Implementing public service reform
Messages from the literature

The Centre for Effective Services connects policy, practice and research, helping to ensure the implementation of effective services to improve the lives of people across the island of Ireland. Part of a new generation of intermediary organisations, CES is a not-for-profit organisation, with offices in Dublin and Belfast.

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Introduction

Key points

• This review aims to inform those involved in implementing public service reform initiatives on what is known about effective implementation of public service reform. It provides an ‘implementation lens’ on the large and challenging issue of reforming public services.

• The differing approaches to reform adopted by governments at different periods in time reflect a range of political ideologies, orientations, policy directions and values, particularly in relation to the role of the State, and its relationship with citizens.

• Internationally, there are very few evaluations of reform initiatives which could shed light on their impact and outcomes.

• There are various definitions of ‘public service reform’. A useful definition is:

  *Public service reform is a deliberate change to the structures and processes of public sector organisations and/or services, with the objective of getting them (in some sense) to run better.*

• There is a move towards viewing public service reform as systems change and systems-based reform.

• Whole of government working is a systems change approach to reform, in that it involves the purposeful adoption of a more joined-up and coordinated approach to effect change. It emphasises a collective approach to tackling societal problems.
1.1 Purpose of this review

This review of the literature on implementing public service reform aims to inform those involved in implementing public service reform initiatives on what is known about effective implementation of public service reform. Its aim is to provide useful guidance to leaders, managers and front-line staff on the factors they should pay attention to, and focus on, when implementing public service reforms in Ireland and Northern Ireland. These are identified as the supportive factors for implementing public service reform.

The review sets out to bring together the relevant research and learning from a range of disciplines and areas of enquiry, including public policy, implementation science, change management and systems change. In particular, it provides an ‘implementation lens’ on the large and challenging issue of reforming public services.

The review involved analysing research on public service reform from sources including academic publications, documentation and literature from government departments and agencies, think tanks and research centres, in addition to documentation and websites outlining current reform developments in Ireland and Northern Ireland, and international examples of public service reform. In a bid to present the most recent debates in the area, the review mainly focuses on material from 2000 onwards, to cover the pre- and post-economic crisis period. It is also limited to English-language publications.

This first chapter sets the wider context for public service reform and outlines some of the different approaches to reform. Chapters 2 and 3, respectively, aim to ‘set the scene’ in terms of public service reform in each jurisdiction, and to summarise the main reforms announced by Government, in Ireland and Northern Ireland. In some instances these reforms are well under way; in other cases, there has been only partial implementation to date. Chapter 4 identifies the supportive factors for effective implementation of public service reform that emerge from the literature, and Chapter 5 provides some international examples of public service reform efforts. Chapter 6 pulls together the learning for Ireland and Northern Ireland from the review of the literature and the Centre for Effective Services’ (CES) experience of working with government departments and agencies to implement public service reforms.
1.2 The context of public service reform

Public service reform has been part of the international landscape of government and administration since the beginning of the 20th century. It is affected by the wider political system and the nature of how individual states are organised, the economic climate and the individual public administration system. Public service reform can also be impacted by international influences and events. For example, the European dimension will continue to be important for budgetary and related reform efforts in Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The literature suggests that while public service reform may be a simple proposition in theory, this simplicity masks the true complexity of reform. There are numerous contested models and theories of public service reform in the literature, but they do not necessarily provide insights into the dynamics of reform processes, or enable us to know whether reform ever achieves its goals.\(^1\)

The scope for an in-depth understanding of public service reform is further complicated by other factors such as the absence of evaluation of reform initiatives, which could shed light on their impact and outcomes, and the difficulty in generalising commentary or learning across jurisdictions, because of the underlying differences in history, culture, systems and structures. The scarcity of data that could support evaluation, the lack of agreed criteria by which to measure progress, and the elusiveness of change are further confounding factors in attempts to look systematically at the experience and outcomes of public service reform.\(^2\) Indeed, the absence of evaluation of public service reform is seen by some as ‘one of the great collective failings of public administration’.\(^3\)

Notwithstanding these difficulties, it is possible to discern some dominant trends and approaches to public service reform over recent decades, and to note the way in which the focus and objectives of reform have changed and developed in response to wider economic and social pressures.

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1. McTaggart and O’Flynn (2015)
1.3 Defining public service reform

There are a number of definitions of public service reform in the literature. The terminology can refer to public sector reform, public service reform, public management reform and public administration reform. In reality, what reform means in essence, regardless of the exact terminology used, suggests a common operational definition. For the purposes of this review, an adapted definition of that offered by Pollitt and Bouckaert\(^4\) is used. Public service reform can be defined as:

\[
\text{a deliberate change to the structures and processes of public sector organisations and/or services, with the objective of getting them (in some sense) to run better.}
\]

This is a broad definition, which could apply to many different types of reform. Reform has been applied to areas such as structures, sector and service regulation, productivity arrangements, and front-line service delivery, to name but a few.

The more diffuse and system-wide the reform effort, the more difficult it is to determine if it makes things ‘better’ or not, because determining what would have happened had the reform not been introduced is difficult, if not impossible, where there are no appropriate comparisons to be made elsewhere.

Also, as Pollitt and Bouckaert\(^5\) highlight, reform, or ‘getting things to work better’, inevitably involves some form of trade-off between what is being introduced and what must be changed or stopped. For example, reform efforts which are focused on cost-cutting may make an organisation or service more efficient in its use of resources. However, it may reduce the effectiveness of the service in terms of improving outcomes for service users and being responsive to their needs. Some reforms in the public service invariably involve a ‘trade-off’ of this kind, and this should be kept in mind when considering the examples of reform presented in this report.

\(^4\) Pollitt and Bouckaert (2011)

\(^5\) Ibid.
Approaches to reform

Public service reform efforts have seen changes in trends and focus over previous decades, with the motivations for reforms coming from a number of areas including fiscal crises, increasing citizen demands and expectations for better public services, and major shifts in political systems. From the 1980s onwards, there have been substantial shifts in approaches to reform. These have moved from economically driven reforms to reduce the role and involvement of the State in service provision and regulation, to the New Public Management-style reforms of the 1990s, and the current shift towards more integrated and joined-up approaches to policy development and service provision.

The changing role of the State

The purpose and direction of public service reforms can be seen as an expression of the fundamental role of the State, and its relationship with its citizens.

For instance, in a recent OECD review of central public service reform initiatives, the 1980s is described as a time of ‘receding government’, most often associated with the Reagan administration in the US and the Thatcher era in the UK. This period was characterised by a lessening of the role of central government through increased privatisation, decentralisation and reduced expenditure. The rationale behind this approach of ‘economic liberalisation’, was that increased choice, reduced taxes and State control over service provision and regulation would lead to greater economic growth. This period of receding government paved the way for the wave of New Public Management (NPM) reforms.

New Public Management

It is generally accepted that NPM became a core feature of the wave of public service reform in Anglo-Saxon countries during the late 1980s, through the 1990s and into the early 21st century. NPM is often referred to in the literature as the application of market-type mechanisms in the public service. NPM is defined by Manning as:

a management culture that emphasises the centrality of the citizen or customer, as well as accountability for results. It also suggests structural or organisational choices that promote decentralised control through a wide variety of alternative service delivery mechanisms, including quasi-markets and private service providers competing for resources from policymakers and donors.

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6 OECD (2015)
7 Curry (2014), p.11
8 Manning (2000)
There is no definitive checklist of the most important aspects of NPM. However, there have been attempts to outline some of the key components of this reform approach. Some of the elements of NPM outlined by Hood, among others, include a shift to greater competition in the public service, an emphasis on private sector management techniques, and a general striving for discipline and cost-cutting in resource use and allocation. There were general moves to implement NPM-type reforms in most western countries throughout the 1990s–2000s. The UK, New Zealand and Canada were among the first countries to implement NPM reforms, as were the Netherlands and Denmark.

Some of the core tenets of NPM have been implemented in many countries. However, the general trend observed towards the adoption of NPM-type reforms has come increasingly into question, and there is an extensive literature critiquing the approach and its impact. The adoption of NPM reforms is seen as having resulted in some tensions, and in the rapid proliferation of agencies in some countries, including Ireland. This led to increased policy disintegration, fragmentation and reinforced vertical structures or silos. It appears that there is now an emerging awareness of the important role public services play in providing stable and more equitable conditions for citizens, often in collaboration with partners from the private sector, and community and voluntary services. There is also an increased awareness that not all private sector practices or learning are directly transferable to the public service, which must implement reforms in a highly political and complex environment.

The Developmental Welfare State

In an Irish context, the concept of the Developmental Welfare State has been put forward by the National Economic and Social Council (NESC). The concept takes a view of social and economic policy as the means of supporting the development of the full potential of every citizen, family, communities and the economy. The Developmental Welfare State comprises three integrated areas of state activity (services, income supports and activist measures); it needs to be underpinned by strategic governance and leadership, rights and standards, and strong local integration of services.

The enabling state

An example of the current discourse about the changing role of the state is also provided by the Carnegie UK Trust, which argues that a paradigm shift is currently happening in social and public services, that is fundamentally changing the role of the state from the welfare state to the ‘enabling state’. The ‘enabling state’ is described as a shift in the model of public services from:

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9 Hood (1995)  
10 Hartley and Skelcher (2008)  
11 NESC (2005)  
12 Wallace (2013)
• NPM to public value
• centralised to local states
• representation to participative democracy
• crisis intervention to prevention
• recipients to co-producers
• State provision to the third sector.

Modern reform directions
At the present time, public service reform appears to be generally driven by the intertwined objectives of delivering high-quality public services responsive to citizens’ needs, along with the need for cost-effective management, value for money and performance management. The concept of joined-up government is strong in the rhetoric of reform, which aims to deliver integrated, needs-led services to citizens.

There is also an appreciation that cost-cutting alone cannot deliver the reforms required at the service level to improve outcomes for citizens and achieve increased efficiencies. As highlighted by Ruane, economic reforms and wider service reform initiatives occur in tandem as the two reform agendas overlap.\textsuperscript{13} Cost-cutting and reform initiatives need to be addressed in parallel, because if costs are cut and nothing else changes, the costs simply re-emerge over time as predicted by normal linear patterns of growth.\textsuperscript{14}

Governance and structural reform
The relationships between the political system, the executive system and the legislature provide the context for reform and, together, these form the overarching governance framework within which reform happens. In recent years, there has been increasing use of the concept of governance in relation to public service reform. While the concept of governance has many meanings, it is seen as flagging a shift from a narrower idea of government, to include the recognition of the complex networks of organisations on whose work and outcomes effective policy implementation depends.\textsuperscript{15}

A reorganisation of governmental structures and processes is often a part of public service reform and this was a core aspect of reforms in Ireland in the early 2000s and the post-fiscal crisis period. For example, in what has been referred to as the ‘bonfire of the quangos’, the Government announced plans to cull, merge or absorb 181 state agencies and local bodies\textsuperscript{16} with many agencies, especially those which fulfilled advisory functions, being affected by these reforms.\textsuperscript{17}

\textsuperscript{13} Ruane (2012)
\textsuperscript{14} McTaggart and O’Flynn (2015)
\textsuperscript{15} Rhodes (1996)
\textsuperscript{16} Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2014a)
\textsuperscript{17} MacCarthaigh (2014)
There has been much structural reform in the UK, which has primarily been focused on compensating for poor capacity to have a long-term strategic focus, and also weaknesses in coordinating policy across departments. A study of structural reforms in the UK suggests that successful departmental restructuring is rare. The study cautions against hastily organised restructuring, highlights poor awareness of the costs of restructuring, and disruptions to the system which can last for up to two years. It concludes that future efforts at structural reform in the public service should have a clear operational purpose and expert implementation support, and urges exploration of non-structural ways of achieving improved focus and coordination, such as whole of government working.

Another dimension of structural reforms, and an extension of governance roles, is the introduction of regulators as oversight bodies in financial areas, in service areas such as health and insurance, and through parliamentary committees.

Reform as systems change
System-wide public sector, and sector-wide (e.g. health, justice), reform plans in Ireland and Northern Ireland, which will be detailed in the next chapter, indicate an increasing view of public service reform as systems change and systems-based reform. Systems thinking represents a shift from viewing any system, including an organisation, as a series of separate constituents to seeing them in terms of their interrelationships and linkages within the wider system, and recognising that the system is greater than the sum of its constituents. A systems change focus acknowledges that reform efforts do not always produce intended, linear outcomes, and that an ongoing process of learning, innovation and reflection is required to bring about long-term social change. Systems change is a process geared towards changing the status quo by changing the structure or function of a system with purposeful interventions.

The rationale for a systems change approach to public service reform
The focus on a systems change perspective arises from a growing awareness of the difficulties in mainstreaming new interventions and addressing the root causes of so-called ‘wicked’ problems, such as poverty, health inequalities and climate change. Changes which impact on how the government does its work, and make the reform and policy/service environment more complex include:

- increased complexity due to the growth in various communications technologies, resulting in a considerable increase in communications between departments, organisations and agencies.

18 Gash (2015)
19 Ibid.
21 Foster-Fishman, Nowell and Yang (2007)
- more variety in the number and type of bodies providing services to the public, some of which are not directly answerable to department ministers
- blurring of the boundaries between domestic and global policy due to instantaneous and globalised communication networks.

**Whole system thinking in the public sector: whole of government approaches**

The discourse about whole of government or joined-up government approaches to managing complex policy areas represents one of the key applications of whole system thinking in public services. In order to combat the increased fragmentation witnessed with the wave of some recent reforms, and the realisation that a more integrated approach will be required to address some of society’s ‘wicked’, cross-cutting problems, countries are now moving towards reforms focused on more joined-up, integrated working.  

This is particularly the case in countries such as Australia, New Zealand and Scotland, among others, with whole of government working reforms being central to reform efforts in Australia and New Zealand in particular. Whole of government working involves:

- New financial and accountability systems to facilitate work across boundaries
- New forms of distributed leadership, focused on building relationships and collaboration
- Capacity to manage complexity, ambiguity and chaos
- A shift towards more connected forms of working across portfolios and between national, regional and local levels

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23 Christensen and Laegreid (2007)
24 Halligan (2013)
25 Colgan, Kennedy and Doherty (2014)
Whole of government working constitutes a type of systems change approach to reform, in that it involves the purposeful adoption of a more joined-up and coordinated approach to effect change. It emphasises a collective approach to tackling societal problems and, when adopted at national policy level, can communicate a strong message that working together can help to improve outcomes and make society better. It involves harnessing the power of collaboration to work towards the collective good.

**Systems thinking approaches to service delivery**

The use of a systems approach to service improvement in particular service areas such as housing and homelessness, and disability services has been tested in the UK and Northern Ireland. The studies conducted on these initiatives point to positive outcomes, while also cautioning against wide generalisation to the whole of the public services sector.

**Managing whole system change**

The challenge of managing whole system change is highlighted by McTaggart and O’Flynn, who argue that thinking on reform tends to focus on distinct levels of analysis, but not on the whole picture. They argue that ‘while each of the parts of the reform picture has been identified and explored in great depth, there is not much conceptual or empirical work that has joined these pieces together’, with coordination between the multiple intervention points in dynamic public service systems being a particularly difficult task. The report of case studies conducted in Wales concludes that systems thinking provided a solid framework for change, by enhancing understanding of the true nature of the task, by emphasising effectiveness over efficiency, by powerfully engaging workers in the redesign of the system in which they work, and by strengthening understandings of the nature of the users’ service needs.

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26 Zokai et al (2010)
27 Pidgeon (2010)
28 McTaggart and O’Flynn (2015)
Public service reform in Ireland

Key points

• The challenging economic climate in Ireland has created a strong impetus for the widespread programme of political, administrative and public service reforms implemented from 2008 onwards.

• In addition to sector-specific reforms, public service reform in Ireland has cross-cutting objectives aimed at achieving a greater focus on the service user, greater efficiencies, and rebuilding the trust in government through reforms concentrating on working in a more open, transparent way.

• Civil service renewal is a central priority. Current plans recognise the need for better collaboration and joined-up working across departmental silos.

• There is a strategic focus on building leadership capacity in the Civil Service, better performance management and creating more opportunities for staff to develop in the workplace.
2.1 Introduction

This chapter sets the scene in terms of public service reform in Ireland, and summarises the main public service reforms announced by the Government in Ireland. In some instances, the reforms are under way or complete; in other cases, there has been only partial implementation to date. This chapter does not set out to analyse the progress on implementation of the various reforms.

Public service reform initiatives have been a recurrent feature of the Irish landscape for over 40 years. The Devlin Report in 1969, Serving the Country Better (1985), The Strategic Management Initiative, Delivering Better Government (1996), and Transforming Public Services (2008) are among the most important reform initiatives over that period. The literature notes that, over that time, the focus was on enabling a developing public service to modernise, by embracing new management techniques, new structures and processes, new financial systems and new technologies.30

In 2008, the OECD conducted a review of public management in Ireland and produced its seminal report Ireland: Towards an Integrated Public Service.31 This in-depth review was undertaken in the context of several years of high levels of economic growth. It represented a ‘first’ in international terms, in approaching the assessment of the public service from a national system-wide perspective.32 The report noted that, in line with other OECD countries, public service reform efforts had focused on reforming internal structures and processes and building capacity at individual and organisational levels. It proposed that these essential reforms would not be sufficient to meet the challenge of a more complex, outward-looking, dynamic and educated society, and the expectations of citizens, so as to achieve the broader societal goals.

The OECD argued that the shift towards a more goal-oriented public service would require:

1. improving governance and performance dialogue to address fragmentation and disconnected working
2. expanding the use of networks to bring together regular players across the public service
3. moving towards a focus on outcomes rather than inputs and processes, and increased flexibility to allow managers to achieve those outcomes
4. increasing flexibility and mobility for workers to help broaden the skills and competencies of generalist staff
5. having a strong leadership to support the renewed change, both through the creation of a Senior Public Service, and the development of a more strategic role for the Centre.

30 Institute of Public Administration (2013)
31 OECD (2008)
32 Ibid.
The report emphasised the need for strong leadership to support effective implementation of integrated policy and service delivery, driven by a coherent social vision. The recommendations outlined in the OECD report were largely translated into reform plans that were subsequently published, but in a much more challenging economic environment, nationally and internationally. Over the following years, the Government was required to implement a widespread programme to cut costs and increase efficiencies, with the extent of cuts implemented estimated to be in the region of €30 billion, and the numbers employed in the public service reduced by almost 10%.33 This reality created a new imperative for fundamental political and administrative reforms.

Both the public service as a whole, and the Civil Service now have in train major reform and renewal plans. The sections below describe the plans and reforms announced and/or under way.

2.2 Current public service reform plans

In 2011, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) released the first Public Service Reform Plan 2011-2014.34 The goal of this plan was to create a strong culture of innovation, change and managed risk across the public service. The key areas of focus that this plan committed to are:

- placing customer service at the core: making government services more accessible to citizens
- maximising new and innovative service delivery channels: utilising innovative technologies to heighten customer service experience, improve information sharing and lessen costs
- radically reduce costs to drive better value for money: through reducing staff numbers, property portfolios and maintenance
- leading, organising and working in new ways: by streamlining administration operations, eliminating duplication, and implementation of a shared services model throughout the services
- strong focus on implementation and delivery: through aligning service leadership teams around an agreed plan of action.

The follow-up Public Service Reform Plan 2014-201635 aims to address these challenges at strategic, service and operational levels. The Plan sets out a series of cross-cutting strategic reforms with the objective of delivering better outcomes through a focus on:

- service users
- efficiency
- openness, transparency and accountability
- leadership, capability and delivery.
A programme of political and legislative reform is under way and, in some instances complete, with the aim of improving openness, transparency and accountability, as part of the Government’s objective of rebuilding the relationship with the citizen and restoring public trust in the institutions of the State.

Each of these strategic reform intentions is translated into a set of operational projects such as increased digitalisation, better value-for-money procurement and greater use of shared services. Operational reforms include plans to change how the public service does its business, with the objective of increasing efficiency. These include a broad range of initiatives to improve productivity, reduce costs and provide greater value for money. In the context of this plan, operational reforms will be driven by management. The reforms are enabled by the pay and productivity measures agreed in the Croke Park and Haddington Road Agreements, respectively. These were a series of productivity and cost-cutting reform measures scheduled for implementation in 2010–2014 (Croke Park) and 2013–2016 (Haddington Road).

Local government reform

Local government reform was one of a number of high-level sectoral reform priorities set out in the Public Sector Reform Plan 2014-2016. The other main sectoral priorities were in relation to the Civil Service, education and training, justice and equality.

The Local Government Reform Act 2014 gave effect to the reforms set out in Putting People First, the Government’s Action Programme for Effective Local Government. The main reform projects included:

- a significant programme of structural reform and rationalisation
- a programme of shared services
- a strengthened role for local authorities in economic development
- sustainable local government funding
- a new public utility, Irish Water
- strengthened accountability of local government through the setting up of the National Oversight and Audit Commission for Local Government.

Health

A considerable programme of reform is under way in health, as outlined in Future Health: A Strategic Framework for Reform of the Health Service 2012-2016. The Future Health framework provides a greater focus on health and well-being, as opposed to just the treatment of ill health. It proposes more patient-focused service reforms, with a less hospital-focused model of care to
be introduced which offers more community-based alternatives. A Programme Management Office has also been established to support the implementation of reforms, with a focus on using programme and project management methodologies as a key driver.

While there have been delays in progressing the implementation of a single-tier model of health service provision through the Universal Health Insurance (UHI) system, there have been developments in other areas. These are aimed at providing more equitable, patient-focused care, for example, the introduction of free GP care for all children under six years and those over 70 years.

Other reforms include Healthy Ireland, the national framework for action to improve the health and well-being of people, with a focus on prevention and keeping people healthier for longer. Initiatives are in train for the modernisation of the health infrastructure through the implementation of hospital groups and community healthcare organisations, and additional primary care centres.

A series of patient safety initiatives, including legislative initiatives, is planned for the period 2015–2017. In terms of funding models, the Health Service Executive published the Implementation Plan for Activity-Based Funding (also known as ‘Money Follows the Patient’) in 2015, which outlines changes to funding for hospitals, moving from block grants to funding on the basis of quantity and quality of services delivered.

Justice and equality
There is currently a system-wide reform programme in the justice and equality sector, which is underpinned by a considerable programme of legislative reform. The system-wide reform is focused primarily on building safer communities through enhanced integrated working by front-line services and changes to models of service delivery.

There were also reviews carried out on the Department of Justice and Equality and An Garda Síochána. The independent review on the performance, management and administration of the Department of Justice and Equality acknowledges several core strengths, but also identifies areas of significant weakness in the culture, leadership, strategic oversight role, risk management and general management structures and processes. The report recognises that the challenges faced by the Department of Justice and Equality are also being met elsewhere in the Civil Service and that various reform initiatives are under way to address them. However, the report recommends a range of fundamental changes within this department, supported by a programme of specialist training and development to lead and drive the change programme.
The report of the Garda Inspectorate40 arose from the *Haddington Road Agreement 2013-2016*, which called for an independent review to be undertaken on the structure, operation and deployment of An Garda Síochána. A total of 81 recommendations involving the structure, culture, leadership, human resources (HR) and risk management of the organisation are outlined. Many of the recommendations included had been made in previous reports of the Inspectorate, but have not been fully implemented. Key reforms recommended in the report include reducing the number of Garda regions, establishing a programme of continuing professional development (CPD) for all personnel, and aligning the organisational culture of An Garda Síochána with the reform programme. The need for a strong implementation group to support the reforms has been highlighted.

**Education**

As in health, there are extensive reforms under way in education which, as highlighted in the *Public Service Reform Plan 2014-2016*, are focused on the themes of lifelong learning, improving quality and accountability for educational outcomes across the system, supporting inclusion and diversity (including those with additional needs, and language, social and cultural differences) and building better systems and infrastructure (service delivery reform and better use of technology to improve services).

Reforms outlined in the *National Strategy to Improve Literacy and Numeracy 2011-2020*41 include increasing the classroom time allocated to mathematics, reading and writing, improving the professional skills of staff in early childhood care and education (ECCE) settings, and increasing awareness of the importance of digital literacy. The free pre-school year is being extended to provide two free years to all children aged between three years and five and a half years. In terms of curriculum, a new framework for the Junior Cycle42 is being introduced, which involves significant changes to practice and assessment in the first three years of post-primary education. Features of this new framework include a focus on broader skills development beyond core literacy and numeracy skills, greater flexibility awarded to schools in terms of subjects offered, and a dual approach to assessment which includes both externally assessed and classroom-based/formative assessments of student learning.

There have been significant structural reforms in further and higher education, with 33 local Vocational Education Committees (VECs) amalgamated into 16 Education and Training Boards (ETBs), and a reorganisation of the higher education sector which will involve the merging of institutes and the development of regional clusters of universities and technological institutes.

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40 Garda Inspectorate (2015)
41 Department of Education and Skills (2011)
42 Department of Education and Skills (2015)
Cross-sectoral front-line public services

One example of a major cross-sectoral front-line public service reform in recent years has been the establishment of Intreo, which is a single point of contact for income and employment supports. It represents a joining together of services previously provided separately by the Department of Social Protection and the former national training and employment authority, FÁS. This is a large-scale public service reform, involving more than 7,000 staff. Intreo aims to provide an integrated system of social welfare income benefits, community welfare services and employment supports.

2.3 Civil service reform

Civil service reform is a fundamental component of the Government’s Public Service Reform Plan. The Civil Service is an important area as not only does the Civil Service act as the backbone of the State, it also supports the entire system of governance and can thus assist other types of reform in the system. Some elements of the literature conclude that civil service reform initiatives internationally have been largely unsuccessful, especially when concerned with public financial management. Civil service reform in Ireland has also been referred to as more intermittent than continuous.

However, there is a renewed effort in Ireland to reform and renew the Civil Service, as outlined in the current Civil Service Renewal Plan 2014-2016. The Civil Service Renewal Plan was published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in 2014 and reflects the commitment made in the overarching Public Service Reform Plan 2014-2016 to develop the capacity of the Civil Service to meet the challenges facing the country now and into the future.

The Civil Service Renewal Plan is the result of two streams of work in 2013, one carried out by the Independent Panel on Strengthening Civil Service Accountability and Performance, and the other carried out by the Civil Service Renewal Taskforce. It covers four main areas:

- **a unified civil service** – Managing the civil service as a single, unified organisation
- **professional civil service** – Maximising the performance and potential of all civil service employees and organisations
- **responsive civil service** – Changing the culture, structure and processes, so that civil servants become more agile, flexible and responsive
- **an open and accountable civil service** – Continuously learning and improving by being more open to external ideas, challenge and debate.

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43 Repucci (2014)
44 Ibid.
45 Rafter (2015)
46 Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (2014c)
The Civil Service Renewal Plan acknowledges the strengths of the Irish Civil Service such as the public service ethos, the quality and objectivity of policy advice, the implementation of high-profile programmes (for example, hosting the EU Presidency), and the ability to adapt to changing circumstances and priorities. The plan also highlights some areas where improvement and change are needed:

- improve the pace of delivery
- collaborate, coordinate and join up Government more effectively
- focus on solutions not structures or processes
- manage performance consistently and tackle underperformance
- actively communicate what the Civil Service does
- create better opportunities for staff to develop
- match skills and roles more effectively
- invest in staff through training and technology
- increase flexibility and mobility into and out of the Civil Service.

The overarching analysis on which the Civil Service Renewal Plan is based concludes that:

- Organisational boundaries seem to limit the opportunity for joined-up thinking when it comes to important issues, or when trying to utilise resources, including that of staff capabilities.
- Departments seem to be managed in silos. A unified civil service does not mean that all departments need to be the same, but it does mean that they need to be managed with a clear and collective leadership and management structure.
- There is a need to continuously support and develop staff, just as much as there is a need to challenge them and address underperformance issues.
- There is a need to attract leaders and managers with efficient skills and competencies who are capable of encouraging and developing excellence throughout the Civil Service.
- There is a need to share best practice experience among departments. This will enhance responsiveness and the capacity to foresee any future changes in circumstances.
- The Civil Service is an active and full participant in Irish society and needs to engage accordingly. Actively communicating what the Civil Service does, and improving how it listens, learns and collaborates, is essential.

Based on these findings, the Civil Service Renewal Plan sets out the following vision, mission, values and commitments.
Vision

- To provide a world-class service to the State and to the people of Ireland.

Mission

- To offer objective and evidence-informed advice to Government, respond to developments, and deliver Government objectives while striving to achieve optimal outcomes in the long-term national interest
- To serve citizens and stakeholders efficiently, equally and with respect, in a system that is open, transparent and accountable.

Values

- A deep-rooted public service ethos of independence, integrity, impartiality, equality, fairness and respect
- A culture of accountability, efficiency and value for money
- The highest standards of professionalism, leadership and rigour.

Commitments

- We will encourage creative and innovative thinking, constructive problem-solving, openness to change and flexible working methods.
- We will ensure through appropriate merit-based recruitment, training, and lifelong learning and development, that the Civil Service has the necessary expertise to advise on and implement public policy in a complex and changing world.
- We will maximise the contribution of all staff by nurturing and rewarding talent and by encouraging civil servants to develop their potential in a workplace committed to equality, diversity, and mutual respect.
The Civil Service Renewal Plan proposes a Programme Management Office (PMO) to manage implementation, which involves 25 actions designed to make the Civil Service more unified, professional, responsive, open and accountable.

The Civil Service Renewal Plan identifies a number of key enablers to underpin the renewal effort. These reflect the need to:

1. sustain political and administrative leadership for the duration of the Renewal Plan
2. invest in, and resource, these changes effectively
3. provide the right central supports
4. regularly communicate and engage with staff and stakeholders
5. evaluate and report progress against each action regularly and transparently
6. accelerate technological change and innovation
7. lead change at every level.

2.4 Progress towards reform

Hardiman notes that undertaking public service reform in conditions of economic crisis adds considerably to the challenge government faces in implementing reform.47 Opportunities for rationalisation of structures and reorganisation of work practices, while available, must be secured in a climate where change cannot be softened by financial incentives.

In 2013, the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) published a progress report on public service reform in Ireland.48 The report notes that solid progress has been achieved since its first review in 2011, especially in terms of cost savings, while maintaining levels and quality of service. By looking back on earlier IPA proposals for public sector reform, and drawing on the experience of other jurisdictions, the report undertook an in-depth analysis of progress, shortfalls and continuing challenges, using a set of perspectives based on the following challenges:

- designing a productive public service
- renewing public service capacity
- implementation reform
- engaging the citizen
- securing political accountability.

In relation to implementation, the report notes the new implementation structures that have been put in place to drive civil service reform. It sees the implementation of strategic, high-priority and cross-cutting performance issues as a major challenge, and draws on international experience for ideas on how to manage that challenge.

47 Hardiman (2010)
48 Institute of Public Administration (2013)
The report sees change management as an area in need of further improvement across the system. It suggests that implementation problems may be linked to weaknesses in the policy development process in Ireland. The report highlights particular challenges and difficulties in the area of capacity, and in ensuring that the right people with the right skills are in place to support sustainable change, and in ensuring that key capacities of project management, change management, contract management, and delivery-focused policymaking are in place.
Public service reform in Northern Ireland

Key points

- Northern Ireland has generally not followed the same pattern of reforms witnessed across the rest of the UK. The context for reform is more complex due to unique features of the devolved government, the Troubles and conditions attached to the various agreements and power-sharing arrangements.

- Current reform efforts in Northern Ireland are being delivered in a challenging economic and political climate. Political stability is crucial in ensuring that the momentum for reform is sustained.

- Public service reforms across sectors are focused on structural reforms to reduce costs and achieve greater efficiencies, and also on cross-cutting objectives concentrating on the delivery of better quality, innovative and integrated policies and services.

- The OECD governance review, reporting to the Northern Ireland Executive in 2016, will help to propel existing and further reform efforts in Northern Ireland.

- Strategic plans for the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) emphasise the need to create a professional civil service, with increased skills required in the areas of leadership, management and administration.
3.1 Introduction

This chapter sets the scene in terms of public service reform in Northern Ireland, and summarises the main public service reforms announced by Government in Northern Ireland. In some instances, the reforms are under way or complete; in other instances, there has been only partial implementation to date. This chapter does not set out to analyse the progress on implementation of the various reforms.

While public services in Northern Ireland function in a framework of sectors, institutions and funding arrangements broadly similar to the rest of the UK, some aspects of devolution in Northern Ireland mark it as distinct. The literature suggests that, in terms of reform efforts, Northern Ireland is ‘playing catch-up’ due to the complexities of power-sharing, unsettled devolution and the resultant fragmentation of public services.

There are unique features of the current Northern Ireland public administration which derive from the model of devolved government that was established in 2007. The Northern Ireland Executive is a five-party, power-sharing Executive, which has varying degrees of devolved authority in the following areas:

- health and social services
- energy (except nuclear energy)
- education
- employment and skills
- agriculture
- social security
- pensions and child support
- housing
- economic development
- local government
- environmental issues
- transport
- culture and sport
- Northern Ireland civil service
- equal opportunities
- justice and policing.

The introduction of the power-sharing Executive in Northern Ireland was accompanied by an increase in the number of government departments from 6 to 12, to ensure adequate representation of parties in ministerial offices, as

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49 Birrell (2010)
50 Knox (2015)
opposed to achieving greater administrative efficiencies.\textsuperscript{51} This is a relatively large number of departments for the population of Northern Ireland (1.8 million). While this has helped to ensure the inclusion of various political views, it has also resulted in a diffusion of leadership across different parts of government.

3.2 Current public service reform initiatives

As in Ireland, Northern Ireland is experiencing challenges posed by reduced resources to deliver public services, and a need to cut public spending through a number of channels, including reducing the public sector workforce by 20,000 over the next four years.\textsuperscript{52} There is also a challenge in maintaining political stability in the next Assembly term, so as to ensure that the momentum for reform is sustained. The focus on delivering high-quality and efficient public services remains a core objective, and was one of the five priorities of the Northern Ireland Executive’s \textit{Programme for Government 2011-2015}.\textsuperscript{53} The expected outcome of the reforms was a range of financial and structural benefits, as well as improved access for citizens to services and information. A wide-ranging programme of public sector reform and innovation is under way at present. This programme has several strands, including those discussed in the following sections.

Supporting reform

A Public Sector Reform Division has been established. Its main remit is to support the reform process within the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) and across the wider public sector in Northern Ireland. It will do this mainly by helping to advance one of the five ‘Programme for Government’ priorities, ‘\textit{Delivering High Quality and Efficient Public Services}’. Generally speaking, the aim is to improve public service standards, making public services more modern, efficient and responsive to need, reducing bureaucracy and duplication, and enhancing the quality of life for people in Northern Ireland. The Public Sector Reform Division has instigated a number of activities to support reform in Northern Ireland.

OECD Public Governance Review

The OECD has carried out an independent strategic review of public sector reform and is scheduled to report back to the Northern Ireland Executive in 2016. The aim of the review is to bring forward recommendations to amplify the impact of current reform across Northern Ireland’s public sector on the quality of services and value for money, and to identify further areas for reform. The report is focusing on three overarching themes that have been identified from a

\textsuperscript{51} Knox (2015)
\textsuperscript{52} Deloitte and Reform (2015)
\textsuperscript{53} Northern Ireland Executive (2011)
scoping exercise of public sector reforms currently taking place in other OECD countries. These are: strategic direction, operational delivery, and engagement with people.

Innovation Laboratory

A Public Sector Innovation Laboratory has been established to help develop strategic and tactical solutions to complex problems in Northern Ireland. This is in line with a number of international developments of innovation labs in the UK (Nesta), Denmark (Mindlab), and Finland (SiTRA). The first Innovation Laboratory project announced in April 2014 was in the area of Regulatory Impact Assessment (RIA), which is a tool to assist with assessing the impact of a new policy. Recently, an Innovation Lab was also organised to help inform the review of the non-domestic taxation system in Northern Ireland.  

Stormont House Agreement

The Stormont House Agreement signed in December 2014 adopted a wide-ranging programme of public sector reform and restructuring. The Agreement includes various strategies, covering finances and welfare reform, general reform (including cross-cutting reforms), and legacy issues. In effect, the Agreement requires the implementation of measures to manage costs and reduce the public sector pay bill. These include reducing the number of civil servants and the wider public sector; reducing the number of Members of the Legislative Assembly (MLAs) to five per constituency; extending shared services; and reducing the number of government departments from twelve to nine. However, implementation of the Agreement had stalled pending further political agreement.  

A Fresh Start: the Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan

The political situation in Northern Ireland deteriorated during 2015, resulting in several missed deadlines for progress on implementing the Stormont House Agreement. A Fresh Start: the Stormont Agreement and Implementation Plan is the result of 10 weeks of negotiations between the Northern Ireland Executive, and the British and Irish governments. The Fresh Start Agreement aims to secure the stability of the devolved institutions and provide the Executive with a stable and sustainable budget. The Fresh Start Agreement supplements the Stormont House Agreement and outlines the Executive’s commitment to public sector reform and restructuring. Focus remains on financial reforms and efficiencies, welfare改革，and corporation tax. The Agreement provides the Executive’s assessment of its existing financial reforms and efficiencies, and outlines the next steps for progressing the reform agenda.

54 Department of Finance and Personnel (2015)
55 Northern Ireland Office (2014)
56 Deloitte and Reform (2015)
58 Northern Ireland Executive (2015b)
59 Northern Ireland Office (2015)
60 Ibid.
Details are provided on the progress of the Public Sector Reform and Restructuring Transformation Fund, which enables the reduction of pay costs through voluntary exit schemes and a recruitment freeze (initiated in November 2014). This transformation funding is set to facilitate the reduction of the Northern Ireland Civil Service headcount by approximately 5,210 between April 2014 and March 2016, with a further 2,200 individuals exiting from the wider public sector between April 2015 and March 2016.

Six thematic areas for Northern Ireland Civil Service cross-cutting reform opportunities have also been identified and incorporated within the Fresh Start Agreement. The Northern Ireland Civil Service Board will provide the overarching governance for the progression of the cross-cutting projects. The thematic areas are as follows:

- greater consolidation of services across the Northern Ireland Civil Service
- changing how the Northern Ireland Civil Service interacts with the citizen
- better utilisation of resources across the Northern Ireland Civil Service
- more effective use of technology
- proportionate governance
- management and generation of revenue streams.

In keeping with the requirements of the Agreement, the Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (OFMDFM) has sponsored legislation in the Assembly to allow for reform. The Departments Bill\(^6\) has been introduced into the Assembly to enable departmental restructuring, with the number of departments reducing from twelve to nine by May 2016. This will enable the removal of a number of layers of governance and attendant support functions, with the aim of creating better coordinated and more efficient services. The restructuring of the departments and reallocation of functions will be the most significant organisational change to the devolved administration since 1999. In addition, the Assembly Members (Reduction of Numbers) Bill (2016)\(^6\) has been initiated to reduce the number of MLAs to five per constituency. This will take effect from the first Assembly elections after the May 2016 election.

**Joined-up working**

As noted earlier, one of the impacts of the devolved governance structure in Northern Ireland has been the fragmentation of administration; this has resulted in a focus on joined-up government. One specific ‘wicked issue’ has been the very high levels of poverty in Northern Ireland. The scale of this problem has prompted the **Delivering Social Change** initiative.\(^6\) This framework represents a new level of joined-up working by ministers and senior officials.
across different departments to help ensure implementation of initiatives that can improve the outcomes for people. It is about supporting and influencing a new culture and making cross-cutting work the focus to achieve social benefits. The framework is helping to tackle poverty and social exclusion by:

- providing a way for OFMDFM to take forward significant cross-cutting policy development and programme delivery work
- providing a mechanism for other departments to use the framework to progress their cross-cutting policy and delivery work
- developing an outline framework for future social policy interventions to complement the economic strategy in time for the next Programme for Government.

There are a number of projects being delivered as part of the Delivering Social Change initiative across Northern Ireland, which focus on prevention and early intervention, parenting and family support, child health and well-being, literacy and numeracy, and capacity building programmes for health professionals.

Civil service reform

The Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS Corporate Learning and Development Strategy 2010-2013)\(^6^4\) outlines the key commitments of the Executive in providing opportunities for ongoing professional development for staff. There are three areas targeted for improvement in the strategy: improving performance, reducing absenteeism, and increasing efficiency. In addition, the skill areas of leadership and management and administration are given precedence, especially in terms of creating skills to support the Civil Service into the future. Some other key commitments in the strategy are as follows:

- development and training to be evaluated in terms of both delivery and impact on the achievement of objectives at all levels of the organisation
- line managers to support their staff to take more responsibility for their own development and careers
- development and training to support the drive towards greater professionalism in the Civil Service.

Local government

Many reforms are already completed in the area of local government. The vision for local government reform in Northern Ireland is to create ‘a thriving, dynamic local government that creates vibrant, healthy, prosperous safe and sustainable communities that have the needs of the citizens at their core.’ \(^6^5\)

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\(^6^4\) Northern Ireland Civil Service (2010)
\(^6^5\) Department of the Environment (2013)
The twin objectives of the reform are improved service provision and long-term cost savings. Twenty-six councils have been amalgamated into eleven new Councils. The main features of the reform are:

- transfer of certain functions from central to local government
- integration of functions to provide for more joined-up approaches
- strengthened role for Councils in local economic development
- new responsibilities for Councils in leading community planning and the preparation of a community plan
- strengthening of statutory governance arrangements, ethical standards and accountability
- new models of service delivery
- new performance management arrangements.

Health and social care

Health and social care in Northern Ireland is undergoing a significant period of reform. *Transforming Your Care*\(^{66}\) is a far-reaching proposal made by the Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (DHSSPS) in 2011 to change how the health and social care system works. *Transforming Your Care* focuses on reshaping how services are structured and delivered in order to maximise the effectiveness of all available resources. This reform requires a move towards prevention, self-care, increased primary care, and care that is provided at home or closer to home.\(^{67}\) After a period of public consultation, a Strategic Implementation Plan\(^{68}\) was produced in October 2013. The plan sets out the transformation process of incorporating *Transforming Your Care* into a new service delivery model over a period of three to five years. Progress has been slow due to a change in the wider financial climate, with the Executive unable to provide the £70 million of transitional funding required by the DHSSPS to achieve *Transforming Your Care*’s change vision.\(^{69}\) A progress report on the 99 proposals it contains is being prepared by the DHSSPS.\(^{70}\)

An examination of the governing arrangements for ensuring the quality of health and social care provision was commissioned by the DHSSPS. The Donaldson report, *Right Time Right Place*\(^{71}\) was published in January 2015. Key findings in the report highlight that Northern Ireland has too many acute hospitals in proportion to the population, and that the complexity of the governance arrangements has created ambiguity in accountability. The report sets out 10 recommendations which span the health service, including areas of patient safety and quality improvement, as well as broader system recommendations covering the commissioning and configuration of services.

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\(^{66}\) Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2011)

\(^{67}\) Thompson and Todd (2015)

\(^{68}\) Health and Social Care Board (2013)

\(^{69}\) Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2015a)

\(^{70}\) Northern Ireland Assembly AIMS Portal (2015a)

\(^{71}\) Department of Health, Social Services and Public Safety (2014)
Health Minister’s proposals for fundamental reform

In November 2015, the Minister for Health, Simon Hamilton, taking into consideration the public consultation responses to the Donaldson Report, and also the DHSSPS Permanent Secretary’s review of the administrative structures within the health and social care system, announced radical changes to the way health and social care is to be delivered. The Minister proposed a change in the way services are to be commissioned, which involves the closing down of the Health and Social Care Board (HSCB). In his consultation, the Minister proposes that the functions of the HSCB would be redistributed to the DHSSPS, the Public Health Agency, and the Health and Social Care Trusts. The new Public Health Agency will have a renewed focus on early intervention and prevention, while the Trusts will have greater freedom to foster innovation in the planning of services in order to achieve better outcomes for the public. In turn, the DHSSPS will play a greater role in the oversight of Trust performance and management through the creation of a new directorate. The Minister also expressed his intention to contribute a sizeable portion of any additional funding allocated to the DHSSPS in the next budget to the Health and Social Care Transformation Fund. This fund will be used to further the implementation of Transforming Your Care in Northern Ireland.

Education

The education sector in Northern Ireland is also undergoing a period of structural and operational reform. Education administration has been streamlined with the merging of the five Education and Library Boards (ELBs) into the newly formed Education Authority (EA) in April 2015. The Education Authority has assumed responsibility for the same operational functions and services delivered by the Education and Library Boards, and will commence a significant change programme to harmonise policies and the delivery of services across the Education Authority sub-regions. It is intended that, by reducing duplication of functions through the abolition of the ELBs, the Education Authority will provide a cost-effective model for delivering education services in Northern Ireland.

There is also a considerable programme of legislative reform under way in relation to embedding shared education in the Northern Ireland system, stronger anti-bullying measures, and statutory assessments of children with special educational needs. It is intended that these Bills will be initiated before the end of the current Assembly mandate.
Structural reform and the 10-year Strategy for Children and Young People

In keeping with the *Stormont House Agreement* and a reduction in the number of government departments from May 2016, the revised Department of Education will be formed and will take on new responsibilities. It will assume responsibility for the Childcare Strategy, and for children and young people. The *10-year Strategy for Children and Young People* is the current main framework for dealing with children and young people’s issues. Under the OFMDFM *Delivering Social Change* framework, which seeks to join up work across government departments to enact positive change, a co-design process with relevant stakeholders has already been initiated to build on the strategic outcomes of the current children’s strategy, which will expire in 2016.

The development of the new children’s strategy will also be impacted by the *Children’s Services Co-operation Act 2015*. There is now a statutory obligation to develop an outcomes-based strategy that will improve the well-being of children and young people. A statutory obligation is also placed on government departments and agencies to cooperate with one another to contribute to the well-being of children and young people, with express reference being made to learning and achievement. Importantly, the Act contains an enabling power authorising departments to pool budgets and share resources. The Act received Royal Assent on 9 December 2015.

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80 Northern Ireland Office (2014)
81 Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (2006)
82 Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (2015)
83 Children’s Services Co-operation Act (2015)
The supportive factors for implementing public service reform

- Leadership
- Capacity building
- Citizen engagement
- Communicating the vision
- Capacity to innovate
- Public service values
- Using data
- Performance measurement
- Governance arrangements
- Resources and timeframes
- Policy development and implementation
Supportive factors for implementing public service reform

The review of the literature indicates that the main supportive factors for implementing public service reform include:

- effective policy development and implementation
- leadership which is flexible, relationship based and focused on achieving systems change
- capacity building and professional development
- citizen engagement and consultation
- communicating the vision for reform and engaging staff
- capacity to innovate and take measured and appropriate risks
- public service values and a learning organisational culture
- using data to inform decisions and provide feedback
- outcomes focused performance measurement and management
- collaborative networked governance arrangements
- adequate resources and timeframes.
4.1 Introduction

From the commentary on public service reform in Ireland and Northern Ireland, and an appreciation of the lessons learned from reform in other jurisdictions, it is possible to identify some supportive factors for effective implementation of public service reform. However, the literature is relatively scant on the detail of how these factors should be implemented in practice. As highlighted by Kuipers and colleagues\footnote{Kuipers et al (2014) p.9}, in their recent review of the management of change in public organisations, ‘Most authors provide a rich background on the what of a change by describing its national, political and service environment. Much less attention, however, is paid to how change is implemented...’

In presenting the supportive factors, it is important to acknowledge the intrinsic complexity of the implementation of public service reform initiatives. These factors, while important, are always operating in the context of a system where numerous other implementation efforts may be occurring at the same time, in different parts of the system, and at varying implementation stages. The reforms being implemented may even interact with each other and produce new or unplanned consequences. Similarly, the supports for effective implementation interact with each other to create an enabling context. It is important to note that the supportive factors presented in this section represent emergent findings from the literature, and do not aim to present a definitive or exhaustive checklist for successful implementation of reform. The supportive factors which are most important will vary depending on the type of reform at hand, and the nature of the existing system into which reforms are being introduced.

4.2 Effective policy development and implementation

Effective policy development is a core element of public service reform, since policy is a crucial dimension of the work of government. Policymaking is a diffuse and wide-ranging activity, which can emerge in different ways and take different forms. A policy is defined as ‘A course or principle of action adopted or proposed by a Government, party, business or individual’.\footnote{Oxford English Dictionary (2010)} Likewise, policy implementation itself is a far from linear process, which rarely entails straightforward deployment of resources, easily obtained stakeholder buy-in, and clear-cut and shared policy objectives.\footnote{Knox (2015)} In common with many other supportive and inhibiting factors in the area of public service reform, the impact of decades of New Public Management and efforts to mitigate elements of its impact, are evident in the discourse about effective policy development and implementation. The activities of policy development and implementation are intrinsically linked, with poor policy design often a reason for poor implementation. As Gold stated, there is no good way to implement bad...
policy. However, a well-designed policy can also be implemented poorly, and this is one of the main reasons why thinking about how a policy will be implemented should be an integral feature of the policy development process.

In its Building on Basics report, the OECD points to significant deficits in strategic policy development capacities at departmental level across OECD countries included in the study, arising from the managerial focus of NPM approaches, and a devaluation of the technical skills needed for evidence-based policy development in areas such as research, analysis, and evaluation.

Drawing on cross-country analysis, the OECD proposes some areas of reform needed in order to strengthen capacity for setting strategic policy directions and, in the process, enhancing resource allocation and management. Reform proposals that address the perceived disconnect between policy development and policy execution or implementation, by strengthening executive expert involvement in policy development, are also included. The key reform proposals made by the OECD include:

- increased and more systematic use of data, evidence and evaluation (for example, whole of government standards for post-implementation evaluations, cost-benefit analysis, and use of independent fiscal forecasting)
- strengthening policy development capacity within departments
- integration of executive and professional expertise into policy development
- a more consistent division of policy responsibilities between central and sub-central governments.

The report suggests that the skills and capacities for policy development need to be strengthened, and the expertise of executive agencies better integrated into policy development, without undermining the authority of core ministries. Relevant, appropriate and timely policy-based research is seen as a prerequisite for effective departmental policy development. The integration of policy development and policy implementation is seen as an important advance on more traditional approaches, where policy development was seen as separate from implementation.

4.3 Leadership that is flexible, relationship based and is focused on achieving systems change

Effective leadership is widely highlighted in the literature as one of the most important enablers of public service reform. There has been a sharply increased interest in leadership in policy administration discourse and practice, with leadership development programmes being introduced as part of civil service reforms in both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland. Leadership can

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87 Gold (2014)
88 OECD (2015)
89 Ibid.
90 Bennington and Hartley (2011)
play a crucial role in supporting reform efforts through championing the change process and supporting, modelling and rewarding desired behaviours from staff. Leadership roles also serve as the main interface between a state body, department or agency and the media and political spheres.\textsuperscript{91}

The importance of leadership as an enabler of reform efforts is supported by empirical evidence. A review of sources of public services improvement conducted by Boyne,\textsuperscript{92} which included results from 65 empirical studies (predominantly from the United States), concluded that only management and resources are significant predictors of public service improvement.

Current research on leadership is moving away from viewing leadership as an individual personality trait, and more towards the view that it is a set of processes concerned with mobilising action by a diverse set of stakeholders towards common goals, and the framing of those goals.\textsuperscript{93} In particular, it has been referred to within the public service context as a \textit{skill that involves ‘reading’ the context and being able to articulate opportunities, mobilise support, and shape longer-term interests}.\textsuperscript{94} In fact, awareness of the local context in an organisation/department has been highlighted as a core element of successful civil service reform.\textsuperscript{95}

This new conceptualisation of leadership is reflected in a growing awareness of the need for \textbf{systems leadership}, which works across government or indeed the ‘whole of government’, to achieve greater joined-up working in order to solve more complex, ‘wicked’ societal problems, which cannot be tackled by working in silos.\textsuperscript{96} In this context, there is a need for leadership antennae which are able to envision future scenarios and issues, both within and outside their sphere of influence, rather than just dealing with the status quo, since systems today are adaptive, dynamic and continuously changing. A core challenge for leadership in this respect is to identify and create the capacity for change by taking account of the contextual pressures.\textsuperscript{97} This type of systems change has also resulted in calls for an increased awareness of, and preparation for, future leadership requirements.\textsuperscript{98}

In relation to whole of government working, there is increasing interest in characteristics of \textbf{distributed leadership}, i.e. \textit{spanning various people and roles throughout the system}.

Depending on the type of reform, distributed leadership could refer to leadership at the national, local, departmental/agency and individual levels. One of the core arguments for this approach to reform is that all people within a system, regardless of their position, should feel responsible for their work, and

\begin{footnotesize}
\begin{itemize}
\item\textsuperscript{91} Rickards and Ritsert (2013)
\item\textsuperscript{92} Boyne (2003)
\item\textsuperscript{93} Bennington and Hartley (2011)
\item\textsuperscript{94} Morrell and Hartley (2006)
\item\textsuperscript{95} Repucci (2014)
\item\textsuperscript{96} Ghate, Lewis and Welbourn (2013)
\item\textsuperscript{97} Andrews, McConnell and Wescott (2010)
\item\textsuperscript{98} Chapman (2004)
\end{itemize}
\end{footnotesize}
that they can make suggestions for changes that benefit the citizen. Thus, a
distributed form of leadership can empower the workforce and encourage its
members to take responsibility for reform successes, and also give them more
flexibility to adapt and respond to changing needs more efficiently.99

Public service leadership differs from other types of leadership in that there is
administrative or bureaucratic leadership (civil/public service) and political
(ministerial) leadership. Generally, the broader and more sector encompassing
the change, the greater the need for political leadership.100 There are examples
of public service reform efforts where political leadership was more important in
the exploratory, decision-making and resource allocation stage of the reform
process, whereas administrative or bureaucratic leadership was more influential
during the actual implementation stage.101

A study of a series of reform efforts in the UK by the Institute for Government
has highlighted how transitions and changes in leadership at senior official and
political level can impede public service reform efforts.102 The study highlights
the needs for consistency in leadership, or a lasting coalition of leaders around
the reform, and points to leadership which is too ‘personalised’ or invested in
individuals as being unable to survive crucial transitions, and as a systemic
issue which can lead to reform failure.

A question that emerges is ‘what type of leadership is required for which
purpose?’ When analysing what the problem is it is important to identify
whether it is a technical or adaptive challenge. Technical problems generally
have known solutions that can be implemented through authoritative expertise
and through the organisation’s current structures, procedures and processes.
Adaptive challenges, on the other hand, can only be addressed through
changes in people’s priorities, attitudes and loyalties.103 They are challenges
that do not have a clear problem definition, and the solution requires learning
to occur.

4.4 Capacity building and professional development

Opportunities for continuous professional development are extremely important
in civil service systems that expect staff to be competent generalists, and turn
their ability to any task, as is the case in the Republic of Ireland and Northern
Ireland. The UK, Spain and Portugal also favour the recruitment of competent
generalists, whereas prior attainment of technocratic, and especially legal
skills, is prioritised in the Civil Service in France, Germany, the Netherlands and
Scandinavian countries.104 The Civil Service in both the Republic of Ireland and
Northern Ireland appear to place emphasis on ‘learning on the job’, and this can

100 Kuiper et al (2013)
101 Askim et al (2009)
102 Panchamia and Thomas (2014)
103 Heifetz et al (2009)
104 Hardiman (2010)
only be achieved if the relevant supports are in place at a departmental/organisational level. In fact, the extent to which an organisation continuously develops its workforce has been identified as one of the key features of a high-performing organisation.\textsuperscript{105}

In its review of progress towards public sector reform,\textsuperscript{106} the IPA noted that the public service of the future cannot succeed without developing more specialist skills. The report noted some limited recruitment to allow for a move towards recruiting more specialist skills, such as the creation of a dedicated Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service based in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The report also highlights the need to identify the areas where the greatest risk exists in terms of specialist capacities.

It has been highlighted that the development of such specialist skill sets in the Civil Service can help to circumvent the reliance on private consultants for some core activities, a reliance that has been attributed to ‘implementation paralysis’.\textsuperscript{107} A reliance on ‘buying-in’ rather than ‘building’ particular capacities in the Civil Service also creates vulnerabilities, and limits the development of a healthy internal pipeline. Kidson\textsuperscript{108} argues that the main focus should be on ensuring that ‘buying’ and ‘building’ are mutually reinforcing, and that bought-in skills can have a lasting benefit when skills transfer is an explicit objective. This skills transfer needs to be managed proactively, as it will not happen automatically.

As noted earlier, the OECD proposes that the skills and capacities for policy development need to be strengthened, and the expertise of executive agencies needs to be better integrated into policy development. Comprehensive professional development for policymaking involves building several key competencies including professional expertise, technical and analytical expertise, executive experience and political skills.\textsuperscript{109} The ‘opening up’ of recruitment for senior-level positions in the civil and public service in Ireland in recent years is an example of how government is broadening and deepening the skills and capacities of senior public servants.

The demands on front-line staff, arising from new, integrated ways of working that derive from public sector reform, must also be recognised and supported.\textsuperscript{110} This imperative goes beyond capacity building to mean the alignment of systems and processes, in partnership with trade unions and professional bodies. It also means ensuring that front-line staff are recognised as innovators in both process efficiency and service improvement.\textsuperscript{111} In the UK context, employee engagement has been posited as a critical success factor for

\textsuperscript{105} De Waal (2010)  
\textsuperscript{106} Institute of Public Administration (2013)  
\textsuperscript{107} Lavelle (2006)  
\textsuperscript{108} Kidson (2013)  
\textsuperscript{109} OECD (2015)  
\textsuperscript{110} Housden (2014)  
\textsuperscript{111} Ibid.
achieving world-class levels of innovation, productivity and performance in both the public and private sectors.\textsuperscript{112}

The importance of communication and media skills development for civil servants has also been emphasised, with the immediate requirements of media leaving little time to prepare and no margin for error. This is something that is likely to intensify with the ongoing development of technology and social media.\textsuperscript{113}

However, the literature also stresses that building capabilities in the civil service in particular is about more than just individual skill sets, and that learning at team level must be more widely valued.\textsuperscript{114} This form of capacity building must go beyond the transactional approaches to training that are common across the board, and embrace a cohesive practice of feedback and reflection that is shared among colleagues. It is argued that a focus on merely individual skill sets is ‘a reductive view of skills’, which neglects a core facilitator of capacity building, ‘the connections between people that allow them to succeed in their work’.\textsuperscript{115} In terms of reform, this requires putting an appropriate infrastructure in place, which helps the sharing and dissemination of learning more widely among departments.

Developing systemic capacity to cope effectively with complex change initiatives is also necessary in order to improve the provision of public services. If there is no change in system capacity, there will be no improvement.\textsuperscript{116} This point is reiterated by Lumsden and Mangan\textsuperscript{117} who assert that capacity building in the area of managing complexity should be core to civil service reform efforts in Ireland. They highlight that while much civil service work involves tasks such as the administration of existing policy and more straightforward work such as grant awarding and assessments, many officials are engaged in complex policy development and implementation where there are multiple conflicting objectives, political priorities, and considerable internal and external pressures.

Similarly, it has been highlighted that the increasing complexity of current societal problems requires more of a ‘broad church’ approach to public policy than was previously evident.\textsuperscript{118} This will require capacity building for policymakers beyond the traditional business school, public service management focus, with skills, concepts and theories offered by the social sciences being much more in demand given the nature of current societal problems and low levels of trust in government seen in the post-economic crisis period, particularly in Ireland.\textsuperscript{119}

\textsuperscript{112} MacLeod and Clarke (2009)
\textsuperscript{113} Lumsden and Mangan (2013)
\textsuperscript{114} Kidson (2013)
\textsuperscript{115} Ibid, p.13
\textsuperscript{116} Hartley and Skelcher (2008)
\textsuperscript{117} Lumsden and Mangan (2013)
\textsuperscript{118} MacCarthaigh (2013)
\textsuperscript{119} Ibid
4.5 Citizen engagement and consultation

More active citizen engagement is a common element of public service reform efforts. It is seen as a hallmark of a more democratic, transparent form of doing business and helps ensure that reforms are actually addressing the needs of the citizen – which is, in essence, the core objective of the public service. It can help to improve the policymakers process and build trust in government. Adopting a citizen-centric approach is highlighted in the literature as one of the characteristics of a highly productive public sector organisation.120 However, it has been argued by some that active citizen involvement in public service processes is only given tokenistic attention in reform planning and, frequently, not enough time is allocated to the consultation process.

The discourse on citizen engagement as part of public service reform locates the citizen focus on a continuum from customer of services to partner. The customer focus seeks to strengthen the quality, efficiency, integration and timeliness of services.121 The 2008 OECD review of Ireland’s public service notes that a life cycle approach to policy development offers a mechanism for putting the citizen at the centre of policy development and delivery. The report highlights reform efforts in Canada and Australia which were strongly focused on integrating services to citizens. It also draws attention to the need for moves towards e-governance, and the design of online public services to be supported by joined-up internal processes among departments and agencies, a consistent whole of government vision, and robust means of monitoring progress towards citizen-centred service delivery.

Towards the other end of the continuum, open and inclusive policymaking and reform require a two-way dialogue, and mechanisms to enable citizens to have influence on policy development and decision-making.122 This is often referred to in the literature as ‘collaborative governance’,123 ‘deliberative democracy’124 or consultation which goes beyond seeking commentaries, observations and complaints, and ultimately helps the government be more responsive to citizens’ needs. As indicated above, there are a number of positive outcomes of more meaningful collaborative engagement processes with citizens, including improved clarity and shared understanding of issues, more effective management of differences, increased decision-making capacity, and greater transparency and trust.125

There is also a growing interest internationally in the concept of ‘co-production’, which connects with citizen engagement. Co-production, while contested in some parts of the literature, is usually taken to mean the active involvement of citizens in service planning design and delivery, including the direct involvement of users in the production, at least in part, of their own services.126

120 Deloitte and Reform (2015)
121 OECD (2008)
122 Ibid.
123 Ansell and Gash (2008)
124 Henton, Melville, Amsler and Kopell (2005)
125 Emerson, Nabatchi and Balogh (2011)
126 Wallace (2013)
4.6 Communicating the vision for reform and engaging staff

In the change management literature concerning public services, staff engagement is highlighted as essential to support change efforts and reduce resistance. Successful reform is inherently linked to changing behaviour, and this change cannot be realised unless people are clearly informed of what is required of them. In fact, Fernandez and Rainey assert that communicating a convincing need or vision for change is very often the first step in the reform process. Effective and ongoing communication is therefore crucial in order to implement change effectively. Widespread communication with key actors, whose expertise and involvement are essential for change or reform efforts, can assist implementation through enhancing perceptions of ownership around the process, promoting dissemination of relevant information, and gathering feedback. It is also representative of a transparent, more democratic approach to the reform process that attends to the political context in which it must take place.

The vision underpinning reform must be formalised into a plan or strategy that is shared with stakeholders to provide a roadmap for the change. In devising this plan, it is important that there are clear and specific goals for the strategy. Strategies that contain too many commitments, actions and components can create confusion among stakeholders and among those required to implement it, and are difficult to communicate succinctly.

The literature highlights that communication and culture building go hand in hand. Effective and ongoing communications can help create a ‘culture of support’ for the change or programme goals by publicising the case for change, consulting about a change agenda, and gathering feedback to help coordinate reform efforts and pre-empt resistance.

4.7 Capacity to innovate and take measured and appropriate risks

In the past, the civil service has not rewarded measured and appropriate risk-taking. This risk aversion can act as a barrier to the implementation of innovative reform efforts, and this problem is compounded by a political system which uses failures as a means of political party point-scoring rather than an opportunity for learning from experience. This has contributed to the development of a very risk-averse culture among civil servants, a culture which has been attributed to a systemic stifling of reform efforts. Maddock asserts that government ministers themselves may often not cultivate innovation because of the speed with which they want change to be implemented.
From a practical perspective, this risk aversion is understandable. The public service and services come under scrutiny from a wide variety of stakeholders, including politicians, the media, service users themselves, advocacy groups and oversight bodies. Furthermore, the consequences of risks taken in public services do not just impact on those taking the risk, but can also affect the lives of communities, families and individual citizens. Strong leadership is required in order to encourage, reward and model innovation and measured risk-taking.\textsuperscript{131} High organisational performance is facilitated by an organisational culture which allows experimentation, and views mistakes as an opportunity to learn.\textsuperscript{132}

It is important to acknowledge that there are examples of innovation in the public service, particularly in relation to service delivery, with pilots and pathfinder projects used as means to contain risk by trialling new initiatives before embarking on more mainstream implementation. There is also evidence from a survey of Nordic countries to suggest that central government departments or institutions tend to have scope for more innovative or novel reforms in comparison with non-central departments or institutions, which tend to have more incremental innovations.\textsuperscript{133} It has been suggested that one of the barriers to innovation in the public service is that dissemination of such advances is arguably much slower than in the private sector, and changes to service delivery take longer to implement.\textsuperscript{134}

In addition, academic literature on public service innovation is limited,\textsuperscript{135} and much of the existing literature is not empirically based.\textsuperscript{136} One of the enablers to fostering such innovation cited in the literature is developing links and associations between those required to innovate and the end users.\textsuperscript{137} Senior-level champions, or those in leadership positions, have also been cited as important enablers of innovation, particularly in rewarding and encouraging innovative ideas and initiatives and providing ongoing support for implementation.

Much like the literature on leadership, there is a migration from viewing innovative thinking as a trait to perceiving it more as a competency that can be developed through techniques such as de Bono’s ‘six thinking hats’ or Plsek’s Directed Creativity Cycle.\textsuperscript{138} Some governments, such as those of Singapore and Denmark, deliver programmes to develop creative and innovative thinking capacities among their civil servants.\textsuperscript{139} As highlighted earlier, the Government in Northern Ireland has developed Innovation Labs to help policymakers generate solutions to issues they are currently facing.
Innovative ideas are not only generated internally. Much can be learned from original reform efforts implemented elsewhere, and the publication of these case studies, and the opportunities for disseminating learning across government and with those in other jurisdictions should be maximised. This can be achieved through formalised networks to facilitate engagement, and systematic scanning of what reforms are being introduced in other jurisdictions. Secondments from both the wider public and private sector have also been suggested as a way to increase innovation in the civil service.140 The sharing of learning from reform efforts, especially those which have been unsuccessful, can be impeded by protective traditions and limited information sharing between departments. Unless public services get better at learning from failure, the same mistakes will be made.141

There are interesting initiatives under way in Europe and in other OECD countries to encourage innovative reforms and dissemination of the learning from such efforts. For example, in the UK, Nesta commissioned the development of a diagnostic tool for measuring innovative performance and capability in public sector organisations.142 In 2013, the European Commission launched a pilot project called the 'European Public Sector Innovation Scoreboard' to improve the ability to benchmark the innovation performance of the public sector in Europe.143 The OECD has also developed an Observatory of Public Sector Innovation, which collects and analyses examples and shared experiences of public sector innovation in order to provide practical advice to countries on how to make innovations work.144

4.8 Public service values and a learning organisational culture

The ethos and culture in an organisation are central to overall performance and employee satisfaction. As Kelly et al highlight, in education for example, the culture and leadership of schools has been consistently reported as a predictor of success.145 Likewise, as indicated by Gresham’s Law, bad employees drive out good employees in organisations with a poor ethos. These authors also emphasise that public service ethos is something that is more often talked about than fostered or managed. It appears that there is much focus in the literature on the need for culture change in the public service, but little consensus about how to achieve it.146

The culture in public service organisations is open to scrutiny and negative comment, and the public service is cited in narratives as being not ‘fit for purpose’. The topic of organisational culture or how to achieve culture change is frequently discussed in the public service reform literature. However, the
nascent nature of organisational culture means that achieving or describing effective approaches to culture change is not straightforward. Kidson argues that culture change is achieved in organisations through ‘catalytic mechanisms’, or giving people clear signals about what is expected of them. In other words, there is a need to clearly translate reform objectives into concrete expressions of the changes required, which communicate what is valued.147

In their review on achieving systems change, Abercrombie and colleagues state that having an organisational culture which promotes and supports learning is of the utmost importance, and leadership has a role to play in driving the development of a learning culture. The leadership activity of building a learning organisation may be complicated by the need to create norms beyond the boundary of individual organisations. Indeed, encouraging learning in the network of organisations that make up a system is in itself an activity with the potential to change that system. Some components of a learning culture presented in this review include:148

• creating a strong overarching vision for the planned reform or change initiative
• encouraging individuals to question and challenge ways of doing things
• being comfortable with uncertainty
• being willing to experiment
• empowering staff to use their judgements and take initiative
• creating opportunities for staff to reflect on their learning.

The authors stress that the last point is fundamental. Learning without adaptation offers scant benefit for systems change. This point is supported by Kidson, who argues that any initiative which is focused on capacity building reforms in the civil service must address skills and also the organisational context in which these skills are required.149 He argues that knowledge and abilities of civil servants are located within a particular organisational context, and capacity building efforts must attend to how that context encourages challenge, feedback and learning.

Another theme in the literature cited as a supportive factor for public service reform efforts, which is related to organisational culture, is public service values. Publications on public service administration present a range of values associated with the public service, including impartiality, honesty, loyalty, equity, accountability and fairness.150 This is one of the core factors which differentiates the public service culture from that of the private sector – where the public service is not driven by achieving profit, but by delivering services to

147 Kidson (2013)
149 Kidson (2013)
150 MacCarthaigh (2008)
the citizen. This is one of the reasons why enablers to innovation in the private sector are not always applicable to the public service – the same market mechanisms do not apply and the public service is driven by different underlying values.

It has also been suggested that the growing awareness of public service values and how they are created is associated with the paradigm shift to New Public Governance, and a drive to establish greater trust and confidence in government.\(^{151}\) Harnessing the unique motivating values of working towards the collective good, can serve as an enabler in reform efforts which are focused on adding public value.

4.9 Using data to inform decision-making and provide feedback

Collecting more data and making more sources of data open to the citizen are often features of reform efforts, in a bid to increase the use of data and ensure greater transparency and accountability. In terms of designing reform initiatives, effective decision-making and planning can only be undertaken with reliable and adequate data. A review of an example of public service reform in Ireland which involved the centralisation of a student grants function highlighted the importance of adequate data for reform planning and implementation.\(^{152}\) The review concluded that where data have not been collected, or are of limited or inconsistent quality, these data gaps must be acknowledged in the design of the reform, and particular attention should be paid to those dimensions which are not based on strong data.

Collecting adequate data about performance and outcomes, in addition to inputs and outputs, is also crucial in determining ‘what works’ in terms of achieving greater efficiency and effectiveness. Too often, there is a lack of robust evidence on the effectiveness of public service reform efforts because the data simply are not available. Data are also crucial for public service reform because, as highlighted by Pollitt and Bouckaert,\(^ {153}\) international comparison of reform efforts in different countries is often not possible because each government and public service context is so unique – each country and its public service start from different points and have different histories. Likewise, the consequences of reform efforts will vary from country to country depending on the policy and legislative context for reforms.

\(^{151}\) Sangiorgi (2015)
\(^{152}\) Rafferty, Rochford and Garvey (2014)
\(^{153}\) Pollitt and Bouckaert (2003)
Outcomes-focused performance measurement and management

There has been a focus in public service reforms globally on increased and improved performance measurement.\textsuperscript{154} An emphasis on performance measurement and management was a cornerstone of New Public Management reforms in the UK. However, in the post-New Public Management era this emphasis also indicates a commitment to public service quality for the citizen and makes government departments and agencies more transparent.\textsuperscript{155}

From a practical and evaluative perspective, the focus on improved performance measurement makes sense, as measurement feedback is required to gauge the progress of reforms and exert control. A review conducted by Bird and colleagues\textsuperscript{156} puts forward why the measurement of performance in the provision of public services is important:

1. \textit{To find out what works}: Well-constructed performance indicators can provide a valuable source of evidence to inform policy, and can provide a post hoc form of evaluation following the implementation of reforms.
2. \textit{To determine relevant competencies required}: Performance measurement can help determine what staff, departments, agencies or organisations are performing well, and determine what competencies are present when effective performance is observed.
3. \textit{To support democratic accountability}: Making such performance data available to the public ensures that the state fulfils its democratic accountability to taxpayers.

Performance management and measurement is also cited as being central to reform efforts because its absence signals tolerance of underperformance. It is also presented as a need to increase human resources and management capacity within the public service to provide time for policymakers to focus on developing policy.\textsuperscript{157} Some authors caution against simply borrowing human resource tools from the private sector for this, as they may not take account of the unique public service context.\textsuperscript{158}

However, there is evidence that where performance data are collected at departmental level they are not always sufficiently used. Ward conducted an analysis of parliamentary scrutiny of the annual departmental output statements issued in Ireland, and concluded that select committee meetings did not engage with the output statements of more than a third of departments.\textsuperscript{159} It is suggested that the capacity to engage with and analyse these performance

\textsuperscript{154} OECD (1997)
\textsuperscript{155} De Waal (2010)
\textsuperscript{156} Bird et al (2005)
\textsuperscript{157} McTaggart and O’Flynn (2015)
\textsuperscript{158} Lavelle (2006)
\textsuperscript{159} Ward (2015)
indicators should be increased, possibly in the form of an Oireachtas Budget and Audit Office, to provide independent and specialist assistance to committees, as is the case in Canada, through the Parliamentary Budget Office. This was also one of a number of suggestions in a recent OECD review of budget oversight by the Irish parliament, which, among other important points in relation to budget oversight, raised the need for more specialist analytical support for members of parliament to engage in budget scrutiny.

The literature also highlights that while performance measurement is often an element of public service reform efforts, it has its weaknesses, especially when performance targets and indicators are not aligned with the desired service outcomes. The UK is provided as an example of where the widespread focus on performance targets and measurement across the public service has not resulted in the scope of change anticipated. The same authors warn that performance targets carry the risk of prioritising compliance with standards over wider organisational learning.

Performance measurements must be aligned to the desired outcomes for a service or department overall; otherwise, they will not influence behaviour in the desired way. Bloch et al. provide the example that if police are funded on the basis of burglars caught, they will have no economic incentive to reduce the number of crimes committed. In other words, the performance measurement framework for the public service, if appropriately constructed, can be supportive for public service reform efforts.

4.11 Collaborative, networked governance arrangements

‘Public governance’ refers to the different state arrangements applied to the organisations through which public policy is shaped, made and executed. Public governance includes the formal constitutional design and legal status of the bodies. For example, it includes the rules that set out how a legislature and executive are to operate, or how a public-private partnership is to be held accountable. Thus, the concept of governance encapsulates issues of policymaking and decision-making, accountability and policy implementation.

Reform of governance arrangements is often a feature of public service reform both nationally and internationally. For example, whole of government working, which tends in many jurisdictions to be an integral element of public service reform, introduces a shift from the concept of government, where there are clear hierarchical lines of decision-making and accountability, with decision-making
located at the top of the public sector organisation, to that of more dispersed governance; this is due to the fact that in complex initiatives, accountability may be dispersed across many levels of government and many organisations, including non-governmental and private sector organisations.\textsuperscript{165} This dispersed governance, sometimes termed ‘networked governance’ involves new forms of accountability, budgetary management systems and performance indicators, particular kinds of boundary-spanning leadership and a strong focus on monitoring and evaluation.\textsuperscript{166}

Skelcher examines the link between modes of governance and the performance of public service bodies, which, arguably, is a central question for reform planning and structures.\textsuperscript{167} He posits three distinct types of performance – organisational performance (concerned with efficiency, productivity, outcomes, client satisfaction), democratic performance (legitimacy, consent, accountability) and system performance (system capacity to resolve collective problems, overall government functioning). His review of the literature on governance reforms suggests that it is easier to establish associations between governance reforms and democratic performance (legitimacy, consent and accountability) and system performance (how integrated a system of public organisations is), than organisational performance (substantive outputs and outcomes). He concludes that reform of governance arrangements does not necessarily lead to changes in performance at the organisational level. Where the governance reforms result in more organisational autonomy, it can act as a catalyst for management changes which can have a positive impact on organisational performance.

It has been suggested in the literature that, generally, there is a trend moving from New Public Management to New Public Governance, which implies objectives of more cooperative and open relationships between government and citizens.\textsuperscript{168} New Public Governance has also been referred to as ‘Network Governance’\textsuperscript{169} or the ‘Digital Governance Model’.\textsuperscript{170} This shift encapsulates a move from the New Public Management stance of viewing the citizen as a customer to a move which focuses on collaboration with the citizen, and advances in democratic practice, citizen choice and co-production as modes of service design and delivery.\textsuperscript{171} It is suggested that this shift is a result of the more complex societal age in which we live, in which populations are more heterogeneous and less static, and demand for service user choice has increased.\textsuperscript{172} It also reflects a growing awareness that a focus on governance structures alone will not necessarily deliver the change required, and the processes surrounding engagement are as crucial as formal structures developed to steer the work.

\textsuperscript{165} Colgan, Kennedy and Doherty (2014)
\textsuperscript{166} Ibid (2014)
\textsuperscript{167} Skelcher (2008)
\textsuperscript{168} Sangiorgi (2015)
\textsuperscript{169} Kelly et al (2002)
\textsuperscript{170} Rainford and Tinkler (2011)
\textsuperscript{171} Sangiorgi (2015)
\textsuperscript{172} Mulgan (2007)
4.12 Adequate resources and time frames

This is an obvious enabler but a crucial one, and is especially important considering the fact that public service reforms tend to be economically driven. Simply put, successful reform requires sufficient resources to support the process, especially where the reform is requiring staff to implement new practices or do things differently. As summarised by Fernandez and Rainey, change ‘is not cheap and is not without trade-offs’. \textsuperscript{173} A failure to provide adequate resources can result in increased stress for staff, which can affect morale and result in half-hearted implementation efforts and less attention being paid to other core tasks. Adequate resources are all the more important when the Government is pursuing a comprehensive reform agenda, as is the case in Ireland and Northern Ireland. From a long-term perspective, when resources are so tight that all staff can do is cope with current events and crises, this can have a negative impact on the capacity to develop forward-thinking and innovative policies, and plan for the future.

Adequate time frames are crucial for successful implementation of reform efforts. Implementation takes time, and the more complex and diffuse the reform is the more important it is to allow for adequate time to develop, plan and implement the changes required. One barrier which is endemic in the public service system is the inadequate time frames to implement reform. Government life cycles and terms of office have contributed to the incremental and cyclical pattern of public service reform efforts.

Short-term political time frames are often cited in the literature as a barrier to the effective implementation of public service reform efforts. This is supported by research which indicates that the high-performing organisations in the public service are those which prioritise long-term commitments over short-term gains. \textsuperscript{174} Centrally directed programmes in particular are more likely to be bound by election cycles and terms of government. Effective implementation and the realisation of the change becoming ‘business as usual’ should feasibly be achieved within the current government term, if power changes. This can lead to a short-term view of public service reform, in which cross-cutting systemic change is unlikely to be achieved or even attempted. This is an important point to consider when the evidence indicates that successful change at a systems level can take 7-10 years to implement. \textsuperscript{175} It would appear there is an inherent tension between electoral cycles which very often dictate reform agendas, and how much time is required to implement that reform.

\textsuperscript{173} Fernandez and Rainey (2006), p.172
\textsuperscript{174} De Waal (2010)
\textsuperscript{175} Abercrombie et al (2015)
Related to this is the issue of budget time frames which do not facilitate long-term planning for change. Short-term budgets not only restrict the time available for public service reform initiatives, they can also result in the prioritisation of quick wins over more substantial systemic change.\(^{176}\)

The impact of short-term time frames for policymaking has also been discussed in the systems change literature. Chapman\(^ {177}\) refers to a ‘positive feedback loop’, linking the design and formation of policy to outcomes, and hypothesises that one of the core reasons why this does not always happen is simply a lack of time. He puts forward a model (see Figure 3) whereby the lack of time to devote to policy exploration and formulation results in fewer improvements in policy design and implementation, thereby reducing successes and increasing the need for new intervention and policies, ultimately reducing the capacity for systems-based learning.

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\(^{176}\) Drumm (2012)  
\(^{177}\) Chapman (2004)
Caveats and limitations of the literature

There are a number of important caveats and limitations to the literature reviewed here which warrant mention. First of all, the research referenced in this review emanates mainly from the UK, Australia, New Zealand, USA, Canada and European countries. Each of these regions has its own unique state structure, which means that the applicability of findings and recommendations may be limited in certain respects. The review is limited to English-language publications and is not a systematic review of literature.

Secondly, empirical evaluations of reforms efforts are themselves scarce. Most are narrative or case study accounts, which while helpful in describing the nature of the change do not always provide adequate information on impact or outcomes of the change. There is also the danger that what is being presented is a biased account, since successes are more likely to be reported on and shared than are failures. This type of research can be difficult to conduct in the public service, often because the relevant and sometimes basic data can be difficult to obtain. Future reviews or studies of public service reform should pay greater attention to what has contributed to successful implementation, rather than descriptive accounts of reform efforts. This would increase understanding of what makes reform successful.
International examples of public service reforms

There are a number of international examples of public service reforms which can provide valuable learning on implementation. In this section, international examples of different approaches to centrally driven public sector reform in Canada, Australia, Finland and Scotland are provided. These examples represent a cross-section of reform efforts focused mainly on whole of government initiatives or reform of large-scale service delivery systems. They have been selected because the broad and integrated nature of the initiatives may contain transferable learning for many types of reform in public services.

Canada

Two periods of intensive public sector change occurred over the past 50 years in Canada. The period from the mid-1960s to early 1970s involved a significant redefinition of the public sector, the creation of the welfare state and the creation of major social programmes in the areas of pensions, Medicare and unemployment insurance. From the mid-1980s, there were pressures to curtail government, but with a much more limited enthusiasm for New Public Management.\textsuperscript{178}

Significant structural change to the size of the public sector occurred in the mid-1990s, mainly driven by fiscal pressures.\textsuperscript{179} Other priorities in the mid-1990s included the need to strengthen policy capacity, and the capacity to manage horizontal policy issues. There were initiatives to shift the focus of reporting from activities to impact, more transparent reporting, accountability frameworks, and the promotion of continuous learning in the public service. Performance reports on progress to meet departmental regulatory plans became a feature of annual reports to Parliament.\textsuperscript{180}

In Canada, departments and agencies are required to indicate in their Report on Plans and Priorities and Departmental Performance Report, the alignment of programme activities to Government of Canada outcome areas. The alignment of strategic outcomes and their corresponding programme activities to the whole of government framework make it possible to calculate spending by Government of Canada outcome area and also to correctly total all government spending. A programme activity can only be aligned to one Government of Canada outcome area. A strategic outcome, however, can contribute to more than one outcome area.

\textsuperscript{178} Evans, G.
\textsuperscript{179} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{180} Ibid.
Since the mid-2000s, the annual reports of the Clerk of the Privy Council have maintained a strong focus on public service reform, and have charted the year-on-year progress on the core themes of the reform programme. There is evidence of a particular emphasis on human resources, employee development, performance management, renewal through capacity building and the creation of ‘functional communities’ of professionals.\textsuperscript{181}

The most recent reform initiative is *Blueprint 2020*.\textsuperscript{182} *Blueprint 2020* sets out a vision for the Canadian Public Service to ensure that it is equipped into the future. It is described as the overarching management agenda of the Public Service. The four guiding principles underpinning the modernisation efforts are:

1. An open and networked environment that engages citizens and partners for the public good, together with...
2. A whole-of-government approach that enhances service delivery and value for money, enabled by...
3. A modern workplace that makes smart use of new technologies to improve networking, access to data and customer service, and...
4. A capable, confident and high-performing workforce that embraces new ways of working and mobilising the diversity of talent to serve the country’s evolving needs.

The *Blueprint 2020* vision was the basis of a *Blueprint 2020 Dialogue* – a large-scale consultative process that engaged employees at all levels and regions. Employee engagement is seen as essential, so that individual public servants can take ownership of the vision, be empowered to lead change, and be innovative in their everyday work. Arising from the *Blueprint 2020* Dialogue, *Destination 2020* charts the priority areas for action. These include: Innovative Practices and Networking, Processes and Empowerment, Technology, and People Management.\textsuperscript{183}

In terms of service delivery to citizens, e-government has been a long-standing priority of the Canadian Government. Canada’s investment in whole of government work since 2000 has been primarily driven by the intention to develop seamless, citizen-centred service delivery.\textsuperscript{184} A major e-government initiative – the Government On-Line Initiative – was partnered by Modernising Services for Canadians (MSC), which brought together 170 different government websites. These programmes led to the establishment of Service Canada, which provides a one-stop point of access for citizens to all federal services. The establishment of Service Canada was a major structural reform project. One of the core goals of Service Canada is to build whole of government approaches to

\textsuperscript{181} Government of Canada (2015)
\textsuperscript{182} Government of Canada (2013)
\textsuperscript{183} Ibid.
\textsuperscript{184} Roy and Langford (2008)
services that enables information sharing and integrated service delivery for the benefit of Canadians. The integration of services across the levels of government is central to this goal.

To support the whole of government work, two Councils and an Institute were established to promote research and dialogue around common standards and approaches to integrating services and technology between agencies and levels of government.

The Public Sector Chief information Officer Council and the Public Sector Service Delivery Council bring together service policy and delivery officials to exchange best practices and collaborate on service delivery. In 2005, the Institute for Citizen Service Delivery was established to promote high levels of citizen satisfaction with public sector service delivery, mainly through the use of research and the application of innovative, best practice solutions to support quality service delivery.

AUSTRALIA

Australia is described as ‘a typical case of a public management system, which contrasts significantly with countries dominated by the rule of law.’185 Dimensions of reform have been linked to different government policy orientations, which have had a wide impact on how the public service is led, structured and operated.186

A number of phases of public sector reform in Australia have been noted since the mid-1960s.187 These are described as:

• the End of Certainty (1960s to 1980s) characterised by features such as trade liberalisation, the abolition of White Australia policy, and labour market regulation

• administrative law reforms (1970s and 1980s)

• the period characterised by New Public Management (1980s and 1990s) and characterised by devolution, market orientation and privatisation, deregulation and ‘customer focus’

• the period of ‘Responsiveness to elected Government’ (1980s to 2000s), involving introduction of political advisors, loss of tenure of agency heads and central control of communications.

The cumulative impact of this suite of reforms is described as having been both positive and negative.188 The positive impacts of reforms include economic gains from trade liberalisation and labour market flexibility, efficiency gains,
some evidence of improved effectiveness as well as broader gains in areas such as transparency, increased mobility and greater community participation. More negative impacts are described as including some serious failures in outsourcing and privatisation, loss of expertise leading to poorly informed purchasing, public servants drawn more heavily into political processes, excessive reliance on business approaches, and excessive reliance on the individual public servant at the expense of the team or profession.

More recent developments have focused on the concept of ‘connected government’ and an increased emphasis on ‘public value’ in leadership development, along with modifications of earlier initiatives. An in-depth review of Australian Government Administration Ahead of the Game: Blueprint for the Reform of Australian Government Administration was published in 2010; this review made recommendations in four key areas:\(^{189}\)

- meeting the needs of citizens (more integrated services linking levels of government)
- strong leadership and strategic direction (strengthening strategic policy advising, strengthened role of departmental secretaries, strong role for the Australian Public Service Commission)
- highly capable workforce (career development, more investment in human resource management and return to central remuneration systems)
- efficiency (strengthened governance arrangements, reduced ‘red tape’, systematic agency reviews).

One of the key features of the reform proposals was the strengthening of the Australian Public Services Commission, centralising all human resources activity away from the Prime Minister’s Office, and with responsibility for workforce planning, learning and development, recruitment and retention, pay and employment conditions.\(^{190}\) In relation to developing leadership capacity, the Cabinet Implementation Unit in Australia facilitates capacity building across the Australian public service on implementation and delivery, and develops a network of implementation capability sharing across the public service.

In terms of service delivery reform, integrated, citizen-centred service delivery, participation and partnership have been strong drivers of public sector reform efforts in Australia over a number of decades.\(^{191}\) Whole of government work has a long track record in Australia, motivated strongly by a drive for integrated local service delivery. A 1976 Report of the Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration argued for a new style of public citizen-centred administration.\(^{192}\)

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\(^{189}\) Advisory Group on Reform of Australian Government Administration (2010)

\(^{190}\) Zussman (2012)

\(^{191}\) Management Advisory Committee (2004a)

\(^{192}\) Royal Commission on Australian Government Administration (1976)
The Coalition of Australian Governments was established in 1992 to act as a forum for considering whole of government issues and identifying priorities for whole of government work. In the early 2000s, the Prime Minister’s role in setting these priorities was strengthened through the establishment of the Cabinet Implementation Unit, with a core function of supporting whole of government work.

The concept of a ‘one-stop shop’ for service delivery bore fruit in 1997 with the establishment of Centrelink as an integrated delivery mechanism for employment and income support across all levels of government. During the 1980s, new structures and processes such as taskforces for whole of government work took over from traditional interdepartmental committees. These primarily top-down approaches gave way in the 1990s to a stronger focus on community consultation, participation and partnerships.

FINLAND

In Finland, improving the way government worked horizontally has been a major focus of governmental reform since the 1980s. It was decided that reform could be achieved without instituting formal changes in authority or power between organisations but by altering the working methods of government.

The Government set out its agenda in the Government Programme, introduced in 2003. This concentrates on horizontal activity of the Government and identifies priority areas. Each area has its own programme outlined in the Government Strategy Document, which focuses on horizontal policies and identifies the targets, measures and concrete acts required for success in line with financial prerequisites as set out in the Government budget documents.

The Government Strategy Document provides concrete, quantifiable targets for each area of government in order to facilitate evaluation. The focus is on outcomes rather than outputs and the findings are used mainly for political rather than managerial purposes. Since 2006, all ministries and agencies are required to enter their performance information onto a state Internet reporting system, further increasing the transparency of public administration. Early evaluation of the reforms suggested that it had helped government to become more strategic and results focused. It has also improved transparency and horizontal thinking across government. Success of this process relies on political will for consensus and support from the Prime Minister.
SCOTLAND

The establishment of the Scottish Parliament in 1999 provided a new context for public service reform in Scotland, as competence in matters which had until then been reserved to the Westminster Parliament was then vested in Holyrood. The Coalition Government elected in Scotland in 1999 inherited an approach with strong parallels to the wider UK, but also one with important nuances. For example, while a target-driven approach to reform had been ‘rigorously applied’ in Scotland, the approach to children and young people at risk had a long-standing and distinctive public service tradition, and ‘market-making’ reforms were absent from the National Health Service (NHS).196

One of the Scottish Parliament’s first acts was to make the Permanent Secretary the Principal Accountable Officer for the entirety of the resources voted to the Scottish Government, thus opening the way for a more joined-up approach to government and the wider public service.197

These imperatives were recognised in Government publications such as For Scotland’s Children published in 2001, and Transforming Public Services: the next phase of Reform, published in 2006. This latter document set out the Government’s commitment to:

- user-focus – choice, voice, and representation
- quality and innovation – fostering innovation, continuous improvement, universal standards and intervention
- efficiency and productivity – efficient government and arms-length bodies, simplifying planning, funding and reporting, scrutiny
- joining up – community planning, testing new ways of delivering services, information and communications technology (ICT) and integration strengthening
- accountability – democratic accountability, accountability for performance of senior managers and to service users.

These objectives were set within the mainstream of UK practice on public service reform, as defined by the Labour Government in Westminster. In the years up to 2007, however, the translation of these desires into practical and sustained policy were often frustrated by the operation of the governing parties. As the Permanent Secretary of the day put it:

“One of the consequences of coalition government was to strengthen the desire of individual Cabinet Ministers to maximise their own degree of autonomy and consequently that of their department.” 198

196 Housden (2014)
197 Elvidge (2011)
198 Ibid, p.31
The Scottish First Minister, who was conscious of the limitations of the approach, engaged with civil servants at the centre of the organisation on future scenarios for Scotland from 2006 onwards. This work highlighted the difficulty of trying to tackle long-standing challenges on the economy, inequality and public health with traditional policy solutions.

The Opposition, the Scottish National Party (SNP), was also aware of the limitations of the approach. Its Manifesto for the 2007 election proposed:

- an outcomes-based approach to the framing of the objectives of government and enabling the electorate to hold the Government to account for performance
- a reduced size of Cabinet, as an expression of commitment to a collective approach.

In parallel, early in 2007, Sir John Elvidge, Permanent Secretary to the Scottish Government, developed an internal proposal to abolish the departmental structure of the Civil Service to create a single, coherent organisation. And thus:

> *In May 2007, two separate analyses of the ways to define and pursue the objectives of government more effectively by changing the organisation and functioning of government...came into conjunction.*

In the following years, and under a minority Scottish National Party Government, the model that emerged had the following key characteristics:

- an outcomes-based approach to the objectives of government
- a single statement of purpose providing a framework for supporting objectives and measurable national outcomes
- a system for tracking those outcomes and reporting on performance in an accessible and transparent way
- the alignment of the strategies and business plans of public bodies to the purpose and national outcomes
- a concordat with local authorities, significantly reducing the numbers of specific grants and performance management requirements in favour of a partnership approach to govern the working and financial relationship between central and local government
- single outcome agreements with each local authority, replacing the requirement for multiple plans, and the creation of community planning partnerships at local level to drive improvement and prevention
- the creation of the Scottish Leaders Forum, bringing together the chief executives of all publicly funded institutions with the Civil Service and (increasingly) the community and voluntary sector in a leadership dialogue and in capacity building.

199 Elvidge (2011)
This framework was endorsed by the independent Christie Commission reporting in 2011. Its recommendations, fully adopted by the SNP Government, proposed four pillars for future advancement:

- a decisive shift towards preventative approaches
- greater integration of services at local level
- greater investment in people and workforce development
- a sharper focus on improving performance through greater transparency, stronger innovation and more thoroughgoing adoption of new technologies.

Continuity has been an important part of the Scottish approach.

"The approach of the Scottish Government has remained on the outcomes path since 2007. This period of stability has been reinforced by international recognition, scrutiny in the Scottish Parliament and the stimulus provided by the Christie Commission. The debates on Christie in the Scottish Parliament showed how far these ideas – challenging and radical – had by 2012 become mainstream. The report of the Parliament’s Local Government and Regeneration Committee referred to consensus across the political parties, saw the move to preventative spending as essential and called on efforts made in recent years to be sustained."
6

Key messages on implementing public service reform

1. A compelling and explicit vision and purpose is essential to guide reform.
2. Strengthening policy development skills and integrating expertise on implementation should increase the success of public service reforms.
3. A citizen-centric approach is one of the characteristics of a highly productive public sector, but it must be real.
4. Public service reform increasingly involves whole system, whole of government change to deliver needs-led services to citizens.
5. Changes in governance arrangements and structures alone will not deliver public service reform.
6. Public service change requires leadership geared to managing complex change.
7. Invest in people – building capacity for managing complexity and continuous professional development are essential enablers of change.
8. Public service values are tangible assets which should be harnessed to support reform.
9. Achieving systems change takes time and resources, and requires political and administrative leaders to have long-term goals and perspectives.
Introduction

The learning in terms of implementing public service reform is still developing. The messages presented in this chapter are emergent, general themes from the current review of the literature, which have cross-cutting applicability across public services. They are not an attempt to present definitive answers to the question of how best to implement public service reform. It is intended that these messages will provide helpful guidance on how to approach the implementation of reform efforts.

The key messages outlined here draw on both the experience of the Centre for Effective Services in working with government departments and agencies to support implementation of a diverse set of policy initiatives across the public service, and on the public service reform literature.

1 A compelling and explicit vision and purpose is essential to guide reform

The vision, values and purpose underpinning reform need to be clear and explicit, in order to command the support of citizens, communities, public servants and other stakeholders, and should be expressly communicated to all involved in the change effort.

Political orientations and values underpin public sector reform initiatives. In every country, reform efforts represent an explicit or implicit perspective on the role of the state, and its relationship with citizens. These orientations and values determine the nature and focus of the reform.

The goal of providing the citizen with effective services to improve outcomes for society as a whole is at the heart of the change in many jurisdictions and speaks to the core public service values and motivations of those working and contributing every day to the work of the public service.

Reform is not easy in hard economic times. Where wider public sector reforms coincide with economic reforms and significantly reduced resources, it is important to ensure coherence among all of the reform efforts. If the reform efforts are focused solely on cost-cutting, and not also on improving the service outcomes, costs will simply re-emerge over time in line with normal linear patterns of growth.
2 Strengthening policy development skills and integrating expertise on implementation should increase the success of public service reforms

Strengthening the quality of both policy development and policy implementation are core elements of public service reform. The skills needed for policymaking and setting strategic direction have been identified by the OECD. They include technical skills such as research, analysis and evaluation, systematic use of data, and the capacity to integrate policy design with policy execution. The integration of implementation with policy development marks an important shift in the policy arena. Whole of government policymaking is now also seen as an important feature of policymaking.

3 A citizen-centric approach is one of the characteristics of a highly productive public sector, but it must be real

Enabling citizens to participate fully and meaningfully in service design and public policymaking processes is crucial. It can strengthen the outcomes of the reform process across the spectrum of public services. It can also heighten citizen trust in the process. The literature points to the challenge that meaningful citizen participation poses, and highlights the need for structures and processes that embed and institutionalise participation and engagement.

4 Public service reform increasingly involves whole system, whole of government change to deliver needs-led services to citizens

There is a strong move towards managing public service reform as a form of whole of government or system change, due to the complexity of modern government, the focus on joined-up services to citizens, and the prevalence of ‘wicked’ problems that require concerted action across portfolios and over time. Whole system change demands a sophisticated change capacity and an ability to work across traditional boundaries and silos (horizontal and vertical) rather than a focus on separate dimensions of the public system.
5 Changes in governance arrangements and structures alone will not deliver public service reform

A reorganisation of governmental structures and processes is often part of public service reform, and it has been an important aspect of reforms in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Reform of public services involves changes in behaviour, culture and working practices; this does not always require changes in governance arrangements and structures. The limited research available on structural reforms cautions against hastily organised restructuring, and highlights poor awareness of the costs of restructuring and disruptions to the system, which can last for up to two years. Non-structural ways of achieving improved focus and coordination, such as whole of government working, should be explored, and structural reforms in the public service should have a clear operational purpose and expert implementation support.

6 Public service change requires leadership geared to managing complex change

Effective leadership is widely seen as one of the most important enablers of public service reform. The kind of leadership needed is systems leadership – a form of leadership that can empower staff, offer flexibility, work across boundaries, reward people’s capacity to adapt to new circumstances, tolerate and translate complexity and chaos, and be responsive to new needs.

Continuity in the leadership of the reform process over a period of years is also essential for success.

7 Invest in people – building capacity for managing complexity and continuous professional development are essential enablers of change

Developing specialist skills and capacities alongside generalist skills is essential for ensuring that public services can cope with complex change. Continuous professional development allows public servants to acquire the necessary range of professional, technical and analytical expertise, political skills, and capacities for new, integrated ways of working and team-based skill sets.
The literature tells us that if there is no change in system capacity, there will be no change. Managing complexity is one of the core capacities.

The literature points to the need for more reflection in the public service and openness to trial and ‘failure’. The current political system and adversarial nature of party political engagement often means there is very little tolerance for being wrong. A more realistic understanding of reform efforts is that they are a series of continuous improvements to services and outcomes for the citizen, rather than a one-off, fixed, perfect solution.

8 Public service values are tangible assets which should be harnessed to support reform

Successful public sector reform depends on cultural change. It demands an organisational culture that promotes learning and reflection; an organisational culture where people are comfortable with uncertainty, are willing to use their own judgement and take initiative, have a capacity to innovate, continuously improve, and have a positive attitude towards measured and appropriate risk-taking.

Public service values and the intrinsic motivation of working towards the collective good to improve outcomes for citizens are valuable, tangible resources to public service organisations, especially when it comes to implementing reforms. They should be acknowledged, supported and rewarded.

9 Achieving systems change takes time and resources, and requires political and administrative leaders to have long-term goals and perspectives

Short-term political time frames are often cited in the literature as a barrier to the effective implementation of public service reform efforts. Systems change is a long-term goal which can take 7-10 years to achieve. Research indicates that high-performing organisations in the public service are those which prioritise long-term commitments over short-term gains.
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REFERENCES


Implementing public service reform
Messages from the literature

The Centre for Effective Services connects policy, practice and research, helping to ensure the implementation of effective services to improve the lives of people across the island of Ireland. Part of a new generation of intermediary organisations, CES is a not-for-profit organisation, with offices in Dublin and Belfast.

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