Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Making Innovation Real
Our Public Service.
Delivering Today, Shaping Tomorrow.

Prepared by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
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A strategy for embedding innovation in the Irish Public Service

Making Innovation Real | Our Public Service. Delivering Today, Shaping Tomorrow

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Foreword

I am delighted to publish Ireland's inaugural Public Service Innovation Strategy, which is intended to guide our efforts in fostering and sustaining innovation across our Public Service.

The Covid-19 pandemic has forced governments around the world to pivot rapidly and change the way they organise their activities to meet the needs of the public. Ireland's Public Service has responded admirably in this transformed environment, quickly developing new channels to deliver services to citizens, whilst simultaneously taking measures to mitigate the pervasive impact of the virus on our economy and society. As we plan our recovery from this unprecedented economic shock, it is imperative that we identify ways to sustain the enhanced culture of innovation that has featured prominently across our Public Service since the onset of this pandemic.

Innovation is about finding new means of delivering services and policy responses in ways that can add value to the people we serve. This value can take many forms - greater access to services; more efficient, effective and intuitive interventions; increased transparency and trust in our policy responses or; divesting our organisations of unnecessary, cumbersome or antiquated processes and systems.

In taking stock of where we are now, and where we need to go in terms of our innovation ambition, we have identified four key priority areas that we intend to address to achieve our vision of a truly world-class, innovative public service:

- First and foremost, Public Service Bodies should seek to put users at the heart of the services they perform and the policy responses they craft, in order to enhance user experience. This will involve engaging with the citizen to know their needs and designing solutions that reflect the user's perspective, using digital solutions that are informed by the right data.

- Secondly, we must develop a permanent culture where staff are continuously empowered and equipped to innovate. This will involve building skillsets at all levels and developing the right supports and structures that 'hardwire' innovation as the norm in our Public Service.

- Thirdly, we need to share successful innovations across our organisations so that they are adopted or adapted through the amplifying mechanisms of collaboration. We also need to look elsewhere - to other Governments abroad as well as to industry and our own vibrant start-up ecosystem – in order to foster mutually beneficial partnerships.

- Finally, this pandemic has taught us a number of valuable lessons about the need to anticipate change and secure long-lasting transformation. In order to move forward, we need to include different voices in our governance of innovation in public services, and increase our experimentation with new technologies and emerging policy approaches.

The response to Covid-19 has highlighted the ingenuity and resourcefulness of our public servants. This Pandemic has seen unprecedented levels of collaboration, inventiveness and organisational agility combined with grit and determination. These are markers of a truly innovative Public Service and I am confident that the implementation of this Innovation Strategy will help us to sustain this into the future.

Michael McGrath, TD
Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform

Introduction

Since launching 'Our Public Service 2020', excellent progress has been achieved in driving initiatives that focus on the three core pillars of the framework: *Delivering for Our Public, Innovating for Our Future* and *Developing Our People and Organisations*. However, as the recent pandemic has taught us, we must continuously redouble our efforts if we are to achieve our vision of being a world-class public service that is instinctively innovative.

Over the last number of years, we have identified and actioned a number of key initiatives designed to promote a culture of innovation in the Public Service. Much of this programme of work was a direct result of the in-depth research that was undertaken culminating in the report '*Enabling Innovation in the Irish Public Service*' which was published in November 2018. A central recommendation in this report was to develop a strategy to embed innovation across the Irish Public Service and to provide guidance and tools for our Public Service organisations to incorporate innovation into their own corporate strategies and business plans.

The Covid-19 pandemic and the subsequent shift in the global economic landscape reminded us that we are often required to pivot dramatically and quickly change how we serve our public. This has been clearly evident across all industries during the pandemic and has been equally true for the Public Service. There have been sustained levels of resilience and commitment to continue providing services to our citizens. This is innovation. We adapted, displayed creativity, collaborated and prototyped quickly, in order to ensure our citizens were supported. Whilst the pandemic has disrupted - and will continue to disrupt - our lives, we will use this disruptive force as a catalyst to continue applying innovation to our daily roles. The implementation of this strategy will enable the Public Service to continue delivering high quality services to our citizens that are efficient, integrated and inclusive.

This strategy was developed collectively, involving public servants from a range of different organisations. Its purpose is to embed innovation across our Public Service to deliver now and to help shape the future, positioning Ireland to become a world leader in public service innovation.

I encourage all Public Service bodies to make use of the supports and tools published alongside this strategy to assist them in driving a culture of innovation within their organisations. This will ensure alignment to the overarching vision and key priorities articulated in this document.

Finally, this strategy was developed in conjunction with four pilot organisations across the Civil and Public Service over the course of seven months. We also received valuable and insightful contributions from practitioners of innovation in the Public Service drawn from the Action Team on Public Service Innovation, which is coordinated jointly by the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation and Enterprise Ireland. I would like to take this opportunity to pay tribute to all those involved for their time, energy and commitment, especially in light of the exceptional circumstances which prevailed throughout the development of this strategy.

Robert Watt
Secretary General
Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

Strategy Overview

Innovation Definition

Innovation as a concept can often be misconstrued or misinterpreted which can lead to poor implementation. To provide consistency of approach, we define innovation as:

> "the creation of a new, viable offering that adds value"

Innovation Vision

Ireland's Public Service Innovation Vision will be to:

> "Harness the power of innovation to deliver world-class public services in Ireland"

This vision will unite the Public Service to achieve the priorities and goals set out in our strategy to 'make innovation real'.

Priorities

In order to achieve our vision, we will focus on four key priority areas. Each priority is documented along with the reasons why it was chosen, and an accompanying case study taken from one of the pilot organisations that were used to inform this strategy.

Goals

In order to achieve our priorities, we will align our efforts to eight key goals. To make this strategy specific, attainable and focused, we have identified two goals under each priority.

Vision "Harness the power of innovation to deliver world-class public services in Ireland"

Priority 1
Citizen-centric Innovation

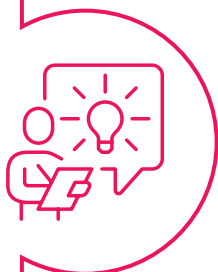Put citizens and users at the centre of innovation to enhance their experience of public services

Goals

1.1 Listen and engage with citizens and users

1.2 Design and deliver integrated and easy to use services

Priority 2
Culture of Innovation

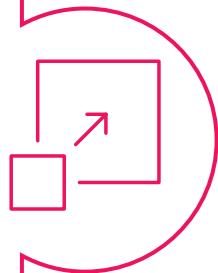Create a culture where all staff are inspired, empowered and enabled to innovate

Goals

2.1 Lead with vision, empower staff and challenge the norm

2.2 Equip staff with the skills, mindset and tools to innovate

Priority 3
Scale up Innovation

Work across sectors and organisations to optimise efficiency by scaling innovations across the Public Service

Goals

3.1 Connect and collaborate across the ecosystem to scale successful innovations

3.2 Capture and share insights, knowledge and lessons learnt

Priority 4
Transformative Innovation

Drive innovation across the Public Service by pioneering change and long-term transformation

Goals

4.1 Develop strategic insights for future trends and requirements

4.2 Support and promote policy for innovation, digital transformation and new ways of working through experimentation, testing and continuous improvement

Priority 1

Citizen-centric Innovation

Put citizens and users at the centre of innovation to enhance their experience of public services

Integral to this strategy is the importance of providing high quality, effective and relevant services to our citizens. Therefore, the citizen should be kept at the core of the decision-making, design and delivery processes and innovations should be developed with this mindset.

MAKE INNOVATION REAL

Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine (DAFM)
Customer Engagement Contact Centre

PRE-INNOVATION

The challenge for DAFM was to merge two main contact centres, which served two different functions with voice calls as the main channel of communication for circa 160,000 clients, into a single Customer Engagement Contact Centre(CECC). The aim of this project was to enhance the service provided by leveraging the significant investment DAFM had made in new technology and ensuring DAFM's front-line contact centres meet the needs of its diverse customer base.

POST-INNOVATION

The Customer Engagement Contact Centre system was established which has, for the first time in the Irish Civil Service and globally, integrated three major technology platforms to develop a multi-channel approach to provide an enhanced customer service to all relevant stakeholders.

KEY INNOVATION LEARNINGS

Both customers and staff benefit from a holistic, streamlined Customer Relationship Management system that effectively meets the needs of all users. The importance of knowing your customer is extremely important when developing a service. This was noted in this project which identified that for many customers, telephone contact was the preferred choice. Therefore, instead of providing solely 'online' services, the Department also provides a telephone offering in order to cater to the many customer groups they serve.

HOW THIS ALIGNS TO PRIORITY 1

The success of this project was a direct reflection of the innovative design process. The project team listened to their customer and designed a service that enhanced their experience with the Department. This highlights the benefits of placing the citizen at the centre of innovation to provide them with the best possible service.

Goals | Citizen-centric Innovation

Goal 1.1 Listen and engage with citizens and users

⚙ Action	❓ Rationale	📋 Success Criteria
Citizen Engagement Explore and test new ways of engaging with the public and others to consult on the design and delivery of proposed and existing services. This should be done in line with best international practice and include design thinking, service design and customer journey mapping.	The needs and expectations of the citizen are changing with emerging technologies and trends. Moreover, practical, engaging and interactive communication methods are becoming increasingly popular amongst younger generations. It is important to evolve and engage with the citizen in order to learn from them, identify their requirements and provide the best services possible.	• Increased citizen engagement metrics. • Services designed and reviewed based on reliable citizen engagement metrics and data.
Service Delivery Undertake an awareness campaign encouraging Public Service organisations to leverage customer-facing employees to use their unique position to capture feedback from customers. Use this information to identify ways to improve services.	Insights and knowledge gathered from public servants who operate and understand the delivery of services is critical to their continuous development and improvement.	• A centralised user experience and service design capability established to enable organisations to improve service delivery. • Successful innovation projects across the Public Service using user experience and service design expertise.

Goal 1.2. Design and deliver integrated and easy to use services

⚙ Action	❓ Rationale	📋 Success Criteria
Promoting Digital Support the Public Service ICT strategy, the forthcoming National Digital Strategy and the roll-out of unique identifiers and common datasets for enhanced service design and the reorganisation of work. Examine the feasibility of accelerating an assisted digital service through the provision of 'one stop shops' for key, high volume services.	Delivering integrated and easy-to-use services requires the proper and effective use of data. This will provide an improved experience for the user and the public servant. Furthermore, appropriate digital infrastructure is required to better equip organisations facing unprecedented future opportunities and challenges.	• Increase in services being transacted online. • Increased integration across online services provided by different Public Service organisations. • Greater customer engagement.
Harness Data Use data as an enabler in line with the National Data Strategy by promoting key datasets, such as the PPSN and Eircode, in the design or redesign of public services. This will also require an increased appetite from Public Service organisations to participate in data-sharing agreements in addition to publishing greater levels of open data.	There is a heightened expectation from the citizens for services to be integrated, instantaneous and easily accessible.	• Number of services using core datasets. • National Data Infrastructure maturity level. • Open data league tables.

Priority 2

Culture of Innovation

Create a culture where all staff are inspired, empowered and enabled to innovate

In order to enable a culture of innovation within the Public Service, it is important that our people possess the capabilities, knowledge and mindset to innovate every day. This includes possessing relevant skills, understanding the supports available and feeling inspired by leadership to apply an innovative lens to their everyday roles.

MAKE INNOVATION REAL

LGMA | South Dublin County Council Waste Permit Inspections

PRE-INNOVATION

South Dublin County Council has in excess of 40 permitted waste facilities. The Local Authority's Waste Enforcement Unit is required to complete multiple inspections of facilities. Due to social distancing restrictions implemented by the Covid-19 pandemic, physical inspections were not possible.

POST-INNOVATION

South Dublin County Council developed a procedure to carry out remote inspections of waste facilities whilst maintaining the integrity of the inspection outcome. The inspection utilised drones, smart phones, video charts, video inspection and email. To facilitate this the permit holder is advised a drone flight of their facility will take place. Following the drone flight, a video chat is held with the permit operator to discuss the drone images. Proof of records is provided by email by the permit holder. Where required, the permit holder carries out a walkthrough of the site using the camera on their smart phone to allow Waste Enforcement Officers to inspect areas which cannot be captured by drone.

KEY INNOVATION LEARNINGS

The use of technologies such as drones and video chat allowed a virtual tour of the site without the Waste Enforcement Officers entering.

HOW THIS ALIGNS TO PRIORITY 2

Covid-19 has caused global disruption across all industries. As with many other organisations, social restriction measures significantly impacted the level of service provision to citizens. The necessity to innovate during the pandemic highlighted the resilience, agility and innovative capability of public servants to adjust their routine and work remotely for the first time in their careers. Whilst the pandemic acted as a catalyst for innovation, it demonstrates that public servants can work together to achieve a common purpose once provided with the proper skills and supports in a culture that encourages innovation.

Goals | Culture of Innovation

Goal 2.1 Lead with vision, empower staff and challenge the norm

Action	Rationale	Success Criteria
Leadership Continue to offer ongoing professional development to leaders throughout the Public Service and formalise innovation as a core competency of leadership roles in the Public Service.	It is important that leadership across the Public Service understand and are aware of the necessity for innovation. This is essential to inspire staff and create an environment where public servants are unafraid to challenge the norm, try new ideas and create the conditions for their organisation to excel in a dynamic environment.	• Number of Public and Civil Service leaders upskilled in innovation. • Improved innovation metrics in staff sentiment measures, such as the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey.
Organisational Strategy Support all Public Service organisations to include innovation in their statements of strategy and business plans.	Developing an innovation strategy for the Irish Public Service is essential to make innovation real. It is equally important for DPER to provide supports to Public Service organisations to develop their own innovation commitments that align to the overarching vision. This will enable Public Service organisations to be able to respond to the ever-changing needs and expectations of their customers.	• Number of Public/Civil Service organisations with innovation ambitions clearly outlined in their corporate documents, strategies and plans.

Goal 2.2 Equip staff with the skills, mindset and tools to innovate

Action	Rationale	Success Criteria
Structures Embed innovation criteria into the recruitment process, ongoing performance expectations, personal development plans and promotional opportunities.	Being accountable for innovation activity, understanding the importance of having this mindset and being constantly reminded of it through the various structures will help create a culture of innovation and equip staff with the skills and mindset to respond to future challenges and opportunities.	• Recruitment and promotion campaigns clearly reference innovation as a requirement in the Public Service. • Public servants demonstrating innovation competencies daily and are assessed on this criterion in performance reviews.
Centralised Supports Grow and improve the centralised Public Service innovation supports, including the Public Service Innovation Fund and innovation recognition ceremonies. Facilitate learning and development supports to Public Service organisations through an easy-to-access procurement framework.	Developing centralised innovation supports will facilitate innovation and collaboration across the Public Service. Providing practical steps and methodologies will ensure innovation projects result in increased collaboration, reduced silos and optimal service efficiencies.	• Number of fund applications. • Number of successful projects supported by the fund. • Successful establishment of a public service innovation recognition event. • Number of engagements on Our Public Service website. • Number of innovation learning interventions completed by Public Service organisations.

Priority 3
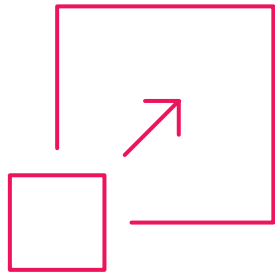
Scale up Innovation

Work across sectors and organisations to optimise efficiency by scaling innovations across the Public Service

Whilst developing innovative projects and skills locally helps to meet priorities 1 and 2, it is vital that this knowledge is shared across the Public Service. This might include sharing your learnings with other Public Service organisations who experience similar opportunities and challenges as you; or sharing a new system across an eco-system. Effective collaboration can result in innovation scaling, co-creation of improved processes, reduced inefficiencies and new partnerships. By scaling innovation and collaborating across sectors, the Public Service will be able to work together to achieve our vision.

MAKE INNOVATION REAL

The Courts Service | Jury Summons Centralisation

PRE-INNOVATION

Since its inception in 1976, each Court office around the country processed their individual Jury summonses. This was paper-heavy, time-consuming and mundane for those involved.

POST-INNOVATION

Jury summons were centralised in a single office which improved efficiency, reduced labour requirements and enabled staff to complete higher value-adding tasks which in turn, improved customer service and job satisfaction.

KEY INNOVATION LEARNINGS

Through a combination of 'good timing' and communication across Public Service organisations, the Courts Service identified an opportunity with the Revenue Commissioners' Printing Unit who had capacity to print all jury summons notices free of charge. This reduced costs, alleviated concerns surrounding working with external parties and resulted in a new partnership all of which demonstrates the importance of communication across the Public Service when innovating.

HOW THIS ALIGNS TO PRIORITY 3

The effective communication between the Courts Service and Revenue resulted in a 'win-win' outcome. The Courts Service were able to print jury summons centrally whilst Revenue were able to use their internal printing facilities to full capacity. This solution was the result of a personal connection between a Courts Service staff member and a Revenue staff member. This demonstrates that the smallest link can often result in great outcomes. Connecting and collaborating across the Public Service is key to successful innovation.

Goals | Scale up Innovation

Goal 3.1 Connect and collaborate across the ecosystem to scale successful innovations

Action	Rationale	Success Criteria
Collaboration Assemble diverse groups to address key challenges. Collaborate with the wider ecosystem (industry, research, international etc.) to encourage co-developed solutions using mechanisms like innovation sprints and hackathons.	Providing the opportunity for collaboration across the Public Service, and with others from outside the Public Service, will encourage co-creation, help establish new partnerships, allow innovation to scale up and provide solutions that are tailored to the needs and expectations of our public.	• Number of innovation sprints and hackathons held. • Number of successful solutions identified and appropriate mechanism to track implementation.
Innovation space Establish a dedicated space for the Public Service that can be used to drive innovation in both policy and services and to foster collaboration.	Providing the physical space for collaboration across Public Service organisations can result in the creation of solutions that may not have been considered otherwise. A creative, open and safe space can provide Public Service organisations and their stakeholders with the opportunity to think differently, challenge themselves and create innovative solutions.	• Innovation space established. • Activity outputs of innovation space.

Goal 3.2 Capture and share insights, knowledge and lessons learned

Action	Rationale	Success Criteria
Scale Support public servants and Public Service organisations to collaborate and scale their innovations across the Public Service through greater levels of engagement.	Providing the necessary channels to enable Public Service organisations to collaborate, learn from one another and develop partnerships will help to scale innovation across the Public Service. Supporting greater engagement and collaboration will better equip the Public Service to respond and operate effectively in a dynamic environment.	• Virtual network sessions established to engage regional offices. • Development of smaller, focused networks as required. • Public Service Innovation Week activity and outputs. • Our Public Service website offerings further developed.
Knowledge Sharing Leverage the knowledge from Public Service organisations who have implemented successful innovations to assist those elsewhere who require a similar skill set or expertise.	Cataloguing organisational experiences and expertise will help build innovation-specific skills to address challenges and opportunities faced by Public Service organisations.	• Number of referrals from internal experts and consultants. • Database of internal experts and detailed case studies.

Priority 4
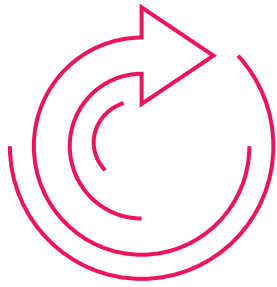
Transformative Innovation

Drive innovation across the Public Service by pioneering change and long-term transformation

A key aspect to innovation is always thinking ahead and looking to the future. It is important that as a nation, we are aware of emerging global technologies and trends that will impact our society and economy. Having this strategic foresight will enable us to achieve our vision of becoming a world-class innovation leader.

MAKE INNOVATION REAL

Department of Public Expenditure and Reform | Robotic Process Automation in the Public Service

PRE-INNOVATION

Many organisations in the Irish Public Service are replete with processes that are rules-based and computer-oriented. These tasks can be time-consuming, costly and tedious for staff to perform. Many of these processes involve numerous systems and applications that are difficult to integrate using conventional methods and therefore people are used to execute these tasks instead.

POST-INNOVATION

The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform undertook a pilot programme to test the viability of Robotic Process Automation ("RPA") in four Civil Service organisations. Following successful outcomes, the Department collaborated with the Office of Government Procurement to put in place a procurement framework in 2019 to enable Public Service organisations to quickly and easily deploy RPA to automate expensive and mundane tasks. The Public Service now has approximately 15 bodies using this technology including a number of centres of excellence in larger organisations. More Public Service organisations are now exploring the potential for RPA to help make their services quicker, cheaper and more accurate.

KEY INNOVATION LEARNINGS

Experimenting with technology is about more than capitalising on the capabilities of the technology itself. Implementing RPA involved questioning the value of processes; understanding how lean they are and how they could be improved before being automated. The approach taken also emphasised the need to upskill our own people to deploy this solution. It also became clear that using national procurement mechanisms can help to drive innovation.

HOW THIS ALIGNS TO PRIORITY 4

The success of this programme is a consequence of a willingness to test and experiment with new technology as well as embracing new ways of approaching common challenges faced across the Public Service. Deploying RPA by Public Service organisations was endorsed as policy in a recent Government Decision on advancing digital public services. This will enable long-term transformation in how services are delivered by supplementing our human workforce with a virtual workforce of the future.

Goals | Transformative Innovation

Goal 4.1 Develop strategic insights for future trends and requirements

⚙ Action	❓ Rationale	☑ Success Criteria
Anticipatory Innovation Set up a foresight function to scan national and international solutions, trends and emerging possibilities to help inform and guide future innovations.	In order to be a world-class leader in innovation, it is important to know what is occurring nationally and internationally with regards to future trends and emerging innovations in order to remain current in an ever-changing world.	• Emerging trends are captured and being used in the Public Service as appropriate.
Innovation Board Establish an Innovation Board for the Public Service with a mix of public servants and others from outside the Public Service to provide strategic vision, oversight and guidance to the Public Service's innovation function.	The Innovation Board will monitor the effective implementation of this strategy. This Board will also play a key role in challenging the Irish Public service on innovation activity and policy.	• Innovation Board is established with a mixture of Private and Public Sector representatives.

Goal 4.2 Support and promote policy for innovation, digital transformation and new ways of working through experimentation, testing and continuous improvement

⚙ Action	❓ Rationale	☑ Success Criteria
Technology Experimentation Promote the testing of new technologies by providing guides to their potential application in the Public Service. Support the GovTech Action plan by devising a mechanism for the safe and legal application of new technologies in Public Services.	Being 'digitally ready' is important when striving to be a world-class leader in innovation. Having the blueprints ready for the implementation of future innovations and technology is essential in order to continue delivering high quality services to our customers.	• Range of new technologies adopted in the Public Service. • Number of guidance materials produced.
Innovation Policy Office Establish a challenge-based Innovation Policy Office which works in tandem with the Innovation Board.	Providing this capability will demonstrate Ireland's commitment to becoming a world-class leader in innovation. It will also provide a 'safe space' for public servants to engage in more calculated risk taking to develop new solutions reflective of our customers' expectations.	• Office established. • Number of challenges commenced.

Implementation

The implementation of this strategy will be under the remit of the Reform and Innovation Division of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Progress will be reviewed as a component of the forthcoming Public Service Reform and Development Framework.