5 Skills and Capabilities for Policy Development in the Civil Service in Ireland

This chapter assesses the existing skills and capabilities in the Irish public service and presents frameworks and practices to support skills development in the public administration. It concludes with a number of areas of opportunity to further strengthen existing good practices, streamline the training and professional development offerings and nurture a culture of evidence-based policy development across the system.

In setting out the enabling environment for sound policy development, each stage of the policy cycle requires support from key enablers, such as government structures and processes, organisational capacity and support, policy skills, and tools and instruments for policy development. Part II of this report focuses on strengthening the organisational capacity and support in terms of policy development skills and capabilities (Chapter 5) and tools and instruments for policy development (Chapter 6). A number of enabling governance arrangements strengthening the pillars of evidence, implementation and feasibility, and legitimacy were discussed in Part I.

Effective policy development cannot be achieved without the right set of skills and capabilities across the civil service. These include technical skills in the use of evidence and data or the specific issue at hand but also know-how to bring in project management experience and political achievability. In short, skills and capabilities are key enablers for policy development. This chapter assesses the current frameworks and practices to support skills development, provides an examination of how best to streamline the training and professional development offerings and how a culture of evidence-based policy development can be nurtured across the system.

Frameworks and practices to support policy development skills

Policy development skills and capabilities: Perceived strengths and weaknesses

A survey of 168 civil servants as part of this project highlighted that the civil service was perceived to be well-developed in general skills and knowledge for policy development (see Figure 5.1). Respondents considered that skills were well developed in areas like problem definition, understanding the policy context, internal communication, and stakeholder engagement (although there were mixed views on how well policy practitioners engage stakeholders in policy processes). However, practitioners and the civil service in general were thought to be lacking in areas such as the use of data for policy, strategic and systems thinking, anticipating future challenges, external communication, monitoring and evaluation, and the ability to apply relatively new methods like behavioural insights and user-centred design to policy processes. Other, more technical areas like economic/impact modelling, legal drafting or expertise, and regulatory impact assessments were also cited as requiring a boost in skills and capability.

Figure 5.1. Skills and capabilities for policy development at the organisational level in Ireland
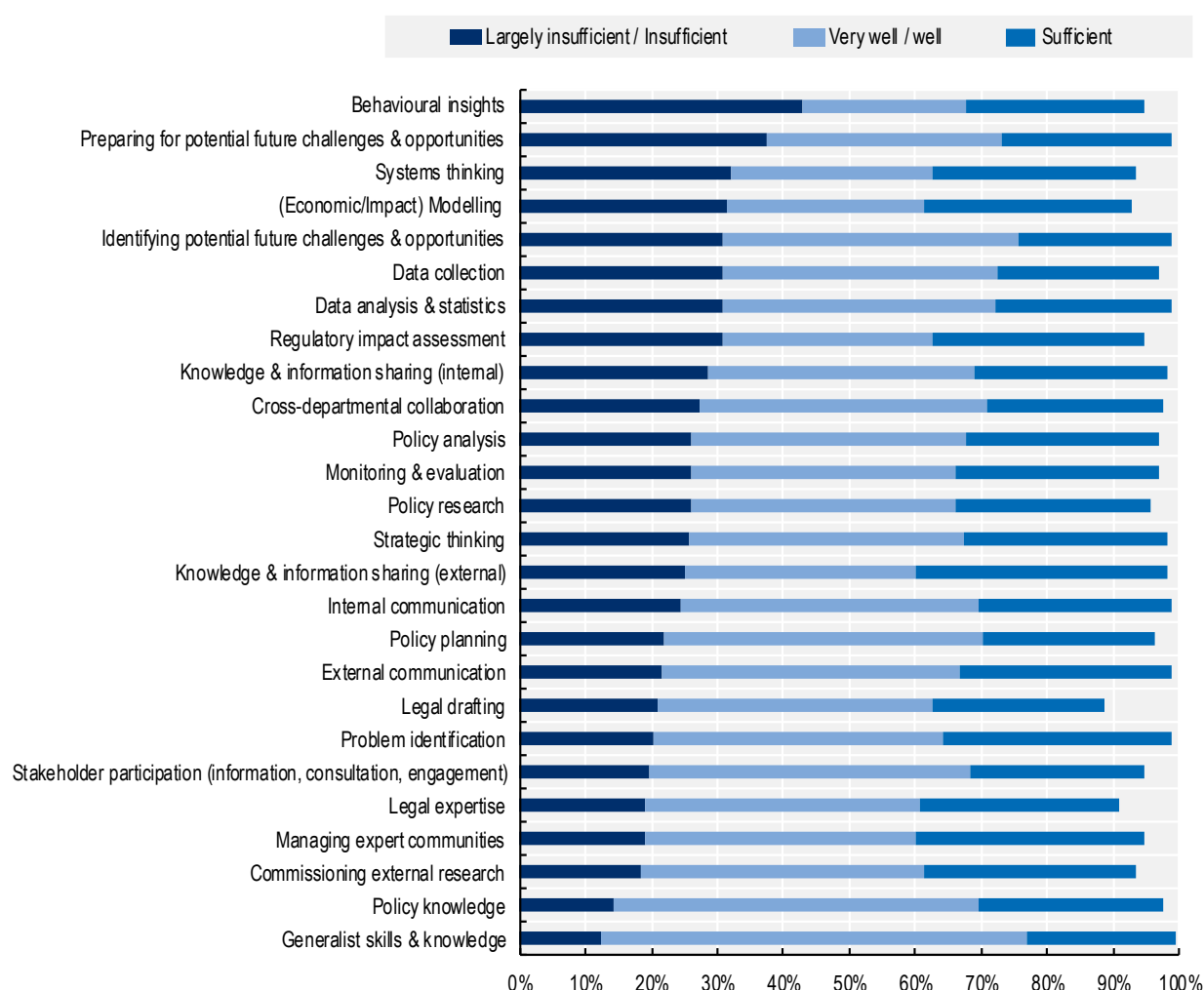
Note: n= 168. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked, "In your view, how well is your department/organisation equipped with the following skills and capabilities for policy development?". Response options included "largely insufficient", "insufficient", "sufficient", "well", "very well" and "not applicable".
Source: (OECD, 2022[1])

A number of interviews undertaken for this project highlighted in particular that the generic set of competency levels for the civil service ("competency framework") does not at the moment reflect the increasingly specialised skills required for policy development. There is also currently no overarching articulation of the specific skillsets and competencies required of policy professionals at various levels of their careers. The renewal of the Irish competency framework for the civil service (as included in the Civil Service Renewal 2024 Action Plan) offers an opportunity to further articulate policy development skills and competencies at various professional levels, either as a specific policy speciality or as a subset of the overall competency framework. Efforts in other jurisdictions to define key skills for policy offer some pointers on skills needed for a modern policy professional. In terms of process, attempts in Ireland to define and develop skills and capabilities in other parts of the civil service such as the ICT Professionalisation strategy would offer insights into how to develop a specific cohort of the civil service (even if this would not go as so far as the Policy Profession Standards in the United Kingdom). It is difficult to assess if officials have the right policy skills without defining what the necessary skills are.

Towards a systematic articulation of policy skills

A few jurisdictions have articulated the range of skills required for policy, such as the United Kingdom's Policy Profession Standards and New Zealand's Policy Skills Framework (see Box 5.1), with a strong focus on team and system capabilities rather than individual qualifications or specialisms. New Zealand's Policy Skills Framework includes non-technical skills like strategic thinking, political savvy, understanding political context and priorities, designing for implementation, and advising and influencing (this framework was showcased in an OECD report on skills for a high-performing civil service) (OECD, 2017[2]).

Box 5.1. Policy standards and skills frameworks in New Zealand and the United Kingdom

New Zealand's Policy Skills Framework

The Policy Skills Framework describes the knowledge, applied skills and behaviour expected of good policy advisors. Descriptions are broken down into levels from "developing" to "practising" to "expert/leading". It includes skills that are often mentioned as important to policy processes but rarely defined (such as "strategic thinking" or "political savvy"). Supporting tools enable individuals to articulate their policy skills profile or credentials and allow managers to map the skills makeup of their teams to identify any gaps or overlaps. The framework and tools can be used in recruitment, performance and development processes or organisational workforce planning. The specific policy skills components are underpinned by public service-wide foundation skills and knowledge that include an understanding of the machinery of government, key legislation and the code of conduct.

The Policy Skills Framework is one of three key policy improvement frameworks designed to support government agencies in delivering effective policy advice and promote a more consistent approach to policy design and delivery. The policy improvement frameworks were launched by the New Zealand prime minister in 2016. They are supported by a dedicated group within the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet – the Policy Project – as well as a head of the Policy Profession (the chief executive of the department) and a Policy Profession Board made up of senior policy leaders (chief executives and deputies) as overall governance of the policy improvement programme.

United Kingdom's Policy Profession Standards

In 2018, the United Kingdom developed Policy Profession Standards, setting out the expectations of all policy professionals. This was part of a wider programme to improve policy development. The Standards are arranged around three pillars.

1. Ensuring civil servants are able to use evidence and analysis to understand and develop new strategies: It focuses on competencies to understand policy context, the application of research methods to improve solutions, to enable participation by stakeholders and facilitate work internationally.

2. Developing the capacity to produce robust advice to support democratic governance and accountability: It includes a framework for working effectively with ministers and the parliament, develops skills for integrating value-for-money considerations in decision making and highlights the implications of multilevel governance in the United Kingdom.

3. Strengthening the delivery of policy and systems, including the evaluation of policies: It explores the need for using data for better policy targeting and continuously improves policy delivery, highlighting a better understanding of commercial and procurement options.

The Policy Profession Standards provide a tool for civil servants to self-assess their skills and highlight areas for self-development. It also serves as a diagnostic tool in support of developing the skillset of

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teams and adapting strategic planning and recruiting. It also informs the creation and dissemination of learning material for specific departments and for the whole civil service.

Source: (Government of the United Kingdom, 2022[3]); (Government of New Zealand, 2019[4])

The Civil Service Renewal plan sets out a vision for the civil service as "an innovative, professional and agile civil service that improves the lives of the people in Ireland through excellence in service delivery and strategic policy development" (Government of Ireland, 2021[5]). In particular, the areas listed under Pillar 2 on "Innovating for Our Future" of the Our Public Service 2020 reform plan (see Figure 5.2) address the need for the public service to be both increasingly innovative and collaborative and are highly relevant to policy development; they should thus be referenced and leveraged in all policy skills and capability development programmes.

Figure 5.2. Pillar 2 "Innovating for Our Future" of the reform plan Our Public Service 2020

Source: Adapted from (Government of Ireland, 2019[6])

In terms of institutional anchorage, the Civil Service Management Board (CSMB) may play a leading role in articulating the policy skills and validating the policy skills framework, given its broad representation, its impartiality and its guardian role for related policy reforms.

A curriculum for policy professionals

The development of a skills or competency framework for policy development may be combined with a connected curriculum for policy professionals. This policy curriculum can serve as a support for training and competency development and is discussed in more detail in the section on training.

Beyond the more formal skills frameworks and standards, however, interviews and research for this report highlighted that the skills and capabilities ecosystem for policy development of Ireland is also shaped by more informal or cultural practices.

Informality of the Irish system

At times, the moments of informality of the Irish system, partly driven by the small size of the civil service, is both a strength and a weakness. Commentators have noted that, in Ireland, informal agreements, discussions and decisions taken at meetings are not always consistently recorded (MacCarthaigh, 2021[7]). This feature of informality was echoed by various interviewees, noting that many public officials, especially in senior roles at the centre of government and in central departments, work well together at an informal level.

This has advantages in terms of a fast exchange of information and checking the feasibility of actions (testing policy ideas and options with the right people) and may mean that decisions can be taken quickly – an asset in the fast-paced environment of today. However, a lack of formal structures and guidelines has disadvantages, especially related to a loss of institutional knowledge when individuals change functions. Moreover, a lack of official records also poses a risk in the event of future judicial reviews of decisions taken. This is a particular risk in an ageing civil service, with a significant cohort close to retirement (the "retirement cliff").

Bringing in skills from outside

Despite the fact that recruitment has been open for all levels for years, the civil service was also perceived as largely looking internally for skills – with a historical preference for bringing in talent at the graduate level (often with an economics background) and with little outside recruitment or mid-career recruitment appears to occur in practice. In recent years, external specialist profiles have been recruited for functions such as human resources, information and communications technology, finance, and communication alongside traditional recruitment of economists, statisticians, social scientists and accountants, for example. Most staff at all levels are now predominantly qualified to third-level standard.

For senior-level positions, however, internal candidates often still outperform external candidates. Civil service salary levels may be part of the reason why external profiles are less attracted to join.

> *"In theory, the system recruits and does open recruitment from both within and outside the service. Very few seem to come from outside the service. I don't believe that's because our wisdom is actually held within the service. Salary is part of this."*

The Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) is seen as being effective at building skills inside the civil service (OECD, 2020[8]). Continuous improvement and upskilling is a core focus ofr the IGEES network, with training provided on relevant technical issues, including evaluation techniques and econometric analysis. IGEES is credited with bringing more evaluation and economic analysis skills into the civil service, and the IGEES network across departments is seen as an asset to the policy system, especially when IGEES staff work directly with policy development staff, creating a culture of peer learning.

In order to further leverage the IGEES skillsets across the civil service, a number of interviewees encouraged IGEES to be as "outward-looking" as possible, for example through further mainstreaming IGEES competences in the departments. The latter has been a challenge over the years.

> *"We brought in mostly economists at the time, but they were really based mostly in the centre of government, mostly in the Department of Public Expenditure, Department of Finance, and the Department of the Irish Prime Minister…[T]he capacity was planned as far as building from that central position. So, the challenge then was to actually broaden and to get capacity building across all other government departments."*

Increasing the awareness of IGEES outputs and studies across the civil service may also lead to a fruitful collaboration with departments, some of which currently turn to external partners (typically consultants) to meet certain technical needs.

> *"One of the challenges is the weaknesses of some departments and the use of private consultants rather than government agencies such as IGEES."*

Greater collaboration on policy development between IGEES personnel and policy teams within government departments, through appropriate structures, shared work programmes or engagement models (e.g. an internal consultancy model), would create opportunities for skills transfer from IGEES to colleagues within their departments, and help with training and capability building.

The IGEES network of economists and policy analysts is well placed to further support the evaluation of programmes within government departments, and the development of guidance on evaluation

methodologies to departments, for example through guidance materials or short-term project-based collaboration. It could also support the uptake of findings from policy evaluations into policy development in a more systematic manner, including emphasising the importance of an evaluation mindset in policy design and development. In terms of raising awareness of evaluations, the Norwegian practice of a central evaluation portal could be a helpful example (see Box 5.2).

Box 5.2. Central evaluations portal in Norway

In Norway, the Directorate for Financial Management and the National Library of Norway maintain and manage a centralised evaluations portal (www.evalueringsportalen.no). All the studies and evaluations are made available on the portal as soon as published. Moreover, they are easily searchable and categorised. One can search based on topic, commissioning institution, conducting institution, type of evaluation (ex post evaluation, socio-economic analysis, etc.) or based on the underlying method of the study (questionnaires, public datasets, literature review). The portal contains the studies conducted by the government and agencies since 2005 as well as some selected earlier governmental studies. Finally, on the portal one can find various evaluation guidelines as well as evaluation agendas and relevant professional and news publications. Such a centralised platform helps to build and enable the reuse of knowledge. Moreover, since it is easily searchable and updated by default, the portal increases the transparency of public sector analysis.

Source: (OECD, 2020[9])

Looking ahead, IGEES can further maximise its contribution as part of a strengthened policy development system by gradually looking more into future policy and bringing lessons from the past. IGEES may cultivate this potential by increasingly working alongside and with policy practitioners who are developing policy proposals. In this way, the lessons from policy evaluations can directly feed into the design and the monitoring and evaluation framework of policy proposals, and peer learning can be encouraged during this process.

Further suggestions to strengthen the role of IGEES and increase the uptake of policy evaluations can be found in the 2020 OECD report "The Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service: Using Evidence-Informed Policy-making to Improve Performance".

The training ecosystem

Learning needs

A learning needs analysis has already been conducted by OneLearning, the Irish Civil Service Learning and Development Centre, to map the demand for learning and training. It aimed to highlight learning needs for the civil service as a whole and for departments more specifically.

The process was a comprehensive one, involving engagements with learning and development business partners across the civil service; workshops with small and medium-sized enterprises and with learning and development professionals; local work with learners and a learner survey; significant input from senior management; and engagement with the human resources community. Following this process, OneLearning developed a series of themes and used a subgroup structure to plan the response required in each area. It identified the high-level topics and courses relevant to each theme, and the work ultimately

helped to specify the training requirements set out in a major request for tender that was issued in May 2021.

The training needs identified were wide, but among those most relevant to policy development were policy analysis, project management, managing programme and project budgets, innovation and delivering change, data analytics, design thinking, system thinking, and business process improvement.

Following the learning needs analysis, the six categories of training tendered for comprised communication and customer service; innovation, data and project management; people management; personal and team building; finance and governance; and the Irish language. The contracts now in place as a result of this process form the basis for the key elements of training overseen by OneLearning in the Irish civil service.

Respondents to the OECD survey expressed a very strong demand for training and capacity development activities in a range of learning formats, including internal training (virtual/in-person); external training (virtual/in-person); learning from others (opportunities to shadow more experienced colleagues), opportunities to "learn by doing" by being able to take on a new type of work or challenging policy project, and having access to a community of practice on policy development. In contrast, staff mobility schemes were the least popular for skills development.

Link with performance assessment and competency frameworks

The learning opportunities identified by OneLearning should be connected with the current performance assessment framework and the current and future competency framework in the civil service, to further embed policy skills development in human resources processes and in the way civil servants are trained and developed over their careers. Moreover, the Irish government has a sound understanding of the emerging institutional learning needs as a result of the upcoming retirement cliff, i.e., which skills are likely to disappear and need to be replaced. Various initiatives are already underway to upskill the civil service as part of the civil service renewal. Some of those skills are highly relevant to policy roles, such as the work of IGEES, which could be used as a prototype for developing other centres of expertise across the civil service.

Training offer by OneLearning and the Institute of Public Administration

Various delivery options for training already exist, and the ecosystem for capacity development is rich, albeit not entirely joined-up, both within and outside the civil service.

OneLearning and the Learning Management System were established in 2017 within the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDR) as one of the flagship measures of the Civil Service Renewal Plan. OneLearning was established relatively recently for the provision of learning and development across the civil service. OneLearning is responsible for all training that is common across the civil service and offers a wide range of training programmes and "learning paths", including in relation to policy development. For example, the Data, Innovation and Management Learning Path provides modules on data analysis, design/systems thinking, policy development and analysis. A number of these courses are being developed in-house, such as in co-operation with IGEES, a collaboration that serves as a pertinent example of mainstreaming technical knowledge across the civil service.

Bringing in civil servants as faculty in training programmes was mentioned as a good practice by interviewees, as it supports and leverages internal competences; students get to hear and learn from real experience rather than academic theory. The United Kingdom also draws on senior practitioners for policy training, as does the Australian Public Service Academy (see Box 5.3).

A number of interviewees encouraged OneLearning to open its training offer beyond the civil service and gradually allocate slots for participants from the public sector more broadly and from subnational institutions in particular. This would help with the cross-fertilisation of ideas, improve mutual understanding

and networks across levels of government and between policy and delivery and could broaden the potential talent pool for the civil service.

The Institute of Public Administration (IPA) also offers development and training for civil servants and for the wider public service too. IPA's Training and Development Division provides an extensive range of executive development and professionally accredited programmes, short training courses and organisational development supports for new and experienced managers, administrators and technical staff across the public sector. For example, the IPA offers policy-related courses including a diploma in local government studies, which is well received, as well as a Master's degree in policy analysis. The latter is a two-year, part-time programme designed to address tangible needs of policy analysis skills across the public administration. By including civil servants as guest lecturers in its faculty, it helps ensure that curricula are relevant, practical and applicable to everyday policy work. In the Master's course, students explore subjects such as project management, economic and financial analysis, social policy analysis, and cost-benefit analysis. The Master's provides a flexible teaching structure with both in-person and remote learning options. Several specialisations are offered, including public management, criminal justice, financial management, healthcare management, human resources management and local government management.

Skills for the future

A key challenge for all agencies that propose training for policy development is to ensure that it is up to date and relevant to the most modern needs of the public service. The responses to the OECD's survey offer some broad reflections on what skills and capabilities policy practitioners in Ireland think will be needed in the future.

Both internal communication across the government and external communication with different stakeholders, the media and the public require new skills and capabilities. Digital technologies and social media have increased the velocity of decision making, had a profound impact on public communication and have produced a complex information ecosystem that has made it more challenging for policymakers to communicate (OECD, 2021[10]). Information consumption has been transformed by rapid digitalisation and the proliferation of communication platforms across connected devices, while information production has also shifted as each individual can now publish content or produce data. COVID-19 has also been a catalyst for change and acceleration of innovative practices in the field of public communication, as seen in many OECD countries including Ireland.

In the future, inclusive, responsive and compelling communication may thus require considerable adjustments to how communication is organised and the mandate is serves, as well as to the skills of public officials and communicators alike (OECD, 2021[10]). Irrespective of the changes due to digitalisation, inclusiveness considerations may also have an impact on communication and could require new drafting and writing skills, for example to make sure government documents also exist in simple language.

Emerging technologies have opened new possibilities for public communicators to gather and analyse evidence. For example, big data, cloud computing, smart algorithms and analytical software have unlocked a vast trove of insights and diminished the cost of acquiring and processing relevant information. Embracing these technologies will require building capacity across departments. New practices and competencies have given life to a wide range of specialisations within the profession itself, as well as increasing its reliance on expertise in other related disciplines ranging from data science and artificial intelligence, to behavioural science, to search engine optimisation (SEO), and user experience (UX), web and graphic design. This points to the need for specific skillsets and expertise. In particular, interventions should target digital, analytical and data science skills; access to behavioural science expertise; and professional training across essential communication competencies.

The digitalisation of communication channels and the data revolution has sparked the proliferation of a range of sub-domains across social media, websites and apps, analytics, and beyond. Each of these sub-domains comes with a specialisation that government communication units need to acquire in order to effectively leverage the opportunities of these new channels.

As the field continues to evolve rapidly, investing in regular training and professional development of communicators, both on core skills and according to a set of specialisations, will remain highly important to empower them to embrace innovations and new practices for a more impactful function. Building a strategic and innovative outlook for public communication, in tandem with efforts to upskill teams and units to carry this out in practice, ought to go hand-in-hand with a focus on ethics. This is fundamental to ensuring that opportunities for inclusive, responsive and compelling communication that come with innovations in the field are compatible with the public interest and do not erode public trust.

The growing availability of data allows governments across the OECD to make more informed and evidence-based decisions for policy development. However, creating a data-driven public sector requires recognising data as a strategic asset and having the skills necessary to help reap the benefits of evidence-based decision making (OECD, 2019[11]). In addition to the knowledge of information technology systems and tools, the area of skills to be strengthened that was the most frequent mentioned in the OECD survey relates to data collection, analysis, and evaluation. Determining data needs, collecting the necessary information and additional data points, and accessing already existing databases as well as data management require enhanced data literacy across the civil service to inform policy analysis and development. In particular, as data analysis depends on the availability of high-quality source data, governments require skillsets related to data engineering and science. Moreover, statistical analysis and interpretation of available data assets and statistics (e.g. through modelling and forecasting) will likely become more important in the future, not just for specialists but also for policymakers with generalist profiles. This is closely linked to the ability to present and visualise data. In the same vein, greater knowledge of data protection is becoming more important.

Evermore complex policy challenges and increasing uncertainty could render skills related to systems thinking, risk and resilience assessment as well as strategic foresight more important in the future. As described in Chapter 2, the civil service could consider equipping policymakers with strategic foresight skills and practice systems that can stimulate iterative processes for policy development through to implementation.

Momentum for optimisation and for advancing a policy curriculum

With these modern skills in mind, the Institute of Public Administration (IPA) is currently finalising its Corporate Strategy 2022-2027. It will set out a transformation agenda aimed at meeting the new and evolving education, training, development and skills needs of the civil and public service. There will be a particular emphasis on expanding and updating the training and development of senior management across the civil service, state agencies and local authorities.

One of the goals will be to identify and address the current and evolving professional learning and development needs of the public service. Among the actions it commits to for this purpose will be to establish a dedicated business development function to engage with and systematically identify the professional learning and development needs of all its stakeholders, including government departments, agencies and individual sectors. The Institute will seek to ensure that its course content and design reflect leading practice and stakeholder requirements, including those of the public service. In particular, it will seek to link the policy development skills training with a renewed and updated competency framework for the civil service.

The Institute is placing particular emphasis on identifying expert delivery partners and building strategic alliances to respond to training and development needs, including the more specialised needs of senior

civil and public servants. It will also review, benchmark and streamline existing courses and programmes to optimise their relevance, and it will seek to eliminate unnecessary overlaps within programmes. In this regard, it will link to the programmes offered by other agencies, including OneLearning.

More widely, the IPA is seeking collaborative research opportunities and partnerships that support knowledge creation and advance thought leadership. This will be a significant feature of the Institute's work to meet the skills and training needs of the public service. Finally, the IPA will seek to add to its contribution of learning and development in the public service by developing itself further as a learning organisation.

Both OneLearning and the IPA offer short training courses for the civil service on the same or related topics, such as project management, change management, human resources and leadership skills. In order to avoid overlap and ensure efficiency (the IPA is partly funded by a grant administered by DPENDR), there is a need to streamline the training offer. The IPA's forthcoming Corporate Strategy brings an opportunity to promote this streamlining in collaboration with OneLearning. There is scope for the two organisations to work closely together in developing a joint understanding of civil service training needs, including in respect of policy development and strategic foresight.

In addition, there is scope for DPENDR to specify its priorities in the context of its periodic funding discussions with the IPA and ensure that the Corporate Strategy 2022-2027 reflects the skills needs of the civil service. Training offerings and the connections between them (and the relevant student cohorts) may need to be made explicit. A package of offerings related to policy that includes areas like project management, policy leadership and people management could be articulated as an overall "policy course", akin to a mini curriculum. The IPA has identified a number of training priorities in new and evolving areas such as strategic transformation and new ways of working, as well as digital, climate, innovation, data and communication. The IPA has also committed to developing training in the areas of benefits modelling, data analytics, human-centred design, programme management and agile project management skills.

The new IPA strategy is an opportunity to enable the development of a policy curriculum based on required skills and then deliberately commission the necessary training offering. This approach could perhaps be best achieved by fostering close collaboration between the IPA and DPENDR's own training and development body, OneLearning.

As mentioned earlier, this policy curriculum may reflect the structure and priorities of a skills and competency framework for policy development, to allow for a coherent match between skills needs and the training offer. The curriculum may also result in the better harnessing of existing resources already devoted to training needs analyses and to training and development in both IPA and OneLearning.

In addition to the courses offered by OneLearning and the IPA, various other academic institutions, in Dublin, Galway, Limerick and Cork, offer public service-oriented programmes focusing on political science and on public management and governance. Academia could be more involved in the training of civil servants outside the usual degree-based offerings. This might include specific offerings on policy-related research methodologies, such as statistical analysis, policy analysis and economic modelling, and could be commissioned as a collective offering for the civil service and delivered in-house by departments. A broader role for academia in policy development, in particular in relation to research, is discussed later in this report.

Whichever institute delivers the training, information about the offerings could be set out in one place (OneLearning) so that potential students and their managers can assess the most appropriate offering for their policy development needs. Some sort of assessment criteria could also be designed that would enable either a centralised assessment of the quality of offerings or a system for departments and students to rate the quality of courses (a trip advisor for training offerings).

Other jurisdictions are creating comprehensive approaches to developing the skills of the civil service. The Australian Public Service has recently launched the Australian Public Service Academy which has specific programmes related to policy training (see Box 5.3). The United Kingdom's policy curriculum and campus

also include policy skills such as a Master's in public policy in collaboration with the London School of Economics and Political Science (LSE) (and includes senior civil service practitioners as faculty) (see Box 5.4). In contrast, New Zealand does not have a centralised public service training or policy training offering. Its approach to whole-of-government policy skills development, building on the Policy Skills Framework, is described below (see Box 5.5).

Box 5.3. Developing skills of civil servants: The Australian Public Service Academy

The Australian government created an Australian Public Service Academy in 2021 to strengthen the capacity of the public administration and support a more holistic and cross-sector approach to building skills for policymakers. Over the last ten years, three reviews of the public service – the "Ahead of the Game" report, the McPhee Review and, the most recent, the Theodey Review (in 2019) – highlighted that skills and capacity in the public service was the single most important element to strengthen the effectiveness of the public sector.

The latter review underlined, however, the fragmentation of skills development initiatives, material and guidelines across the public service and stressed the lack of guidance on the essential features that characterise a good civil servant. As a result, the Australian Public Service Academy was created to respond effectively to these challenges.

One of the unique characteristics of the Academy is that it is a networked organisation with a central hub and different services, which are designed and delivered by the agencies that have a comparative and known advantage in these areas. For instance, Services Australia might provide support in developing skills in the delivery of social protection support.

- The core element of the Academy is the Australian Public Service Craft and Value, a set of six fundamental capabilities at the foundation of an effective public sector. These include:
- integrity
- working in government
- engagement and partnership
- implementation and services
- strategy and policy evaluation
- leadership and management.

Each of these capabilities includes access to a specific online toolkit and links to related courses, which are differentiated according to the level of expertise (foundation, practitioner and lead).

In addition, the Academy offers a Graduate Development Program, which scales up the approach and uses a whole-of-government approach with a focus on the Australian Public Service Craft.

Source: (Government of Australia, 2022[12])

Box 5.4. Developing skills of civil servants: The United Kingdom Campus for government skills

To deliver on the government priorities as set out by the Declaration on Government Reform of 2021, the government of the United Kingdom supported the creation of a Government Campus and a new curriculum for all civil servants. The curriculum was developed by the newly created Government Skills and Curriculum Unit, hosted by the Cabinet Office and the civil service. The new training programme aims to improve the public servants' general and specialist expertise, strengthening their creativity and their networks. Training courses bring together all civil service training bodies, such as the Civil Service Leadership Academy, and include profession-led training, including the Intelligence Assessment Academy and the Government Commercial College. In addition, it will also bring together business-specific training, such as the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office's (FCDO) International Academy and various schemes for accelerated development.

The training provided by the Government Campus programme is not centralised but rather is offered in a decentralised way across the civil service by departments, agencies and professions. The Campus is expected to unite all government training and make it accessible to all public servants.
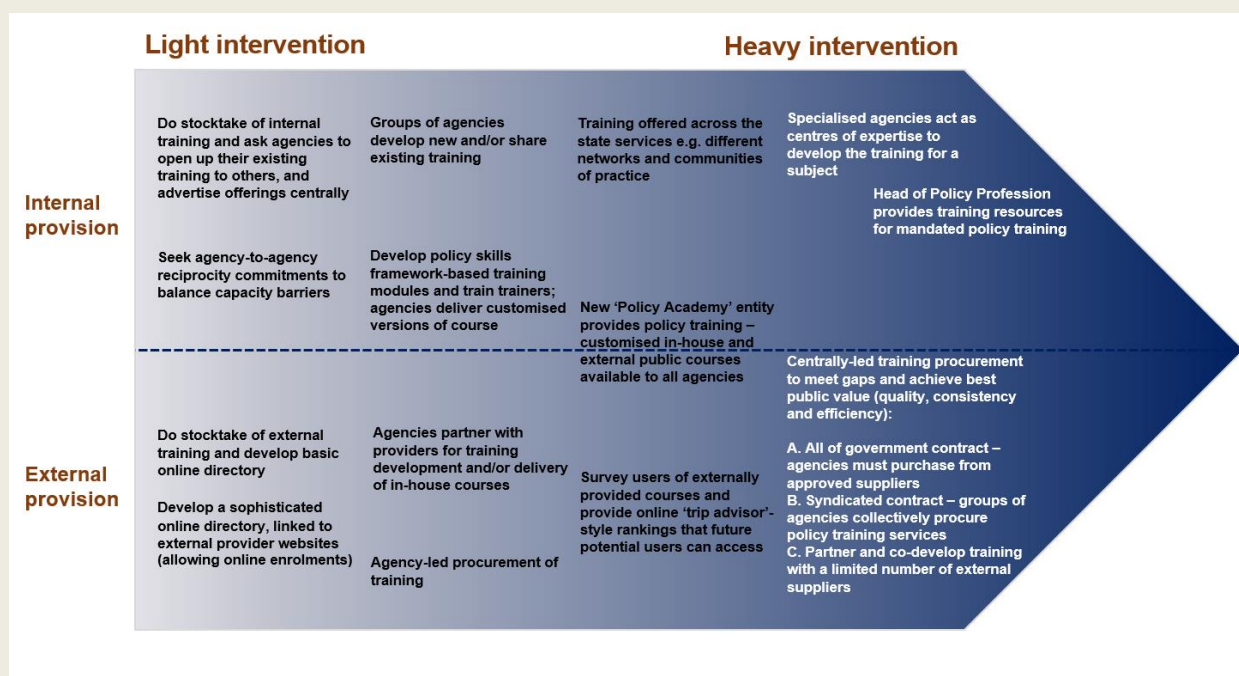
Source: (Government of the United Kingdom, 2021[13])

Box 5.5. The policy workforce and pathways to improved capability in New Zealand

The New Zealand policy skills framework articulates the skills required of policy professionals across the government. However, the New Zealand public management system is characterised by relatively autonomous departments, making any whole-of-government capability-building effort difficult. As a result, the "Pathways to Policy People Capability" report was published. It analysed policy workforce issues, described key trends and perceptions related to recruitment, retention, development and deployment of policy staff across the government, and offered potential collective policy workforce development initiatives. Policy training strategies were set out from light to heavy intervention (centralised procurement) and provision of policy training.

The options for action (see Figure 5.3) were plotted on a matrix to support strategies for training policy staff, sharing training between departments and developing centres of expertise.

Figure 5.3. Training options: A mix of light to heavy interventions

Light intervention

Heavy intervention

Internal provision

- Do stocktake of internal training and ask agencies to open up their existing training to others, and advertise offerings centrally
- Seek agency-to-agency reciprocity commitments to balance capacity barriers

- Groups of agencies develop new and/or share existing training
- Develop policy skills framework-based training modules and train trainers; agencies deliver customised versions of course

- Training offered across the state services e.g. different networks and communities of practice
- New 'Policy Academy' entity provides policy training – customised in-house and external public courses available to all agencies

- Specialised agencies act as centres of expertise to develop the training for a subject
- Head of Policy Profession provides training resources for mandated policy training

External provision

- Do stocktake of external training and develop basic online directory
- Develop a sophisticated online directory, linked to external provider websites (allowing online enrolments)

- Agencies partner with providers for training development and/or delivery of in-house courses
- Agency-led procurement of training

- Survey users of externally provided courses and provide online 'trip advisor'-style rankings that future potential users can access

- Centrally-led training procurement to meet gaps and achieve best public value (quality, consistency and efficiency):
- A. All of government contract – agencies must purchase from approved suppliers
- B. Syndicated contract – groups of agencies collectively procure policy training services
- C. Partner and co-develop training with a limited number of external suppliers

Developments in New Zealand include communities of practice in specific policy areas (behavioural insights, futures), some training by the Policy Project (training of the trainers) and the launch of the development pathways tool (to support individuals seeking training and development aligned with skills in the Policy Skills Framework).

Source: Adapted from (Government of New Zealand, 2022[14])

OneLearning does not use a credit system, and there is no specific curriculum on policy development. A policy curriculum would be a useful organising framework for policy training. As noted above, the United Kingdom has developed a policy curriculum with various levels of training up to the Master's level (see Box 5.3), linked to the Policy Standards. While formal training is important, a survey of policy professionals in the United Kingdom conducted in 2019 suggested that formal training and credentials were less important than informal development and training for career progression: "Less than a quarter (23%) felt that a professional qualification had helped to improve their performance in policy making, suggesting that other forms of development including on-the-job experience were relatively more important. Indeed, around two-thirds (66%) cited departmental learning as the means by which they kept up to date as a policy professional" (UK Policy Profession Board, 2019[15]).

Additional capacity-building formats and a culture of evidence-based policy development

Formal training is only part of the development equation. Most people learn on the job. The human resources management literature (Lombardo and Eichinger, 2000[16]) refers to this as a ratio of 70% "learning by doing" on the job, 20% learning from others (including mentoring, support and feedback from more senior colleagues) and 10% formal training. The survey of civil servants conducted for this project

largely confirmed that this ratio applies to the Irish civil service (Figure 5.4). Results showed that informal contacts within one's department are considered the main source of policy development information in the civil service (73% of respondents), followed by the department's own website (70% of respondents). 50% of the respondents also rely on informal contacts outside their departments. This type of informal on-the-job learning can be leveraged by more formal approaches, such as shadowing more senior colleagues, buddy systems, mentoring and on-the-job coaching. Performance management practices, especially performance conversations with line managers, are critical in this context. These conversations offer regular opportunities to discuss strengths and gaps related to specific policy development skills and to determine training needs or development opportunities (to take on different skills-enhancing projects or types of policy work).

Figure 5.4. Sources of capacity for the civil service in Ireland
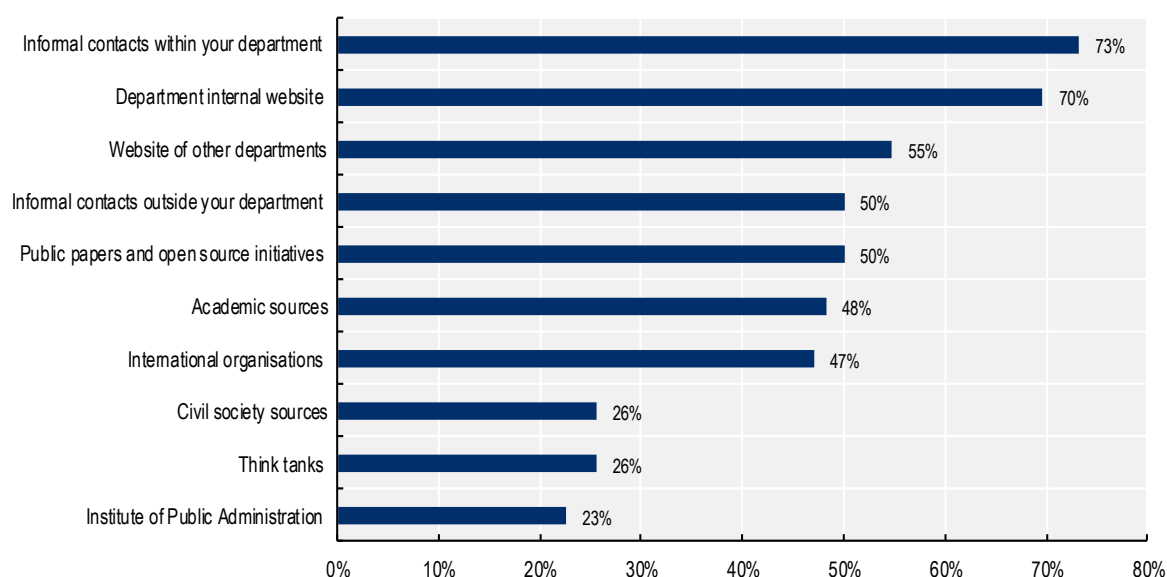
Note: n=168. Respondents to the OECD survey were asked, "What are the sources you use to consult or learn more on policy development tools, instruments and methodologies?".
Source: (OECD, 2022[1])

Another way to build policy capability and drive a culture of evidence-based policy development across the system is through skills and knowledge exchange in communities of practice. These collaborative platforms both strengthen technical exchange and build an active network within and across departments. For example, the United States Federal Government has a well-established Federal Foresight Community of Interest involving members from across the federal government as well as non-governmental and private sector partners. Examples related to policy can be found in Australia and New Zealand, where some specific communities have developed in particular areas, such as behavioural insights, futures and foresight. Both Australia and New Zealand also have well-established communities of practice for regulators: the National Regulators Community of Practice across Australia (supported by the Australia and New Zealand School of Government) and the New Zealand Government Regulatory Practice Initiative. These two communities of practice collaborate, including in a joint webinar on "What the Aussies can learn from the Kiwis" looking at the development of a curriculum, training offerings and certification regimes.

Furthermore, communities of practice on evaluation are seen to be useful as in the cases of Canada and the United Kingdom. In the health sector in Canada, for example, the public health network is composed

of all chief evaluation officers of health, who share knowledge and expertise. Heads of evaluation of different departments have a network as well and organise periodical consultations to share expertise and insights about their job. Smaller departments benefit from bigger ones and vice versa, as the former are smaller and more flexible, and the latter have greater economic and human resources. At the international level, international contacts can be leveraged to learn about best practices and improve capacities. Health Canada, for example, has strong connections with entities in Australia, the United Kingdom and the United States.

In the United Kingdom, the Cross-Government Evaluation Group is a cross-disciplinary group composed of analysts and evaluation managers from different government departments. Its objective is to improve the supply of, stimulate the demand for and encourage the use of good-quality evaluation evidence in government decision making. For instance, the Cross-Government Evaluation Group steered the rewriting of the Magenta Book in 2020. The Cross-Government Evaluation Group acts as an informal network that allows people in charge of evaluation in the different government departments to share good practices and work together on joint projects. Its members meet four to five times per year.

More detailed examples of communities of practice can be found in Box 5.6 below.

A community of practice on policy development in Ireland is foreseen as an outcome of this project and will be supported by a mission statement as a concrete output of this project. An international community of practice could also be envisaged to encourage international peer learning and exchange.

Box 5.6. Public sector communities of practice in Australia and New Zealand

Communities of practice can be instrumental in raising the productivity of the public sector by increased communication of knowledge or by reinforced collaboration networks across government entities.

New South Wales government, Australia

The public sector of New South Wales (NSW) in Australia has several communities of practice that all civil servants can join freely. These communities of practice are important tools to promote innovative methods and tools, share good practices, create new collaboration networks and improve formal or informal capacity-building from peers. There exist 11 communities of practice created according to specific sectors and functions, e.g., those of policy professionals, procurement professionals or workforce analytics professionals.

The community of practice of policy professionals, for instance, provides opportunities for policy professionals from the whole New South Wales government and offers good practice examples, technical training, case studies of innovative activities, policy tools, and policy guidelines and frameworks. It supports its members through several initiatives. For example, it has produced a free webinar programme sharing expertise and insights from senior leaders and experienced practitioners, and it is now developing a policy toolkit of templates and resources for optional use across the sector, drawing from good practices and resources available in different agencies.

New Zealand

New Zealand's Policy Project, in the Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet, includes several supporting policy-related communities including a Policy Leaders Network (a key community for the Policy Project) and a group of policy capability leaders (who meet to discuss policy improvement work in their departments). Other self-generating communities of practice have developed and are led by

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interested volunteers. Contact details are housed on the Policy Project's website and linked to the Policy Methods Toolbox. They include:

- The New Zealand Behavioural Insights Community of Practice brings together practitioners specialised in behavioural insights. It promotes and supports the use of behavioural insights to inform policy design and interpret policy outcomes. It involves several institutional centres of expertise, such as the Behavioural Science Aotearoa, hosted in the Ministry of Justice.

- The Service Design Network is an informal network of practitioners interested in design thinking that meets on a monthly basis. This community of practice is supported by the Auckland Co-design Lab, a collaboration project between local and central governments focused on building and promoting social infrastructure based on the co-design of social services with users.

Source: (Government of New South Wales, n.d.[17]); (UK Policy Profession Board, 2019[15])

Various interlocutors indicated that the organisational culture within their departments did not sufficiently emphasise, enable or support the provision of evidence-informed policy advice that would require significant upskilling in working with evidence and data. Critical success factors to nurture an evidence-driven approach to policy development are:

1. Senior leaders setting expectations that all policy advice should be based on the best available evidence (with evidence broadly defined as data, evaluations of past policies, and insights from stakeholders and those likely to be affected by policy); this includes consistent and overt use of evidence and research to inform policy advice to ministers.

2. Backing up those expectations with resources and tools to support the development of evidence-informed policy.

3. Ensuring quality standards for policy are set as benchmarks that include evidence and engagement as essential ingredients of good policy advice and are referenced in departmental or civil service-wide quality assurance processes.

4. Senior leaders and managers recognising and showcasing exemplars of evidence-based work with tangible impacts.

5. Socialising an organisational culture based on organisational vision and strategic goals that include evidence-informed policy as fundamental to achieving organisational excellence. Opportunities for staff to present work, especially work in progress, for the cross-fertilisation of ideas and approaches, and for reflection on what works, when and why, in terms of policy design. An organisational culture that offers opportunities for sharing and reflection is likely to be more innovative, informed, co-ordinated and successful in terms of delivering quality policy advice to decision makers.

6. Including policy development skills in performance conversations with line managers.

7. Strengthening collaborative links with academia to inform research and policy options.

8. Determined action to support cross-departmental and cross-sectoral collaboration (discussed in more detail later in the document).

9. Supporting all aspects of training and development, including overt identification of training gaps and training needs throughout the organisation.

Areas of opportunity to support skills and capabilities

This chapter highlighted a number of key findings from the OECD survey and interviews related to skills and capabilities for policy development in Ireland, such as the demand for new and highly technical skill profiles, the pivotal role of IGEES in mainstreaming evaluation and economic analysis skills across the system, and the rich training ecosystem. It underscored the ambitious strategic orientation of the civil service renewal package and discussed drivers of excellence in the civil service, highlighting a momentum for the optimalisation of training offerings and for advancing a policy curriculum with a connected policy skills framework. Finally, this chapter addressed ways to nurture a culture of evidence-based policy development across the system.

A few areas of opportunity to further strengthen these good practices are as follows:

- Deliberately **articulate the skills required of policy professionals** – what they need to know, what they need to be able to do and how they should behave at different levels of their policy careers. This could take a number of forms, from a **policy skills framework** to a separate policy rubric in the overall civil service competency framework (noting that there are skills common to policy and other functions in the civil service). Ideally, this would be a co-design process whereby the policy community would define skills required for their work, both traditional and cutting edge, and any related definitions, practice standards and levels of expertise. It might also include archetypes of policy professionals that would form sub-specialities in the policy cohort, especially in areas where expertise is currently in short supply (e.g., deep-data experts, specialists in user-centred design/behavioural insights, strategic foresight). This could be led and validated by CSMB.

- Develop a process or tool whereby individuals can **map their policy skills** and managers can map the skills of their teams, as the foundation for intentionally developing policy staff (as individuals, in teams, organisations, across the civil service).

- Create a **policy curriculum** (starting with mapping and assessing existing offerings and building on the work underway by OneLearning) connected to the policy skills framework and commission development and training offerings where there are gaps in current offerings.

- Examine how best to **streamline the training and development offerings** of existing agencies (primarily OneLearning and the Institute of Public Administration) for the civil service, with particular reference to policy development and strategic foresight.

- Build programmes to encourage **on-the-job learning** from others, based on existing good practices from across the civil service. This might include both guidance on setting up processes for buddy systems, mentoring and shadowing and explicit responsibility for seniors to support the development of more junior colleagues (included in performance agreements and recognised in performance discussions).

- Envisage possible **centres of expertise** (in different methods or policy expertise) with outward-facing roles and a mandate to build capability in their particular areas of expertise (such as the system leaders/functional leaders in New Zealand and the United Kingdom). This could build on existing structures in place such as IGEES, the hub-and-spoke arrangements of the Central Statistics Office and the Office of the Attorney General's secondment programmes. It might be possible to experiment with different operating models to test the success of various approaches (e.g. twinning programmes, internal consultancy model, and explicit remit to build capability across the civil service as has been effective in the areas of innovation and government communication).

- Once the **strategic policy units** have been mapped and their composition, activities and added value have been assessed, explore the possibility of a network of strategic policy units with a hub at the centre of government feeding into a whole-of-government strategic policy agenda. The units could include mechanisms for how they work together (joint policy teams on cross-cutting goals and challenges) and how they can be deployed (to where the demand is greatest).

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