



For Policy.  
For Practice.  
For Impact.

We bring new ways of thinking to complex problems,  
to help advance social change.

# CES Ten Year Review Summary September 2018



# **Foreword**

by Nuala Doherty  
*Director, CES*

In 2017, in the lead up to marking ten years of CES, we initiated two important tasks. The first was to commission a review of our work to tell the story of CES and to capture some of what we have learned along the way. The second was the development of a new organisational strategy, which builds on that learning and sets out our direction of travel over the next three years.

The review brings together our work history, feedback from partners and senior leaders in services, analysis and case studies of our project work, and examines them through a lens of public value.

CES is a not for profit, independent organisation which shares many values with public services, and occupies a unique role in the policy and practice landscape.

Our new strategy which accompanies the review reaffirms our commitment to supporting the work of government departments, agencies and organisations to improve outcomes for people in health, mental health and education.

The concept of public value, which moves beyond measuring economic benefits, to consider quality and outcomes for people offered fresh perspectives on how CES adds value to human and social services. The public value framework used by the research team identifies four different pillars in public value, one of which is focused on system capacity.

The world has changed since CES first opened its doors in 2008. CES was set up as an intermediary organisation to create an appetite for good quality research evidence amongst policy makers and practitioners, and to help them generate that evidence. Since that time, governments around the world have initiated a range of reform initiatives. The complexity of social problems such as poverty, homelessness and youth mental health requires new approaches, better use of data and learning from other jurisdictions. The skills and capacity needed to interpret, analyse and apply forms of evidence such as data, research and feedback from citizens have become more sophisticated. Ten years on, the review shows that while we have stayed true to our original mission, the work has grown in scale and complexity, reaching into new sectors and engaging with a broader range of departments, agencies and organisations. The review identifies both the use of evidence and building capacity as areas where CES has and will continue to add value.

The role of CES as a 'bridging mechanism' or 'broker' is a strong theme in the review. Supporting government departments, agencies, organisations and people in the system to make connections is an important aspect of CES's work. Cross government and whole of government work is essential to achieve better results for citizens. CES has reviewed the evidence and produced resources to support

this way of working. We are now working with government departments across Ireland to test some of these skills and approaches in the real world, in a programme focused on systemic change.

CES's learning on effective implementation is recognised within the review as a valuable resource for agencies, government departments and other organisations involved in policy and practice. We now know more about the stages of implementation, the people, skills and organisational infrastructure that need to be in place when introducing, scaling and sustaining change. Frameworks, tools and approaches can support practical application and contribute to a growing field of knowledge to support organisational change, better use of evidence, service improvement and public value.

Through our work with government departments, agencies and frontline practitioners, we have learned that evidence is only one of several factors which influences systemic change. Relationships, trust, competency and a commitment to working with others over time is also important. We look forward to building our partnerships over the coming years. As an all-island organisation, we are committed to strengthening the connections across both jurisdictions. We know that the similarities and differences offer a wealth and experience of learning that is valued by policy makers and practitioners. CES will continue to facilitate these important connections even in the most uncertain of times.

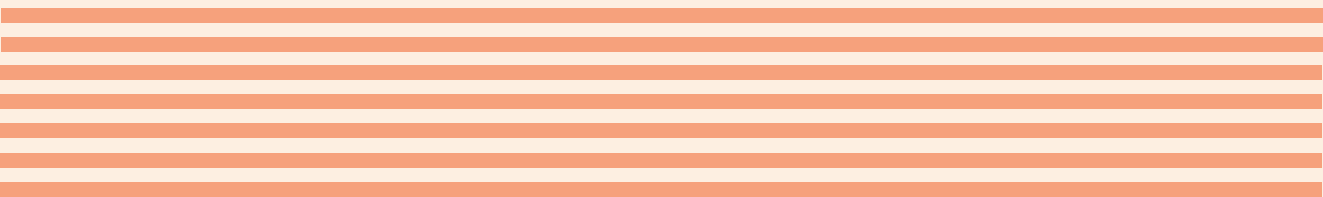
We are grateful to our funders for their strategic investment during our first ten years, which has enabled our work to be responsive to needs within the system as they emerge. I would like to thank the research team for their work on the review, and to all of those who took the time to contribute their reflections and feedback. This summary offers a brief insight into the findings, and the longer report is also available on our website. The report provides us with a significant repository of rich learning, ideas and possibilities as we move forward into our second decade.

**Nuala Doherty**  
Director, CES



## Introduction

In 2017 we commissioned a team of researchers from Ulster University to carry out a review, to coincide with CES marking its tenth year. The aim of the review was to look back on the work over the past decade, and to describe the contribution that CES makes to the work of public services in Ireland and Northern Ireland. This summary describes what the review involved and how the work has evolved over the past decade. It highlights some of the areas where CES has added value to policy, practice and services in Ireland and Northern Ireland.



## A decade of change

Since it was established in 2008 CES has worked on over ninety projects with government departments, agencies, statutory and voluntary service providers and service commissioners throughout the island of Ireland. Projects range in scale and duration. Some projects delivered on core funding commitments and in other cases CES was contracted. CES has also initiated projects independently, to contribute to the field or to scope out emerging areas of interest to services.

The evolution of CES over the past ten years is best understood within the context of significant changes to public services in both Ireland and Northern Ireland. The work of CES has grown from an initial focus on services for children and families to a broader range of human services – publicly funded services in areas such as education, health, mental health and social services which promote the wellbeing of people.

The past decade has seen a significant shift from measuring costs and outputs of services to a stronger focus on outcomes. Service improvement, partnership and change are important features of this new landscape. There is increasing interest in the role of evidence in informing policy and services, a strong commitment to reform and innovation and an appetite for strategies which listen to, and involve people using services. Cutbacks, the lack of specialist skills and risk aversion are some of the factors that impact on introducing these approaches and making them routine.

Intermediary organisations such as CES are new developments which have emerged in the system in recent years, in Ireland and internationally. Intermediaries are third party organisations working between two or more organisations, disciplines or sectors to help them work in new and more effective ways. Intermediary organisations do not provide direct services, instead they work to support, provide technical assistance and connect other organisations. The complex nature of challenges in human services and a strong change agenda has opened up opportunities for an organisation like CES.

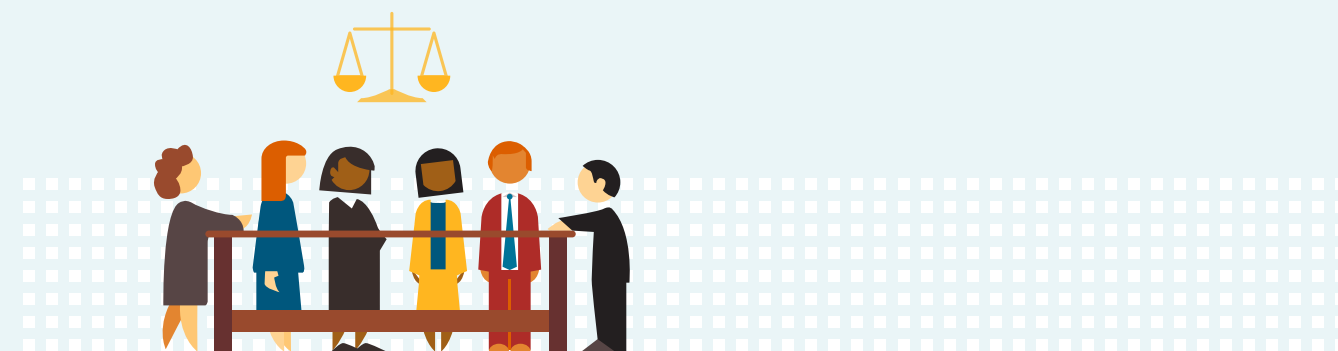


## Ten years of CES

CES was established in 2008 as a joint initiative of The Atlantic Philanthropies and government departments in Ireland.

CES was set up to create an appetite for good quality research evidence amongst policy makers and practitioners, and to help them generate that evidence. The first phase of CES's work focused on the design and implementation of services for children and young people based on evidence of what works. Ten years on, CES has reached into new sectors, such as health, social services and education.

Since 2016 CES has been managing a significant programme based on public service reform and innovation, in partnership with government departments in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The programme is supported by the final phase of investment by The Atlantic Philanthropies in Ireland and aims to bring about systemic change in services in the long term, through new ways of working.



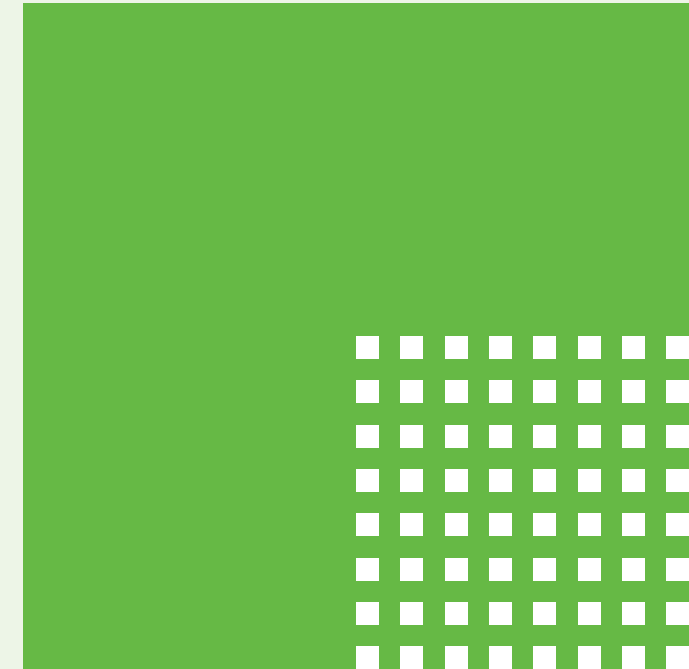
## A public value approach

The research team began by examining ninety CES projects thematically. In depth interviews were organised with individuals both inside and outside of CES, including senior leaders. A short survey was conducted through the CES mailing list. The team wrote up case studies describing the impact of eight projects using an approach modelled on the Research Excellence Framework from the UK.

The review anchors the work of CES in the context of public value. Public value means measuring organisations in a way that moves beyond costs and outputs, to the quality of services and the outcomes for people using them. The Barber Review Public Value Framework from the UK identifies four pillars which can help to understand public value. These are:

- Pursuing goals
- Managing inputs
- Engaging users and citizens
- Developing system capacity.

The fourth pillar of developing system capacity was identified by the research team as being particularly relevant to understanding the work of CES.



## From policy to practice: ten years of growth

The research team examined projects under the five headings of:

- practice
- connections
- service design
- policy
- systemic change

CES's work [in practice](#) aligns with its mission of making evidence accessible and useful to those who design and deliver services. Projects involve capacity building, and the production of evidence informed tools and resources. There has been an increasing focus in recent years on the development of tools and resources to improve practice. Feedback highlighted the quality, practical focus and clear style of CES resources, such as the Access Evidence series for frontline practitioners.

CES's work [in policy](#) has involved supporting government departments in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The review highlights how trustworthy, objective analysis and evidence provided by CES is valued by policy makers. CES has contributed to policy development by bringing a practitioner perspective, creating opportunities for learning and reflection, and proving support and resources to support whole of government approaches and implementing policy.

Projects involving [connections](#) involve building and supporting networks, and developing relationships and partnerships. The review recognised networks as a strategic investment in embedding evidence use and implementation across service provision, and where CES could engage with a range of professionals. Networks such as the Implementation Network and the Parenting Network helped to create common ground between jurisdictions, sectors and disciplines, and to build relationships and collaboration.

Working with organisations to [design services](#) which bring about positive outcomes for people is central to CES's mission. CES draws on knowledge and experience of using evidence, focusing on outcomes, and effective implementation. The review highlights the value of CES in providing an independent perspective in helping to plan for implementation, understanding the context and reflecting the needs of communities when designing services. The On the Right Track series provides key messages, learning and tools for service commissioners.

Projects involving [systemic change](#) include those focused on public service reform and the skills and competencies needed to improve social/human services. This area of work has particularly developed over the past five years, notably through the Goal Programme for Public Service Reform and Innovation, and CES's partnership with the HSE Mental Health Division. The review affirms a strong role for CES in supporting the cultural change needed in systemic change. This has involved working in partnership, using co-design and co-production approaches, and working across agencies and departments.





## Learning from experience - how CES's work has changed

CES has maintained and strengthened its original vision of supporting evidence informed policy and practice to improve outcomes for children, young people and families. The work is now reaching into new sectors including education, health, mental health, social services and justice, and a diverse range of services.

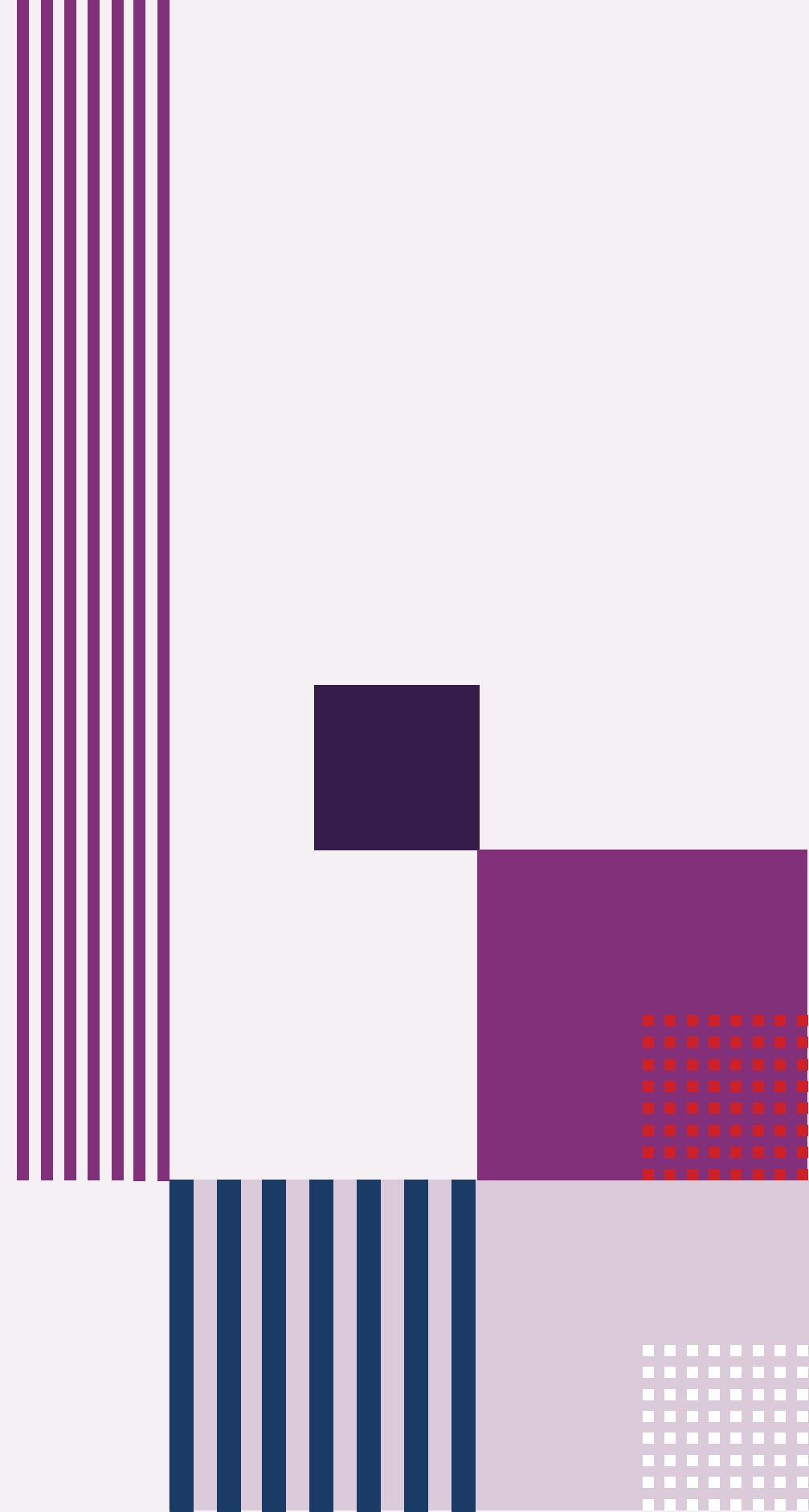
The approach of CES has evolved, based on learning about how evidence is applied in practice.

In addition to research evidence, CES has recognised the strategic importance of tools and resources in engaging practitioners and policy makers. CES has developed and used a range of tools, drawn from disciplines of organisational development, implementation science and project management, and used them to engage with and build the capacity of both practitioners and policy makers to use evidence.

CES's work has grown significantly in scale, reach and complexity. A diverse range of agencies, departments, foundations and organisations engaging CES's services.

The ambition for CES's work has grown.

Recent work on public service reform and systems change builds on a strong body of earlier work involving the use of evidence, service design, whole of government, interagency working, networks and implementation. Stronger relationships, increased knowledge and capacity, experience and resources have created opportunities to engage in systems change initiatives.



## Adding value to public services in Ireland and Northern Ireland

*'CES has contributed to the advancement of evidence informed policy and practice, and has helped in particular to bring a sharper focus onto implementation at all stages of the policy implementation cycle.'*  
*(CES Ten Year Review)*

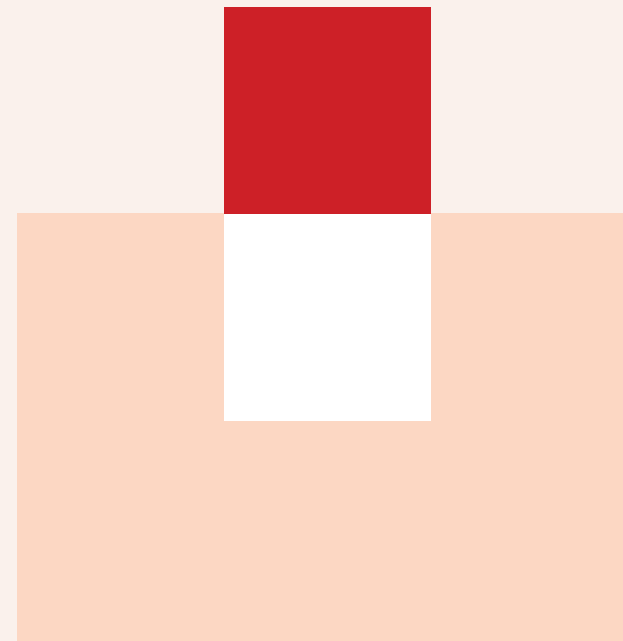
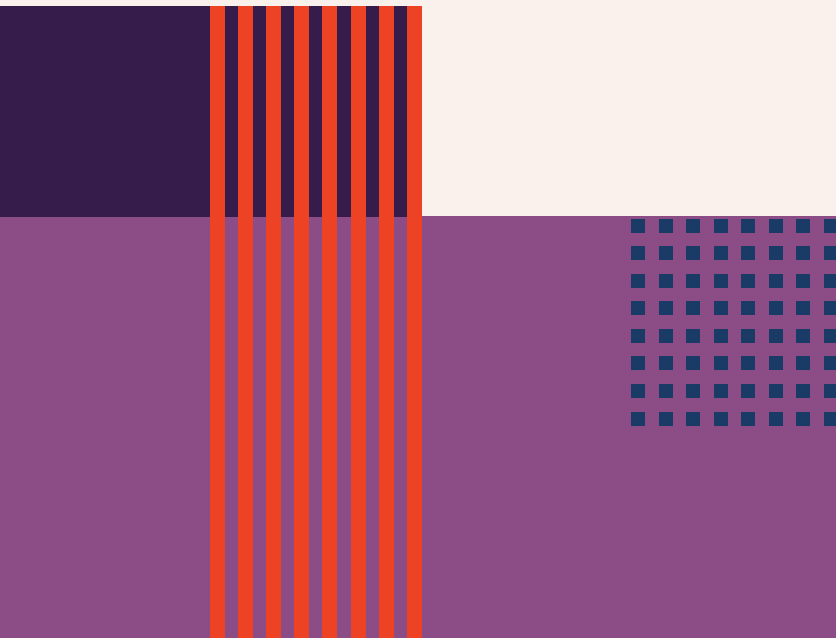
The review asked individuals and organisations to reflect on the contribution of CES to services. A number of themes emerged when the responses were analysed and these are explained in greater detail in the report.

CES's knowledge and connections in the field of implementation were recognised as having practical use for those involved in both policy and practice. How CES works was also seen as important. CES was seen to share values with the public sector. As a result, relationships were characterised by partnership, trust and high levels of engagement.

CES has added value to public services in the following ways:

### Using evidence, useful evidence.

CES has helped organisations to use evidence by Identifying examples of good practice, interpreting and analysing data, gathering feedback from service users, summarising and synthesising research. 46% of CES projects over the past ten years involved using evidence. CES's perspective on implementation was seen as critical in understanding different forms of evidence and how to present it. Over time the organisation changed from an academic to a more practical, real world approach. The review identified projects such as 'On the Right Track' and Access Evidence as good examples of how CES has communicated complex information and data in ways that were useful for service commissioners and practitioners.



### Implementation in real world settings.

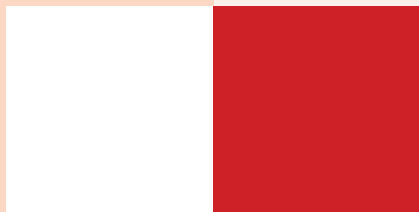
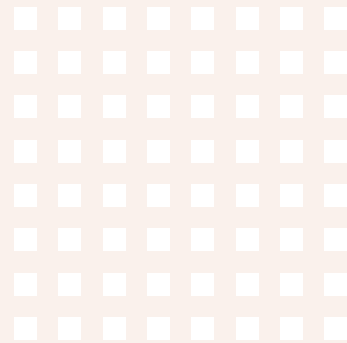
CES has learned that evidence on its own is not enough to address a problem. The context and how evidence will be implemented are just as important to consider. CES has supported implementation of a range of projects, policies and services, and has learned that it needs to be planned and that it takes time. CES's international connections in Implementation were seen as valuable to both policy makers and practitioners.

CES has developed tools, resources and frameworks, and has drawn from the disciplines of implementation science, organisational development, and project management to support implementation of policies, programmes and services. These were used to develop bespoke approaches to supporting the implementation of change in different contexts – from strategic and operational change in mental health services, to clinical guidelines in health settings.

### An all island perspective.

CES has committed to an all island approach since it was established. While structures, policy context and service delivery are different between both jurisdictions, there are also similarities. Proximity provides opportunities to learn, but this work is challenging and has been further complicated by the collapse of power sharing arrangements in Northern Ireland.

CES has brought an all island dimension to its work in different ways. Projects with the Big Lottery Fund and recent work on public service reform in Northern Ireland have opened up new relationships and strengthened existing ones. Advisory groups, steering committees and project teams include perspectives from both jurisdictions. Shared learning events, and networks such as the Implementation Network bring people together to speak openly about the challenges of implementing policy and delivering services in both jurisdictions.



### Creating connections and building relationships.

The review highlights CES's investment in relationships and networks which create valuable connections. Networks were established to bring together communities of practitioners and policy makers, to exchange learning and knowledge, and to provide ways of sharing evidence.

CES has worked with a number of organisations, including large statutory providers which were, and continue to implement significant change initiatives. The review found CES's work to be most effective when there was a high level of engagement, and where relationships developed over time. Collaboration and co-design approaches helped to generate buy in and inform tools and resources to leave behind once CES's work was concluded.

CES's work with Tusla the Child and Family Agency involved the development of an evidence informed toolkit – combining learning from research, practice wisdom, and evidence informed tools and resources. The toolkit was co-produced with the Agency and presented in a format that was easy for social workers to access, understand and apply.

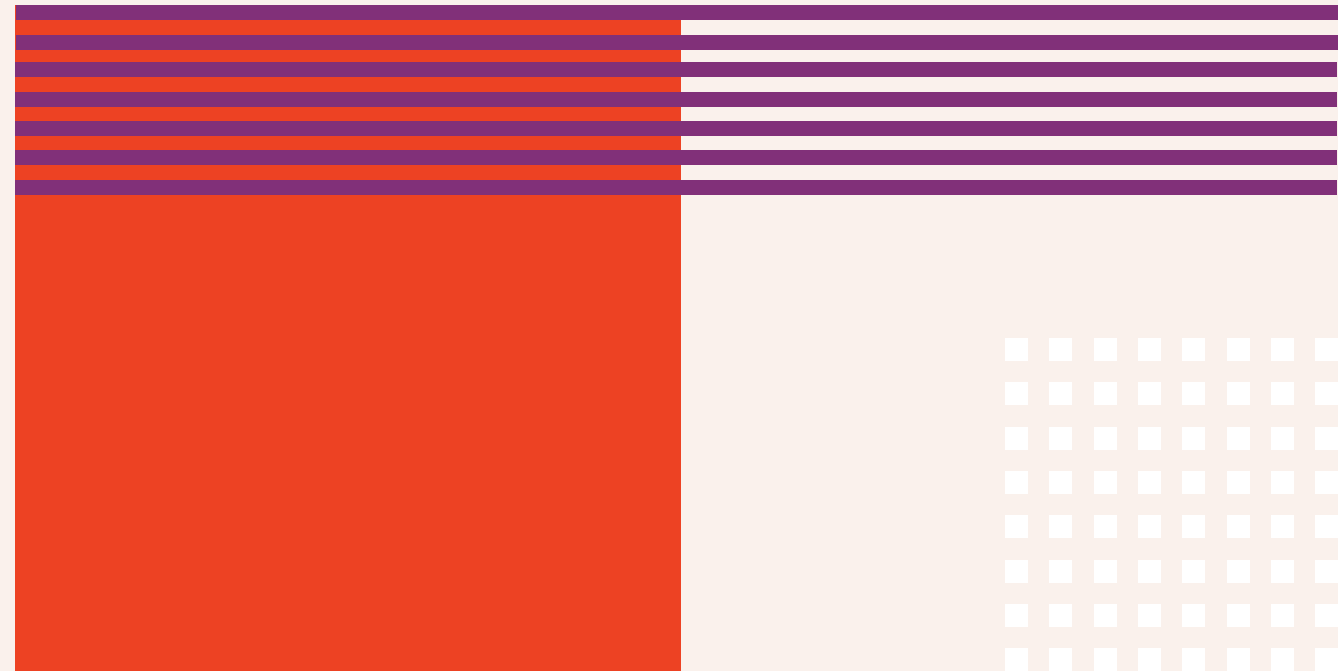
### Joining up the system.

CES is described in the review as 'a bridging mechanism' and as a 'broker, linking research policy and practice.' Interviews highlighted a potential role for CES as 'the glue in the middle' of the system, which could support collaboration and joined up thinking. Work linking the disciplines of research, policy and practice was seen as a unique feature of CES. Resources produced to support whole of government approaches and collaborative working were identified as relevant to the current needs of policy makers.

### Being positioned inside and outside the system.

The rapid pace of growth and information flow and the complexity of challenges highlights the need and demand for reliable sources of objective analysis, particularly for policy makers. CES was seen as a critical friend, an independent perspective with similar values, with a focus on evidence. Policy makers valued the questions and challenge presented when working with CES, and highlighted CES's work on supporting leadership development, and data driven decision making. Flexible approaches such as the secondment and embedding of staff were seen as a way for CES to create a 'footprint and traction within the system.'

Further details about themes emerging are available in the longer report.



## Stories of Change

### Supporting change that lasts in mental health services in Ireland

*'Two years into the process, any initial scepticism around the approach has been replaced by growing ownership across the service.' (Yvonne O'Neill, Mental Health Services - Head of Performance, Contracting and Improvement in Community Operations, HSE.)*

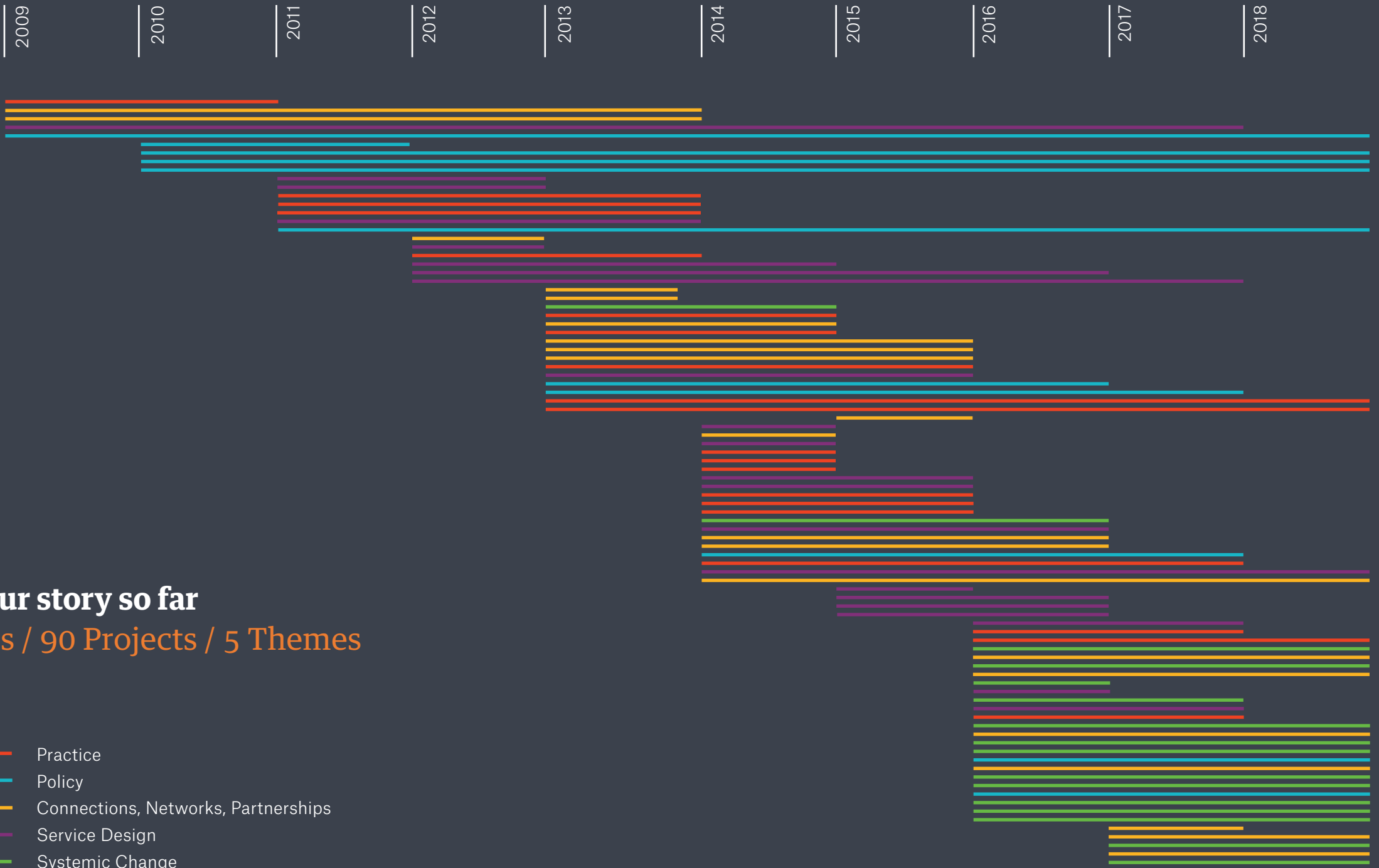
In 2014 the HSE Mental Health Division engaged CES to establish a Programme Management Office. The PMO was set up to provide a structured, sustainable framework to support transformational change in mental health services. CES recruited a small, multidisciplinary team and located them in the HSE Mental Health Division.

Important aspects of the programme included governance, using evidence, engaging service users and recognising that everyone has a part to play in service improvement. A Mental Health Change Board was set up to authorise new projects and make decisions about resources.

Building capacity for change within services was a critical part of CES's approach. CES developed, designed and customised methodologies, training, tools and resource templates based on evidence and the needs of services. This means that new approaches are sustainable as the partnership draws to a close.

Over the lifetime of the partnership CES worked with services on projects which address a range of complex challenges in mental health services. The new governance approach has been adopted as the preferred way of working. This service improvement approach will also inform change in the delivery of community health services. All of these developments support the professionals who design and deliver services, and will ultimately benefit people using services, their families and carers.





## CES - Our story so far

10 Years / 90 Projects / 5 Themes

- Practice
- Policy
- Connections, Networks, Partnerships
- Service Design
- Systemic Change



**For Policy.  
For Practice.  
For Impact.**

The Centre for Effective Services (CES) is a Company Limited by Guarantee. Registered in Ireland at 9 Harcourt Street, Dublin 2. Company registration number 451580; Charity number 19438.

[www.effectiveservices.org](http://www.effectiveservices.org)

#### **IRELAND**

CES Dublin Office  
9 Harcourt Street  
Dublin 2  
Telephone: +353 (0) 1 416 0500  
[office@effectiveservices.org](mailto:office@effectiveservices.org)

#### **NORTHERN IRELAND**

CES Belfast Office  
Forestview, Purdy's Lane  
Belfast BT8 7AR  
Telephone: +44 (0) 02890 648632  
[nioffice@effectiveservices.org](mailto:nioffice@effectiveservices.org)

[twitter](#) / [linkedin](#) / [youtube](#)