



The Centre
for Effective
Services



Partnerships, Profile, People

CES Strategy 2022-2026

Improving lives through evidence-informed policy and practice



Our vision in CES is to be a trusted partner in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of public policies and services.

Foreword

Our new strategy builds on strong foundations since CES was first established in 2008. The organisation was set up to support a growing need for evidence to inform the development of improved policy and services for children on the island of Ireland. CES has now become a unique entity that supports government, agencies, and funded services to use evidence and effective implementation strategies to achieve better outcomes across a wide range of human services.

Like many organisations, the past three years have brought challenges, change and uncertainty for CES. As a charity in receipt of a significant philanthropic grant, an important focus for our work now is sustainability. We have been successful in expanding our work, securing new contracts in health, justice, education and services for children and young people. These are areas of work close to our core values. They are connected, interdependent, and the pandemic has revealed how essential these services are for improving our health, wellbeing and lives.

Our vision in CES as set out in this strategy is to be a trusted partner in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of public policies and services. We publish this strategy with renewed clarity and confidence about how CES can support policymakers and service providers as the process of rebuilding and strengthening our public services begins. We have identified three strategic priorities in achieving our vision – **partnerships**, **profile** and **people**. We will continue to grow our partnerships with government departments, agencies and, community and voluntary organisations. We will raise the profile of our work and demonstrate how we add value. The CES People Plan will prioritise attracting and retaining the skills, innovation and values of our people which make our service offer unique.

This strategy consolidates our work to date in two key areas. Firstly, our belief that evidence has a critical role in informing policy and practice for good outcomes, and ultimately, people's lives. As evidence moved centre stage during the pandemic, debates about the standards, forms, producers and application of evidence were reignited. While public support for evidence and science may be strong now, it can never be taken for granted. Experience around the world suggests that public trust in the policymaking process will be a priority for governments in Ireland and Northern Ireland over the coming years. We are committed to supporting and enabling the use of evidence in policy and practice and it remains at the heart of our service offer.

Despite increased knowledge and understanding about what it takes to put evidence into policy and practice, there is still an implementation gap. Our deep theoretical knowledge of implementation science at CES has been strengthened by our experience of its application in the real world, for example our work to support community and voluntary service providers in Northern Ireland and supporting implementation of a new child health programme in Ireland. Disciplines such as change management, project management and realist evaluation provide additional tools and processes to our skillset to help our partners in implementing and managing change across public services.

This strategy is the result of an extensive process of engagement with our staff and Board, and we thank them for their energy and commitment to CES. We extend our gratitude to our funders and partners for their support and look forward to our continued collaboration over the next four years.



Dr Inez Bailey, CEO



Dr Jack Golden, Chair

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Centre for Effective Services

January 2022

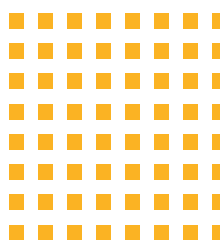
CES is focused on the future, and we are ready to action ambitious, sustainable plans to support service providers and policymakers in delivering improved outcomes and value for people living in our communities.





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Introduction

This is the Centre for Effective Services' (CES) third organisational strategy. The strategy provides a guide to sustain our growth and expertise and articulates our essential purpose and the impact we intend to have. We have described the difference we want to make in terms of outcomes for people living and working in our communities, for the organisations we work with, for our team and for CES as an organisation. We have identified strategic priorities, which together with the outcomes and the needs of our partners will guide our annual planning and objective setting process at an organisation, team and individual level.

The strategy has been formulated in a time of great change and disruption locally, nationally, and internationally. It draws on a strategic review undertaken in Autumn 2020 and an all-staff engagement process through 2021. The needs of our stakeholders have been considered as CES looks to the future as an essential partner in the rebuilding and strengthening of public services in Ireland and Northern Ireland. The strategy process has been an opportunity for CES to reflect and renew.

About CES


CES is a not-for-profit, all-island organisation established in 2008. At CES we believe that Ireland and Northern Ireland should and can have excellent public services and we want to play our part in making that a reality.



We are committed to our **purpose**, that is, *to improve the lives of people on the island of Ireland by supporting the implementation of excellent public services through evidence-informed policy and practice.*



Our **vision** in CES is to be a trusted partner in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of public policies and services.



The range and complexity of our work continues to evolve. CES was originally set up to enable good quality research and evidence among policy makers and practitioners, while also working to provide that evidence. An early focus on children and young people is still core to our work and we are committed to delivering tangible improvements for the wellbeing of children, young people and families. CES has expanded its reach in health, social care, housing, justice, and education. Services supporting older people and mental health are growing areas of work for us. We work with an increasing number of government departments, statutory agencies, community and voluntary providers and international organisations. Cross-departmental, cross-sectoral collaboration is vital for the future. CES has built up expertise in this area combined with a track record in leadership development, building capability and capacity for change.

We have maintained a focus on addressing social problems whilst flexing our approaches to support our partners and lead through the challenges of Covid-19. In doing so, we believe that CES has proved itself an agile partner. Originally funded through philanthropic and state grants, CES is increasingly funded through income generation for the provision of expert support aligned with our charitable status.

CES adds value and provides opportunity for partners through its local and global connections, perspectives, development and funding opportunities, including within the European Union. Our focus is on understanding the common experiences and needs of people to better evidence, design and deliver improved services.

CES is focused on the future, and we are ready to action ambitious, sustainable plans to support service providers and policymakers in delivering improved outcomes and value for people living in our communities.

Our Team

The CES team combines expertise relevant to our work, including implementation and change management; research; evaluation and evidence synthesis; policy and practice; knowledge and communications; finance and governance. Our work is made possible by the commitment of our staff and their continued knowledge and skills development. We operate a twelve-month professional development programme for recent graduates interested in implementing evidence-informed services, and the translation of evidence into policy and practice.



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Values

In carrying out our work the following values matter to us:

				
Collaboration: We value working collaboratively with organisations and people living in our communities, listening to and engaging with a range of voices because problem solving and making change happen takes collective effort.	Creativity: We recognise that creativity comes in many forms and we work in innovative ways to support, challenge and enable alternative ways of planning, doing and reflecting.	Equity: We believe that all people living in our communities deserve effective public services, whether delivered by statutory agencies or the community and voluntary sector.	Evidence: We appreciate evidence in all its forms, from the rigour of research to the expertise of policy makers and practitioners, and the experiences of people living in our communities.	Learning: We prize opportunities to expand and build upon our knowledge and ways of working to ensure excellence and quality in all that we do. We endeavour to share our learning creatively, internally and externally.

Context

Looking ahead we envisage a period of ongoing challenge and uncertainty, heightened by the growing climate crisis, Brexit and the legacy of the pandemic. Policymakers will look to mitigate the longer-term negative impacts on public services, whilst we adapt as a society to living with Covid-19.


Complex social problems have been exacerbated by the pandemic, including mental health, social care for older people, domestic violence, poverty, homelessness, drug and alcohol misuse, child welfare and healthcare waiting lists. These problems are recognised in strong policy narratives around the growth in inequality and the importance of diversity and inclusion.

The characteristics and diversity of the population are also changing (age profile, migration, multi-culturalism, economic status, etc.) This has a corresponding impact on policy priorities, service design and delivery.

Funding for all public services has been constrained by large budget deficits, the prioritisation of crisis-related spend and an even greater emphasis on value for money. The community and voluntary sector is experiencing increased regulation and some redefinition of roles in a time of increased state intervention. Other global economic trends around taxation, inflation, green policies and the unknown extent and timing of economic recovery add to the uncertainty.

Digital technology has enabled developments in remote working, online meetings and eLearning. Service changes, such as virtual GP appointments, have been rapidly implemented at scale due to technological advancement. Whilst this has brought huge benefits, it has also presented new challenges, from sustainability to exacerbated isolation and a digital divide.

Climate change has moved towards the top of the global political and public agenda with heightened public awareness and increased anxiety. Sustainability in service design and provision will be an essential standard for public services.



Decision-making and implementation informed by science and evidence has come to the fore. However, the overproduction of data along with a growth in misinformation and fake news has impacted public confidence. The scale and speed at which research and evidence is being produced presents challenges for policymakers in decision-making. It is critical that trust is rebuilt with the public and that there is transparency around the evidence used and the policymaking process. New approaches to public engagement will be required to co-design and improve services based on sound evidence.

CES brings expertise and independence to assure the integrity and quality of the data and evidence from which policy is formulated and which inform decisions impacting peoples' lives.

Policy Environments

Both governments on the island are operating in a challenging context. Ireland has a multi-partner coalition government since June 2020. The Northern Ireland Assembly restored power sharing in government in January 2020 following a three-year suspension.

Each government^{1,2} has developed an ambitious Programme for Government aimed at improving public wellbeing and economic and public service recovery and reform. The programmes provide a policy context across the areas in which CES has been and will continue to be actively engaged.

Brexit and the EU-UK transition has given governments and the public cause for concern. CES fulfils an important role as an organisation operating across Ireland and Northern Ireland, continuing to hold and develop relationships and collaborative opportunities across the island, as well as bringing an international perspective on best practice.

There are strategic frameworks in place for improving the wellbeing of children, young people and families.^{3,4} A central theme of these and other frameworks is implementation and an emphasis on government departments, other agencies and stakeholders working together to deliver social change.

Both governments have strong roadmaps for transforming health and social care services.⁵ Both care systems continue to struggle with long waiting lists exacerbated by Covid-19 and service capacity pressures.

All policy areas are impacted by the need to rebuild the economy, restore and transform services, deliver value and address the major challenge of climate change. To meet these and other challenges, both governments have committed to reform and renewal of their civil services.^{6,7} There is an emphasis on whole-of-government approaches and collaboration.



1 Programme for Government: Our Shared Future, Department of the Taoiseach, Oct. 2020 (including the Shared Island Initiative).
2 Programme for Government (PFG), Northern Ireland Executive, 2021.
3 Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures, the National Policy Framework for Children and Young People, 2014 – 2020, Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth.
4 Children and Young Peoples Strategy, 2020-2030, Northern Ireland Executive.
5 Committee on the Future of Healthcare: Sláintecare, 2018.
6 Civil Service Renewal 2030 – Building on our Strengths.
7 Capacity and Capability in the Northern Ireland Civil Service, NIAO, 2020.

Outcomes

People living in our communities

Short term

People...

- ▶ are increasingly engaged in policy and service design and implementation.
- ▶ inform our approaches and processes.

Long term

People...

- ▶ have better designed and better implemented public services, which improve their lives.

Organisations we support

Short term

Our partners...

- ▶ are better supported to achieve their outcomes through our expertise in evaluation, service design, implementation science, programme and change management.
- ▶ have greater capacity to design and deliver their services.
- ▶ are better able to build connections within and across organisations.

Long term

Our partners...

- ▶ are more skilled and effective because of our collaborations.
- ▶ trust and value CES.

Our team

Short term

Our team...

- ▶ know they are valued and are engaged in transparent decision-making processes.
- ▶ reflect, develop and evolve their skills.
- ▶ have opportunities for progression and work that is challenging and rewarding.

Long term

Our team...

- ▶ experience CES as an attractive place to work. We are contemporary, diverse and competitive in what we offer.

CES as an organisation

Short term

CES...

- ▶ is better known for its expertise, service offering and the work we do.
- ▶ is a learning organisation using emerging approaches and methodologies in our work.
- ▶ has a more diverse stream of income sources.
- ▶ policies and practices are more environmentally conscious.

Long term

CES...

- ▶ is financially sustainable, which allows us to continue to develop innovative approaches to deliver on our purpose and vision.
- ▶ has a strong reputation and we are recognised for our skills and expertise.

Strategic Priorities and Pillars

We have identified ten strategic priorities in achieving our purpose. These priorities come under three pillars, Partnerships, Profile and People, and we commit to them over the lifetime of this strategy.

Vision

Our vision in CES is to be a trusted partner in the design, development, implementation and evaluation of public policies and services.

Purpose

To improve the lives of people on the island of Ireland by supporting the implementation of excellent public services through evidence-informed policy and practice.



Pillar 1 Partnerships

We will

Continue to develop and grow strategic relationships with governments and their agencies in Ireland and Northern Ireland, securing additional large programmes of work to support their delivery of outcomes.

Develop a strategy for working with the Community, Voluntary and Social Enterprise (CVSE) sector.

Enable the voice of people and communities to be heard in the work that we do, by investing in developing our people and testing methodologies, best practice and tools.



Pillar 2 Profile

We will

Clearly communicate our role, purpose and service offer to build visibility and expand our work within Northern Ireland, Ireland and Europe.

Evolve our service offer and our operating model, underpinned by an enhanced CES' quality assurance system and our use of new digital technologies.

Scope effective change methodologies, tools and resources to augment and improve our service and product offer.

Develop and implement new measures to better demonstrate achievement of CES' outcomes.



Pillar 3 People

We will

Develop a coordinated People Plan with an emphasis on attracting, retaining, engaging and rewarding our team.

Review and action relevant organisational policies with a view to:

- strengthening diversity, equity and inclusion and
- ensuring that in our operations we are as environmentally sustainable as possible.

Develop and implement a new Finance and Business Plan in order to sustainably manage, expand and diversify our income sources and control costs.

Our Service Offer

CES works with agencies, government departments and service providers throughout the island of Ireland, in areas such as education, health, justice, children and young people and social services. Our service offer aims to improve the lives of people on the island of Ireland by supporting the implementation of excellent public services through evidence-informed policy and practice. Our team provides expertise, support and services for public policy and services.





We have maintained a focus on addressing social problems whilst flexing our approaches to support our partners and lead through the challenges of Covid-19.

This strategy reaffirms our commitment to supporting the work of government departments and organisations to improve outcomes for people using services in health, education and justice, throughout their lives.





**The Centre
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effectiveservices.org



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