

# A New Era of Learning

Strategy 2022–2027





# Foreword

Welcome to the Institute of Public Administration's *A New Era of Learning: Strategy 2022–2027*. This plan builds on the success and achievements of previous plans, as well as learnings which inform future requirements. The plan is being published at a time of global geopolitical instability with Ireland facing a new set of economic, environmental and societal challenges against the backdrop of the country's successful recovery from the impact of the Covid-19 crisis.

The Institute has been through several significant changes since it was established in 1957. No period has seen more fundamental change to the way we work than the period since 2017, when our last strategy statement was launched. Unforeseen at that time, Covid-19 has had a radical effect on society, the public service and the Institute itself. The response to the crisis has accelerated a number of trends, such as coordination of services across organisations and levels of government, digitalisation of services, and remote working and learning. These are reshaping our operating environment.

This strategy covering the period 2022 to 2027 frames our response to the particular challenges and opportunities which face the Institute in the post Covid-19 environment, and at a time of both uncertainty and new initiatives in the reform of the public service.

In developing this strategy, we undertook an extensive consultation process, both externally and internally. The resulting goals and objectives reflect the views of a wide range of stakeholders from across government departments, local government, state agencies and other public bodies, as well as staff, management and the Board. These views address both the nature of the challenges facing the Institute as well as the responses required.

Several messages came across clearly in the consultation process. Prominent amongst those was the identified need for the Institute to adopt a strong focus on the needs of senior civil and public servants. Also emphasised was the need for the Institute to further develop appropriate supports to facilitate the public service in dealing with emerging cross-cutting and complex issues, such as climate and sustainability. Our work in the years ahead must be based on an agenda of transformation for the Institute. We perform to a high standard, but the fast-changing world challenges us to do more, especially in such fields as innovation, strategic foresight, digitalisation, climate change and data analytics.

We recognise that we launch this strategy at a time of major uncertainty. Some events shaping our work environment, like climate change and sustainability, while complex, are well known and foreseen. Others, like the impact of Covid-19 during the last strategy period, and the currently evolving effects of the war in Ukraine on the world economy, cannot be predicted but must be responded to. The level of risk associated with the implementation of the strategy is consequently significant. The goals and objectives set out in the strategy will need to be kept under constant review and we must be able to adapt and modify the strategy as new circumstances may dictate. Agility and innovation will be vital.

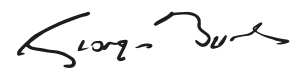
At its core, the Institute acts as a promoter and facilitator of good government. We aim to educate and inform, promote good practice, generate dialogue and debate, and create connections across the public service so as to improve the Irish public administration system for the benefit of the public. As at the beginning of its life, the Institute retains a fundamental belief in the profession of public administration, and a belief that through learning, education, development and research, our civil and public service can successfully address the challenges facing it.

It is a particular strength of the IPA that it benefits from a highly talented, professional and committed staff, as well as a strong body of associates. All are vitally important in delivering on our mission and vision. We are committed to supporting and renewing our staff in their professional and personal development to allow them to excel in their work and deliver on our strategic goals and objectives. We would like to acknowledge the hard work of all those involved in contributing to, shaping and developing this plan. We thank Dr Marian O'Sullivan (Director General, 2015–2022) for her committed contribution and the achievements of the previous IPA strategy. Equally, we thank Dr Fergal Lynch (Chairperson and Board Member, 2016–2022) for his great efforts and commitment to the IPA during his term on the IPA Board.

We look forward to working with the Board and all our staff, students and stakeholders to ensure the ambitious goals and objectives we have set are delivered to the best of our ability.



**Helen Brophy**  
Director General



**George Burke**  
Chairperson



# Background and Context

## Who We Are and What We Do

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The Institute of Public Administration was founded in 1957 by a group of senior public servants who identified the need for the professional education and training of Irish public sector employees, alongside the analysis and evaluation of public management and policymaking.

The Institute exists to advance the understanding, standard and practice of public administration and public policy. Under the aegis originally of the Department of Finance and, since 2011, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, the IPA has been supporting the development of public servants and the public sector in Ireland and abroad for sixty-five years.

The IPA differs from other educational and training providers in that it covers the whole of the public sector and adopts a multifaceted approach. We work with and across central government and local government, providing education, training, research, publishing and consultancy services. This cross-cutting approach ensures that the IPA applies a unique, whole-of-government perspective to its activities. We also provide services for the community and voluntary sector, where they interact with government, and for private sector clients wishing to gain a better understanding of the state, its role in Irish society, and public administration.

The Whitaker School of Government and Management brings the IPA's education, library, publishing and research activities together. The School delivers a range of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes, accredited by the National University of Ireland, which have been designed to respond to the specific needs of civil and public servants. The School is in a unique position to design and deliver programmes that both respond to the specific needs of those employed in the wider public service and enhance the analysis and formulation of public policymaking. The Institute is Ireland's only dedicated public management research resource. It offers a research service aimed at enhancing our understanding of the public service and how it works. The Institute is also the only Irish publisher specialising in texts on public administration and management.

We provide an extensive range of training and development programmes and consultancy services. A wide variety of professional courses are provided each year at the Institute's training and education centre in Dublin, in regional or client venues, and internationally. A number of our training programmes are accredited by outside agencies, including the Chartered Institute of Public Finance and Accountancy, the Chartered Institute of Personnel and Development and the Mediators' Institute of Ireland. Through services such as our Governance Forum, conferences, seminars, publications and international work, we promote dialogue and debate on the development and future direction of our public services.

## The Institute's Operating Environment

The Covid-19 crisis has had a significant and lasting effect on the Institute's operating environment. The Institute was quick in establishing a Covid-19 strategic group at senior management level. This group met regularly to decide on the Institute's policy in relation to the evolving Covid-19 crisis. Senior management also established a formal Working Group on Technology-Enabled Services which identified what would be required for staff, students and clients in order to ensure the continuation of studies, training and other client services.

After a period of operating primarily online, the IPA has moved to a hybrid arrangement, adapted to the needs of students, clients and staff. The success of this approach was illustrated by the fact that while working primarily online from March 2020 to May 2022 the IPA delivered:

- 8 sets of online examination sessions;
- 2 full academic years of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes;
- 3,700 online classes (2,650 class webinars and 1,050 pre-recorded lectures);
- 1,675 training courses;
- 155 consultancy projects.

The ability to act decisively and efficiently meant that the challenge of staff working remotely, coupled with the online delivery of programmes and examinations, was managed smoothly. 81 per cent of students rated their overall online experience with the IPA as 'very good' or 'good'. 90 per cent of lecturers rated the effectiveness of our online provision as 'very good' or 'good'.

More broadly, the Institute's operating environment is affected by changes taking place in the public service. In recent years, the overarching strategy guiding public service reform has been the *Our Public Service 2020* plan. The next phase of public service transformation is currently being developed with a view to a new strategy being ready in late 2022. The intention is that it will be closely aligned to *Civil Service Renewal 2030* – the strategy guiding reform in the civil service. This strategy has three main themes: delivering evidence-informed policy and services; harnessing digital technology and innovation; and building the civil service workforce, workplace and organisation of the future.

A number of other central government strategies are focused on reform and will impact on the future work priorities of the IPA. A strategy for embedding innovation in the Irish public service, *Making Innovation Real*, was established at the end of 2020, and actions are being progressed under this strategy. The Covid-19 crisis gave greater impetus to some issues, particularly digital delivery, and the government introduced a new digital strategy for the public service, *Connecting Government 2030*, in March 2022. The Our Public Service team in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform are working with the Department of the Taoiseach and the OECD, with the support of the European Commission, to develop the project *Strengthening Policy Making and Foresight in the Irish Public Service*. The intention is to develop a strategic foresight action plan for the public service.

At local government level, developments in relation to the direct election of mayors and debate regarding future structures have the potential to influence territorial reform and could lead to some reassignment of powers to local government. Other sectoral strategies, such as the *Sláintecare* reform programme for the health services, are also influential in shaping the needs of the Institute's clients. These various strategies and plans inform the IPA's priorities. What is clear across the various plans is a focus on problem-solving, resilience and agility, and enabling those closest to delivery to innovate and make fully informed and considered decisions. Lesson learning and sharing across the different sectors will be important in this context.

Similar to the central and local government sectors, the wider state body and agency sector continues to embrace the opportunities for reform, innovation and new ways of working. Their strategies, functions and work programmes continue to evolve in line with government policy and stakeholder expectations. The focus on governance and accountability has become stronger and the clarity of responsibilities at board and executive levels, the relationships with departments and funding entities, and the extent of assurance and performance reporting have become increasingly important. The same focus is also evident within public benefit, charitable and not-for-profit entities which are in receipt of public funds. Arrangements for the provision of knowledge, insight and lessons learned will be critical in supporting this and related sectors.



## Stakeholder Consultation Process

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The strategy has been developed based on extensive consultation with key stakeholders from government departments, state agencies, local authorities, other public bodies, IPA students, Board members, and management and staff. Emerging priorities have been used to inform the development of the goals and objectives set out in the strategy.

The anticipated demand and needs of public service going forward to be addressed by the IPA which were identified through this consultation process include six key areas of focus as follows:

### 1. New Emerging Themes:

- The IPA has an important role to play in supporting the civil and public service with public service transformation. Transformation is needed to help address issues such as climate policy, social policy, etc. more effectively.
- Central to this role is the need for new programmes and courses relevant to evolving policy needs such as sustainability, digital government, AI, etc.

### 2. Programme/Course Design Approach:

- Leverage partnerships, associates, collaboration, etc. to advance specialist areas of expertise and identify centres of excellence for collaborative arrangements.
- Present experts in specialist fields to advocate for and support the civil and public service.
- Avail of IPA research and publications to inform programme/course design approach.

### 3. Key Target Audience:

- Prioritise the needs of the senior civil and public service by determining the specialist requirements of senior leaders and managers in dealing with complex and cross-cutting policy issues.
- Of critical importance is the practical expertise of tutors, associates and contributors to underpin experiential learning particularly for senior-level programmes.

### 4. New Ways of Learning and Delivery Modes:

- Explore the opportunity to develop micro-credentials for future learning. Certification is becoming more important for roles in areas such as human resources, procurement, finance, etc., with a consequent need for specialism.
- Further progress blended and online learning, leveraging technology to ensure an excellent virtual and hybrid learning experience.
- Apply Technology Enhanced Learning (TEL) with adequate staff training in TEL programme design/delivery and interactive learning.

### 5. Stakeholder Engagement & Communication:

- Adopt a proactive approach to enhance awareness and understanding of the IPA across the public service, particularly at senior levels, leveraging digital and social media opportunities where appropriate.
- Enhance the IPA's visibility through its commentary role and, in particular, promote IPA personnel in respective areas of expertise to provide commentary on relevant issues.
- Use IPA research to inform and stimulate debate in addition to promoting and advocating for the public service.
- Develop alumni and related networks to promote engagement via events such as conferences and seminars which promote the IPA as a forum for debate and insights.

### 6. Talent Acquisition, Development & Retention:

- Develop a talent acquisition, development and retention strategy with the focus on:
  - › Targeted recruitment campaigns to attract high-calibre candidates;
  - › Developing and motivating staff as a key retention mechanism;
  - › Provision of time and space for staff to innovate;
  - › Effective succession planning to retain knowledge and expertise.



# Review of Strategy 2017-2021

The period of the Institute's previous strategy (2017–2021) brought major economic, social, demographic, technological and environmental change. In addition, the Covid-19 pandemic presented us with significant challenges and opportunities. The IPA responded in a very agile and innovative way. We pivoted our business model to online delivery and continued to deliver all our educational, training, consultancy and research services to a high standard, while ensuring the health and well-being of our staff.

Our strategy for 2017–2021 set out three strategic objectives. We made strong progress under each, as summarised briefly below.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 1



**Provide relevant, flexible, practice-led, research-informed services and products aligned with current and emerging needs in the public service**

The IPA moved from being a recognised college of UCD to its original status of being a recognised college of the NUI. Following a successful international NUI review of the effectiveness of the implementation of our Quality Assurance procedures, all NUI programmes were approved for another seven years. We delivered over twenty events each year to public servants via our Governance and Housing Fora and continued to diversify our training programmes to meet the needs of all stakeholders. We developed new programmes in Innovation and Sports Governance and delivered programmes and services to a wide range of international clients from Albania, Myanmar, Romania, Thailand, Malawi, Turkey, Taiwan, Cyprus and the World Bank. We continued to publish research reports, books and journals, supported Local Government projects, and established research partnerships with the EPA and LGMA.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 2



**Provide a progressive organisational environment, resourced to deliver quality and excellence**

We had a strong financial performance over the lifetime of the strategy, driven by a diversified and evolving portfolio of services, early responsiveness to demands and requests, competitive and cost-effective fee structures and new services aligned with the needs of our client sectors. We reviewed our skills set and staffing requirements and our use of associates on a regular basis. Staff training and education options were provided at postgraduate and undergraduate level and skills level. Building infrastructural reports were completed and an office refurbishment plan was implemented.

## STRATEGIC PRIORITY 3



**Actively promote and position IPA as a key provider of choice for the wider public service**

The IPA continued to maintain its presence in national and international markets. There was continuous relationship building and marketing of our products and services with our client base. We increased our marketing campaign across print and digital marketing channels, and we harnessed our expertise as a key support for government departments, local authorities and state agencies through membership of boards and chairmanship of audit and risk committees. We participated in national and international seminars, and increased our membership of other bodies, including the Institute of Directors (IoD), 30% Club, Asia Matters, DISPA (European Schools of Administration), OECD Schools of Government, IASIA (International Institute of Administrative Sciences), ACESA and Dublin Chamber of Commerce.





# Mission, Vision and Values



## Mission

To advance the understanding, standard and practice of public administration and public policy, supporting our public service to deliver on the complex challenges it faces.



## Vision

To be Ireland's recognised Centre of Excellence in building capacity and capability across the public service.



## Values

- **Integrity:** To be honest, sincere and ethical in our dealings with one another and with clients.
- **Client-Centred and Responsive:** To act efficiently and effectively in the best interests of the client and in meeting their needs.
- **Openness and Accountability:** To act and to take decisions in a transparent manner and be open to scrutiny.
- **Trust and Respect:** To ensure we are trustworthy both to clients and to colleagues and those with whom we come in contact.
- **Innovation and Learning:** To always strive for new ideas, best solutions and the acquisition and dissemination of new knowledge.
- **Research-Led:** Contribute to knowledge creation and use evidence-based research in our decision-making and the services we provide.
- **Practice-Led:** To pursue good practice and facilitate practitioner knowledge; insight and experience to be shared and implemented across the public service.



## Our Governance Framework

The Institute of Public Administration is a company limited by guarantee and is a designated body with charitable status. It is also a body that operates under the aegis of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Accordingly, the Institute must adhere to significant legal, regulatory and governance obligations as a company, a charity and a state-funded entity. In addition, the Institute is an accredited college of the National University of Ireland as well as a validated and approved provider of courses and programmes from various national and international professional bodies. To ensure we operate and can attest to the required standards and norms within our governance framework, the Institute has put in place robust management assurance frameworks and support systems across the organisation, overseen and monitored by the Board and Board Committees. The management assurance framework complements the work of third-party assurance providers, internal audit, and the Comptroller and Auditor General.

The IPA remains committed to ensuring effective governance structures, fit-for-purpose governance arrangements and a good governance culture which inspires confidence and trust in the Institute. We are also committed to revising and amending the governance framework based on changes to our obligations or where evolving circumstances dictate that updating is necessary.

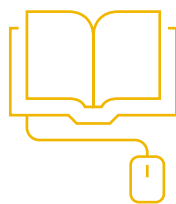


# Public Sector Equality and Human Rights Duty

Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act 2014 establishes a positive duty on public bodies to have regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, promote equality, and protect the human rights of staff and the people to whom services are provided.

Consistent with our values and overall philosophy, we are committed to the promotion of equality and human rights in all aspects of our work. This extends to cover all stakeholders, not least our own staff, students and the working environment in which we all operate. In addition to our focus on transformation, we will continue to promote diversity, integration, equality, openness, transparency and inclusivity.

We will determine how further enhancements may be made across activities, policies, programmes and initiatives. The results of the review will inform the development of our action plan – progress against which will be outlined in our annual reports.



## GOAL 1

### Professional Learning and Development

Proactively identify and address the professional and accredited life-long learning and development needs of our civil and public service.

#### Objectives

- 1.1. Establish a dedicated all-Institute strategic development function to: (i) engage proactively and (ii) systematically identify the professional and learning and development needs of all stakeholders.
- 1.2. Continuously review and update course and programme design, delivery and content to reflect: (i) leading practice, (ii) stakeholders' requirements for practical and experientially based insight and learning, and (iii) all quality assurance standards by implementing a structured programme of quality improvement.
- 1.3. Integrate our approach to research, knowledge creation, and course and programme design and update, to delivery synergies and leverage associated outputs.
- 1.4. Identify expert delivery partner(s) and develop strategic alliances to respond to: (i) the specific and specialised needs of senior civil and public servants, and (ii) broader needs across the civil and public service.
- 1.5. Propose and agree learning, competency development and/or Continuing Professional Development (CPD) route-maps for civil and public servants, providing a CPD framework for civil and public servants which benchmarks international and national standards.
- 1.6. Develop and provide: (i) micro-credential offerings and (ii) short-course accreditation to reflect and meet stakeholders' CPD and related requirements.
- 1.7. Review leading practice and ensure that TEL methodologies and supports are incorporated into course and programme design as appropriate.
- 1.8. Enhance design and delivery formats routinely (conventional, hybrid, remote, etc.) for the suite of IPA offerings to meet customers' needs and preferences.



## GOAL 2

### Research, Thought Leadership and Innovation

Position the IPA as the recognised thought leader through targeted research, expert advice and service delivery excellence.

#### Objectives

- 2.1. Refine and augment our research focus to: (i) address knowledge gaps, (ii) ensure practical relevance for public service managers and policymakers, and (iii) position the Institute as the authoritative 'thought leader' in best practice standards of public administration and public policy.
- 2.2. Develop and apply criteria for determining our: (i) research focus and (ii) consultancy service lines, i.e. to prioritise expert advice, practical support, knowledge creation and the optimal use of IPA resources.
- 2.3. Develop a communications strategy to actively promote and position the IPA as a recognised thought leader and centre of excellence.
- 2.4. Implement a knowledge management system, protocols and ICT solution to leverage research findings, support knowledge sharing and enhance collaboration across all IPA divisions.
- 2.5. Explore, develop and pursue collaborative research opportunities and partnerships to support knowledge creation and advance thought leadership in priority areas.



## GOAL 3

### Culture, Knowledge Sharing and Our Learning Organisation

Elevate and integrate our approaches to staff development, knowledge sharing and culture, to reflect a progressive teaching and learning organisation.

#### Objectives

- 3.1. Complete a review of our workplace culture and develop an action plan to enhance the IPA's position as a progressive 'teaching and learning organisation'.
- 3.2. Review our organisational structure and staffing to identify and address requirements necessary to deliver our strategic objectives.
- 3.3. Determine (i) core and (ii) associate staffing requirements to ensure that organisational resourcing reflects learners' needs.
- 3.4. Formulate and implement an integrated people strategy to attract, retain, develop and motivate staff, while managing succession and optimising performance and quality of outputs.
- 3.5. Promote fundamental rights across all aspects of our work by ensuring that our equality and human rights action plan is implemented effectively.
- 3.6. Develop customised career learning and development plans in collaboration with all staff, and agree individual research plans with relevant personnel.



## GOAL 4

### IPA Organisational Environment

Deliver process and administrative efficiencies while meeting the professional expectations of our staff, customers and stakeholders.

#### Objectives

- 4.1. In reviewing our campus infrastructure, ensure that our facilities can deliver our services in a sustainable, cost-effective manner that is fit for purpose for the future requirements of our public service.
- 4.2. Develop ICT and Support Services strategies to: (i) mitigate cyber and all relevant risks, (ii) support TEL implementation, (iii) facilitate hybrid working, (iv) provide for business continuity and (v) integrate critical finance functions across the organisation.
- 4.3. Review and streamline work processes – identifying and implementing ICT and/or related solutions to deliver efficiencies and increase automation.
- 4.4. Complete assessments of investment and effort against the benefits of, and demand for, IPA services.
- 4.5. Complete review and develop implementation plan to support leading practice in the management of our corporate functions – considering the pursuit of quality and accreditation standards as appropriate.
- 4.6. Ensure full compliance with our governance and legislative requirements through the implementation of effective assurance frameworks and other internal and external evaluations.





# Implementation, Monitoring and Review

The Senior Management Group (SMG) will be responsible for the development of a detailed business plan, which will contain the required investment programme, actions and key performance indicators (KPIs), as well as timelines and measurable targets. This plan will be subject to updates and revisions on an annual basis following a review phase. Progress on the actions and KPIs will be reviewed by the SMG on a quarterly basis. The Director General and SMG will report to the Board as part of their monitoring and reviewing of the plan.

We have set ourselves an ambitious and challenging strategy for the next five years. The Board will review progress in implementation, with regular reports on progress and KPIs from the SMG. The Board will arrange for a formal mid-term review of the strategy in early 2025.





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