

International Council for Information
Technology in Government
Administration

Country Report 2006

IRELAND

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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 (representative assembly) 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 Mrs. 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 current Taoiseach is Mr. Bertie Ahern T.D. 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, 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

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

administered in the public courts. Judges are appointed by the President and are usually senior figures in the legal profession.

The police service, An Garda Síochána (Guardians of the Peace) was established in 1922. Today the force has approximately 12,000 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/
Houses of the Oireachtas (Parliament of Ireland – Dáil and Seanad)	http://www.oireachtas.ie/
More information about Ireland	http://www.gov.ie/aboutireland/Eng/default.asp

2 Strategic Approach to eGovernment

Strategic Plans

The first Government Action Plan on the Information Society was published in 1999.² It was entitled *Implementing the Information Society in Ireland* and set out a range of measures appropriate to the development of an Information Society in Ireland. It covered a number of broad areas: telecommunications infrastructure, development of electronic commerce and business opportunities, enabling measures, legislative measures, ICTs and delivery of public services, support areas where action is needed, and taking the work forward.

A second Government Action Plan entitled *New Connections*³ was published in March 2002 and has been the main strategy document orienting eGovernment policy since then. This plan set out the key infrastructures, which included eGovernment, and supporting frameworks for the Information Society.

The key infrastructures were defined as:

- Telecommunications infrastructure – developing the capacity necessary for delivery of advanced telecommunications services
- Legal and regulatory environment – ensuring a secure and predictable legal framework for electronic transactions that provides the necessary confidence for both business and consumers
- eGovernment – a key leadership role for Government in driving wider engagement with information and communication technologies (ICTs) through its own business processes and service delivery arrangements.

The supporting frameworks were defined as:

- eBusiness – to support and underpin the competitiveness of business in meeting the challenges of a new competitive environment
- Research and development (R&D) – a basis for innovation through science and technology to support knowledge-based economic activity
- Lifelong learning – to ensure availability of knowledge and skills, to support the process of adapting to ongoing change, and to build on the potential of ICTs to enable new ways of learning
- eInclusion – to ensure that our development as an Information Society is inclusive, and builds on the potential of ICTs to address issues of disadvantage and exclusion.

New Connections has run its course and a final progress report on developments in Ireland under the plan will be published shortly. A previous progress report was published in 2004⁴.

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, April 2004: <http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/index.asp?locID=181&docID=1773>

A third Government Action Plan is currently being prepared. This will build on achievements under the *New Connections* action plan, the work of the Information Society Commission, and will also reflect the wider international developments such as the EU's i2010 strategy⁵.

Chief Information Officer

The term Chief Information Officer (CIO) is not used within Irish Government for those with overall responsibility for IT. Each Government Department has a head of IT. In addition, the Director of the **Centre for Management and Organisation Development** (CMOD) at the Department of Finance; the Head of Technology Policy at CMOD; and, the Director of the **Information Society Policy Unit** (ISPU) at the Department of the Taoiseach have key central roles relating to IT across Government.

⁵ i2010: http://europa.eu.int/information_society/eeurope/i2010/i2010/index_en.htm

3 Organisational Issues

Integrated Service Delivery and Cross-Government Collaboration

The **Information Society Policy Unit** (ISPU)⁶ of the Department of the Taoiseach has overall responsibility for developing, coordinating and driving implementation of the Information Society and eGovernment agenda.

The **Centre for Management and Organisation Development** (CMOD), a division of the Department of Finance, has a central role in cross-government collaboration and eGovernment strategy. CMOD's role includes: determining technology policy; initiating cross-government systems and initiatives, and assisting Departments' participation in those; approving and monitoring ICT spending across Government Departments; and, facilitating peer reviews of large ICT projects.

Measurement of Progress in E-Government

Progress in eGovernment is not measured separately as such. This is being considered as part of the new Government Action Plan due later this year.

Global Initiatives in Training, Funding and Procurement

Training

A new approach to training of new recruits (internal or external) to ICT in the Civil Service is being proposed. At present, ICT staff are recruited from general service grades. Applicants for ICT posts are required to undergo aptitude testing and an interview. If successful and placed highly enough on the subsequent panel, an applicant is recruited and then trained for their new role 'on the job' and through specific non-certified training courses in the main.

It is proposed that a *certified* approach to training should be employed for new entrants to ICT posts from hereon in. Such training would effectively be a "gateway" to an appointment in an ICT area, i.e., it would be part of the process of proving whether somebody was suitable to work in an ICT area rather than a comprehensive skilling of an individual to work in ICT.

The aim of a new training programme would be to provide a thorough and uniform introduction in computing to students with sufficient aptitude but probably little or no previous formal ICT training and to provide a mechanism for measuring a student's general suitability for assignment to an ICT post. The training programme would form a

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

foundation for students' further professional development throughout their employment in the ICT area.

Funding

Funding for ICT projects comes from each Department's allocation through the annual budget process. 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 initiatives for which they would hope to receive funding. Following completion of the estimates and determination of the actual allocations, monies are devolved into individual Departmental votes.

A separate fund, **The Information Society Fund**, (ISF) was put in place in 1999 by Government for specific eGovernment related projects, separate from funding that came from the normal budget of a Department.

The purpose of the ISF was to enable prioritisation of objectives set out in the Government's first Action Plan on the Information Society. The Fund was envisaged primarily as a fast track mechanism to resource public sector initiatives, which advanced the information society agenda.

The ISF finished its remit at the end of 2005 as eGovernment is now considered mainstream and therefore funded through the normal budgetary process.

An **eInclusion Fund** is available to support the participation of late adopters of technology in an inclusive Information Society. The purpose of the Fund is to target those who are at greatest risk of being left behind in the move to the Information Society by exploiting the potential of technology to foster communities of common interest through on-line services and networks.

Funding Control

There is a section within the Department of Finance called the **IT Control Section** from the Centre for Management and Organisation Development (CMOD). IT Control Section's primary responsibility is the implementation of a streamlined delegation regime that devolves the responsibility and accountability for ICT related expenditures to Departments and Offices. This is mainly achieved through implementing and monitoring Department of Finance Circular 16/97, which deals with delegated sanction arrangements for ICT related expenditure in Government Departments and Offices. These arrangements link ICT planning and ICT projects with the Strategic Management Initiative⁷ (SMI) Business Planning process, and create a formal mechanism for identifying the costs of (a) developing the ICT elements of SMI Business Projects and (b) maintaining modern ICT infrastructure and associated office and back office systems, i.e. the cost of maintaining existing services.

⁷ SMI is a Public Service modernisation programme: <http://www.bettergov.ie/>

The Section works to an annual plan which requires Departments and Offices to submit summary ('Part I') returns to IT Control Section by end-November and more detailed ('Part II') returns by end-April. As part of this process, organisations are required to provide:

- Details of actual expenditure in the previous year and projected future expenditure;
- Succinct impacts statements for new business projects; and,
- Confirmation that formal project management and procurement procedures are in place and that the organisation has a current Strategy Statement.

The returns are formally reviewed and discussed with organisations on an annual basis.

In addition, the Section has regular contact with organisations throughout the year on ICT matters including, inter alia, discussions on:

- Procurement practices and Value for Money;
- Software procurement and licensing; and,
- Project management and governance.

Procurement

The general public procurement process is governed by national and European Union (EU) rules. The main body of existing guidance on public procurement in Ireland is set out in the booklet *Public Procurement Guidelines*⁸, which was drafted by the National Public Procurement Policy Unit (NPPPU) of the Department of Finance.

eProcurement

The National Public Procurement Policy Unit (NPPPU) within the Department of Finance was established in June 2002 to formulate policy; disseminate advice and best practice experience on procurement to the Irish public sector in order to improve its procurement capacity; and, deliver the Government's eProcurement strategy.

The Department of Finance launched an **etenders** website⁹ in 2001. Since then the etenders site has become the central source of information on public sector procurement advertisement and tenders. The etenders facility has become an invaluable resource for the whole procurement community both public and private and is provided free-of-charge to all registered users. The etenders facility currently provides centralised access to tender notices and to procurement opportunities with the Irish public sector through a single internet gateway. The site is one of the key dissemination mechanisms for Irish public sector tender opportunities, including those advertised in the Official Journal of the

⁸ http://www.etenders.gov.ie/guides/guides_list.aspx?Type=2

⁹ <http://www.etenders.gov.ie/>

European Union (OJEU). Tender documentation is being made available to suppliers directly by public bodies via the site's online tender publication facility. 95.2% of Ireland's OJEU notices are now submitted electronically (via e-Sender) to the European Journal. This is the second highest rate in Europe just behind Finland at 95.6%.

Frameworks

The revised EU public procurement Directive covering procurement procedures of public sector bodies [2004/18/EC – Article 32] provides for “framework agreements” under which contracting authorities enter into arrangements with suppliers or service providers to supply goods or services under agreed conditions for a period of time.

The Centre for Management and Organisation Development in the Department of Finance established an ICT Framework Steering Group to devise and implement aggregated procurement for ICT goods and services across the public sector. The group consists of representatives from Department of Finance (CMOD & NPPPU); Department of Social & Family Affairs; Department of Agriculture; Department of Education; Revenue Commissioners; Health Service Executive; and the Local Government Computer Services Board (LGCSB). The first framework procurement was for PCs from which five vendors qualified to participate. This framework is in place since May 2006 and is open to all non-commercial public sector organisations in Ireland. Additional framework procurements are under way.

4. 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.

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 Policy Unit (ISPU)**¹⁰ of the Department of the Taoiseach, which has overall responsibility for developing, coordinating and driving implementation of the Information Society and eGovernment agenda; and
- The **Information Society Commission (ISC)**¹¹. This was an independent advisory body that drew on high-level representation from business, the social partners, and Government itself, and reported directly to the Taoiseach. It provided independent expert advice to Government, and monitored Ireland's progress as an Information Society. The ISC concluded its work in December 2004. The new Government Action Plan may determine other structures.

¹⁰ Information Society Policy Unit: <http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie/index.asp?locID=175>

¹¹ Information Society Commission: <http://www.isc.ie/>

These 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 eGovernment. 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).

In order to support implementation there is also a specific agency, the **Reach Agency**¹² that was established in 1999 to develop a strategy for the integration of public services and the implementation of eGovernment. The Reach Agency is responsible for the Public Services Broker (an infrastructure that serves as a single point-of-contact for accessing all public services, connecting different administrations) and other pieces of the national eGovernment infrastructure.

EGovernment strategy is developed through a formal process, starting with proposals made by representative bodies. Policy matters are researched by ISPU and by CMOD, and then draft papers are 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.

Primary Methods of Providing Information and Services to Citizens

Information and services to citizens are provided in a number of ways including: by telephone call, through public offices, by home or business visit, by printed media, and, by electronic media (web, email, mobile telephone, radio and television). The precise method depends on the information or service. In many cases, information and services are provided by multiple methods. The following are examples of information and services provided electronically via the Internet:

¹² Reach Agency: <http://www.reach.ie/>

OASIS

Oasis¹³ (Online Access to Services, Information and Support) provides citizens information online relating to the social and civil rights of everyone in Ireland. Oasis provides information a citizen may need at various stages in their lives:

- Becoming a parent
- Starting school in Ireland
- Leaving school in Ireland
- You and Your Job
- Getting married in Ireland or abroad
- Relationships in Ireland
- Somewhere to live
- Moving country
- Retiring from work in Ireland
- When someone dies in Ireland

Citizens Information is also provided by the Citizens Information phone service or at locally based Citizens Information Centres.

BASIS

The BASIS¹⁴ (Business Access to State Information and Services) website was developed in order to provide business with a single access point to all Government information and services. It was established in 2000 as part of the Irish Government Action Plan 'Implementing the Information Society in Ireland'. Information on the website is structured around the "life events" of a business:

- Starting a Business
- Funding
- Legal and Regulatory
- Business Operations and Trade
- Premises and Environment
- Employment Issues
- Taxation
- Returns and Other Obligations
- Innovation and Product Development
- Expanding your Business
- Government Tenders
- Closing/Selling a Business
- How do I?

¹³ <http://www.oasis.gov.ie/>

¹⁴ <http://www.basis.ie/>

Reach

reachservices¹⁵ provides secure access to public sector information and online, interactive services. It also features a wide range of application forms for public services delivered by various public sector bodies - Government Departments, State Agencies, Local Authorities and the Health Sector.

Information about a service typically includes:

- links to all public sector information on a particular service or resource
- links to online interactive services offered by public sector organisations
- links to service application forms
- supporting documents required
- contact details for further information
- related services

Services are organised in three ways: by subject, by organisation and via an “A to Z” listing.

Revenue Online (ROS)

The Revenue Online Service (ROS) is the Irish Revenue's interactive facility offering business and individuals a quick, secure and cost effective method to manage their Tax Affairs online.

ROS¹⁶, which has been in place for a number of years, enables **Self-Employed Individuals, Business and Practitioners** to view their own, or their client's, current position with Revenue for various taxes and levies, file tax returns and forms, and make payments for these taxes online in a variety of methods.

In 2006, Revenue¹⁷ introduced a full suite of services for **Employees** (PAYE - Pay as you earn). PAYE On-Line allows employees do most PAYE business on-line including:

- View their own tax record
- Claim a wide range of tax credits on-line
- Request a review of tax (balancing statement) for a particular year
- Claim a refund of tax including health expenses
- Share tax credits between themselves and their spouse
- Change their address and update other personal information

¹⁵ <https://www.reachservices.ie/>

¹⁶ <http://www.ros.ie/>

¹⁷ <http://www.revenue.ie/>

Mobhaile

mobhaile is a website based around a citizen's community, interests and life. See under "Use of Innovative Technologies to Serve Citizens" later for more details.

Government Departments/ Offices and Agencies

As well as information being available to the citizen via the services described above, Government Departments and associated Offices and Agencies also have their own websites. A central listing is available at the Government of Ireland website¹⁸.

Use of Innovative Technologies to Serve Citizens

mobhaile

mobhaile [<http://www.mobhaile.ie>] is a website based around a citizen's community, interests and life. It has been designed and developed by the Local Government Computer Services Board (LGCSB)¹⁹ and was supported by the Information Society Fund. ["mo bhaile" is an Irish language phrase that translates into English as "my home" or "my town"].

mobhaile helps to build ICT capacity in the Community and Voluntary sector - by helping community groups to set themselves up online. It allows groups to work together, to share information and facilities, to create locally derived content, and allows participants to include themselves, by engaging with issues and activities of interest to them.

On mobhaile.ie citizens can:

- search for businesses, services, things to do and places to visit
- locate places on the map
- send SMS texts and eCards
- register business/service/group details if not on already on mobhaile.ie
- save previous searches and location for future use on the site

Mobile Telephone – Short Messaging Service

A number of Departments/Offices provide services using the mobile telephone short message service (SMS). For example:

- **Department of Agriculture and Food**
Given the penetration of mobile phones among its farming customers, the Department of Agriculture and Food²⁰ focuses on Short Messaging Service (SMS)

¹⁸ <http://www.gov.ie/>

¹⁹ <http://www.lgcsb.ie/>

²⁰ <http://www.agriculture.gov.ie/>

or text messaging as a key channel for its farming customers. In addition, the Department provides a facility on its website for users to register for topics they are interested in and as a result receive updates by SMS (as well as or instead of by email) when information relevant to their chosen subjects is published on the website.

- **Revenue**

Revenue provides a Short Messaging Service which enables an individual claim a number of tax credits; change their address; order certain forms and leaflets; and, check the progress of any written contact. Using this service requires prior registration with Revenue.

News Feeds/Syndication

Many Government Departments/Offices and Agencies have introduced information feeds on their web sites. Some examples include:

- The **Department of Communications, Marine and Natural Resources**, which uses an RSS feed for press releases²¹;
- The **Department of Finance**, which used RSS for information about the 2006 national budget²²;
- **OASIS** (Online Access to Services, Information and Support) – which is an Irish eGovernment website that provides Citizens Information online – has a feed for the latest topical information on its site²³;
- The **Central Statistics Office** has a number of different feeds on a range of statistical information²⁴; and
- The **Department of Social and Family Affairs** uses RSS to flag changes to website content²⁵.

²¹ <http://www.dcmnr.gov.ie/Press+Releases>

²² <http://www.budget.gov.ie/2006/>

²³ http://www.oasis.gov.ie/oasis_rss_feed.html

²⁴ <http://www.cso.ie/rss/rss.htm>

²⁵ http://www.welfare.ie/syndication/general_rss.xml

5. Other Issues

Identity Management

The Centre for Management and Organisation Development in the Department of Finance, is working on an identity management policy in conjunction with a number of Departments and agencies including:

- Central Statistics Office,
- Department of Foreign Affairs,
- Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform,
- Department of Social and Family Affairs,
- Department of Health and Children,
- Health Service Executive,
- Revenue, and
- Department of the Taoiseach.

The purpose is to develop a framework to enhance the operational integrity and effectiveness of identity needs in the public service in Ireland while protecting the privacy of personal data.

Miscellaneous selection of eGovernment Web sites in Ireland

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/
Patents Office – online look-up	http://www.patentoffice.ie/eRegister/PTRegNr.asp
National Training and Employment Authority (FAS)	http://www.fas.ie/
Central Statistics Office (CSO)	http://www.cso.ie/

The General Register Office	http://www.groireland.ie/
Driving Test applications on-line	http://www.drivingtest.ie/
Civil Service job applications on-line	https://www.publicjobs.ie/