

Executive Summary

The Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Services (IGEES) supports an integrated approach to policy formulation and implementation in the civil service based on economic and analytical skills. IGEES was created in March 2012 with the aim of expanding analytic capacities for evidence-informed policy making following the budgetary pressures created in the aftermath of the global financial crisis. IGEES's role was to build and extend capacity to achieve value-for-money in policy making across all government departments. The goal is to ensure that a range of public interventions and public expenditure decisions are informed by quality economic analysis and contribute to better outcomes for citizens. This is achieved by placing IGEES staff in all government departments, as well as through specific recruitment, learning and development processes. The IGEES launched a Medium-Term Strategy (MTS) for 2016-2019 to improve the quality of its output, increase the impact of policy analysis process and better inform the policy debate as well as to further develop IGEES as a whole-of-government service.

This OECD study looks at the key institutional features and governance of IGEES in light of international good practices, and offers an analysis of its processes, tools, people management and impact. It identifies current achievements, as well as remaining barriers.

Despite a context of relatively constrained human resources in the Irish Civil Service, IGEES has helped strengthen the overall analytical capacity across departments and built a robust evidence base for better policy and decision making. With resources spread across a large number of Departments, IGEES has helped to deliver a large number of analytical outputs in a variety of policy areas. It has thus contributed to various decision-making processes, such as the development of new regulations and the assessment of programme effectiveness, including through spending reviews. The assessment of spending proposals helps improve the quality and effectiveness of public expenditure.

Despite the progress made, there are several areas where improvement is needed. Data availability and use is one such area, as Ireland does not have an integrated data infrastructure, and access to data across departments remains difficult. There is therefore scope for IGEES to develop a strategy to strengthen evidence and promote “smart” data. Creating leadership for analytical work and its use in government departments is another area requiring attention. Given the robust job market in Ireland, it is important that IGEES branding help attract high-quality candidates in economic and analytical positions.

The study offers four main recommendations to support the development of IGEES within its broader strategic environment and to inform policy development in Ireland in the medium term.

First, greater coherence is needed in the governance of IGEES. The service currently has a broad reach across all government departments, but its governance remains fragmented. For shared ownership of IGEES across government and the country as a whole, OECD recommends that the “Policy Oversight Group” and the “External Advisory Group” form a co-ordinated “Advisory Group” that should function as a “Strategy Board”. A corollary would be to rename the internal advisory group as an “Internal IGEES Steering Group”, which would better reflect its managerial function. While IGEES has helped create a skills base, it will be important to establish the foundations for a policy on evidence-based policy making to increase access and use of data. This could build on current efforts to promote Open government data,

but needs to go well beyond that. IGEES should continue to improve co-ordinate with the statistical office and foster greater access to administrative data. In addition, these efforts should be integrated with broader civil service renewal strategies.

Second, it will be important to further develop peoples' skills and to foster a policy community across the Irish Civil Service. This would entail developing a marketplace and electronic community tools for IGEES analysts, and increasing staff engagement. It will also be important to explore the possibility of developing career opportunities for the analytical professions. IGEES could also continue diversifying its professional expertise, by including other social and applied sciences to strengthen its scope, quality of work and staff motivation. To fully achieve its potential as a cross-cutting service, IGEES should further invest in increasing staff mobility.

Third, it will be important to leverage IGEES to improve the quality and promote greater use of evaluation in Ireland. Complementing IGEES' analytic tools with well-being approaches would both bring the service closer to international good practices in policy analysis and broaden its scope. This could entail reviewing and enhancing the tools and guidelines to broaden their scope. In addition, it would be important to enhance the focus on implementation and theory of change. Finally, IGEES should consider strengthening its capacity for evidence synthesis and knowledge management, using meta-analysis and systematic reviews. These latter are not yet well developed in Ireland's evidence-informed policy-making system. It will also be important to improve mechanisms for using of evidence, sharing best practices and better sharing findings and economic evaluation with Parliament.

Fourth, IGEES should broaden the scope of its dissemination and sharing processes. It needs to continue organising high-level events, branding its analytical work and encouraging its analysts to participate in policy conferences and dialogue. These initiatives could be expanded by connecting with international experts and enlarging the scope of the domestic policy discourse. Establishing mechanisms for peer-to-peer exchanges and sharing work at more junior levels, particularly the more isolated analysts, would help build a broad community of practice. Finally, the branding and dissemination strategy of IGEES could be consolidated by expanding on social media and broaden ownership of the service beyond DPER.



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