the objectives and intended benefits. Performance indicators should be identified to show the extent to which the regulations are meeting their objectives. The Guidelines point to possible review mechanisms, including "reporting on performance within Annual Reports, consulting with stakeholders, establishing Review Groups and regular appearances of the relevant Minister or Regulator before Oireachtas Committees". Standing orders from parliament state that the minister responsible for implementing a law must provide an assessment of its functioning within a year. However, it is not clear to what extent ex post reviews of legislation are taking place in Ireland and how effective the institutional framework for RIAs and the Guidelines have been at incentivising policy teams to actually use RIAs as a core policy tool. The OECD survey results suggest that ex post reviews are one of the least used sources of evidence in the problem identification and policy development process. This is unsurprising as, according to the OECD iREG data, ex post evaluation systems remain rudimentary in most member countries, and it is still not mandatory to conduct an ex post review in one-third of OECD countries.

Furthermore, as mentioned earlier, many regulatory proposals are being published online without an accompanying RIA document being published alongside – this makes it unclear whether the RIA was undertaken at all or whether it was undertaken early in the policy process and also misses the opportunity for stakeholder input into the RIA development.

Various challenges around the access to data by policy officials were reported, e.g., high cost of data; outdated and low-quality data, and long procedures to obtain data (see earlier discussion on evidence and data). Furthermore, it is difficult to determine whether there has been any significant improvement in the quality of RIAs since 2005 – the OECD examined a number of RIAs published online and found that they generally tended to be descriptive in nature and lacking in quantification of regulatory impacts. According to the OECD survey, there is a strong desire among policy officials for a greater level of training in RIA and the associated methodological tools (e.g., cost-benefit analysis). While the civil service has contracted out RIA training to certain outside consultants, it is not clear how systematically policy officials undergo RIA training and how many officials are able to actually carry out RIA effectively. Furthermore, it is not clear if officials can easily access advice and help for producing RIAs – a function previously provided by the RIA Network.

Areas of opportunity to strengthen policy tools and frameworks

Based on the OECD survey on policy development tools and instruments and on the fact-finding interviews, this chapter highlighted a range of useful process requirements and formal guidance tools for policy development in the Irish system that are used by policymakers across the government. They include the 2006 Cabinet Handbook, the Public Spending Code with its Technical Guidance Series, the Capital Works Management Framework, DPENDR's "Consultation Principles & Guidance", along with sector-specific guidance tools developed by individual departments and agencies. The chapter articulated ways to further mainstream the use of these tools and methodologies across departments and leverage the RIA Guidelines.

In this context, a number of areas of opportunity can be identified:

- **A consistent, repeatable and scalable approach for policy design and delivery of advice to decision makers** would have multiple benefits, including to help ease cross-departmental work (working to the same process model), to clarify quality standards (articulating what good policy advice looks like) and to ensure that policy staff have a common playbook that can be applied to any policy work (thereby mitigating some of the downsides of staff turnover).
- There is a need for an **overarching toolkit (or one-stop shop) as part of a broader good practices hub for guidance materials** and to ensure an **increasing awareness** of existing tools.
- Collect, consolidate and promulgate the best tools across research, evidence, impact assessments, data, public engagement, government communication and policy design methods to feature on the policy toolkit as part of a broader good practices hub so these are widely available for policy practitioners. The CSMB may envisage leading this effort.
- The **Cabinet Handbook** could be updated to reflect recent tools (e.g. eCabinet) and practices.
- The **RIA Guidelines** could be reviewed by DPENDPDR or the regulatory oversight function to determine whether they remain up to date with current developments in regulatory policy, e.g., the ways to integrate assessments of innovation and the distribution of the incidence of costs and benefits between different social groups.

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Part III Towards a Modern Policy Capability Infrastructure

7 Towards a Modern Policy Capability Infrastructure and Policy Toolkit in Ireland

This chapter provides a number of insights and pointers on how the Government of Ireland could develop a policy capability infrastructure, which may serve as a narrative for socialisation across the civil service to kick-start and build momentum for the change process in policy development. It also proposes the development of an accompanying toolkit as part of a broader good practices hub and suggests a number of steps that could be considered.

This assessment report underscores current strengths in Ireland's policy development system, including in relation to evidence-informed policy development, policy co-ordination and stakeholder engagement in the co-design of policies, as reflected in examples of sound policy across various domains. The Irish government has several important reform strategies and programmes in place to further develop the capability of the policy development system to deliver effective policies, such as the strategy for Civil Service Renewal 2030, the National Data Infrastructure, and the public service reform plan Our Public Service 2020. The report highlighted some of these reform initiatives and the civil service leadership can lend its support and momentum behind these efforts and help establish coherence between them for the sustainability of reforms.

At the same time, this assessment suggests a number of areas of opportunity and action that can further bolster the policy development system. Systems, protocols and standards need to be in place to allow for better understanding, leveraging and sharing of data, including in relation to the growing need for real-time data to inform timely and effective decision making. Policy implementation can be improved by taking a stronger feasibility perspective in the design phase, focusing on co-design, building implementation alliances, and reinforcing feedback loops from monitoring and evaluation. Legitimacy may benefit not only by applying a partnership approach between political staff and civil servants but also by strengthening the capabilities of the civil service in shaping the public policy debate. Articulating policy skills and linking those with the competency framework and the training offer is another important avenue for reform, as well as creating a one-stop shop for policy tools and instruments to support the daily work of policy practitioners.

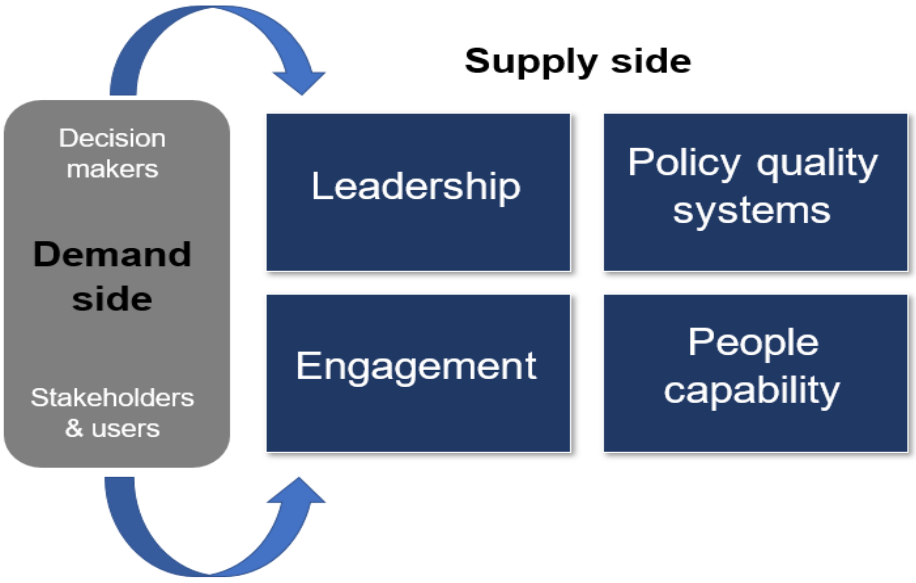
This brings us to the next step: how can these observations and action points translate into structural improvements in policy development in a comprehensive manner? How can the identified policy development strengths be leveraged across the system and the gaps addressed? It may be useful to recall the lessons on the process of developing such an improvement journey (Washington, 2022[1]), shared during a peer learning session as part of this project, and some of the key insights in policy capability change programmes (Washington, 2022[2]):

- agree on a vision and powerful narrative
- develop a model of the policy process as an organising framework
- articulate what great policy advice looks like and what goes into it.
- bring together guidance, methods, tools and capabilities to support policy professionals in their day-to-day work
- describe the characteristics of a high-performing policy shop (team and organisation)
- encourage and support leaders and departments to assess their policy capability and kick-start an improvement trajectory
- spell out the skills required for policy professionals and take a system-wide view of people's capability
- present the programme as a whole-of-government change process
- leverage and support other reforms.

Applying these insights to the Irish context, a useful and comprehensive way forward could be to develop a policy capability infrastructure building on the 3-pillar framework (data and evidence, feasibility/implementation/ legitimacy) as well as on the Civil Service Renewal 2030 Strategy.

An example of such a policy capability infrastructure can be found in Figure 7.1. The demand side reflects the public interest of public policy, underscoring the expectations from citizens as end-users of public services and their democratic representatives as well as civil society, professional organisations and the private sector as stakeholders of public policy. The supply side consists of 4 interlinked and mutually reinforcing elements of a sound policy capability infrastructure: leadership, policy quality systems, engagement and people capability.

Figure 7.1. Policy Capability Infrastructure



Source: Adapted from work and presentation delivered by Sally Washington (Executive Director, ANZSOG, Aotearoa New Zealand) during the OECD Ireland Policy Improvement Workshop on 10 November 2022, (Washington, 2022[2]) (Washington, 2022[1])

As illustrated by an initial mapping exercise below (see Table 7.1), the elements of the policy infrastructure model can be linked and applied to the 3-pillar framework, the CSR 2030 and other elements of the Irish policy system.

Table 7.1. Dimensions of a Policy Capabilities Infrastructure

Policy Project - Policy Capability Infrastructure dimensions	3-pillar framework Ireland with enablers	CSR 2030	Other linkages with the Irish policy system
Demand side: decision makers, stakeholders and users	Legitimacy	Guiding principle: the public at the centre	Stakeholder participation practices / co-creation / user-centric design
Leadership	Legitimacy	Guiding principle: leadership and culture	CSMB PSLB
Engagement	Feasibility/implementation	Delivering evidence-informed policy and services Guiding principle: outcome focused Guiding principle: alignment with the public service	
People capability	Enablers: skills and capabilities	Building the Civil Service workforce, workplace and organisation of the future	Competency framework renewal OneLearning IPA strategy renewal
Policy quality systems	Data and Evidence Enablers: tools and instruments	Delivering evidence-informed policy and services Harnessing digital technology and innovation	Data infrastructure

Source: Author's own elaboration

This mapping can be further completed to serve as a basis for defining a vision for a policy capability infrastructure in Ireland. This vision may serve as a narrative for socialisation across the civil service to kick-start and build momentum for the change process.

The policy infrastructure may be underpinned by a policy toolkit as part of a broader good practices hub. The toolkit would aim at supporting policy practitioners in their day-to-day policy work. Several operational and practical considerations may shape the toolkit:

- The toolkit should serve as a one-stop shop for policy professionals, and in terms of format, it should be simple, easy to understand and navigate, user-friendly and available online. (The design workshops and tests with end-users are expected to provide inputs and feedback on the format.)
- The toolkit should feature good practices and case studies from Ireland and other countries to illustrate the broader practices or principles. A number of good practices and case studies from this assessment report can feed into the toolkit. The toolkit can be envisaged as a living document, reflecting new tools and case examples whenever they become available.
- The toolkit should include links and references to existing tools and instruments for policy development. The present project is not expected to build new tools or instruments, although the preparation of the toolkit may help to identify gaps.
- In order to be as practical as possible for policy professionals, the toolkit can be structured around the stages of the policy development process (rather than around more abstract concepts), highlighting policy needs and challenges that policy professionals may face.

Furthermore, a future Community of Practice on Policy Development at senior civil service level could drive the policy infrastructure and provide guidance and leadership for its implementation across the government. Initial discussions suggest that:

- Strong demand and interest for a community of practice were expressed by various interlocutors from both inside and outside (agencies, academia) the civil service.
- A triple objective can be set: (1) strengthening policy development capacity across the system, through peer learning and the exchange of good practices, methodologies and lessons learned; (2) building linkages between various parts of the policy development system and driving organisational culture change towards collaborative approaches and evidence-driven policy development; (3) increasing informal networks and relationships across the policy development system;
- The community of practice at senior civil service level should build on existing networks and capabilities and, if deemed useful, create synergies with the strategic policy units established in a number of departments;
- In terms of the technological aspects, building on the OneLearning “Learning Management System” can be envisaged, in particular as this system features platform functionalities.

The plan for a modern policy infrastructure, the toolkit, as part of a broader good practices hub, and the community of practice will require sufficient **resources** to be launched, managed and co-ordinated, as well as leadership to ensure high-level support (as a point of reference, both New Zealand and the United Kingdom have small, dedicated project teams to support the capability build). One area for attention is the **institutional anchorage** of the plan for a modern policy infrastructure and of the community of practice, in terms of presence (where it sits) and **stewardship** (who is sponsoring it). A key success factor will be to portray this package of initiatives as a whole-of-government improvement plan.

Areas of opportunity for a modern policy capability infrastructure and policy development toolkit as part of a broader good practices hub

Moving forward, a number of steps can be considered:

- define a vision for a policy capability infrastructure that can serve as a **narrative for socialisation** across the civil service to kick-start and build momentum for the change process (use OECD assessment report as an anchor)
- establish supporting **mechanisms to ensure change is socialised and sticks**: anchorage at senior civil service level; a communication strategy; communities of practice;
- allocate a **leadership role and ownership of the agenda with dedicated resources** so that the material will be updated and include the wider policy profession in the change process (collaborative operating model);
- map the **relevant networks in the policy development sphere** (e.g. Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service network, Project Management Network, Government Communications Network, Assistant Secretary Corporate Network) in order to create synergies with the envisaged community of practice at senior civil service level;
- develop a **community of practice on policy development at senior civil service level**, to further strengthen policy development capacity across the system.

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OECD Public Governance Reviews

Strengthening Policy Development in the Public Sector in Ireland

The report analyses the policy development process in Ireland. It focusses on three main areas that shape policy development: evidence, implementation, and legitimacy. It also discusses the skills, capacities, methods and tools in the Irish public sector that support effective policy development. The report highlights Ireland's strengths, identifies gaps, provides examples of good practices, and suggests a number of areas of opportunity and action to bolster the policy development system and improve policymaking.

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