



Ireland: “Our Public Service 2020” The public service of the future for everyone in Ireland

Ireland, which was nicknamed the “Celtic Tiger” from 1994 to 2008 (thanks to an average annual growth rate of 5.9%), is set to post growth of 3.5% in 2018.¹ Between 2008 and 2015, however, the country had to cope with a complicated economic situation. This period coincided with a strong determination within the administration that gave rise to two successive public service reform plans (2011-13 and 2014-16).² The second plan received a very positive assessment from the OECD.³ The recommendations in the OECD’s report have laid the groundwork for launching “Our Public Service 2020”, a bold and innovative new project.⁴

The success of the second public service reform plan (2014-16) paved the way for “Our Public Service 2020”

The Irish government regards the transformation of the public service (whose total headcount stood at 315,000 in September 2017⁵) as a means for boosting economic growth. During the first phase of reforms (2011-13), public service quality was maintained despite a reduction in both headcount and budgets.⁶ The second phase went even further by focusing on operational goals. By the end of 2016, 90% of the 227 measures included in the plan had been implemented.

Greater emphasis was placed on user satisfaction. Alternative delivery methods for public services were tested, including methods that involve civil society and the private sector. For example, the JobPath programme was launched;⁷ the Department of Social Protection commissioned this programme aimed at helping the unemployment find work. eGovernment services have been rolled out to the public thanks to the creation of the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO), the drafting of an ICT strategy and the implementation of an 18-measure action plan.⁸ The Public Services Card, a smartcard, now provides access to many public services.⁹ A one-stop shop strategy has been launched with the creation of Local Enterprise Offices serving VSEs and SMEs, and the creation of Tusla, the Child & Family Agency.

This policy of seeking efficiency gains continued along the lines of the first reform plan with the implementation of pooled services: the civil servant payroll shared service,¹⁰ PeoplePoint (to manage human resources and pensions),¹¹ and MyPay (to manage local government payrolls).¹² Moreover, the new Office of Government

¹ <https://www.tresor.economie.gouv.fr/Articles/2017/11/09/eire-eco-novembre-2017>

² <http://reformplan.per.gov.ie/2014/downloads/downloads.html>

³ <http://www.oecd.org/gov/ireland-public-sector-reform-plan-assessment.pdf>

⁴ <http://www.per.gov.ie/en/public-service-reform/>

⁵ <http://ops2020.gov.ie/resources/Our-Public-Service-2020-WEB.pdf>

⁶ From 2008 to 2014, a 10% reduction in the number of public servants and a 20% cut in the total public service payroll.

⁷ <http://www.seetec.ie/jobpath>

⁸ <http://www.per.gov.ie/en/public-service-reform/>

⁹ <https://psc.gov.ie/>

¹⁰ <http://www.per.gov.ie/en/howlin-launches-innovative-payroll-shared-service-centre-in-tullamore/>

¹¹ <http://www.per.gov.ie/en/peoplepoint-whats-the-point/>

¹² https://merriestreet.ie/en/News-Room/Releases/Minister_Alán_Kelly_T_D_launches_MyPay_-_payroll_and_superannuation_shared_service_for_local_authorities.html

Procurement generated savings of €300m as at end 2016.¹³ A digital registry of public property is expected to improve the management of public property. In the budgetary field, performance budgeting is ramping up and accrual basis accounting is set to be introduced gradually. Many measures have been implemented in terms of transparency and open data, and these measures are worth continuing.

None of these systems would have been possible without major changes to the civil service. This is why the Civil Service Renewal Plan was initiated in October 2014. Various measures were planned: a survey of civil servants' commitment to the civil service, the creation of a Civil Service Management Board, and setting up rewards for excellence and innovation. The Plan's collaborative approach and the strengthened transparency and efficiency make it a key factor for the reform's success.¹⁴

All of these measures have paid off – a report by Ireland's Institute of Public Administration¹⁵ ranks the Irish civil service number one in Europe in terms of professionalism and neutrality. According to the research referenced in this report, Ireland ranks No. 6 for the quality of its public administration and No. 5 for public opinion regarding the implementation of governmental programmes.

A public consultation makes “Our Public Service 2020” (OPS 2020) truly inclusive

One of the recommendations laid out in the OECD report was to assess the results of this reform.¹⁶ Therefore, for OPS 2020, six target outcomes are clearly indicated: improving client/citizen satisfaction, increasing trust in the administration, expanding the use of digital techniques, making public action more effective, enhancing the quality of public services, and building the engagement of civil servants.¹⁷ OPS 2020 is underpinned by three pillars:¹⁸

- Delivering for the public: Various metrics will enable services to be assessed. These metrics must be digital, high-quality and accessible to everyone. Increased communication with the public is sought. Commitment and results in terms of efficiency are required (e.g. better value for money, shared services).
- Innovating for the future: A true culture of innovation must infuse the administration with the creation of networks involving researchers and the private sector, and participation in the research efforts of international innovative laboratories (such as the Observatory of Public Sector Innovation). In keeping with the recommendations of the OECD report, the use of public data must be optimised in an economic perspective. More broadly, the public service must perfect its strategic planning capacity, break down silos, encourage collaborative work, enhance project management, and develop the evaluative culture.
- Developing the people and organisations of the public service: Ireland's public service is faced with several challenges, including a wave of retirements over the next five years that will raise the risk of a substantial loss of knowledge. Many projects will be launched: developing public expertise, setting up talent management programmes, opening recruitment campaigns, facilitating internal mobility and promotions, fostering diversity, boosting the commitment of public employees, and updating the values of the public service.

What makes OPS 2020 unique is the wide-scale public consultation about it. Members of the public were invited to submit proposals either via a special portal on the Ministry's website or by email.¹⁹ Twenty-three submissions including numerous initiatives were received from members of the public, non-profits or companies,²⁰ facilitating ownership of this new reform plan by the Irish public as a whole.

Virginie Ma-Dupont

¹³ <http://www.oecd.org/gov/ireland-public-sector-reform-plan-assessment.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.irishtimes.com/news/politics/renewing-the-civil-service-how-the-new-plan-could-hammer-home-accountability-transparency-and-efficiency-1.1996799>

¹⁵ https://www.ipa.ie/fileupload/ResearchPapers/PublicSectorTrends_2017.pdf

¹⁶ <http://www.oecd.org/gov/ireland-public-sector-reform-plan-assessment.pdf>

¹⁷ <http://www.ops2020.gov.ie/>

¹⁸ <https://per.consultation.ie/en/consultation/our-public-service-2020>

¹⁹ https://merrionstreet.ie/en/News-Room/Releases/Public_Consultation_on_third_Public_Service_Reform_Plan.html

²⁰ <https://per.consultation.ie/en/node/8/submissions>