

ICA Country Report 2004

IRELAND

1 Government Structure

Ireland is a parliamentary democracy¹. The national parliament is called the Oireachtas and consists of the President and two houses. These are the Dáil (The House of Representatives) and the Seanad (the Senate). The powers of these two bodies derive from the Constitution of Ireland and law.

The Constitution of Ireland is Bunreacht na hÉireann, the basic law of the State. Adopted by referendum in 1937 it defines Ireland as a sovereign, independent and democratic state. It sets out the administrative structure of the Government and states that all powers of the Government derive under God from the people. It defines the structure and principles of legal and social policy to guide the Oireachtas (Parliament). The rights of every citizen are also enshrined in the constitution.

The President of Ireland is elected by direct vote from the people for a term of seven years. While the president doesn't have any executive powers, the role is more than a ceremonial one. The President has certain powers which make him or her essentially the guardian of the Constitution and may choose to exercise these powers on the advice of the Government or Council of State. The current President is Mary McAleese.

The Irish Government consists of not less than seven and not more than fifteen members. The Head of the Government is the Taoiseach, who is appointed by the President on the nomination of the Dáil. The Taoiseach nominates one member of Government to be Tánaiste, who acts in the place of the Taoiseach if the Taoiseach is absent.

Departments of State are assigned to members of the Government, with a Minister occasionally being responsible for more than one department. Ministers are assisted in the administration of these departments by Ministers of State who are not members of the Government.

The Dáil is the primary of the two houses. While government administration and policy may be criticised in both houses, the government is responsible to the Dáil only.

The main political parties are Fianna Fáil, which has been in Government more times than any other party, Fine Gael, The Labour Party, The Progressive Democrats, The Green Party, Socialist Party and Sinn Féin.

Civil Servants assist in the running of each of the fifteen Departments of State and are appointed through public competition.

Irish law is based on Common Law and is enshrined in the Constitution of 1937. Statutes passed by the British Parliament before 1921 also have the force of law unless they have subsequently been repealed or have been found to be unconstitutional. Justice is administered in the public courts. Judges are appointed by the president and are usually senior figures in the legal profession.

¹ From <http://www.gov.ie/aboutireland/Eng/default.asp>

The police service, An Garda Síochána (Guardians of the Peace) was established in 1922. Today the force has approximately 11,450 members. The Gardaí are headed by a government appointed Commissioner and are answerable to the Minister for Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

Additional information can be found at the following links:

The President's official web site	http://www.gov.ie/aras/
The official Government web site – this has links to Government Departments and other state organisations	http://www.gov.ie/
More information about Ireland	http://www.gov.ie/aboutireland/Eng/default.asp
Legislation in Ireland	http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/front.html

2 eGovernment Approach

The first Government Action Plan on the Information Society was established in 1999², and now the main strategy document orienting eGovernment policy is the Government's Information Society Action Plan, *New Connections*³. This plan sets out the key infrastructures and supporting frameworks for the Information Society. eGovernment is identified as a key infrastructure along with Telecommunications and the Legal and Regulatory Environment. The key supporting frameworks identified are: eBusiness; Research and Development; Lifelong Learning; and eInclusion.

The latest progress report on *New Connections* was issued on 29th April 2004⁴. This sets out the developments that have taken place in each of the key infrastructures (including eGovernment) and supporting frameworks identified in the original action plan.

3 Organisational and Operational Issues

Structure

In Ireland eGovernment strategy and the related implementation involve a number of structures and bodies acting at different levels.

Political responsibility for the Information Society agenda rests with the Cabinet Committee on the Information Society. The committee is chaired by the Taoiseach (Prime Minister) and the vice-chairman is the Minister of State for the Information Society. It includes the Ministers for Finance; Enterprise, Trade and Employment; Communications, Marine and Natural Resources; Education and Science; Community, Rural Affairs; Social and Family Affairs; Environment and Local Government; Health and Children; Justice, Equality and Law Reform.

There is an E-Strategy Group of Secretaries General (Director General) to support the Cabinet Committee and to address national E-Strategy issues on information society.

The Minister of State for the Information Society's task is to coordinate policy in order to encourage information society development, promote and monitor the implementation of national policies in this area, and ensuring Ireland is represented at European and other international fora on related issues.

² Implementing The Information Society In Ireland: An Action Plan, January 1999: <http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/index.asp?docID=229>

³ *New Connections*: <http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/index.asp?docID=557>

⁴ *New Connections - Second Progress Report*, 29th April 2004: <http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/index.asp?locID=181&docID=1773>

The Minister coordinates all Government departments, and to manage this task is supported by a number of structures including:

- The Assistant Secretaries E-Government Implementation Group, which is the operative body ensuring coordination among Government departments and their policies (including local Government representatives)
- The Information Society Commission (ISC)⁵, which is an independent advisory body that draws on high-level representation from business, the social partners, and Government itself, and reports directly to the Taoiseach. It provides independent expert advice to Government, and monitors Ireland's progress as an Information Society. The ISC plays a key role in shaping the evolving public policy framework for the Information Society in Ireland. It contributes to the policy formulation process, monitors progress, and highlights issues that need to be prioritised
- The Information Society Policy Unit (ISPU)⁶ of the Department of the Taoiseach, which has overall responsibility for developing, coordinating and driving implementation of the Information Society and E-Government agenda.

The new arrangements are designed to deliver a more coherent overall approach, at the highest level of Government, to formulation and implementation of policy on a wide range of issues that increasingly cut across traditional Departmental boundaries – between Departments and Agencies, and between central and local government.

There are other structures that play a role in policy conduction on E-Government. In particular there is a technical advisory office, directly involved in strategy conception, under the Department of Finance, called the Technology Policy Unit from the Centre for Management and Organisation Development (CMOD). Moreover the Department of Finance itself has an important role in allocation of the Information Society Fund (ISF).

In order to support implementation there is also a specific agency, the Reach Agency⁷ that was established in 1999 to develop a strategy for the integration of public services and the implementation of E-Government. The Reach Agency is responsible for the Public Services Broker (an infrastructure that serve as a single point-of-contact for accessing all public services, connecting different administration) and other pieces of the national E-Government infrastructure.

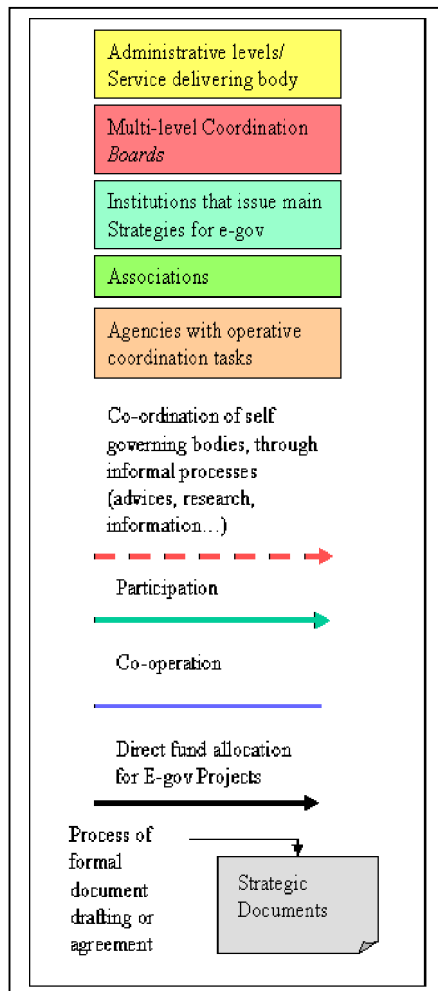
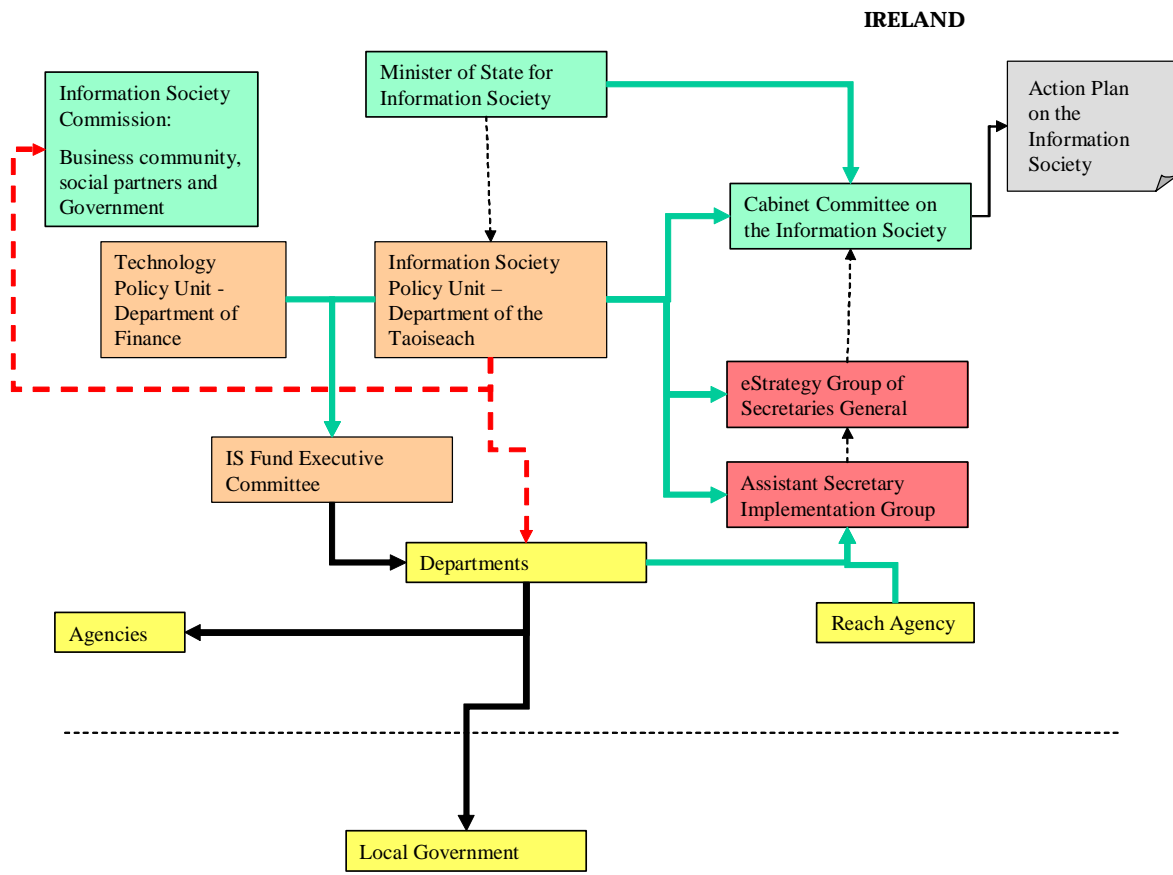
E-Government strategy is developed through a formal process, starting with proposal made by representative bodies. Policy matters are researched by ISPU and by CMOD, then draft papers circulated to appropriate stakeholders. Afterwards positions are discussed and then deliberated at the highest levels of senior management, in the monitoring policy bodies. Finally policy positions are presented to Cabinet Committee for final decision.

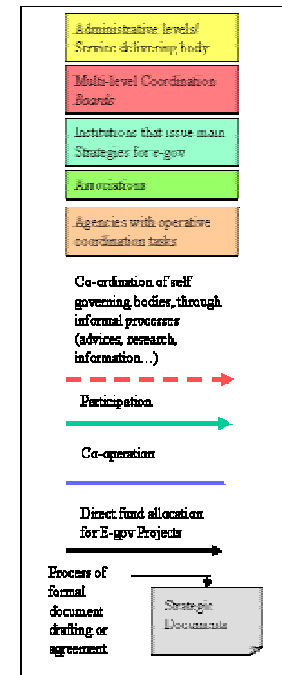
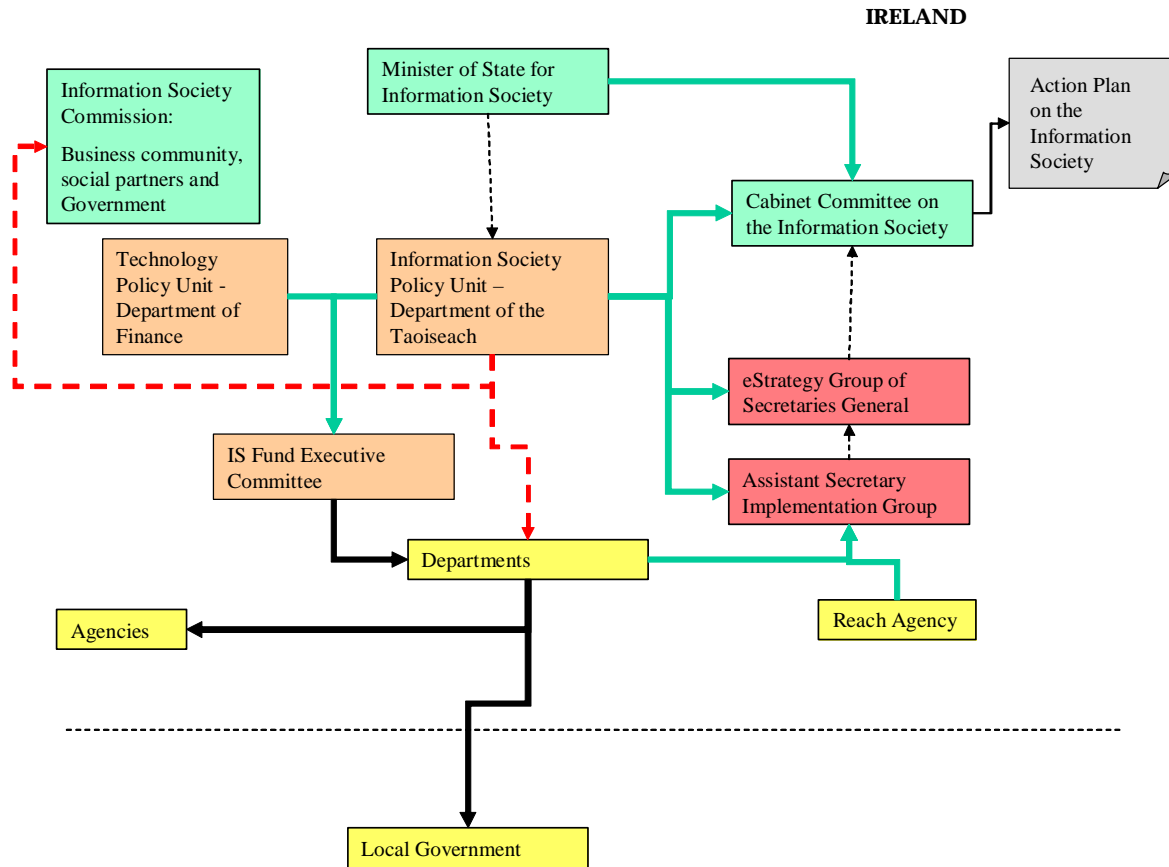
Lower administrative levels are not explicitly involved in the process, but in the Cabinet Committee on the Information Society, in the E-Strategy Group of Secretaries General and in the Implementation Group of Assistant Secretaries General they are represented by those Ministries with corporate governance responsibility for local administration and local administrative sector.

⁵ Information Society Commission: <http://www.isc.ie/>

⁶ Information Society Policy Unit: <http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/index.asp?locID=175>

⁷ Reach Agency: <http://www.reach.ie/>





Funding

In Ireland there is a specific budget to achieve the objective of the Information Society strategy including E-Government issues: the Information Society Fund.

The Information Society Fund was established by Government in 1999 to enable prioritisation of objectives set out in the Government's first Action Plan on the Information Society. The Fund is envisaged primarily as a fast track mechanism to resource public sector initiatives, which advance the information society agenda. Priorities were determined in consultation with Government Departments and are set out in or consistent with the Government Action Plans on the Information Society. E-Government is currently one of the seven strands encompassed in the current Action Plan on the Information Society, New Connections.

The amount of the fund has been €54.64 Million allocated in 2002 and €43 Million allocated in 2003. This may not be the only expenditure on E-Government annually. Other expenditure may occur outside of the IS Fund, in particular from individual Departmental IT budgets.

The objectives for the Information Society Fund are agreed by both the Department of the Taoiseach⁸ (Prime Minister) and the Department of Finance⁹ in consultation with Government Departments. The Department of Finance coordinates the amount of funding to be provided annually in the Fund in consultation with all Government Departments.

A Budget Estimates process is entered into each year by the Department of Finance in consultation with all Government Departments. Through this process Government Departments have the opportunity to indicate ongoing and/or future Information Society initiatives for which they would hope to receive Information Society funding. Following completion of the Estimates and determination of the actual allocations, monies are devolved into individual Departmental votes to support priority Information Society initiatives. A small component of the overall Information Society Fund is also maintained centrally for other priority initiatives, which may arise over the course of the year.

The fund is allocated for projects selected by a board consisting of the Department of the Finance and the Department of the Taoiseach.

In evaluating projects for funding, the following broad criteria are taken into consideration:

- projects must meet one of the elements of the E-Government vision:
 - be of a cross cutting nature across multiple Departments/Agencies;
 - be re-usable by other Departments/Agencies;

⁸ Department of the Taoiseach: <http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/>

⁹ Department of Finance: <http://www.finance.gov.ie/>

- enhance Ireland's competitiveness internationally;
- assist Ireland in meeting international regulatory requirements;
- clearly progress the objectives of the Government Action Plan for implementing the Information Society in Ireland; and
- be sustainable within the budget of the developing agency.

All applications for funding from the Information Society Fund must be made by or through a Government Department/Office.

Local governments and/or their agencies are thus eligible for funding as long as their application is supported by a relevant Government Department and that they meet the criteria as set out in the Fund guidelines.

Service Delivery

According to the administrative architecture of Ireland, which is very centralised, the greatest part of services benchmarked by E-Europe rests on competence of central government and services are provided on-line by national sector portal, as is noted in the following tables:

<i>Online services for Citizens</i>	<i>Central National Portal</i>	<i>National Sector Portal</i>	<i>Local Portal</i>
Income taxes		X	
Job search		X	
Social security benefits		X	
Personal documents		X	
Car registration		X	
Application for building permission			X
Declaration to the police		X	
Public libraries		X	
Birth & marriage certificates		X	
Enrolment in higher education		X	
Announcement of moving		X	
Health-related services		X	
<i>Online services for Businesses</i>			
Social contribution for employees		X	
Corporate tax		X	
VAT		X	
Registration of a new company		X	
Submission of statistical data		X	
Custom declaration		X	
Environmental permits		X	
Public procurement	X		

<i>Online services for Citizens</i>	<i>Central Administration</i>	<i>Intermediate Administration</i>	<i>Local Administration</i>
Income taxes	x		
Job search	x		
Social security benefits	x		
Personal documents	x		
Car registration	x		
Application for building permission			x
Declaration to the police	x		
Public libraries			x
Birth & marriage certificates	x		
Enrolment in higher education	x		
Announcement of moving	n/a		
Health-related services	n/a		

<i>Online services for Businesses</i>	<i>Central Administration</i>	<i>Intermediate Administration</i>	<i>Local Administration</i>
Social contribution for employees	x		
Corporate tax	x		
VAT	x		
Registration of a new company	x		
Submission of statistical data	x		
Custom declaration	x		
Environmental permits	x		
Public procurement	x		

5 Other Information

Additional information can be found at the following links:

General Policy

Information Society Policy Unit	http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/index.asp?locID=175
New Connections - A Strategy to realise the potential of the Information Society, March 2002	http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/index.asp?docID=557
New Connections - Second Progress Report, 29th April	http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/index.asp?locID=181&docID=1773

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Public Services Broker and related services

Reach [<http://www.reach.ie/>] is responsible for developing and implementing an integrated set of processes, systems and procedures to provide a standard means of access to public services, to be known as the *Public Services Broker*.

The **Services and Data Exchange Catalogue (SDEC)** [<http://sdec.reach.ie/>] is the definitive source for Ireland's *Public Services Broker* technical documentation and interoperability guidelines.

reachservices [<http://www.reachservices.ie/>] is a government portal for public services in Ireland delivered by Reach. It provides quick, secure access to public sector information and online, interactive services

The **Inter-Agency Messaging Service (IAMS)** [<http://www.reach.ie/iams/>] is an interoperability solution for the integration and improvement of services to customers of the public service in Ireland. It also helps to exchange customer data among agencies in the public service. The IAMS will initially allow the exchange of birth registration data between the GRO and the Department of Social and Family Affairs' Client Identity Services Section (CIS), and between the GRO and the Central Statistics Office (CSO). This service will eventually be extended to support the capture and dissemination of death and marriages notification data among a wider range of agencies

Miscellaneous selection of e-Government Web sites in Ireland

Reach	http://www.reach.ie/
reachservices	http://www.reachservices.ie/
OASIS - Information for Citizens	http://www.oasis.gov.ie/
BASIS - Information for Business	http://www.basis.ie/
Revenue (taxes) on-line	http://www.ros.ie/
Companies Registration Office – on-line filing	http://www.cro.ie/
Motor Tax on-line	http://www.motortax.ie/
Land Registry (responsible for registration of transactions relating to land and property in Ireland)	http://www.landregistry.ie/
e-Tenders – public sector tender opportunities	http://www.e-tenders.gov.ie/
Shipping Route Planner	http://www.imdo.ie/route-map.shtml
Driving Test applications on-line	http://www.drivingtest.ie/
Civil Service job applications on-line	https://www.publicjobs.ie/