# Improving Public Service Delivery

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# Foreword

This paper is one of a series commissioned by the Committee for Public Management Research. The Committee is developing a comprehensive research programme designed to serve the needs of the future development of the Irish public service. Committee members come from the Departments of finance, Environment and Local Government, Health and Children, Taoiseach, Public Enterprise, as well as from Trinity College Dublin, University College Dublin and the Institute of Public Administration. The research is undertaken for the Committee by the Research Division at the Institute of Public Administration.

This series aims to prompt discussion and debate on topical issues of particular interest or concern. Papers may outline experience, both national and international, in dealing with a particular issue. Or they may be more conceptual in nature, prompting the development of new ideas on public management issues. The papers are not intended to set out an official position on the topic under scrutiny. Rather, the intention is to identify current thinking and best practice.

We would very much welcome comments on this paper, as well as on public management research more generally. To ensure the discussion papers and wider research programme of the Committee for Public Management Research are relevant to managers and staff, we need to hear from you. What do you think of the issues being raised? Are there other topics you would like to see researched?

Research into the problems, solutions and successes of public management processes, and the way organisations can best adapt in a

changing environment have much to contribute to good management and are a vital element in the public service renewal process. The Committee for Public Management Research intends to provide a service to people working in public organisations by enhancing the knowledge base on public management issues.

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# Improving Public Service Delivery

# Part One:
# Background and Overview

*1.1 Structure of the paper*

This discussion paper comprises ten linked parts. These are as follows:

- After summarising the paper's structure, *Part One* outlines the scope of the current study, its purpose and terms of reference.

- In *Part Two,* some key definitional and conceptual issues are introduced and discussed because they are fundamental to the understanding of efforts to improve public service delivery systems. Important distinctions are made between the factors influencing the delivery of services in the public and private sectors.

- Within this context, *Part Three* draws upon previous research evidence, including that based on comparative crossnational studies, to define and discuss some of the most frequently used terms for different types of *users* of public services: namely *clients, customers, consumers* and *citizens*. These differences in terminology are then explored, as well as their important implications for serviceprovider relationships, and used to develop a broad conceptual framework for the systematic analysis of the development and implementation of improved service delivery systems.

- Having clarified the terminology, and identified some of the important issues to be addressed, *Part Four* uses this framework to analyse international experiences in the development of public service delivery systems. Some of the key attributes of a quality customer service organisation are also identified.

- *Part Five* establishes the national policy context and background to current Irish government initiatives which aim to improve delivery systems within the public service. It summarises the main developments to date.

- Drawing upon national and international case study evidence, *Parts Six* to *Nine* go on to analyse: (i) the charter approach to the promotion of improved public service delivery; (ii) initiatives to improve the integration of services provided within and between public service organisations; (iii) innovative approaches to public consultation/ involvement in the development of these services; and (iv) the implications for public service organisations of the reorientation and cultural change required to focus on meeting customer needs.

- Finally, *Part Ten* draws on these findings to identify constructive ways forward for the development of improved delivery systems within the Irish public service.

*1.2 Study purpose*

*Delivering Better Government* (DBG, 1996) states, at the outset, that:

> The central thrust of this Report is the achievement of an excellent service for the Government and for the public as customers ... at all levels, building on the good service that is provided at present. This is essential on social grounds because of the importance of the services provided by the Irish Civil Service to the well-being of the individual citizen and to the coherence of society as a whole. It is also essential for economic reasons because of the

importance for national competitiveness of the work of the Civil Service (1996).

Given its centrality to the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI) and its vital importance for the social and economic wellbeing of the country, the national significance of improving public service delivery systems has been reaffirmed by the Taoiseach:

> We must continue with this ongoing improvement programme in order to meet the challenges which are facing us as a country achieving and experiencing rapid economic and social development. Our Civil Service is central to our economic and social success now and in the future. We simply cannot afford not to embrace change. If we do not take up the opportunities offered by better performance management, better financial management and better information technology systems, then we will be failing our customers and clients and failing ourselves as professionals (Ahern, November 1997).

Given the importance of achieving tangible improvements in the quality of services delivered by the civil service to its external customers, the Committee for Public Management Research (CPMR) commissioned this study to both inform the process of change currently in hand and stimulate discussion of some of the key issues to be addressed in taking forward this aspect of the SMI and DBG.

The Committee agreed that:

- While the primary focus of developments to date under the SMI had been within the civil service, the study should also draw on and evaluate initiatives within the wider public service.

- In so doing, it should also be aware of the changing relationship between public, private and voluntary sectors in the delivery of services to external customers.

- Finally, it recognised that external customers are diverse in terms of their organisation, their socioeconomic characteristics and the demands they place on public services. In this context, the committee felt that the study should focus on the general public as external customers[1]. Although other bodies in the public, private and voluntary sectors are also very important, the nature of their customerprovider relationship is quite different from that with the general public. To have explored such relationships in depth would have widened the study's scope too much at this initial stage. However, in focusing on the general public, it was of course acknowledged that such a grouping is itself diverse in character.

*1.3 Study terms of reference*

With this focus in mind, the committee approved the following terms of reference for this first phase of the research:

1. To undertake a review of relevant national/international evidence evaluating the development, implementation, monitoring, review and cost of systems to improve the quality of services delivered by the civil service, local government and other appropriate organisations.

2. To consult with key national/international authorities experienced in the evaluation and/or delivery of such services in order to identify appropriate case studies and models of best practice.

3. To undertake in-depth appraisals of a number of those case studies in the Irish public service in order to both develop understanding by key change agents of the major issues to be addressed in the promotion of quality service delivery and provide models of best practice that could be transferable to other organisations.

Within this overall remit, it was agreed that, in terms of detailed analysis, this discussion paper should focus on a number of specific issues, in order to input as effectively as possible to the SMI process.

These specific issues were:

- different charter approaches to the promotion of the improved delivery of services to external customers;

- effective approaches to the integration of services provided within and between public service organisations, including the use of ITbased platforms;

- innovative approaches to public consultation/involvement, including Citizens' Juries;

- ways in which organisational cultures have been reoriented in order to adopt, as a primary focus, the meeting of customer needs; and

- the twoyear Action Plans prepared by departments/offices and, on the basis of best practice identified here and elsewhere, indicate practicable ways forward for the public service.

On the basis of the findings produced by this first phase, specific areas requiring more detailed analysis and investigation would form a second research phase to be commenced later in 1998.

# Part Two:
# Key Terms and Definitions

## *2.1 Introduction*

In operationalising the study's terms of reference, and in order to facilitate understanding of some of the complex and interlinked issues involved, it is important to define at the outset a number of the basic concepts and terminologies used by researchers and practitioners alike. For example, what is meant by the term *public service* and how do such services vary in different administrations, as well as over time? How do public services differ from privatesector services? What is the nature of the relationship between the service provider and the recipient of those public services? Is there a common understanding on who is to use these services? Are such users best seen as *clients, customers, consumers* or *citizens?* What implications do these different terminologies have for the changing nature of the relationship between the public service and its users?

## *2.2 What are public services?*

For this study, *public services* are defined as those services which are mainly, or completely, funded by taxation. As such, they can differ markedly from commercial private-sector services in a number of ways. These differences need to be both acknowledged and discussed, because of their potential implications for the development of delivery systems. Most typically, public services would include the following areas of public management: central and local government, the health

authorities, education, defence, justice/home affairs and noncommercial semistate organisations.

When drawing upon international research evidence, it is particularly important to appreciate that such a broad functional definition of the public service can vary both through space and over time. As Martin (1997) has observed, in relation to 'social public services' within the European Union (EU), there are significant definitional differences between public administrations in the EU member states and it is mistaken to regard public, private or voluntary services as discrete and noninteractive spheres of human activity. As any attempt at crossnational comparisons of services makes abundantly clear, the same activities (e.g. health or education) may be undertaken by either the public and/or private and/or voluntary sectors depending on the country concerned. With regard to the services provided, the relationship between these three sectors can also vary significantly.

As Flynn (1990) has observed, certain of the public services' established activities may be contracted out operationally, in some countries, to private firms but the delivery of such services may continue to be funded from taxation and remain governed by public service criteria. Examples of this type of arrangement would include the contracting out of local government services, such as refuse collection and local transport, to private companies, as well as the privatisation of certain central government functions, such as the prison service. This approach was a particular feature of the marketled drive to reform the provision of public services which was undertaken in a number of national and local administrations, particularly during the 1980s (see Part 4). In some situations, compulsory competitive tendering resulted in similar services still being provided by public service staff but on different terms and conditions of employment than those which applied before contracting out (see Escott and Whitfield, 1995).

While the number of separate organisations, at national level, involved in the delivery of public services may be large, many public

administrations are characterised by a comparatively small number of public service bodies which are responsible, either directly or indirectly, for handling the vast majority of contacts with the general public. For example, research undertaken in 1997, on behalf of the Department of the Taoiseach by *Irish Marketing Surveys* indicates that, while onethird of Irish adults had been in contact with one civil service department/office or another, over the previous twelve months, over 90 per cent of such contacts had been with just three organisations: the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, the Office of the Revenue Commissioners, or the Department of Agriculture and Food[2].

*2.3 How do public and private services differ?*

As already indicated, public services can differ significantly from commercial privatesector services in a number of ways. Murray (1990) has expressed this view emphatically:

> We hear less nowadays of the assertion that public affairs should be managed on the same lines as private business ... Public servants have to be careful that, in rebutting the assertion, they do not inadvertently give the impression that efficiency is either irrelevant or satisfactory in the public sector. But those who prescribe private sector efficiency as the remedy for public sector ills are demonstrating that they know little or nothing about the objectives and constraints of the public sector (p. 151).

It is important to outline such differences in objectives and constraints, not least because of their potential implications for the continued application of approaches to improved service delivery systems originating in the private sector to public service organisations. For instance, public services do not normally operate for financial profit or require immediate payment for goods or services prior to delivery. If public services are charged for, then they are not usually sold to customers at commercial prices set to produce profits (see Flynn, 1990).

Likewise, where private sector companies are contracted to public bodies for the provision of services, e.g. for the provision of transport to the general public, charges may be subsidised for social policy reasons. Clearly, such practices do not apply generally in the commercial private sector.

In addition to their primarily noncommercial character, public services are often distinguished by an absolute, or at least comparative, lack of competition in the normal market sense of seeking to entice customers away from their competitors or rival service providers. Indeed, public services are often monopolistic or oligopolistic. As a result, many of the basic features of a commercial marketplace are quite simply absent from the delivery of public services. In addition, given the regulatory role often performed by public services such as tax collection and law enforcement, not only are public services often monopolistic or oligopolistic in character, but they can also be mandatory.

In the public services, different guiding principles, such as equitable treatment and the allocation of resources according to need, pervade the processes of decisionmaking, management and provision. As a result, financial subventions may be given to the service providers (e.g. in transport) to ensure that such services are maintained, albeit at a reduced level, outside peak times and in less densely populated rural areas. Murphy (1997a) captures this issue extremely well:

> I want to stress that the principles of fairness and equity are most important when we come to examine the concept of quality in public administration. Of course efficiency and cost effectiveness are key elements, but unlike his/her counterpart in the private sector, the public service customer or client seldom has the choice of an alternative competitive supplier. Equality of treatment is, therefore, very important and should not be lost sight of when efficiency measures, including, for example, contracting out of public services are being implemented (p.2).

Fairness and equity are not normally indicative of the private sector. Within a commercial, marketled context, private sector companies would not normally be obliged, because of their primary obligations to provide financial returns to their shareholders, to maintain nonviable services to geographically or financially disadvantaged groups.

Within the public service system, a different culture also prevails internally. This can place demands upon the management of public service delivery systems which are not characteristic of the private sector. For example, public service managers often have to balance the needs of the general public as users, with accountability to their elected representatives. In addition, the demands of the mass media acting in the 'public interest' have to be managed. All these factors operate within an entirely different financial framework, and often industrial relations climate, from that which prevails in the private sector. Compared with their private sector equivalents, another key aspect of the organisational climate within which the public service operates has been described by Murray (1990) in the following manner, 'I remain convinced that in assessing the confidence rating of the civil service, account must be taken of the political culture in which it operates. Most commentators agree that the dominating feature of that culture in Ireland is clientalism' (p.93)[3].

Public and private bodies also differ significantly in their service relationships with external customers (see O'Shea, 1992). Within the marketoriented private sector, the relationship between service provider and customer is normally direct and comparatively straightforward (see *Figure 1)*. If the service on offer to the customer meets an actual or perceived need, at a competitive price, it will normally be demanded and sold. In such conditions, customer satisfaction should find expression through the level of sales as supply seeks to meet that demand.

The comparative freedom of consumers to choose between competing service providers, to select on the basis of price and/or quality, as well as to express satisfaction (or otherwise) with the service provided, means that customer needs are paramount in services provided by the

**Figure 1: Customer Relationship: Private Sector**
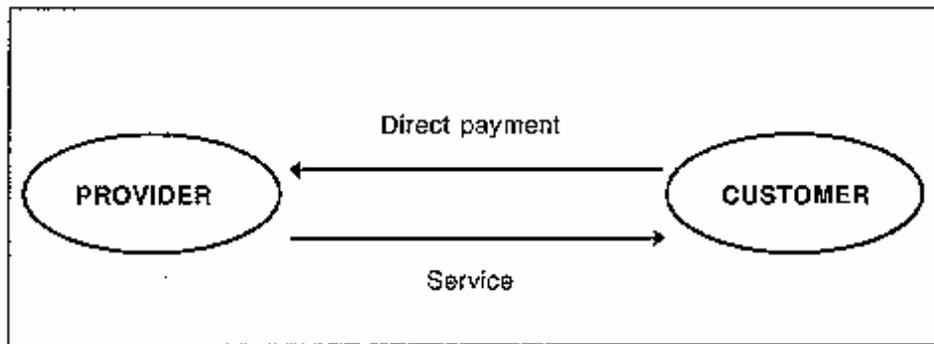


private sector. With regard to the provision of public services, the providercustomer relationship is often more complex and indirect (see *Figure 2).* Payment is not normally made directly for the service received and so customer control is weakened. Customer choice is very limited when provision is monopolistic. From the providers' viewpoint, ability to pay is often not a key determinant of demand and accordingly market

**Figure 2: Customer Relationship: Public Service**
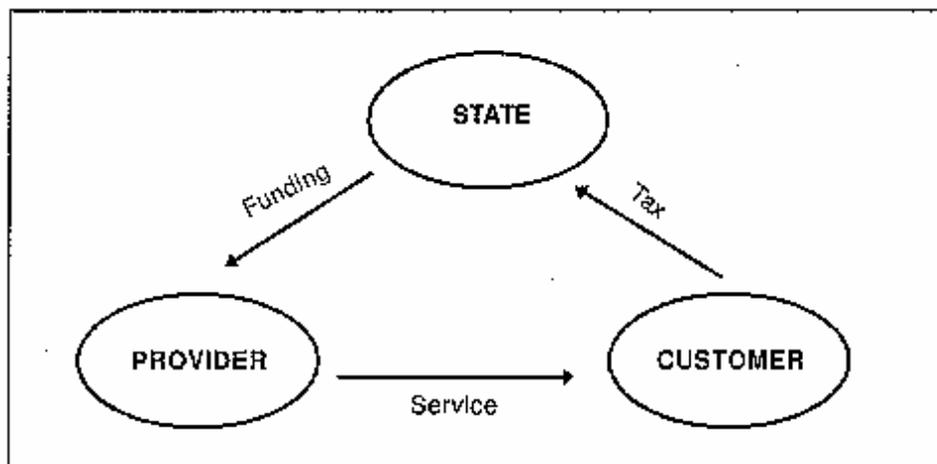
disciplines of price control frequently do not apply. Indeed, the providers' ability to supply is likely to be determined by budgetary funding outside its direct control.

Funding which comes directly or indirectly from the state is often fixed by annual allocation, through the Exchequer budgetary arrangements. Consequently, within the public service, mismatches in demand and supply can find expression in longer waiting lists or the rationing of services. In fact the relationship between demand and provision in the public services can be perverse in private sector terms. As Pollitt and Bouckaert (1995) point out:

> A fall in demand can actually be a relief. less pressure, more time for professional development, research or leisure, little or no reduction on budget. An increase in demand, by contrast, may be very unwelcome, because it means more pressure on staff and facilities but probably no increase in budget (or only a disproportionately small one). It is only in recent years that changes in budgeting practices have begun to lessen these 'perverse incentives' by relating budgets to workload or performance (p. 12).

Finally, it is important to recognise that, given such a perverse serviceprovider relationship, monopolistic public bodies can be vulnerable to the development of an unvirtuous circle of low standards in both the demand for, and supply of, their services:

> The phenomenon of 'excess demand' which leads to queues and rationing decreases the motivation to improve quality in other ways too. If one customer dislikes the service and goes elsewhere (if they can) there is usually another one waiting in the queue. Large scale desertion ('exit') may be unlikely because the public provider occupies a monopolistic or oligopolistic position (there are few if any alternatives to exit to). This restriction on behaviour is, of course, likely to be felt most acutely by

low-income consumers. Trapped in a monopolistic system which provides them with essentials such as health care or education or social security benefits, such customers often form very low expectations for service quality. To put it bluntly, they get used to low standards and so do the service providers (Pollitt and Bouckaert, 1995, p. 12/13)[4].

# Part Three:
# Towards a Broad Conceptual
# Framework

*3.1 A plethora of terms*

A comparative review of the international and national literature on, or relevant to, the improvement of public service delivery systems soon highlights the lack of a common nomenclature in relation to preferred definitions of the providercustomer relationship. For example, within the context of the SMI, the term *customer* is generally used to capture this relationship. Customer service is likewise the concept most generally understood and widely used in the current Irish context. However, as the preceding review of differences between public and privatesector services makes clear, the monopolistic, oligopolistic and involuntary/mandatory nature of many service relationships between the public service and the public can limit the appropriateness of the concept of customer choice. As a consequence, some commentators prefer the use of the term *consumer* because it does not imply, to the same degree, a cash exchange for goods and services (see, for example, Deakin et al., 1995)[5]. Others prefer the term *citizen* because it more appropriately captures both the mutual rights and responsibilities of the service provideruser relationship[6]. Citizenship rights include the exercise of choice through participation in political processes and citizens who are not users are still likely to have an interest in the cost and efficiency of public service provision[7].

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On occasion, terms such as *client, customer, consumer* and *citizen* are used interchangeably which can simply add to the confusion. Accordingly, it is important to discuss and attempt to develop a shared understanding of the relationships between these different terms, as well as to place them within a broad conceptual framework which can be used later for systematic analysis of the research evidence. In so doing, it must be stressed that, within the scope of this comparatively small study, it was not practicable to attempt a definitive exposition of these terms, which would attract universal acceptance and be invariably applicable across different administrations. Rather, the aim of this discussion is to seek to provide a logically consistent and comparatively simple basis for assessing the development of public service delivery systems both in Ireland and elsewhere.

### 3.2 The public as clients

In their analysis and critique Of the fundamental changes which have taken place within the local government sector in the United Kingdom (UK) in recent decades, Bums et al. (1994) plot the progress of the changing relationship between the public and the public service in an interesting way, which has wider application outside that country and within other public services (see *Figure 3)*.

During the earliest phase, in this serviceprovider relationship, which is characterised as one of 'bureaucratic paternalism', a traditional, professional model tends to dominate the serverserved relationship. At this stage, officials and politicians often refer to the users of public services as *clients* or collectively as *client groups*. In such circumstances, Bums et al. (1994) conclude that a 'we know best' attitude to the public tends to predominate, as officials and politicians often refer to their shared perception of the public interest, but without meaningful engagement with that very public:

> The key characteristic of the client relationship is that the client is, on the whole, dependent on the professional ... virtually all power lies with the professional. This creates a feeling of impotence in relation to the particular service being provided. Not surprisingly, the term 'client' because of its connotations with closed and often paternalistic decisionmaking, is now used less frequently ... even in social services circles where it was well established (p. 40).

### *3.3 The public as customers*

Due to such shortcomings, and in particular the comparative impotency of the public under a client system in terms of impacting upon the nature of the service being delivered to them by others, many of those striving to reform public services have dropped terms such as 'client' and 'recipient'. They prefer to talk, instead, about the needs of the *customer* (see *Figure 3).*

**Figure 3: Relationships between the general public and the public service**

| ***Description of member of the public*** | ***The service relationship is strongly shaped by:*** |
|---|---|
| *Client* | The dominance of the client by the professional |
| *Customer* | The experience of the customer in using the *organisation* |
| *Consumer* | The interest of the consumer in the product or service provided |
| *Citizen* | The concern of the citizen to influence *public decisions* which affect the quality of life |

Source: based upon Bums et al. (1994)

In part, at least, this preference reflects the unsatisfactory character of clients' encounters with professional service providers. Originally pioneered within privatesector management thinking (see, for example, Peters, 1988), such ideas have been enthusiastically extended to the delivery and management of public services; with the idea of customerdriven government, based on an approach which strives to meet the needs of the customer rather than the bureaucracy (see Osbome and Gaebler, 1992). Such thinking is not new:

> The *customer* is always right: he (sic) can choose, criticise and reject. The *client,* on the other hand, gives up these privileges and accepts the superior judgement of the professional. It is one of the aims of the wouldbe professions to convert its customers into clients and in so doing stake out an exclusive area of discourse in which those trained in the skills and inducted into the 'mysteries' of the trade can claim a monopoly of wisdom and proficiency (Gower Davies, 1974, p. 220).

As a positive response to this unsatisfactory situation, innovative efforts have been made to adapt customer service models to a public service context. In so doing, it must be acknowledged that what is involved is nothing less than the reorientation of public services to set service for the public as the key organisational value (see Stewart and Clarke, 1987). As will be discussed later (see Part *Nine),* creating a 'customer-first' culture requires not just major investment in improved delivery systems and staff training to develop good interpersonal skills (particularly for frontline staff) but also fundamental organisational change (see Baddeley and Dawes, 1986; 1987).

*3.4 The public as consumers*

Burns et al. (1994) do, however, issue a strong warning against complacency:

> The use of the word 'customer' is ... a mixed blessing. On the one hand it implies that, by renaming clients as customers, they will enjoy the power exercised by purchasers in the market place. This is nonsense, because the sellerbuyer relationship rarely exists in the public sector. On the other hand, an inventive approach to customer relations can win loyalty and, in certain situations, strong support for ... services.

However, they conclude, on balance, that:

> At root the customer care approach does not tip the balance of power strongly in favour of the user. As a result, customer care may turn out to be a form of organisational sleight of hand in which bureaucratic paternalism disappears only to be replaced by a new, more subtle form of managerial paternalism (p. 43).

Finally, Bums et al. (1994) note, in their critique, that, as a further stage of development, the concepts of *consumer* and *citizen* have more to offer because, in different ways, they focus more sharply on empowering the public users and funders of services. The concept of consumer refers essentially to the relationship of a person to a product or service (see *Figure* 3). As a concept, consumerism has advanced steadily over the past three decades and often focuses its arguments around the five key principles of access, choice, information, redress and representation (see, for example, Potter, 1988). Whilst consumers, in the private sector, may be able to exercise considerable influence on the quality and development of the services they use, the situation is often far less clear cut with public services.

3.5 *The public as citizens*

The involuntary and monopolistic character of many public services can be a key factor inhibiting consumer preferences and limiting the validity of a consumerist model. Accordingly, Bums et al. (1994) highlight the

importance for *empowerment* strategies of keeping the focus on the *citizen:*[8]

> Customer care programmes have their place but, when they focus on the citizen as customer they are in danger of missing the point. We need to focus on the citizen as *citizen.* If ... government is to have meaning m the future any consumerist emphasis on individual and material needs must be balanced by measures which foster attitudes that go beyond self interest (p.51)[9].

 Some of the service delivery implications of the concept of citizenship will be discussed later within the context of the charter approach (see *Part Six*). However, at this stage, it is still valuable to note that even when a public service is provided on a mandatory basis, it does not absolve the provider from the requirement to treat its fellow citizens with due dignity and respect.

> The myriad services and taxes administered by the civil service affect hundreds of thousands of individuals each year. It would be suiprising if every one of these individuals was happy with the service they receive. It would be amazing if the poor image of the service were not in part the result of the justified anger and fustration of these individuals justified not because their claims were rejected but rather by how their claims were handled. I know of no development more apt to improve the image of the civil service and, more importantl, to raise the standard of pubhc administration than an improvement m the *quality* of services provided to the public. By quality I have in mind such factors as courtesy, consideration, information and speed (Murray, 1990, p. 42).

> If the citizen can expect as of right certain tangible standards of service from public bodies, so also must the citizen own the responsibility for ensuring that the system that administers them is guided by objective policies aimed at meeting social rather than personal needs.

*3.6 Development of a framework*

To conclude, an analysis and evaluation of the plethora of terminologies used in the literature, as well as within the policy communities, indicates that a simple but useful conceptual framework can be put forward which summarises the progressive development of the serviceprovider relationship with the general public over time (see *Figure 3)*. From the general public's point of view, it plots the progress from comparative dependence as a client to mutual involvement as a citizen in the development of public services and their delivery. This framework is doubly helpful because it can be placed within the wider context of different approaches to public service reform over time and between different types of administration.

# Part Four:
# International Policy Context

*4.1 Introduction*

For the past three decades, many of the world's more advanced capitalist economies have been engaged to varying degrees in processes of public service reform. Member countries of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) have adopted a variety of approaches to this reform process, although they have firequently shared common features: 'In general, reform programmes undertaken have been directed at the dual aims of ensuring that the public service has the right people, structures and organisation to develop and deliver the right policies and services, while at the same time ensuring that the public service operates as efficiently and effectively as possible' *(Strategic Management in the Irish Civil Service, 1995, p.6).*

Improving service delivery systems has often been an integral component of wider moves to reform existing approaches to public service management more generally. And, just as it was possible to trace in broad terms the development of serviceprovider relationships over time, from that of dependency as *clients* to one of much greater involvement and *empowerment* as *citizens,* so it is possible, in similar manner, to place initiatives to improve public service delivery systems within a wider framework of a threefold typology of public service reform strategies (see *Figure 4).*

**Figure 4: Public Service Reform Strategies**
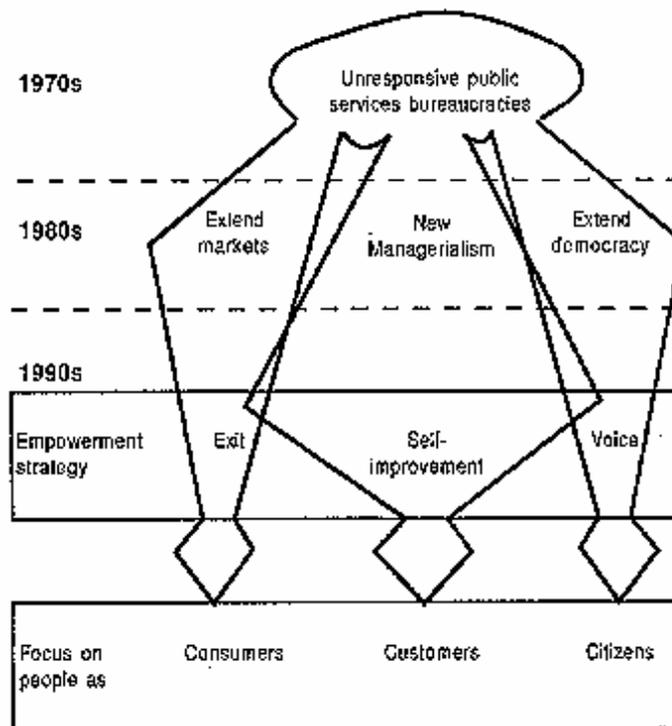


Source: based on Burns et al. (1994)

During the period up to the mid-1970s, Bums et al. (1994) identify the dominant public service organisational form as 'bureaucratic': 'For each service there emerged a defined department or division; an administrative hierarchy of control; a set of procedures designed to ensure uniformity of treatment; and groups of professionals or specialists to perform tasks' (p. 21). At this time, although service delivery systems might seek to ensure fairness and impartiality, they were often characterised by inflexibility and the type of topdown professionalclient relationships discussed at 3.2 above.

Public discontent with the limitations of this relationship, and its often insensitive outcomes, together with a growing political consensus that the public services needed to develop more costeffective and responsive approaches, led to calls for reform both within and without the public service. However, there the consensus ended and two marked divergences of approach emerged (see *Figure 4)*. On the one hand, the importance of exposure to marketforces and competition was emphasised. Individual choice and the needs of *consumers* were stressed. Radical reforms in the organisation and delivery of public service often followed. Elsewhere, a different rhetoric and modus operandi developed, which emphasised the needs of communities. This approach sought to strengthen the voice of service users as citizens and increase their direct involvement with those services and their development.

Between these two comparative extremes of public service reform policy and strategy lies a more managerial approach. It draws ideas and approaches from both sides of the political spectrum, but aims to replace unresponsive public service bureaucracies by more flexible and responsive systems geared to the needs of public service *customers* (see *Figure 4)*. Here the emphasis is not so much on the imperative of market forces or the urge to give greater voice to the communities served. It is on the drive for internal selfimprovement. The aim is to provide a more modem public service which is far more responsive to the competing pressures of the outside world and which will equip the public service more effectively to meet changing national socioeconomic needs.

*4.3 A diversity of approach*

An examination of experiences in different administrations indicates that many countries have drawn to varying degrees, at different points in time, upon these three strands. As the OECD points out: 'The origins of service quality initiatives in the member countries appear to vary. In some countries a budget pressure was the determining factor; in others it was general dissatisfaction with government services. Some countries had a

combination of origins'. In the UK, the initiative was developed and promoted by political leaders. In Canada, it was initially developed and promoted by civil servants. In a number of countries (e.g. Australia, New Zealand and Sweden), management and staff of individual government organisations initiated service quality improvements as part of internal management reform and in the absence of a centrally driven initiative.

> Service quality initiatives reflect a general acceptance of the importance of responsive and efficient government to economic and social progress, within a general context of budgetary constraints. They are being promoted by governments of various political persuasions. Service quality initiatives are not necessarily part of 'smaller government' initiatives, although they may be when competition in service delivery is introduced. They are also consistent with an ongoing role for the public sector and with defending and instilling confidence in the public sector (OECD, 1996, p.20).

Based on its international experiences up to that time, the OECD (1987) suggested that the key components of responsive service delivery were: transparency; participation; satisfying user requirements; and accessibility. In revisiting these key elements nine years later, the OECD (1996) stresses their continuing validity but restates them as follows:

- clients participate in or are consulted about decisions on what level and type of service is to be provided;

- they are informed as to what level and type of services are to be provided;

- they can reasonably expect to receive this level of service;

- they have rights of complaint and redress if the appropriate level of service is not provided; and

- service delivery agencies are required to set service quality targets and to report their performance against them' (p. 18).

To the above features, they also add the importance of openness and accountability on behalf of the service providers. With regard to quality of service delivered, they stress the following types of characteristic: timeliness; volume/amount; accessibility/convenience; availability; accuracy; safety; appropriateness or suitability; as well as more qualitative aspects such as pleasantness and simplicity. Equality and legality are acknowledged as priority issues in service delivery, together with the cost of the service referred to and its efficacy.

The OECD (1996) identifies five points on the potential spectrum of user involvement with service delivery: information; consultation; partnership; delegation; and control. But it also concludes that:

> Clients cannot have a final say on the level and type of service, unless perhaps they are paying the full cost ... In other words, the client's views and interests are not the only ones to be considered, as he (sic) represents only one of several stakeholders. There is a balance to be struck between the views of clients and the views of the service provider and/or the government, on behalf of more general interest groups such as taxpayers (p. 27).

Whilst continuing to use the traditional terminology of the public as client, OECD (1996) are very well aware of both the centrality of improving public service delivery systems to the wider process of public management reform and the fundamental implications such improvements have for organisational culture and the developing relationship between citizens and the state.

Drawing upon Canadian expertise in this area, which also reflects the experiences in other countries, it is possible to outline a checklist against which public servants can measure the progress made by their own organisations.

> Why are quality service organisations so different? Rather  than using the traditional 'command and control' framework which

implies that 'we know what's best for our clients and employees', quality service organisations:

- ask their clients to identify their needs and expectations;
- continuously meet the needs of their clients while managing their expectations;
- support active employee involvement in meeting these needs;
- foster employee innovation to improve processes continuously;
- cultivate a 'peoplefirst' environment where teamwork is valued;
- accept the risk associated with innovation;
- support a continuous learning environment; and
- provide visible leadership for employees, which is crucial to the success of any quality services initiative.

How can we recognise a quality service organisation when we see one, particularly m the public sector? The National Quality Institute highlights the following characteristics as typical of quality service organisations in both the public and private sectors:

- everyone understands where the organisation is heading and understands his or her part in the process;
- there is respect for people in the organisation and all employees are encouraged to develop their potential;
- the primary focus is on serving clients; cooperation and teamwork are a way of life;
- leaders are fully involved in the quality services programs and initiatives;
- everyone concentrates on achieving quality; there is a focus on continuous improvement;
- employees appreciate and understand stakeholders' expectations and know how to satisfy them; and
- the organisation is driven by quality and innovation (Treasury Board of Canada, 1995).

# Part Five:
# National Policy Context

*5.1 Introduction*

It has been seen internationally that achieving improvements in the delivery of services to the public is a core feature of many reform programmes in the public service. As Boyle (1995) has pointed out, 'Reformers have emphasised the quality of public service delivery. Decentralisation of decisionmaking authority to regional and local levels and a shift from the traditional rules/control focused administration is used to create a more responsive clientorientated culture' (p.31).

That does not mean to say that individual agencies or groups of agencies have not sought to improve the quality of the services that they deliver as part of good business practice without the overall umbrella of an explicit servicewide strategy. Neither does it mean that individual/groups of managers and/or staff members have not strived to improve the quality of the services that they deliver to the public, in response to feedback received. However, explicit attempts to improve service delivery on a servicewide basis, in Ireland, can probably be traced to the 1980s[10].

*5.2 National initiatives*

With regard to providing the institutional framework for the improvement of the quality of services delivered to the public, the Ombudsman Act (1980) can be seen as a major landmark, at least with regard to the

handling of complaints. This Act provided for an ombudsman who could investigate, either on their own initiative or on the basis of a complaint received from the public, actions taken by civil servants. In 1985, the scope of the Act was extended to embrace the actions of a wider range of public servants working for health boards and local authorities, as well as the postal and telecommunications services. The first ombudsman took up office in 1984[11].

In 1985, *Serving the Country Better* advocated a greater responsiveness to citizens' needs as part of a general approach to improved public service management. Indeed, during the interview phase of this research, it was clear that a number of government departments/offices traced their original impetus to adopt a more customerfocused approach in part at least to this White Paper. Subsequent progress was, however, far from dramatic throughout the service.

In 1994, the Taoiseach, Mr Albert Reynolds TD, announced his determination to give the Irish public service a more strategic focus through a new *Strategic Management Initiative* (SMI). Public service reform was on the political agenda once again and this agenda enjoyed crossparty support. The new government later that year repeated this call in their policy agreement for coalition and pledged,' ... the reform of our institutions at national and local level to provide service, accountability, transparency and freedom of information. In so doing, we are committed to extending the opportunities for democratic participation by citizens in all aspects of public life' *(A Government of Renewal,* 1994).

*5.3 NESF Report (1995)*

Within this setting, in February 1995, the National Economic and Social Forum (NESF) published a major report on *Quality Delivery of Social Services*[12]. Although specifically focused on the 'social services', the Forum's report felt that both the deficiencies identified and its

recommendations were of general application to all public services. The main deficiencies identified were:

- lack of client participation in policymaking and implementation;

- lack of administrative coherence;

- lack of integrated delivery of

- lack of clear information; and

- lack of independent appeals procedures' (p.3).

By way of solution, in addition to recommendations specific to individual services/agencies covered by the study, a number of *rights* were advocated. These rights related to greater consultation and participation; better information and advice; more choice and simplicity; improved access; and redress. In addition, integrated planning at national level and the integrated delivery of services at local level were recommended. Finally, the NESF acknowledged that 'central to the successful implementation of the recommendations is that a joint commitment by management and unions to major and radical reforms in the public service would be essential' and, to this end, the NESF recommended action to improve the quality of communications, specifications, delivery and staff (p.7). In turn, the NESF also realised that the achievement of this ambitious agenda for change would require its linkage to the SMI and the new government programme.

*5.4 Delivering Better Government (DBG)*

Building upon a report (1995) by a study group on the quality and delivery of services, [13] the SMI Coordinating Group of Secretaries, in their second report to government *Delivering Better Government,* identified the delivery of quality services, across the whole range of its activities , not only as an essential task of the civil service but also as integral to the approach which underpinned the SMI itself: a strong focus on processes,

an emphasis on work done and maximum value for money. The Coordinating Group stressed that the approach to improved service delivery 'needs to be clearly focused on achieving specified results to agreed standards and targets and on being more open' (1996, p. 10). The Group felt that 'a particular focus on customer satisfaction, on quality, on the time taken and the cost involved in delivering the services in question will '... provide the basis for a measurable assessment of performance' (p. 11). The following principles were enumerated:

1.  a specification of the quality of service to be provided by departments and offices to their customers;
2.  consultation with, and participation by, customers on a structured basis;
3.  the provision of quality information and advice to customers, in relation to the methods of delivery of services;
4.  the integration of public services at local, regional and national levels; a comprehensive system of measuring and assessing customer satisfaction; and
6.  complaints and redress mechanisms, which operate close to the point of delivery.

To assist with the operationalisation of these objectives, a Quality Customer Service Working Group (QCSWG) 'was established with specific terms of reference: (a) to develop a quality service framework for the civil service, based on the principles set out in *Delivering Better Government,* and (b) to oversee and facilitate the adoption and implementation of a Quality Service Improvement Programme, within this framework, by each department and office. The QCSWG comprises senior civil servants from a range of departments/offices, as well as external representatives from the private and voluntary sectors with relevant knowledge and expertise. It is supported in its work by the Frontline Group on QCS, which comprises a wider range of civil servants engaged in the direct delivery of services to the public. The terms of

reference for the Frontline Group are: (a) to identify the key issues and challenges arising in the frontline delivery of services, and (b) to contribute to the development of the QS framework across departments.

In *Delivering Better Government,* the Coordinating Group of Secretaries was also mindful that not only must improvements in public services be achieved but they must also be seen to be achieved. 'Publicly articulated, these principles will lead to a qualitative improvement in service delivery. It is vital that this is accompanied by a similar improvement in public perception. The reality that a fair and efficient service is being delivered is lost if the public as customers do not perceive the service as efficient and helpful' (p. 11).

Drawing upon the findings of the NESF Report (1995), the Group advocated a partnership approach with community/voluntary organisations in the interests of developing greater openness and improving service delivery. It also acknowledged the important tensions which can exist between the public service and its users when the organisation concerned has not only a service delivery but regulatory function. These dual roles 'must be dealt with in the development of appropriate policy guidelines and, critically, in the training of the civil servants who provide services directly to customers' (p. 11).

In order to establish benchmark data with which to monitor subsequent changes in public perceptions of the quality of public services, a nationwide survey of civil service customers was commissioned (see IMS, 1997). Interestingly, these results suggested a comparatively high level of satisfaction already amongst those with recent contact with the service: 72 per cent felt that it had been efficient and 35 per cent declared themselves to be very satisfied with the service received. Although, clearly, there is still room for improvement.

*5.5 Quality Customer Service Initiative (QCS1)*

Drawing upon the work of the QCSWG, and following the recommendations made in *Delivering Better Government,* the government launched, in May 1997, a major QCS Initiative which sought to ensure that departments and offices across the civil service would set standards of service quality for their external customers to be delivered within a specified timeframe of two years. A full list of the departments/offices participating in the QCSI is given in Appendix 1, although the intention is to extend the initiative more widely through the public service. A full list of the *Principles for the Delivery of Quality Customer Service,* for incorporation in the resultant *Action Plans,* was given to departments/offices (see Appendix 2). These principles may be summarised as follows:

- set out clearly details of the services which are provided and how departments and offices are structured to deliver these services;

- specify the standards which have been set for the delivery of these services;

- detail the arrangements for getting in touch with departments and offices by telephone, letter and personal visit;

- explain the arrangements for consulting with customers on services provided; and

- outline the arrangements for monitoring and review on a regular basis and for reporting on the achievement of service delivery targets.

At the launch, a number of guiding principles for quality customer service were also outlined. These were standards; information; timeliness and courtesy; complaints; redress; consultation; choice; better coordination; and access. It was also announced that telephone access to all departments and offices would be introduced on a phased basis for the price of a local call from anywhere in the country.

*5.6 Public Service Management Act (1997)*

The Public Service Management Act (1997) marked another major step forward in the management of the public service and the degree to which customer service issues were made explicit by each department/office in framing their *Statement of Strategy.* The Act requires each department or office to publish their statement in accordance with the guidelines approved by government. These guidelines include 'Customer/Client Interests and Needs' which states that an important element of strategic analysis is the identification of customers' and clients' interests and needs with a view to improving service delivery. Accordingly, each strategy statement should pay attention to improving service delivery, and often include specific objectives for improving service delivery systems[14].

This focus on the customer is also evident in the guidelines relating to performance measures and indicators, where quality service standards are specifically mentioned. Indeed, under the Act, the outputs each strategy statement is to address are defined as 'the goods and services (including standards of service) that are a consequence of the activities of the Department'. For the first time, standards of service are highlighted in legislation. The Act also requires each department/office to lay their *Statement of Strategy* before the Houses of the Oireachtas and, for the first time, a newly established AllParty Committee on the SMI will have responsibility for monitoring progress on the statements, including the service delivery element. Indeed, the Committee has decided to focus on the QCSI in the first instance.

In this context, it is also worth noting that the Comptroller and Auditor General Amendment Act (1993) introduced for the first time a statutory requirement on departments to be accountable for the effectiveness and valueformoney of their operations. This marked a significant advance by increasing the focus on customerrelated issues and the extent to which customer needs were being met by a department's activities. Finally, current efforts to make regulations more accessible to the public, to improve

their quality, to simplify them and lower their costs of compliance will also have tangible benefits for improved delivery of services to external customers. in addition, other initiatives will have extremely important and potentially positive benefits for improved service delivery, e.g. efforts to improve the handling of crossdepartmental issues, as well as the significant moves towards improved transparency and openness.

*5.7 Improved information*

Since its inception in 1984, the Office of the Ombudsman has dealt with over 46,000 complaints from the public services' external customers. Whilst the current statutory remit of the Ombudsman does not cover all public services and the complaints received will only represent a fraction of this client base, it is noteworthy that at the heart of many of these complaints is the question of access to information. In an effort to address such difficulties, the Ombudsman's *Guide to Standards of Best Practice* (1997) for public servants sets out the standards for all public servants for dealing fairly and impartially with customers.

The rights of external customers were also significantly extended by the enactment of the Freedom of Information Act (1997) on 21 April 1998. This Act reverses the traditional assumption that a member of the public would not have access to information unless this was provided for explicitly in legislation or otherwise. Subject to a range of clearly defined exemptions, members of the public now have extensive access to information on a department's activities, as well as their own personal information. In consequence, the Act increases the extent to which the customer and her/his needs influence official policy. A clear link has also been established between freedom of information and QCS by appointing the current Ombudsman as Information Commissioner under the Act (see Murphy, 1997b).

*5.8 Sectoral initiatives*

Finally, it must be noted that, in addition to (and in some cases predating) these servicewide efforts, individual departments and offices have commenced their own initiatives to improve specifically the quality of the customer services for which they are responsible. Examples of these include:

- the *Code of Practice* and *Charter of Rights* for the delivery of services to customers of the Revenue Commissioners, as well as the *Guides for Small Businesses;*

- the annual *Guide to Schemes and Services* produced by the Department of Agriculture and Food, as well as the *Charter of Rights for Farmers;*

- the *Charter of Rights for Hospital Patients* and *Shaping a Healthier Future,* produced by the Department of Health and Children;

- the wide range of customer service initiatives introduced by the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs; and

- the Department of the Environment and Local Government's programme for delivering *Better Local Government.*

In addition, important Proposals have been brought forward to improve the integration of services delivered by departments/offices across a number of interrelated sectors. Examples of such proposals are included in the *Report of the Expert Working Group on the Integration of the Tax and Welfare Systems (1996)* and the *Report of the Rural Development Policy Advisory Group (1997).*

# Part Six:

# The Charter Approach

*6.1 Introduction*

In making the transition from comparatively unresponsive public service bureaucracies to adopting a clear user focus in the delivery of public services, it has been seen that national administrations have adopted a variety of approaches, often involving the adoption of an explicit statement of standards in the form of a charter. Some administrations have mounted specific highlevel initiatives to set improving the quality of services provided by public bodies as a major national strategic objective in its own right. Such countries include Belgium, Canada, France, Portugal, Spain, the UK and the United States of America (USA). Such an approach has often involved the advocacy at the highest level within government of the widespread adoption of an explicit charter of rights for citizens[15]. While not mutually exclusive, other administrations, including Ireland (see *Part 5),* have explicitly integrated QCS Initiatives within a wider programme of public service reform. In all countries, individual bodies have pioneered improved service delivery systems as part of reorienting their businesses to focus on performance by results.

In this context, it is important to note that initiatives are also being replicated at the supranational level. For example, the EU, through its *Citizens* First initiative (1996 onwards), has committed itself to providing accessible information on EU citizens' rights to work, live and study in another member state. More recently this initiative has been extended to embrace gender equality, consumer protection, travelling

within the EU, as well as buying goods and services in other member states. Information is also provided on what to do if citizens feel these rights have been infringed.

However, because of the potentially significant implications of adopting a charter approach as part of a national QCS strategy, the experiences of those countries which have followed this path to date need to be reviewed and their potential implications for the Irish QCSI explored. After all, it has already been noted that individual institutions within Ireland have already followed this strategy and its wider adoption by the Irish public service is a matter of current debate. In so doing, it is important to note that the specific rationale for adopting a charter approach to the improvement of public services at national level varies from country to country.

*6.2 Some examples of a charter approach*

In Portugal, the *Public Service Quality Charter (1992)* was a deliberate attempt by government to generate confidence in a system of public administration which enjoyed little public support (see CorteReal, *1996)*. In France, the *Public Service Charter (1992)* draws together diverse initiatives to improve the quality of services provided by public bodies over the preceding decade (see Trosa, *1995;* Pochard, *1996)*. It incorporated a number of the important characteristics identified by the OECD *(1996),* namely improved transparency and simplicity in service provision; greater integration in point of delivery; better arrangements for reception of the public; arrangements for handling complaints and redress; as well as less centralisation of services. In addition, efforts were made to improve the motivation of staff through the provision of additional financial incentives to those involved with the development and delivery of improved services.

It is important to appreciate, however, that such strategies are not confined to Europe. In North America, the Canadian federal government

has responded to the challenge to provide its citizens with 'quality services that are relevant, responsive, accessible and affordable', despite 'dwindling resources', by 'a quality service approach to management, which clearly stresses client satisfaction, employee involvement and innovation'. In taking forward its *Declaration of Quality Services Principles (1994),* the Government acknowledged not only its own corporate budgetary and other needs, as well as the needs of its customers, but also that 'all employees contribute to the management and quality of their own outputs and, thus, to the success of the organisation'. In the USA, President Clinton, in *1995,* directed every executive department and federal agency to publish customer service standards in a form readily available to customers. These standards cover all operations that deliver significant services directly to the public, including those delivered in partnership with state and local governments. Achievement against these standards is monitored and results published annually. Public bodies are encouraged to survey their employees for ideas to improve customer service and to take measures to recognise employees for meeting or exceeding service standards. In addition, agencies are required to take action across agency lines of responsibility to serve shared customer groups more effectively.

Elsewhere in the world, the Australian government, for example**,** has recently strongly advocated the widespread adoption of government service charters in order to help shift public bodies from an internal to an external focus and to open them up more effectively to customers. It is planned that this initiative will cover all government departments, agencies and enterprises providing services to the public, with over *115* charters scheduled for completion by mid *1998 (see Developing Service Charters, 1997).* However, probably the best known, longest running and most frequently cited of these initiatives is the *Citizen's Charter (199 1)* adopted in the UK. It is the acknowledged precursor of many of the initiatives taken in other countries. Given the administrative similarities between the two countries, and the way in which the Irish charter-type initiatives which have been adopted to date have been influenced to some

degree by the UK approach, the British experience with adopting such a strategic approach to the improvement of public service delivery systems both nationally and locally needs to be analysed in detail.

*6.3 Case study: UK Citizen's Charter (19911998)*

As with other administrations, the highprofile, primeministerial launch of the *Citizen's Charter (1991)* should not he seen as a oneoff innovation occurring in isolation. The impetus and focus were new but the UK *Citizen's Charter* is best seen as a further extension of a range of earlier initiatives within the British public service, which had taken place, particularly since *1979,* as part of a radical governmentdriven programme of fundamental reform. The primary drivers for this change programme were to reduce levels of public spending and to provide services without increasing expenditure. Such reforms had already included the Financial Management Initiative; the Next Steps programme *(1988);* the introduction of internal markets within the National Health Service (NHS); and compulsory competitive tendering in the provision of national and local government services, as well as the extensive privatisation of public transport services and public utilities.

These innovations had, as a central element, the notion that many of the problems of the public sector were due to its domination by the producers and deliverers of services, either trade unions, professions or officials. Implicit in this thinking was a growing recognition of the importance of the individual service recipient. Thus, in emulation of the private sector and the market, a change in emphasis would be required to promote the view that services should be consumerled rather than producerdriven (Connolly, et al., *1994).*

Within this rapidly changing climate, and under severe budgetary restrictions, individual public bodies had also become more proactive in their approach to improved service delivery, often seeking quality

accreditation through schemes such as *Investors in People* and the British Standards, BS5750 (see Turton, 1996).

Published as a White Paper in July 1991 and launched as a tenyear programme, the *Charter* sought explicitly to improve the quality of services delivered to the public by encouraging organisations to put customer service first 'while also acknowledging public responsibility'[16].
In so doing it was guided by six key *Charter Principles:*

- *Standards*

  Setting, monitoring and publication of explicit standards for the services that individual users can reasonably expect. Publication of actual performance against these standards.[17]

- *Openness and information*
  Full, accurate information readily available in plain language about how public services are run, what they cost, how well they perform and who is in charge. [18]

- *Choice and consultation*
  The public sector should provide choice where practicable. There should be regular and systematic consultation with those who use services. Users' views about services, and their priorities for improving them, to be taken into account in final decisions on standards.[19]

- *Courtesy and helpfulness*
  Courteous and helpful service from public servants, who will normally wear name badges. Services available equally to all who are entitled to them and to run to suit their convenience. [20]

- *Putting things right*
  If things go wrong, users should receive an apology, a full explanation and a swift and effective remedy. Widely published and easy to use complaints procedures with independent review wherever possible. [21]

- *Value for money*
  Efficient and economical delivery of public services within the resources the nation can afford. Independent validation of performance against standards.[22]

The potential impact of this initiative was considerable given the estimated 58 million people in the UK that use public services each day. To facilitate this process, and under the guidance of an advisory panel appointed by the Prime Minister, a central charter unit was established within the Office of Public Service (Cabinet Office), to promote best practice within the public service, disseminate information, and identify areas for further improvement and obstacles to progress. Within this remit, the unit runs an annual *Charter Mark Award Scheme* to encourage best practice, including encouraging nominations from members of the general public. The main criteria for a Charter Mark Award are summarised in *Figure 5*. Finally, the charter unit supports local quality networks and disseminates promotional material. It also liaises closely with the separate charter units established in each department. Comprising approximately forty staff, it has been estimated that the central unit alone had running costs of approximately £16.5 million between 1991 and 1995. Despite its high profile, the *Citizen's Charter* was not given either a cabinet commirree or subcommittee with overall responsibility for implementation of the policy.

Up to 1997, there were nearly fifty national charters and over 10,000 local charters in operation, covering a wide range of public services, including taxation, education, social welfare provision, transport, the justice system, housing and health (see Appendix 3). Following the general election in May 1997, the government announced its intention to relaunch the *Citizen's Charter* as part of its drive to modernise and improve government. In particular, it expressed the wish for the new programme to focus firmly on the needs and wishes of the people who both use and deliver public services. To this end the government has embarked upon an extensive consultation exercise

covering central and local government service providers, consumer groups, independent experts/thinktanks and social partner organisations. It is also considering means by which the Charter Mark can be strengthened and its synergy with other awards and standards improved. The outcome of this review is anticipated in 1998.

**Figure 5: Criteria for Charter Mark**

- Set yourself clear, tough and meaningful performance standards.
- Tell users what those standards are and how you perform against them.
- Tell users in a clear, straightforward way about all the services and help available and how to get the most out of them.
- Consult people on what services they need and how services can be improved, and make good use of their ideas.
- Give people choices wherever possible.
- Have polite and helpful staff, and a userfriendly approach to things like opening hours, answering the phone and any special needs of the people who use the service.
- Make it easy for people to say when they are not happy with the service and act swiftly to put mistakes right.
- Give value for money by budgeting carefully and using resources efficiently and effectively.
- Continually make improvements in the quality of service you provide and have new ideas for valueformoney improvements for the future.
- Show that your users agree that you provide a really good service.

*6.4 Evaluation of the Citizen's Charter*

At the time of its introduction, the *Citizen's Charter* and associated initiatives were greeted by considerable scepticism, particularly from government critics, the providers of public services and branches of the mass media. In retrospect, this popular criticism can be traced to a considerable extent back to other governmental initiatives during that period after 1979. However, if the *Citizen's Charter* approach per se is

separated out from these other measures, which were primarily geared to the extension of privatisation, internal markets and tight public expenditure controls, it is interesting to note that despite the change of government the current policy review focuses on regenerating and improving, rather than abolishing, the *Charter*. Why is this?

One explanation is that, although the *Charter* began as a central, topdown initiative strongly driven by the then Prime Minister, it has succeeded in widening its appeal by both encouraging and reflecting the rising expectations of the general public with regard to public services. It has also linked in with, and helped to promote, rather than attempt to subsume, the wide range of organisationbased initiatives already taking place throughout the public service. In effect many of the values that the *Charter* endorsed have now been mainstreamed into the expectations of the general public and the way in which public services manage their business.

However, the decision to develop rather than abolish the *Charter* should not be taken to imply that it has not been the subject of considerable informed criticism. There is general acceptance, within the unit itself, that the initial standards set, whilst deliverable, were often perceived by the public as insufficiently challenging. The *Charter* initiative was also criticised for its failure to provide additional funding to support the improvement of services. Indeed, improvement within existing resources was the hallmark of the approach adopted by Ministers. However, as was pointed out by the Opposition, 'It is no consolation to people who go to the housing department of the local authority to be told politely, quickly, efficiently and courteously that there are no houses available to meet their demands' (Malcolm Bruce (Liberal Democrat) MP, 15 November 1991).

The report of the House of Common's Public Services Committee: *Citizen's Charter Five Years On* (1996), cites over thirty recommendations, including better evaluation of the programme (with a particular focus on outcomes for users, as well as management indicators), more independent complaints procedures, greater clarity on the redress

available through charters, and better consultation with users. However, the most telling criticism of the *Citizen's Charter* relates to its lack of engagement with the very citizens it purports to empower.

Despite its title, the charter initiative was firmly rooted in the consumerist, marketdriven approach to public management reform described earlier (see *Figure 4)*. In the *Charter's* first annual report, it states that: 'Through these Charters the citizen can increasingly put pressure upon those responsible for providing services to provide them to a high standard, rather as commercial competition puts consumer pressure on the performance of private sector organisations'. As Pirie also states, as a member of the charter advisory group, ' the Citizen's Charter, if it is to be effective, must imitate in some sense, the rights which people have as customers in the competitive market'.

Ironically, the term 'citizen's charter' was first used in 1988 by Labourcontrolled local authorities to signify engagement with, and the empowerment of, citizens and local communities. Gyford (1991) in looking across the political spectrum identified a wide variety of means by which such empowerment was being pursued at local level:

> Public participation, user involvement, consultation and cooption arrangements, decentralisation, privatisation, opting out, use ofthe voluntary sector, encouraging selfhelp and mutual aid, market research and opinion polling, changing the organisational culture, improving reception facilities, developing customer relations and marketing, and devising mobile and onestop shop services.

The *Citizen's Charter* was focused on the individual citizen as consumer. It largely ignored the responsibilities of citizenship to the wider community.

*6.5 Conclusions*

Despite the considerable shortcomings identified above, the *Citizen's Charter* initiative in the UK has proved to be sufficiently useful to justify its continuation and improvement. It raised the quality of the services delivered by public bodies to the forefront of national debate. It provided guidelines for encouraging innovation in public service bodies. It established a central coordinating and promotional unit which encouraged best practice in a wide range of public bodies. It was topdown and narrow in its approach to engagement with the citizens whose rights it sought to promote. However, there is also little doubt that it both built on and extended the debate on improving public service delivery systems at a national level in a manner that would be difficult to replicate by a lowerprofile and less wideranging approach.

Following his indepth and critical assessment of the *Citizen's Charter,* and associated initiatives in the public utilities, health, education, social welfare, justice, local government and transport areas, Bynoe (1996) concludes:

> Many dismiss the Citizen's Charter as a poor attempt at public relations. Yet as a policy vehicle it touches subjects of widespread public concern which politicians ignore at their peril. Ways must be found to render public services more responsive to those who use them. Poor quality services need to be improved and waste eliminated. In its fashion, the Charter programme has attempted such tasks. It has highlighted the need to improve the standards of public service management and accountability. It attempts to transform the culture of the public service into one which acknowledges the vital importance of user perceptions of service standards and delivery. Any Government whose strategy is to guarantee robust, popular and effective public services must pursue these broad objectives (p. v).

# Part Seven:

# Integrating Public Services

*7.1 National background*

*Delivering Better Government* (1996) noted that:

> There are many vital national issues which can no longer be resolved from within the functional remit and skill base ofa single Department or Agency. Indeed, many of the most pressing issues which must be addressed require the expertise and commitment of a variety of Departments and Agencies in order to achieve a successful outcome. Increasingly, therefore, effective action necessitates new approaches to understanding, developing and managing the linked activities and processes that result in the desired outcome, whether the provision of services to the public or sound policy advice to Ministers and Government. These approaches challenge traditional Departmental and functional boundaries (p. 14).

*Delivering Better Government* (1996) goes on to identify a number of key policy areas where a more integrated intra and interdepartmental approach would be vital for the effective delivery of services. These policy areas include unemployment and social exclusion, as well as local development. In addition, the need for improved integration in the delivery of public services, within Ireland, has an important geographical dimension (see, for example, the *Report of the Rural Development Policy Advisory Group, 1997)*.

The profoundly unsatisfactory implications ofpoor integration in the delivery of social services specifically have been clearly expressed by the NESF (1995):

> Social services are administered by and through different bodies and there is little, if any, inter-Departmental or inter-Agency communication or planning. Unemployment and other forms of social exclusion give rise to fflancial, housing, educational and social needs which are addressed by a disparate array of services. Yet the users ofthese discrete services are mainly the same people ... In general, the entire system involves lengthy, repetitious applications, information gathering and travel to claim due entitlements. This involves costs for the people who, by the very fact they are claiming assistance, are not in a position to pay. In particular, people living in rural areas find transport and access *23*
> to social services a serious problem (pp. 31-33)[23].

*7.2 Different approaches*

Such difficulties are not unique to Ireland but are generally characteristic of many public administrations which have strong vertical structural organisation into separate departments and agencies, but comparatively weak horizontal structures for the effective development, management and delivery of services involving crosscutting issues. Internationally, a number of different approaches can be identified that seek to improve the integrated delivery of public services at the local, regional and national levels. In addition, developing information technologies are being utilised to support these solutions.

> *Onestop shops,* or citizen's service centres are another service improvement tool, different from the various charters. One of their specific purposes may be to provide clients with particular information adapted to the different situations experienced by them. Onestop shops are being tested and promoted mostly at a

local level in the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, the Nordic countries and Italy. ... (OECD) Member countries suggest that a single point of contact for information improves efficiency with simple referral tasks (Amberg, 1996, p. 256).

However, as Amberg also points out, 'onestop shops need to perform the service, not just provide information about it' (p. 256). In their study of public welfare services across the EU, Deakin, et al. (1995) cite a number of examples in the social welfare area, where the provision of a onestop shop facility had significantly improved not only the quality of informational services available to their customers, but also the processing and payment of claims locally. These local level examples included the Ballyfermot OneStop Shop (Dublin) and the Severnside District Benefits Agency (UK). The Department of Agriculture and Food, as well as the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs, are also actively developing the improved access to a range of services through their network of local offices.

Desirable as such initiatives are, they do not generally go further than improving the integration of services provided by different parts of the same department or agency. *Government gateways* progress the onestop shop concept to embrace a range of service providers, not always exclusively from the public sector.

The efficient provision of a high quality service to the public requires integrated, customerorientated services. However, the customer does not necessarily differentiate between the various public sector organisations and may not always appreciate 'who does what'. The question of linkage between local authorities and other public services must, therefore, be addressed. Ideally, there should be a single local contact point where people can get information and advice on the full range of public services, submit claims or applications for such services and receive the services required *(Better Local Government,* 1996, p.36).

A number of pilot initiatives in this area are currently in operation or being developed in Ireland. Other local level examples are cited by Deakin et al. (1995), e.g. L'Alliance Project for the elderly at IssylesMoulineaux (France). In addition, innovative applications of information technology (IT) are being developed to aid the provision of improved integrated service delivery systems at local level (see 7.5 below). Finally, the Australian government has embarked upon the development of a superagency to act as a central gateway for the public to access a range of departmental and agency services. Taking each administrative level in turn, it will now be valuable to discuss case studies of national, regional and local initiatives to improve the integrated delivery of public services.

## 7.3 National case study: Australia

As discussed earlier, many OECD countries have been engaged in public service reform programmes over the past two decades, which have often embraced different and changing approaches to the improvement of service delivery systems. In Australia, recent changes in strategy have resulted in radical proposals to both reform the public service more generally and to adopt an innovative approach to the providercustomer interface. During the period 1983-1996, the strategic approach adopted in Australia was one of managerial reform (see *Figure 4)*. However, following a change of government in 1996, the emphasis has shifted markedly towards reform through exposure to marketled forces. Whilst acknowledging the continuing need to maintain a core public service, privatisation of service provision is now one of the reform programme's key features. Although these features had been evident, if not dominant, in the earlier reform efforts, the emphasis from the mid1990s onwards has been on competition and contestability in service provision, contracting out, client focus and the application of purchaser/provider principles (see Halligan, 1997).

Greater emphasis is now placed on the contribution to be made by the private and voluntary sectors to service provision. 'Departments

and agencies are now being asked to identify those functions or services that could be contestable and transferred in whole or in part to the private sector. Only when it can be shown that the public sector clearly adds more value than might be elsewhere achieved is service delivery being retained in the public sector' (Kemp, 1997). In addition to the promotion of service charters (see *Part 6),* the government created in July 1997 a new agency, *Centrelink,* which aims to provide a highquality service to external customers and a onestop shop for services currently provided by different departments. These functions include all payments and services (income support) previously provided by the Department of Social Security (DSS) and some employment and student services for the Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (DEETYA). In total, five departments currently buy services from *Centrelink* under servicelevel agreements. From a servicedelivery viewpoint, the strategic aim of *Centrelink* is to provide, through one agency, a multifunctional range of services previously undertaken by different departments.

*Centrelink's* staff totals over 23,000 and comprises personnel transferred from the DSS head office in Canberra, 20,000 from the DSS's existing area, regional and national offices and telephone service centres. Further staff are being transferred from the Department of Health and Family Services. The small number (700) of DSS staff remaining focus on policy and research work. The agency's budget ($40 million) represents approximately 30 percent ofthe commonwealth government's expenditure. *Centrelink's* head office is in Canberra but it will use the DSS's existing service network of 282 local offices for service delivery. IT will be used to improve services through toucliscreens, call centres, Internet access and selfhelp information kiosks.

*Centrelink* has its own service charter indicating what customers can expect from the agency, what they have to do to receive a highquality service and offering an effective complaints mechanism. *Centrelink* has been established as a statutory authority, rather than corporation or

business enterprise, with a board of management and chief executive accountable to the minister. It is anticipated that its functions will eventually become subject to contestability (see Australian National Audit Office, 1997). In many ways it is too soon to be able to evaluate critically the effectiveness of this radical approach being adopted by the Australian government. For example, major issues remain to be resolved about *Centrelink's* legal liability for the information provided. However, even at this early stage, this case study provides a valuable illustration of the types of approach that can be adopted at national level to improve the integration of related services previously provided by different agencies.

### 7.4 Rural area case study: Sligo

In *Better Local Government: A Programme for Change* (1996), the Department of the Environment argued strongly that not only should existing local authority services provided at county and town levels be more effectively integrated but, more radically, that the infrastructure already provided throughout Ireland by the local authorities should be used to provide the basis for government gateways.

> Some public services (e.g. in the taxation and social welfare areas) have already made significant progress towards developing onestop shops covering their own particular services. Various related other initiatives are under way, including pilot projects in the context of western development, work on the development of an integrated social services system, and on the development of local authority centres with comprehensive information and advice on housing options and schemes. As yet, however, limited progress has been made towards developing the type of 'gateway to government' envisaged ... Local authorities, with their multipurpose remit and wide geographical coverage, are well placed to fulfil this role, building on the existing network of local authority area offices (p.36).

The Department then goes on to advocate that every effort should be made to bring local public offices together in the same building or adjacent to each other in a public service cluster or campus. Suchclusters would seek to include not just local authority offices but also those of development agencies, health boards and social welfare offices etc. These proposals were supported by the Devolution Commission which advocated the establishment of onestop shops in five different national locations to provide housing, education, economic and environmental services at local level.

Recent developments facilitated by Sligo County Council provide a good example of the type of initiative already in train[24]. Since early 1996, a range of local authority services and local development agencies have been brought together at the Sligo Development Centre[25]. As well as sharing accommodation and infrastructure provision, perhaps more significantly, work systems are being integrated and staff expertise shared. The centre also operates as a onestop shop for the even wider range of voluntary organisations, development associations and individuals concerned with local development. 'The impact at community level of the combined strategy is far greater than could be expected from the splintered approach where individual initiatives were being developed in isolation with consequent overlapping of effort, duplication of facilities and lack of customer focus' (Madden, 1997). Elsewhere in the county, the Sligo Rural Renewal Project (1996) is piloting, through ACE (a federation of local voluntary groups), the improved coordination of state agency services within a disadvantaged rural area (Lough Arrow/Castlebaldwin) (see *Pilot Programme Interim Evaluation Report,* 1997).

*7.5 Local case study: Navan (Co. Meath)*

Throughout the literature on improving public service delivery systems, there are frequent references to the potential contribution that can be made by developing appropriate IT-based platforms. This is particularly true

with regard to the improved integration of public services within and between agencies. To help envisage how such a platform might operate and what it might contribute, by way of improved public service, it is valuable to consider in some detail an appropriate case study at the local level. Meath County Council has deployed, and is deploying, IT-based systems as a means of realising the business objectives identified under SMI more generally and *Better Local Government,* in particular.

Located to the north of Dublin, Meath is a large prosperous county of 905 square miles and 110,000 people. In addition to Navan, which is the county town and main administrative and business centre, the other main settlements are Ashbourne, Duleek, Dunshaughlin, Kells, Oldcastle, Slane and Trim. While the southern half of the county is increasingly affected by the growth of commuting to Dublin, the rest of the area is largely agricultural in character but with important mining, manufacturing and tourism sectors. With a population of over 12,000 in the town and its environs, Navan is not markedly different from many other mediumsized Irish county towns.

However, it is its unremarkable character that makes the innovative and pioneering approach of Meath County Council, whose headquarters are based in Navan, all the more remarkable. Senior managers and elected members in the authority have embarked upon an ambitious programme of IT development designed to improve the quality and accessibility of council services provided to the public as well as the internal efficiency of the council's operation. The county management team is fully committed to providing integrated management systems which will enable local authority services to be directly accessed online by the general public.

Under the leadership of the county manager, and with the support of an IT unit of ten staff, Meath County Council was the first Irish local authority to implement an *Intranet Information Platform*[26]. Their business case for an Intranet approach is based on its case of use and deployment in a wide area network; its flexibility; ease of administration and training; and

cost-effectiveness. Intranet technology also facilitates the operationalisation of onestop shops. Present IT-based administrative systems include finance (i.e. payroll, creditors payments, cash receipting, income and expenditure), housing rents/loans, rates, water charges, the INGRES database (Register of Electors, planning data, roads database), as well as a countywide Geographical Information System (GIS) and linkage to static data such as policy documents. Several of these systems were developed or partly developed in-house. One novel but extremely important Intranet feature is the scrolling marquee that allows the entire organisation to be alerted in the case of an emergency e.g. a major fire, road closure or disruption of water supply. The information will scroll on every homepage and any staff member is therefore in a position to inform the public as necessary and handle enquiries.

The Intranet disseminates updated information on all aspects of the council's business and will ultimately provide a single interface, for use by staff, elected members and the public, for accessing a diverse range of information on their locality in a user-friendly manner. To support these developments, the council has made a major investment, not just in the necessary hardware and software, but in the training and development of staff. The library and six area offices located in the main settlements outside Navan are linked into this network and multi-purpose reception areas, with customer self-service points, are being provided. These local service centres will act as one-stop shops, with all county council forms now available on the Intranet where they can be filled in and processed on the spot.

In its submission to the Telecom tireann *Information Age Town* competition, the potential of its Intranet platform to improve the integration of services provided by other public bodies in Navan was also acknowledged[27]. Besides the county council, a wide range of other public services and bodies are located within Navan, delivering services to the locality. In addition, oluntary organisations and private sector services had an important potential role (see *Figure 6)*. Although these proposals

may now be modified ortake longerto reach fruition, the potential is there for quantum improvements in the delivery of services, by the public sector and other agencies, to the general public through the medium of IT.

**Figure 6: Navan Website**
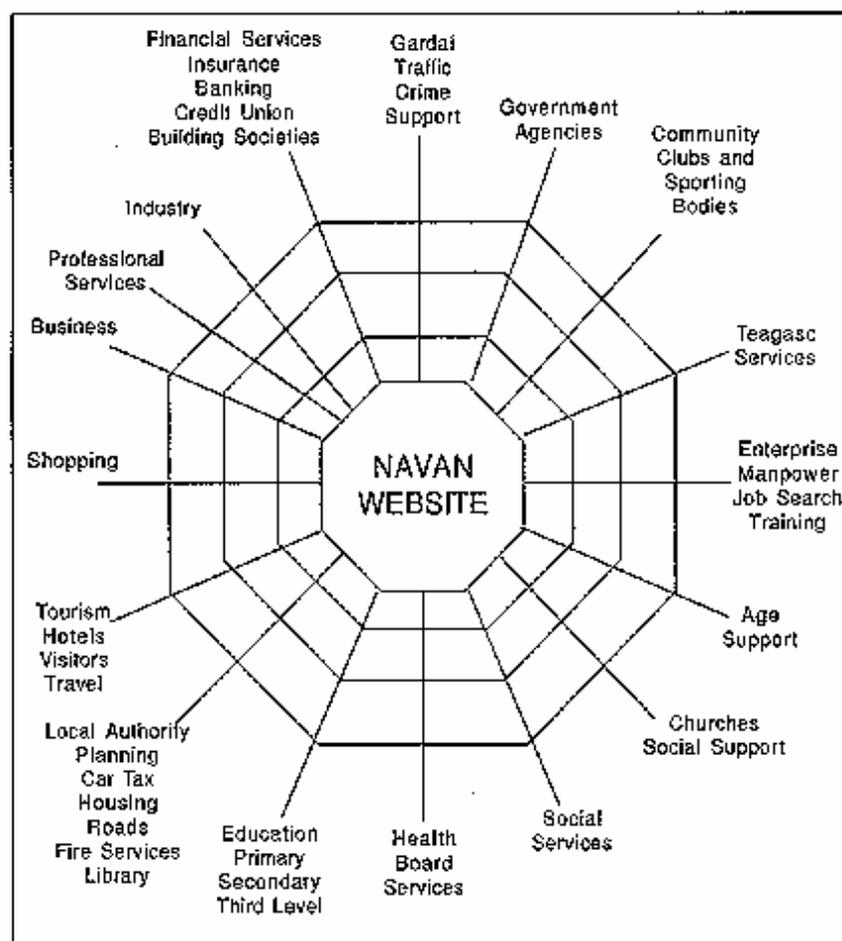


*Source:* Navan UDC (1996)

# Part Eight:

# Engagement with the Public

*8.1 Why engage?*

It has already been seen that different strategic approaches by governments to the improvement of public service delivery systems have sought to engage with the general public in a variety of ways (see *Figure 4*). The need to engage with the users ofpublic services holds true whether the strategy for reform is market driven or more oriented towards empowerment. For whatever reason, by engaging with its external customers, public bodies are seeking to improve the efficiency, effectiveness, and hopefully, the equity of the services they deliver.

In summarising the results of their recent UK-based research, Steele and Seargeant (1997) identify three main types of reasons for public service bodies to engage with the public:

- They regard *specific* reasons as the most important and these fall into four main groups: the exploration of needs; the development of policies, plans and strategies; the setting ofpriorities for services; and the assessment of service performance. Examples cited include consultation to encourage greater public participation in the arts in Wales; police authorities holding public meetings to nominate priorities for area policing in the following year; national customer satisfaction surveys for the Benefits Agency to assess service performance; and the development of user-friendly methods of self-assessment by the tax authorities.

- *Contextual* reasons are regarded as less obvious and relate particularly to culture and attitudes. They often derive from a belief in the value of consultation per se or the desire to empower users. Other contextual reasons identified can be less positive, e.g. the desire to create public support for an idea which would then become an obstacle to implementing a government decision.

- Finally, organisations may have *instrumental* reasons which may not be explicit but serve to undermine the success of consultation. Such reasons would include 'going through the motions' by complying with requirements to consult or using consultation to defer difficult decisions.

Whatever the motivation, such engagement strategies can have wider implications.

> Service quality initiatives ... raise fundamental issues about the relationship between the state and the citizen. ... As direct consultation sometimes through new bodies such as user boards with client as well as broader groups of citizens increases, considerations arise about the relationship between the existing democratic processes and these new consultative arrangements. Citizens are also represented in representative bodies (city councils and parliaments) by elected politicians. Direct consultation with citizens may change the role and flinctioning of representative bodies, since it provides new channels for information on the needs of the citizens to reach decision makers (Shand and Amberg, 1996).

*8.2 Levels of engagement*

On the basis of experiences to date in OECD member states, Lunde (1996) suggests that there is a continuum of involvement by external customers in the delivery of services by public bodies:

- *Information:*
  At this first level, the customer is provided with information about the services available. The primary purpose of this customer information is to increase transparency and facilitate the handling of enquiries by providing the necessary details to help any subsequent application. In turn, this can lead to more effective processing of claims. The main challenge for public bodies at this level is to identify the appropriate target group and then reach that group when it has been identified.

- *Consultation:*
  At this level, the customer is invited to give views on the service concerned. However, these views may or may not impact upon the delivery of the service concerned because responsibility for such decisions remains with the service provider or government. For the public service manager at this level, the principal challenges relate to defining the user and devising appropriate means ofconsultation (e.g. through surveys or focus groups).

- *Partnership:*
  The progress from consultation to joint or shared decision making with regard to public service provision represents a significant change in the approach to user engagement. It signifies the adoption of an empowering rather than listening strategy and applies to situations where users have veto rights and/or are represented in more than a token fashion on decisionmaking bodies. Particular problems at this level include determining who will represent user views and how to manage situations where user views diverge significantly.

- *Delegation:*
  At this higher level of engagement, users are themselves empowered to make decisions, within an agreed fiamework determined by the service providers or government. Again, it can be difficult at this level to determine who will represent the users,  how will the process

of decision making be organised and who will be accountable for failures as well as successes in service provision.

- *Control:*
  Finally, the public service can adopt a strategy of complete empowerment, where users have full responsibility for and control over the provision of services. Although examples of this level of empowerment are comparatively rare, community run transport schemes or housing estate management would be near approximations.

As Pollitt (1996) has observed, 'The whole point of such [engagement] is that it should increase the probability that the service in question will be progressively shaped along the lines that its users would choose' (p. 138). The relationship between increasing empowerment of users and their involvement with different stages of the service delivery process is captured in *Figure 7.*

*8.3 Means of engagement*

In their analysis of experiences in OECD countries, Lunde (1996) and Amberg (1996) identify a wide range of different methodologies for giving voice to users' needs. These include smallscale surveys of key informer groups; larger scale customer satisfaction surveys; local/regional/national opinion polls; referenda; surveys of geographically defined populations where spatial factors are believed to be significant; feedback from the frontline experiences of service providers; user boards and suggestion boxes; customer complaints procedures; user advisory boards; representation of users on boards; focus groups; brainstorming groups; monitoring of news media reports; as well as public hearings or sounding board meetings.

In their analysis and evaluation of the wide range of different types of consultation used by public authorities in the UK to date, Steele

**Figure 7: Dimensions of User Choice**



Users have full executive authority over service

Users share executive authority with producers (power-sharing)

Users have right to be consulted

Vertical Dimension:
Degree of POWER of users,
from low to high

Horizontal Dimension:
SCOPE of user power

Service design — Service Inputs — Service activity/ processes — Service outputs — Service outcomes/ impacts/ effects — User satisfaction (outcome/ expectation gap)

Users have rights of redress

Users are consulted at discretion of producer

Users provided with information

*Source:* OECD, 1996

and Seargeant (1997) rightly stress that choosing the right method of consultation is extremely important. This choice should be determined by the purpose of the consultation exercise, the characteristics of those to be consulted and the organisation's experiences and capabilities. They also stress that even the right method will not produce useful outcomes unless the process is planned and managed well, deploying general project management skills, as well as skills and tasks specific to the consultation. From their analysis, not perhaps surprisingly, they conclude that the most difficult phase for organisations was decision making after the consultation. In many cases, changes or actions stemming directly from the consultation were hard to find. Steele and Seargeant (1997) also counsel that: 'The current popularity of consultation appears to endow it with powers it does not possess. It is not a suitable tool for resolving conflict or avoiding difficult choices'.

Many of the means of engagement listed above will be familiar within the Irish context and some of them will have already been utilised by public service bodies as part of a QCS approach. For example, the Department of Agriculture and Food consults regularly with representatives of its key producer interest groups over the development of its services,[28] as well as with staff. The experiences of the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs in this regard are already comparatively well documented and include feedback from ongoing consultation with customers and staff[29]. However, rather than focusing on the use of some of these more familiar modes of engagement with users, it is probably more informative to evaluate a less familiar approach being developed elsewhere which has particular potential for helping public service managers deal with problematic service delivery issues at the local level.

*8.4 Case study: Citizens' Juries*

Originally pioneered in Germany and the USA, and used more recently in Spain and the Netherlands, *Citizens' Juries* involve the public in their

capacity as ordinary citizens with no special 'axe to grind'. They are usually commissioned by an organisation which has power to act on their recommendation[30]. Between twelve and sixteen jurors are recruited, using a combination of random and stratified sampling, to be broadly representative of their community. Their task is to address an important question about policy or planning. They are brought together for four days, with a team of two moderators. They are fully briefed about the background to the question, through written information and evidence from witnesses. Jurors scrutinise the information, cross-examine the witnesses and discuss different aspects ofthe problem in small groups and plenary sessions. Their conclusions are compiled in a report which is returned to the jurors for their approval before being submitted to the commissioning authority. The jury's verdict need not be unanimous nor is it binding. However, the commissioning authority is required to publicise the jury and its findings, to respond within a set time and either to follow its recommendations or to explain publicly why not (see Coote and Lenaghan, 1997).

Compared with other methods of engagement, *Citizens' Juries* represent a significant movement along the spectrum from consultation with users to the empowerment of citizens (see Figures 4 and 7). They offer to ordinary citizens a meaningful opportunity for the provision of quality information on the delivery of services, time to reflect on such issues, the opportunity to scrutinise these issues with service providers and elected representatives, as well as the freedom to come to independent conclusions. Jurors are financially compensated for their involvement and potential loss of earnings. The authority which the jury findings can carry depends to a considerable extent on how far their membership can be seen to be fairly representative of the population concerned and the extent to which their deliberations are conducted openly, without bias or distortion.

Examples of where the citizens' jury approach has proved valuable are growing in number. In the UK, the following are illustrative:

- More people with severe mental illnesses live in central London than any other area of the UK and the burden on local service providers is immense. Kensington, Chelsea and Westminster Health Authority sets aside £300 million, or 26 per cent of its total budget, for its 2,300 mentallyill patients. Members of the jury were asked to put themselves in the position ofpatients, carers and the public and decide the best way forward from each perspective. Thejury recommended a number of concrete proposals, including an educational/awarenessraising campaign for the public and improved crisis support facilities which are currently being taken forward by service providers. This jury was jointly funded by the Health Authority and the Riverside Mental Health Trust.

- A citizens' jury was also constituted in Walsall to help decide the way forward for palliative care for the terminally ill within the Authority's area. Four possible scenarios were presented to the jury and their recommendations regarding improved specialist nursing care and provision of a local hospice are now being evaluated.

- Following a citizens' jury on drugsrelated crime, Lewisham Council (London) is to invest up to £300,000 over three years on a new and innovative community drugs education programme.

- Other recent UK examples includejuriesto deliberate onhow citizens should pay for health care in the future (Luton), 'on priority setting for local health care provision (Cambridge and Huntingdon Health Authority), the impact of information technology (Norwich), and redevelopment proposals for local urban areas (Camden, London).

## 8.5 Conclusion

By focusing upon the recent experiences of the citizens' jury experiments in the UK it is not intended to imply that other innovative measures to engage with the general public are not also being developed. For example, the Office for Public Management (OPM) has been commissioned by a

number of local authorities for this purpose and has used deliberative sampling methodologies, as well as area liaison panels. By emphasising innovative experiments, it is also not intended to imply that more established means of engaging with the public are not still meaningful, depending on the issues and users concerned.  However, it is clear that the use of *Citizens' Juries* by local government and health authorities in the UK has added significantly to the range and utility of consultation mechanisms available.


       *Citizens' Juries* are not cheap. Each lasts four days (including one day at a weekend) and jurors are currently paid £200 each for participation. Management time, hire of premises and evidence from service providers can increase costs to £20,000.  However, these costs compare reasonably well with those of an opinion poll, over which they have a number of distinct advantages. The views of people on the street are not necessarily wellinformed. Jury participants are and they have an opportunity to engage closely with experts and service providers in forming their views. Available evidence suggests that jurors take their responsibilities seriously and public service managers are learning, through involvement with juries, that only wellfounded proposals stand up to close scrutiny.

# Part Nine:
# Changing Organisational Culture

*9.1 Introduction*

> For too long, the organisation and management of the public sector seem to have taken on a life of their own. A country's citizens were almost after thoughts to the complex network of structures, policies and systems internal to government. However, the reversion to a client focus in goveniment changes substantially the operating environment for both elected officials and public service employees.... Service quality is so much more than saying 'We'll answer the telephone in three rings or fewer'. It is a continuous effort to improve quality in every way possible. That means that as elected officials and as public service employees, we can expect the words 'service' and 'quality' to become virtually interchangeable in our lives. And the public will certainly look upon that as good news (Eggleton, 1996, pp. 219-223).

Speaking from his extensive experience as President of the Treasury Board (Canada), Eggleton stresses that effective improvements in service delivery systems require more than superficial changes in work practices. The commitment to providing and improving the quality of services delivered to the public has to be mainstreamed within the organisation. It has to become an integral part of the way that public body functions in both its internal operations and external interface with the

general public. It often requires nothing less than a fundamental topdown and bottomup reorientation of the established organisational culture.

In order to begin to understand what this process of change might entail, a case study has been selected for examination in detail. This organisation would not regard itselfas having successfully completed this transformation entirely. However, it has made sustained efforts over a significant period of time to integrate an explicit emphasis in its business strategy on delivering improving services to its customer base. In order to ground such issues within the shared experience of the Irish public service, the case study selected can be taken as indicative of what can be achieved by individual departments/offices, given sufficient commitment throughout the organisation.

### 9.2 Case study: Office of the Revenue Commissioners

In terms of the range of serviceprovider relationships discussed earlier, taxation is a prime example of a mandatory service provided by a monopolistic public body with statutory authority to potentially involuntary clients. At the same time, it is also important to appreciate that the relationship between a taxation service and its public goes well beyond that of payer and payee. In such a situation, the public can reasonably expect certain standards of service, including good information, support and guidance, together with clear avenues for complaint and redress, should they be felt to be necessary. As citizens, the general public also has responsibilities to both provide, through the political process, and honour, through their own behaviour, a fair taxation system.

> The idea of the taxpayer's agreement to pay is an essential element of a successful tax system. A contract between the state and its citizens about the way in which revenue is raised and spent is fairly explicit in democracy as we know it. Some political cultures carefully nurture the civic aspect of taxation. Such an

approach is not historically part of the Irish tradition and an appreciation of the cost to the compliant taxpayer of those who evade their fair contribution is a recent and welcome development (Hederman O'Brien, 1997, p. 101).

It is within this context that the changes that have taken place in the Office ofthe Revenue Commissioners over the past two decades need to be understood. In the period leading up to the mid-1980s, there was large scale and growing popular dissatisfaction with the existing policy and administration of the Irish taxation system. In its *Fifth Report (1986),* the Commission on Taxation summed up the situation as follows: 'The administration of taxation in Ireland has virtually broken down. Non-compliance is a major problem. The situation will get worse unless the evident problems are tackled quickly and with determination. Radical measures are needed'. Such was the scale of the pressure mounting on taxation policy and the administration of the taxation system, that the Office of Revenue Commissioners began a fundamental reappraisal of the manner in which it conducted its business. While the levels of taxation were a matter for government, the management of the system itself was clearly the direct responsibility of the office.

A number of significant organisational weaknesses were identified:

- Existing systems were process rather than customer driven. Little casework was done. The organisation was desk-bound with little direct facetoface contact with taxpayers. When people did not submit tax returns, estimates were issued. These estimates were often excessive and were, in consequence, either ignored or appealed. The appeals system could not cope.

- The public perception of the office and its officials was poor. In fact, many taxpayers felt intimidated by the organisation and, as a result, were unwilling to make contact. This situation undermined a system which relied on voluntary compliance.

- Little or no customer service facilities existed and people were actively encouraged not to come back with further enquiries. The most simple courtesies were not observed, e.g. saying 'thank you' when payments were actually made. Issuing of receipts was also generally slow.

- Staff morale was low and the Revenue Commissioners was seen as an unattractive place to work. Staff felt alienated by the severe criticism to which the organisation was being subjected.

- All in all, the office was failing in its core business. For the reasons indicated above, tax revenues were down and the taxation system was grinding to a halt.

Such was the scale of difficulties that the organisation undertook, taking account of the Commission on Taxation and the advice of the International Monetary Fund (IMF), a fundamental review of the administration of the tax code as well as the system itself.

As a result, the Revenue Commissioners decided, with strong support from its senior management team, to undertake a major QCS initiative. The scale of the cultural change required in the organisation at that time should not be underestimated. Over 6,000 staff had to buy into the new way of perceiving the taxpayer as a customer. Extensive training and awarenessraising sessions were undertaken.' Indeed, important internal debates took place on whether the concept of a customer was appropriate in a mandatory relationship with the service provider. The argument for improved service delivery gained general acceptance, as staff appreciated that it would be easier to gain and retain customer loyalty, once it was made as easy as practicable to comply, by rewarding compliance with better services and discouraging slippage back into noncompliance.

An integral part of this relaunch was the development and commitment to a simple but powerful mission statement: *'The mission of*

*the Revenue Commissioners is to serve the community by fairly and efficiently collecting taxes and duties and implementing import and export controls'* and a *Charter of Rights (1989)* for customers. The bilingual *Charter ofRights* was published and displayed in each of the office's 130 branches nationwide. It is also used frequently in other contacts with taxpayers. The charter states that in its dealings with the Revenue Commissioners, the public is entitled to:

- *Courtesy and consideration:* to expect that Revenue staff will at all times carry out their duties courteously and considerately;

- *Presumption ofhonesty:* to be presumed that a taxpayer's affairs have been dealt with honestly unless there is reason to believe to the contrary and to subject to the Revenue Commissioners responsibility for ensuring compliance with the law;

- *Information:* to expect that every reasonable effort will be made to give *full,* accurate and timely information about Revenue law, entitlements and obligations under it. So that they can do this, Revenue are entitled to expect all the facts and the *full* cooperation which they need to deal with your tax affairs;

- *Impartiality:* to have these affairs dealt with in an impartial manner by Revenue staff who seek to collect only the correct amount of tax or duty, no more and no less;

- *Privacy and confidentiality:* to expect that personal and business informationprovided will be treated in strict confidence andusedonly for purposes allowed by law;

- *Independent review:* the right to object to a charge of tax or duty if it is felt the law has been applied incorrectly and to ask that the case be reviewed. If the matter cannot be resolved satisfactorily by Revenue officials there are rights in law to an independent review;

- *Compliance costs:* to expect that the Revenue Commissioners and their staff recognise the need to keep to the minimurn necessary the

costs incurred in complying with Revenue law, subject to their responsibility to carry out their functions efficiently and economically; and

- *Consistent administration:* to expect that the Revenue Commissioners will administer the law consistently and apply it firmly to those who try to evade paying their lawful share.

The charter also states that:

> The objective of the Revenue Commissioners is to collect the taxes, duties and other charges placed under our care and management in an efficient way and at the least possible cost to the public. This objective is to be achieved in a manner which (a) fosters the highest degree ofpublic confidence in our integrity, efficiency and fairness, and (b) encourages voluntary compliance with Revenue law and deters evasion and avoidance.

Both operationalising this Objective and ensuring that the service delivered is consistent with the charter of rights were extremely daunting tasks, given the scale of activity involved. After all, Revenue activities impact directly on every household and business in the country, with a total population of over 1.5 million taxpayers[31]. In order to operationalise its new organisational goals, Revenue has integrated QCS into its corporate planning and business planning processes. Its first corporate plan, *Strategies for Achievement (1994-96)* placed the emphasis on simplification of information and procedures, as well as developing a programme to assess external perception of Revenue's performance.

As part of the customer service agenda, a new range of user-friendly leaflets and guides were produced, including those specifically targeted to less advantaged groups (such as the disabled). Libraries, post offices and Garda stations were used to distribute appropriate informational material. Forms were redesigned and new information pack produced for specific key audiences (e.g. small and

medium-sized enterprises). Programmes of consultation with professional and other bodies took place. Special exhibitions and informational stands travelled around the country. Perhaps most significant of all, the central revenue information office (Cathedral Place, Dublin) and local enquiry office in Dublin were opened. During the period of the first plan, two independent customer surveys were also undertaken to monitor the attitudes of the general public and business community to services provided. The responses indicated a considerable degree of satisfaction with the quality of customer service provided.

The *Statement of Strategy 1997-1999* was formulated, in consultation with staff, to increase ownership of the planning process. Nine working groups were established, involving 160 staff across all grades and locations, and each group, which was chaired by an assistant secretary was given a business area programme to consider, including customer service. Whilst references to QCS permeate the statement, there are a number of specific commitments made to improve customer services:

1. An officer will be assigned with overall responsibility for developing, coordinating and managing customer service policy, and ensuring consistently high standards of service throughout the office.

2. Strengthen the quality service approach by establishing service standards for interactions with all different categories of customers (including individuals, large businesses, and small/mediumsized enterprises).

3. Continue to develop integrated Revenue information offices in major locations and evaluate the feasibility of a onestop shop approach with other departments where there is a common customer base. Vehicle Registration Tax (VRT) information kiosks are already operational at the VR Office in Tallaght and at Cathedral Place, Dublin.

4. Use modern telecommunications to encourage transaction of business by telephone, including extension of the Central Telephone Information Office (CTIO), where appropriate.

5.  Encourage electronic filing of returns and declarations, as well as other electronic information exchange.

6.  Give taxpayers a wide choice in the way they do business, e.g. direct debit, GIRO, Laser cards.

7.  Continue to improve the efficiency of repayment arrangements.

8.  Provide timely and accurate information on the website.

The current position within Revenue is probably best encapsulated by the Chief Inspector of Taxes: 'We should have a fixation about the quality of everything we do. This attention to quality covers everything from day-to-day taxpayer services to professional, effective checks and deterrents where necessary' (cited by McCumiskey, 1994). Working out these values in business terms is, however, never final but part of a continuously changing process.

*9.3 Conclusions*

From analysis of the information available on the changes which have taken place within Revenue, a number of broad lessons can be drawn. Over a period of a decade and a half, it has been possible to reorient fundamentally the Office of the Revenue Commissioners, from being process oriented to being focused on the needs of it s external customers. This process of change was greatly facilitated by business imperatives. It was also facilitated by strong managerial leadership which adopted an increasingly consultative approach in spreading ownership of these changes as broadly as possible through the staff.

Customer service values have become inseparable from the success of the business overall and when changes are proposed, one of the first questions asked is, 'how will this affect our customersT. Informal as well as formal channels for feedback on service delivery are exploited. If a customer is dissatisfied with the service, and there is just cause for complaint or appeal, then the customer is encouraged to do so.

The absence of complaints is not taken as a positive performance indicator. Appeals and complaints procedures are widely publicised and the pattern of both these courses of action analysed for lessons learned. The office's training capacity was expanded to cater for the customer service training of staff and the majority of courses now contain a customer service component. The office's view is that any expenditure costs associated with adopting a customer service approach are more than offset by gains in tax revenue and growing levels of compliance. There is certainly little comparison between the general public's perception of the work ofthe Revenue Commissioners in the early 1980s and the current perception.

# Part Ten:
# Going Forward

*10.1 Résumé*

Improving the quality of services delivered to the general public is both a key element of the SMI change programme currently in progress and vitally important to the economic and social wellbeing of the country. At the present time in Ireland, individual government departments/offices and other public service bodies have developed Quality Customer Service (QCS) Initiatives to improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the way their businesses are run. Analysis of best practice both here and overseas indicates that there is still considerable scope for further improvement by the Irish public service in this area, for example with regard to improved service integration and engagement with the public. Under *Delivering Better Government* (1996), an ambitious agenda for change has been proposed and most departments/offices have now introduced twoyear Action Plans aimed at moving their organisation further in that direction. Before concluding this discussion paper by suggesting possible ways forward, it will now be valuable to review the approach adopted in those departmentalAction Plans to assess the extent to which they deal with the types of issues discussed above and reflect the latest best practice.

*10.2 Civil Service Customer Action Plans*

It has already been seen that, when launched in May 1997, the Quality Customer Service Initiative required a large number of service providers

to develop twoyear *Action Plans* clearly addressing, on behalf of the external customer, the important issues of standards, information, timeliness/courtesy, complaints, redress, consultation, choice, better coordination and access. The requirement to develop *Action Plans* applied not only to those departments/offices dealing with large numbers of the public but also to central policy departments/offices whose direct contact with external customers was much more limited. Overall, the resultant output from departments/offices is extremely varied.

For some departments/offices (such as the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs and the Revenue Commissioners) that already have a considerable track record in the QCS area, their plans tend to summarise and/or represent information already available in the public domain. For most departments/offices, however, it is clear that explicit statements and commitments to improving the delivery of services to the public over a specific timeframe are a comparatively new departure. Some plans make effective use of photographical material  (e.g. the Departments of Defence; Education and Science; as well as Tourism, Sport and Recreation), while some plans place a stronger emphasis on other design features to make the documents appear bright and attractive (e.g. the Departments of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; Finance; and Marine and Natural Resources).

In contrast, other plans adopt a far more  minimalist approach presentationally but still remain clear in terms of their content (e.g. the Departments of Justice, Equality and Law Reform; Environment and Local Government; Health and Children; and the Taoiseach; and the Valuation Office). Preferred format varies considerably. Most are either A4 or A5 in size. However, presumably to appeal to the general public, some agencies have produced theirplans exclusively in leaflet format (e.g. the Department of Foreign Affairs, the Office of Public Works (OPW) and the Land Registry). References to websites in most plans are frequent.

Lack of standardisation in appearance may not be particularly significant from a customer service viewpoint. What is more significant, however, is the extent to which the different departments/offices explicitly address the principles outlined in the guidance for the production of these plans (see Appendix 2). For example, some departments/offices are extremely clear in the manner in which they intend to deliver on the specified standards, what individuals need to do to contact the relevant operational or other units, and how to register a complaint if unsatisfied with the service provided. Such plans include the Departments of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands; and Public Enterprise; and the Central Statistics Office. Others are far more superficial in their approach.

Overall the plans lack consistency in terms of their perceived readership. Some are clearly designed for the general public. Other plans are extremely detailed in content, resembling more an internal business plan. The style of English used could also be plainer and more accessible. In addition, the plans vary considerably in their degree of bilingualism. The needs of particular customers, such as access for the disabled, are treated very unevenly. Likewise, only a few of the plans give a clear indication of the steps being taken to spread ownership of the plan amongst the staff themselves. A number of them read as imposed or top-down initiatives which have yet to fully take root in the departments concerned.

It would be too easy to criticise the generalised character and lack of specificity of a number of the *Action Plans* produced recently by departments and offices. However, it is clear that the very discipline of producing such a plan has begun a process of reflection and change in some organisations which needs to be further encouraged and monitored. Based upon the analysis provided by this research, are there practical ways to encourage and develop further the process of change that has already begun?

*10.3   Next steps*

This paper has examined the latest international thinking and best practice with regard to the improvement of public service delivery systems and has evaluated the pioneering initiatives already being undertaken within Ireland. The research indicates quite clearly that, with some notable and noteworthy exceptions at national, regional and local levels, there is still a very long way to go before it can be asserted that Irish public service organisations have taken on board wholeheartedly the need to be customer focused throughout the design, planning, implementation, monitoring, evaluation and review of the services delivered.

Too often, during the course of the research, a very strong qualitative impression was gained that in many bodies still, despite the national initiatives already taken and the rising expectations amongst external customers themselves, a genuine commitment to addressing the needs of the general public remained relatively low in the pecking order of managerial priorities compared, for example, to meeting the internal political demands of the system. Rarely were customer service needs placed centre stage. Often, customer service issues appeared to be pioneered, if at all, by a comparatively small number of committed individuals, at all levels and across a range of organisations, who all too frequently appeared to lack the real support of senior management to operationalise these concerns and mainstream customer service issues as an integral part of the business. Whilst in no way detracting from the achievements made within the Office ofthe Revenue Commissioners, for example, with regard to real improvements in the quality of service delivery systems, these changes were driven, in the first instance, by a business imperative. Many public bodies lack that external impetus to change and reorient their business activities to become customer rather than process driven.

In the absence of such imperatives, and given the comparatively early stage of meaningful developments to date, it is important to attempt

to plot possible ways forward which will encourage ratherthan discourage those positive tendencies already developing within the Irish public service. It will also be important to facilitate the sharing of experience, across the public service, of constructive approaches to addressing customer needs within a realistic management context. Finally, there are new ideas and initiatives being developed outside Ireland which, ifpiloted within an appropriate Irish context, could assist with the development of improved service integration and innovative but meaningful engagement with external customers. These could establish a demand within the Irish public service for recognition of achievements in the mainstreaming of customer service values within a wide range of different types of public service organisation.

With these broad objectives in mind, a number of potential ways forward are proposed for further informed discussion and debate:

- The progress made in Ireland to date, as well as experience in other administrations across the world, clearly indicates that an explicit and repeated commitment at the highest political level, as well as the direct and sustained involvement of the senior management team within the organisation(s) concerned, are essential prerequisites for driving forward the fundamental organisational changes which are necessary to ensure that customer needs are placed and kept at the centre of that organisation's mission and vision.

- It remains to be seen to what extent the objectives and targets set in the departments'/offices' twoyear Action Plans prove to be meaningful and/or deliverable. The progress of each organisation in taking forward, ftulher developing and implementing its plan needs to be monitored and reported on, both internally and externally, with both objectivity and realism. Where unforeseen difficulties arise, these need to be addressed positively and supportively. Effective management systems need to be developed to anticipate problems, as well as to disseminate, to staff and customers alike, the good news of actual achievements.

- In taking QCS Initiatives forward across organisations, but within specific sectors of activity (e.g. central or local government), the evidence suggests that it is important to seek to establish, and to achieve, the correct balance between the role ofthe centre in directing or overseeing change and the individual public body that will have to drive through that change in a manner that is meaningful to its particular service and/or locality. In such circumstances, it is difficult to be universally prescriptive. However, the progress made in a number of administrations with national and locallevel charter initiatives deserves further consideration in the Irish context. The approach to charters within the Irish public service to date has been somewhat ad hoc and adversely affected to some extent by the types of criticism levied, with some justification, at the *Citizen's Charter* initiative in the UK. It is, however, interesting to note that despite the change in political climate within the UK, the charter approach is to be overhauled rather than abolished. There are concrete lessons to be learned here for taking forward more systematically a charterstyle approach within Ireland, where this to be considered appropriate.

- The development and promotion of a nationally recognised *Charter Mark* or standard could be a valid role for a unit, within the central administration, responsible for promoting improved delivery systems within the public service. Such a unit or units could also publicise, through seminars, publications and other means, the promotion and sharing ofbest practice at national and local levels. Despite the public scepticism, experience in the UK has shown that such accreditation schemes have been remarkably popular, fuelled at least in part by peer rivalry between the organisations concerned.

- Extremely encouraging initiatives are currently in hand to improv the integration of services delivered within and between public bodies in Ireland. However, such experiments are only in their infancy and further work needs to be done to evaluate and suggest practical ways forward for their more widespread adoption. In this regard, the

promotion of pilot initiatives is particularly appropriate. In addition, the sharing of information on the latest ITbased initiatives, as well as other examples of best practice, would appear to be extremely important in this rapidly developing area.

- Fundamental improvements to service delivery systems raise difficult questions for existing management and work practices within the Irish public service. Indeed, the wholehearted adoption of a focus on customer needs often requires a fundamental reorientation of that organisation and a major change in its prevailing culture. Not enough is known in detail about best practice means of achieving such radical changes in an Irish public service context. However, many public bodies have now embarked publicly, if only tentatively, upon a course of action through their twoyear plans. The sharing of informed analysis on the different ways forward to achieving such changes would be extremely valuable in the context of the clearly stated objectives contained in *Delivering Better Government (1996)* to deliver improved public services to the general public.

- Finally, the research has indicated that, with a few notable exceptions, the Irish public service does not, by and large, seek actively and systematically to engage with the public it serves. A vast and expanding range of tools are now available to public bodies to help them consult with, or even empower, the citizens who both fund and use the services they provide. Once more the means are available, and the expertise exists, to work with public bodies in developing their strategies for engagement with the people they serve. Evidence from the UK and elsewhere suggests that the *Citizens' Jury* approach could be especially appropriate for helping to identify ways forward with particularly difficult areas of service delivery, e.g. in identifying and obtaining endorsement for service priorities in the health sector; for identifying and incorporating community needs in local environmental planning initiatives; or to inform the development of

a strategic crossagency approach to the resolution of major social problems, e.g. substance abuse.

## 10.4 Conclusions

This discussion paperhas sought to stimulate informed discussion ofsome issues central to the achievement oftangible improvements in the delivery of services to the general public in Ireland. Although it has drawn extensively upon best practice examples, both in Ireland and overseas, it has neither sought to be comprehensive nor definitive in its approach. Because of the potential breadth of the area of research enquiry, under the guidance of the Committee for Public Management Research (CPMR), it has focused on a limited number of issues of immediate and specific relevance to the current change programme. The ways forward identified above are for discussion by key change agents, who after due reflection may or may not decide to operationalise and/or alter these proposals. If this paper stimulates constructive debate, then it will have achieved its purpose.

Whatever the approach adopted, 'the overall aims of policy should be to improve and sustain the quality of all public services; to ensure that services are able to meet socially recognised needs; to guarantee access to services for all citizens who need them and fairness in the allocation of resources to those whose needs are greatest' (Bynoe, 1996, p. 109). The achievement of these aims requires a faridamental transformation in the nature of the organisation concerned and a continuing responsiveness to changing socioeconomic conditions.

**APPENDIX ONE**

**Departments/Offices included in the Quality
Customer Service Initiative**

Agriculture and Food

Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands

Central Statistics Office

Civil Service Commission

Defence

Education and Science

Enterprise, Trade and Employment

Environment and Local Government

Finance

Foreign Affairs

Health and Children

Justice, Equality and Law Reform

Land Registry

Marine and Natural Resources

Met tireann

Office of Public Works (including Government Supplies Agency)

Ordnance Survey

Public Enterprise

Revenue Commissioners

Social, Community and Family Affairs

Taoiseach

Tourism, Sport and Recreation

Valuation Office

**APPENDIX TWO**

**Principles for the Delivery of Quality**

**Customer Service**

**QUALITY SERVICE STANDARDS**

Publish a statement of standards which outlines the nature and quality of service which customers can legitimately expect and display it prominently at the point of service delivery.

**INFORMATION**

Take a proactive approach in providing information that is clear, timely, accurate, available at all points of contact and meets the needs of people with disabilities.

Continue the drive for simplification of rules, regulations, forms information leaflets and procedures.

**TIMELINESS AND COURTESY**

Deliver services with courtesy and minimum delay, fostering a climate of mutual respect between the service provider and customer.

**CONSULTATION**

Provide a structured approach to meaningful consultation with, and participation by, the customer in relation to the development, delivery and review of services.

Involve staff at all levels in the development of service delivery.

**CHOICE**

Provide choice, where feasible, in service delivery including payment methods, location of contact points, opening hours and delivery times.

Provide services for those who wish to do business through Irish.

**BETTER CO-ORDINATION**

Foster a more coordinated and integrated approach to delivery of services.

**COMPLAINTS**

Establish a well publicised, accessible, transparent and simple to use system of dealing with complaints about the quality of service provided.

**REDRESS**

Introduce a formalised system for customers who are dissatisfied with decisions.

**ACCESS**

Provide clean, accessible public offices which ensure privacy, comply with occupational and safety standards and facilitate access for those with disabilities.

Give contact names in all telephone and written communications to ensure ease of ongoing transactions.

**APPENDIX THREE**

**UK Citizen's Charter**

**Some examples of the Charters available**

**United Kingdom: England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland**

Taxpayer's Charter (HMC&E)

HM Customs and Excise Charter Standards

Taxpayer's Charter (M)

HM Customs and Excise  Traveller's Charter

**Great Britain: England, Scotland and Wales**

Benefits Agency Customer's Charter

Child Support Agency Charter

Contributor's Charter

Employer's Charter

Jobseeker's Charter

Redundancy Payments Service Charter

**England and Wales**

Council Tenant's Charter

Courts' Charter

Further Education Charter

Higher Education Charter

The London Bus Passenger's Charter

The London Underground Customer's Charter

Patient's Charter

Parent's Charter

Road User's Charter

Training and Employment Agency Charter

Victim's charter

**Scotland**

Further and Higher Education Charter
Tenant's Charter
Justice Charter
Patient's Charter
Parent's Charter

**Wales**

Charter for Further Education (Welsh language version)
Charter for Further Education (English language version)
Charter for Higher Education (Welsh language version)
Charter for Higher Education (English language version)
Council Tenant's Charter (Welsh language version)
Council Tenant's Charter (English language version)
Patient's Charter (Welsh language version)
Patient's Charter (English language version)

**Northern Ireland**

Northern Ireland Bus Services Charter
Charter for Patients and Clients
Northern Ireland Child Support Agency Charter
Courts' Charter for Northern Ireland
The Further Education Charter for Northern Ireland
NICS DFP - Citizen's Charter for Northern Ireland
The Parent's Charter for Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Railways (NIR) Passenger's Charter
Royal Ulster Constabulary Charter
The Social Security Agency Charter (NI)
Tenant's Charter
Training and Employment Agency (NI) Customer's Charter

## Notes

1. This study was asked to focus specifically on the improved delivery systems to external customers, e.g. the general public. The SMI and DBG also require the development of improved service delivery to customers internal to the civil service, i.e. officials and ministers. Although extremely important, such developments were outside the scope of the current study.

2. Undertaken by INIS, on behalf of the SMI CrossDepartmental Team, this research comprised a series of structured questions which were included in the IMS National Omnibus Survey, The Survey is regarded as being statistically representative of the adult (+18 years) population, with interviews conducted in seventy randomly selected sampling areas. It was carried out in May 1997 from a new quota sample (n=1,274) controlled by sex, status, age, social class, region and area. The research was designed to measure the general public's experience of, and attitudes to, the level of service provided by the Irish civil service.

3. 'Put simply, Irish clientalism involves individuals who seek out their TD, or similarly placed 'é1ites', in order to acquire some benefit or service which they feel they would not receive by their own, or their group's efforts' fflazelkorn, 1986, p.327).

4. The concept of *exit* was introduced by Hirschman (1970) and refers to customer behaviour when the quality of goods or services deteriorates. Under the exit option, customers stop buying and, in consequence, revenues drop, participation declines and management is forced to take remedial action.

5. Whilst not aspiring to be definitive, and within the specific context of a comparative analysis of EU public welfare services (i.e. central, regional and local government services responsible for the health and welfare of the population), this crossnational study provides a helpful guide to some of the terminologies used in the literature.

6. Deakin et al. (1995) define *citizenship* as a status that derives from full legal membership of a collectivity, which confers certain rights and obligations.

7. Individual states are quite specific in their legal requirements for citizenship. For example, Article 9 of *Bunreacht na hAireann* (1937) defines the conditions for, and fundamental political duties of, Irish citizenship. In this context, it is also important to acknowledge that not all service users will be citizens. Indeed, some public services are geared specifically to the needs of noncitizens, e.g. the administration of the requirements for citizenship

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and the management of refugees. Both of these services normally fall to the justice and home affairs areas.

8. Deakin et al. (1995) define empowerment as a 'situation in which power is transferred from the provider to the consumer, so thatthe latter enjoys control over future transactions'.

9. Social exclusion may be defined as the process through which individuals or groups are wholly or partially excluded from full participation in the society within which they five. It can be caused either by fiLilure to secure employment (i.e. exclusion from the labour market) or by limited access to benefits or social services. Such exclusion may also be related to the absence of full citizenship rights (Deakin et al., 1995, pp. 129-130).

10. Within the Ifish context, the public service may be defined as comprising the civil service, defence forces, the Garda SiochAna, local authorities, education (excluding private institutions), health, (excluding private institutions) and noncommercial semistate bodies (see Humphreys and Gorman, 1987 and Humphreys, 1983).

11. Within these areas of jurisdiction, the Ombudsman may investigate any action that, in their view, was (a) taken without proper authority; (b) taken on irrelevant grounds; (c) the result of negligence or carelessness; (d) based on erroneous or incomplete information; (e) improperly discriminatory; (f) based on undesirable administrative practice; or (g) otherwise contrary to fair or sound administration.

12. The scope of the study comprised social welfare, An Post, health, housing, other local authority and FAS training services.

13. In this report it is interesting to note that the study group stress that the focus of the QCSI is 'on the customer (or the recipient of services) as distinct from the citizen who is entitled to certain rights and privileges from the State'.

14. All departments/offices produced such *Statements ofStrategy* in 1996/97. Following the change of government in 1997, these statements have now been revised.

15. These include the Belgian Public Services Users' Charter (1992), the French Public Services' Charter (1992), the Portuguese Public Service Quality Charter (1993) and, of course, the UK Citizen's Charter (199 1).

16. Much of the formative thinking contained in the Charter initiative can be seen in the earlier Cabinet Office Occasional Paper *(1988), Service to the Public.*

17. These standards were embodied in national charters which set service standards in all the main central government public services (e.g. for patients and for parents). In recent years, greater emphasis has been placed on local service providers developing and improving the national standards in their own local charters after consultation with local users. Such local providers have typically been general medical practitioners (GPs), schools, job centres, hospital trusts and local authority services.

18. The introduction of performance tables for schools, hospital and ambulance trusts, local authorities, police and fire services has been a key part of the charter approach under this principle.

19. Public services are now encouraged to consult their users both to gauge levels of satisfaction and to identify areas of service delivery for prioritisation. All new and revised national charters are now being consulted on so that users' views can be taken into account. All departments and agencies are required to consult their users regularly about the services they provide and report the findings.

20. A number of innovations have occurred in this area ranging from comparatively simple measures, like giving the name of the public servant providing the service to the user and changing opening hours so that a service can actually be received, to the development of 'onestop shops' where people can carry out a range of transactions at a single point of call at the one time (see *Part Eight)*.

21. A special Complaints Task Force was set up and reported in 1995 on improved ways of handling complaints.

22. This principle has often meant a determination at local level to get the most for users from the budget available, whether by fluiding old tasks in more economical ways or by consulting users about service priorities.

23. For a full discussion of the vital issues involved in providing better policy integration between the tax and social welfare systems, see the *Report ofthe Expert Working Group* (1996).

24. For a very useful account of the initiatives taken in another largely rural area (Co. Donegal), see McLoone, 1996.

25. Located in the Borough, the centre accommodates the County Enterprise Board, the LEADER Partnership Company, the County Enterprise Fund Company, the social and environmental units of the County Council, together with a number of crossborder initiatives established under the Programme for Peace and Reconciliation.

26. The Intranet is an organisation's own internal information and communication system. It is effectively a Council Wide Web which replicates, in miniature, the World Wide Web (WWW). It is estimated that the cost per employee of introducing the Intranet is approximately £30.

27. The *Information* Age Towm competition (1997), sponsored by Telecom tireann, invited submissions from towns, with populations between 5,000 and 30,000, to become Ireland's testbed for a wide range of IT applications and systems. A total of 51 towns, including Navan, entered the competition. Ennis, as the winner, will receive £15 million investment in IT which will provide a telephone with digital voicemail in every home; an ISDN connection and highspeed access to the WWW for every business; a personal computer linked to the Internet for the majority of homes; the full range of public services online and the deployment of smartcard technology. The three runnerup towns (Castlebar, Killarney and Kilkenny) each received £1 million in IT investment.

28. These groups include the Irish Farmers Association (IFA), the Irish Creamery Milk Suppliers' Association (ICMSA), the Irish Cooperative Organisation Society (ICOS) and Macra na Feirme.

29. These include independent customer surveys undertaken by the Market Research Bureau of Ireland as well as customer panels. For useful case studies of the significant efforts made by this department to improve service delivery see Blennerhassett, 1992; McCumiskey, 1994; and O'Shea, 1996.

30. During the period 1996/97, the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR) was commissioned to conduct a pilot series of fivejuries, ofwhich four were in the health sector. In addition, the King's Fund commissioned a further three pilots. Parallel with these developments were a series of six pilotjuries commissioned by local authorities and sponsored by the Local Government Management Board (LGMB). All these initiatives were subject to independent evaluation by researchers from the University of Birmingham.

31. In 1995, total gross receipts were £14.3 million; over 1.7 million payments were processed; there were over 1.5 million personal callers; over 5.7 million telephone callers and over 2.5 million items of post. Over 160,000 vehicles were registered and over 0.5 million customs declarations made.

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