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# *Evaluation of the Goal Programme for Public Service Reform and Innovation*

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## Foreword

We welcome this report from the evaluation of the Goal programme. The evaluation provides some important insights for those interested and engaged in public service reform. The Goal programme involved seven government departments in Ireland and Northern Ireland delivering, and learning from, nine public service reform and innovation programmes in collaboration with CES, over the period 2016 - 2019. Between 2017 and 2019, an evaluation team from the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) carried out an evaluation of the programme.

This independent evaluation of the Goal programme provides a succinct analysis of the factors that can help or hinder reform and identifies seven lessons of interest to those engaged in future reform initiatives. These include the value of supporting or assisting public service reform programmes where the desired outcomes are clear but where the path, the means of getting there, needs exploration and clarification. Other useful lessons include the need to encourage leadership at all levels and to plan for sustainability and the embedding of the reform from early on.

It is reassuring to read that the evaluation recognises the benefits of the approach taken to designing and implementing this programme to support public service reform and innovation. The evaluation finds that the short-term outcomes for the programme were achieved, although it points out that it is too early to judge if the outcomes and changes will be sustained. The evaluation highlights the impact the support provided had for public and civil servants, engaging them in new ways of working, strengthening skills and capacities, developing leadership at multiple levels, as well as enabling changes in services and policy in a number of areas.

The evaluation will complement other analysis of the field of public service reform and it can add to the existing body of learning in Ireland and Northern Ireland about supporting improvements in public services.

We would like to thank the IPA team, who worked with us as partners on the evaluation and who brought an independence and rigour to the evaluation process. We would also like to thank all those who participated in the evaluation process, their insights and reflections have shaped the learning emerging from the evaluation.

It was a privilege to co-deliver this programme with the participating government departments in Ireland and Northern Ireland. In CES, we believe that citizens deserve excellent public services, and we are committed to working with organisations, agencies, government departments and across sectors, so that this standard can be attained. We look forward to building on this work in the future.

Nuala Doherty,

Director, CES

## The Evaluation Team

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## Executive Summary

### About the Goal Programme

The Goal Programme for Public Service Reform and Innovation (Goal Programme) supports systemic change in public services in Ireland and Northern Ireland with the aim of improving outcomes for people using public services. The Atlantic Philanthropies funded the programme, providing €10 million towards its development. The Centre for Effective Services (CES) delivered the programme in partnership with seven government departments in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The Programme was established in 2016 and the project work concluded in 2019.

The Goal Programme centred around nine strategic sectoral reform exemplar projects in Ireland and Northern Ireland. Six of these projects are from three government departments in Ireland, with one from each of three government departments in Northern Ireland:

- Developing Evidence and Knowledge Management (Department of Health, Ireland)
- Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Pathfinder (Department of Health, Ireland)
- Building Collaborative Working Practices (Department of Education and Skills, Ireland)
- Using Data to Inform Policy (Department of Education and Skills, Ireland)
- Reform of Youth Funding Schemes (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Ireland)
- Evaluation Training for Civil Servants (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Ireland)
- Leadership Development Programmes (The Executive Office, Northern Ireland)
- Children and Young People's Strategies (Departments of Education and Health, Northern Ireland)
- Embedding Innovation (Department of Finance, Northern Ireland)

CES support for the Goal Programme included gathering and reviewing evidence; preparing evidence reviews; co-designing and developing tools and materials; design and delivery of training and professional development programmes; and running activities and events to share learning about how to achieve reform of public services.

An Advisory Group of top public servants from Ireland and Northern Ireland provided oversight of the programme.

### Context to the Goal Programme

The origins of what became the Goal Programme for Public Service Reform and Innovation (Goal Programme) go back to a 2013 meeting of the board of The Atlantic Philanthropies (Atlantic) in Dublin with a group of government ministers from Ireland about how Atlantic might make best use of their final grants to Ireland. A lot of the discussion centred on the need for more effective coordination and joining up of government services. There was a perceived need for capacity building to ensure better delivery of services for citizens, particularly the disadvantaged. The governments in Ireland and Northern Ireland both had existing public sector reform programmes, and the Atlantic board saw support for the development of aspects of these programmes as a way of furthering the achievement of their social goals across the island of Ireland, targeted at meeting the needs of the disadvantaged.

Early in 2015, the Atlantic Philanthropies requested a formal grant proposal from CES for the Goal Programme. Established in 2008, CES works with agencies, government departments and service providers across the island of Ireland. They are a non-profit organisation with skills and expertise in areas such as education, health, children and young people and social services. CES formally submitted a funding proposal for a grant to Atlantic in April 2015.

## About the Evaluation

CES commissioned the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) to conduct the evaluation of the Goal Programme. The purpose of the evaluation was to assess what happened across the programme, identify what changed and provide insights into what contributed to those changes, and disseminate the findings to inform future public service reforms. It is not an evaluation of the individual projects, rather their collective contribution to the Goal Programme outcomes'. The evaluation, conducted between September 2017 and December 2018, focused on addressing four key questions:

1. How has the Programme been operationalised, implemented and delivered?
2. Has the Programme been implemented as intended? What were the key factors that have been central to its implementation?
3. What tools, resources and materials have proved most useful?
4. Have (and to what extent) the short-term outcomes been achieved, considering the overall timeline and different development stages of the nine projects?

This executive summary, based on the IPA's evaluation of the programme:

- Highlights progress with regard to achieving the desired short-term outcomes
- Identifies the factors that can help and hinder public sector reform
- Draws out lessons for future public service reform programmes and projects.

The evaluation team based their conclusions on a range of sources used during the evaluation, including key informant interviews, participant workshops, questionnaire analysis, case vignettes and documentary analysis.

## Achieving the short-term outcomes

In developing the Goal Programme, CES identified a number of short and long-term outcomes. A central focus of the evaluation was on assessing the degree of achievement of six agreed short-term outcomes listed below.

### Staff engaged in new ways of working

The Goal Programme has been successful in helping staff engage in new ways of working. Across most of the projects, participants referred to new ways of working to support positive cross-cutting outcomes. For example, participants in the Children and Young People's Strategies project referred to more joined-up working across departments to develop and deliver the strategies.

### Exemplar projects embedding new ways of working in the public and civil services

Participants in the Goal Programme were positive overall that the outcomes from their project would be sustainable. However, given delays in implementation of most of the projects, plus the fact that projects were phased in with some starting later than others, it was difficult to draw firm conclusions regarding the degree to which the work was embedded at the time the evaluation concluded.

### Improved collaborative working processes within and between government departments

There was evidence of the Goal Programme leading to improved collaborative working practices within and between government departments. For example, the Using data to inform policy project has contributed to greater collaboration of sections across the department in how they share and use data. However, overall, cross-departmental collaboration had been modest.

### Public and civil servants connecting learning and practice between Ireland and Northern Ireland

The main arenas where connecting learning and practice across the jurisdictions was viewed in a positive light were the Advisory Group and two learning days, held in 2017 and 2018. The Advisory Group was seen as providing a 'safe space' where the top managers of each civil service could share experiences. Departmental staff involved in the Goal Programme attended two learning days, where they could share their experience and learning. However, at the project level, the achievement of this outcome was less well developed.

### Strengthened skills and capacity within the civil and public services

Alongside the development of new ways of working, this outcome was one where significant progress was made. Project participants identified a number of enhanced skills and capacities resulting from their participation. For example, in both the Evaluation Training for Civil Servants and Leadership Development Programme, the projects themselves carried out evaluations that indicated that participants had strengthened their skills and capacity.

### Increased numbers of civil and public servants with experience of driving improvements in outcomes and working collaboratively

This was another very positively reviewed outcome by departmental staff involved with the Goal Programme. As with the embedding issue, however, challenges remained regarding spreading the benefits from projects more widely across the system.



## Six factors that can help or hinder public service reform

The evaluation team gave particular attention at the evaluation workshops to identifying significant factors that drove success and presented challenges/barriers to reform during the Goal Programme. Drawing from the workshops and evidence from the interviews, these factors, grouped into six themes, capture the learning from the evaluation about what helps and what hinders reform.

### Leveraging senior buy-in and sponsorship

The evaluation team identified two main roles for senior level sponsorship, heads of government departments and the next management tier down:

- a) A largely 'symbolic' role, giving status and credibility to the planned change, and
- b) A practical role, where particular behaviours and actions can help or hinder reform.

A critically important practical role for the project sponsors was in terms of modelling behaviours that support change and innovation.

### Going with the grain: aligning with context, priorities and what has gone before

Fitting in with public service-wide or corporate goals/objectives and strategies, or with earlier initiatives or consultations was helpful in terms of giving the projects traction. This made for an easier process, as staff could recognise that the projects were important. In some cases, such as the Building Collaborative Working Practices project and the Leadership Development Programme, they linked with wider public service reform priorities identified in high-level reform plans: The Civil Service Renewal Plan in Ireland and the draft Programme for Government in Northern Ireland, respectively. In other cases, such as the Reform of Youth Funding Schemes and Embedding Innovation projects, the issues tackled followed on from previous work identified as a government priority. In these cases, participants saw the projects as a clear and logical progression of the work.

### Getting and keeping the right people/skills/expertise and managing succession

Departmental project leads are crucial to project development and implementation, as their role is to act as change agents. Once the project team is established, it is important to invest in their capacity and development. Dealing with staff turnover can be a challenge. Better use of succession planning and knowledge management can ease the difficulties.

### Accessing and using external supports

Putting an emphasis on co-design and co-production of projects, through wise and careful use of external supports, plays an important role in skills and capacity development. The research and facilitation skills provided through CES' external support helped in progressing the projects. Another key role for the external support was to strengthen capacity of the departmental teams.

In the case of the knowledge management project in the Department of Health, departmental personnel emphasised what they referred to as 'the benefits of a middle ground approach' - not on your own, but also not commercial consultants coming in and telling you what to do. CES people became 'part of the journey', 'a partner and a critical friend with them on the journey'. It was noted that this is somewhat unusual for the civil service.

### Applying appropriate tools and techniques to support change

Two aspects of the technical supports provided by CES were particularly helpful to reform projects. One was the analytical frameworks, project management and facilitation skills provided. The other

was the identification and presentation of evidence to underpin the change. Both support project development and implementation.

#### Enabling and embedding sustainable collaboration and cross-sectoral learning

Probably the most challenging aspect of the process of reform is the issue of building sustainability and ensuring a lasting legacy. Aspects of the Goal Programme were seen as helpful in supporting better collaboration and learning. Departmental staff involved in the programme appreciated the importance of taking time out to reflect, think things through and engage constructively with colleagues across departments.

For example, a briefing update for the Advisory Group from the Department of Health and Department of Education on the Children and Young People's Strategies project noted that the Goal Programme had achieved 'the development of a mind set and a willingness to pursue other projects jointly across departments'. Among those projects identified are a trial Family Drug and Alcohol Court between the Department of Health and the Department of Justice, and a joint project between the Department of Health and the Department for Communities, which aims to support the most vulnerable families to secure access to benefit entitlements.

## Seven lessons for future public service reform programmes

Seven lessons learned from the evaluation of the Goal Programme, of interest to those engaged in future reform initiatives, are set out below. These lessons are based on the evaluation of the Goal Programme, plus the evaluation team's knowledge of public service reform initiatives more generally. The lessons resonate with an OECD (2018) report on innovation in government, particularly around the use of 'systems approaches'<sup>1</sup>.

### Focus on projects where desired outcomes are clear but the path there is uncertain

A Goal Programme-type intervention, running exemplar projects and using appropriate external supports, is most appropriate for mid- to large-scale projects, which are focused on a real issue of concern to the public, with cross-organisational boundaries, or ones that address serious capacity issues across organisations, and which are likely to provide fruitful opportunities for doing things differently. A Goal Programme approach is particularly useful when there is scope to shape and design the project and use external expertise to plug gaps rather than as an extra pair of hands. In other words, this type of approach works best when the desired outcomes are reasonably clear but where the means of getting there need exploration and clarification.

### Build strong but flexible governance arrangements

Flexibility and adaptability in the application of governance arrangements is important if they are to be supportive of change. Used rigidly, governance arrangements can become an additional administrative constraint on projects. Maintaining oversight but applying it in a flexible manner, for example, not overly formulaic and proportionate in manner, allows for adaptation, but at the same time imposes a discipline on project management and accountability.

The governance arrangements put in place – the use of Memoranda of Understanding, the Advisory Group, project sponsors, project leads, and formal reporting requirements, were generally seen as providing a good framework to support reform projects in the Goal Programme. The Advisory Group played an important role in bringing senior leaders together from both parts of the island to oversee and discuss reform. Project sponsors set the tone for reform. In particular, in cross-organisational projects, the role of the sponsor in freeing up the project team from the day-to-day constraints of departmental responsibilities can be crucial to success.

### Encourage leadership – at all levels

Distributed leadership builds the capacity for change and improvement across levels and organisations. As a leadership model, it moves away from a simple view of leadership from the top to more collaborative and shared leadership. Organisations need to support the development of middle management change leadership capabilities.

For example, the cross-departmental project team working on the Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Pathfinder project were given the freedom to come up with creative solutions to the issues facing youth mental health services. They were tasked with piloting new models for delivering whole-of-government projects. This 'light touch' approach, and detachment from traditional departmental hierarchies, was seen as particularly important in allowing the group the freedom to explore options. It did, however, present challenges for some team members, and their line managers.

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<sup>1</sup> OECD (2018), *Embracing Innovation in Government Global Trends 2018*, Paris: OECD.

### Balance pace and urgency with the need to take time and be iterative about change

A tension present in reform efforts is balancing the need for a sense of urgency and pace to ensure implementation happens, with a recognition that change in the public sector takes time. Experience suggests that a managed reform process requires having an identifiable person responsible for implementing a reform, deadlines for implementation and a forum for holding them to account. At the same time, the process should create space and time for creative solutions and options to emerge.

### Take care over team selection and support their development

The pace of change and considerable amount of substitutions of personnel in many cross-agency initiatives can erode team effectiveness. It can also be difficult for staff to divorce themselves from the realities of their organisational boundaries and accountability structures. There is a consequent need to free up team members and invest in their skills and capacity development.

### Make appropriate use of external support

Of particular benefit are two aspects of external support. One is the evidence base it can provide to support reform. The production of supporting documentation, analytically rigorous but accessible in manner, provides a foundation for reform efforts. The other main aspect is the facilitation tools, techniques and expertise that external support can provide.

A particular aspect of the co-design of the Goal Programme was CES' expertise. As noted by a department official, it was 'not CES replacing civil servants work, it was another skill set'. One departmental project lead referred to 'the value of an independent, evidence-based approach'. The rigour, project management, facilitation and presentation skills of CES and their associates were key attributes in progressing the projects.

### Plan for sustainability and embedding of reform

It is important to be conscious of the issue of sustainability from the start. Reform succession is also vital but often forgotten. Are there people to step in and continue the reform when others move on? Staff turnover is going to happen, so there is a need to find ways to manage it better. Better succession management, use of knowledge management etc. can help in this regard.

In Northern Ireland, the Leadership Development Programme for senior civil servants has played an important role in driving and embedding the culture change needed to embed reform. Participants on the programme noted much greater collaboration and a changed leadership culture and referred to a greater sense of collective responsibility for the future development of the Northern Ireland Civil Service. This collaborative focus is being further developed through a Top Leaders Forum, arising from the success of the Leadership Development Programme. This forum is a senior management network for Grade 2s and 3s (permanent secretaries and deputy secretaries) that meets monthly. One senior manager described the forum as illustrative of a change in culture at senior levels towards more engagement, collaboration and networking.

## Conclusion

The Goal Programme illustrates an innovative and novel approach to supporting public service reform. There is now a group of public servants thinking and acting differently and working in new ways. This would not have happened without their participation in the Goal Programme.

A lesson from the Goal Programme is that external support of the type provided through the programme can support capacity building within the civil service rather than replace it. The civil service used the particular expertise of CES, backed by funding support from The Atlantic Philanthropies, to assist their own staff to build skills and capacity, and work on reform projects.

Of particular benefit are two aspects of the external support. One is the evidence base it can provide to support reform. The production of supporting documentation, analytically rigorous but accessible in manner, provides a foundation for reform efforts. The other main aspect is the facilitation tools, techniques and expertise that external support can provide. Providing public servants with the tools and techniques to work together collaboratively and build capability can provide lasting benefits to reform efforts. There is strong evidence that engagement of external support is most successful when the external partners have a good understanding of the realities of the public sector context of reform and appreciation of the need to balance competing demands and accountability requirements.

# 1 Background to the Goal Programme for Public Service Reform and the evaluation

## 1.1 The origins of the Goal Programme

The origins of what became the Goal Programme for Public Service Reform and Innovation (Goal Programme) go back to a 2013 meeting of the board of The Atlantic Philanthropies (Atlantic)<sup>2</sup> in Dublin with a group of government ministers from Ireland about how Atlantic might make best use of their final grants to Ireland. Arising from this meeting and further work overseen by the Atlantic country director for Ireland, the idea for what emerged as the Goal Programme evolved. This programme was seen as a means of supporting public service reform that would further the achievements targeted by Atlantic grants co-funded with government in Ireland since 2012 (Boyle and Shannon, 2018). The Atlantic board expressed a keen interest in having an all-island dimension to the programme.

Early in 2015, the Atlantic country director began discussion with the Centre for Effective Services (CES) around their possible involvement in submitting a formal proposal to Atlantic for grant support to run the Goal Programme. Established in 2008 (initially based on funding provided by Atlantic and the Irish government) CES works with agencies, government departments and service providers across the island of Ireland. They are a non-profit organisation with skills and expertise in areas such as education, health, children and young people and social services. CES formally submitted a funding proposal for a grant for €9.97 million to Atlantic in April 2015. The Atlantic board approved the grant in July 2015.

In late 2015/early 2016, there was a further round of meetings between CES, Atlantic and senior officials in government departments participating in the Goal Programme to design and agree the overall governance arrangements for the programme. Also central to the discussions was project selection<sup>3</sup>. Taking a project-based approach and using exemplar projects were design features of the programme. In this context, CES recognised the importance of having criteria to guide their discussions with civil service managers regarding what projects should be included in the Goal Programme. In

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<sup>2</sup> The Atlantic Philanthropies is a private foundation and life-limited philanthropy created in 1982 by Irish-American businessman Chuck Feeney. Atlantic began making grants in 1987 and handed out their final grants in 2017. Atlantic were involved in a range of projects including stimulating a knowledge economy by investing in higher education, reforming the design and delivery of services for children and older adults, and protecting and expanding human and civil rights. Atlantic's work in Ireland has been characterised by its close working relationship with the Irish government and the public service (Boyle and Shannon, 2018).

<sup>3</sup>An evaluation vignette produced as part of this study provides more information on project selection. Available at <https://www.effectiveservices.org/resources/goal-evaluation-vignette-project-selection-for-the-goal-programme>

discussion between CES and senior civil servants involved in the process, it was evident that some project selection criteria were particularly influential. In particular:

- The project is a strategic priority for senior management in the civil service
- The project is one where external support from an organisation like CES is required
- There is a willingness to share learning across departments and jurisdictions
- That it should be possible to measure the difference the Goal Programme input had made

Informed by the criteria, and arising from discussions with senior officials, nine projects emerged which had the support of departments in the two jurisdictions. Six of these projects were from three government departments in Ireland; one from each of three government departments in Northern Ireland (see Table 1.1). A brief description of each of the projects is set out in Appendix 5.

**Table 1.1 The nine Goal Programme projects**

- Developing Evidence and Knowledge Management (Department of Health, Ireland)
- Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Pathfinder project (Department of Health, Ireland)
- Building Collaborative Working Practices (Department of Education and Skills, Ireland)
- Using Data to Inform Policy (Department of Education and Skills, Ireland)
- Reform of Youth Funding Schemes (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Ireland)
- Evaluation Training for Civil Servants (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Ireland)
- Leadership Development Programme (The Executive Office, Northern Ireland)
- Children and Young People’s Strategies (Departments of Education and Health, Northern Ireland)
- Embedding Innovation (Department of Finance, Northern Ireland)

A balance between ambition and pragmatism emerged. The final list of projects selected were ambitious in scope but tempered by the reality of where government departments were at in terms of their own priorities. Table 1.2 illustrates this point. Projects were classified as to whether they were mainly concerned with mission support (primarily internal management improvements that support the achievement of departmental objectives) or mission delivery (primarily focused on service improvement). Five of the projects were mission support oriented, and four were mission delivery oriented. Projects were also classified as to whether they were mainly concerned with reform internal

to a department or whether they had a cross-departmental focus. Three were primarily concerned with change within one department, and six had an explicitly cross-departmental remit.

**Table 1.2 Project classification**

Project	Mission support	Mission delivery	Departmental focus	Cross-departmental focus
Developing Evidence and Knowledge Management (Department of Health, Ireland)	✓		✓	
Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Pathfinder project (Department of Health, Ireland)		✓		✓
Building collaborative working practices (Department of Education and Skills, Ireland)	✓		✓	
Using data to inform policy (Department of Education and Skills, Ireland)	✓		✓	
Reform of youth funding schemes (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Ireland)		✓		✓
Evaluation Training for Civil Servants (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Ireland)	✓			✓
Leadership Development Programme (Northern Ireland Civil Service)	✓			✓
Children and Young People's Strategies (Departments of Education and Health, Northern Ireland)		✓		✓
Embedding Innovation (Department of Finance, Northern Ireland)		✓		✓

A Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was signed, in late 2016, between Atlantic, CES, and the departments of Public Expenditure and Reform, Health, Education and Skills, and Children and Youth Affairs in Ireland. The MoU set out the purpose of the programme, the desired short-term and long-term outcomes, funding levels and governance arrangements. Participants saw the MOUs as very significant. Among the points made by those interviewed were:

- The importance from a governance perspective to have something documented



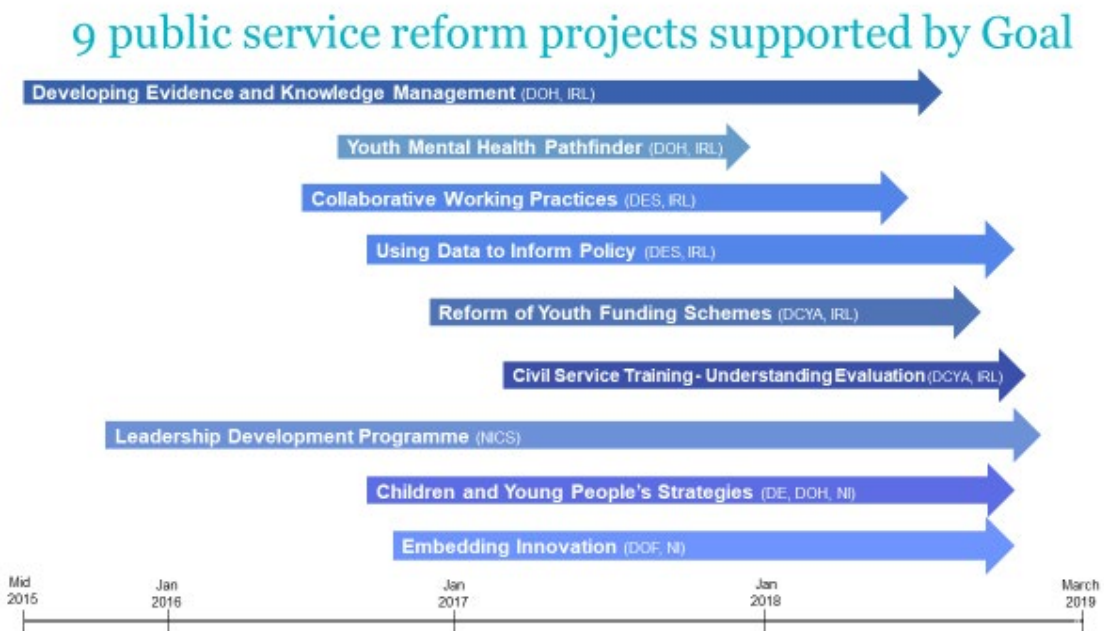
- There was a signed document to support project engagement ('a safety net')
- It set out expectations of each other
- Reflected the dialogue that proceeded them (co-design process)

CES assigned a senior manager to lead and direct the Goal Programme. CES also recruited some additional staff and associates to work on the programme. Each of the nine Goal Programme projects had a project team consisting of CES personnel working alongside officials in Government departments.

CES engaged Sir Peter Housden, former Head of the Scottish Civil Service, as an associate to support the work of the Goal Programme over its lifetime. He acted as an advisor to the CES team working on the Goal Programme, played an important role in the design and delivery of the leadership programme in Northern Ireland, and chaired the Goal Programme Advisory Group, made up of senior civil servants from government departments from Ireland and Northern Ireland.

The projects did not start all at once but commenced at different times (see Figure 1.1). All projects were underway by early 2017.

**Figure 1.1 Goal Programme project commencement dates**



Source: CES, 2019

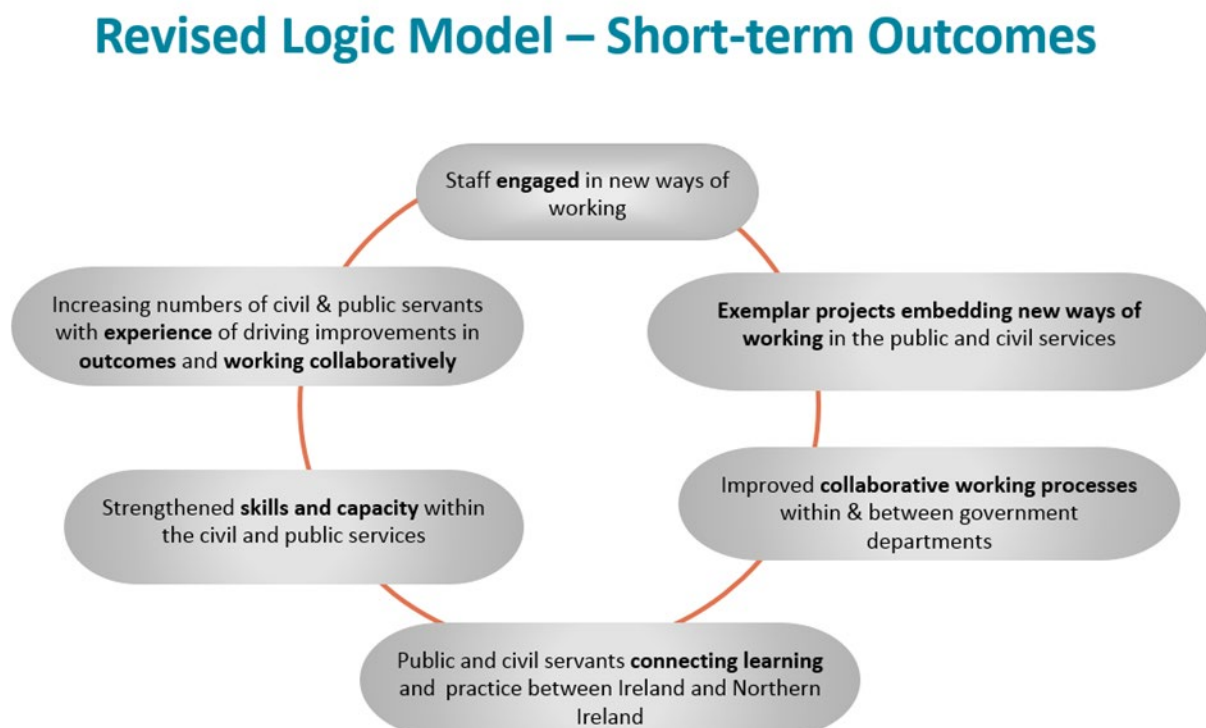
## 1.2 Evaluation scope and focus

In August 2017, CES issued an invitation to tender for the evaluation of the Goal Programme. The tender stated: ‘The evaluation should assess what happened across the programme, identify what changed and provide insights into what contributed to those changes, and disseminate the findings to inform future public service reforms. It is not an evaluation of the individual projects, rather their collective contribution to the Goal Programme outcomes’. The tender also specified that the evaluation should address four questions:

1. How has the Programme been operationalised, implemented and delivered?
2. Has the Programme been implemented as intended? What were the key factors that have been central to its implementation?
3. What tools, resources and materials have proved most useful?
4. Have (and to what extent have) the short-term outcomes been achieved, considering the overall timeline and different development stages of the nine projects?

In the context of developing the Goal Programme, CES identified a number of short and long-term outcomes, which are set out in the Goal Programme logic model (Appendix 1). In terms of identifying what changed, the focus of the evaluation is on the short-term outcomes, set out in Figure 1.2.

Figure 1.2 Goal Programme short-term outcomes



Source: CES, 2017

In the longer-term, the programme aims to achieve improved outcomes for people using services, better use of evidence in policy and joined up service delivery.

In the context of commissioning the evaluation, CES also developed a theory of change for the programme (Appendix 2). This theory of change makes explicit the linkages between the resources, activities and outcomes that make up the Goal Programme.

## 2 Evaluation framework and methodology

The evaluation (which consisted of 65 person days) was divided into three work packages:

Work package	Focus and scope	Timescale
Work package 1	<b>Context and programme design</b> of the overall Goal Programme	Nov 2017 – April 2018
Work package 2	Implementation and outcomes of <b>4 Goal projects</b> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Building Collaborative Working Practices</li> <li>• Using Data to Inform Policy</li> <li>• Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Pathfinder project</li> <li>• Children and Young People’s Strategies</li> </ul>	April – October 2018
Work package 3	Implementation and outcomes of <b>5 Goal projects</b> : <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Reform of Youth Funding Schemes</li> <li>• Evaluation Training for Civil Servants</li> <li>• Developing Evidence and Knowledge Management</li> <li>• Leadership Development Programme</li> <li>• Embedding Innovation</li> </ul> Summative analysis of Goal Programme (Summary report)	October 2018 – March 2019

### 2.1 Evaluation framework

The framework for the evaluation is set out in Table 2.1. This framework highlights the core of the evaluation: to understand what is happening across the Goal Programme (what has changed), and provide insights into what contributed to those changes (why has change occurred, if it has?).

**Table 2.1 Evaluation framework**

What has changed?	Why has change occurred?
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Staff <b>engaged</b> in new ways of working</li> <li>• Exemplar projects <b>embedding new ways of working</b> in the public and civil services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role of <b>change design</b> (theory of change; logic model)</li> <li>• Role of <b>change sponsors</b> (Advisory Group; departmental sponsors)</li> </ul>

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Improved <b>collaborative working processes</b> within and between government departments</li> <li>• Public and civil servants <b>connecting learning</b> and practice between Ireland and Northern Ireland</li> <li>• Strengthened <b>skills and capacity</b> within the civil and public services</li> <li>• Increased numbers of civil and public servants with <b>experience</b> of driving improvements in <b>outcomes</b> and <b>working collaboratively</b></li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Role of <b>change agents</b> (CES; departmental lead)</li> <li>• Role of <b>change tools/resources/materials/processes</b> (training and capacity building; workshops, mentoring and coaching; co-designed tools and resources)</li> </ul>
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The ‘what has changed’ column takes progress towards the short-term outcomes agreed for the Goal Programme as its focus. The ‘why has change occurred’ column identifies the main drivers of change (see Boyle<sup>4</sup> for an assessment of change drivers in any planned change in the public service). Together, the elements of the evaluation framework allowed the evaluation questions set out in the request for tender to be addressed.

## 2.2 Methodology

Given the nature of the Goal Programme, its intended outcomes, and the fact that the evaluation was conducted as the programme was underway, a primarily qualitative approach was considered most appropriate for data gathering and analysis. Qualitative data, as Ospina, Esteve and Lee (2017, p. 596) note ‘at their best, are words that emerge from observations... interviews... or documents... are collected (or accessed) in a naturalistic way... and are processed through several iterations of systematic analysis’<sup>5</sup>.

A number of complementary research methods shaped the gathering of the data required for the evaluation:

<sup>4</sup> Boyle, R. (1988), *Making Change Work: A Study of Planned Organisational Change in the Irish Civil Service*, Dublin: Institute of Public Administration

<sup>5</sup> Ospina, S., Esteve, M. and Lee, S. (2017), ‘Assessing Qualitative Studies in Public Administration Research’, *Public Administration Review*, 78 (4), pp. 593–605.

- Key informant interviews. Interviews with stakeholders were particularly important in collecting information on the issues addressed in the evaluation. **Forty-eight** people were interviewed. Most of the interviews were with people involved in the nine projects, with the departmental sponsor, departmental project lead and CES project lead as the main focus<sup>6</sup>. A small number of interviews were with people centrally involved in the Goal Programme as a whole, both in CES and in the Northern Ireland and Irish civil service.
- Participant workshops. Two evaluation workshop sessions provided an opportunity for group discussion on the operation and outcomes of the Goal Programme:
  - A session at the Goal learning day held in Newry on 19 October 2018. Thirty-seven participants involved in the Goal Programme took part. Departmental staff from eight out of the nine Goal projects attended, as did project staff from CES.
  - A session at the Advisory Group meeting held on 16 November 2018. Nineteen participants took part, involving senior managers from the Northern Ireland and Irish civil service and CES.

In both sessions, participants reflected on success factors and barriers to change in the public service, and lessons learned from the Goal Programme.

- Questionnaire analysis. Alongside the interviews, interviewees were invited to fill in a short questionnaire examining aspects of the operation and outcomes of the Goal Programme (see Appendices 3 and 4). Twenty-one questionnaires were completed.
- Case vignettes. Particular themes were examined and highlighted, to illustrate what contributed to their successes or failures.
- Documentary analysis. Careful review of relevant documentation (reports, background documentation, government policy papers, academic literature etc.) provided supportive evidence of the contribution made by the Goal Programme to the desired short-term outcomes.

By using this range of methods, triangulation of the data was possible<sup>7</sup>. Investigator triangulation, through members of the evaluation team sharing their individual understandings and perspectives, also provided a further check on data quality and emerging findings. This approach helped with validating the emerging findings and illustrating where consistent or divergent messages were emerging. It also helped illustrate the contribution of the Goal Programme to change and reform:

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<sup>6</sup> Five of the eight departmental project sponsors were interviewed (one sponsor had responsibility for two projects). Departmental and CES leads from all of the projects were included.

<sup>7</sup> <http://methods.sagepub.com/reference/encyc-of-research-design/n469.xml>

where the programme was a particularly strong influence on achieving desired outcomes, and where it was less strong or effective.

### 3 Progress towards the short-term outcomes

When exploring progress towards the short-term outcomes defined for the Goal Programme, it should be noted that implementation of most of the projects was slower than initially anticipated. This is not uncommon for reform projects in both the public and private sectors, and it affected the pace of progress towards the short-term outcomes.

Despite this, it is possible to draw some conclusions as to the contribution of the Goal Programme to the achievement of the desired short-term outcomes. Box 3.1 provides an illustration of the views of those participating in the Goal learning day evaluation workshop in October 2018 as to whether, overall, they had a positive or negative view as to the achievement of certain outcomes. The more detailed discussion below examines each of the six short-term outcomes specified in the Goal Programme in turn.

#### **Box 3.1 Outcome rating of Goal learning day evaluation workshop participants**

Participants from the Goal Programme who took part in a Goal learning day were asked to rank progress on outcomes of the Goal Programme on a scale from 1 to 4, with one for very limited progress and 4 very good progress. The outcomes are ranked in the order of those that received the most positive ratings (score below is result of total positives [3 or 4] less negatives [1 or 2]):

+27	Successful implementation of a number of large-scale sectoral reform and improvement programmes in Ireland and Northern Ireland - providing exemplar projects that embed new ways of working in the public and civil service
+22	Increasing number of civil and public servants with: experience of driving improvements in outcomes and working collaboratively; skills in evidence, outcomes, evaluation and implementation, and appropriate leadership practices.
+9	Better use of data and evaluation across the system
+7	Joined up models of service being delivered in a number of large-scale sectoral programmes
-16	Public and civil servants connecting learning and practice between Ireland and Northern Ireland

#### 3.1 Staff engaged in new ways of working

The Goal Programme has been successful in helping staff engage in new ways of working. Across most of the projects, participants referred to enhanced ways of working to support positive collaborative outcomes. Several projects, for example, noted improved engagement and collaboration arising from the project. Participants in the *Children and Young People's Strategies* project referred to more joined-up working across departments to develop and deliver the strategies. The *Leadership Development Programme* resulted in greater engagement and collaboration, with greater networking within and across departments, and with people consulting in relation to problems, sharing experiences, and sharing learning. The *Reform of Youth Funding Schemes* project presents a new way of working within



the sector: there will be a greater focus on needs analysis, outcomes and measurement, supported by a needs prioritisation process and performance and oversight framework developed during the project.

Not so much a new way of working, but a more structured approach to consultation and to project management generally was cited in a number of projects. For example, in the *Using data to inform policy* project, the way CES introduced stop and check-in points during the project was welcomed by the departmental project lead: “Let’s review what we’re doing. Let’s evaluate how far we’ve got. Are we still on track? That was a regular checklist... Over the year and a half of the project, I’d say they asked four times. They were comprehensive reviews. That was really useful. That’s the learning I take most from it.” It could be argued that such a way of working should be routine (and indeed is practised) but the experience from Goal programme participants was that often, the urgent drove out this structured approach, and it was the discipline imposed by the Goal Programme that facilitated it.

The team-based approach to addressing cross-cutting problems was one of the distinctive features of several of the projects and a driver of new ways of working. In the *Evaluation Training for Civil Servants* project, the working group overseeing the project involved the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service, OneLearning, and CES and was seen as a useful collaboration: a good ‘light-touch’ model for bringing people together and engaging with stakeholders. The team-based approach was also notable in the *Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Pathfinder* project, as illustrated in Box 3.2. This demonstrates both the benefits and the challenges of departing from the traditional hierarchical management style in a cross-departmental project.

### **Box 3.2 Cross-departmental team-based working**

The *Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Pathfinder* project team were given freedom to come up with creative solutions to the issues facing youth mental health services. The ‘pathfinder’ approach was initiated to pilot new models for delivering whole-of-government projects. The departmental project sponsor emphasised the new way of working of the team and the implications for management:

“You’re bringing a bunch of people in from a bunch of different agencies, all of whom have bosses back at base, who are very hyper-conscious of their own prerogatives and typically, when you put together these groups, everybody reports back, and they get their orders and so on. If I had run that that way, the thing wouldn’t have worked, so I had to let these folks go off and do their own thing and pretty much keep a very light touch on it, which is tricky because it’s going to come out with something which might or might not sit well with the people I’ll report to.”

This 'light touch' approach, and detachment from traditional departmental hierarchies, was seen as particularly important in allowing the group the freedom to explore options. But it did present challenges for some team members, and their line managers.

On the less positive side, in several of the projects, reference was made to the challenges associated with spreading the benefits beyond project participants, and to the issue of sustainability of the new ways of working once the Goal Programme ended. In the *Children and Young People's Strategies* project, for example, concerns were raised during our interviews about the resources allocated to the project in the longer-term and how this may hinder sustainability of the new ways of working that have been developed. These include, for example, allowing staff time away from 'normal' work activities to properly engage with others working on the strategies.

### 3.2 Exemplar projects embedding new ways of working in the public and civil services

Participants in the Goal Programme tended to agree that their projects were indeed exemplar projects and were positive overall that the outcomes from their project would be sustainable. However, given the phased approach to work on the projects, delays in implementing many of the projects, and the fact that the new ways of working, in the main, were still at a relatively early stage with regard to being embedded, it is difficult to draw firm conclusions relating to this outcome.

There were examples where the projects were achieving traction and suggestions that the new ways of working will become established in practice. For example, some participants described the *Leadership Development Programme* as a catalyst for achieving a new organisation/leadership culture in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. The subsequent introduction of a development programme for Grade 2s (permanent secretaries) was not originally envisaged and is seen as an outcome of the success of the programme for Grade 3s (deputy secretaries). In the *Developing Evidence and Knowledge Management* project, the knowledge networks are being sustained, with three networks in existence covering Private Member's Bills, parliamentary affairs more broadly, and evidence informed policy. These groups meet quarterly and there appeared to be good interest in the sessions.

There was evidence of the new ways of working carrying over into different settings. The *Children and Young People's Strategies* departmental project lead noted that she intended to use lessons learned from the project in relation to consultation and co-design for the review of another policy area. Arising from the *Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Pathfinder* project, the department had started training other potential leaders of projects in facilitation and collaboration skills based on the experience learned from the project. They also ran a second pathfinder type project, much less reliant on external support, and using the internal capacity they have created.

There has also been some work undertaken to embed the learning from the projects more widely in the public and civil service<sup>8</sup>. Examples include:

- Bi-lateral sharing of learning.
- The preparation of documents to support future working.
- The exchange of new ideas and practices through workshops, meetings, presentations, etc.

There was evidence of challenges to embedding the new ways of working arising from experience to date. The central recommendation of the *Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Pathfinder* project, to use Section 12 of the Public Service Management Act 1997 to pool youth mental health resources into one cross-government unit with participation across key agencies so that there is a single point for direction and decision making, has to date not been implemented<sup>9</sup>. Section 12 has never been used before and progressing the concept of how it will work has involved discussions with the Office of the Attorney General, and discussions concerning how accountability will work with regard to shared resources and responsibilities. While some progress has been made in establishing what an order made under Section 12 would look like, there has been no decision yet to progress the action. As one participant noted, a potential downside was that there is a “risk that if nothing comes from this, it may affect attitudes to such collaborative work in the future”.

The *Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Pathfinder* and *Reform of Youth Funding Schemes* projects illustrate a further challenge to embedding new ways of working: the transition of the work from one phase or one team to another. The *Reform of Youth Funding Schemes* departmental project lead identified a challenge for sustainability of transitioning from having the initiative based in the reform unit of the department to the youth affairs unit, which oversees the youth funding schemes. Similarly, the *Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Pathfinder* departmental project lead indicated that progress had been affected by personnel changes, with the staff who brought it through the initial phase stepping out of the project. As a general comment, she noted that “transitioning of projects through phases is not something we do all that well”.

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<sup>8</sup> This issue is examined further in the evaluation vignette on embedding learning produced as part of this study and available from <https://www.effectiveservices.org/>

<sup>9</sup> Section 12 of the Public Service Management Act 1997 deals with the assignment of responsibility in respect of cross-departmental matters. It empowers Ministers of State to assign responsibility and accountability to civil servants for the performance of functions relating to two or more departments.

### 3.3 Improved collaborative working processes within and between government departments

There is evidence of the Goal Programme leading to improved collaborative working practices within and between government departments. Box 3.3 gives an example from the *Embedding Innovation* project where cross-departmental collaboration has brought benefits and the challenge of sustaining those benefits. At the outset of the *Leadership Development Programme*, collaborative working was recognised as a leadership weakness in the Northern Ireland Civil Service. Module three of the five project modules explicitly addressed the issue of ‘working collaboratively’. An evaluation of the programme commissioned by the project itself indicated that working collaboratively was the area where participants believed their behaviour had most changed as a result of the project. The *Using Data to Inform Policy* project has contributed to greater collaboration of sections across the department in how they share and use data. In the case of the *Developing Evidence and Knowledge Management* project, an internal evaluation of the pilot knowledge network concluded that the network was a positive mechanism for sharing tacit knowledge within the department with high levels of attendance from staff across the department. The department subsequently decided to continue with the knowledge network for a further year and establish two more knowledge networks.

#### **Box 3.3 Setting up an advisory group for the Innovation Lab**

The Innovation Lab was set up to use innovation methods, such as design and behavioural insights, to develop public services and policies with users. The most prominent development in respect of cross-departmental collaboration arising from the *Embedding Innovation* project was the creation of an advisory group for the Innovation Lab. Interviews suggest that having a forum that was not directly accountable, in policy or financial terms, for the work of the Lab provided for new ideas and fresh thinking about what the Lab could do. The representative nature of the advisory group, with volunteers coming from across the civil service, provided a whole-of-government perspective. It was also a different model from a traditional external advisory group that would have involved a public appointments process for its creation. One interviewee noted that the Innovation Lab’s advisory group had created a “reform change community” and another noted that a number of officials that had been involved had kept in touch and maintained an interest in the Lab. However, this was undertaken as a personal initiative rather than via a formal platform. As it is a relatively new forum, the length of time advisory group members are expected to serve for, the basis for their succession, and the sustainability of the group given its voluntary nature is still to be determined.

The *Building Collaborative Working Practices* project specifically addresses the efficiency, effectiveness and oversight of collaborative working within the Department of Education and Skills.

Those involved in the pilot working groups and the project steering group note improvements in their experience and skills in this regard.

Several projects noted a deepening of engagement with others within or across departments arising from the work undertaken. A primary impetus for the *Children and Young People's Strategy* project was that the departments were keen to use a whole of government approach and to identify key areas for collaboration across the strategies. However, the degree of cross-departmental engagement was relatively modest overall across the programme. Most interviewees felt that while inter-departmental collaboration had improved, the level of improvement was limited in scope.

Difficulties associated with improved collaborative working practices tended to be associated with the variable degree of buy-in to the projects by management in departments and agencies. A tendency to put their own organisational needs first at the expense of collaboration was evident in some cases. As one departmental project lead involved in overseeing the work of a cross-agency team noted: "For some... staff, there wasn't that much engagement from their own managers, so it was seen as totally voluntary and they were trying to squeeze it in". This is a widespread challenge in cross-departmental working.

### 3.4 Public and civil servants connecting learning and practice between Ireland and Northern Ireland

The main arena where connecting learning and practice across the jurisdictions was viewed in a positive light is at the Advisory Group. At this senior level, the Advisory Group was seen as a very useful forum for the sharing and exchange of information. The Advisory Group provided a 'safe space' where the top managers of each civil service could share experiences, not only on the Goal Programme, but also wider aspects of public service reform. One participant contrasted the experience with that of the north/south ministerial council, seeing the Advisory Group as having more open and fluid conversations, with the council being more formulaic, even when only civil servants are in the room.

At the project level, this was the outcome judged the least effective. In interviews, and at the evaluation workshop held at the Goal learning day, the connection of learning and practice between Ireland and Northern Ireland ranked lowest of the short-term outcomes for the Goal Programme. A number of reasons were given for this. These included:

- There were no cross-border projects.
- Challenge of time, logistics, and permission from the system.
- Projects started at different times.

However, there are some positive results at project level. The outputs from the *Building Collaborative Working Practices* project were shared with the *Children and Young People's Strategy* project team. The departmental project lead for the *Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Pathfinder* project has given an input on collaborative practices based on the project to the *Leadership Development Programme*. Participants viewed the two Goal Programme learning days in Newry in 2017 and 2018 very positively (see Box 3.4). They were seen as useful events for team members to hear first-hand what was happening with the other Goal Programme projects. As one learning event participant from the Irish civil service put it, there are “not many times you get to engage with the Northern Ireland Civil Service and what they are doing”. Expressions of interest in projects running in each jurisdiction were noted at the learning days, though there is only limited evidence of this interest following through in practice.

#### **Box 3.4 Using learning days to share lessons from the Goal Programme**

During the course of the Goal Programme, CES ran two learning days for project participants, in November 2017 and November 2018, both in Newry. The purpose was to provide an opportunity for Goal project leads and other key people to come together to share their work and learning. The intention was to have an informal sharing of successes and failures and sharing of learning from participation in the programme.

Feedback from participants was very positive. People were interested to hear about the projects they were not involved with and highlighted the value of the cross-border element of this learning. Hearing about the common issues and lessons learned across projects was found to be particularly helpful:

*“And no matter what you say when you send me stuff, actually hearing people talk about their experiences is invaluable. I thought the learning event was really good”.*

*“At Newry I was struck by the degree of emergent knowledge, the energy around the initiatives and the challenges and benefits of collaboration within and between government departments”.*

### **3.5 Strengthened skills and capacity within the civil and public services**

This outcome was one where significant progress was made according to Goal Programme participants. In both the *Evaluation Training for Civil Servants* and *Leadership Development Programme*, the projects themselves carried out evaluations that indicated that participants in the training/development programme had strengthened their skills and capacity.

In the *Building Collaborative Working Practices* project, interviewees referred to a strengthening of skills and capacity among departmental personnel. The project was aimed at a more efficient and

effective approach to collaborative working in order to facilitate better policy making. This in itself was intended to enhance capacity. Department personnel referred to learning a lot about collaborative working in the course of the project:

*“Collaborative working is a phrase that’s bandied about and can mean absolutely anything to anybody but there is a discipline and a methodology there that gives this way of working a real structure and points to best practice.”*

Changing aspects of the culture of the participating organisations through capacity building was a theme in some of the projects. In the *Embedding Innovation* project, the project team usefully engaged in interviews and other detailed engagements with senior public service stakeholders about the extent to which innovation was happening across the service and what the opportunities and challenges were around developing an innovation culture. In the *Using Data to Inform Policy* project, the DES project sponsor described a ‘cultural shift’ taking place with the presence of the data map and GDPR. The challenge for them in progressing this work was to ‘catch the wave’ and build the capacity of civil servants to understand and use the data.

Departmental project interviewees from several projects mentioned the wider transfer of learning brought by CES, both in terms of learning from what worked well in other projects, and in terms of their experience with other organisations and in other settings.

### 3.6 Increased numbers of civil and public servants with experience of driving improvements in outcomes and working collaboratively

This was another very positively reviewed outcome by Goal Programme participants. Participants on the *Leadership Development Programme* reported improvements in their ability to manage for outcomes and work collaboratively, in an evaluation carried out of the *Leadership Development Programme*. In the *Reform of Youth Funding Schemes* project, participants in the trialling of the needs assessment and performance framework tools were exposed to new ways of thinking about collaborative outcomes for the youth funding programme. Box 3.5 gives an example of where cross-departmental working was being encouraged because of the Goal Programme.

#### **Box 3.5 Changing mind-set across departments**

A briefing update from the Department of Health and Department of Education on the *Children and Young People’s Strategies* project to the Goal Programme Advisory Group noted that the Goal Programme had achieved ‘the development of a mind-set and a willingness to pursue other projects jointly across departments’. Among those projects identified were a trial Family Drug and Alcohol

Court between the Department of Health and the Department of Justice, and a joint project between the Department of Health and the Department for Communities with regard to securing access to benefit entitlements for the most vulnerable families. (Department of Education and Department of Health, 'Strategy and Policy Collaboration for Children and Young People in NI', Briefing note prepared for Goal Advisory Meeting, 13 April 2018.)

As noted previously, arising from the *Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Pathfinder* project, the department started training other potential leaders of projects based around the experience learned from the project. One interviewee outlined the benefits of such an approach:

*"We've put about ten people through facilitation training... and we discovered that one of our AOs (administrative officers), who is only early twenties, is a fantastic facilitator and she has been used around the house in a whole bunch of things..."*

*You can offer training and that will pull people out who are interested in this, give them a few techniques but above all, give them permission to work differently and out of the siloed, military, Fordist command structure. I think that's been one of the findings we've had, which is that, yes, we were able to take some of these techniques and start training people and employing them around the place."*

As with the embedding issue, however, challenges remained concerning spreading the benefits from projects widely across the system. In the case of the *Embedding Innovation* project, for example, attention focused on the Innovation Lab's operating model and how that could be used to develop more traction across the public service. As this project neared its conclusion, however, interviewees suggested that implementation remained an issue and that more needed to be done to engage the organisations responsible for carrying through the outcomes of the Lab. Similarly, more work needed to be done to spread the lessons of the Lab, in terms of innovative practices across the public service.

While the number of public servants engaging directly with the Goal Programme was substantial, as a proportion of the totality of the public service in both jurisdictions, it was very limited. While there are increased numbers of civil and public servants with experience of driving improvements in outcomes and working collaboratively, the impact on the wider civil and public service has, to date, been relatively limited.



## 4 Managing the process: what helped and what hindered reform

The evaluation team gave particular attention at the evaluation workshops with the Advisory Group and at the Goal Programme learning day to working with participants to identify significant factors driving success and presenting challenges/barriers to reform during the Goal Programme. Here, drawing from the workshops and evidence from the interviews, these factors are grouped into six themes that capture what we were told about what helps and what hinders reform.

### 4.1 Leveraging senior buy-in and sponsorship

It is a given of most reports on reform or change to note that top management commitment is vital to success. This evaluation report is no different, but we attempt to go behind the relatively simple comment about the need for top-level commitment to identify what that means in practice, and the implications for senior managers and others wishing to leverage senior sponsorship as a means of reform.

From the experience of the Goal Programme, the evaluation team identified two main roles for senior level sponsorship:

- a) A largely 'symbolic' role, giving status and credibility to the planned change, and
- b) A practical role, where particular behaviours and actions can help or hinder reform.

As regards the 'symbolic' role, repeatedly in the projects, participants noted the fact that the secretary general or permanent secretary had signed-off on the project was of importance to them. Having the signed support of the secretary general/permanent secretary was perceived by departmental personnel to give the project the required sanction, and to give them leverage in pursuing the project objectives, as the following quote from a departmental project lead illustrates:

*"From our point of view, the main benefit from having what we had at that stage – it didn't just go to the assistant secretary; it was the secretary general who was supporting us as well. That really supported us and made it easier for us to get people more interested in the project and comply with what we had to do."*

The Goal Programme recognised the importance of having the secretary general/permanent secretary of the department on board, and a named assistant secretary general/deputy secretary as sponsor of the project. While neither were involved in the day-to-day project work, they authorised the projects and were responsible for their implementation. This gave the projects a greater status within the department than their size and budget alone would imply. Officials referred to the value of having the secretary general's 'signature' and consequent 'time and focus'.

With regard to the practical role, while on a day-to-day basis there was limited need for direct involvement of the senior sponsors, their intervention could be crucial at times when issues needed to be addressed that were beyond the responsibility of the project team. As one departmental project lead noted:

*“If it was just at principal officer level and below, it probably would have progressed very similarly, if all goes well, it’s fine, but if there are resourcing implications... or problems with the project, it’s really important that those higher up are engaged with the project as a department and not just our unit... I think it’s critical actually.”*

Similarly, the CES project sponsors played a role in supporting the CES project leads, and also in liaising with the departmental project sponsors and project leads as necessary to smooth out any challenges that arose during the course of the project.

Another critically important practical role for the senior sponsors was in terms of modelling behaviours that support change and innovation. One departmental project lead felt that the sponsor role, through giving the team freedom to operate outside of the ‘normal’ hierarchical structure, was central to progressing the project more quickly than would have been the case otherwise:

*“I think one of the things that contributed to the success of the project was the visibility it had at senior level. Sometimes you don’t want that because you want to work under the radar and get everything lined up. In this case, because it was challenge after challenge getting the silos within the department together – and the silos across the civil service – actually having that visibility let us move more quickly than we would have otherwise.”*

*If we hadn’t had it, I think back, and I was probably taking all sorts of licences that I would have felt more nervous about if it hadn’t existed. That supported a creative space for the staff below... It definitely gave that kind of permission to be innovative.”*

This modelling of behaviour in terms of giving teams freedom to be innovative, especially when working in a cross-departmental context, is vital to addressing and tackling cultural norms that can exist in hierarchical organisations such as the civil service, where the tendency to fall back into silos is strong.

Concerning challenges, maintaining senior buy-in when projects are not political priorities can present difficulties. While senior managers could take initiatives so far, particularly the mission delivery-oriented projects, the need for political direction ultimately drives the pace of change. Turnover of sponsors could also present challenges, as noted below in section 4.3.

## 4.2 Going with the grain: aligning with context, priorities and what has gone before

There was a sense that, overall, the projects selected addressed what were widely seen to be clear and compelling problems or issues that resonated with the departments concerned. In some cases, such as the *Building Collaborative Working Practices* project and the *Leadership Development Programme*, they linked with wider public service reform priorities identified in high-level reform plans: the *Civil Service Renewal Plan* in Ireland and the draft *Programme for Government* in Northern Ireland respectively. In other cases, such as the *Reform of Youth Funding Schemes* project and the *Embedding Innovation* project, the issues to be tackled followed on from previous work identified as a government priority. In these cases, the projects were seen as a clear and logical progression of the work. The *Evaluation Training for Civil Servants* and *Developing Evidence and Knowledge Management* projects were examples of issues often seen as important but not urgent in public service organisations, and likely to be lower priority in the normal scheme of things.

Fitting in with public service-wide or corporate goals/objectives and strategies, or with earlier initiatives or consultations so staff could recognise what was agreed was needed, was helpful in terms of giving the projects traction. It provided an enabling context for change. In Northern Ireland, the *Leadership Development Programme* itself helped change the context by engaging senior leaders more deeply with the issue of collaborative leadership. Officials from several of the departments running the projects were also familiar with CES, having worked with them before, and so were aware of their capacity and capabilities. This made for an easier process regarding working together and co-design and delivery of projects.

When the projects were underway, 'going with the grain' was also important in terms of managing relationships and processes. For example, from several CES project leads' perspective, the departmental teams were particularly skilled at maintaining the boundaries of the project, and managing the availability of senior personnel within departments, ensuring their involvement while not over-burdening them. On several occasions, CES personnel referred to the importance of pacing and of working to the department's time-line. In other words, it was important to appreciate that change could be slow in the public service. Those involved in the projects include busy managers with wide-ranging responsibilities and the project time-lines had to reflect this. As one CES project lead noted:

*"Relationships are absolutely critical. People have to trust you and have to know that they can talk to you about what is going on and know that you're there to support them. You're not there to be critical or to come in with a solution that can't be applied. So, it's an understanding of the limitations and restrictions in which they are working."*

There were also times when the context could hinder change. For example, where industrial relations and other change programmes were happening at the same time, the issue of competing priorities could affect the pace of progress, with the urgent driving out the important. During the *Using data to inform policy* project, the introduction of GDPR became a major issue for the department, and the departmental project lead was a key resource for GDPR. This affected the time they could make available for the project and affected timelines for progressing it. In Northern Ireland, the political context, given the continuing absence of the Executive, affected the momentum and prioritisation of the projects. The absence of political decision-making influenced how far projects or associated work could evolve beyond the initially agreed parameters.

Existing ways of doing things could also be a barrier to change. This was particularly the case in respect of the cross-departmental projects, where competing department priorities, and varying degree of buy-in from participating departments and agencies could lead to changing deadlines and moving goalposts for projects. It was also the case that procedural requirements could be frustrating, particularly at project inception, with entry prolonged as a result.

#### 4.3 Getting and keeping the right people/skills/expertise and managing succession

The projects followed a ‘distributed leadership’ approach: leaders playing a role at different levels both within and across organisations<sup>10</sup> (see Figure 4.1).

The project leads were crucial to project development and implementation (Box 4.1). The departmental project lead had the pivotal role as the main change agent for the project, and the link between the wider Goal Programme, senior management, and the staff working on the project. The CES project lead provided external support and analysis. Both departmental and CES project leads enabled team members to make sense of and frame the desired changes. They could also facilitate the development of an environment where employees more generally were less resistant to change. In order to take on this role, project leads needed the support of their senior managers both in terms of ensuring they had adequate resources and time to do the job, and also in terms of giving them the freedom to think and act innovatively, as noted above in section 4.1.

##### **Box 4.1 Importance of departmental project lead**

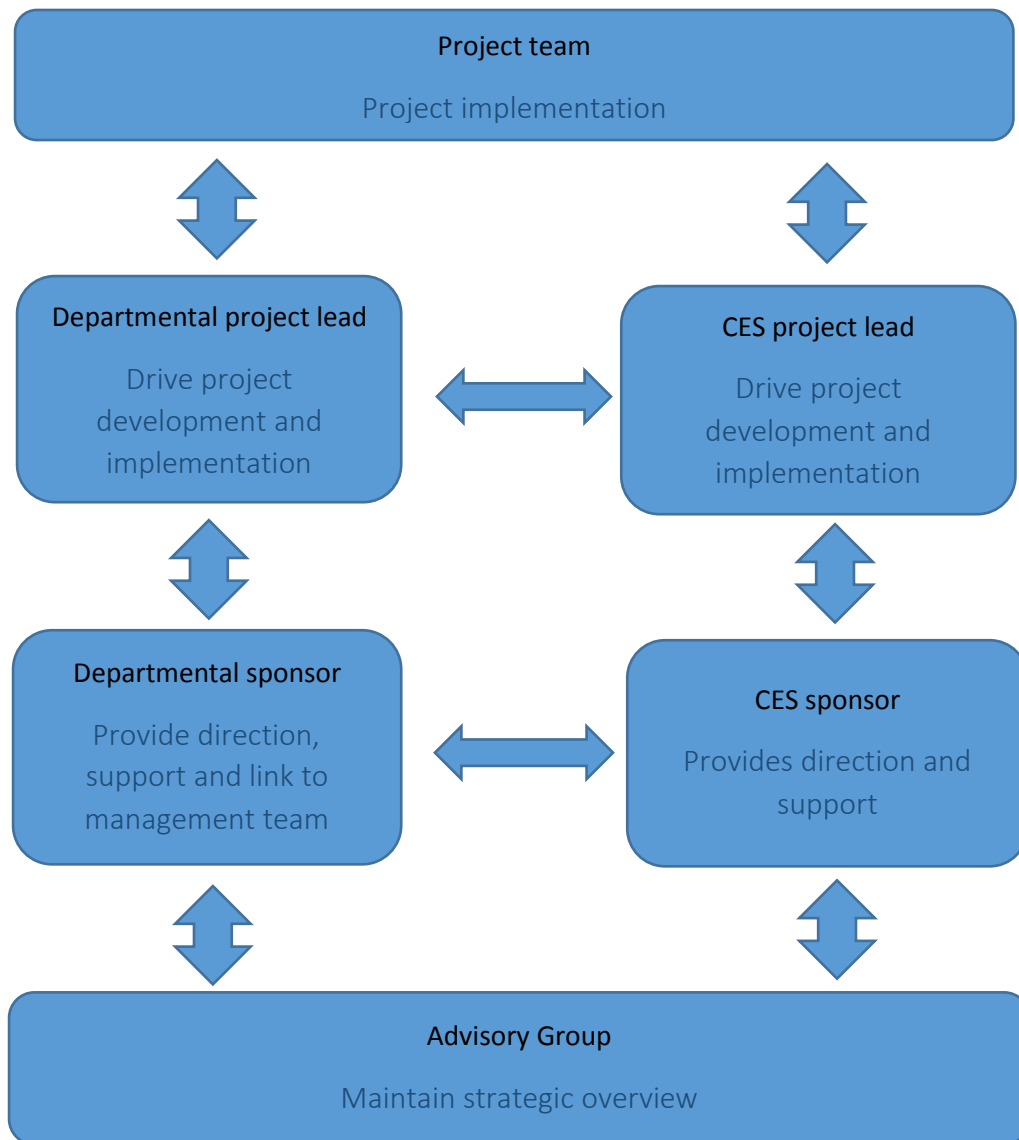
In the *Youth Mental Health and Pathfinder* project, a report on the project notes: ‘the leadership and intellectual input of the head of the core team was critical. It would be easy to take this quality of

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<sup>10</sup> This issue is examined further in the evaluation vignette on distributed leadership produced as part of this study and available from <https://www.effectiveservices.org/>

leadership for granted. Our main concern about the replicability of the success of this pathfinder in another part of government would be: who will bring the leadership and other qualities that we relied on the head of team for at key points?’<sup>11</sup>

**Figure 4.1 Distributed Leadership, Roles and Relationships**



<sup>11</sup> R. Gaynor, P. Thomas and A. Templeman (2017), *15 Days: A practical guide to leading accelerated, high impact collaboration in the Irish Civil Service*, Dublin: Centre for Effective Services, [https://effectiveservices.org/downloads/15\\_Days\\_Report\\_Final.pdf](https://effectiveservices.org/downloads/15_Days_Report_Final.pdf)

Regarding the project teams, comments were positive about the mix, energy and commitment of group members, and especially the inclusion of members with frontline experience. In some of the cross-departmental projects, there was a degree of variability regarding the capacity and skills of participants.

Once the team was established, it was important to invest in their development. In several of the projects, team members felt that they could have done with more space and time to work together, and more support from senior managers to allow them the time to work effectively together. This was particularly the case for cross-departmental projects, where there were variable degrees of buy-in to the project from different departments.

There was also the challenge of dealing with staff turnover. As one CES project lead noted: “Team composition from both sides seems to have worked, but we have been beset by changes, and I don’t know if you can do anything about that... how do you capture the knowledge and experience of the departing person without over-burdening them... and sometimes the change happens really quickly”.

Most projects were challenged by changes in personnel (Table 4.1). Seven projects had a change of departmental sponsor during the programme, in one case having three different sponsors. Four projects had a change in the departmental lead (and in two of the remaining five cases, the departmental lead was absent for part of the project, on other duties or extended leave). There was more stability as regards CES personnel. The CES sponsors remained the same throughout. The CES project lead only changed in three of the projects (though in one case there were three different CES project leads). As one CES project lead noted in relation to the turnover of departmental personnel involved in the project: “CES were holding the history of the project”. Managing changes in departmental personnel, and consequent loss of organisational knowledge and memory, was a constant theme across the projects. Though in some cases, interviewees noted that the departing colleagues took with them and subsequently made use of knowledge of how the Goal Programme worked in their new work environments. Given turnover is an increasingly normal feature of business in the public service, this raises the need for anticipating, managing and planning succession etc., and good handover routines.

**Table 4.1 Number of project sponsors and project leads over the lifetime of the projects**

Project	Departmental sponsor	Departmental lead	CES sponsor	CES lead
Developing Evidence and Knowledge Management	1	1	1	2
Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Pathfinder	1	1	1	1
Building Collaborative Working Practices	2	1	1	1
Using Data to Inform Policy	2	2	1	1
Reform of Youth Funding Schemes	2	2	1	3
Evaluation Training For Civil Servants	3	1	1	1
Leadership Development Programme	2	2	1	1
Children and Young People’s Strategies	2	1	1	1
Embedding Innovation	2	2	1	2

#### 4.4 Accessing and using external supports

A distinctive feature of the Goal Programme was the role played by CES and their associates, providing external support to each of the projects. The emphasis on co-design and co-production of projects played an important role in skills and capacity development. The design of the Goal Programme aimed to ensure that CES was not imposing solutions and answers, rather the departments identified their needs. The Goal Programme afforded departments the opportunity to address any skills and capacity gaps, or areas where skills and capacity needed strengthening, through supports provided by CES from amongst its own staff or associates. Across all departments, interviewees regarded this as one of the most important features of the Goal Programme, commenting that CES understood the way in which departments work and respected their timeframes. As a result, civil servants felt they retained ownership and control of their projects. The involvement of CES allowed the departmental project teams to retain and develop key processes in-house. This was seen as facilitating capacity building, as the projects weren’t ‘hived off’ to external providers:

*“Co-design was fundamental. We needed to have ownership. It couldn’t be seen that CES are coming in and telling us what to do.” (Departmental interviewee)*

*“My role was really to drive it from the department’s side... the goal was that it was co-designed from the outset so that, optically it was seen to be driven from within the department and it wasn’t just consultants coming in, telling the department how to work better. So that message was important from the start... it wasn’t just that CES turned up with the material and said, this is it... it was really moulded every step.” (Department interviewee)*

The flexibility of the Goal Programme meant that projects could be agreed, but still be in development. This enabled CES to bring in high-quality external support thinking where necessary, to help shape and co-design the specifics, with CES working alongside departmental officials to ensure that the way the project developed still fitted the aims of the programme. The expertise brought to the projects by CES, as noted by a department official, was “not CES replacing civil servants work, it was another skill set”. The academic rigour and research and presentation skills of CES were key attributes in progressing the project:

*“Their background in social science and psychology, the academic rigour that they apply to that. And also, being able to draw out the essence from the literature so that it was applicable in the department environment, that it wasn’t in ‘highfalutin’ language, it was applicable... Their understanding of how the department, you know, works and what the other challenges are.” (Departmental interviewee)*

An important contribution of CES was their encouragement that the projects should have an evidence base. As new ways of working were introduced, departmental personnel were encouraged to reflect that it was important that this would be grounded in evidence from a variety of sources. Whilst in principle civil servants are well aware of the need for sound evidence-informed policies, sometimes in the busy-ness of government departments, this can be overlooked, and having the external support as part of the Goal Programme helped keep it as a priority.

A major benefit of the Goal Programme from a departmental perspective, which came across repeatedly both at the project level and in the learning day evaluation workshop, was that it provided an alternative to buying-in support through commissioning. In practice, this is only possible in limited cases, where the external partner has funding to bring to the table or where organisations are exempt from some procurement rules. While recognising the benefits of existing public procurement procedures, interviewees noted that the Goal Programme saved departments time and money by not



having to seek funding and then go via public procurement. Box 4.2 provides some illustrative examples of the views expressed.

#### **Box 4.2 Goal Programme as an alternative to commissioning external supports**

One departmental project lead stated that it would probably have taken a couple of years and detailed thought at the start about precisely what is needed to enable a contract to be drawn up that would form the basis for the agreement (if they had to go through procurement). Goal allowed more flexibility, and to define needs as they went along: “it was more iterative – you could go back and re-think, develop as you went; you didn’t have to be so clear at the outset like you would in a tender process”.

In the case of the *Developing Evidence and Knowledge Management project*, departmental personnel also emphasised what they referred to as “the benefits of a middle ground approach” (not on your own, but also not commercial consultants coming in and telling you what to do). CES staff became “part of the journey”, “a partner and a critical friend with them on the journey”. It was noted that this is somewhat unusual for the civil service; it was suggested the different contracting arrangement (i.e. not a classic procurement relationship) facilitated this.

One of the senior officials involved with the *Embedding Innovation* project reflected that:

*“...the beauty or the value of what we got from CES really particularly hinged around the very high calibre of the consultant support we got, particularly the associate consultant who came to work alongside us, and that we got tremendous value out of that. The skillset that came, the knowledge background, and what she was able to add, but also, what was superb about it was, because of this nice relationship with CES, we weren’t tied up in bureaucracy about getting approvals for consultants and so on. It was a fluent arrangement, and it worked very well for us.”*

CES themselves had the flexibility within the context of the Goal Programme to bring in external supports where they did not have the expertise themselves. This was seen as particularly beneficial in the *Leadership Development Programme, Embedding innovation, and Youth Mental Health and Pathfinder* projects.

CES was able to perform a role of providing supports that would otherwise have been difficult to procure. There seemed to be a high level of trust from civil servants towards CES, and CES continuously worked on building and maintaining good relationships. In individual cases where issues arose, the

senior-level sponsorship engagement between CES and departments was extremely important in keeping the projects on track.

#### 4.5 Applying appropriate tools and techniques to support change

CES was seen as particularly helpful to the projects in the support they provided towards the development of analytical frameworks and evidence-informed documentation. Both supported project development and implementation.

With regard to analytical frameworks, the framework produced by CES for the analysis of the consultation responses in the *Children and Young People's Strategies* project was highlighted by the departmental project lead as particularly helpful:

*"It meant that we actually had really good resourcing of the views of children and young people and stakeholders, and their views on government interventions and things that governments support, right across the board. We have that now in a format that is easy to read, accessible by everybody – it's on our website. That has been a huge benefit and success of this whole programme. We couldn't have done that without CES. That is one major success factor for bringing them in."*

With regard to evidence-informed documentation, a number of projects found supporting documents provided by CES of particular use, and a legacy that will provide benefits after the projects are completed. These include:

- Evidence review to inform the design of the Leadership Development Programme
- Literature review on knowledge management
- Briefing paper on communities of practice
- Synthesis of Irish data and evidence on mental health and wellbeing for 0-25 year olds
- Literature review document and practice wisdom report on collaborative working
- Good practice guidance and self-assessment tools for effective collaborative practice
- Comparative evidence reviews of international children and young people's strategies
- Evidence review for the revised youth funding scheme

In the case of the *Reform of Youth Funding Schemes* project, a 'Sources of evidence informing the design of the Revised Youth Funding Scheme' document was highlighted as particularly useful. Similarly, a workbook to help the analysis of area needs is seen by the department as having worked very well and being innovative in terms of supporting the allocation of funding based on the analysis of needs in an area. A performance and oversight framework presented in workbook format was also

seen as very useful. These tools, according to the departmental project lead, are “decently grounded in evidence”. Box 4.3 provides a further example from the *Building Collaborative Working Practices* project.

**Box 4.3 The role of support documentation in the *Building Collaborative Working Practices* project**

The main tools developed during the project are Excel workbooks (the stocktake and lookback), which have been developed in order to be as straightforward to use as possible. It is intended that all DES working groups will use the tools as they commence and conclude involvement with a working group. In addition, there is a wide range of supporting material including a literature review, Collaborative Practice Guidelines and a Practice Wisdom document. The Practice Wisdom document emerged during the course of the project. It reflects the learning and experiences of the pilot working groups, together with feedback from a series of workshops on the project held at a series of network events with staff at middle management level.

There are also a number of outputs aimed at supporting the sustainability of the interventions and approaches developed in respect of collaborative working, once the project ends. A management board checklist has been developed that is intended to assist the management committee both when setting up and in the ongoing oversight of working groups. An implementation plan for embedding collaborative working across the department has also been produced, and guidelines for IT staff who may be required to amend the Excel workbooks.

#### 4.6 Enabling and embedding sustainable collaboration and cross-sectoral learning

Widely recognised as the most challenging aspect of the process of reform associated with the Goal Programme was the issue of building sustainability and ensuring a lasting legacy from the programme<sup>12</sup>. Aspects of the Goal Programme were seen as helpful in supporting better collaboration and learning. Particularly appreciated was the importance of taking time out to reflect, think things through and collaborate with colleagues across departments. Having dedicated space and time to work on the project, with guaranteed resources and a degree of ring fencing is something that civil servants do not often get. This was very evident in the project inception phase, where a significant amount of work went into engagement, consultation and planning. The Goal Programme allowed for this, and interviewees suggested that this preparation was fundamental to later success.

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<sup>12</sup> The issue of sustainability is examined further in the evaluation vignette on sustaining new ways of working produced as part of this study and available from <https://www.effectiveservices.org/>

An interviewee from the Department of Education involved in the *Children and Young People's Strategies* project noted some potentially lasting benefits with reference to embedding collaboration:

*"Trying to get departments to engage with other departments has always been very difficult. I do see a change now, particularly because CES has been involved with the Department of Health on the Family Matters<sup>13</sup> and the Looked After Children and our Children and Young People Strategy. That has brought the Department of Health, ourselves and other units with this department together to focus on those... That in itself is a huge change."*

The challenge of freeing up of individuals' time, even though the Goal Programme created time and space for the project, presented difficulties at times. As noted in a report on the *Youth and mental health pathfinder* project:

*'From the outset, we planned a mix of working in smaller groups, around a spine of intensive one-day workshops with the whole pathfinder group. This approach was designed to deal with the reality that all pathfinder group members have demanding day jobs... In practice, they are not given any less to do in their day job by their line managers, so we relied heavily on their engagement, commitment and discretionary effort. This remains one of the big barriers to effective, collaborative working across a system<sup>14</sup>.*

In a similar manner, limited departmental resources were identified as a potential barrier to success by interviewees in the *Children and Young People's Strategies* project. While a Project Board (comprised of senior officials from various departments, and the chief executive at the Office of the Northern Ireland Commissioner for Children and Young People) was seen as a mechanism to share ongoing development between the three strategies, the strategies are continuing to progress but at a slower rate than expected. This can be attributed to the lack of devolved government in Northern Ireland, and to staff time and resources being constrained.

Cross-sectoral learning was limited across the projects, though the Newry learning days were spoken of very positively (as previously illustrated in Box 3.4). Participants thought it was helpful to hear about other projects and to identify people they could follow up with later. Meeting with other projects was seen by one interviewee as enabling them to "join the dots" and reflect on the challenges and opportunities posed by reform efforts.

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<sup>13</sup> Now called the Family and Parenting Support Strategy (Family Matters was the older family strategy).

<sup>14</sup> R. Gaynor, P. Thomas and A. Templeman (2017), *15 Days: A Toolkit*, Dublin: Centre for Effective Services, [https://effectiveservices.org/assets/15\\_Days\\_Toolkit\\_Final\\_ForWeb.pdf](https://effectiveservices.org/assets/15_Days_Toolkit_Final_ForWeb.pdf)

Box 4.4 illustrates the benefits of planning for sustainability from the start, but also some of the challenges associated with this.

**Box 4.4 Planning for sustainability in the Evaluation Training for Civil Servants project**

In drawing up the project specification document, sustainability was identified as an issue from the start. It was scheduled for consideration towards the end of the project. In practice, the department ensured it was raised earlier. The CES project lead felt that as a general lesson, it would be helpful to have sustainability built in from early in the project.

The intention is that the training programme developed under Goal will transfer to the OneLearning platform (OneLearning is the learning and development centre for the Irish civil service) for delivery across the civil service on a regular basis. It is likely that it will take some time to get a full programme up and running, due in part to constraints on OneLearning in terms of their capacity to cope with the many and varying demands on them, of which this training programme is just one.

As the training programme may not be delivered again for some while, it raises the question of when pressure from the Goal Programme ceases, how will prioritisation of this training programme be maintained? A similar challenge is to find deliverers for the training – this could also be a potential blockage to sustainability. There has been discussion about the best model to go for in terms of delivery – contract out to a provider or use a team of experienced civil servants). In addition, there is the question of who will update the material. These issues were under consideration by a working group from the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, OneLearning, and CES, at time the evaluation concluded.

## 5 Conclusions and lessons learned from the Goal Programme for future public service reform programmes

In this chapter, based on the evaluation of the Goal Programme, plus the evaluation team's knowledge of public service reform initiatives more generally, seven lessons learned of interest to those engaged in future reform initiatives are set out. Reform of public services is a constant activity and the experience gained from the Goal Programme can help throw light on how best to support reform.

### Focus on projects where desired outcomes are clear but the path there is uncertain

A starting point is to recognise that a Goal Programme-type intervention is not necessarily the best way to progress reform projects in all circumstances. For example, urgent reforms, often driven by a crisis, are likely to proceed anyway and have little scope for reflection. Similarly, there are large-scale systemic reform changes, such as curriculum change in education, where processes are in place to oversee such reforms. Small, straightforward reform projects with a clear path and end point are also unlikely to benefit from significant supports: where a project has a clear path at the start, external support is likely to be more about supplementing capacity than adding value.

A Goal Programme-type intervention, running exemplar projects and using appropriate external supports, is more appropriate at a mid-to-large scale project level. Projects focused on a real issue of concern to the public, with cross-organisational boundaries, or ones that address serious capacity issues across organisations, are likely to provide fruitful material for doing things differently. A Goal Programme approach is particularly useful when there is scope to shape and design the project and use external expertise to plug gaps rather than as an extra pair of hands. In other words, when the desired outcomes are reasonably clear but where the means of getting there need exploration and clarification.

When projects focus on the needs of service users and compelling issues of public and policy importance, but where the way to achieve desired outcomes is unclear, they lend themselves to the use of collaboration tools and outcome measures that can be transformative. This can encourage project participants to look across government from the point of view of the user as a driver of change, going outside the boundaries of routine practice. Using collaboration tools and outcome measures can facilitate transformative change.

### Build strong but flexible governance arrangements

The governance arrangements put in place – the use of Memoranda of Understanding, Advisory Group, project sponsors, project leads, and formal reporting requirements, were generally seen as providing a good framework to support reform projects in the Goal Programme. Crucially, governance

arrangements must be applied with flexibility and adaptability (not overly formulaic and proportionate in manner) if they are to be supportive of change. If applied rigidly, governance arrangements can become an additional administrative burden or constraint on projects. Maintaining oversight but applying it in a flexible manner allows for adaptation, but at the same time imposes a discipline on project management and accountability.

### Encourage leadership – at all levels

The distributed leadership approach adopted in the Goal Programme worked well and is applicable in a variety of reform settings and circumstances. Distributed leadership builds the capacity for change and improvement across levels and organisations. As a leadership model, it moves away from a simple view of leadership from the top to more collaborative and shared leadership.

This is not to say that leadership from the top is not important. In the Goal Programme, the Advisory Group played an important role in bringing senior leaders together from both parts of the island to oversee and discuss reform. Project sponsors set the tone for reform. In particular, in cross-organisational projects, the role of the sponsor in freeing up the project team from the day-to-day constraints of departmental responsibilities can be crucial to success.

Also, at a top level, it is worth noting that the *Leadership Development Programme* in Northern Ireland provided a supportive context for the other reform projects there: senior leaders were engaged in thinking more about joined-up government, and how they could collaborate better to achieve desired outcomes. Similar contextual supports, by linking in development supports for senior managers with reform initiatives, can be helpful more generally.

At the level of the project, successful cross-agency collaborations require managers with skill at facilitation and brokering among individuals and agencies with different perspectives and interests. Managers who are effective across boundaries use the big picture, framing, persuasion, negotiation, and other means of influence to help set direction, gain commitments, build trust, and motivate and coordinate others outside their hierarchical control. Managers who act as change agents can frame and make sense of the change with colleagues and bring them along with them. However, for this to happen, organisations need to support the development of change management capabilities within middle management. This is where external supports of the kind provided by the Goal Programme can be particularly helpful.

### Balance pace and urgency with the need to take time and be iterative about change

A tension present in the Goal Programme, as in most public service reform efforts, was to balance the need for a sense of urgency and pace to ensure implementation happens, with a recognition that

change in the public sector takes time. This requires taking a 'tight-loose' implementation approach. Experience suggests that a managed reform process requires having an identifiable person responsible for implementing a reform, deadlines for implementation and a forum for holding them to account. At the same time, the process should create space and time for creative solutions and options to emerge.

It is important to recognise the need for adaptability through shared learning. Managers and project team members should have the ability to maintain flexibility and creativity to adapt to changing situations without losing focus on the strategic vision and goals.

Reforms driven by immediate and pressing needs may prove harder to sustain once that need has eased, not least because they are often presented as necessary rather than desirable changes in structural or organisational terms. In these situations, speed and iteration are not necessarily in conflict, and the skill and experience of managing reforms may facilitate outcomes that are more efficient.

Experience suggests that a managed reform process requires having an identifiable person responsible for implementing a reform (or part of a reform package), deadlines for implementation and a forum for holding them to account.

### Take care over team selection and support their development

Selection of team members is a significant task. It is important they have the required range of skills, and knowledge of the system, in order to perform effectively. Cross-departmental/agency reform implementation requires capabilities in problem framing and boundary setting, and an ability to bring fresh thinking about what appear to be intractable problems. A mix of abilities and member characteristics can contribute positively to team performance.

The means by which teams work together is central to their success. Developing rules of behaviour, providing team members with the required developmental supports, and ensuring effective leadership of teams all contribute to ensuring that the process by which the team carries out its work supports the task in hand. The team leader role is a critical one, particularly in terms of (a) acting as the link between the team, other units and senior managers, and (b) helping the team develop innovative solutions to problems and support team members in their respective tasks.

The pace of change and constant substitutions of personnel in many cross-agency initiatives can erode team effectiveness unless a core group can maintain coherence. It can also be very difficult for staff to completely divorce themselves from the realities of their organisational boundaries and accountability structures, as well as employment/job-related commitments, to engage in cross-



departmental work. There is a consequent need for senior managers to free up team members and invest in their skills and capacity development.

### Make appropriate use of external support

A lesson from the Goal Programme is that external support of the type provided through the Goal Programme can support capacity building within the civil service rather than replace it. The participating departments worked jointly with CES in the delivery of the project. This is something of a hybrid model, between the civil service taking on the work itself, or outsourcing most of the work to a consultancy. In the case of the Goal Programme, the civil service used the particular expertise of CES, backed by funding support from The Atlantic Philanthropies, to assist their own staff to build skills and capacity, and work on reform projects.

Of particular benefit are two aspects of the external support. One is the evidence base it can provide to support reform. The production of supporting documentation, analytically rigorous but accessible in manner, provides a foundation for reform efforts. The other main aspect is the facilitation tools, techniques and expertise that external support can provide. Providing public servants with the tools and techniques to work together collaboratively and build capability can provide lasting benefits to reform efforts. There is strong evidence that engagement of external support is most successful when the external partners have a good understanding of the realities of the public sector context of reform and appreciation of the need to balance competing demands and accountability requirements.

### Plan for sustainability and embedding of reform

It is important to be conscious of the issue of sustainability from the start. To build on one of the findings of the evaluation, concerning how those involved in the Goal Programme projects found regular review of progress to be helpful, it would appear appropriate and important that this practice would continue into the future and that regular 'stock-takes' of progress and objectives take place.

For reforms to take root, they need to be supported by managers at all levels, and their purpose disseminated and communicated regularly via such means as knowledge transfer, staff meetings, intranet, departmental publications and visual representations (posters etc.). There is also strong evidence that connecting reform objectives to the stated values of the organisation, as well as the wider politically-set goals of the public service, increases their chances of acceptance.

Reform succession is vital but often forgotten. Are there people to step in and continue the reform when others move on? Any project team of reformers must have sufficient competence, previous knowledge and contacts, as well as access to the necessary information and methods to coherently implement and consolidate reform. Succession is going to happen, so there is a need to find ways to

manage it better. Better succession management, use of knowledge management etc. can help in this regard.

## Conclusion

The Goal Programme illustrates an innovative and novel approach to supporting public service reform. There is now a group of public servants thinking and acting differently and working in new ways. This would not have happened without their participation in the Goal Programme.

There is a need to think about what happens next, in terms of building on the capability and supports developed, sustaining the benefits from the Goal Programme, and spreading the lessons learned more widely. This evaluation is one tool to help dissemination of the lessons learned about meaningful reform.

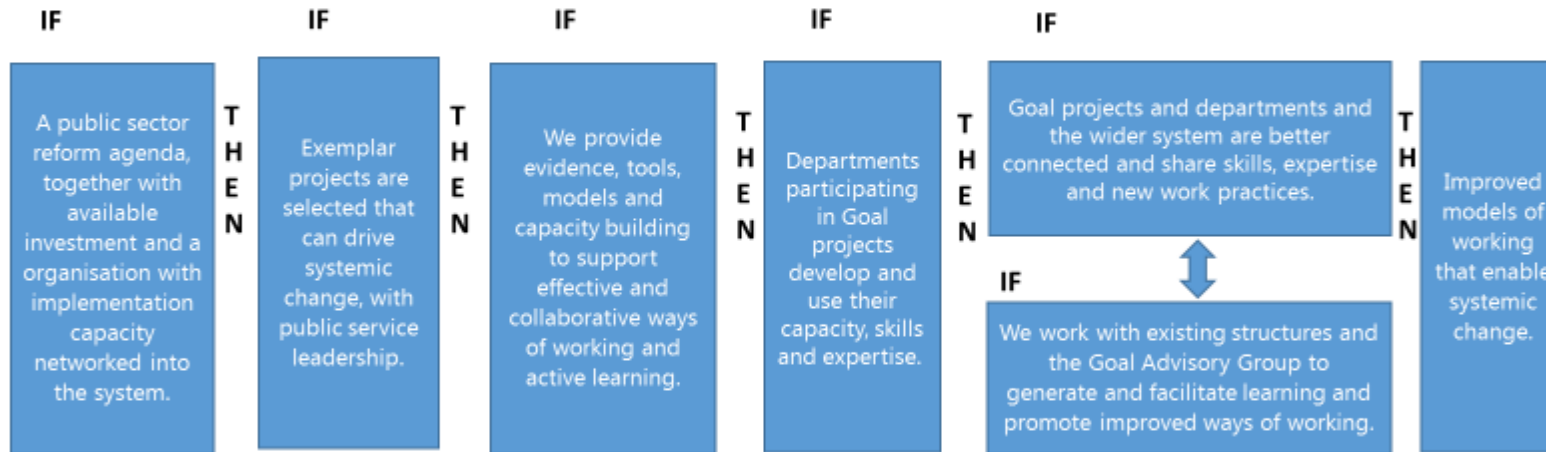
## Appendix 1 Logic model for the Goal Programme for public service reform (2017)

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Short-Term Outcomes (By 2018)	Long-Term Outcomes (2019 and beyond)
<p>Leadership and support from Government departments and agencies in Northern Ireland and Ireland responsible for specific reform programmes and wider public sector/system reform</p> <p>CES</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Experienced team</li> <li>Track record of collaborating with government policy makers and service providers</li> <li>Learning about systems change</li> <li>CES publication 'A primer on implementing whole of government approaches'</li> </ul> <p>Engaged staff from government departments and agencies</p> <p>Partnerships and collaborations with relevant organisations and individuals</p> <p>Associates and secondments providing local and international expertise on systems change, public sector services and reform, and specialist sectoral/technical knowledge</p> <p>Funding from Atlantic Philanthropies and experience and learning from the investment</p>	<p>Technical, evidence, implementation and evaluation <b>support provided to 9 exemplar public service reform projects</b> across 7 government departments</p> <p><b>Training and capacity building</b> programmes, on leadership, change management, evaluation and using data, policy implementation, etc.</p> <p>Identify <b>mechanisms for embedding</b> and sustaining new ways of working.</p> <p><b>Leaders</b> communicate about and participate in projects and capacity building work</p> <p><b>Advisory Group</b> (of key stakeholders) oversees progress, provides leadership and guidance, and overcomes 'road blocks'</p>	<p><b>Tools and resources co-designed</b> by CES and government departments. e.g. to support collaborative working, strategy / programme design, data mapping, implementation planning and monitoring</p> <p><b>Workshops, mentoring and coaching</b> to support, for example, policy development and implementation, collaborative working, stakeholder engagement, knowledge management and use of data</p> <p><b>Reports and literature reviews</b> to aid the development of strategies and action-plans</p> <p><b>Capacity building programmes, and resources</b> developed and delivered to ROI and NI civil and public servants, through a co-design process involving CES and department staff</p>	<p>Successful implementation of a number of sectoral reform programmes – providing <b>exemplars embedding new ways of working</b> in the public and civil services</p> <p><b>Staff engaged</b> in new ways of working</p> <p>Improved <b>collaborative working processes</b> within and between government departments, demonstrated by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Better (co)design of policy and services</li> <li>Staff working more effectively together</li> <li>Stronger culture of collaboration and incentives for collaboration in place</li> </ul> <p>Strengthened <b>skills and capacity</b> within the civil and public services, with regards to:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Using evidence in policy development and implementation</li> <li>Using data to inform policy</li> <li>Using outcomes</li> <li>Collaborative working</li> <li>Decision-making and leadership</li> <li>Policy implementation</li> <li>Evaluation</li> </ul> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Increasing number of civil and public servants with <b>experience</b> of driving improvements in <b>outcomes and working collaboratively</b></li> <li>Public and civil servants <b>connecting learning and practice</b> between Ireland and Northern Ireland</li> </ul>	<p>Improved outcomes for users of human services</p> <p>Visible accountable leadership in the civil and public service consistently prioritising Public Sector Reform</p> <p>Social, education and health policy is more evidence-informed and better implemented</p> <p>More joined up delivery of services across sectors and organisations and between top-level policy and front-line services (vertical and horizontal joining up of policy and services)</p> <p>Government policies and services are transformed by policy makers and service providers accessing and using relevant evidence in decision-making in their work</p> <p>Ireland and Northern Ireland are recognised as centres of excellence in implementing effective, evidence informed, outcomes focused policies and services across government departments and executive agencies</p>

Source: CES

# Goal Programme Theory of Change

A Theory of Change (ToC) clarifies and makes explicit the linkages between the various resources, activities and outcomes that constitute the initiative or programme and identifies the causal pathways between them.



- Assumptions**
- Changing political and policy environment in Ireland and Northern Ireland
  - Sustained commitment to public service reform in Ireland and Northern Ireland
  - Aligned to public service reform plans in Ireland and Northern Ireland

Source: CES

## Appendix 3 Goal Programme evaluation questionnaire

### Goal Programme on Public Service Reform Evaluation Questionnaire

(Please circle the number that best corresponds with your views. Or tick not applicable.)

<i>Project Name:</i>	Strongly Disagree	2	3	4	Strongly Agree	Not Applicable
Appropriate resources have been made available for the project	1	2	3	4	5	
The project has benefitted from good leadership	1	2	3	4	5	
The composition of the project team has been right	1	2	3	4	5	
We have used new, interesting tools and methods	1	2	3	4	5	
We are clear on the project objectives	1	2	3	4	5	
The right supports have been in place to help us achieve our objectives	1	2	3	4	5	
The project aligns well with the department's strategy	1	2	3	4	5	
The project aligns well with wider public service reform objectives	1	2	3	4	5	
I have developed my own competencies through involvement with the Goal project	1	2	3	4	5	
I have learnt new ways of working from my involvement with the Goal project	1	2	3	4	5	
As a result of my involvement with the Goal project I now think differently about policy making	1	2	3	4	5	
I will use what I have learnt from the Goal project in future change initiatives	1	2	3	4	5	
The Goal project supports learning within my department	1	2	3	4	5	
The Goal project supports evidence-informed policy making within my department	1	2	3	4	5	
The Goal project has led to better collaboration within my department	1	2	3	4	5	
We have key learning points from our Goal project which we will disseminate	1	2	3	4	5	
The Goal project has led to better collaboration across the civil service	1	2	3	4	5	
The Goal project highlights new ways of working for the civil service	1	2	3	4	5	
The outcomes from the Goal project are sustainable	1	2	3	4	5	
We have learnt from the other Goal projects	1	2	3	4	5	
The project is an exemplar project	1	2	3	4	5	
I would recommend the Goal programme to people outside my organisation	1	2	3	4	5	

## Appendix 4 Results from Goal Programme Evaluation Questionnaire

(n=22. 1 = Strongly Disagree; 5 = Strongly Agree)



## Appendix 5 Short description of the nine projects in the Goal Programme

### Developing Evidence and Knowledge Management (Department of Health, Ireland)

In 2015, the Department of Health (DOH) instigated a project, *Working Better Together* (WBT) to improve organisation and work within the department. There were nine WBT work-streams. The Goal Programme supported two of the nine work-streams on knowledge management and stakeholder (agencies and other groups under the department) analysis. In addition, the director of CES was on the WBT oversight committee.

The objective of the GOAL project as set out in the project specification document are:

- Strengthen awareness among staff about effective knowledge management and how it can support the work of the department
- More collaborative working by departmental staff, including through grade based networks and non-grade based collaborative fora including knowledge networks
- Foundation for incremental improvements in knowledge management and collaborative working.

A multi-grade, cross-departmental project group of about nine people was put in place. It was determined that one pilot community of practice (COP) would be established. The topic of how to respond to private members' bills was chosen as this has been a feature of the current Dáil. Rather than using the term COP which was thought to be obscure, the term knowledge network was used. The network met once a month for three months, facilitated by CES.

### Youth Mental Health and Wellbeing Pathfinder (Department of Health, Ireland)

The youth mental health pathfinder concept was developed in the context of:

- a) *Connecting for Life*, the suicide reduction strategy (specifically the objective 'to work differently across Government to enhance supports for young people with mental health problems or vulnerable to suicide'), and
- b) The *Civil Service Renewal Plan*, specifically Action 5 of the plan: 'Improve the delivery of shared whole-of-government projects'. Three pathfinder projects were identified to pilot new models for delivering whole-of-Government projects, of which one addressed the issue of youth mental health.

The outcomes for the project envisaged in the initial project specification document are:

- Strengthened awareness of existing data and evidence related to youth mental health and wellbeing in Ireland, and the insights and implications for policy
- Enhanced capacity to engage in collaborative problem solving
- Learning about the benefits and challenges of this Pathfinder approach to the whole of government working

Twelve pathfinder group members were charged with using fifteen days of working together to get to the heart of a problem. The pathfinder group was composed of nominees from each of the participating organisations: Department of Health, Department of Education and Skills, Department of Children and Youth Affairs, the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Centre for Effective Services (CES). Each member of the team made the same commitment: to work on the pathfinder project one day a week for six months. The team was split into three smaller working groups, and the process involved a mix of working in smaller groups and one-day workshops with the whole group. A core team of four additional staff supported the project.

#### [Building Collaborative Working Practices \(Department of Education and Skills, Ireland\)](#)

There are extensive reforms under way in education. These reforms require the participation of multiple divisions and sections within the Department of Education and Skills (DES), as well as bodies under the aegis of DES and external agencies. However, the geographic distribution of DES's staff, with broadly similar numbers employed in Dublin, Athlone and Tullamore, presents particular challenges for collaborative working. The purpose of the project is to strengthen collaborative working in support of effective policy development and, ultimately, better outcomes for learners. The project aims to identify opportunities for applying the evidence on collaboration within DES and to pilot models of collaborative working across the department.

The objective of the Goal project as set out in the project specification document are:

- To develop shared understanding of effective collaborative practice
- To assess and review past and current collaborative practice in the light of understandings of effective practice
- To strengthen collaboration in the context of policy development, policy review and policy implementation processes
- To develop good practice guidance for collaboration
- To pilot and evaluate new models of collaboration
- To develop protocols for a consistent approach to oversight and governance practices.



The project team, involving staff from CES and DES, brought different types of evidence together to develop tools and processes with the intention of embedding them into day-to-day ways of working. Drawing on findings from academic and grey literature, experience within the department, workshops with departmental staff and trials of tools with departmental working groups, the department and CES designed a suite of resources to work together to help to support and enhance collaborative working - from the inception of a working group through to the closure of the working group.

### [Using data to inform policy \(Department of Education and Skills, Ireland\)](#)

The Department of Education and Skills (DES) places importance on developing its capacity to enhance the use and management of data and knowledge and to extend its use of research and evaluation to inform policy development and implementation. The purpose of the Goal project is to enable data to be used to optimum effect in order to support and inform education policy development and implementation. The outcomes as set out in the project specification document are:

- Strengthened awareness among staff about existing data, where it can be accessed and how it can be used
- More effective end-use of data by DES staff to support and inform policy development and implementation
- Improved picture within DES of data gaps and data quality
- Foundation for incremental improvements in data management systems and use.

The project was broken down into four stages – design of a data map outlining the department’s data sources, development of the data map, completion of case studies and map updates, and awareness raising and support for DES staff.

### [Reform of Youth Funding Schemes \(Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Ireland\)](#)

This is a technical and capacity building project to support the reform programme for the Youth Funding Schemes as recommended in the 2014 Value for Money and Policy Review (VFMPR). The VFMPR found that youth programmes could provide significant benefits for young people, but that the programmes and governance arrangements require significant reform. Significant change is required across the system to achieve the desired re-design, from department level through to Education and Training Boards (ETBs) and to project workers at community level. Substantial capacity building is needed to support the change across the sector. The ETBs and youth officers/liaison

officers employed by them have a major role in the new governance and performance oversight arrangements.

The objectives of the Goal programme, in this context, as set out in the project specification document, are to:

- Put forward a design for the new outcomes focused funding scheme, ensuring that appropriate consultation is undertaken with relevant stakeholders, and including learning from the sample projects.
- Assist in the phased implementation of the new scheme during the life of the Goal project.
- Enhance the skills and capacity to deliver the new scheme effectively, at central (Department) and local level (youth officers in ETBs), and in the voluntary youth sector, including systems and technical competence.
- Support key stakeholders to engage effectively in the change process.

#### Evaluation Training for Civil Servants (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, Ireland)

This project aims to provide a professional development programme for civil service staff in understanding the role of evaluation in human services. Prior to the Goal programme, over the period 2014-16, DCYA and CES co-designed and delivered an evaluation training programme to staff within the DCYA and its agencies (particularly Tusla). The aim of the programme was to support the capacity of staff commissioning, overseeing and reviewing evaluations (rather than those doing evaluation).

The intent of the Goal project is to leverage learning from the prior evaluation training programme for the benefit of the wider civil service. Particular justifications include the emphasis on building capacity in the civil service in recent reform plans to the enhanced use of evidence in reform initiatives, and the lack of an existing comparable training programme available to the civil service.

As set out in the project specification document, the project objectives are to design a professional development programme that:

- Develops and supports civil service staff to better understand different evaluation methodologies, help inform oversight of evaluation projects related to their work and better utilise evaluation findings in the formulation of public policy.
- Meets the needs of participating staff, using methods and approaches that reflect good practice in approaches to adult learning

- Can continue to be developed on a sustainable footing to staff across the wider civil service after the Goal Programme has been completed. Development of the programme is based on the likelihood that the programme will be incorporated as part of the OneLearning portfolio of training courses.

### Leadership Development Programme (The Executive Office, Northern Ireland)

CES had been providing strategic advice to the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) in its preparation of the Programme for Government and reshaping of government departments. In preparing for the new Programme for Government, leadership development has occurred at the NICS Board and Departmental Board level. The NICS Board committed to providing a programme of leadership development for its 40-strong Grade 3 cohort. This programme was seen as having strong connections to the outcomes of the Goal Programme, particularly in increasing the skills of civil servants in evidence, outcomes, evaluation and implementation and in the provision of visible accountable leadership across sectoral and organisational boundaries as a key component of 'whole of government' working.

The project specification document set out three main objectives for this project:

- Assess the feasibility for, design and deliver a Leadership Development Programme for Grade 3s in NICS
- Support the sustainability of the initiative, through partnership working with CAL; advice on policy and any learning or collaborative practices that are established.
- Support the evaluation of the programme and learning about the project.

The Leadership Development Programme was subsequently extended to include the design and delivery of a Leadership Development Programme for the Grade 2s (permanent secretaries) in the Northern Ireland Civil Service.

## Children and Young People's Strategies (Departments of Education and Health, Northern Ireland)

Through this project, CES are supporting the Departments of Health and Education in Northern Ireland with the development and integration of three strategies: The Children and Young People's Strategy (CYPS), Looked after Children Strategy (LACS), and the Family Support Strategy (FSS). The project lead for the CYPS is based in the Department of Education, while the project lead for the two other strategies is based in the Department of Health.

The Children's Services Co-operation Act (Northern Ireland) 2015 (the 2015 Act) came into effect in December 2015 and is designed to improve cooperation amongst departments and agencies as they deliver services aimed at improving the well-being of children and young people. The 2015 Act requires the Northern Ireland Executive to make arrangements to promote co-operation and places a duty on named bodies to co-operate where appropriate. It also requires the Executive to develop and adopt a strategy that delivers on the stated outcomes for improving the lives of children and young people. The legislation specifies that children and young people must be consulted in the development of the strategy.

The outcomes envisaged in the project specification document are:

- Meaningful, integrated strategies for CYPS, LACS and FSS which clearly describes the outcomes and actions which should be achieved for children and young people in Northern Ireland.
- These strategies have effective monitoring, reporting and implementation mechanisms.
- Effective, efficient collaborative working across the Department of Health and the Department of Education and other departments/agencies in the co-design process and implementation of the three strategies.
- Increased skills and capacity of the strategy teams.
- Increased learning for the Northern Ireland Civil Service (NICS) on working collaboratively across policy, monitoring and implementation.
- Increased leadership support for collaborative and cross-departmental working through the Project Board.

## Embedding Innovation (Department of Finance, Northern Ireland)

The Innovation Lab was established in 2014 within the Northern Ireland Department of Finance's Public Sector Reform Division to provide a new means to tackle difficult public sector challenges. The OECD's 2015-16 review of the Northern Ireland public service referred to the Lab as 'an impressive example of how the government is nurturing innovation across the public sector (OECD 2016: 43).

Its work (involving some 18 projects by that stage) was also reviewed in 2016/17 by a consultancy firm, which described the Lab's aims as 'to improve public services and policy by creating a safe space to co-create ideas, test prototypes and refine concepts with citizens, civil servants and stakeholders' (PDR 2017: 6). Both the OECD and PDR made recommendations in terms of the Lab's governance and funding, and the decision to include the Innovation Lab as one of the nine projects with the GOAL programme coincided with the final stages and publication of the PDR review.

The Innovation Lab and CES worked together to agree the following objectives of the project are to:

- Establish a sustainable business and associated governance model for the Innovation Lab that situates it as a shared resource across government, focused on the Programme for Government and is consistent with the OECD and evaluation recommendations.
- Improve the skills and capacity of the staff of the Innovation Lab, particularly in implementing innovative approaches.
- Support the development of mechanisms for civil servants engaging with the Lab to access resources or develop skills that can be used in implementation of innovations.
- Support the viability and sustainability of new approaches identified by the Lab.



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