



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland

Organisational Capability Review Report

Central Statistics Office (CSO)

July 2024

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The purpose of the Organisational Capability Review (OCR) Programme is to facilitate an independent examination of the current and desirable future capability and performance of an organisation. More specifically, Organisational Capability Reviews employ a defined and robust assessment to identify the critical gaps, opportunities and specific measures needed to enable State organisations to strengthen their capability to meet the challenges of the future, and deliver public services underlined by the core concepts of resilience, versatility and sustainability.

This Organisational Capability Review Report sets out the key findings and recommendations arising from a capability review of the Central Statistics Office (CSO). The CSO was established in 1949 as the national statistical agency of Ireland, operating as an office attached to the Department of the Taoiseach. The Statistics Act 1993 established the organisation as an independent statutory body in the Irish Civil Service, clearly setting out its role as the producer and co-ordinator of national official statistics, while its role in the development, production and dissemination of European statistics was set out in the legal framework established through EU Regulation 223/2009.

The CSO is operating in a highly dynamic, fast-paced and complex society where new opportunities, challenges and barriers to delivery are constantly emerging. It is within this context of a 'data revolution', where new technologies are leading to an exponential increase in the volume, speed and types of data available, that the CSO must continue to transform and modernise to grasp the potential of this rapidly changing data ecosystem. While a more incremental approach to change has enabled the organisation to address key issues in the past, the growing complexity in areas such as global migration; integration; digitisation; climate; innovation; housing; health and cybersecurity all demand a more radical, comprehensive, future-focused strategic approach if the CSO is to remain well positioned alongside its international counterparts. In developing such an approach, the CSO will be required to continue to demonstrate robust independent leadership, and apply strategic thinking and planning, supported by the National Statistics Board (NSB), to meet the future data needs of its range of customers and stakeholders, both public and private.

The CSO has demonstrated a range of areas of strength, particularly across the realms of organisational leadership; innovation; staff engagement and collaboration, all underlined by a very positive reputation both nationally and internationally. As is the case with most organisations, there are, of course, also areas requiring focus and development, so that the CSO can position itself as a National Statistical Institute (NSI) of the future, prepared and equipped to meet the challenges and opportunities arising in the evolution of the statistical and data landscape over the next decade and beyond. In this regard, the key areas which the Management Board of the CSO should now prioritise are:

1. An Enhanced Leadership role in the Data Infrastructure Arena
2. The Organisation's People and Skills
3. Corporate Supports and Governance

1. AN ENHANCED LEADERSHIP ROLE IN THE DATA INFRASTRUCTURE ARENA

In the current post-pandemic era of significant change, the CSO must demonstrate the capability to deliver on its core business as the provider and co-ordinator of official statistics, informing decision-making for the private and public sectors and society as a whole, and as a part of the system that produces data and insights on which government policy and strategy is based. It is without doubt that the

CSO has implemented significant improvements over the past decade in particular. However, the organisation must now also demonstrate the capability to move into a greater leadership role, thinking and planning strategically in order to anticipate and respond to future needs of the data infrastructure in Ireland.

In progressing this leadership role, the following areas require focus:

(i) More Proactive Leadership on the National Data Infrastructure (NDI) and NDI+: The CSO should become more appropriately proactive in using its powers under the legislation to secure the full adoption of the National Data Infrastructure (NDI) across the Civil and Public Service, in order to solidify its data leadership and data stewardship role; continue to improve data quality and standards; and pursue opportunities for greater interoperability across the system. This will involve the promotion of data standards as an asset rather than an imposition on Public Service organisations. It will also be fundamentally important in supporting the CSO as it rolls out the NDI+, which will include the unique identifiers of the NDI in addition to common standards, rules and guidelines to govern the classification, storage and management of data. Key to this work will be further and deeper engagement across Government to ensure clarity on the role of the CSO in the drafting and implementation of national data and statistical strategies.

(ii) Transition to a Digital Census: The forthcoming transition from the traditional paper-based to digital-first Census represents both a significant challenge and a major opportunity for the CSO. In progressing and leading this major initiative, the CSO will be required to demonstrate high-level strategic thinking and foresight to achieve the buy-in of the general population, supported by a robust project management plan, adequate resourcing and access to experienced ICT and communications specialists.

(iii) Access to Privately Held Data: EU Regulation 223/2009 was amended in 2023 to create a process to facilitate a legal right of access to privately held data for National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) for the first time. This marks a highly significant change in the CSO's operating environment - it will hugely impact the work programme of the organisation into the future, while also bringing heightened risks, not least in the cybersecurity realm. The scale of the challenges involved in implementing this amended regulation cannot be overstated. Consequently, the CSO needs to ensure that it is strategically positioned and adequately resourced to lead on this reform, taking its place alongside its European counterparts.

(iv) Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS): The CSO should seek to immediately review the current IGSS programme, before expanding further the reach of the programme across the Civil and Public Service. In doing so, the full potential of the programme should be realised through ensuring that each host organisation is adequately strategically prepared to accept one or more IGSS secondees. The CSO should also ensure that all IGSS Memos of Understanding (MOUs) are aligned with the CSO's strategic objectives and are subject to annual review; that more experienced rather than newly recruited staff are seconded; and ensuring greater collaboration with host organisations so that IGSS staff are appropriately placed in Strategic Policy Units. Such Units should facilitate collaborative working between IGSS staff and colleagues such as IGEES and research staff engaged in the policy development process. The matter of the appropriate, strategic placement of IGSS staff in host organisations should be addressed by the CSO Director General at the most senior management fora available, supported by similar engagement by Management Board members with colleagues across the sector.

(v) Strategic Engagement with Policy Development Leaders: Key to the leadership role of the CSO in the data infrastructure arena in Ireland is the requirement to have earlier sight of emerging data needs in public policy and across wider society. This will necessitate structured engagement at CSO senior management level with policy development leaders, together with the development of opportunities for structured discussion and feedback from all external stakeholders. The CSO should also pursue the requirement for Government organisations to consider emerging statistical needs as a component of the three-year strategic planning process, followed by engagement with the CSO as appropriate. Finally, the three-year surveys conducted by the CSO with external stakeholders should have a forward-looking component, with external stakeholder engagement addressed in a new Communications Strategy.

2. THE ORGANISATION'S PEOPLE AND SKILLS

A skilled and motivated workforce is pivotal to driving an organisation's growth and development by lifting performance, capability and productivity. It is without doubt that people are the main asset of the CSO, a fact widely acknowledged across the full senior management cohort. The CSO has made significant strides over recent years in articulating this recognition of its people through the development of its People Strategy; support of equality, diversity and inclusion initiatives; coaching and mentoring programmes; and staff health and wellbeing developments. While recognising the positive impact of all of these initiatives, there are a number of areas that now require focus in order to support the organisation's human capital ambitions for the future:

(i) Whole of CSO Approach to Staffing: The staffing profile of the CSO is one whereby a professional/technical staff cohort is at the core and deemed mission-critical, supported by administrative and field staff grades. In any such situation of a core reliance on technical staff, care is required to ensure that the role and value of all staff cohorts is recognised and acknowledged equally, not least through learning and development opportunities; skills matching; skills management; and HRM supports. This work should also be supported by a reconsideration of the Culture and Values Review on the appointment of the new Director General to the organisation.

(ii) Recruitment and Retention: Recruitment for technical posts such as Statisticians is a challenge across the Civil and Public Service, not least when competing with often more appealing remuneration packages offered by the private sector and peer organisations in the public service. This is an issue keenly felt by the CSO, where the recruitment challenge is reported to be escalating. While the organisation is seeking to address this through direct recruitment campaigns on a rolling basis, more needs to be done to position the organisation as an employer of choice in order to address both recruitment and retention. In support of this work, the CSO should continue engagement with the Public Appointments Service (PAS) to review their current standalone recruitment strategy for some posts and explore the possibility of greater utilisation of the recruitment shared service. Other issues requiring consideration include: addressing career progression for technical staff whereby opportunities are made available for the development of generalist skills in addition to technical competencies; supporting technical staff to step up to leadership roles; the proactive pursuit of a STEM identity for the organisation that will highlight to emerging graduates the attractiveness of a career in statistics; and the finalisation of discussions on the 18-year duration of the Statistician pay-scale.

(iii) Strategic Workforce Planning: It is acknowledged at senior management level in the CSO that strategic workforce planning is a relatively recent area of focus within the organisation. The Management Board should maintain the momentum it has built in this area with a particular focus required on succession planning at all staff levels. Such strategic HRM planning should also be employed to address

the retirement cliff; recruitment and retention challenges; and issues specific to the Statistician grade, supported by the work of the recently established SMG Subgroup to Review the Statistician Grade. Central to progressing this approach across the organisation is the need for the CSO to also conduct a comprehensive strategic skills audit organisation-wide, to identify not just current skills needs but also new skills that will be required due to the expected evolution in the organisation's operating environment. A particular focus will be required on the areas of Artificial Intelligence (AI); Data Science; Machine Learning; HRM; Legal; ICT and Governance. Once completed, this work should be supported by the introduction of a Talent Management System to address skills management on an ongoing basis organisation-wide.

(iv) Management of the Field Staff Cohort: The current operational practices of the CSO warrant the employment of field staff or survey interviewers on a full-time and part-time basis. Given the particular nature of the field staff role, issues arise that require consideration such as competency requirements; performance management; health and safety considerations; and HRM engagement. Early consideration needs to be given to how the organisation's HRM function can manage these issues proactively.

3. CORPORATE SUPPORTS AND GOVERNANCE

In our post-pandemic environment, expectations for delivery of Government services have shifted dramatically, not least for the CSO, which as an organisation is widely viewed as having significantly raised its profile due to its proactive responses throughout the pandemic period. Given the role of the corporate and governance functions in safeguarding the excellence agenda set by CSO senior management over the coming period, the following issues require consideration:

(i) Cybersecurity: Cybersecurity is an area demanding continuing intense focus by the CSO given the risk to organisational reputation in the event of a cyberattack. The CSO has been designated an essential entity under the NIS2 Directive¹, which is currently being transposed into national legislation, and is also an active participant in the Irish Government Cyber Core Group, which meets regularly to collaborate and exchange information. The CSO continues to implement the National Cyber Security Centre of Ireland (NCSC) baseline standard requirements and has a Cybersecurity Risk Register and Cyber Incident Response Plan in place. Nevertheless, the organisation now needs to introduce an organisation wide dedicated Cybersecurity Strategy, informed by insights and learnings from other National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) who have already progressed work in this area. In support of this work, adequate resources must be in place and regularly reviewed to ensure maximum data security. To this end, further future focused engagement is required by the CSO with the Vote Team in the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDR) during the Estimates process, with detailed requirements for investment in cybersecurity clearly set out to ensure that the National Data Infrastructure is protected.

(ii) ICT Governance: An appropriately staffed and governed ICT function is mission-critical for the CSO given: the delivery agenda; the cybersecurity risk; the absolute need for the highest organisational reputation in data management and security; and the forthcoming transition to a digital-first Census of Population. The area of ICT governance is one requiring further focus by the organisation. While all major ICT projects are subject to oversight and monitoring by the Project Oversight Board (POB), specific ICT

¹ NIS2 is the EU-wide legislation on cybersecurity which updates the 2016 Network and Information Systems (NIS) Directive.

governance structures should be established through which ICT projects are proposed and approved and project delivery is monitored.

(iii) HRM Function: While the professional capacity of the HRM Unit in the CSO has been enhanced in recent years, ongoing attention to the area of strategic HRM is required. In supporting this work, continuing to increase the expertise and capability of the HRM team in strategic HR should be prioritised, with an Organisational Development (OD) exercise to review the capacity of the HRM team worthy of consideration. In addition, the acting capacity of the Head of HRM Function should be addressed as a matter of priority once operationally viable.

(iv) Communications Function: Given the importance of official statistics for Government at both a national and European level, together with the value placed by the public on the outputs of the CSO, not least the Census of Population, it is crucial that there is widespread public understanding and awareness of the role of the CSO and the contribution it makes across society. While significant work has been undertaken in improving the external communications function of the CSO over recent years, the organisation must strive to ensure that its message on role and value proposition is clearly transmitted across the full range of stakeholders, public and private. Of equal importance is the communication of that message to all staff. Accordingly, it is imperative that a unified communications function, encompassing both internal and external communications, is developed in the CSO to professionalise both functions and align all CSO communications from an operational and strategic perspective. This should be supported by the development of a comprehensive Communications Strategy encompassing the external and internal strategic objectives, supported by a Website Strategy and Social Media Strategy.

(v) Finance and Vote Issues: The current financial management system in the CSO urgently requires increased attention. This will necessitate immediate consideration of the timescale for the transition to the Civil Service Financial Management Shared Service (FMSS) and decisions at Management Board level regarding the implications of this timescale for the organisation and the consideration of possible urgent interim solutions. In addition, a more strategic approach to financial planning and reporting in the organisation should be pursued to ensure consistent optimum use of available resources.

This should be coupled with a forward-looking approach to engagement in the full Estimates process with DPENDR, supported by a transparent and future-focused perspective for the organisation. This will provide a firm foundation for the organisation's future strategic success within a clearly articulated framework for the organisation's medium-term to longer-term strategic objectives. While multi-annual commitments on current funding are currently not possible as part of the Estimates process, the CSO can nevertheless develop such a multi-annual perspective and share it with DPENDR to provide forward-looking visibility on the CSO's projected future current funding objectives. The multi-annual approach to capital funding will also provide a good foundation for addressing the CSO's ongoing infrastructural requirements.

Finally, the CSO should engage on a structured basis with the Vote Section in DPENDR to agree a high level framework document in relation to vote transfers and to facilitate other areas of collaborative work such as the fiscal related recommendations of the ESS Peer Review 2022.

CONCLUSION

The CSO operates in a rapidly changing, dynamic and complex environment, balancing multiple priorities across a national and European brief, with a multitude of stakeholders and customers, both public and

private. It is thereby of crucial importance that the organisation strives to consistently build organisational capability and embed a strong organisational culture of continuous improvement. Timely implementation of the recommendations set out in this report will support the CSO in meeting these objectives and will enable the organisation to position itself strategically and operationally for the challenges of the future.

The recommendations forming the basis for the CSO's Action Plan are set out at the end of each chapter in this report, differentiating between those assessed as critical and important.

INTRODUCTION

OVERVIEW OF THE CENTRAL STATISTICS OFFICE (CSO)

The Central Statistics Office (CSO) is an independent office of State that provides free, independent statistical information to support understanding, effective debate, and decision-making across government, business and society.

The CSO was established in 1949 as the national statistical agency of Ireland, operating as an office attached to the Department of the Taoiseach. Prior to this, statistics in Ireland were collated within a division of the Department of Industry and Commerce under the Statistics Act 1926². Having made significant progress in the production of national statistics during the 1950s and 1960s, Ireland's accession to the EEC in 1973 expanded the remit of the CSO significantly to meet both national and European statistical requirements.

The Statistics Act 1993³ established the CSO as an independent statutory body in the Irish Civil Service under the aegis of the Department of the Taoiseach, while EU Regulation (EC) 223/2009⁴ established the legal framework at EU level for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics. In 2017, the Government of Ireland adopted the 'Commitment on Confidence in Statistics', thus fulfilling obligations set out in EU Regulation 2015/759⁵ which amended Regulation 223/2009. In doing so, the government reconfirmed its commitment to guarantee the independence of the CSO; support the CSO in ensuring compliance with the European Statistics Code of Practice⁶; and support the development of the broader Irish Statistical System (ISS)⁷ under the stewardship of the CSO.

ORGANISATIONAL FUNCTIONS

The Statistics Act 1993 provides the statutory basis for the operation of the CSO, specifically for the "collection, compilation, extraction and dissemination for statistical purposes of information relating to economic, social and general activities and conditions in the State⁸." At a national level, CSO official statistics help to monitor economic and social progress, facilitate policy planning, and ensure people live in an informed society. It is therefore vital that statistics are produced in an independent and objective manner lest public trust is compromised. Accurate, relevant, and timely data is essential in order to deliver services and inform decision-making across a range of areas including the environment, health, welfare, migration and the economy in addition to the private sector. Data sources have continued to proliferate, and while speed and topicality are key in the contemporary news cycle, the fundamental principles of quality, accuracy and integrity at the heart of official statistics are a distinguishing factor of great significance in a world where fake news and disinformation are increasingly prevalent.

The Act, under Sections 10(2) and 10(3), further provides for the co-ordination role of the CSO, specifying that the CSO "shall have authority to co-ordinate official statistics compiled by public authorities" and "to assess the statistical potential of the records maintained by public authorities, and in conjunction with

² [Statistics Act 1926](#)

³ [Statistics Act 1993](#)

⁴ [Regulation \(EC\) No 223/2009 of the European Parliament](#)

⁵ [EU Regulation 2015/759](#)

⁶ [European Statistics Code of Practice](#)

⁷ [Irish Statistical System](#)

⁸ [Statistics Act 1993 Section 10](#)

them, to ensure that this potential is realised⁹”. Under Section 31,¹⁰ the Act requires that public bodies cooperate with any request from the CSO Director General to develop their “*recording methods and systems for statistical purposes*” where practicable, and that public bodies shall consult with the Director General if they propose to “*introduce, revise or extend*” any information system or a new survey.

In this coordination role, also termed data stewardship, the CSO provides leadership within the Irish Statistical System (ISS), including management of the Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS), which supports CSO Seconded Statisticians in Government Departments and Public Service organisations to promote the value of common data standards and the use of administrative data, in addition to contributing to policy development and evaluation (Section 2.2.1). In progressing this role, the CSO is leading on the development of the National Data Infrastructure (NDI), which promotes the use of the identifiers of Eircodes; Personal Public Service Numbers (PPSN); and Unique Business Identifiers across the Civil and Public Service to allow for the efficient collection, management and sharing of data while also positioning data as a strategic asset across the Irish data ecosystem. It is a priority for the CSO that the NDI will develop, through their stewardship, into the NDI+ which will include the unique identifiers of the NDI in addition to common standards, rules and guidelines to govern the classification, storage and management of data across the Civil and Public Service.

The Statistics Act 1993 also sets out the independence of the Director General of the CSO on statistical matters; the process of collection of information; the use of administrative records of public authorities for statistical purposes; and the protection of confidential information. Finally, the Act also established the National Statistics Board (NSB) on a statutory basis, with the primary function of guiding the strategic direction of the CSO. The NSB comprises eight members including the Director General of the CSO, who is an ex-officio member. All other members of the Board are appointed by the Taoiseach.

From a European perspective, Regulation 223/2009¹¹ on European Statistics provides the legal mandate for the CSO to “*co-ordinate official statistics compiled by public authorities.*” This Regulation was amended in 2023 to create a process to facilitate a legal right of access to privately held data for National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) for the first time. At a European level, CSO official statistics provide a consistent picture of Ireland’s performance across a range of indicators and facilitate comparisons between Ireland and other countries. EU legislation also provides for data stewardship by the CSO to lead and coordinate the compilation of official statistics to meet EU statistical requirements, with 60% of CSO statistical outputs¹² prescribed under EU law. The CSO subscribes fully to the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics¹³ and complies with the European Statistics Code of Practice¹⁴, providing leadership across the European and International data ecosystem through engagement and collaboration with international bodies such as Eurostat, the UN and other National Statistical Institutes (NSIs).

STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

The CSO articulates its strategic priorities in two primary documents - the long-term strategy ‘CSO 2030’¹⁵ and the Statement of Strategy 2020-2023¹⁶, currently being updated. The vision of the organisation is

⁹ [Statistics Act 1993 Section 10\(3\)](#)

¹⁰ [Statistics Act 1993 Section 31](#)

¹¹ [Regulation \(EC\) No. 223/2009 of the European Parliament](#)

¹² [Statistical Work Plan](#)

¹³ [UN principles of Official Statistics](#)

¹⁴ [European Statistics Code of Practice](#)

¹⁵ [CSO 2030](#)

¹⁶ [Statement of Strategy 2020-2023](#)

articulated as providing “independent insight for all” while its mission is to “describe Ireland, its people, economy, society and environment through verifiable data and accurate information while providing impartial insight”. The CSO is also guided by the strategic priorities of the National Statistics Board (NSB), as set out in their current strategy, ‘Strategic Priorities for Official Statistics 2021-2026’¹⁷.

ORGANISATIONAL STRUCTURE

Under the Statistics Act 1993, the Director General of the CSO is appointed by the President on the nomination of the Taoiseach. The Director General has sole responsibility in relation to professional statistical matters including statistical methodologies, professional standards, the contents of statistical releases and publications, and the timing and methods of publishing statistics. For administrative purposes a Minister of State in the Department of the Taoiseach is assigned as Minister with responsibility for the CSO. The organisation is structured across seven directorates:

1. Climate, Environment, Enterprises & Sustainability
2. Corporate Affairs
3. National Accounts & Prices Statistics
4. International Accounts, Trade & Government Finance Statistics
5. Social Statistics
6. Statistical System Co-ordination
7. Technology & Statistical Services

Each directorate is managed by an Assistant Director General (Assistant Secretary grade) and comprises one or more divisions managed by a Senior Statistician or a Principal Officer. The responsibilities of each directorate are set out in Table 1 below:

Table 1: Structure of the CSO by Directorate (at March 2024)

Climate, Environment, Enterprises & Sustainability	Enterprise Statistics Collection, Analysis & Results; Agriculture; Tourism & Transport; Climate & Energy; Enterprise Statistical Integration and Structural Outputs; Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs); Eco-System and Agricultural Accounts; Environment
Corporate Affairs	HRM; Finance; Communications & Dissemination; Facilities
National Accounts & Prices Statistics	National Accounts Data Collection & Quality; National Accounts Analysis & Globalisation; National Accounts Integration; National Accounts Large Cases Unit (LCU); Prices
International Accounts, Trade & Government Finance Statistics	Government Accounts Classifications; Government Accounts Compilations & Outputs; Balance of Payments (BOP) - Financial Sector; Balance of Payments - Analysis & Dissemination; International Trade
Social Statistics	Labour Market & Earnings; Income Consumption & Wealth (ICW); Crime & Social Analysis; Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) Survey & TALIS (Teaching and Learning International Survey); Social Data Design – Innovation; Social Data Collection; Housing; Census Data Collection; Census Processing & Dissemination; Census Administration
Statistical System Coordination	Statistical Systems Coordination Unit (SSCU); Irish Statistical System (ISS) Coordination & Horizontal Reports; Health, Wellbeing & Social Cohesion; Administrative Data Centre; Quality Management Support & Assurance (QMSA); ISS Department of Health; ISS Department of Education & Skills; ISS Department of Social Protection; ISS Department of Transport; ISS Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth*

¹⁷ [NSB Strategic Priorities for Official Statistics-2021-2026- Quality Information for all- Numbers Matter](#)

Technology & Statistical Services	Technology - Infrastructure; Technology – Data & Analytics Services; Technology - Data Collection; Digital Architecture & Cyber Security; Methodology; Life Events & Demography; Data Science
Director General	International Policy & Planning; Enforcement, Legal & Governance

* Departments in which a team of statisticians are seconded, managed by a Senior Statistician

CSO STAFFING

The CSO is based across three geographical locations:

- 1. Cork Office (HQ):** Cork is the CSO HQ in which the corporate support functions including HR, Finance, Communications, Enforcement, Legal & Governance and Technology are largely based. A number of operational areas including Social Data Collection, Labour Market, Income & Wealth, Health & Wellbeing, Life Events & Demography and the main Household and Enterprise Surveys are also managed in Cork.
- 2. Rathmines Office:** Work programmes comprising Macro Economic Statistics, Government Finance Statistics, Environment Statistics, Energy Statistics, Climate Statistics, National Accounts, Balance of Payments, International Trade Statistics, the Growing Up in Ireland Survey and the Large Cases Unit are all managed in the Rathmines Office in Dublin.
- 3. Swords Office:** The Census of Population is managed in the Swords Office.

The number of staff employed by the CSO expands and contracts in line with the work agenda in any given year. For example, in a Census data collection year, staff numbers increase by over 5,000 with the employment of temporary field staff¹⁸ to meet the business need. The CSO has both a permanent and temporary field force who are located throughout the country and collect household survey information. The number of staff employed by the CSO as of 31 March 2024 was 1,048 (971.89 FTE), including 120 Survey Interviewers, of which 105 were permanent and 15 were temporary. The staffing complement in the CSO includes general Civil Service grades in addition to Statisticians, Senior Statisticians, a Technology Team and Survey Interviewers.

A breakdown of staffing numbers by geographical location is set out in Table 2 below:

Table 2: Breakdown of CSO Staffing by Location (at 31 March 2024)

Location	Staff
Cork	591 (568.79 FTE)
Rathmines	205 (200.3 FTE)
Swords (Census)*	102 (99.6 FTE)
Field Staff (Household Surveys)	150 (103.2 FTE)
Total	1048 (971.89)

*Census staffing figures are cyclical and fluctuate based on the five-yearly Census of Population. Field staff data includes both permanent and temporary staff

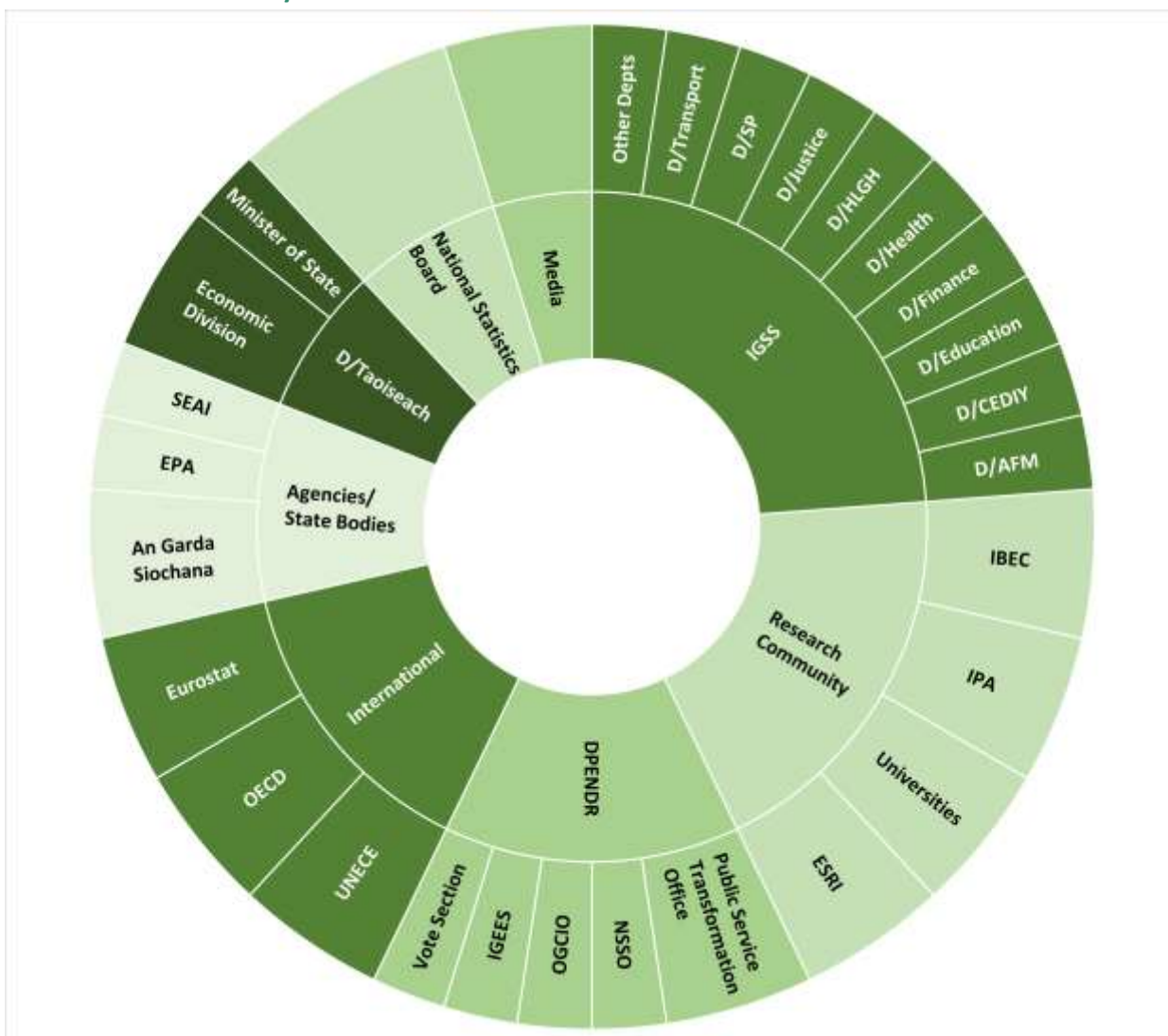
¹⁸ Unless otherwise stated, the reference to field staff in this report includes both survey coordinators and survey interviewers

The CSO also provides statistical expertise to the Civil and Public Service in the form of Seconded Senior Statisticians, Statisticians and Graduates through the Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS). These are resourced by the host Department rather than by the CSO. As at 31 March 2024 a total of 47 seconded positions were recorded across 17 organisations, comprising 5 Senior Statisticians; 35 Statisticians and 7 Graduates with an additional 8 Statistician and one Senior Statistician vacant positions. A full breakdown of locations of seconded staff and current vacancies is provided in Appendix 3.

EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS

The following chart illustrates the current reach of the CSO across its core delivery areas by reference to its range of primary external stakeholders:

Chart 1: External Primary Stakeholders of the CSO



OVERVIEW OF FUNDING

The CSO gross allocation for 2024 is €82.615 million which includes €3.1 million National Recovery and Resilience Plan (NRRP) funding for the provision on an online Census platform.

In addition to this, the CSO receives funding from other Public Service bodies for delivery of specified statistical work to compensate the organisation for any pay and non-pay costs incurred on such project-type activity. Funding in this category in 2024 will be received from sources including the Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science; the Department of Justice; the Office of

the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO); the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA); the Sustainable Energy Authority of Ireland (SEAI); and the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth. Currently the total budgeted funding for 2024 in respect of this work is approximately €750,000 but the funding received will reflect actual cost incurred.

Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, also awards grants to eligible bodies such as the CSO to support specific activities defined in Eurostat's statistical work programme. Such funding is to compensate the CSO for any pay and non-pay costs incurred on this EU work activity. Total budgeted grant funding for 2024 is approximately €165,000, however funding received will reflect actual staff hours and expenses incurred. In addition, the CSO receives some EU grant funding directly into Appropriations in Aid¹⁹. This grant funding element is expected to amount to €190,000 for 2024.

¹⁹ Departmental receipts which, with the agreement of the Dáil, need not be paid directly into the Exchequer, but which may be retained to defray the expenses of the Vote to which they refer.

PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

The Organisational Capability Review Programme commenced in 2016, on foot of Action 20 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan (2014)²⁰. This action provides for the implementation of a programme of organisational reviews, the purpose being: *“To embed a culture of regular and objective assessments of the capacity and capability of each Department to achieve its objectives and take the necessary action to close any gaps.”*

There have been eight reviews completed to date²¹. Each review is undertaken by the Organisational Capability Review Team, based in the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDR), supported by an External Review Panel (ERP), and assisted by a Departmental Liaison Officer (DLO) nominated from the organisation under review.

REVIEW METHODOLOGY

This review was guided by a structured standards based methodology template that measured the capability of the CSO against a series of best practice statements under the themes of:

- Leadership
- Strategy and Policymaking
- Delivery
- Business Support Functions



²⁰ [Civil Service Renewal Plan](#)

²¹ A Synthesis Paper was published in January 2021 outlining the main findings of the first six reviews undertaken and is available along with all of the reviews undertaken to date on gov.ie.

TERMS OF REFERENCE OF THE CSO REVIEW

The Terms of Reference agreed with the CSO Management Board for this review were:

“To review the organisational capability of the Central Statistics Office (CSO) to deliver on its strategic aims as set out in its Statement of Strategy 2020 to 2023; its long-term vision ‘Independent insight for all’ as set out in CSO 2030 and its statistical obligations under the Statistics Act 1993 and relevant EU legislation. The review will be future focused and aimed at assessing the capability of the CSO by reference to leadership, strategy and policymaking, delivery and business support functions.”

GOVERNANCE OF THE OCR PROCESS

The Organisational Capability Review team carried out this review. The team was supported by a Liaison Officer from the CSO who provided vital support and assistance, scheduled and attended interviews and workshops, provided research support, and participated in the drafting of the final report. The team reported to an External Review Panel whose role was ‘to review, validate, edit and finalise the report prepared by the team’. The panel comprised:

- Mr. John McCarthy, former Secretary General, Dept. of Housing, Planning & Local Government
- Professor Frances Ruane, former Director, Economic & Social Research Institute (ESRI)
- Ms. Fiona Tierney, former CEO, Public Appointments Service (PAS)

REVIEW PROCESS

Evidence gathering for this review involved desktop research and interviews and workshops aimed at assessing the capability of the CSO from internal and external perspectives. Interviews with members of the CSO Management Board and Heads of Functions, in addition to 23 staff workshops, took place across the three CSO locations of Cork, Rathmines and Swords, with a small number conducted on-line. There was good engagement from staff across the three office locations, and from the field staff who attended workshops remotely.

Table 3: Overview of Interviews and Workshops Conducted

Category	Number of Engagements	Number of Participants
Minister of State	1	1
Management Board (incl. Director General)	8	8
PO Heads of Function	10	12
PO and Senior Statistician Workshops	3	21
AP and Statistician Workshops	7	75
HEO/AO and HEO/AO Equivalents Workshops	4	34
EO Workshops	4	42
Clerical Officer Workshops	3	35
Co-ordinator Workshops	1	9
Field Staff Workshops	1	45
Sub-total	42	282
External Stakeholders *	23	
Total Number of Engagements	65	

* A list of external stakeholders consulted is set out in Appendix 2

External evidence gathering comprised interviews with the Minister of State and with the CSO's main stakeholders, including the National Statistics Board (NSB), a number of Government Departments; international organisations that work closely with the CSO; and members of the research community.

STRUCTURE OF THE REPORT

This report is structured in line with the four themes against which CSO capability was measured:

- Leadership
- Strategy and Policymaking
- Delivery
- Business Support Functions

While these themes are addressed separately within the report, they should be regarded as components of the framework underpinning modern, complex Civil Service organisations, which support the delivery of Government priorities, strategic objectives and programmes of work.

Each chapter includes a list of the main findings under each theme and concludes with a list of recommendations. A comprehensive list of the review recommendations can be found in Appendix 1.

CHAPTER 1. LEADERSHIP

This first chapter deals with leadership by the CSO Senior Management Group (the Management Board and the Principal Officer and Senior Statistician staff cohort). It considers the strengths and capacity of the Senior Management Group (SMG); the extent to which prioritisation between strategic and immediate aims is achieved; the quality of cross-divisional co-operation within the CSO; the degree to which the CSO influences and collaborates on a cross-government and international basis; and the quality of CSO communications, both internally and externally.

1.1 LEADERSHIP BY SENIOR MANAGEMENT

The Management Board is the primary decision-making committee of the CSO and provides the leadership and management required at a corporate level. The Leadership Team of the CSO, known internally as the Senior Management Group (SMG), comprises the Management Board, general service Principal Officers and Senior Statisticians (PO Equivalents).

1.1.1 Management Board

The Management Board comprises the Director General (DG), who acts as Chair of the Board, and seven Assistant Directors General (ADG), one of whom is the Chief Information Officer. The post of Director General of the CSO is equivalent to the rank of Secretary General of a Government Department, while Assistant Directors General are equivalent to that of Assistant Secretary. The Management Board meets weekly, with meetings rotated between the Cork and Dublin offices, and online when required.

Table 1.1 Composition of the Management Board

Position	Grade
Director General	Secretary General
Head of Climate, Environment, Enterprises & Sustainability	Assistant Secretary
Head of Corporate Affairs	Assistant Secretary (Acting)
Head of National Accounts & Prices Statistics	Assistant Secretary
Head of International Accounts, Trade & Government Statistics	Assistant Secretary
Head of Social Statistics	Assistant Secretary
Head of Statistical System Coordination	Assistant Secretary
Chief Information Officer (Head of Technology & Statistical Services)	Assistant Secretary

There have been three new appointments to the Management Board in the last twelve-month period, one of which is in an acting capacity. Overall, the Board is of mixed tenure ranging from a few months to twelve years. There is a 50/50 gender balance on the board. Of the eight Management Board positions, six have been internal appointments and two external. The appointment of external staff to the Management Board is viewed as positive by stakeholders in introducing a broader perspective together with greater insights into the needs of data users.

The Management Board of the CSO is strong, collegiate and decisive with a shared ethos of 'CSO first', where Board members challenge each other in a professional, respectful and constructive manner. There is a clear sense of the vision and purpose of the office and evidence of a strong commitment to the development and pursuit of strategic goals.

The Management Board periodically reviews the organisational structure to ensure that it is aligned to maximise cross-directorate and cross-divisional engagement while delivering on its operational and strategic objectives. The recent new appointments at Management Board level have facilitated a restructuring of the organisation over the last year which involved:

- The previously termed Economic Statistics Directorate which consisted of nine divisions, was split into the National Accounts & Prices Statistics Directorate and the International Accounts, Trade & Government Statistics Directorate;
- The previously termed Business Directorate was restructured as the Climate, Environment, Enterprises & Sustainability Directorate;
- Three new divisions have been created - Housing; Data Science; and Health, with divisions such as the Quality Division and the Administrative Data Centre Division having changed directorates;
- The Director General has taken responsibility for the International, Policy and Planning Division and for the Enforcement, Legal and Governance Division.

Further change is planned with a recent decision by the Management Board to split the Social Statistics Directorate. This Directorate consists of eleven divisions and includes responsibility for the Census; Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) Survey; Teaching and Learning International Survey (TALIS); Household Surveys; Labour Market; Crime; and Sexual Violence Surveys. This will result in the formation of two Directorates - a Social Statistics Directorate and a Demography & Housing Directorate, with sanction for an additional Assistant Director General post required. This may address concerns raised by some staff regarding the need for a dedicated ADG for the Census programme of work.

The other significant change within the organisation is the current commencement of a new Director General on the departure of the previous Director General after a twelve-year term. It is viewed that the transition period will not prove overly challenging for the Board given the mix of experience in place and the 'can do' and positive culture evidenced.

1.1.2 Board Decision-Making

The Board demonstrates strong, decisive leadership with a responsive, insightful approach to decision-making in place. The COVID-19 pandemic is considered to have facilitated a greater tolerance and acceptance of risk at Board level. This in turn facilitated agile and innovative responses to central Government requirements during the crisis periods of both the pandemic and the Ukrainian humanitarian crisis. The CSO developed new COVID-19 products and services to support the national response to the pandemic and to fulfil the need for insight into the impact of the crisis on businesses and society. Similarly, the CSO supported the development of a national response to the Ukrainian humanitarian crisis, developing a series of frontier releases on arrivals from Ukraine to Ireland; using administrative data from a range of sources; and producing maps to show the location of the new arrivals. Both situations saw the organisation employing new data sources; new processes; surveys; and methodologies to capture societal, business and economic impacts in an almost real-time timeframe.

There is a good balance between a strategic and operational focus on the weekly agenda of the Management Board, to which all Board members contribute. The Board is a questioning board with issues teased out and all opinions considered.

1.1.3 Board Self-Reflection

The Board sets time aside, in the form of bi-annual away days, to consider their performance, their balance between operational and strategic objectives, and to consider strategic challenges, plans and solutions.

The Board also invests time in team and individual coaching. Team coaching recommenced in late 2023 to support the ongoing development of the Management Board, particularly given the recent new appointments to the Board. There is also a considerable focus on the personal development of individual Board members with each assigned a personal development coach.

1.1.4 Principal Officers and Senior Statisticians

There has been approximately 15% turnover at Principal Officer and Senior Statistician level during 2023 primarily due to retirements, promotions and mobility. The calibre of the Principal Officer and Senior Statistician grades is considered by Management Board members to be very good, with their commitment and technical expertise noted by some members in particular.

While the Principal Officer and Senior Statistician staff cohort is very influential in the international statistical community, opportunities for their exposure to policy development are more limited. This is due to the remit of the CSO, its statutory independence, and the fact that, while its outputs inform policy development across the Civil and Public Service, it does not have a direct policy development role. It was also observed that being a technical organisation, soft skills such as leadership and communications across this cohort could benefit from greater opportunities for development. Management Board members acknowledge that these challenges do not support opportunities for career development at a senior level, which is an issue of focus for the Board at this current time.

Data gathered for this review shows that, generally, Principal Officers and Senior Statisticians have a lot of autonomy in their role, freedom to follow up on new ideas or approaches and are good at decision-making. Where decisions require the provision of additional resources or buy-in from other divisions, the Principal Officer or Senior Statistician may submit the case to Management Board for approval.

1.1.5 Senior Management Group (SMG)

The Senior Management Group (SMG) comprises 59 staff members encompassing Management Board, Principal Officers and Senior Statisticians, including seconded staff members. This forum meets in person on a quarterly basis with a managing committee comprising Principal Officers, Senior Statisticians and a Management Board Sponsor. The committee sets the agenda for the quarterly meetings, and the forum is chaired by a Principal Officer or Senior Statistician. Agenda items are usually either strategic or informative, with subgroups convened to take on specific projects, develop papers and revert with findings or recommendations to ultimately inform and assist the deliberations of Management Board. As such the SMG is part of the Board's decision-making process.

The Terms of Reference (ToR) for the Senior Management Group (SMG) set out that:

“The Senior Management Group, comprising Senior Statisticians and Principal Officers, is an essential part of CSO governance and leadership. The assignment of responsibilities by the Director General for the performance of functions under Section 4(1) of the Public Service Management Act, 1997 requires Senior Statisticians and Principal Officers to participate effectively in the Senior Management Group (SMG) and to contribute to policy on corporate and strategic issues.

The SMG will contribute to corporate decision-making through:

- An ongoing programme of work;
- Regular meetings involving the MB;
- Sub-groups, or other methods, producing inputs into MB decision-making;
- Reviewing progress on CSO corporate and strategic issues;
- Providing a forum for the exchange of corporate information.”

The ToR also state that the Management Board will attend and fully participate in SMG meetings. The SMG is reported as operating very positively with open discussion across a range of strategic and operational issues.

1.1.6 Managerial Structures

Managerial structures are regarded as effective, with middle managers generally clear on the roles and responsibilities of senior managers. Organisation charts are available on various ICT platforms, with the Enforcement, Legal and Governance Division currently working to increase staff awareness of governance requirements and ‘who does what’ within the organisation.

1.1.7 Ministerial Engagement

The Statistics Act 1993 sets out the independence of the Director General (DG) in respect of all statistical matters, with the Taoiseach delegating the powers exercisable by him to the DG. The Taoiseach also delegates powers to the Minister of State in the Department of the Taoiseach in respect of the presentation of the Vote to the Committee on Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform, and the Department of the Taoiseach. While the Director General meets with the Minister of State twice per year to advise on organisational objectives and progress, Ministerial involvement is otherwise limited. Nevertheless, the Minister of State considers that the CSO is a very valuable resource, trusted and well-regarded but that more should be done to build awareness of the role of the organisation, and its potential contribution supporting national policy development through the provision of data and insights. This is a matter being progressed by the organisation with increased engagement across Government Organisations evident in recent years.

Unlike most Government Departments whose line Ministers engage on their behalf in budgetary matters, the CSO, due to its statutory independence, negotiates directly with the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery, and Reform (DPENDR). Some Management Board members expressed the view that this arrangement can be challenging as the CSO does not have the benefit of a Minister to advocate on its behalf during the annual Estimates process.

FINDINGS: LEADERSHIP BY SENIOR MANAGEMENT

F1.1 The CSO Management Board works positively and collaboratively, with a number of new appointments over the past twelve-month period. There is a clear sense of strategic vision and operational deliverables at Board level supported by robust decision-making processes. Regular periods away from the office for reflection by the Management Board, coupled with team and individual coaching, are all deemed very positive initiatives that will continue to support the effective functioning of the Board.

F1.2 The Board regularly reviews the structure of the organisation to ensure it is optimally positioned to deliver on its operational and strategic vision. The CSO is proceeding with the process of dividing the Social Statistics Directorate at this time.

F1.3 The Senior Management Group (SMG) works positively, actively contributing to the strategic work of the organisation, with a collaborative approach to the manner in which the work agenda of the group is set and progressed.

F1.4 Engagement by the CSO with the Minister of State in the Department of the Taoiseach works well and is in keeping with the organisation's independence as defined under the Statistics Act 1993.

1.2 PRIORITISATION

The Management Board of the CSO, similar to many other Government Departments and Organisations, faces the challenges of balancing long and medium-term strategic goals, short-term actions and responding to unforeseen emergency response situations, such as those presented by the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukrainian humanitarian crisis.

1.2.1 Balance Between Short and Long-Term Goals

The CSO has an excellent reputation in Ireland and abroad, where it is widely regarded as an independent producer of high-quality official statistics. The organisation is working in an increasingly dynamic environment, characterised by the growing importance of administrative data²²; an expanding data stewardship role across the Civil and Public Service; the pursuit of access to privately held data; and the delivery of an increasing contribution of data and insights to policy deliberations in Ireland. This has required the CSO to increasingly demonstrate capacity and capability to balance the delivery of its statistical work programme at Irish and EU level with its evolving medium to long-term strategic priorities, which will place the organisation at the heart of the national data ecosystem.

The CSO has proven such competency over recent years, with the Eurostat Peer Review Report²³ 2022 acknowledging the retention of focus on strategic aims even through national crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. There is an inherent understanding at Management Board level that the organisation cannot simply just focus on the operational or the CSO will not remain relevant.

In addition to publishing its annual Statistical Work Programme, which presents a list of all the statistical products to be produced by the CSO, the CSO has developed two long-term strategy documents, *CSO 2020*²⁴ published in 2013, followed by *CSO 2030*²⁵ published in 2020. CSO 2030 sets the overarching strategic direction for the CSO to achieve its long-term vision of 'Independent Insight for All'. The CSO also produces a Statement of Strategy every three years, focusing on its short and medium terms aims, and is guided by the National Statistics Board's five-year Statements of Strategy, the most recent being '*Quality Information for All - Numbers Matter 2021-2026*'.

²² Administrative data is information collected by other Government Departments and agencies for their own purposes, which is then used by the CSO to accomplish its mandated objectives.

²³ [Eurostat Peer Review Report 2022](#)

²⁴ [CSO 2020](#)

²⁵ [CSO 2030](#)

A further management tool warranting consideration by the CSO to support the balancing of short and long-term goals is the articulation and reporting of all organisational priorities in advance on an annual basis, cascading from the three-year Statement of Strategy. In essence, such a document could incorporate the annual Statistical Work Programme together with strategic actions set for any given year. This issue is discussed in detail in Section 2.1.2.

1.2.2 Resourcing Priorities

The strategic ambition of the CSO, set against its delivery obligations in the Irish and EU context requires an ever-increasing balancing of resourcing priorities to both deliver the work programme and realise the strategic aims of the organisation to work at the heart of Government and at the core of the national data ecosystem.

Overwhelmingly, the level of resources required for the Census Programme was raised in discussions on resourcing priorities organisation wide, together with an understanding that the organisation is bound to certain prioritisations due to EU requirements. Prioritisation was viewed as a constantly evolving and somewhat frustrating issue for Management Board members in particular, due to the nature of the work. The CSO delivers through its people, with staffing costs accounting for approximately 80% of its annual budget. In comparison with more traditional departments, its staffing needs can be volatile due to the cyclical nature of some of its work such as national surveys and the five yearly Census, which can require additional field and support staff for limited periods of time. The organisation is also facing additional requirements at both EU and national level which, along with its ambition to deliver on the data stewardship role, can prove challenging in terms of the allocation of staff resources. More generally, some stakeholders expressed concern that the European requirements may get precedence over national needs, although the operating environment of the CSO in terms of legal obligations arising from regulation was acknowledged.

Notwithstanding these issues, it is considered that the CSO is good at adapting to changing needs and responds appropriately in reassigning capacity, with resources allocated based on evidence and need. There is a sense from this review however, that the CSO is at risk of over-committing across Government in an attempt to demonstrate its potential while not always having adequate resources in place to deliver. This matter is further complicated by the significant challenges arising for the CSO in both attracting and retaining the required skillsets, most particularly across Statistician, Technical Specialist and Field Staff grades (Section 4.4.3). Coupled with this is the noted reality that Government Departments and Organisations are looking for faster responses to meet their data services and policy development needs.

1.2.3 Management Board and Senior Management Group Prioritisation

The CSO has appropriate structures in place to enable prioritisation and re-prioritisation of resources albeit the organisation is operating in an environment where attracting and retaining staff is a challenge, coupled with its strategic objectives placing an additional burden on often stretched resources.

Management Board agendas facilitate appropriate space for discussions on prioritisation needs. Coupled with Management Board self-reflection days and with an annual prioritisation exercise conducted in line with budget allocation, prioritisation is evident across the organisation. In addition, the structure of the SMG and opportunities for collaborative discussion and agenda setting ensures all senior management have a regular opportunity to feed into prioritisation processes.

The CSO has also readily demonstrated its ability to flex in responding to the COVID-19 pandemic and the Ukrainian humanitarian crisis, deprioritising projects to facilitate the reassignment of staff to projects established in response to the crises.

FINDINGS: PRIORITISATION

F1.5 The CSO is regarded as a highly flexible organisation that has demonstrated its capacity and capability to balance the delivery of its statistical work programme at Irish and EU level with its evolving medium to long-term strategic priorities, while also delivering a rapid response to unforeseen national crises through the prioritisation and reprioritisation of work programmes as required. The resource burden placed on the organisation by Census delivery is of particular note, given the crucial role of the CSO in the production of independent, verifiable information and insight, which can be regarded as a key pillar of a democratic society.

F1.6 The further development of a process to articulate, consolidate and report in advance on CSO operational and strategic priorities on an annual basis would further enhance the process of prioritisation across the organisation.

F1.7 While the CSO has developed the structures and processes for effective prioritisation of its organisational projects and goals, it does run the risk of overcommitting across Government in the absence of adequate resources, while seeking to progress its strategic objectives. The organisation needs to strike an appropriate balance in this regard in order to ensure that both strands of activity are supported by adequate resources.

1.3 INTERNAL CROSS-COLLABORATIVE WORKING

This section assesses the extent to which the internal business teams, divisions and directorates collaborate with one another, whether this collaboration has a structural and systematic basis, and the degree to which multi-disciplinary teams are established on shared interest programmes and projects.

1.3.1 Collaborative Culture and Structures

The CSO has a positive collaborative culture which has progressed from a traditionally more siloed approach pre-pandemic, assisted greatly by video-conferencing and technological advancements. Notwithstanding this, collaboration across three geographical locations, coupled with field staff dispersed nationwide, continues to prove challenging. There are also particular issues arising with staff based in the Swords office feeling at a remove from the organisation given their singular remit in Census production and management.

There are natural synergies between the work of certain divisions and directorates in the organisation, hence some areas more readily lend themselves to collaborative working than others. However, for Census staff based in the Swords location the opportunities to collaborate with staff in the Cork and Rathmines locations are less frequent. In recognition of such issues, the CSO is taking steps to encourage more cross-cutting team, divisional and directorate engagement. Teams are increasingly looking across directorates so that they can use data more effectively and more frequently, with structured liaison groups being put in place to support greater collaboration, for example between the economic statistics and the enterprise statistics areas.

1.3.2 Staff Networks

There are a number of staff networks either operational or reported as previously operational within the CSO including:

- The General Management Forum (GMF) which comprises the Senior Management Group (including the Management Board), Assistant Principal Officers, and Statisticians (including seconded staff);
- The HEO Network;
- The EO Network;
- The CO Network; and
- The Field Operations Review Group (FORG) (comprising Field Coordinator representatives and Field Staff representatives).

Various levels of activity are recorded depending on the particular group.

(i) **General Management Forum (GMF):** The Terms of Reference for the GMF²⁶ sets out its role, purpose and scope, which includes its role as a co-ordination and oversight group for management and leadership in the CSO; as a driver for innovation and continuous improvement; and as a forum for networking, discussion, opinion-gathering and information exchange.

The GMF membership encompasses all CSO staff designated as Officers of Statistics and working at the grades of Assistant Principal Officer/Statistician, Principal Officer/Senior Statistician, Assistant Director General and Director General. Membership also includes CSO staff at these grades on secondment to other Government Departments, Offices and Agencies. Engagement with and participation in GMF activities is a role requirement. The GMF is managed by an Executive Committee comprising a Management Board Sponsor, SMG Executive Committee Members and eight Assistant Principal/Statistician nominees from across the three offices and the Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS). The Executive Committee meets bi-monthly and sets its own agenda and annual work plan.

An in-person GMF conference is held every second year with staff reporting that more frequent conferences would be welcomed to facilitate greater opportunities for networking and cross-collaboration. In addition, GMF information sessions, known as 'bitesize'²⁷, are conducted online on a fortnightly basis providing information about innovation, new processes, new products, technologies and on a broad range of other topics that are of interest to members. Recordings of the presentations are made available on the CSO's communication platform and any member of the GMF can suggest a topic to be covered.

Generally, staff view the GMF as constructive and beneficial, with an increase in in-person conferences also welcome, albeit expensive to resource. It is noted that there is no demand organisation-wide for the development of separate Principal Officer or Assistant Principal Officer networks structured by grade only.

²⁶ [Terms of reference for the General Management Forum](#)

²⁷ GMF Bitesize meetings are held online fortnightly. Issues of interest to Statisticians and APs, on a wide variety of topics, are presented on and staff can ask questions or make comments. Recordings are available for those who are unable to attend the event.

(ii) **Higher Executive Officer (HEO) Network:** This network meets quarterly and has been in place for a decade. It facilitates confidential discussions relevant to the grade. Feedback from staff indicated mixed views as to the value of the group.

(iii) **Executive Officer (EO) Network and Clerical Officer (CO) Network:** Both of these networks are no longer in operation. Staff feedback suggests that there is no significant appetite for the re-establishment of either network.

(iv) **Field Operations Review Group (FORG):** The FORG is intended to act as a review group for the operational procedures surrounding the collection of household survey data, and to drive innovation and continuous improvement. Under the Terms of Reference, the FORG is to act as an opinion gathering, discussion and proposal body, with proposals to be brought forward to relevant management grades and staff representatives for consideration.

The group meets quarterly and comprises Field Coordinator and Field Interviewer grades. It is chaired by a Statistician, who is the only representative of management of the field staff cohort in the group. While the group provides an opportunity to raise issues and contribute to the agenda, the feedback indicates that Field Coordinators would prefer more frequent meetings, more timely minutes, a more comprehensive information flow from the group to the field staff and greater communication as to the reasons why proposals are not taken on board by senior management. The FORG is also reported by staff as drifting into IR and HR issues, which is deemed inappropriate as it was founded as an ideas group not a negotiating body. A review of the structure and effectiveness of this group is particularly important as many field staff expressed a sense of being removed from the organisation in terms of corporate communications and engagement (Section 1.5.4).

There are a number of other networks operating in the CSO which are open to all staff including field staff, both permanent and on contract. Such networks include:

(v) **Culture Network:** The Culture Network is involved in creating awareness in the CSO of all cultural backgrounds, and explores and celebrates the cultural diversity of staff, highlighting all cultural events taking place in Ireland.

(vi) **Family Supports Network:** The Family Supports Network raises awareness by offering information on supports available to assist CSO staff members facing a wide range of family challenges.

(vii) **LGBTQ+ Network:** The LGBTQ+ Network aims to raise awareness and provide support to LGBTQ+ colleagues and allies to ensure the CSO is an inclusive and equitable workplace with a sense of belonging where everyone can thrive.

(viii) **Disability Network:** The Disability Network raises awareness amongst CSO colleagues, and is supportive of the wide-ranging impact of disabilities, whether hidden or visible, in the workplace, at home and in society in general.

(ix) **Neurodiversity Network:** The Neurodiversity Network aims to raise awareness and create a space for all staff including members and allies of the CSO neurodivergent community, where neurodivergent issues can be raised, supported and accommodated.

(x) **Wellbeing Champions Group:** This group plans and delivers activities and initiatives to raise awareness and encourage health and wellbeing among staff.

1.3.3 Team Approaches

There are some formal structures in place to facilitate and promote collaboration across teams such as the Business and Macroeconomic Group; SMG subgroups such as those for Technology; Ethics and the Statement of Strategy Development Group, in addition to a number of Communities of Practice. The development of more blended outputs such as the Irish Population Estimates from Administrative Data Sources (IPEADS)²⁸ has also encouraged greater collaboration. Informal collaboration is also a feature of the CSO culture.

Such structures supporting collaboration work well and are maximised by technology. Collaboration cannot be taken for granted however and in a blended working environment it is important to go beyond formal collaboration structures and encourage a culture of proactive sharing of ideas and knowledge across the various fora and platforms available to the organisation including CSO Connect, the GMF 'Bitesize' Information Programme and Communities of Practice (see information box below).

Communities of Practice

Communities of Practice are in operation across the organisation and facilitate informal collaboration on usually a technical topic such as Data Science, Geographic Information Systems (GIS) or the use of R (a programming language) Software. A Community of Practice about the Irish language has recently been established. Membership can be drawn from across the Civil and Public Service with the R Community of Practice group consisting of 70 members, 20 of whom are external to the CSO. It is a useful networking and knowledge sharing mechanism with training materials designed within the group to ensure learning feeds down and across. The establishment of the groups is informal, where any member of staff can set one up. Communities of Practice are run on a voluntary basis and ultimately their success depends on the strength of leadership of the person managing the forum and the amount of their time they can dedicate to it, taking into account the pressures of their workload.

There is a sense however that these Communities of Practice groups are for the Statistician staff cohort only, so it would be beneficial if more information was circulated to staff on the Community of Practice criteria, establishment process, communities currently operational, and their membership, as a way of encouraging others to either join existing communities or consider the establishment of a new group. Location does not impact on their operation due to the use of video conferencing. A concerted effort should therefore be made at Management Board level to introduce a more structured approach to the establishment of Communities of Practice.

1.3.4 Cross-Directorate Collaboration

There is structured formal engagement across directorates such as a recent cross-directorate engagement whereby 60 staff from the Enterprise and National Accounts Directorate met to discuss common areas of work and innovation. The intention is to roll out this model across other directorates and to encourage more targeted regular engagement. While such formal structures are in place to support cross-directorate engagement, in some cases increased publication of their availability and target audience would facilitate greater engagement by staff.

²⁸ The Irish Population Estimates from Administrative Data Sources (IPEADS) uses anonymised administrative data combining 17 datasets from public service bodies as an experimental method of producing population statistics.

FINDINGS: INTERNAL CROSS-COLLABORATIVE WORKING

F1.8 The CSO demonstrates a collaborative ethos and culture with an awareness at senior management level of the challenges posed by a staff complement across three geographical locations and field staff dispersed nationwide. In recognition of such challenges the CSO is proactively encouraging more cross cutting team, divisional and directorate engagement where appropriate. A particular focus on this issue is required in developing a single corporate identity and ethos that extends to all staff particularly those based in the Swords office and field staff nationwide.

F1.9 The General Management Forum (GMF) comprises Management Board members, Principal Officer, Senior Statistician, Assistant Principal Officer and Statistician grades, including seconded staff. This forum is working very positively, with fortnightly information sessions scheduled on a wide range of topics and an in-person conference held every second year. Staff would welcome more opportunities for in-person engagement at GMF level.

F1.10 There are a number of staff networks operational in the CSO with others having lapsed in recent times. Some of these networks are working very well and contributing to and driving the operational and strategic objectives of the CSO whilst also acting as a support to staff on many and varied topics including disability, culture, sexuality and health and wellbeing. All staff networks require Terms of Reference, regularly reviewed, to ensure they are meeting both staff and organisation needs. The Field Operations Review Group (FORG) in particular requires review in terms of structure and effectiveness given the sense of disconnect described by that staff cohort.

F1.11 The CSO has formal and informal structures in place to promote regular liaison and collaboration between staff in related business units. There are a number of working groups, including initiatives such as Communities of Practice, Senior Management Group and General Management Forum subgroups and some structured formal cross-directorate engagements in place. However, there is a perception amongst staff that the Communities of Practice are overly technically focused, and therefore largely targeting the statistical staff cohort, whereas it is open to all staff with interest in a topic to join or to create a new forum on a non-statistical subject.

F1.12 There are opportunities for structured formal engagement across directorates, however greater promotion of these opportunities is required across the organisation in order to encourage increased staff engagement.

1.4 CROSS-GOVERNMENT AND CROSS-SECTOR ENGAGEMENT IN IRELAND

Given the legal remit of the CSO as the producer of official national and European statistics, together with its formal and ever-evolving national coordination and data stewardship role, positive and productive cross-government and cross-sector engagement is pivotal to its success.

1.4.1 Relationship with the Department of the Taoiseach

The CSO is a professionally independent statutory body under the aegis of the Department of the Taoiseach. While the Director General has sole responsibility in relation to professional statistical matters, the Economic Division in the Department provides administrative oversight on matters such as Parliamentary Questions, Government Decisions and legislative matters in addition to liaison with the Minister of State with responsibility for the CSO.

Positive relationships were reported between the CSO and both the Department and Minister of State, with meetings convened with the Director General bi-annually. The importance of continued proactive engagement by the CSO with Government Departments at an early stage of policy development, where appropriate, was noted by the Minister of State.

1.4.2 Relationship with the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform

The relationship between the CSO and the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery, and Reform (DPENDR) is positive, with engagement on both Vote issues and the Transformation Agenda.

- **Vote Engagement:** The CSO has worked very collaboratively with the Vote Team over the last 18-month period to facilitate new staff joining the Vote Team in gaining an in-depth understanding of the work of the organisation. Due to the statutory independence of the CSO there is no Ministerial involvement in the Vote process. While engagement with the Vote Team is structured and collaborative, this review has found that scope exists for greater engagement by the CSO with the Vote Team on issues such as agreeing a framework document for vote transfer and recommendations arising from the ESS Peer Review 2022 (Section 4.8.1).
- **Transformation Agenda Engagement:** The CSO has significantly increased engagement with DPENDR and the broader transformation agenda over recent times, contributing to the Government's Public Service Reform Strategies (Public Service Transformation 2030; Civil Service Renewal Plan 2030), and assuming responsibility for the administration of the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey (CSEES), which is noted as a significant undertaking. All these initiatives share the common vision of data as an important resource to be managed and exploited.

DPENDR note particular engagement from the CSO on open data, digital transformation and evidence-informed policymaking. In addition, the Director General now co-chairs a Strategic Working Group on Better Public Services and a Civil Service Management Board Project Sponsor Group (Strengthening Policymaking), together with ongoing engagement with the Senior Public Service (SPS).

1.4.3 Cross-Government Engagement

The CSO continues to work to ensure that it is at the heart of the national data ecosystem and is uniquely placed to leverage national data assets through an ambitious programme linking administrative datasets across Government organisations. Central to the approach of the CSO is the building of key partnerships across Government to ensure the necessary data and insights are available to policy makers and signalling the emergence of trends which may require a policy response, in addition to trends which may demonstrate the impact of policies on society, the environment or the economy. Also crucial is the increasing provision of data services to the Civil and Public Service to support the structuring, classification and management of their data to ensure maximum utility.

At the core of the work of the CSO is the understanding that coordinated, secure and well-governed data, and its use, across the Civil and Public Service is key to providing the insights required to understand and respond to the complex societal, economic and environmental challenges facing Ireland. Critically, this approach is underpinned by a strong cross-government commitment to evidence-informed decision-making as enshrined in reform and renewal strategies such as Public Service Transformation 2030 and Civil Service Renewal 2030. The CSO, with its robust legislative mandate to collect, link, analyse and disseminate data, is central to this commitment, offering increasingly frequent, timely, and granular insights into the transformations that are happening in Ireland today.

Specific examples of how the CSO undertakes this work on a cross-government basis include:

- Participation in a significant number of inter-departmental and cross-sector working groups and committees, including Senior Officials Groups (SOGs) (Appendix 5);
- Management of the Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS) (Section 2.2.1);
- Collaboration with staff in the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) (Section 2.2.1);
- Collaboration with the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) (Section 2.2.3);
- Leadership of the National Data Infrastructure (NDI) (Section 2.2.1);
- Operation of the CSO Administrative Data Centre²⁹;
- Implementation of the Irish Statistical System Code of Practice (ISSCoP) accreditation process;
- Provision of bespoke statistical analysis across the Civil and Public Service via Pathfinder Projects;
- Provision of support with methodology and data quality standards across the system;
- Managing surveys on behalf of departments (Growing Up in Ireland; Trust Survey) and on behalf of the Civil Service (Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey);
- Management of the Formal Statistical Liaison Group (FSLG), a forum for statistical units embedded in the broader Public Service; and
- Delivery of Virtual Data Rooms³⁰ to support the Civil and Public Service in the secure sharing of data.

Irish Statistical System Code of Practice (ISSCoP)

The CSO has a formal coordination role to play across the Public Service in relation to official statistics. This coordination role is set in a legal context both nationally (Statistics Act 1993) and at EU level (Amended EU Regulation No. 223/2009).

For official statistics to be of value they must be trusted. Achieving and maintaining trust requires that statistics are produced in an objective, transparent and independent manner. The 2011 Public Service Reform Plan recommended that the CSO develop a Code of Practice and Standards for the gathering and use of data for statistical purposes across the system. The CSO subsequently introduced the Irish Statistical System Code of Practice (ISSCoP) in 2013 for compilers of official statistics across the Irish Statistical System (ISS).

In operationalising the Code, the Director General of the CSO agrees a list of official statistics with each public body that produces statistics within the ISS. These statistics are then assessed against the Code, with only those statistics deemed compliant designated as official statistics for the purposes of the ISSCoP and may be published under the ISSCoP logo.

In recognition of the importance and complexity of its work across Government, the CSO established a specific directorate, the Statistical System Coordination Directorate, to manage and develop its coordination role across the Irish Statistical System (ISS), including management of the Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS).

²⁹ Administrative data received by the CSO is transmitted via a secure IT link to the CSO's Administrative Data Centre (ADC). In the ADC, identifying details such as name, address, date of birth, PPSN are then anonymised by Statisticians who work in this area. All data received by the CSO is used exclusively for statistical analysis.

³⁰ An analytics platform supporting secure virtual data rooms with a standard analytics and visualisation toolset, and governance process to facilitate cross-agency data analysis.

The prominent role of the CSO in the Irish Statistical System (ISS) as both a producer and coordinator of official statistics at a national and European level requires consistent, high quality cross-sector engagement. In meeting this need the CSO engages significantly in sectors including Economic and Business; Environment and Climate; Health; Education; Construction and Housing; and the Social Sector to support early engagement in policymaking; increase awareness of the work programme of the CSO and progress the role of data stewardship and the NDI and NDI+. In doing so the organisation also participates in a number of cross-sector Working Groups; Liaison Groups, Senior Official Groups (SOGs); Steering Groups and Task Forces. Full detail of all such cross-sector fora is listed in Appendix 5.

Some external stakeholders, while recognising the progress of the CSO to date, hold the view that there is more to be done in terms of greater outward focus and collaboration with other Government Departments. Some Civil and Public Service organisations would welcome more interaction with the CSO to progress methods by which organisations can better use data in policy formulation and to benefit from the assistance the CSO can provide in reducing the burden on suppliers of data.

It is particularly noteworthy that, in some organisations, very positive collaboration exists between seconded statisticians and staff of the Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) which has resulted in very valuable outputs. In addition, a number of departments have expressed their support for expansion of the IGSS.

FINDINGS: CROSS-GOVERNMENT AND CROSS-SECTOR WORKING

F1.13 Positive relationships exist with the Department of the Taoiseach and Minister of State assigned responsibility for the CSO. Similarly, effective relationships are in place with the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform with purposeful collaboration on both vote issues and the Transformation Agenda.

F1.14 The CSO has made significant progress in its data stewardship role, actively collaborating across Government through inter-departmental working groups and committees, the IGSS Programme, engagement with the IGEES Programme, the ISSCoP accreditation process and operation of its Administrative Data Centre. A new directorate, the Statistical System Coordination Directorate, has been established to manage and develop the CSO's coordination role across the Irish Statistical System (ISS). However, there is scope for further proactive engagement across Civil and Public Service organisations particularly on data sources for policy development; development of data quality standards; development of methodologies; support in the running of surveys; and reducing the burden on suppliers of data.

F1.15 There is considerable support across Government organisations for the expansion of the Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS). Where collaboration is facilitated between staff of IGSS and IGEES, the combined outputs add significant value to the host organisation and the system as whole. This dynamic should be built on and maximised to its highest potential.

F1.16 The CSO is highly engaged on a cross-sector basis, reinforcing the prominent role it plays in both the Irish Statistical System (ISS) and internationally, as both a producer and co-ordinator of official statistics and in its data stewardship role.

1.5 EU/INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

The CSO is highly regarded at EU and international level, where it is considered a modern and innovative organisation. The current Director General has significantly raised the CSO's profile internationally, supported by many other staff who contribute to a range of international working parties and exert influence across the system. This reputation was acknowledged by the Minister of State who noted the importance for Ireland in the CSO continuing to maintain this high standing internationally. Many contributors to this review noted that Ireland has influence disproportionate to its size at international level.

Specific examples of EU and international engagement by the CSO include:

- As a member of the European Statistical System (ESS) the CSO participates in a wide range of EU Working Party Groups, Task Forces and Committee Meetings relating to the development of harmonised statistical methodology; the drafting of statistical legislation; and the assessment of statistical standards and quality;
- The CSO networks with other National Statistical Institutes (NSIs), exchanging views, experiences and solutions on methodological and technical issues;
- The CSO participates in a significant number of International Conferences and meetings:
 - United Nations Statistical Commission;
 - United Nations Economic Commission for Europe – Conference of European Statisticians;
 - OECD Committee on Statistics and Working Parties;
 - International Statistical Institute;
 - International Association of Official Statistics.

Meeting EU requirements has been a significant driver of the CSO's work over recent years, with 60% of CSO statistical outputs driven by the mandatory requirements of EU Directives and Regulations.

Eurostat, the statistical office of the European Union, holds responsibility for publishing high-quality Europe-wide statistics and indicators that enable comparisons between countries and regions. At Eurostat level, the CSO is regarded as having an excellent reputation, consistently performing to the highest standards expected from a National Statistics Institute (NSI) both in terms of meeting EU statistical requirements and setting and managing standards and strategy. This view was supported by many national external stakeholders who consider the CSO as highly regarded internationally, leading a lot of the conversations and very highly engaged.

The CSO also adheres to the European Statistics Code of Practice (ESCoP) and its compliance with the Code is periodically examined through a peer review process led by a team of experts from across the European Statistical System (ESS). The most recent European Statistical Peer Review³¹ took place in February 2022 and found that the CSO is fully compliant with the ESCoP. The review team fully supported the clear strategic direction being set for the future development of the CSO and the ongoing development of the data stewardship role.

³¹ [Eurostat Peer Reviews](#)

FINDINGS: EU AND INTERNATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

F1.17 The CSO is highly regarded and very engaged at European and international level and is viewed as playing a strong role in the modernisation of official statistics and the development of an expanded data stewardship role for National Statistical Institutes (NSIs).

1.6 COMMUNICATIONS

As the CSO continues to grow and as its role quickly evolves beyond that of publishing official statistics to encompass a data stewardship and leadership role, communication, both internal and external becomes ever more important. The CSO must communicate effectively and in a targeted way to staff and stakeholders to ensure there is understanding and engagement with the organisation's short and long-term strategic goals and priorities and the means by which they will be delivered.

1.6.1 Communications Unit

The CSO has a dedicated, professionalised Communications and Dissemination Division which is focused on developing and implementing a comprehensive external Communications and Dissemination Strategy to build on the overall awareness and reputation of the CSO. It also develops the User Engagement Strategy, manages media relations and ensures that the reputation and profile of the CSO is maintained and enhanced. The Division is supported in its work by established and professionalised Graphic Design, Digital Marketing and Webmaster functions.

The CSO also has a separate Internal Communications and Engagement (ICE) Unit, situated in the International Policy & Planning Division which reports directly to the Director General. The ICE Unit manages communications internally, delivering all staff Town Hall meetings and a range of other communications such as Vlogs, newsletters and 'Bitesize' information events.

There is an informal business partner model in place for both communication functions, with the Communications and Dissemination Division having regular and structured engagement with business areas across the full spectrum of external communication requirements. Internal communication campaigns are supported by the ICE team as requested by business areas.

1.6.2 Communications Strategy

A new external Communications Strategy is currently under development, following on from the previous 2021-2024 iteration. This strategy will capture the importance of delivering evidence and insight for CSO data users and of broadening the communications function to ensure that there is greater awareness of the totality of the CSO's work. It will take account of the CSO's expanding role in the delivery of data services and will consider how to continue to build trust with Irish society so that there is a greater understanding of the CSO's purpose in using data for the common good and in the public interest.

There is no formalised internal Communications Strategy in place in the CSO. While the organisation has sought to embed an internal communications plan into each new initiative internally, feedback from this review indicates that this is an area requiring immediate focus. One example in this regard consistently raised in the course of this review was the lack of internal communication on the recent decision to migrate between statistical processing platforms which impacted significantly on working practice.

1.6.3 External Communications

With the professionalisation of the external communications function, the CSO has rebranded the organisation in recent years, with external users, international organisations and CSO staff reporting

positive feedback on the quality of external communications. This is ever more important given the need for the CSO to increasingly communicate the breadth of its role, activities and successes to not just the general public but to all stakeholders, including across Government, the Civil and Public Service, the media and international users alike.

(i) Communication with External Stakeholders: There is some evidence which suggests that the CSO should be more assertive in communicating their expertise and potential across the Civil and Public Service and general society. In doing so the organisation can demonstrate the totality of its work and avoid the risk of being perceived as the organisation that ‘does the Census’.

The CSO employs an external contractor to conduct a review of User and Non-User ³²Engagement every three years, using the analysis as a mechanism to modify and develop their products and services, to improve their website and improve the PxStat³³ platform. Extensive engagement with liaison groups also provides a feedback mechanism from users as to what they require from the CSO in terms of outputs and services.

The CSO engages with the media on a daily basis providing links to releases, infographics and sound bites. Media coverage is monitored on a daily basis and a weekly briefing is provided to the Director General. A weekly notification is also issued signalling the following week’s outputs to inform the media of the full range of upcoming scheduled releases. In cases of a new release or one providing a unique insight, the CSO will issue Media Advisory Notices to news desks to alert them as to what the release will cover. In addition, the CSO provides webinars to media outlets on how to better use the website and provides a practical guide to accessing data on the open data portal or PxStat. Currently there is also media engagement on the drafting of the revised Communication Strategy focusing on the quality of release formats.

The CSO engages with schools through a number of initiatives such as the John Hooper Competition, the BTYSY Open Data Award and at the Ploughing Championships in order to help improve statistical literacy and the use of CSO data.

While engagement with international stakeholders is reported as positive, national stakeholders would appreciate seminars and conferences to enhance communications and showcase the innovative work being carried out. In addition, some staff and external stakeholders believe that the CSO could do more to improve public understanding of what it does through providing greater analysis with its statistical releases, which could be achieved without compromising the need for impartiality. This was also a finding of the ESS Peer Review 2022 and warrants early consideration. There is also a perception that the public view the work of the CSO as Census-focused, so there is a need to consider how to reposition the narrative to reflect the full breadth of the role of the organisation.

(ii) CSO Website: Like all Government bodies, the CSO’s online presence plays a vital role in communicating and engaging with its customers, stakeholders and the general public. The CSO maintains a user-friendly and up-to-date website where considerable efforts have been made by the external communications team to employ visualisations, infographics, sound clips, quotes from Statisticians, a revised publication template, and a new PxStat platform for the dissemination of data. The further

³² Non-users were defined as those who were aware of the CSO but did not use its services.

³³ PxStat is a Data Dissemination Management System used by the CSO for publishing statistics in open data formats.

development of the website should be articulated in a comprehensive Website Strategy for the organisation.

CSO website users, both national and international, recognise the considerable progress made in this area and, in the case of technical users, are replicating some of CSO's website initiatives in their own organisations. The media is also increasingly using the material provided which helps to further communicate the CSO's message. However, the organisation has to maintain a balance in delivering for the high-volume technical user, such as researchers, and for the casual users, such as members of the public. In this regard there is a mixed response to the website and PxStat platform between the technical and casual user cohorts regarding ease of access to data.

The CSO is also currently developing a 'Trust Centre' on the website explaining how the CSO uses data for the public good and in the public interest in compliance with the Statistics Act 1993 and Data Protection legislation.

(iii) Social Media: The CSO currently maintains a social media presence across the main social media platforms except TikTok (LinkedIn, Instagram, Twitter/X, Facebook, YouTube, Mastodon). While the CSO has a moderator who reviews the platforms daily there is a view internally that there is potential to the CSO to develop more of a persona on social media.

The CSO uses social media to run regular digital marketing campaigns such as 'Count on Us'. These campaigns can support Household Survey Interviewers by supporting a data collection campaign in addition to creating lists of email contacts for users who would like to be included in future surveys. These campaigns are also crucially important in building organisational profile.

1.6.4 Internal Communications

Effective internal communication is vital given the locations of the three CSO offices across Cork and Dublin, the reality of blended working and the volume of field staff dispersed nationally. While the CSO demonstrates a culture of openness and actively encourages feedback from line managers and staff, a number of issues arise relating to internal communications:

(i) Staff Meetings: Following every Management Board meeting, ADGs update their Heads of Division as a group to ensure communication of decisions and information. Each ADG also has regular one to one meetings with their direct reports. However, in common with other departments, a mixed approach to staff meetings across the CSO was reported, and it is unclear whether communication of decisions and information from the Management Board fully cascades down through the organisation, with no centralised formal feedback structure in place. Some divisional and team meetings take place weekly or monthly, either in person or online, others not so regularly. In particular, some staff would appreciate more regular structured divisional and directorate meetings with senior managers and believe that a formal organisational policy setting this out would be of benefit. It is noted that the use of online platforms introduced during the COVID-19 pandemic should support the regular scheduling of meetings, with staff location no longer a prohibitive factor.

(ii) Corporate Communications: Effective internal corporate communications have never been so important with the arrival of new staff into a blended working model; to maintain appropriate contact with established staff not in the office full time; and to balance a staff cohort across three locations in addition to field staff nationwide.

There are currently two corporate communication platforms in use in the CSO – the Lotus Notes Bulletin Board and CSOConnect, however an overarching staff portal has not been developed to date. Both the existing platforms facilitate staff interaction, with CSOConnect also facilitating the posting of wellbeing, training, social and statistical content as well as Vlogs, information sessions such as ‘Ask Frankie’, and recordings of the General Management Forum (GMF) information sessions. Nevertheless, there has been considerable confusion created by the existence of two platforms, with the overwhelming feedback from this review indicating that internal communications could be improved significantly by having a single portal containing all of the communications, apps, links and tools that would open on staff log-in daily.

The Management Board minutes are made available to all staff as soon as they have been cleared. In addition, a staff newsletter is published on a quarterly basis and a series of staff interviews are conducted through which individual staff members can share information on their role in the organisation. A HIVE site is available to seconded staff so that they can be kept up to date on events in the CSO. Unfortunately, official internal communications are sometimes slow to issue resulting in opportunities for misinformation. Decisions impacting staff such as the early closure of buildings or the extension of the Blended Working Scheme were not communicated in a timely manner thus giving rise to concern and some frustration.

A series of information sessions are conducted every fortnight for field staff called ‘Field Bites’. These sessions cover a range of topics, many survey-related, such as the purpose of current surveys, results, and user experience of data but also cover HR items, corporate affairs issues, health and safety, and administrative issues, such as expenses claims processes. However, it is of note that these sessions were not referenced by field staff in the course of this review. Particular focus is warranted on enhancing communication mechanisms with the field staff cohort, who have indicated a sense of feeling particularly removed from the organisation from a communication viewpoint. This issue could be considered together with the structure and effectiveness of the Field Operations Review Group (FORG) (Section 1.3.2).

(iii) Staff Partnership Charter: While a Staff Partnership Charter has not been drafted, staff partnership structures are in place through the Staff Engagement and Innovation Committee (SEIC), with the partnership approach of the organisation fully detailed in the terms of reference for that committee. The role of the committee is to work as a partnership structure for management, staff and unions to provide strategic leadership and direction to the Staff Engagement and Innovation Programme. The SEIC meets bi-monthly and has 28 members drawn from the three locations, including representatives from all staff cohorts and the Management Board, Union Representatives, and members of the Staff Engagement & Innovation team.

(iv) Management Board Visibility: Feedback from this review indicates that there could be greater visibility of Management Board members in parts of the organisation, with the Dublin offices of particular note in this regard. This is in keeping with the findings of the 2023 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey whereby only 59% of staff deemed that senior management were sufficiently visible throughout the organisation (although this is higher than the general Civil Service score of 52%).

FINDINGS: COMMUNICATION

F1.18 Considerable work has been undertaken in developing and professionalising the external communications function, the Communication and Dissemination Division, in the CSO in recent years.

However, it is not aligned operationally or strategically with the separate Internal Communications and Engagement (ICE) Unit.

F1.19 While a new external Communications Strategy is being drafted, there is no internal Communications Strategy in place. This places the organisation at risk of its own staff not being fully aware of the developing role of the organisation, its strategic priorities and progress achieved towards its strategic goals, as well as the risk of less than optimum feedback from staff to senior managers.

F1.20 The Communications and Dissemination Division works closely with business areas so that communications planning and support is embedded at business unit level. However, a formal business partner model has not been put in place.

F1.21 Notwithstanding the significant work undertaken in the area of external communications to date, the CSO could be more assertive in communicating its expertise and potential across the Civil and Public Service and society more generally. The scheduling of more frequent seminars and conferences to enhance communications and showcase the innovative work being carried out by the CSO warrants consideration.

F1.22 Some internal and external stakeholders believe that the CSO could do more to improve public understanding of what it does through providing greater analysis with its statistical releases, which could be achieved without compromising the need for impartiality.

F1.23 The CSO will be required to build on progress achieved to date with the organisation's website through continuing to strive to balance the needs of both technical and casual users and developing a comprehensive Website Strategy in line with the Communications Strategy currently being drafted.

F1.24 While the CSO operates clear policies and practices regarding the use of social media and has a social media and a digital marketing function, the development of an enhanced social media persona and articulation of a Social Media Strategy would secure greater engagement with the general public as a whole.

F1.25 There is a culture of openness and transparency in the CSO. However, the quality and extent of communication between the Management Board and staff can vary, depending on the regularity of staff meetings and the individual communication style and approach of managers.

F1.26 Some aspects of internal communications work well such as Vlogs from individual ADGs and the DG, the Town Hall sessions with staff, 'Ask Frankie' Information Sessions, GMF 'Bitesize' information sessions, Field Bites and the Staff Newsletter. However, the existence of two internal communication platforms for staff is causing confusion with neither platform fully meeting the communication needs of the organisation.

F1.27 Increased visibility of Management Board members as an enabler of communication, particularly in the Swords office location and across full directorates, would be welcomed by staff.

F1.28 Field staff as an individual cohort require specific focus in terms of engagement and communication strategies in light of the 'disconnect' reported from the organisation.

F1.29 The work of the CSO in the area of staff partnership and engagement is very positive. Consideration could be given to the development of the Terms of Reference of the Staff Engagement and Innovation Committee (SEIC) into a formal Staff Partnership Charter.

CHAPTER 1 RECOMMENDATIONS - LEADERSHIP

1A CRITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

R1.1 Communications Function: The external-facing Communications and Dissemination Division should be merged with the Internal Communications and Engagement (ICE) Unit immediately in order to professionalise both functions and align all CSO communications from an operational and strategic perspective. This action is required before finalisation of the Communications and Dissemination Strategy which is currently under development.

R1.2 Communications Strategy: The new Communications Strategy for the organisation should encompass external and internal communications and should be developed alongside a Website Strategy and Social Media Strategy that will consider how the organisation can engage more cohesively across all social media platforms. The Communications Strategy should also specifically consider engagement and communication strategies to build a single corporate identity and address the current sense of disconnection expressed by both the field staff and some elements of the Swords based staff in the organisation.

R1.3 Internal Communications: The multiple communication platforms in operation in the CSO should be reconstituted into one overarching CSO staff portal that will launch immediately on staff log in. This portal should act as the sole communication platform for CSO staff, with the continued availability of those communication initiatives currently working positively (Vlogs; Information Sessions; Links to Staff Newsletter). Improved awareness amongst CSO staff of Management Board decisions and current CSO challenges, successes and initiatives should be supported by the continued timely publication of the minutes of Management Board meetings and priority circulation of internal staff notices. In addition, a formal policy on staff meetings across directorates, divisions, units and teams within the CSO should be introduced to ensure consistency and the setting of minimum standards that will support more effective internal communication.

R1.4 Prioritisation: The CSO should further develop the articulation, consolidation and reporting of CSO operational and strategic priorities on an annual basis to enhance the process of prioritisation across the organisation. This matter is further addressed in R2.1. The CSO should also build capability in clearly articulating future focused organisational priorities and funding needs during the annual Estimates process (R4.9).

1B IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS

R1.5 Review of Organisational Structures: The Management Board of the CSO should continue to periodically review the structure of the organisation in line with its strategic objectives. In particular, the current review of the Social Statistics Directorate should continue to be prioritised with a finalisation date agreed for early 2025.

R1.6 Communications Business Partner Model: The reconstituted Communications Function should consider if the introduction of a structured business partner model would add value to the achievement of its strategic aims, in addition to building relationships and enhancing communication internally. Such an approach would significantly support the requirement to particularly improve communications and

engagement with the field staff and staff based in the Swords office. It would also support and promote the development of a single corporate identity and the delivery of the new Communications Strategy.

R1.7 Statistical Releases: The CSO should consider providing more contextual and explanatory information with its statistical releases in order to facilitate greater stakeholder and general public understanding.

R1.8 Staff Partnership Charter: The CSO should build on the good work of the Staff Engagement and Innovation Committee (SEIC) by developing the Terms of Reference of the Committee into a Staff Partnership Charter.

R1.9 Internal Cross-Collaborative Working: The CSO should continue to ensure that opportunities for internal cross-collaborative working are maximised. In particular, opportunities for collaboration should be communicated widely to increase staff awareness and consideration should be given to adopting a more structured approach to the establishment of Communities of Practice.

R1.10 Staff Networks: The CSO should ensure that Terms of Reference are in place, and adhered to, for all staff networks. These should be subject to regular review and should clearly set out how each network will support the strategic objectives of the CSO and position managers and staff as co-creators and co-owners in shaping the future direction of the organisation. The General Management Forum (GMF) should also consider if more frequent in-person events can be developed to enhance networking and collaboration across the management grades. Finally, the Field Operations Review Group (FORG) requires particular review in terms of structure, remit and effectiveness in meeting both the needs of the organisation and the field interviewer and field coordinator staff cohorts.

R1.11 External Stakeholder Engagement: The CSO should consider the scheduling of more frequent seminars and conferences to enhance communications with external stakeholders and showcase the innovative work being carried out.

CHAPTER 2. STRATEGY AND CONTRIBUTION TO POLICYMAKING

This chapter considers the CSO's strategic and business planning processes, contribution to national policy development, and evaluation capability.

2.1 STRATEGIC AND BUSINESS PLANNING

Strategic planning is the process by which an organisation defines its vision for the future and identifies its goals and objectives. The process includes establishing the sequence in which those goals should be realised to ensure the organisation can reach its stated vision. Business planning can be viewed as a crucial support to strategic planning, linking the Statement of Strategy to a consolidated work plan for the organisation and in turn to the business plans of individual units and teams. These plans should drive the operation of individual business units and inform the goal setting stage of the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) process.

Strategic planning in the CSO is informed by both national and international developments including the European Statistical System (ESS), the Irish Statistical System (ISS), and the strategic vision of the National Statistics Board (NSB). The strategic planning framework in the CSO has a number of layers designed to position the organisation for change over the medium to long-term comprising the overarching long-term Strategy 'CSO 2030' under which the three-year Statement of Strategy sits, supported by individual strategies including:

- **Quality Strategy:** Sets out how statistical quality will continue to be improved across the CSO and the Irish Statistical System (ISS);
- **Technology Strategy:** Sets out how the technology divisions will support the CSO in meeting its organisational goals and delivering on its mission;
- **Methodology Strategy:** Aims to ensure the CSO statistical programme of work is grounded in solid, up to date methodology informed by best international practice;
- **Communications Strategy:** Aims to build communications capacity and ensure that good communication practices are embedded in the organisation;
- **People Strategy:** Aims to reinforce the CSO as an employer of choice where talent, ambition and good work are cherished and rewarded.

All strategies cascade down to Divisional Action Plans (DAPs), Local Business Plans (LBPs) and individual Goal Setting Plans under the PMDS process.

2.1.1 Long-Term Strategic Planning

The first CSO long-term Statement of Strategy, 'CSO 2020', was published in 2013, setting out the CSO's values and principles, the changing environment in which it worked, and the vision for where the organisation should be by 2020. It marked the beginning of the first wave of modernisation in the CSO, laying the foundation for meeting emerging demands in official statistics, with an emphasis on quality management and 'getting the basics right'.

The current 10-year strategy, 'CSO 2030', was published in 2020 and can be regarded as the second wave of modernisation. It clearly articulates the CSO's vision of 'Independent Insight for All', positioning the CSO at the centre of the Irish Data Ecosystem and outlining four key roles of:

- **Provider** - Providing trusted insight for all;
- **Innovator** - Developing new products, processes, services and tools;
- **Enabler** - Facilitating others to use products and services of the CSO; and
- **Leader** - Within the Irish data ecosystem and internationally.

This 10-year strategy situates the CSO within the Irish, European and global statistical system, highlighting the importance of legislation and data standards at both national and international levels. It recognises the importance of horizon scanning in order to position the organisation to continually modernise; focus on strategic workforce planning and people development; lead on how data is governed; grow the use of secondary data sources; fill emerging data gaps, provide new statistical services; and influence data use in the wider public service.

The strategy clearly articulates the users of the CSO as the people of Ireland; Government and policy makers; EU institutions and international organisations; researchers; the media; survey respondents and data providers, thus demonstrating the breadth of the role of the CSO as a modern organisation that has developed and responded to the fundamentally changed data, economic and social environment in which it operates. The strategy very clearly sets out the mission of the organisation in delivering official statistics and high quality insight in support of public discourse and informed decision-making, releasing the power of data as a strategic asset for modern Ireland.

2.1.2 Medium-Term Strategic Planning

While the Strategy CSO 2030 sets out the strategic vision for the CSO over the long-term, the Statement of Strategy 2020-2023³⁴ addresses the strategic development of the organisation over the medium-term. The strategy supports the long-term vision of 'Independent Insight for All' with the articulated mission to *'describe Ireland, its people, economy, society and environment through verifiable data and accurate information while providing impartial insight.'*

The Statement of Strategy 2020-2023 includes a succinct description of the CSO's role in the provision of data to support and inform decision-making, articulating that *data creates information* which generates *knowledge* and leads to *informed decision-making*. It also emphasises the role of the CSO in providing leadership to other national data providers, through the provision of quality standards and adherence to national and international standards and legislation.

The CSO will shortly publish a new Statement of Strategy for the period 2024-2025, which will effectively restate the aims of the 2020-2023 Strategy, supporting the strategic mission of 'CSO 2030.' This approach has been adopted to maintain continuity during a period of change in the organisation which will encompass the appointment of a new Director General and the recommendations of this OCR Report.

The new Statement of Strategy for 2024-2025 is structured around four strategic aims:

- Turn data and statistics into information and knowledge for all;
- Embed the CSO's data coordination (data steward) role in the Civil and Public Service;
- Modernise the statistical, technological and administrative processes and systems of the CSO;
- Continue to build the capacity of CSO staff.

³⁴ [Statement of Strategy 2020-2023](#)

The strategy, which was drafted following consultation with internal staff and external stakeholders including Government organisations, the National Statistics Board (NSB), Oireachtas Committees and the Minister of State, sets out the detail of how each of the four strategic aims will be delivered during the lifetime of the strategy. Currently, the CSO reports on the progress made in delivering on its strategic aims in its Annual Reports.

The CSO does not currently publish an Annual CSO Work Plan that would set out in advance the detailed actions to be prioritised under each strategic aim for the year ahead. A published Annual Work Plan would inform stakeholders and the wider public on the detailed strategic and operational work of the organisation; provide clarity across the organisation on the specific areas of activity being prioritised for the year ahead around which organisational energy could be galvanised; and also provide a highly valuable tool for the Management Board to drive and monitor implementation of the Statement of Strategy, with monthly reporting on progress from teams and directorates a fundamental component of the process.

While the CSO publishes an annual Statistical Work Plan, this has a narrow focus on the official statistics that the CSO intends to produce during the year, as well as the statistical work plans for other producers of national and European statistics in Ireland from across the Irish Statistical System (ISS) (Section 3.1.1). The CSO also produces a Plan for Statistics, an internal document that sets out priority actions, mapped against the high-level strategic aims set out in the Statement of Strategy, with progress reported on a quarterly basis to the Management Board.

A published Annual CSO Work Plan, which would in essence require the further development and publication of the current internal document, the Plan for Statistics, would also be highly informative for meetings between the Director General and Minister of State and would complement the annual Statistical Work Programme.

2.1.3 Staff Consultation

Staff are consulted during the development of all CSO strategy and policy documents such as Statements of Strategy, Technology and Cloud Strategies, Communications and People Strategies and the development of the Blended Working Policy. This consultation can take the form of workshops, meetings with interested stakeholders, an in-person General Management Forum (GMF), an in-person Senior Management Group (SMG) or a staff Town Hall meeting. Staff also develop their own Team Charter for their section or division in which they agree a set of shared understandings around how they will deliver on business objectives while managing their time as a group and individuals effectively. Staff are also expected to be involved in the development of Local Business Plans (LBPs) and Divisional Action Plans (DAPs).

Despite such consultation opportunities it is of note that there was mixed awareness of the CSO Statement of Strategy amongst staff in general, with greater awareness evident amongst those in senior management grades. There was a sense amongst staff that the strategy was a document developed by senior management that only had relevance for staff if they were preparing for interviews. It was also acknowledged that broader strategic planning may have less relevance for some staff members compared to Local Business Plans (LBPs), while the use of 'corporate language' was referred to as a potential barrier to engagement and understanding of the strategy amongst staff.

2.1.4 Business Planning Model

The CSO business planning model includes the development of Divisional Action Plans (DAPs) and Local Business Plans (LBPs) to support the implementation of the three-year Statement of Strategy and the longer-term Strategy of CSO 2030, and to feed into the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) process. The CSO business planning model is outlined in Figure 2.1 below.

Figure 2.1 CSO Business Planning Model



Source: CSO, May 2024

(i) **Divisional Action Plans (DAPs):** A Divisional Action Plan (DAP) is prepared by each division in the last quarter of each year, encompassing an end of year review and planning for the year ahead. This provides the opportunity for the division to assess its goals and achievements; discuss any risks; and agree actions for the coming year. DAPs are presented to Management Board members³⁵ by the Head of Division, with all divisions within a directorate presenting on the same day, allowing for the consideration of the DAPs both individually and collectively for each directorate. It also provides for an ‘end of day’ session with all Heads of Divisions within a directorate where the overall operational and strategic position of the directorate is discussed.

The DAPs process feeds into a ‘whole of organisation’ assessment by the Management Board of the themes that arose during the process and also provides for the identification and assessment of risk which informs the CSO risk management process (Section 3.7). In addition, DAPs are reviewed again at the mid-year point through a similar process to assess progress and identify any required changes. DAPs are held centrally in the organisation by the International, Policy and Planning Division.

³⁵ A Chairperson (MB level) is assigned for each of the DAPs days and a MB quorum (4 MB members in line with the MB Terms of Reference) is required for the process to take place.

(ii) **Local Business Plans (LBPs)**: Each business unit within a division develops an annual Local Business Plan (LBP) which supports the Divisional Action Plan (DAP) and informs the PMDS process at an individual staff level. Guidance issues to all Heads of Unit (AP/Statistician or HEO) setting out the aims of the LBP process and positioning it within the broader organisational business planning process. The LBP is regarded as a section working document, is retained within the section and updated at least twice a year, before and after each of the two DAP meetings, and/or where major changes occur, or new risks or mitigations are identified.

The guidance issued to Heads of Units highlights the importance of staff involvement in the development of the LBP and recommends that it includes:

- An initial team meeting to discuss the progress to date and planning for the following year;
- Circulation of the revised/updated LBP to staff following the team meeting to allow for amendments; and
- Re-circulation of the final version to staff and to the Head of Division (to inform the development of the DAP).

Following the DAP meetings, the Head of Division is expected to inform staff of any changes required to the LBP.

A review of DAPs and LBPs conducted for the purpose of this review found that the document templates were very effective in capturing organisational strategic and operational objectives; risks; delivery timelines; and the identification of potential projects. However, the templates did not facilitate the capturing of data that could feed into broader strategic planning in the organisation, such as staff data including vacancies, projected staff movements and retirements; learning and development data; skills data such as skills gaps and financial data.

As with the Statement of Strategy, there was greater awareness of the DAP and LBP processes amongst the management grades, with a clear understanding within the AP/Statistician cohort of their responsibility for driving the LBP process. In early 2023, an internal review of the LBP process involving the Heads of Units found the existing process to be adequate with no amendments or improvements required. However, despite the consultation process with staff outlined above, staff at HEO/EO/CO level reported a more mixed experience of engagement with the business planning process, with some actively involved in discussions while others felt it was the responsibility of their managers. Those involved in the business planning process appeared to have a good understanding of how their work aligned to the overall strategic goals of the organisation.

FINDINGS: STRATEGIC AND BUSINESS PLANNING

F2.1 The CSO has a clearly defined structure in place for both medium and long-term strategic and business planning with significant organisational priority afforded to the implementation and review of strategic and business planning organisation wide.

F2.2 The medium to long-term strategies clearly situate the work of the CSO within the broader data environment and emphasise its role in providing leadership to other national data providers, through the provision of quality standards and adherence to national and international standards and legislation.

F2.3 There is a noted lack of staff engagement with, and awareness of, the strategic priorities of the organisation amongst staff below management grades. In addition, reporting on the progress of strategic

objectives is currently undertaken on a retrospective basis through the Annual Report process, in essence a corporate function of the organisation. Currently the CSO does not publish an Annual Work Plan that sets out in advance the detailed actions to be prioritised under each strategic aim for the year concerned, although it does have a Plan for Statistics, an internal document which provides quarterly progress updates on priority actions for the CSO Management Board.

F2.4 The current DAP and LBP templates very effectively capture the strategic and operational objectives of the organisation. However, data such as staffing needs; skills gaps; financial data; and learning and development needs, which could feed into and significantly support the broader strategic planning of the organisation, is currently not captured and warrants consideration.

2.2 CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT

The CSO is mandated to provide independent statistical information and insights to support effective debate and decision-making across Government, and to undertake a formal coordination or data stewardship role to influence the improvement of the quality of administrative data sources across the Civil and Public Service. Given its legal mandate and the increasing recognition of the CSO's position at the centre of the Irish data ecosystem (the data holdings of the Irish Civil and Public Service) there is an increasing awareness of the role of the organisation in setting data standards and classifications, supporting data integration and enabling policy development, policy evaluation and research. Key to this role is the requirement for the CSO to now adopt a more directive approach towards adoption of the NDI across the sector, with greater reliance on the legislative powers set down in the Statistics Act 1993.

It is of little surprise that a 2023 OECD report³⁶ highlights the contribution of the CSO and the Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS) to policy development in Ireland, describing the CSO as an enabling institution and noting the importance of the National Data Infrastructure (NDI) as an element of the Irish policy infrastructure. The OECD also reports that in a survey on sources feeding into policy development, 60% of respondents selected the CSO, confirming its relevance to the policymaking process. This policy contribution role is also clearly articulated in the CSO's long-term strategy, CSO 2030, and in the current Statement of Strategy 2020-2023, with the importance of this work recognised and understood at all levels within the organisation.

2.2.1 National Policy Input

Specific examples of how the CSO contributes to national policy development include:

(i) Evidence-Informed Policy Development and Evaluation

In 2017 the Government adopted the 'Commitment on Confidence in Statistics³⁷' in which it acknowledged the importance of independent, objective and reliable statistics as a public good, and recognised the role of official statistics in informing effective debate and decision-making. In the intervening years, the growth of the data stewardship role and the evolution of the National Data Infrastructure (NDI) have improved the foundations for the strategic ambition of the CSO to operate at the heart of Government to ensure that data and insights are considered at all stages in the policymaking process.

Progress made to date includes:

³⁶ [Strengthening Policy Development in the Public Sector in Ireland OCED \(2023\)](#)

³⁷ [Commitment on Confidence in Statistics](#)

- The CSO has played, and continues to play, a central role in helping to shape the data and statistical elements of a number of Civil and Public Service strategies. The organisation is a member of the Open Data Governance Board whose work is aligned with key Government priorities such as the Public Service Transformation Programme; the Civil Service Renewal Programme; the Open Government Partnership Action Plan; the National Data Infrastructure (NDI); and the Public Service Data Strategy.
- The CSO has formal structures in place to provide researcher access to microdata in order to support the research community and ensure that maximum usage is made of the data collected by the CSO. This approach supports the move towards evidence-based policymaking, has the potential to reduce the cost of research and also helps to avoid duplicate data collections. Many of these researchers are from across the Civil and Public Service, with 136 projects approved for 247 distinct researchers in 2022 and 116 approved for 168 distinct researchers in 2023.
- In collaboration with Government Departments and Agencies responsible for policy, the CSO develops Pathfinder Projects (policy-relevant research projects based on integrated data), aiming to deliver insight to policymakers while highlighting the value and importance of the NDI. Examples of other services provided across Government include the Sexual Violence Survey for the Department of Justice, the provision of Data Rooms for the OGCIO, the provision of statistical expertise for the EPA and SEAI, and the Growing Up in Ireland Survey for the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth. While this is an area of expected growth for the organisation, it underlines the need for a comprehensive framework on service pricing and vote transfer to sustain such activity into the future.
- Since the COVID-19 pandemic, Government Departments are more aware of the CSO and the expertise it can bring in terms of providing evidence and insight to policy development and in the form of data services, thereby acting as a viable alternative to the employment of external contractors. The CSO supported the central Government response to the pandemic with the delivery of a real-time information dashboard for the Department of the Taoiseach to track critical data and identify emerging trends; the delivery of a COVID-19 Data Research Hub to enable epidemiology experts to analyse sensitive health data; and with partners, the delivery of a National COVID-19 Data Hub on the GeoHive Platform to allow for geospatial visualisation during the pandemic. In addition, the CSO was also a member of the Senior Officials Group on the Government Response to COVID-19. More recently the CSO has joined the Senior Officials Group following the emergence of the Ukrainian humanitarian crisis and the Senior Officials Group on Climate and the Environment.

(ii) Data Coordination and Data Stewardship Role

Over recent years, supported by the strategic vision of the National Statistics Board (NSB), the CSO has been increasingly recognised for its efforts to improve the public data ecosystem in Ireland. The CSO's coordination, or data stewardship role, is mandated in both national and European legislation. This encompasses driving the management of data as a strategic asset for Ireland; working with others to ensure that the data ecosystem is fit for purpose by setting standards and classifications; supporting public service bodies in achieving well-structured and integrated administrative data; and ensuring access to the skills required to embed data analytics into the policy development and evaluation process. The data stewardship role of the CSO is discussed in detail in Section 3.1.5.

The Statistics Act 1993 sets out the responsibilities and powers of the CSO with regard to the coordination and setting of standards for producers of official statistics and holders of administrative data³⁸ and the CSO continues to promote a coordinated approach to data, rather than piecemeal silo development. However, some stakeholders across the Civil and Public Service hold the view that the CSO exercises its powers lightly, relying on ‘a coalition of the willing’, preferring to bring people with them through a collegial approach. While this approach has yielded results across Government with organisations who are predisposed to the CSO data stewardship message, the CSO should utilise its powers under the legislation to cement its data stewardship role, while still maintaining a collegial approach. It is noted that a similar view was expressed in the European Statistical System (ESS) Peer Review Report (2022).

(iii) Development of a National Data Infrastructure (NDI)

As an element of the data stewardship role, the CSO developed the National Data Infrastructure (NDI) to improve the quality of datasets and maximise the potential to link and match data to extract greater insight to inform policy and deliver official statistics. This requires CSO engagement with holders of administrative data across Government to drive its development. Key to the NDI is the collection and storage of three unique identifiers, namely, the Personal Public Service Number (PPSN), the Eircode and the Unique Business Identifier, thus facilitating the linking of data across the Civil and Public Service. These allow for data integration and the production of much deeper and more granular statistical insights, while also reducing costs and supporting data-driven policy analysis across Government. More recently, the CSO is developing the NDI+³⁹ which includes these unique identifiers in addition to common classifications and standards. The NDI is being rolled out across Government organisations through the NDI Champions Group which reports regularly to the Civil Service Management Board (CSMB) on the take up of the NDI. The requirement for the CSO to utilise its powers under the legislation to drive the adaption of the NDI and NDI+ has previously been addressed.

(iv) Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS)

The Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS), a network of CSO Seconded Statisticians working in Government Departments and Public Service organisations, aims to increase statistical expertise in Government organisations, improve the quality of their data holdings, and build a more coordinated analytical service thus actively contributing to the policymaking process, centrally supported by the CSO. As of March 2024, 47 seconded positions were recorded across 17 organisations: 5 Senior Statisticians, 35 Statisticians and 7 Graduates with 1 vacancy at Senior Statistician level and 8 vacancies at Statistician level (Appendix 3). The CSO has formal MOUs in place with the host organisations in relation to all of the seconded statistical staff, addressing the terms and conditions of the secondment and the focus of the work to be carried out.

Feedback from Departments and Public Service entities who participated in this review indicated that the IGSS has significant further potential and requires expansion. It was also noted that requests to the CSO for seconded staff by some organisations in the past could not be facilitated. While the context of this is understood in terms of recruitment and retention of staff in the CSO (Section 4.4.3) this matter warrants consideration in supporting the CSO to drive their data stewardship role across the Public Service,

³⁸ The Statistics Act 1993 sets out the responsibilities and powers of the CSO with regard to the access to records of public authorities, the requirements on public authorities to cooperate with the CSO and where appropriate and practical, the requirement on public authorities to develop their methods and systems for statistical purposes

³⁹ NDI+ can be described as the next stage of the NDI involving the development by the CSO of common standards, rules and guidelines to govern classifications and structure of data, in order to harmonise the concept of what is being measured.

including the priority progression of adoption of the NDI and NDI+ across the sector. It is deemed vital that the IGSS staff cohort are placed in the centre of policy development in host organisations lest the potential of the service not be realised.

One significant complicating factor in this regard, however, is the pattern over recent years of seconded staff being drawn from newly recruited statisticians to the CSO. Such newly recruited staff have not had time to build up adequate experience of the CSO as an organisation, and therefore may not have the requisite experience or skill level to participate in high-level policy deliberations within the seconding departments. In addition, for the more experienced seconded staff, the evidence indicates that their knowledge and experience is not being fully leveraged within host organisations to ensure inclusion and the bringing of added value to the policy development process.

One important point to note in this overall context is the provision in the Civil Service Renewal Action Plan 2024⁴⁰ for the creation of Strategic Policy Units across Government Departments, where evidence informed policymaking should be undertaken in order to bridge data insights to policy decisions. The Plan recommends that the Strategic Policy Units would include staff from the IGSS, IGEES, accountants, legal advisors, researchers and science advisors. Feedback from this review indicates inconsistency in how these units are being established across departments, if at all, hence the potential of IGSS as a service is not being adequately harnessed. While possible solutions to this issue could involve sponsorship of these units at Assistant Secretary level within departments, there is no doubt that the CSO at the highest level should be leading the discussion on the appropriate placement of IGSS staff in host organisations at fora such as the Civil Service Management Board (CSMB) and the Senior Public Service (SPS).

(v) Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES)

IGEES, a cross-government service staffed by economists and analysts, helps provide policy evaluation and economic analysis to individual public service bodies. The CSO, together with its Seconded Statisticians, work closely with the service to draw statistical and analytical inferences from a more integrated data ecosystem and thereby continue to demonstrate the benefits system-wide of such an integrated and coordinated approach. As discussed, the strategic positioning of IGEES staff working collaboratively with IGSS staff, cannot be understated in terms of the potential added value to the policymaking process across Government.

(vi) Inter-departmental Groups

As the national statistical authority in Ireland, the CSO's contribution to national policymaking is twofold, as the producer of official statistics for Ireland across a broad range of sectoral policy areas, and as an expert advisor on data standards and quality for the Public Service, particularly in relation to the administrative data that is collected by Public Service bodies. This latter role is of growing importance as the CSO moves towards increased use of administrative data, supplemented by the more traditional survey data it collects. This role requires a structured approach to engagement with Civil and Public Service bodies to ensure, firstly, that the CSO is involved in the policymaking process in its capacity as data-expert and, secondly, that this involvement takes place at appropriate stages during that process.

In order to facilitate this, the CSO has structured engagements with a range of Civil and Public Service organisations including but not limited to Senior Officials Groups (SOGs); Steering Groups; Working Groups; Liaison Groups; and Data Governance Boards. A full list of all fora in which the CSO currently participates is detailed in Appendix 5.

⁴⁰ [Civil Service Renewal Action Plan 2024](#)

2.2.2 Challenges and Opportunities Associated with this Work

The CSO's evolving role as an enabling institution providing data and insights for the development of policies at national and sectoral level is at times challenging and complex while simultaneously offering opportunities for added value in policymaking across the sector.

(i) Engagement at an Early Stage: A number of contributors to the OCR process, both external and internal, noted that in general, the CSO is not involved in the policymaking process either at an early enough stage or at all. It was suggested that consideration of data may not be taking place at appropriate stages during the development of policy, with data potentially regarded as an afterthought. There is little doubt that early engagement by and with the CSO during the policy development process as an expert data advisor is of significant value in supporting policymaking across departments and ensuring that data is adequately and appropriately considered throughout the process.

It is noted however that as the CSO is moving ever more proactively into its data stewardship role and seeking to support the demands for data for policy development and reporting, the importance of engagement at an early stage is being realised in some areas, with the organisation now an active contributor on a number of high level groups such as the aforementioned Senior Officials Groups and the Civil Service Management Board Subgroup on Strengthening Policymaking. As this role continues to develop, the challenge for the organisation is to clearly define the parameters of its role, which should include a well-developed understanding of the policy discussions it can add value to and those from which it should step back. In undertaking this work, the CSO should also review the potential value to be realised from the provision of knowledge and frameworks on statistical best practice to those directly involved in the policymaking process.

(ii) The Pace of Policymaking: In theory, policymaking is a steady, linear, structured process which requires the definition of a problem; the gathering of data to inform the evaluation of options; consultation with interested parties; and the identification of a course of action. Several contributors however noted that in reality policymaking can be more fast-paced and ad-hoc, subject to a range of influences, including political imperatives and responses to crisis situations that may not allow for such a linear approach. Not only can this mitigate against structured engagement with the CSO at a relevant stage in the process, it may also require data that is not available, either due to timing or the fact that it is not being gathered in the first instance.

(iii) Awareness and Understanding: There was a strong sense from contributors of the need for increased awareness between the CSO and Government Departments of each other's data holdings. This would allow the CSO to ascertain where it can add value and whether the administrative data that an individual department holds can be enhanced, both in terms of data quality and improved compatibility with the NDI. For an individual department, it would support policymaking through access to relevant CSO datasets and help ensure the inclusion of NDI indicators in new administrative datasets. Increased engagement with the CSO would also lead to a reduction in reliance by individual departments on the private sector to provide data analysis. It was noted that a consultation process for the CSO Statement of Strategy resulted in five Government Departments approaching the CSO seeking further engagement, which highlights the appetite across the Civil and Public Service for closer working relationships with the organisation.

(iv) **Resources and Prioritisation:** Issues of resourcing and prioritisation of work will become increasingly more challenging for the CSO as their role as a resource in the policy field continues to grow. There are significant challenges, noted by both internal and external contributors to this review, in delivering the CSO's more traditional, core programme of work of the production of official statistics, while developing its data stewardship role as enshrined in the legislation, within existing resources. This will become particularly pressing in the pursuit of both the NDI and NDI+ as the CSO strives to support improved data quality, data linkage and data mining across the Civil and Public Service.

2.2.3 Public Service Data Strategy

The Public Service Data Strategy 2019-2023⁴¹ is within the remit of the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) and seeks to progress a more consistent and uniform approach to data across Government and enable the secure use of data and services to deliver a well-functioning whole of Government data ecosystem to better serve its citizens and businesses. Input to this review communicated an understanding that the OGCIO has responsibility for both the technical and legal data infrastructures while the CSO brings data knowledge, data quality and the NDI structure, with this approach deemed to work well, not least due to the collegiate approach adopted by both organisations. Within this structure the CSO is both active and visible, in particular through its engagement with the Data Governance Board and other committees.

Notwithstanding this, there is a significant level of ambiguity from external stakeholders in particular regarding implementation responsibilities under the Public Service Data Strategy, having particular regard to the legal mandate of the CSO as data coordinator and thereby the driver of data standards and the NDI/NDI+ across the Civil and Public Service. The scale of activity of both the CSO and OGCIO is extensively acknowledged, however there is a widely held view that there is a need for greater clarity on the objectives to be achieved within specific timelines, the lead/supporting roles of each organisation involved and the resources/skillsets required for delivery. The resulting potential for overlap or gaps between both the work of the CSO and the OGCIO and in terms of the legislation, between the Statistics Act 1993 and the Data Governance Act 2013 was also articulated.

FINDINGS: CONTRIBUTION TO NATIONAL POLICY DEVELOPMENT

F2.5 The CSO, as both a producer of official statistics and as national data steward, has an increasing role to play in contributing to data standards and as an expert data advisor in policy development, policy evaluation and research in Ireland. In undertaking this role, the CSO should also review the potential value to be realised from the provision of knowledge and frameworks on statistical best practice to those directly involved in the policymaking process.

F2.6 While the contribution of the organisation in the national policy field is fully demonstrated through its participation in a wide range of interdepartmental groups and committees, research projects and cross-government programmes, its potential was particularly illustrated throughout the COVID-19 pandemic, and more recently throughout the Ukrainian humanitarian crisis, when independent data and insights were rapidly made available by the organisation to support and inform crucial policy deliberations.

F2.7 The CSO has made significant progress in the development of the NDI across some administrative datasets, however it has been somewhat uneven. In order to accelerate the process and reach a position whereby organisations are accepting full responsibility for implementation of the infrastructure, the CSO

⁴¹ The Public Service Data Strategy is currently being redrafted.

should seek to utilise its full powers under the legislation. This is fundamentally important in support of the organisation moving forward towards the establishment of NDI+.

F2.8 The provision of Seconded Statisticians by the CSO, through the Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS), is recognised as being of significant value to host organisations, with a demand for its expansion across the system. However, the full potential of the service may not be fully realised due to the practice of the secondment of newly recruited, inexperienced staff and the potential under-utilisation of more experienced staff by host organisations.

F2.9 The Civil Service Renewal Action Plan 2024⁴² provides for the creation of Strategic Policy Units across Government Departments, comprising key policy contributors such as staff from the IGSS, IGEES, accountants, legal advisors, researchers and science advisors. There has been no reported coordinated progress on this matter to date thereby the CSO is now required to progress the appropriate placement of IGSS staff in such units as a matter of priority in collaboration with the IGEES. This will also provide a clear opportunity for re-evaluation of how the service is being utilised system wide and Memos of Understanding redrafted accordingly to ensure maximum value for all stakeholders including seconded staff (Section 3.2.2).

F2.10 IGSS staff should be positioned to provide a key link between the CSO and the host organisation on all data-related matters including as data expert in the policymaking process. However, in the absence of such a system currently operating effectively, early and regular engagement between the CSO and departments responsible for policy development is required, to ensure that data is adequately and appropriately considered throughout the policymaking process. Increased regular engagement with departments will allow the CSO to assess their needs, in terms of the extent and quality of their data holdings and their plans for future policy development. It will also allow for sharing of information between the CSO and Government organisations on the data holdings of each organisation.

F2.11 As the CSO continues to step into the role of data steward, issues regarding resources and prioritisation will become increasingly more challenging, with it noted that the current ability of the organisation to deliver at scale on its data stewardship and NDI leadership role is curtailed due to issues of staffing capacity and resources. Such matters will require the CSO to have absolute clarity on both the parameters of its role and resourcing requirements into the future.

F2.12 A significant level of ambiguity exists across the system regarding CSO roles and responsibilities under the Public Service Data Strategy 2019-2023. This is no doubt compounded by the legal mandate of the CSO as data coordinator, and thereby the drivers of data standards and the NDI and NDI+ across the Civil and Public Service. The potential for overlap or gaps between both the work of the CSO and the OGCIO and in terms of the legislation between the Statistics Act 1993 and the Data Governance Act 2013 is also an issue warranting focus.

2.3 EVALUATION CAPABILITY

The ex-post or retrospective assessment of a programme or project, more commonly referred to as 'evaluation', can provide insight on the dynamics of past performances including features of best practice or shortcomings. The evaluation process can inform future programmes, helping to strengthen decision-making and improve the design of similar initiatives.

⁴² [Civil Service Renewal Action Plan](#)

2.3.1 Ex-Post Evaluations

There is a strong awareness within the CSO of the need for and benefits of ‘ex-post’ evaluations and their positive impact on learning and good practice. Examples of good practice within the organisation include:

(i) **Project Oversight Board (POB) Project Evaluation Process:** The POB is involved at a number of stages of the evaluation process including establishing the appropriate level of governance for a project; consideration of progress reports for those projects which come within its remit; and the assessment of project closure reports. The POB produces bi-annual progress reports for the Management Board.

(ii) **Post-Census Review Process:** On the completion of each Census of Population, each business area involved undertakes a ‘lessons learned’ exercise in the form of a detailed assessment, with debriefing sessions undertaken with Census staff at all levels, including field staff, and other related stakeholders such as the National Shared Services Office (NSSO). The learnings from this process are considered and documented and inform planning for the next Census cycle. Following the last Census, a project closure report was also prepared for the Project Oversight Board.

(iii) **Use of the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM):** As part of its work on methodology and quality improvement across the Irish Statistical System (ISS), the CSO developed a handbook of quality standards and guidelines in 2021⁴³. This handbook provides a framework for the production of official statistics, not only for the CSO but also for other producers of official statistics in Ireland. The handbook utilises the Generic Statistical Business Process Model (GSBPM) of the European Statistics Code of Practice (ESCoP) and the United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE) as its key frames of reference to provide an overview of the requirements for statistical quality management. The handbook aims to encourage those involved in statistical production to constantly examine, re-evaluate and improve the quality of the statistics they are responsible for producing.

(iv) **Utilisation of a Pilot Approach for Survey Development:** The CSO regularly conducts pilot surveys prior to the roll-out of a larger survey in order to test questions, methodologies, processes and technology. Learnings from the pilots are captured and shared and then inform the next iteration of the survey. There are also spill-over benefits and learnings from different surveys and campaigns. Learnings from Household Surveys for example, feeds into how the CSO makes use of administrative data in other domains such as the Growing Up in Ireland (GUI) Survey. The CSO also uses focus groups in relation to social data collection, to gain perspectives from the respondent point of view and uses this insight in subsequent data collection cycles.

(v) **Supported Quality Appraisals:** The CSO runs a programme of supported quality appraisals whereby statistical processes and methodologies are reviewed by the Quality, Methodology and Technology Teams. If improvements are required, recommendations are made by the Supported Quality Appraisals Team, and support is provided to implement these changes, for example the introduction of new sampling or Statistical Disclosure Control (SDC) methodology.

(vi) **Revisions Policy and Errors Policy:** The CSO has a General Revisions Policy which sets out guidelines governing revisions of published data in the CSO. The Policy sets out the process for errors correction in published data, including notification requirements, treatment of errors, reporting obligations and

⁴³ [Handbook of Quality Standards and Guidelines](#)

documentation of 'lessons learned'. In practice, this can result in submission of a lessons learned paper to the Management Board, with the associated learnings feeding into the next iteration of the policy.

Notwithstanding the above evaluation and review measures, CSO staff noted that actual use of project evaluations, project closure reports and 'lessons learned' exercises was mixed across the organisation, citing pressure of work and time constraints as barriers to engagement with the process. This was reflected across all levels of the organisation with a general consensus that the organisation does not sufficiently document learning. As such, from a systematic viewpoint, ex-post evaluation is considered an area requiring focus.

2.3.2 Spending Reviews

To date the CSO has not taken part in the Spending Review process undertaken by and in conjunction with the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform. The CSO has been represented on the Steering Group that oversees the review process but has not proposed a paper to date.

FINDINGS: EVALUATION CAPABILITY

F2.13 There is strong awareness within the CSO of the benefits of 'ex-post' evaluation with examples of good policies and practice within the organisation. However, the level of consistency of application is mixed organisation-wide and requires renewed focus.

F2.14 The CSO has been represented on the Steering Group overseeing the Spending Review process but has not participated in the programme to date.

2A CRITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

R2.1 Annual CSO Work Plan: The CSO should introduce an Annual Organisational Work Plan to support its strategic and business planning processes and align with the current annual Statistical Work Programme (which details the annual production of official statistics across the Irish Statistical System). This work plan, which could be developed from the current Plan for Statistics, should be prepared at the start of each year and flow directly from the three-year Statement of Strategy. It should clearly articulate under each strategic theme the actions and sub-actions that will be taken; the directorate, business area and team responsible; and the timelines for delivery. Such a document should act as a tracker of strategy implementation; should inform meetings with the Minister of State, the Department of the Taoiseach, DPENDR and the OGCI0; and should be published at the start of each year.

R2.2 Data Stewardship Role: As the CSO continues to develop its data stewardship role, issues regarding resourcing, role clarification and prioritisation will become increasingly important and indeed challenging. In meeting this challenge the CSO will be required to articulate absolute clarity on the data stewardship role and ensure consistency and depth of understanding across internal and external stakeholders. This issue will particularly require continued positive engagement, clarity, and relationship building with colleagues across Government.

R2.3 National Data and Statistical Strategies: The CSO should engage across Government to progress clarity on the role of the organisation in the drafting and implementation of national data and statistical strategies. In doing so the potential for overlap or gaps between both the work of the CSO and the OGCI0, and in terms of the legislation, between the Statistics Act 1993 and the Data Governance Act 2013, should be considered.

R2.4 National Data Infrastructure (NDI): The CSO should aim to utilise its full powers under the legislation to secure the full adoption of the NDI, in order to solidify its data stewardship role, continue to improve data quality and standards, and pursue opportunities for greater interoperability across the civil and public service. This is fundamentally important in support of the organisation as it rolls out the NDI+.

R2.5 Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS): The CSO should seek to review the IGSS programme, before expanding further the reach of the programme across the Civil and Public Service. In doing so the full potential of the programme should be realised through ensuring that each host organisation is adequately strategically prepared to accept one or more IGSS secondees, who should be appropriately placed in Strategic Policy Units where they exist. Such Units should facilitate collaboratively working between IGSS staff and colleagues such as IGEES and research staff engaged in the policy development process. The CSO should also ensure that more experienced rather than newly recruited staff are seconded.

R2.6 Strategic Engagement with Policy Development Leaders: In order to ensure that data is adequately and appropriately considered at the correct stage of the policy development process, the Management Board should establish a programme of strategic, consistent engagement with colleagues at senior management level in policy development departments. Such strategic engagement will also help to provide clarity on the parameters of the CSO role in policy development; enable the timely assessment of data needs of departments; understand future policy development plans and facilitate sharing of

information on the data holdings of each organisation. The CSO should also pursue the requirement for Government organisations to consider emerging statistical needs as a component of the three-year strategic planning process, followed by engagement with the CSO as appropriate.

2B IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS

R2.7 Business Planning: The Divisional Action Plan (DAP) and Local Business Plan (LBP) templates should be further developed to facilitate the capturing of resource data (staffing needs; skills gaps; financial data; L&D requirements) that will assist broader strategic planning across the organisation.

R2.8 Evaluation Processes: The CSO should renew its focus on organisation-wide compliance with its many evaluation processes and procedures so as to ensure appropriate priority is attached to evaluation by all directorates and business areas, with staff awareness and engagement a fundamental priority.

R2.9 Spending Reviews: The CSO should consider participating in the next round of Spending Reviews, in collaboration with DPENDR.

CHAPTER 3. DELIVERY

The CSO is tasked with delivering an extensive national and European statistical programme, including the Census of Population, together with a legally mandated role of data steward in coordinating, overseeing and assuring the quality of official statistics in Ireland. The CSO not only compiles evidence and insight but increasingly in the role of data steward provides a suite of data and statistical services to the broader Civil and Public Service. This chapter considers the effectiveness of arrangements in place to support the efficient delivery of the CSO's programme of work including governance, procurement, risk management, innovation and customer service.

3.1 OPERATING ENVIRONMENT AND DELIVERY DRIVERS

The CSO operates within a rapidly changing data environment encompassing an increasing number of actors, both public and private, constantly evolving technology, and new and emerging threats. Within this operating environment the primary drivers for delivery of the CSO's work programme include:

3.1.1 National Legislation

At a national level, the legal mandate of the CSO is set out in the Statistics Act 1993, which details the legislative basis for the compilation and dissemination of official statistics. The functions of the CSO as set out in the Act are threefold:

- The collection, compilation, extraction and dissemination for statistical purposes of information relating to economic, social and general activities and conditions in the State;
- The authority to co-ordinate official statistics compiled by public authorities to ensure, in particular, adherence to statistical standards and the use of appropriate classifications; and
- The authority to assess the statistical potential of the records maintained by public authorities and, in conjunction with them, to ensure that this potential is realised in so far as resources permit.

Each year the CSO publishes its annual Statistical Work Plan which contains details of both the official statistics that the CSO intends to produce during the year and the statistical work plans for other producers of national and European statistics across the Irish Statistical System (ISS). In 2023, the CSO released 259 statistical products⁴⁴, of which 236 were planned releases, with an additional 23 unplanned new products. This was somewhat less than the 300 products projected in the 2023 Work Plan. For 2024, the CSO plans to release 307 products, 37 of which will be new products, across six main themes: People and Society; Labour Market and Earnings; Business Sectors; Economy; Environment; and General Statistical Publications.

3.1.2 EU Legislation

The European Statistical System (ESS) is a partnership between Eurostat (the EU Statistical Office), the National Statistical Institutes of Member States (such as the CSO), and Other National Authorities (ONAs) responsible for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics. The primary objective of the ESS is to guarantee that European statistics, compiled in all Member States of the

⁴⁴ Statistical products are defined as a documented set of data that are available to end users in one or more supports or formats. Each statistical product is counted only once on the statistical work plan, even if the product is disseminated more than once (e.g. a statistic that is released on a monthly or quarterly basis will only be counted once). Source: www.cso.ie

European Union, are comparable, reliable, relevant and usable. Eurostat has the central function in this cooperative work, and leads on the development of statistics across country borders and on ensuring the availability of harmonised European statistics of a high quality.

Regulation (EC) No. 223/2009 on European statistics (amended by Regulation 2015/759⁴⁵), known informally as the EU Statistical Law, was adopted by the European Parliament and Council in 2009. It establishes a legal framework for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics, encompassing:

- Statistical principles and governance, including the role of Eurostat and cooperation with the European System of Central Banks (ESCB);
- The European Statistics Code of Practice;
- The production and dissemination of European statistics; and
- Statistical confidentiality.

The 2015 amendment assigned responsibility to the Director General of the CSO, as Head of the National Statistical Institute, for the co-ordination and oversight of the quality of all European Official Statistics compiled by public authorities in Ireland.

In 2023, 60% of the statistical outputs of the CSO were prescribed under European legislation. The CSO subscribes fully to the UN Fundamental Principles of Official Statistics and complies with the European Statistics Code of Practice (ESCoP). Aligned with this, the CSO developed the Irish Statistical System Code of Practice (ISSCoP) to support Irish producers of official statistics.

EU Regulation 223/2009 was amended in 2023 to future proof the legal framework governing European statistics and significantly improve the responsiveness of the European Statistical System (ESS) to data needs. The amended regulation seeks to provide a mechanism and tools for the ESS to react swiftly, and in a collective and coordinated manner, to urgent data demands in times of crises such as pandemics and humanitarian crises. More specifically, the regulation gives statistical authorities the right to access privately held data for the first time. This will significantly impact the work of the CSO into the future, allowing a legal right of access to commercial data which will grow the insights that can be extracted from data, allow for new products and impact modes of data collection.

3.1.3 Census of Population

A Census of Population is taken by Governments worldwide to determine the number of inhabitants in their country and the various characteristics of the population and, as an EU Member State Ireland is obliged to conduct a regular census of its population at least every 10 years⁴⁶. The Census of Population marks a significant opportunity for the CSO as the representative of the Irish Government to engage with everyone in the State over a short time period, collecting detailed statistical data to provide a comprehensive picture of the social and living conditions of the people of Ireland. Traditionally, Ireland has relied on a model of hand delivery and collection of a paper-based questionnaire by a large team of enumerators, which has always yielded high quality outputs. In accordance with the usual five-year interval, the next Census of Population is due to be conducted in 2027.

⁴⁵ In 2015, the basic EU regulation on European Statistics was amended to enable greater access to administrative data sources for statistical purposes (Article 17a of Regulation 223/2009 as amended by Regulation 2015/759).

⁴⁶ [Regulation \(EC\) No. 763/2008](#)

The national digital strategy ‘Harnessing Digital - the Digital Ireland Framework’⁴⁷ and the supporting Public Service Digital and ICT Strategy ‘Connecting Government, 2030’⁴⁸ aim to deliver 90% of applicable Government services online by 2030. To align with these objectives, the CSO intends to introduce an online response option for the next Census of Population. This will increase the level of digital data collection and provide a better, user-focused experience for citizens. The introduction of an online response option will involve a complex change programme, requiring significant redesign of the Census data collection operation and additional investment to achieve a digital-first Census in 2027.

The CSO is also continuing to develop its capacity to produce national population estimates using administrative data sources⁴⁹. A pilot of an administrative Census was undertaken in 2021, with experimental estimates of the population published in December 2021 using this new approach. A second iteration has since been published. It is expected that population counts derived in this way will become more robust in the coming years as the NDI and NDI+ become more embedded across Public Service data holdings, the associated quality of administrative data sources improves, and additional data sources become available to the CSO. This will enable the compilation of detailed annual population estimates required to meet new EU legal obligations. It also presents an opportunity to radically change the approach to Census-taking in Ireland.

3.1.4 National Government Priorities

The CSO is not specifically mentioned in documents setting out national Government priorities such as the Programme for Government – ‘Our Shared Future’, the National Development Plan (NDP) 2021-2030 or the Climate Action Plan 2024. However, the increasing need for data to inform and support the development and implementation of strategy and policy positions the CSO as a key enabler for the delivery of Government priorities at national and local level. This is of particular relevance in an increasingly complex world requiring governments to address ongoing challenges posed by issues such as global migration, integration, health, housing, climate change and digitisation, to name a few.

The CSO’s role is more explicitly stated in the 2021 EY Report⁵⁰ ‘Supporting Excellence: Capital Project and Programme Delivery Capability’ which examined the capability of Government Departments to deliver capital programmes of work under the NDP. The CSO was named as one of the state bodies that can support Government organisations in capital project and programme delivery, through:

- The provision of independent information and knowledge, enabling Government Departments to understand key changes taking place and assisting in evidence-based decision-making when setting and implementing policy; and
- Supporting the development of the strategic assessment and business case for capital projects.

In addition, the CSO has significantly increased engagement with DPENDR and the broader transformation agenda over recent times, contributing to the Government’s Civil and Public Service reform strategies (Public Service Transformation 2030; Civil Service Renewal Plan 2030) and assuming responsibility for the administration of the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey (CSEES) which is noted as a significant undertaking. All of these initiatives share the common vision of data being an

⁴⁷ [Harnessing Digital](#)

⁴⁸ [Connecting Government, 2030](#)

⁴⁹ Known as Irish Population Estimates from Administrative Data Sources (IPEADS)

⁵⁰ [‘Supporting Excellence: Capital Project and Programme Delivery Capability’ \(2021\)](#)

important resource to be managed and exploited, with the CSO being particularly engaged on open data, digital transformation and evidence-informed policymaking.

As discussed previously, the work mandate of the CSO is also driven by the need to respond to unforeseen national and international crises such as pandemics and humanitarian crises. The organisation has clearly demonstrated its ability to respond in an agile and flexible manner to such events, prioritising and reprioritising its work programme as required.

3.1.5 Data Stewardship Role

The CSO is no longer an organisation that exclusively compiles and publishes statistics but also now provides a suite of data and statistical services to the broader system. Increasingly the organisation is leveraging the State's administrative data stock to develop composite data sources bringing enriched insight to official statistics and driving for access to privately held data to further support the quality and utility of its work. Thereby, the CSO is moving more fully into a cross-organisational coordination or data stewardship role as set out in the European Regulation 223/2009 and in the Statistics Act 1993 (Sections 10 and 31).

While the term Data Stewardship is employed to encompass all the diverse supports and services required in this coordination role, the specific areas currently requiring focus by the CSO in protecting and promoting Ireland's data ecosystem include:

- **Improving Data Quality:** Providing standards, rules and guidelines on how to implement consistent and coherent data classifications across Government, and building on the NDI and the NDI+ and the use of common identifiers, there is a need to expand further to provide standards across a broader range of data needs, such as equality characteristics and economic variables such as industry and occupation codes. This work will enable the delivery of training, governance and oversight, to promote and give direction on the best practice use of data classifications across the system.
- **Extracting Insights from Data:** Providing the foundations to bring data together and the analytical capacity to exploit them, data analysis is acknowledged as being central to effective policy design and its subsequent evaluation, however, investing in just data analytics is not enough. Data analytics depends on high quality data, securely and compliantly provided in a timely manner, to enable responses to urgent and complex policy needs. This requires a multi-disciplined team approach, with investment needed in legal, technical and governance expertise together with data science/engineering and analytical skills.
- **Providing Appropriate Data Analysis Tools and Resources:** Required to support the administrative system, this includes putting the CSO Data Hub⁵¹ on a sustainable footing recognising it is now a core part of CSO's technology infrastructure.
- **Developing and Providing an Expanded 'Data Room' Service⁵²:** There is a growing demand amongst Public Service analysts for the expansion of this CSO service which has existed over an extended period. Demand growth exists both in the numbers looking to gain access to CSO data and the increasingly complex, linked datasets that researchers require.

⁵¹The Data Hub is a technology environment platform, designed to handle, process and store big data centrally.

⁵² A data room is a dedicated virtual environment that contains the specific requested data and approved tools for its analysis. Data can be viewed and analysed, but data cannot be removed from the virtual data room.

- **Maintaining Trust in Official Statistics:** This is deemed crucial in terms of policy development, with public trust and confidence fundamental to unlocking the value of data. The CSO is progressing this work for Public Service data and statistics by rolling out a comprehensive programme of statistical audits required on foot of the ESS⁵³ Peer Review 2022.
- **Increasing the Coordination of Identifying, Recruiting, and Developing Data Skills across the Civil and Public Service:** Data skills are highly valued across the Civil and Public Service and are currently hired and trained in a variety of ways. The challenge for the system is to ensure that there is an optimal mix of skills available to each department to support the effective use of data in decision-making at all levels. Challenges in this regard are addressed in detail in Section 4.4.3.

3.1.6 Research and Academia: EU Regulation 223/2009 explicitly recognises the importance of access to statistical data by the research community in the interest of scientific progress in Europe, while on a national basis access to research microdata files⁵⁴ (RMFs) by researchers is provided for under Section 20(c) of the Statistics Act 1993. By providing access to microdata, the CSO supports the research and academic communities and ensures that maximum usage is made of the data collected by the organisation.

A full overview of the services delivered by the CSO in line with its delivery drivers is provided in Appendix 4.

3.1.7 Challenges in the Operating Environment

The CSO is operating in a highly dynamic environment with new challenges and barriers to delivery constantly emerging including:

- An escalating demand from within the Civil and Public Service for data services;
- An increased complexity in what is being measured and reported on;
- Requests for flash and real time estimates;
- Increased competition for user attention in a data saturated world;
- The need to reduce respondent burden;
- Increasing risk of cyberattacks;
- Exponential growth in machine learning and Artificial Intelligence (AI);
- Recruitment and retention of key skillsets; and
- Falling response rates to traditional statistical surveys.

Official statistics are an essential element in creating an informed society for the people of Ireland. The fundamental statistical principles of *independence, timeliness, accessibility, quality, and confidentiality* that lie at the heart of official statistics make statistical data more important than ever. Within an increasingly crowded data environment, where ‘alternative facts’ and ‘fake news’ are increasingly promoted, National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) such as the CSO must ensure that decision-makers have

⁵³ European Statistics Code of Practice (ESCoP) Peer Review was conducted in March 2022. CSO along with all the other National Statistical Institutes in the European Statistical System and Eurostat are all committed to adhering to the Code.

⁵⁴ Research Microdata Files (RMFs) are unit record files provided for statistical research purposes by the CSO under Section 20(c) of the Statistics Act 1993. The processes for authorising access to RMFs and for managing RMF research projects are strictly controlled by the CSO.

the robust evidence and insight they need to inform their thinking, based on data that has been impartially compiled using transparent methodologies that can withstand the closest scrutiny.

FINDINGS: OPERATING ENVIRONMENT AND DELIVERY DRIVERS

F3.1 The CSO operates in a highly complex and dynamic environment, with new challenges, barriers and opportunities in delivery constantly emerging. Delivery drivers for the CSO encompass national and European legislation; national Government priorities, unforeseen national and international crises; the Census of Population; the data stewardship role; leadership of the National Data Infrastructure (NDI and NDI+) and services to research and academia.

F3.2 The development and promotion of Ireland’s data ecosystem, particularly in the realm of data analysis, depends on high quality data, securely and compliantly provided in a timely manner, to enable responses to urgent and complex policy needs. This requires a multi-disciplined team approach, with investment needed in legal, technical and governance expertise together with data science/engineering and analytical skills.

F3.3 Key challenges and opportunities in the CSO’s operating environment over the coming period will include the legal right of statistical authorities to access privately held data for the first time; the move from a paper based to online response option for the Census of Population 2027; the increasing use of administrative data sources; and ongoing efforts to minimise respondent burden through the most efficient possible use of new data sources.

3.2 GOVERNANCE

The CSO’s governance model comprises the following primary features:

3.2.1 Corporate Governance Framework

The CSO Corporate Governance Framework⁵⁵ (December 2023) provides an overview of the governance structures, processes and responsibilities within the organisation in keeping with the governance standards set out by the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform in 2015. Within the corporate governance framework, the Management Board has devolved responsibility to various governance boards across the organisation to administer the governance role in a structured and focused manner. Such governance boards include:

- **Risk Board:** The Risk Board is accountable to the Management Board, formally reporting on a bi-annual basis, and is responsible for the overall governance of risk management within the organisation. The Risk Board is discussed in detail in Section 3.7.1.
- **Project Oversight Board (POB):** The Project Oversight Board (Section 3.3.1) is responsible for approving the appropriate level of governance for new projects in the organisation. The Board reports to the Management Board on a bi-annual basis and escalates issues/projects to the Risk Board when risks are high or are increasing in a manner which raises concern. The Census of Population is one of the major projects overseen by the Project Oversight Board.

⁵⁵ [Corporate Governance Framework](#)

- **Editorial Board:** Established in June 2015, the role of the Editorial Board is to provide advice and support on standards for CSO published content. The Board meets monthly to review publications and support editorial standards across all CSO outputs.
- **Confidentiality and Data Security Committee:** The role of the Confidentiality and Data Security Committee (CDSC) is to co-ordinate the implementation of CSO obligations relating to statistical confidentiality and data security, in line with the requirements of Part V of the Statistics Act 1993, the Data Protection Acts 1988 to 2018, and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR).
- **Business Respondent and Survey Management System (SMS) Project Board:** This Board governs the project developing the Portal for Business Statistics Respondents. The project will review and change processes to make the return of business surveys more cohesive for the respondent. The Board reports to both the Project Oversight Board and the Risk Board.

At senior management level in the CSO it is generally viewed that the governance model in place is robust and meets the current needs of the organisation. There was a shared understanding however that the model requires ongoing review with for example, the Chairs of some Boards requiring immediate rotation. The establishment of the Governance Support Unit (GSU) within the Enforcement, Legal and Governance Division has helped to increase staff awareness of governance roles and requirements, with middle line managers demonstrating a good awareness of senior managers' roles.

3.2.2 Cross-Organisational Governance Structures

The operating environment of the CSO dictates the requirement for governance arrangements that span organisational boundaries including:

- **Co-ordination of all European Official Statistics:** The Director General of the CSO has responsibility for the coordination of the statistical activities of all national authorities holding responsibility for the development, production and dissemination of European statistics ⁵⁶in Ireland. At present there are fourteen Public Service bodies that produce European statistics, with the CSO responsible for ensuring that the quality and methodological standards set out by the EU and detailed in the European Statistics Code of Practice are adhered to.
- **Irish Statistical System (ISS):** The CSO has a legally mandated coordination role to play across the Public Service in relation to official statistics compiled by other public authorities. Under Sections 30 and 31 of the Statistics Act, 1993^{57 58}, the CSO also has powers of access to the records of public authorities for statistical purposes, and to obtain the co-operation of public authorities in developing the statistical potential of administrative records. In undertaking this role, the CSO developed the Irish Statistical System Code of Practice (ISSCoP), which sets out the standard for statistical production and dissemination of official statistics for other Public Service bodies. (Section 1.4.3).

Governance structures in place to support this coordination work include conducting Pathfinder Projects with ISS organisations, providing assistance to the ISS with statistical issues, and the creation of the Formal Statistician Liaison Group.

⁵⁶ EU Regulation 223/2009

⁵⁷ Section 30 Statistics Act 1993

⁵⁸ Section 31 Statistics Act 1993

- **Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs):** Memorandums of Understanding are formal agreements between the CSO and other Government organisations which aim to enhance data cooperation between the two parties and set out their shared commitment to the effective use of data. The MoUs are grounded in the relevant national and EU legislation (primarily the Statistics Act 1993 and Regulation (EC) 223/2009) and are agreed and signed by the CSO Director General and Secretary General (or equivalent) of the other organisation. MoUs are then published on the CSO website.

Each MoU is tailored to the specific set of requirements for each organisation, setting out the roles, responsibilities and areas of cooperation between the CSO and the other organisation, which can include one or more of the following:

- The provision of data for statistical purposes to the CSO by the organisation;
- Access by the organisation to CSO research microdata and custom analyses;
- Use of CSO RMF protocols by the organisation for researcher access to the organisation's data;
- Use of CSO infrastructure by the organisation for publication of its data;
- Technical cooperation and coordination of effort;
- Establishment of a Liaison Group as a formal, high-level mechanism for consultation and communication between the two organisations.

Memorandums of Understanding are also put in place in the management of the Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS) and are agreed between the CSO and host organisations, setting out the roles and responsibilities of each organisation and the seconded staff. At present there are 35 MoUs in place across the IGSS which the CSO is in the process of reviewing and updating, with the intention that all MoUs will then be reviewed every two years.

External stakeholders with MoUs in place expressed general satisfaction, noting that they provide clarity with regard to the roles and responsibilities of both organisations. In general, the MoUs are regarded as providing a supportive structure for engagement, reinforcing ongoing positive relationships and interactions between officials from the CSO and the other organisations. There was support for a regular MoU review process to provide a space for reflection on the relationship and changing needs of all parties.

Nevertheless, it is noteworthy that some of the CSO seconded staff cohort were less positive. Some believed that there was less awareness of the MoU amongst their line managers within the host organisation which meant that in some cases the actual roles did not reflect that originally agreed and documented in the MoU. There was also mixed awareness of the MoUs amongst some seconded staff themselves, which suggests a need for improved communication by CSO management with this cohort prior to and during their period of secondment. Finally, the frequency of reviews of MoUs and the opportunity for seconded staff to input into that process also requires consideration.

3.2.3 Project Governance

The CSO has a comprehensive Project Governance Framework in place comprising the Project Governance Team; the Governance Support Unit (GSU); and the Project Oversight Board (POB). This framework is discussed in detail in Section 3.3.1.

3.2.4 Role of Accounting Officer

As Accounting Officer, the Director General is responsible for the safeguarding of public funds and property under the control of the organisation; for the regularity and propriety of all the transactions in the appropriation account; and for the efficiency and economy of administration of the CSO. Through the completion and signing of the annual Statement of Internal Financial Control as an element of the CSO Annual Appropriation Account, the Director General acknowledges responsibility for ensuring that an effective system of internal financial control is maintained and operated by the organisation. The Director General also acknowledges that any system of internal financial control can provide only reasonable and not absolute assurance that assets are safeguarded, transactions authorised and properly recorded, and that material errors or irregularities are either prevented or would be detected in a timely manner. Maintaining the system of internal financial controls within the CSO is a continuous process and the system and its effectiveness are kept under ongoing review.

FINDINGS: GOVERNANCE

F3.4 The CSO has a robust governance framework in place that is reviewed by the Management Board on a regular basis. Staff awareness of governance structures was strong across the management grades in particular, with work ongoing to increase awareness of governance structures and roles organisation wide. A system whereby Chairs of committees are rotated on a defined basis may assist in the further development of the governance structures.

F3.5 The operating environment of the CSO dictates the requirement for governance arrangements that span organisational boundaries across the Irish Statistical System (ISS). In this regard there are Memorandums of Understanding (MoUs) in place between the CSO and a number of Government organisations addressing data cooperation and the management of the Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS). They are regarded by both the CSO and external stakeholders as providing a supportive structure for engagement, reinforcing the ongoing good relationships and interactions between the CSO and other organisations. However, there is a need for improved awareness and understanding of the MoUs in place amongst both the seconded staff cohort and their line managers within the host organisations. This work should be supported by an immediate review of all MOUs across the IGSS to ensure they provide for the appropriate placement of seconded staff to maximise the potential of the programme together with specifics of the role of seconded staff to support the development of statistical expertise in host organisations. Regular structured review of the IGSS MoUs should then become embedded as normal practice in the organisation.

F3.6 There is a project governance framework in place and operational across the CSO (Section 3.3.1).

3.3 DELIVERY OF PROJECTS

The CSO manages a range of projects in the delivery of its annual work programme encompassing the large scale and resource intensive Census of Population Project; Statistical Projects of a highly technical nature; Technology Projects and locally governed smaller scale projects. The level of governance and management applied to projects is assessed by the Governance Support Unit (GSU) in the first instance and approved by the Project Oversight Board (POB).

3.3.1 Project Management Structures

(i) **Governance Support Unit (GSU):** Project management within the CSO is supported centrally by the Governance Support Unit (GSU) in which the Project Governance Team is located. The role of the GSU is

to provide guidance in the execution of corporate and divisional projects and programmes, providing support and oversight to programme and project management (PM) in the CSO. More specifically the GSU is responsible for maintaining project management methodology, supporting Project Managers and supporting the Project Oversight Board (POB). The GSU maintains an online resource for staff covering all aspects of project management from proof of concept to closure reports, including lessons learned from previous projects.

(ii) Project Oversight Board (POB): The Project Oversight Board is responsible for approving the appropriate level of governance for new projects in the organisation, overseeing project risks and monitoring the progress of projects that come within its remit, which is approximately 12-15 projects at any one time. The Terms of Reference of the POB are published on the CSO website, with membership decided by Management Board and reviewed on an annual basis or as vacancies arise. It is absolutely crucial that members of the POB have a critical understanding of the fundamentals of good project management and are guiding the Management Board in that respect.

On initiation of a new project the GSU evaluates the level of project governance and management necessary against defined criteria and the POB then assesses if the project will come under its remit. In general, the POB manages high-risk, high-reputational, strategic, large and complex projects. Once in the POB system, there is a schedule of attendance in place for each Project Manager, based on the level of risk for each project. In the event that significant risks are identified, there is a facility for escalation to the Risk Board if deemed necessary.

Notwithstanding the structures in place to support project management, there appears to be considerable variation in project management methods across the organisation, with differing approaches evident in the Cork office, for the Census work in the Swords office and across the ICT business areas. Some staff referred to a patchy project management culture, noting that the quality can depend on local management. While there was a general awareness amongst staff of the project management supports and governance structures in place there was also a perception that project management was undertaken on a piecemeal basis; was largely the concern of the Senior Statistician/Principal Officer grade and was not applied consistently across the organisation. It was also noted that, while project management training is available through One Learning, there is also a significant degree of 'on the job' learning of project management skills. A Project Management Network is not currently in operation.

This was reflected at senior management level where there was a view that there is a lack of consistent project management in the organisation - while pockets of good practice exist, programme and project management as a discipline was viewed as inconsistent organisation wide. The structures of the POB were acknowledged but the level of understanding of effective project management was unclear, with the discipline needing to be strengthened in terms of both skills and the application of a properly structured, consistent approach organisation wide.

3.3.2 Skills Gap Analysis

The delivery of the work programme of the CSO requires a diverse skillset to drive projects and programmes from initiation to conclusion and hence employs a broad range of roles including professional statisticians; administrative staff; technical staff; other professional staff (such as financial; ICT) and field staff.

Identification of skill requirements for Statisticians is addressed through the Statistical Training Framework, developed by the CSO in 2018. This aims to measure statistical capability within the organisation and is based on the Generic Statistical Business Process Model, which describes and defines the set of business processes needed to produce official statistics. The Framework works in conjunction with a skills register; role specification forms for each statistical role within an area; and role definition as part of the annual PMDS process in order to identify strengths and gaps at individual Statistician level. This informs the development of a bespoke learning path for each Statistician and provides information for the Learning and Development Statistical Training Unit to identify and prioritise significant skills gaps at an organisational level. This framework is only applicable to statistical staff.

Specific current skills gaps identified by contributors during the course of this review included the areas of Data Science (such as data insight and analytical skills); Legal; specialised statistical skills; and field staff (in particular staff management skills for the coordinators). The gap in the area of Data Science was particularly noted in terms of a significant risk that the CSO could fall behind in Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning given the pressing need to embed such skills into the organisation. As outlined, skills gaps have also been identified in Project Management across the organisation.

FINDINGS: DELIVERY OF PROJECTS

F3.7 Project management structures are in place across the organisation, however while the CSO has matured in this area there remains scope for improvement in terms of project planning and management to ensure consistency of approach across projects of all scale and cost.

F3.8 The level of project management application in the CSO is determined by the size and complexity of the project with larger more complex projects governed by the Project Oversight Board (POB). It is absolutely crucial that the POB shares a critical understanding of the fundamentals of good project management and are guiding the Management Board in that respect.

F3.9 While generic project management training opportunities exist through the One Learning platform, this is not being driven by the CSO in terms of meeting the specific project management needs of the organisation. A Project Management Network is not currently in operation.

F3.10 The delivery of projects in the CSO requires a diverse range of skill sets with current skill gaps identified encompassing the areas of Data Science; Legal; Statistical and field staff. The area of Data Science is particularly noteworthy given the requirement for the CSO to embed Artificial Intelligence and Machine Learning across the organisation.

3.4 MANAGEMENT OF PROCUREMENT

Procurement requirements within the CSO are small in comparison to other Government organisations, nonetheless the growing complexity of public sector procurement processes requires appropriately trained and skilled staff.

3.4.1 Procurement Support

There is a central Procurement Unit in the CSO Cork office, situated within the Enforcement, Legal & Governance Division. This Unit provides support to CSO staff undertaking procurement, ensuring compliance with procurement regulations. However, the Unit is viewed as requiring additional resources to meet growing demand.

The Procurement Unit has four aims:

1. To ensure compliance with national and European regulations;
2. To support staff purchasing goods and services;
3. To provide oversight of high standards of governance; and
4. The continuous improvement of the procurement function.

The Procurement Unit applies a business partnership approach to delivery with significant efforts made to professionalise the unit and upskill staff. The unit supports business areas with the procurement evaluation process, award criteria, selection process and drafting correspondence to contractors. Procurement has been concentrated within eight areas of the organisation (including Census) in order to develop procurement skills, although this delivery model may require review to ascertain whether it sufficiently meets the organisation's needs or whether procurement for the organisation should be fully centralised within one dedicated procurement unit.

There is also a dedicated Census Procurement Unit, situated within the Census Administration Division in the Swords Office. This Unit is led by an Assistant Principal Officer with experience of working in the Office for Government Procurement (OGP). While there is some engagement between the two Procurement Units, the Census Procurement Unit is generally self-sufficient, with a positive relationship with the OGP noted. Such positive relationships were not evident however between the Procurement Unit in Cork and the OGP, with the CSO sourcing independent legal advice on procurement related issues.

3.4.2 Procurement Governance: The CSO has developed Procurement Policies and Governance Procedures that set out the organisation's core procurement values, the procurement governance structure, the operating policies, the regulatory obligations, the competitive procurement process, the non-competitive procurement process, contract management and details of internal and external support. Governance of procurement in the CSO is characterised by a devolved procurement structure:

- The authority to procure goods and services on behalf of the organisation is delegated to assigned procurement sections with no other sections having authority to make purchases or payments on behalf of the CSO.
- Overall management of the procurement process is the responsibility of the relevant contract manager but is subject to general oversight and/or sign off by the Procurement Support Officer prior to commitment to purchase.

3.4.3 Contract Management: The Procurement Policies and Governance Procedures sets out the organisation's guidelines for contract management. This includes information on responsibility for contract management; due diligence; contract review; contract repository; contract extension and contract modification.

3.4.4 Procurement Management Expertise and Training: Staff in the Procurement Unit undertake training to build on their expertise and then provide advice and guidance across the procuring areas of the organisation. However other staff involved in procurement indicate that increased access to such training would help them to increase their knowledge base, which in turn may reduce demand on the Procurement Unit. Staff in the Procurement Unit also have access to external legal expertise and guidance and some are part of an informal network of Procurement Officers from across the Civil and Public Service.

FINDINGS: PROCUREMENT

F3.11 The CSO operates a semi-centralised procurement system with procurement concentrated in eight areas across the organisation, supported by a Procurement Unit.

F3.12 Staff based in the Procurement Unit have regular access to training, however the extension of training opportunities to staff involved in procurement at business unit level would increase their knowledge base and potentially reduce the level of demand on the Procurement Unit.

3.5 INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

An innovative organisational culture is characterised by openness, collaboration and a tolerance for failure and is a highly positive indicator of flexibility and adaptability. Innovation in organisations is a multi-faceted concept that has the potential to deliver long-term viability, agility, ability to grow and expand, and greater success in meeting customer and stakeholder needs.

Within the CSO, there are effectively two strands of innovation: statistical and non-statistical (corporate). Statistical innovation within the statistical business areas encompasses data collection and data processing; the use of new data sources; development of methodology; development of more innovative outputs to meet user needs; and the dissemination and communication of more accessible and engaging material. Notable examples of recent statistical innovations include the Census 'Time Capsule' and the use of data from the 'rip.ie' website to develop real-time death metrics during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Corporate innovation tends to focus inwardly on non-statistical, general innovation measures across the organisation such as the introduction of gender-neutral bathrooms in the Cork office.

3.5.1. Culture of Innovation and Engagement

The CSO demonstrates a strong culture of innovation which has been growing over recent years utilising a bottom-up and top-down approach. Innovation is supported and promoted across the organisation with a high level of awareness organisation-wide of the range of innovative initiatives in progress, both statistical and non-statistical. This is reflected in the results of the 2023 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey which found that 60% of staff believed the organisation supported and encouraged innovation (compared to a Civil Service score of 54%). This spirit of innovation grew particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic when the CSO introduced new data collection methods; new outputs and new output formats; and new methodologies in order to respond to the need for insight on the impact of the pandemic on society and the economy while also informing the Government policy response to the crisis.

The CSO's risk appetite in relation to new products and outputs also improved during the pandemic with a greater understanding that data and methodologies did not require absolute perfection in order to provide valuable insight. One particular example is that of the Frontier Outputs Series. This initiative provides for the use of new experimental methods which are under development and/or data sources which may be incomplete, such as new administrative data sources. Publishing outputs under the Frontier Outputs Series allows the CSO to provide useful new information to users and get informed feedback whilst at the same time ensuring that the data limitations are well explained and understood.

While the CSO does not have a specific Innovation Strategy, the general view across senior management is that innovation is and should be embedded into all strategies across the organisation. The organisation is very clear in the requirement to pursue an innovation approach that benefits all stakeholders and

incorporates staff health and well-being. For example, the 'Le Chéile' People Strategy includes a strategic priority to *'Promote a dynamic culture that encourages innovation and collaboration in the CSO.'*

3.5.2 Structures to Support Innovation

Within the organisation, there are two business units that support and facilitate the two strands of innovation – statistical and non-statistical:

(i) Statistical Innovation: Statistical innovation in the CSO is supported by the Data Science Division which oversees and manages a newly formed Statistical Data Research Board, chaired by a member of the Management Board. The Administrative Data Centre Division is responsible for the development of secondary data sources and the innovative use of data, and for the development of new data sets.

(ii) Non-Statistical Innovation: The Agile & Innovation Unit supports non-statistical innovation in the organisation. Situated within the International Policy and Planning Division, which reports directly to the Director General, this unit provides support for the Staff Engagement and Innovation Programme and the Staff Engagement & Innovation Committee (SEIC). The remit of the Staff Engagement and Innovation Officer (SEIO), based in the Agile and Innovation Unit, is to support innovation and promote participation in innovation initiatives across the CSO. The SEIO also acts as the CSO point of contact for DPENDR innovation activities and is the secretary to the SEIC.

- **Staff Engagement & Innovation Committee (SEIC):** The SEIC was established in 2016 to work as a partnership structure for management, staff and unions in providing strategic leadership and direction to the Staff Engagement and Innovation Programme and improving staff engagement and innovation across the organisation. The Committee is supported in its work by SEIC Champions who promote staff engagement across the three locations and amongst the field staff. There are also SEIC subgroups which focus on different types of initiatives:
 - Local Engagement Groups comprised of staff at divisional level which focus on local initiatives;
 - Organisation Project Teams comprised of staff across the organisation focusing on office-wide initiatives; and
 - Working Groups comprised of SEIC members with a focus on sponsored initiatives.
- **Staff Engagement and Innovation Programme:** The Staff Engagement & Innovation Programme is driven by the SEIC who agree an annual work programme which includes all work being undertaken by SEIC Working Groups and Operational Project Teams, all of which report to the Committee on a regular basis. An annual report on the achievements of the Committee is presented to the Management Board. Programme activities include:
 - Innov8 Snap Session virtual presentations to staff on innovative projects and Frontier Series publications;
 - The CSO Nua Awards, launched in 2021, which are an innovation recognition scheme for staff in the CSO aiming to encourage and promote the development of innovative ideas from staff at all levels for the benefit of the organisation and job satisfaction for the staff involved;
 - CSO Innovation Month, the first of which took place in November 2022.

3.5.3 Perspective of External Stakeholders

A number of contributors, both internal and external, noted the CSO's agility and innovative approach during the COVID-19 pandemic in accessing and producing data that informed the Government's response to the crisis.

The external stakeholders, in general, spoke positively of the CSO's record of innovation, both at national and international level. The Frontier Series and Pathfinder Programme were particularly noted by many contributors. Looking to the future, stakeholder suggestions for innovative work included the incorporation and contextualisation of cross-cutting issues (climate change, ageing etc.) within standard statistics; careful consideration of the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI); and an enhanced data advisory role that would encompass improved data literacy amongst the public and NGO sectors. One important observation from stakeholders however was that the CSO could do more to communicate their progress in innovation across the Civil and Public Service, with a need for the organisation to showcase their work more particularly referenced.

FINDINGS: INNOVATION AND CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT

3.13 The CSO demonstrates a very innovative culture with supporting structures and a positive, open approach to continuous improvement. Senior management actively support innovation and aim to further embed and scale up innovation organisation wide. Communication on progress in innovation across the Civil and Public Service, and amongst external stakeholders, warrants increased focus by the CSO.

3.6 CUSTOMER SERVICE

Customer service is a primary consideration for the CSO given their interaction with a range of stakeholders encompassing the Civil and Public Service, national and international organisations, researchers, academia, the media and the general public. The main considerations with regard to customer service in the CSO are as follows:

3.6.1 Customer Charter and Action Plan

The CSO Customer Charter⁵⁹ is set out on its website, providing information on customer service commitments including response times for queries; a link to a generic email address for feedback; and contact details for each of the three offices, the Customer Relations Officer and the Head of Communications and Dissemination. The most recent publicly available Customer Service Action Plan dates from 2013. As the organisation's range of services, products and engagements have grown considerably over recent years, alongside customer service expectations, the Charter should be updated to reflect this. A revised Customer Service Plan is currently under development and will include detail on how progress on implementation will be reported.

3.6.2 Customer Service Ethos

There is a strong customer service ethos evident across the CSO, with staff at all levels very aware of their customer stakeholders and of the importance of the CSO's work in contributing to an understanding of Irish life and society. This is reflected in the findings of the 2023 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey which found that 71% of CSO staff felt their work had an impact on the public. There was also an acknowledgement by staff that the majority of customer engagement was indirect, particularly in relation

⁵⁹ CSO Customer Charter

to the general public, through the provision of data and publications. Customer service training is readily available across the CSO with the need addressed as an element of the PMDS process.

3.6.3 Customer Feedback

Engagement with customers for feedback purposes is incorporated in many of the CSO's work processes, with a number of customer feedback mechanisms in place across the organisation including the use of shared, generic email addresses; a specific section in survey forms for comments; contact information on all releases and publications for queries or feedback; feedback from Census field enumerators to field management; post-Census debriefing sessions and informal customer feedback through phone and email interactions and public consultations. Feedback received in relation to Frontier Series outputs and survey pilots is used to inform subsequent iterations, requests for bespoke analysis can become part of the standard output being published, and feedback from enumerators and field staff has been used to inform changes to processes.

In terms of the Census work programme, a comprehensive process to collect customer input is in place including a public consultation process. In addition, the CSO conducts a survey of users and non-users through an external contractor every three years, with the most recent survey conducted in 2022. The aim of that survey was to better understand the needs and usage of current and potential users, and gain insight into the awareness and perception of the CSO amongst non-users. The main findings of the survey included:

- 69% of user respondents stated they used the CSO most often for statistical information compared to other sources, while 83% considered themselves to be 'comfortable with statistical information';
- The website was the primary channel for CSO information but over half the respondents said it was hard to find their way around the website, and almost a quarter said the terms/titles did not make sense to them;
- In terms of satisfaction with CSO statistics, 87% found them to be trustworthy; 84% accurate and 81% relevant while 85% believed the CSO contributes to understanding, wellbeing and life in Ireland
- Amongst non-users, 62% used Google as a source for statistical information, although 51% of 'non-user' respondents were aware the CSO gathers statistical information in Ireland;
- 84% of those who were aware of the CSO, but were non-users, stated that this was because they did not have a need.

The results of this survey will inform the next iteration of the CSO Communications Strategy.

3.6.4 External Stakeholder Feedback

External stakeholders⁶⁰ largely noted that they were unaware of any formal feedback processes in place in the CSO. However, they acknowledged that informal feedback takes place through the various CSO Liaison Groups and on an individual, inter-personal level.

A significant number of stakeholders noted the potential benefits of strategic engagement between their organisation and the CSO on a regular basis, either annually or on a multi-annual basis. This would facilitate the provision of formal feedback to the CSO on the services they provide but would also provide for a discussion of the current and future data and service needs of the stakeholder, based on their planned work programmes. It would also offer an opportunity for the CSO to set out its planned

⁶⁰ It is unclear whether the external stakeholders interviewed took part in the 2022 survey of users and non-users, which was conducted via a survey link on the CSO's online and social media channels.

programme of work, including any planned innovations and any barriers that could affect its ability to meet data and service needs.

Whilst this work has commenced as an element of the CSO data stewardship role, with Government Departments having been advised about the data services the CSO is supplying and invited to engage in bilateral discussions on their current and future data needs, it would appear that greater focus is required to ensure the message is reaching key players across the wider customer base.

FINDINGS: CUSTOMER SERVICE

F3.14 The CSO Customer Charter is available on its website with the Customer Service Action Plan currently being revised. The Customer Charter would benefit from being updated to reflect the many developments in customer service practices and processes in recent years.

F3.15 There is a strong customer service ethos evident across the CSO with staff at all levels very aware of their customer as stakeholder and of the importance of the CSO's work in contributing to an understanding of Irish life and society. It is noted that the results of the 2022 Users and Non-Users Survey will inform the next iteration of the Communications Strategy, although it is unclear whether this will result in specific customer-focused actions.

F3.16 There are a number of formal feedback processes in operation across the business areas of the CSO together with informal feedback routes through the various CSO Liaison Groups and on an individual, inter-personal level. However, the extent to which such feedback is reviewed and analysed at organisational rather than business area level so as to facilitate service improvements organisation-wide is unclear. In addition, formal scheduled review engagements between the CSO and external stakeholders are not currently in place and warrant consideration.

3.7 RISK MANAGEMENT

The risk management framework in the CSO was the subject of an external audit in 2023. This audit examined the systems, procedures and controls for identifying, assessing, mitigating, monitoring and reporting on risks in the organisation with the findings confirming that:

- There is a sound framework of control in place, with controls being consistently applied to ensure risks were managed effectively;
- Risk management is fully embedded into the operations of the CSO;
- Appropriate mitigation controls were identified to manage the recognised risks;
- There is a high level of understanding from the Heads of Divisions (HODs) on their roles and responsibilities regarding risk management; and
- Directorates and Heads of Divisions actively drive the identification, assessment, and monitoring of risks within their respective areas.

3.7.1 Risk Management Model

The CSO risk management model is comprised of:

(a) **Risk Board:** Established in 2020, the Risk Board is responsible for the governance and oversight of risk management within the CSO, a function delegated by the Management Board. The Risk Board is chaired by the Chief Risk Officer, who is also a Management Board member, with membership drawn from the

PO/Senior Statistician staff grades. The Board meets quarterly and reports to Management Board on the same basis. Terms of reference for the Risk Board⁶¹ are set out on the CSO website and include the development of appropriate policies, procedures, guidance and systems; the development and implementation of a Risk Management Framework; the active and timely management of risk within the organisation; and the transfer of knowledge about risk events across the organisation.

In addition, the terms of reference detail the decision-making and escalation structures, the criteria for escalation to the Management Board, the working methods, the membership and the schedule for reviewing the terms of reference.

(b) Risk Appetite Statement: The CSO has a Risk Appetite Statement in place which sets out the levels and types of risk the CSO is willing to accept in pursuance of its strategic goals. It includes three risk appetite levels (low, medium and open) with nine defined risk categories of reputational; strategic; financial; data governance; cybersecurity; operational; strategic development; compliance; and innovation and modernisation.

(c) Corporate Risk Register: The CSO Risk Register is informed by the bi-annual Divisional Action Plan (DAP) process. Risks assigned a red/amber rating during the DAP process are added to the corporate risk register and assigned an appropriate risk appetite level and category. This also allows for the identification of common/cross-divisional risks and ensures that the risk management process focuses on strategic risk, with operational risk generally dealt with at local business level.

(d) Divisional Action Plans: Risk assessment by Heads of Division is included as part of the Divisional Action Plan template with clear guidance provided on the identification and scoring of risk. Heads of Division also have to identify the mitigations in place to address and minimise the risk. The Risk Board interrogates the risks and mitigations for all risks on the Corporate Risk Register. Many of these risks are captured as part of the Divisional Action Plan process.

3.7.2 Risk Awareness

There is strong awareness and understanding of risk at Management Board and Head of Division level across the CSO. The Governance Support Unit provides support and information on the risk model to the Management Board as required and periodically conducts training on risk scoring to ensure consistency across the organisation. However, despite the role of the AP/Statistician grades in the business planning process, there are more mixed levels of risk awareness amongst the AP/Statisticians and HEO grades, with a general awareness of the inclusion of risk assessment as part of the Local Business Planning process.

3.7.3 Internal Audit

The CSO historically had a designated Internal Audit Unit in place however a review of the capacity of the unit identified skills gaps, with the Management Board taking the decision to outsource the function in early 2023. The Head of Internal Audit function was retained however, based in the Enforcement, Legal and Governance Division and acting as the link between the external contracted auditors, the Management Board, the Director General in his role as Accounting Officer and the Audit Committee. The Head of Internal Audit also undertakes a limited amount of internal audits and provides administrative support to the Audit Committee which meets four times per year. The Audit Committee comprises a Chairperson (who must be an external member) and between three and five other members appointed

⁶¹ [Terms of reference for the Risk Board](#)

by the Director General, at least two of whom are external members. Internal members are appointed from the PO/Senior Statistician cohort. The Chairman of the Audit Committee reports directly to the Director General.

The Audit Plan is agreed between the Audit Committee and the Management Board on an annual basis. The Audit Committee submits an annual report to the Director General which includes an assessment of any internal audit work undertaken; the supports provided to the Audit Committee and a self-assessment of the Audit Committee's own effectiveness.

3.7.4 Business Continuity Planning: The CSO has a Business Continuity Plan in place (Section 4.7.3) which was developed in 2019 and employed very successfully to guide the organisation through the COVID-19 pandemic. The plan is reviewed annually and is a necessary component of the external European Statistical System (ESS) Audit process⁶², carried out every three years to assure the microdata exchange process.

3.7.5 ICT Risk Management

The sensitivity and volume of data held by the CSO, coupled with the absolute requirement for confidentiality, places a particular requirement on their technology and cyber-security systems, with data and cyber security one of the highest risks facing the organisation. To deliver its mandate the CSO has to access and hold vast quantities of data, both primary survey data (Census, Household Budget and Labour Force Surveys) and secondary administrative data. The CSO further increases the value of this data by matching and integrating data from across the Civil and Public Service. In addition, recent changes to EU Regulation 223/2009, once implemented, will grant the CSO the legal right of access to commercial data. While extensive mitigations are in place, this is an area where constant investment and vigilance are required in an operating environment where threats are constantly evolving.

The CSO has created a new division for Digital Architecture and Cyber Security to drive data and information security. This work is informed by the National Cyber Security Centre (NSCS) Baseline Standard guidelines. The CSO has also been identified as one of the Essential Entities under EU Network and Information Security Directive (NIS 2)⁶³. Regular mandatory cyber security training is provided to all staff; incident response plans have been created; and table-top testing exercises carried out along with Disaster Recovery and Business Continuity Planning.

3.7.6 Management of Health and Safety

The Safety, Health and Welfare at Work Act 2005 requires the CSO to prepare a written Safety Statement detailing the arrangements in place for safeguarding and maintaining a safe and healthy environment for employees, contractors and visitors. The CSO is currently finalising a substantive update to the last iteration of its Safety Statement of 2016 which will incorporate learnings from the management of the pandemic and the introduction of blended working. The CSO does not have a Health and Safety (H&S) Strategy in place. Such a document would add strategic direction and focus to the H&S function of the

⁶² The ESS assesses against the Micro Data Exchange system for data transfer between the CSO and other National Statistical Institutes across the European Union. Achieving the ESS Security standard is an assurance of good Data governance in place for the protection of all NSI trade data relating to MDE (Micro Data Exchange).

⁶³ The Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications is currently drafting legislation to transpose the EU Network and Information Security Directive (NIS 2) and as an Essential Entity the CSO will be required to implement cyber security risk management measures and processes and to report significant cyber security incidents.

organisation and hence warrants consideration, particularly given the extent to which it has staff involved in fieldwork.

The management of Health and Safety in the CSO lies with the Facilities Management function across the three office locations, while field staff management are responsible for the management of Health and Safety for the field staff cohort. A Health and Safety Committee and First Aider Committee are in place with all required roles under the legislation in place across all office locations and for the field staff.

Staff receive H&S input to their induction training and are regularly communicated with on H&S issues through internal communication channels. Courses for staff filling H&S roles such as Safety Representatives; Safety Officers; Fire Marshals; and First Aiders are available as required, with refresher courses routinely completed. Other H&S training is provided for specific roles and tasks such as manual handling. Facilities Management team members are trained to deliver ergonomic assessments to new staff joining the organisation in a blended working capacity. Personal Evacuation Egress Plans (PEEPS) are also developed for staff members where required.

The newest iteration of the Safety Statement will also focus on field staff and their particular needs while a Lone Worker Policy is in the early stages of development. H&S training for field staff is managed by field staff management with training now provided during induction and refresher training to be provided annually. H&S was an area raised consistently by field staff during the course of this review. Field staff work on their own often visiting homes in rural and urban areas across the country, with evenings and unsociable hours a common feature of the role. Although recently introduced for newly appointed field staff, H&S training was not previously provided as a standard component of field staff induction training. Field staff would also welcome training on conflict management and dealing with threatening individuals. While a reporting structure is in place for field staff to report incidents or concerns, there was concern expressed across that staff cohort regarding follow-up actions.

The Safety Statement, and relevant risk assessments, will be brought to the attention of all employees upon publication and will also be reviewed regularly with updates communicated as required.

FINDINGS: RISK MANAGEMENT

F3.17 The CSO has undertaken significant work in the area of risk management over recent years. There is a robust risk management model and risk management processes in place, with strong awareness and understanding of risk at senior management level. Management of risk is both aligned with, and embedded in, the business planning process.

F3.18 Management of Health and Safety in the CSO office locations is the responsibility of the Facilities Management function with field staff management responsible for the health and safety needs of field staff. The Organisational Safety Statement is currently being updated to incorporate learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic and implementation of the Blended Working Policy. A H&S Strategy is not currently in place for the organisation.

F3.19 Particular focus is warranted on health and safety issues across the field staff cohort who expressed concern regarding the isolated nature of the role, the requirement for targeted training such as conflict management and dealing with threatening individuals, and the opportunities for structured engagement with colleagues on health and safety issues in order to share experience and learnings. It is noted that a Lone Worker Policy is in the early stages of development.

F3.20 Business continuity planning in the CSO was proven to be an area of strength during the COVID-19 pandemic. The organisation is continuing to build on lessons learned, with the Business Continuity Plan reviewed annually and audited on a three-year basis through the ESS Audit process.

CHAPTER 3 RECOMMENDATIONS - DELIVERY

3A CRITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

R3.1 Health & Safety: The CSO should ensure that the Organisational Safety Statement is updated annually to reflect the fast-paced changes in the operating environment of the organisation. The CSO should also prioritise the drafting of a comprehensive Health & Safety Strategy in order to strengthen the existing Health & Safety Framework, outline clear H&S objectives for the organisation, and detail actions required with timelines for delivery. A review of health and safety training requirements for the field staff should be undertaken as a matter of priority.

R3.2 Governance of IGSS: The MoUs across the Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS) should be reviewed with host organisations and updated to reflect a refocus on the appropriate placement of seconded staff in strategic policy areas and include detail on the role of seconded staff in improving the statistical expertise of the host organisation. All MoUs, once refreshed, should be reviewed on an annual basis, with such reviews incorporating feedback from all seconded staff. This work should be supported by a review of the collaboration and interaction between the IGSS and IGESS Programmes to ensure maximum benefit is being realised.

R3.3 Project Management: The CSO should continue to pursue its maturity journey in project management by considering whether the Governance Support Unit (GSU) requires further development into a centralised Project Management Office (PMO) that will give practical guidance on all organisational projects, large and small, while delivering a consistency of approach organisation-wide. The Management Board also should ensure that the Project Oversight Board (POB) has a critical understanding of the fundamentals of good project management and are guiding the Management Board in that respect.

R3.4 Project Management Training: Focus is required on the identification of project management training programmes that meet the needs of the CSO across its range of projects, large and small. Roll-out of this training should be driven centrally by the L&D Unit to ensure that all staff grades, as appropriate, are trained in a consistent project management approach. Such training should be further supplemented through the establishment of an internal Project Management Network.

R3.5 Developments in the Data Ecosystem: The CSO should ensure that it is strategically aligned and adequately resourced to meet the significant delivery challenges such as the transition to a digital census and the forthcoming right of access to privately held data.

3B IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS

R3.6 Governance: The CSO should continue to build on its robust governance framework by ensuring that Chairs of all committees are rotated on a defined basis.

R3.7 Innovation and Continuous Improvement: The Communications Unit should advise the Management Board on how better to communicate the innovation message to all stakeholders and the progress achieved by the organisation to date.

R3.8 Customer Service: The Customer Service Action Plan should be updated regularly to reflect the developments made by the organisation in customer service practices and processes.

R3.9 Procurement: The potential for full centralisation of the procurement function in the CSO should be reviewed. In addition, regular training opportunities for staff involved in procurement activity at business level should be made available in order to increase the knowledge base and reduce the level of demand on the Procurement Units.

R3.10 External Stakeholder Engagement: Opportunities for structured feedback from external stakeholders should be developed, scheduled on a set-basis and communicated effectively at the right level. The new Communications Strategy should address engagement with external stakeholders, encompassing the Civil and Public Service, national and international organisations, researchers, academia, the media and the general public, and drawing on the results of the 2022 User and Non-User Survey and feedback received through informal channels.

CHAPTER 4. BUSINESS SUPPORT FUNCTIONS

This chapter explores the extent to which the corporate functions of the CSO are capable of servicing and supporting its business needs across the range of business support drivers, processes and functions including organisational identity, culture and values; human resource management; strategic human resource planning; people management; people development; ICT; finance; knowledge management and data management.

4.1 ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY, CULTURE AND VALUES

4.1.1 CSO Culture and Values

The CSO Statement of Strategy 2020-2023 sets out the CSO's five core values as:

- **Independent:** We are professional, objective, impartial and always act with integrity;
- **Trustworthy:** We are transparent and honest. We comply with the highest international statistical standards and deliver high quality products and services in an ethical manner;
- **Confidential:** We apply the highest standards of confidentiality and respect for data privacy. We comply with the terms of the Statistics Act 1993 and the GDPR and we legally guarantee to only ever use data provided to us for statistical purposes;
- **Serve the Public:** We are engaged with our customers and use our expertise to deliver a quality Public Service;
- **Continuously Learning:** We are ambitious, always horizon scanning and focused on innovation and collaboration.

The CSO's values are consistent with those expressed in the Civil Service Renewal 2030 Strategy which includes a deep-rooted Public Service ethos of independence, fairness and respect, integrity, impartiality, equality, and a culture of accountability, efficiency and value for money. The CSO's values are also informed by the Code of Standards and Behaviours for Civil Servants, the Ethics in Public Office Acts 1995 and 2001, and the Guidelines on Compliance with the Provisions of the Ethics in Public Office Acts as produced by the Standards in Public Office Commission.

There is evidence of a good awareness and understanding by staff of the CSO's core values and culture which are communicated, for example, in the induction training programme. The need for the CSO to safeguard its values is recognised by its staff, in particular the reputational damage that could occur arising from a breach of trust in the CSO. In addition, staff at all levels and across all locations spoke of a distinct CSO culture of friendliness, openness and professionalism, noting that the organisation was a good place to work. There is concern amongst some senior management that the organisational culture and core values are at risk of being eroded due to the challenges posed by blended working, particularly amongst new staff, however no evidence to suggest that this risk has materialised emerged during the course of this review (Section 4.5.2). While a proposed review of CSO culture and values was under consideration by the Management Board, this has been deferred and the necessity to carry out such a review will be assessed after the new Director General takes up the role.

4.1.2 Legal Obligations relating to the Core Value of Confidentiality

Under Section 21 of the Statistics Act 1993, all members of staff in the CSO are designated as Officers of Statistics and are legally bound to uphold the confidentiality of the data accessed in the performance of their duties. All Officers of Statistics sign a declaration of secrecy, with all staff also subject to the

provisions of the Official Secrets Act 1963 and in particular to the provision that: “4(1) A person shall not communicate any official information to any other person unless he is duly authorised to do so or does so in the course of and in accordance with his duties as the holder of a public office or when it is his duty in the interest of the State to communicate it.”

Although underpinned by law, it is essential that respondents to statistical inquiries, and the persons or undertakings for which statistical information is obtained from administrative sources, are fully assured that the CSO protects the confidentiality of the particulars relating to them and that they are used only for statistical purposes. The CSO has a long-standing excellent reputation in this regard. With concerns about data protection increasing across society generally, it is vitally important that the CSO continues to maintain the trust of all sectors of the community. The Code of Practice on Statistical Confidentiality reinforces existing legal assurances and outlines the practical steps the CSO takes to protect confidential data (Section 4.10.5).

4.1.3 Staff Morale

Overall staff morale is considered good across the CSO’s three work locations of Cork, Rathmines and Swords. Staff report a good work-life balance, a good atmosphere and view the CSO as a supportive, flexible and agile organisation. Newer staff, in particular, experience the CSO as a good place to work in comparison to other organisations. Some staff interviewed were of the view that morale is increasingly becoming more difficult to gauge since the introduction of blended working.

Where staff morale is reported as low, some other underlying causes that emerged as factors were:

- The lack of promotional/career opportunities for certain grades;
- The length of the pay scale for the Statistician grade;
- Falling response rates to surveys;
- Uncertainty and perceived lack of internal communication about the move to Altair⁶⁴.

In terms of the Swords office in particular, morale was considered good as staff are all working on the Census of Population which lends itself to a sense of common purpose. Morale at any given time depends on the Census cycle however, and there was an overriding sense amongst staff that the pressure of Census work and the effort of staff in delivering on time was not always understood or appreciated by senior management, with poor communication also cited as a particular issue of concern across some staff cohorts.

Amongst the field staff, specific issues impacting negatively on morale include:

- Increasing health & safety concerns with the perception that these are not sufficiently acknowledged or understood by senior management;
- The isolating and challenging nature of the role;
- Remuneration issues such as the operation of the 5% Bonus Scheme which is not seen as fit for purpose, as well as the lack of subsistence payments for field staff;
- The manner of the allocation of caseloads as this can impact on achieving delivery targets;

⁶⁴ In late 2023 the CSO migrated to an Altair processing platform. Due to procurement issues, the timeline for the migration was short. This was a significant change for the business areas requiring them to move large volumes of code to a new processing platform before the 31st of December 2023.

- The feedback loop to the CSO which can be impacted if positive relationships are not in place with the Census Coordinator who is the only point of contact for field staff with the CSO.

4.1.4 Organisational Identity

The sense of connection with the CSO Head Office in Cork was explored amongst staff based in Rathmines and Swords. Staff in the Rathmines office reported more of a sense of connection with the Cork office than their colleagues in Swords, which may be related to the nature of the work of individual business units and opportunities for collaboration. In the Swords office, which is wholly concerned with Census work, staff had a firm sense of connectivity to their own office but not to the organisation as a whole. The exceptions to this were ICT staff who had more contact with colleagues in Cork and Census Coordinators based in Swords who largely reported a good sense of corporate connection. It is noted that a number of clerical workers in the Swords office on temporary contracts reported that their temporary status negatively impacted on their sense of connection to the organisation.

4.1.5 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (EDI)

The CSO is considered by staff as an inclusive organisation and staff have a good awareness of the Equality, Diversity & Inclusion (EDI) Policy which was published in 2022. The policy sets out the CSO's commitment to promoting an organisational culture of inclusiveness where all staff feel valued and supported to perform to their potential. An EDI Steering Group is in place, tasked with overseeing and monitoring the implementation of the EDI strategic goals of the CSO, including their Public Service duty obligations. The CSO is considered by staff as very proactive in terms of EDI, with the subject addressed as an element of induction training. There is an appropriate gender balance on the Management Board and the CSO supports initiatives such as Pride. It is noted that the CSO was awarded silver accreditation from the Irish Centre for Diversity.

In 2023, the CSO published their second Gender Pay Gap Report⁶⁵ which detailed that the CSO has a mean gender pay gap of 8.2% in favour of male employees which is a slight but positive improvement on the previous year's value of 8.5%. The CSO is committed to closing this gap through firstly identifying the reasons for this differential and then putting in place measures to effectively address the imbalance. In this regard a comprehensive action plan for 2024 has been developed incorporating strategic and operational HRM policy, EDI, and L&D initiatives.

The CSO has a unique staffing structure within the Civil Service, employing a large number of Statisticians, the majority of whom traditionally were male. While this imbalance is still evident today it is decreasing over time. In addition, the CSO employs a large team of Survey Interviewers or field staff to collect survey data, with the majority of staff in this grade recorded as female. As such the CSO has a gender imbalance at certain levels of the organisation. A Gender Breakdown of Grades by Headcount is set out in Table 4.1 below.

⁶⁵ Gender Pay Gap Report

Table 4.1: Gender Breakdown of Grades by Headcount

Grade	Male	Female	Grand Total
Management Board	3	3	6
PO/Senior Statistician	28	12	40
Statistician	92	75	167
Assistant Principal	29	27	56
Higher Executive Officer	64	67	131
Executive Officer	99	144	243
Clerical Officer	79	144	223
Survey Interviewers	73	117	190
Service Officers	8	3	11
Total	475	592	1067

Source: CSO Gender Pay Gap Report 2023

4.1.6 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey (CSEES) 2023

The overall participation rate for the 2023 CSO Employee Engagement Survey at 80% was 23 percentage points higher than the overall Civil Service of 57%. From a CSO perspective the average theme score was down 1% compared to 2020, the most significant decrease was for Innovative Climate (-4%), while the most significant increase was for Learning & Development (+2%). Also of note is that CSO results were higher than or equal to the Civil Service overall results in 21 of the 23 themes in 2023.

Table 4.2: Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey 2023: CSO Top Five Positive Results by Theme and Civil Service Overall Result by Theme

Theme	CSO Total 2023	Civil Service Total 2023
Competence Our belief in our ability and skills to carry out the work required in our roles	79%	78%
Well-Being The extent to which we feel we can realise our own potential and cope with the normal stresses of life	78%	75%
Employee Engagement The sense of energy, connection and fulfilment we have with our work	74%	73%
Social Support The extent to which Civil Servants feel they have the opportunities to develop close relationships at work	73%	72%
Manager Career Support The level of support and development Civil Servants feel is provided from their immediate manager	72%	67%

Source: CSO Employee Engagement Survey 2023

Table 4.3: Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey 2023 - CSO Top Five Most Challenging Results by Theme and Civil Service Overall Results by Theme

Theme	CSO Total 2023	Civil Service Total 2023
Involvement Climate The extent to which we feel that we are involved openly in decision-making in the CSO	49%	42%
Civil Service Renewal Awareness The extent to which we are aware of the impact of the Civil Service Renewal Plan	50%	51%
Public Perception of the Civil Service The extent to which Civil Servants feel they are valued and perceived by the general public	52%	44%
Your Pay How Civil Servants feel about their pay in relation to their efforts and contributions at work and others who are like them	54%	50%
Performance Standards The degree to which Civil Servants feel Performance Standards are high and that underperformance is managed effectively	58%	54%

Source: CSO Employee Engagement Survey 2023

4.1.7 CSO Employee Engagement Action Plan

An Action Plan to address the results of the CSO Employee Engagement Survey 2020 remains in place, setting out the actions being implemented to address each challenge or area requiring improvement, the action owner and the timescale for delivery. Periodic progress reports are made available to DPENDR on implementation of the Action Plan, which is considered a living document and has been updated during its lifetime to reflect the possible impacts of blended working and other initiatives which may impact these or other themes. The most recent progress report was provided by the CSO in January 2024.

A similar Action Plan will be put in place to track implementation and enable reporting to DPENDR on the 2023 CSEES results.

FINDINGS: ORGANISATIONAL IDENTITY, CULTURE AND VALUES

F4.1 There is evidence of good awareness and understanding among staff of the CSO core values and culture. While there is concern amongst some senior management that CSO values may be eroded due to the introduction of the blended working model, there is no evidence to support this concern. However, consideration will be given to recommencing the review of culture and values when the new Director General is in place.

F4.2 Overall staff morale is considered good across the CSO’s three work locations of Cork, Rathmines and Swords, with staff in the Rathmines office reporting a greater connection to CSO HQ in Cork than staff based in Swords, most likely due to the nature of the work in each office. Issues with staff morale across the field staff cohort have been identified which will require consideration by the organisation.

F4.3 The CSO is considered by staff to be an inclusive organisation and very proactive in terms of EDI with an EDI policy in place, the implementation of which is led by a Steering Group.

F4.4 An Action Plan addressing the results of the 2020 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey (CSEES) is still operational with regular updates being provided to DPENDR. A revised Action Plan addressing the results of the 2023 CSEES will be developed in due course, subject to the same reporting procedures.

4.2 HUMAN RESOURCE MANAGEMENT (HRM) FUNCTION

The HRM function, based in Cork, is currently led by a Principal Officer in an acting capacity (this will be a short term arrangement) and comprises six units - Strategic HRM; Field HRM; Learning and Development; the Statistical Training Unit; HRM Operations; and Recruitment and Selection. Recruitment and retention of staff is identified as a particular challenge and risk factor for the CSO currently, although the HRM function has been responding with agility to promote the organisation as an employer of choice. The need for an integrated talent management system to manage HRM functions such as recruitment, learning and development and skills management was raised during interviews.

4.2.1 Quality of Service

In general, the HRM Function is considered helpful and responsive by staff. Staff interviewed had a good knowledge of the weekly online clinic hosted by HRM to deal with queries. A HRM helpdesk through which queries can be submitted is also in place. There was some lack of clarity amongst staff as to 'who does what' in the HRM Function, hence clearer documentation of individual roles and responsibilities warrants action. While HRM policies are available on the staff intranet 'CSOConnect', some staff felt that they were difficult to locate and that a central repository of HRM policies that is easy to find would be useful.

Mixed views are recorded as to how well managers felt supported by the HRM Division in dealing with underperformance (Section 4.5.1). There is also a less positive perception of the field staff HRM service. Field staff generally do not deal with the HRM Function directly, with their contracts managed via the Field Coordinator. Field Coordinators in turn report feeling unsupported by the HRM Function in dealing with challenging HRM issues, particularly in dealing with what was reported as a significant burden in managing staff probation and underperformance.

The Head of Census Administration, based in Swords, is responsible for the recruitment, payroll and administration of Census field staff. The HRM Function in Cork advises on HRM matters for all other Census staff. For Census 2027, dedicated HRM staff will be appointed and based in Cork to act as liaisons for all Census HRM matters.

4.2.2 Professional Capability

Due to the increasing size of the HRM function, professionalisation has been pursued across the HRM team in recent years with ongoing HRM development programmes actively undertaken. Given the need for particular focus on progressing strategic HRM across the organisation, not least in the areas of strategic workforce planning; strategic recruitment and retention; succession planning; management of the retirement cliff and strategic skills gap identification and management, continuing to increase team expertise and capability in strategic HRM should be prioritised.

4.2.3 Business Partnering

There are elements of a HRM Business Partner approach in place on a functional basis. The HRM function did pilot a business partnering approach organisation-wide in advance of the COVID-19 pandemic, with mixed views across the function as to its success. It is clear that a Business Partner approach would be of particular benefit in the Swords Office in terms of management of Census recruitments and local HRM

issues such as managing underperformance, new recruits, and diversity issues. This is being pursued by the CSO with plans to increase HRM support for the Census Programme through the recruitment of an additional HEO and EO post based in Cork. This will also serve to enhance collaboration on HRM issues between the Swords and Cork office locations.

4.2.4 Cross-Government Collaboration

The HRM function participates in the Civil Service HRM Leaders' Network and has also contributed to the development of central HRM policies such as the Management of Sick Leave in the Civil Service and the Review of Probation Policy. Relationships with the National Shared Services Office (NSSO) are reported by staff as negative, with very low satisfaction expressed by field staff in particular in relation to queries about payroll and payment of allowances.

FINDINGS: HRM FUNCTION

F4.5 The HRM Function is considered to be responsive and helpful by staff, however there is scope for improvement in increasing accessibility, with clarity required in terms of roles and responsibilities across the function together with greater support to the field staff cohort generally and the Field Coordinators specifically in the management of staff probation and underperformance. A central repository of HRM policies would also be useful.

F4.6 The professional capacity of the HRM Function has been enhanced in recent years with ongoing team development a priority. Given the need for particular focus on progressing strategic HRM across the organisation, continuing to increase team expertise and capability in strategic HRM should be prioritised. Finally, the acting capacity of the current Head of HRM should be addressed as soon as is operationally viable.

F4.7 A Business Partner approach is currently not being implemented. While plans are in place to introduce this approach in the Census Programme for the 2027 cycle, consideration should now be given to introducing the model organisation wide within the next six-month period, in recognition of the workforce profile of the organisation and the particular HRM challenges presenting.

4.3 STRATEGIC HRM PLANNING

4.3.1 Human Resource Management Strategy

The CSO People Strategy 2020 – 2022, 'Le Cheile', sets out the CSO's HRM strategic goals and is supported by an associated Action Plan. The strategy encompasses four goals:

- Fostering a great place to work that engages, enables and empowers our people;
- Building the statistical and non-statistical capacity of our people;
- Prioritising leadership and management capabilities; and
- Positioning the HR function as a key driver of strategic change.

These goals focus on the key people challenges for the organisation and are designed to ensure that current and future skills gaps are anticipated and addressed, that staff are well managed and well led in an environment that recognises their professional aspirations, supports them in managing personal challenges and encourages high performance for the public good. The People Strategy is a key enabler for the CSO long-term Strategy Statement 'Vision 2030' and the current Statement of Strategy 2020 – 2023. Both Management Board and all staff grades were involved in the development of the People Strategy with staff input facilitated through the various staff networks.

As set out in the Action Plan, an implementation team, supported by a steering committee with a representative from the Management Board, was put in place to progress and oversee implementation of the People Strategy. Implementation is reviewed on a regular basis to ensure actions remain current and fit for purpose. Annual activity reports setting out the actions relevant to achieving each of the four goals were published in 2021 and 2022.

The People Strategy is currently being reviewed and refreshed with input from the Senior Management Group and a number of focus groups. The revised strategy will also be informed by the Civil Service Renewal Action Plan 2024. The HRM Recruitment Unit is also implementing an Employer of Choice Strategy⁶⁶ as part of the process to recruit and retain staff.

4.3.2 Management Board Deliberations

The Management Board regularly discusses strategic HRM issues particularly in the context of recruitment and retention challenges. The HRM function also attends Management Board meetings on a monthly basis.

FINDINGS: STRATEGIC HRM PLANNING

F4.8 The successor to the CSO People Strategy 2020- 2022 'Le Cheile' is under development and will be informed by staff focus groups and the Civil Service Renewal Action Plan 2024. An Employer of Choice Strategy is also being implemented to address challenges in the recruitment and retention of staff.

F4.9 Strategic HRM matters are considered by the Management Board monthly, with implementation of the People Strategy monitored closely with appropriate implementation structures in place.

4.4 STRATEGIC WORKFORCE PLANNING

A strategic workforce planning approach allows organisations to plan and grow for the future, manage workforce requirements to meet evolving business and public needs more efficiently and effectively, and address the challenges of staff turnover, including retirements into the future.

4.4.1 Strategic Workforce Planning Policy

The HRM Function developed the first three-year Strategic Workforce Plan for the organisation in 2023, with the following key strategic workforce planning challenges identified for the organisation:

a) Recruitment & Retention

- Resourcing a dynamic and increasing work programme;
- Recruitment and retention of specialist skills and field staff;
- Delivery of generalist grade requirements using the Public Appointments Service (PAS);
- Positioning the CSO to become an employer of choice into the future.

b) Learning & Development

- Developing leadership capability at all levels;
- Developing a revised statistical training framework for the CSO and the wider ISS.

⁶⁶ <https://www.cso.ie/en/aboutus/careers/whatweoffer/>

c) Digitisation

- Digitalisation and technological advances – challenge of data literacy and building a digitally skilled workforce;
- Organisational agility to optimise the opportunities provided by digital and other technologies.

d) Strategic Workforce Planning

- Embedding strategic workforce planning into the culture of the CSO;
- CSO's retirement profile and succession planning;
- Impact of blended working.

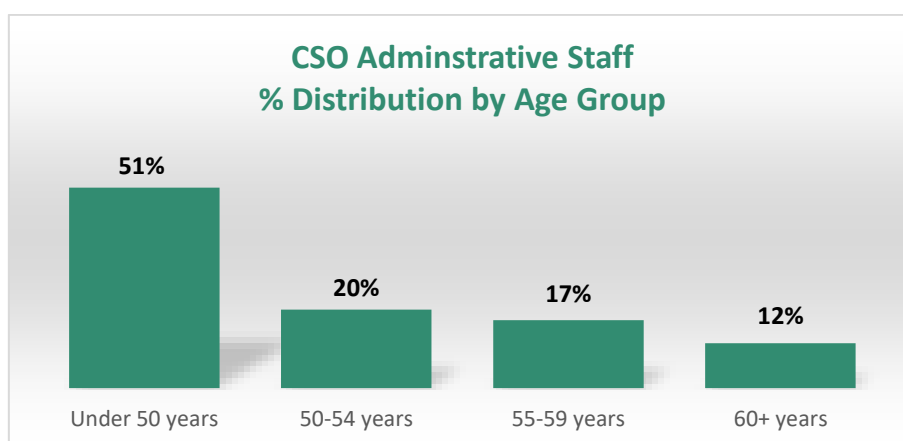
The Plan was developed in collaboration with the Management Board with staff also having the opportunity to provide input. As formal strategic workforce planning is a relatively new approach in the CSO, it is too early to assess the implementation of the Plan and the associated staff engagement.

The CSO completes an Annual Workforce Plan which is created following extensive consultation with Heads of Division. There is a perception amongst some members of senior management that strategic workforce planning has not been given sufficient attention in the CSO to date as the focus has been on filling current gaps and recruitment rather than longer term planning. Given increasing demands on the organisation, there is a need for a more considered approach to strategic workforce planning.

4.4.2 The CSO Retirement Cliff

The CSO, similar to many other Government organisations, faces a highly significant challenge in planning effectively for the management of retirements. In 1994, the CSO decentralised to Cork and a significant number of new staff were recruited during this period. This has added to the considerable number of staff reaching retirement age, across all three offices, in the medium term. Data for the period 1 January 2023 to 31 March 2024 shows 22 retirements for administrative staff, 9 for statistical staff and 11 across the permanent field staff grade. Current data across all three staff cohorts is set out below:

Figure 4.1: Distribution of CSO Administrative Staff by Age Group (%) as at 31st March 2024



Source: CSO HRM Unit, May 2024. N=680 and includes all traditional Civil Service grades from Services Officer to Director General but does not include statistical grades or field staff.

Table 4.4: Age Profile of CSO Administrative Staff by Grade (%) as at 31st March 2024*

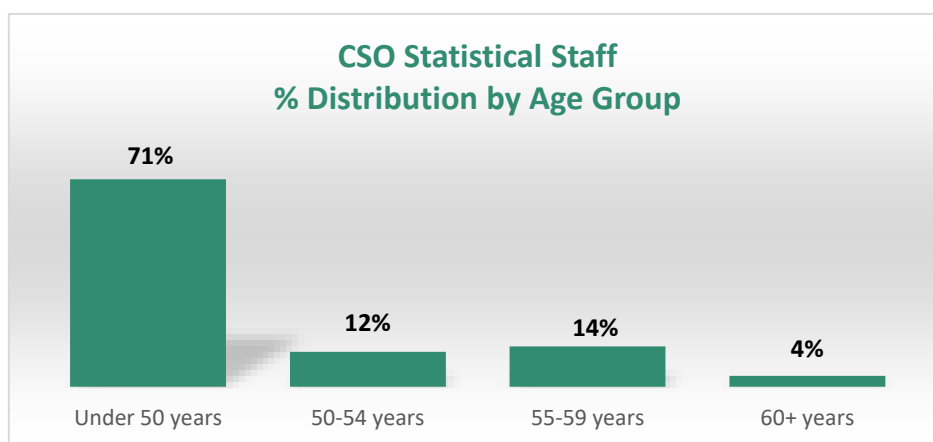
Age Groups	AP	HEO	EO	CO	Other
Under 50 years	43%	45%	59%	49%	57%
50-54 years	28%	24%	17%	20%	11%
55-59 years	25%	22%	13%	15%	21%
60+ years	4%	9%	11%	16%	11%

Source: CSO HRM Unit, May 2024. 'Other' includes Service Officers (SVO), Temporary Clerical Officers (TCO), Graduates, Higher Technical Officers, Technical Officers, CO Interns

As the data indicates, almost half of the administrative staff are aged 50 years and above, with the AP and HEO grade showing the highest percentages at 57% and 55% respectively and the CO grade at 51%. For the senior management grades at PO and above, 56% are aged 55 years or over.

The picture is quite different for statistical staff, which includes both Senior Statisticians and Statisticians, with less than 30% aged 50 years or over. This statistic is particularly noteworthy for the CSO as the statistical staff cohort are mission critical and currently pose challenges in recruitment.

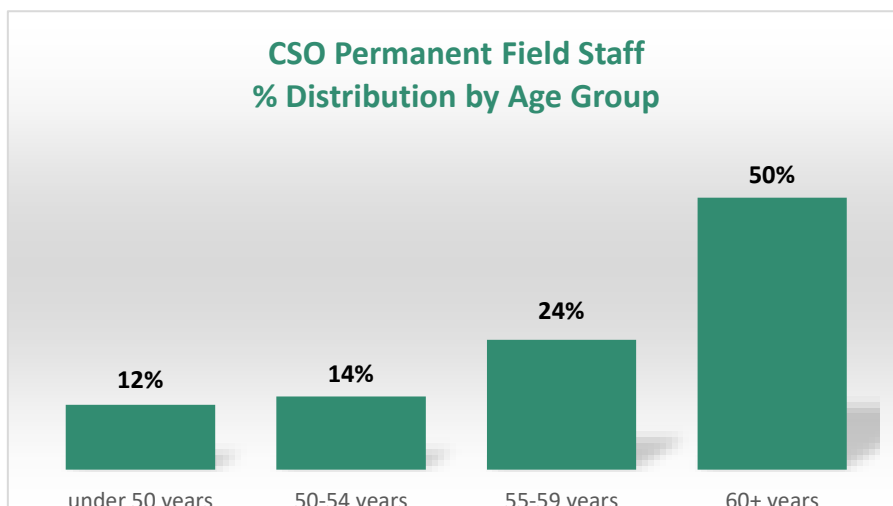
Figure 4.2: Distribution of CSO Statistical Staff by Age Group (%) as at 31st March, 2024



Source: CSO HRM Unit, May 2024. N=218 and includes both Statistician and Senior Statistician grades

Analysis of the permanent field staff, which includes Field Co-Ordinators, Survey Interviewers & Tourism Enumerators, indicates a rather different situation with 88% aged 50 years or over. This may reflect the atypical working hours and nature of the work which may be more attractive to people who have retired from full-time employment.

Figure 4.3: Distribution of CSO Permanent Field Staff by Age Group (%) as at 31st March 2024



Source: CSO HRM Unit, May 2024. N=133 and includes Field Interviewers and Coordinators

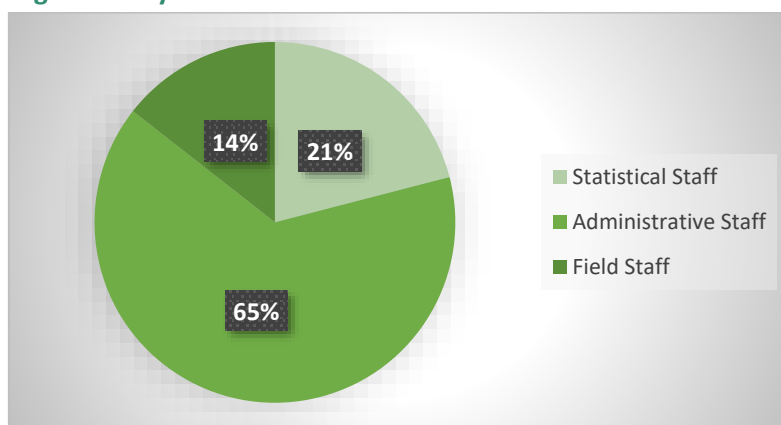
The Strategic Workforce Planning Action Plan identifies succession planning as a critical activity. In 2024, the CSO plans to build on the pilot undertaken in 2022 in relation to retirement forecasting and to identify critical posts across the three different staff cohorts, with the aim of putting in place succession planning and knowledge retention strategies. Over time this will lead to more proactive management of critical roles across the organisation, rather than an exclusive focus on retirement profiles.

4.4.3 Workforce Planning: Recruitment, Career Progression and Skills Management

(i) Recruitment and Retention of Key Skill Sets

The CSO workforce is spread over its three office locations in Cork, Rathmines (Dublin) and Swords (Dublin) with the field staff cohort working remotely⁶⁷. Just over half of the staffing cohort (56%) is based in the Cork office, with 20% in Rathmines and 10% in Swords⁶⁸. The field staff account for 14%⁶⁹ of the overall staff. Setting aside the Management Board, the staffing complement can be broken into three separate categories: Statisticians, Administrative and Field Staff, as illustrated in Figure 4.4 below:

Figure 4.4 CSO Staffing Profile by Role at 31st March 2024



⁶⁷ In general, field staff are not associated with any of the three office locations and do not have office space allocated to them in any of the three locations.

⁶⁸ Additional temporary staff are recruited for the Census to assist with processing (this is a separate group to the Census Field Force) and are based in the Swords office.

⁶⁹ This does not include the temporary field staff recruited for the Census – for Census 2022, 5,600 were recruited.

The ratio of Statisticians to Administrative Staff varies across the three locations, with Statisticians comprising a larger percentage of the staffing complement in the Rathmines office compared to the other two locations.

Table 4.5: Distribution of Statistical and Administrative Staff by Location as at 31st March 2024

Staff By Location	Cork		Rathmines		Swords	
Statistical Staff	112	19%	96	48%	9	9%
Administrative Staff	473	81%	103	52%	90	91%

Source: CSO HRM Unit, May 2024.

The Senior Statistician and Statistician grades are predominantly located in the Cork and Rathmines offices with only three (9%) and seven (4%) respectively of all Senior Statisticians and Statisticians based in the Swords office as illustrated in Figures 4.5 and 4.6 below:

Figure 4.5 CSO Senior Statistician Staff Profile

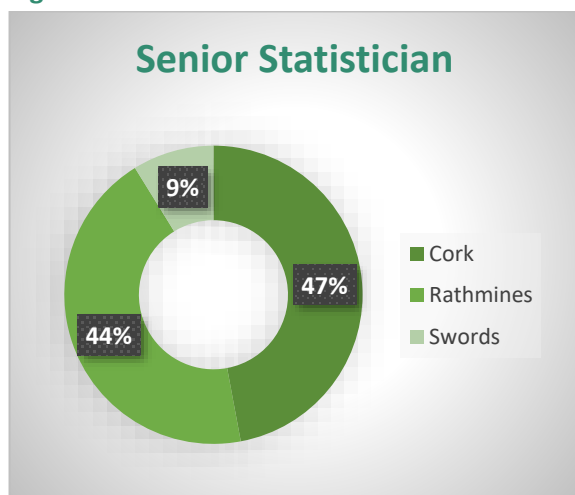
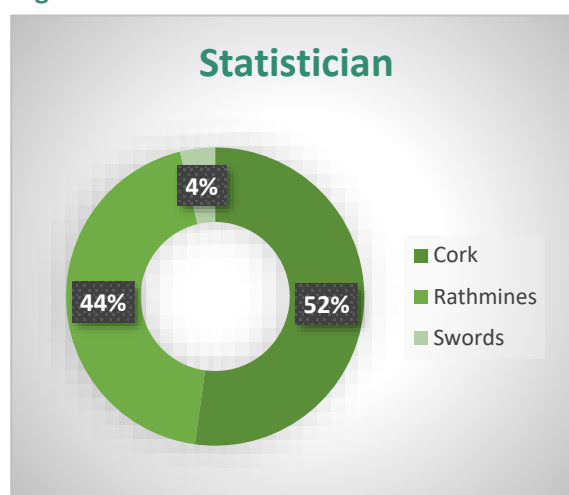


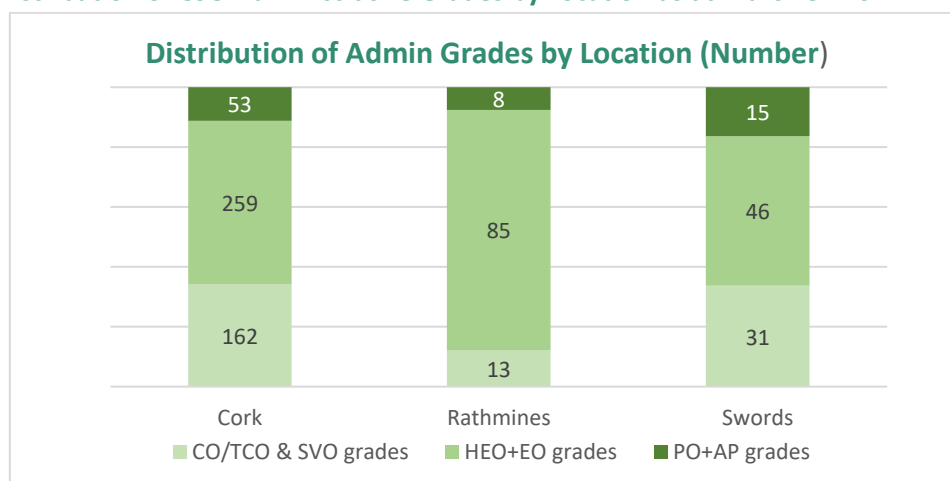
Figure 4.6 CSO Statistician Staff Profile



Source: CSO HRM Unit, May 2024. Staff data as at 31st March 2024. Analysis by OCR team

An examination of the administrative grades indicates a breakdown across the three locations by grade as set out in figure 4.7 below:

Figure 4.7: Distribution of CSO Administrative Grades by Location as at March 31 2024



Source: CSO HRM Unit, May 2024. Analysis by OCR team

The recruitment of technical posts such as Statisticians across the Civil and Public Service is a challenge, not least when competing with often more appealing remuneration packages offered by the private sector and peer organisations. This is an issue keenly felt by the CSO, where the recruitment challenge is reported as escalating, with some believing that recruitment to the Cork office presents an added challenge. The HRM function is responding with significant flexibility including the direct recruitment of Statisticians, ICT staff and Field Staff; a graduate recruitment programme; continuous recruitment for some grades; and the use of social media in recruitment campaigns. The organisation engages with the Public Appointments Service (PAS) on the recruitment of some staff grades, primarily at administrative level.

While the perception is that vacancies are being filled, the pace of recruitment is generally too slow to meet business needs, with gaps a feature across the organisation for extended time periods which is a serious challenge for the organisation. There is often a considerable delay, particularly with Statistician recruitment panels which are exhausted as soon as they are created, with these panels also servicing the IGSS Programme. It is notable that the biggest challenge identified for the CSO into the future, both by staff and external stakeholders, is the recruitment and retention of specialist staff.

Recruitment of field staff is also reported as an issue organisation-wide with the view that the remuneration is quite low coupled with competencies that do not accurately match the role requirements of lone working and the isolated nature of the role. Other recruitment issues are reported in the area of ICT where both the lack of opportunities for blended working due to the nature of the ICT role, in addition to the Cork location are viewed as deterring factors.

Another challenge for the organisation is retention of staff, in particular at Statistician grade. An anomaly in the pay for Statisticians⁷⁰, whereby it takes 18 years to reach the maximum of the pay scale, is resulting in some Statisticians leaving to take up positions in other Public Service organisations, generally at Assistant Principal Officer grade. This is an issue of significant concern in terms of both staff churn and loss of corporate memory in the organisation. In addition, Statisticians are ineligible to apply for internal Assistant Principal Officer recruitment competitions and are being recruited into other Government Departments through open competitions. This has led in some instances to Statisticians leaving the CSO to become APs and then re-entering the CSO at a later stage as a Statistician by open competition but at a higher level of pay. It is noted that the CSO has recently established an SMG Subgroup to review such issues pertaining to the Statistician grade, with urgent action required.

Notwithstanding these issues, departments with staff seconded under the IGSS Programme report that the CSO is helpful in supplying staff where possible, although requests for an expansion of the Programme were a significant feature of interviews with external stakeholders during the course of this review.

(ii) Career Progression

Career progression is a factor for consideration in addressing staff retention issues in any organisation. The aforementioned current pay-scale structure for the Statistician grade, coupled with limited opportunities for internal promotion, results in limited career progression options, which is a significant concern for the CSO given its reliance on this skillset to deliver its work agenda. There is also a perception organisation-wide that staff at Senior Statistician level are not as successful as their equivalents from other organisations in Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC) competitions due in part to their

⁷⁰ Statisticians commence on the AO pay scale, rising over 18 years to the maximum of the AP scale.

specialist career journey and lack of exposure to policy development and implementation. This issue was raised repeatedly during the course of the review and is one which is negatively impacting on morale at that grade.

A proportion of clerical workers based in the Swords office undertaking Census work are on permanent Civil Service contracts but are assigned to the CSO on a year to year basis which negatively impacts their opportunity to have a long-term career in the organisation. Contract renewal in the CSO can be at short notice with some staff only notified of renewal a week or two before their contract expiry date, which they report as understandably stressful. Similarly, within the Swords office, temporary Clerical Officer staff noted that when the Census cycle is ending there is no guarantee that there will be sufficient work for them. Staff report dissatisfaction with the level of communication on these issues from the HRM function.

(iii) Skills Management

(a) Skills Matching: New Statisticians are required to complete a Candidate Skills Analysis Form in order to capture their skills level as they enter the organisation. While it was noted that this may assist the Management Board in assigning Statisticians to posts, it is unclear whether such skills matching is standard procedure. Heads of Divisions are also required to complete Role Specification Forms for each statistical role within their Division. These are used in conjunction with the Statistician Skills Register and the Statistical Training Framework to identify strengths and gaps at individual Statistician level and provide information for the L&D Statistical Training Unit (STU) to identify and prioritise skills gaps at an organisational level (Section 3.3.2).

While there are mixed opinions on how effective the CSO is at skills matching, the overall view of staff is that skills are not generally taken into account when assigning staff to roles outside of the Statistician cohort. The perception is that new staff are not asked about their skills when they join the organisation and are assigned to posts based on vacancy need. Such non-recognition of skills is deemed to be inefficient and impacting negatively on job satisfaction and staff retention. There is no evidence of the systematic use of staff training and development data from sources such as the One Learning platform or Refund of Fees Scheme to inform staff assignment decisions. It is noted however that the CSO has just launched a Staff Qualifications Survey which suggests efforts are underway to progress skills management across the organisation.

b) Skills Register: There is a skills register in place for the Statistician staff cohort which is managed by the STU, with all Statisticians required to update the register annually. All Senior Statisticians are required to specify skills required for statistical roles, which are matched to the skills of the Statistician and gaps identified within a skills matrix. When a Statistician is appointed to a role, either as a new entry or through mobility, the Statisticians and Senior Statisticians are asked to confirm and/or update the skills matrix as appropriate.

The skills register is currently maintained on Lotus Notes while the skills matrix is based in Excel, making the entire process quite onerous and inhibiting the use of the information to its full potential. There are plans to move the skill register from Lotus Notes in the near future thus providing a timely opportunity for the CSO to re-evaluate its skills register across the entire workforce and address the gaps in skills management for non-statistical roles.

c) **Future Skills Needs:** The issue of skills gaps was discussed earlier in the report (Section 3.3.2) and highlighted the need for a diverse skill set across the three staff cohorts – Statistical, Administrative and field. In strategically planning for the workforce of the future the CSO is required to plan across the three realms of statistical staff; administrative staff and new specialist skills such as Artificial Intelligence (AI); Geographic Information Systems (GIS); Cloud Technology; Cybersecurity; Data Science and Data Analysis. It is clear that limited progress has been made to date in addressing skills management in a structured manner with the most concerted efforts focusing on the Statistician grades. While the introduction of a talent management system to address skills management issues was considered previously it did not proceed due to funding issues. This matter is now again being considered by the organisation and requires immediate prioritisation.

FINDINGS: STRATEGIC WORKFORCE PLANNING

F4.10 Formal strategic workforce planning is underway within the CSO with the development of the first three-year Strategic Workforce Plan in 2023 a positive development in this regard. Implementation of the Plan, together with consistent staff engagement, will be key to the success of embedding this strategic approach.

F4.11 The CSO, similar to many other organisations, is facing a retirement cliff thus a particular focused approach to succession planning across the organisation is warranted. A lack of concentrated focus on succession planning will expose the organisation to the loss of mission critical skills and the emergence of new risks.

F4.12 The HRM Unit has a proactive approach to recruitment, with recruitment carried out both directly and, for some staff grades, through the Public Appointments Service (PAS). However, the recruitment challenge for the organisation is escalating with significant delays experienced in filling posts at the Statistician grade in addition to issues with recruiting ICT Specialists. Competition from the private sector and peer organisations is also a reality for the organisation. Challenges are also evident in the recruitment of field staff with a view being expressed that job description/competency requirements do not match the reality of the role particularly as relates to the isolation of the role and the capacity for lone working.

F4.13 The cyclical nature of the CSO work programme requires reliance on the assignment of Civil Service Clerical Officers to the organisation and the recruitment of Temporary Clerical Officers. However, issues arise with regard to contracts being extended at short notice, often for operational and budgetary reasons and the reassignment of permanent staff from the census work programme at short notice. This is a source of considerable frustration across that staff cohort with a strong perception that communication from the HRM on contractual and assignment matters could be strengthened.

F4.14 Delivery of the CSO work programme requires an understanding of the necessary skills for current, new and emerging roles together with an awareness of the existing skill base across the organisation. Although there is a skills register in place for Statisticians, which is used in conjunction with the Statistical Training Framework to address statistical skills gaps across the organisation, a similar system is not in place for other staff. The imminent move of this register from the Lotus Notes platform will provide the opportunity to reassess the approach to skills management across the full staff cohort.

F4.15 The strategic identification of skills requirements for the future is an area requiring immediate focus by the CSO. This strategic work is required across the realms of statistical skills; administrative skills;

and new specialist and developing skills such as Artificial Intelligence (AI); Geographic Information Systems (GIS); Cybersecurity; Data Science and Data Analysis.

F4.16 Retention of staff is also a challenge for the organisation, most particularly across the Statistician grades. Contributing factors relate to pay scales for Statisticians of 18 years' duration and ineligibility for internal Assistant Principal Officer recruitment competitions. It is noted that a SMG Subgroup has recently been established to review the Statistician grade. Career progression issues for the Senior Statistician grade were also particularly noted as a challenge in retaining staff and adversely impacting morale across the grade.

F4.17 The need for an integrated talent management system to assist in the management of HRM functions including recruitment, learning and development, and skills management is again under consideration by the CSO.

4.5 PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

This section focuses on the areas of performance management, blended working, grade-drift, and staff mobility.

4.5.1 Performance Management

The ePMDS system is in place for all staff⁷¹, with 98% of staff completing role profile forms in 2023 and 88% completing the full PMDS cycle. In common with other Government Departments, there are mixed views among staff regarding the quality of the PMDS process in the CSO:

- Some staff regard PMDS as a good opportunity to discuss and set the direction of their work for the year, while others see it as a 'box ticking' exercise;
- PMDS is viewed as utilised positively in identifying staff training needs;
- The online PMDS system is not seen as being sufficiently flexible and contains anomalies such as the Statistician grade being aligned to the Administrative Officer grade rather than the Assistant Principal Officer grade.

While some view PMDS as useful for new staff to give them an understanding of their role, the perception is that it could be used better to document role profiles.

The CSO, like many other Civil Service bodies finds managing underperformance a challenge. While some staff report good support from HRM in dealing with underperformance, some managers, including Field Coordinators, feel insufficiently trained to deal with underperformance and expressed a view that there needs to be stronger support in this regard from the HRM function.

4.5.2 Blended Working

The CSO Blended Working Policy was introduced on a pilot basis in Autumn 2022. Drawn from the Blended Working Policy Framework for the Civil Service,⁷² the pilot was intended to run for an initial period of 12 months, during which time analysis and evaluation was to be conducted to inform further decision-making. The pilot has now been extended until October 2024.

⁷¹ All staff, including permanent and temporary field staff, with the exception of Census enumerators (who are only employed during the Census period) have access to the ePMDS system.

⁷² The central framework provides direction to individual organisations in the Civil Service to develop tailored policies on 'blended working' that are appropriate to their business needs.

The pilot provides for the right of an employee to apply to work remotely, for a maximum of 3 days per week. Due to the nature of their work, some staff have more limited opportunities to avail of the scheme, such as those working in ICT, Facilities Management and Service Officers. The policy includes a requirement for the creation of Team Charters for individual business units to guide attendance arrangements based on business need, with all team members involved in their creation. Staff reported mixed experiences in their level of involvement in this process, with some involved in discussions about the Charters while others were either presented with them or were unaware of the content. However, in general, the Charters are considered useful to staff as they give certainty about the required days of attendance including the team anchor day when the full team is required to be on-site. A sub-group of the SMG, established to monitor blended working and its implementation, was considered to have worked well, however the work of this group is currently paused to facilitate a focus on a review of the Statistician staff grade.

It is accepted across the organisation that blended working is working well and has not impacted on the CSO's ability to meet its operational targets. While concern was expressed by some senior management about the potential negative impact blended working could have on CSO culture, no evidence to support this concern emerged during the course of this review. Such concerns may have influenced the perception amongst some staff that the Management Board was not overly supportive of blended working and would prefer to have staff attend the office more frequently. In reality, some members of the Management Board are anxious that blended working be embraced and its potential acknowledged, with a future-focused rather than reflective, backward stance adopted.

Staff generally report that blended working lends itself to a better work life balance but articulate that internal communication is now fundamentally much more important in maintaining staff engagement. While some staff believe that blended working had led to increased segregation and has impacted on cross divisional collaboration, others feel it has led to less of a divide between the three CSO office locations with the use of online platforms enabling better cross-divisional collaboration between the Dublin and Cork offices. Some staff expressed discontent about the decision not to allow accumulation of flexi-hours when working from home as this is facilitated in other Civil Service organisations.

4.5.3 Grade Drift

There is a perception that there are some elements of grade drift at CO and EO level in the Cork office in particular where the lines between the responsibilities of those grades can be blurred. However, this is not considered a systemic issue but rather as occurring during busy periods or where there is an unfilled vacancy. Grade drift was not reported as a concern in either of the Dublin locations.

4.5.4 Staff Mobility

Mobility opportunities are key to enable staff to develop their career potential and enrich their work experience. The CSO participates in the Civil Service Mobility Scheme⁷³, with an internal mobility policy in place since 2018. The internal policy adopts a two pronged approach to mobility, 'voluntary' whereby staff can register their interest in a transfer to another work area after three years in their current role or 'time based' whereby after five years in a role, staff are automatically considered for transfer.

There was mixed awareness of the internal mobility policy, with the general staff perception that it is not routinely implemented. Due to the cyclical nature of work on the Census, staff in the Swords office are regularly transferred between areas to meet operational needs. It was noted that this can be detrimental

⁷³ <https://hr.per.gov.ie/en/corporate-pages/career/mobility/>

in some cases where a person may have particular expertise in an area. There was also a perception that there is a great loss of specialist skills and knowledge if a specialist is moved on promotion or mobility hence the importance for attention to succession planning across the organisation (Section 4.4.2).

Unique to the CSO is their operation of a seconded staff model in the form of the Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS) through which the CSO provides statistical expertise and support to 18 participating Government organisations through the provision of seconded Statisticians, Senior Statisticians and Graduates (Section 2.2.1).

FINDINGS: PEOPLE MANAGEMENT

F4.18 While the PMDS completion rate was at 88% across the organisation in 2023, there is room for greater compliance with the process. In common with other Government organisations, there are mixed views among staff regarding the quality and consistency of the PMDS process in the CSO with a particular view that greater HRM support is required in the management of staff performance and underperformance.

F4.19 The CSO Blended Working Policy was introduced in Autumn 2022 on a pilot basis and has been extended by the CSO until October 2024. While blended working in general is deemed to work well, some senior management have expressed concern about the potential negative impact on the culture of the organisation however the review did not find any evidence of this to date. It is an issue however that will require ongoing monitoring and engagement, with the decision to pause the work of the SMG Subgroup established to monitor the Blended Working Pilot requiring review.

F4.20 While there is a perception of some elements of grade drift at times at Clerical Officer and Executive Officer level in the Cork office overall systemic grade drift is not an issue in the CSO.

F4.21 The CSO participates in the Civil Service Mobility Scheme, however the Internal Mobility Policy requires review, coupled with more consistent and more transparent application process.

4.6 PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT

This section will consider different aspects of people development, including learning and development; continuous professional development; the identification of training needs; access to training; staff well-being; and induction and mentoring.

4.6.1 Learning and Development (L&D) Strategy

The Learning & Development strategy for the CSO is contained in the 'Le Chéile' People Strategy, 2020 – 2022, which has a key component of building the statistical and non-statistical capacity of staff.

4.6.2 Learning and Development (L&D) Unit

Learning and Development is a function of the HRM Division and involves the design and implementation of training programmes to enhance employees' skills thus fostering professional growth within the organisation. Learning and Development comprises two distinct Units, the L&D Unit and the Statistical Training Unit (STU), both led by Assistant Principal Officer grades. The L&D Unit and the STU each operate a business partnership model and engage in training needs analysis organisation-wide. While the STU manages the specific statistical training needs of staff, the L&D Unit manages learning and development needs on a more general basis. Specific initiatives undertaken by the L&D Unit in recent months include:

- A CSO designed ‘Excellence in Leadership Programme’ for the Senior Management Group (SMG). This programme takes the form of an individualised programme with one to one coaching at its foundation;
- An internally developed ‘Management Development Programme’ (MDP). This is a mandatory programme for new managers, with an additional module on leading strategically built in for AP grades and above;
- L&D Toolkits to provide ‘bitesize’ learning on relevant topics to all types of learners;
- Introduction of a new eLearning and resource hub (Percipio) in 2023 which includes a number of resources for staff, including eLearning, One Learning, SPS Programme, IMI, section specific training etc. This platform gives staff access to virtual courses such as EDI in the Workplace, Data Science, Data Visualisation and Team Management;
- Roll-out of corporate membership to the Irish Management Institute (IMI) which ensures all staff have access to online national and international subject matter and masterclasses;
- Implementation of the Refund of Fees Scheme and programmes of induction, mentoring and coaching;
- Roll-out of career development supports such as interview training and access to the Learning Pathways platform. This platform facilitates access to training on various features of Microsoft 365 software;
- Roll-out of Learning & Development Supports Directory. This is a directory of supports available to staff in the blended working environment and includes a range of options aimed at developing skills, knowledge and career progression as detailed in Figure 4.8 below:

Figure 4.8 Learning & Development Supports Directory



The CSO Statistical Training Framework, of which the STU is a component, forms an integral part of strengthening the overall statistical capability of the Irish Statistical System. Statisticians from across the Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS) also engage with the Framework which ensures a standardised approach and equal access to statistical training resources (Section 3.3.2).

Learning and development for field staff is provided by different sections across the CSO such as HRM, the Data Office and ICT, with survey-specific training provided by the Field Management Division. Training is carried out both in-house and in the field, with it taking an average of six months for field staff to be deemed fully trained for the role. As outlined in Sections 4.2.1 and 4.5.1, Field Coordinators in particular articulate a requirement for greater support and training in staff management and management of probation and underperformance.

L&D as a function within the CSO is deemed very proactive with significant opportunities for staff to attend training. Managers are supportive of training needs identified through PMDS; however, some staff reported that having time to attend courses can sometimes be an issue due to work demands, although this issue is not unique to the CSO. In 2023, 410 staff attended 274 One Learning courses, 37 participated in the Refund of Fees scheme, and 18 staff participated in the European Statistical Training Programme (ESTP).

4.6.3 Staff Health and Wellbeing

The CSO operates a comprehensive Health and Wellbeing Programme which is managed by the HRM function. Staff consider the CSO as very proactive in the promotion and provision of information on staff health and wellbeing. This is evidenced by the results of the 2023 CSEES survey where staff wellbeing rated the second highest category in the survey and at 78% is higher than the Civil Service overall score of 75%. There is a Wellbeing Committee based in the Cork office with a wide-ranging offering of wellbeing supports in place which are advertised via a Wellbeing Calendar on the Bulletin Board. In addition, significant efforts are made in rolling out the Health and Wellbeing Programme across all locations.

During 2023, a total of 1192 staff engaged with Health and Wellbeing events across the organisation which were delivered under four pillars of Mind & Body, Nutrition, Fitness & Health.

4.6.4 Induction, Mentoring and Coaching

(i) Induction: The CSO induction programme, the SMART Start Programme, sets out a structured induction programme for the first year for new staff and newly promoted staff. It does not however apply to staff who have transferred into the organisation through the Civil Service Mobility Programme. The SMART Start Programme comprises a mix of mandatory training modules in subjects including data protection, cybersecurity and the completion of a monthly journal which is a record of work undertaken. During 2023, 226 staff participated in the Programme. Feedback indicates mixed views as to its benefits with some staff finding it useful and others seeing it as burdensome or a 'box ticking' exercise.

In addition, a Peer Support Programme (previously termed the Buddy System) has been in place since 2022 and is considered a key staff support initiative in the new hybrid working environment. It allows for new entrants to be introduced to existing members of staff and also to the culture of the organisation. It supports staff in building their knowledge base and with their career progression. This Programme was evaluated in 2023 and will remain subject to ongoing evaluation.

(ii) Mentoring Programme: The CSO runs a mentoring programme annually which is managed jointly by the L&D and Wellbeing functions. All staff can apply to be a mentor, mentee or both. In 2023, 12 mentoring pairings were established, with 5 of those cross-locational between Cork and Dublin. In late 2023 work commenced on a cross-agency mentoring pilot programme with the Health & Safety Authority (HSA), which has a mentoring programme in place and similar specialist grades. This engagement has resulted in four CSO and HSA staff commencing participation in the programme in 2024.

(iii) **Coaching:** In 2023 the CSO tendered for an executive coaching panel to administer a number of coaching programmes. The panel is comprised of 15 coaches with coaching available to the Senior Management Team (Principal Officer/Senior Statistician and higher). The available coaching programmes include:

- **Excellence in Leadership Programme (ELP):** This programme is designed to develop leadership capacity as a means of improving organisational performance, developing current and emerging leaders, and enhancing the quality of leadership and management across the organisation. In 2023 seven senior managers were selected to take part through a competitive process organised by the L&D Unit, with 12 participating in 2022.
- **Smart Start Programme:** As an element of year one of the Smart Start Programme newly appointed Senior Statisticians and Principal Officers can avail of six coaching sessions to assist in adjusting to their new role. In 2023 eight senior managers availed of this opportunity.
- **Team Coaching:** In 2023 a senior team of seven staff participated in the CSO Team Coaching programme.
- **Ad Hoc Coaching:** In 2023 four members of senior management availed of ad hoc coaching through the executive coaching panel.

All of these coaching programmes are deemed vital in terms of affording senior management the opportunity for wrap-around development, particularly in terms of non-statistical development and opportunities for career progression both internally and externally.

FINDINGS: PEOPLE DEVELOPMENT

F4.22 There are positive Learning & Development practices within the organisation, with the L&D Strategy included as a component of the CSO People Strategy 2020 -2023 'Le Chéile', which is currently under review.

F4.23 Learning & Development needs for staff are identified via the PMDS process.

F4.24 The CSO is considered to be very good at the promotion of staff health and wellbeing with a comprehensive Staff Health and Wellbeing Programme in place.

F4.25 The SMART Start Induction Programme in place for new staff received mixed views.

F4.26 Formal mentoring and coaching programmes are in place with access to coaching programmes available to senior management grades only.

F4.27 The Field Coordinator staff cohort, in particular, require focus in terms of additional L&D supports in managing staff probation and underperformance.

4.7 CAPABILITY IN INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

ICT systems are fundamental to the delivery of the work programme of the CSO with an awareness at Management Board level of the need for strategic leadership in the area of technology. In pursuit of this, the Technology & Statistical Services (TSS) Directorate was established in 2022. The role of the Directorate is to enable the CSO to achieve its strategic business goals through the provision of secure, reliable and innovative data, methodological and technology services within a robust quality framework.

The TSS Directorate is led by the Chief Information Officer (CIO) at Assistant Director General level with a staffing complement of 157 people as of 31 March 2024. An ICT qualification is required for all staff working directly on ICT-related activity and projects in the organisation. The Directorate is comprised of seven divisions as set out below.

- **Data & Analytics Services (29 Staff)** – Managing the technology systems and services to support business processes relating to data processing, analysis, dissemination, quality management and data management;
- **Infrastructure (53 Staff)** - Providing and developing ICT infrastructure services, including the provision of office-wide tools such as the Teams Platform;
- **Data Collection Technology (31 Staff)** - Managing the IT aspects of the selection and delivery of systems to support Census recruitment, field operations and processing and ensure that the delivery of these systems is coordinated between Census IT and the relevant business areas;
- **Digital Architecture and Cyber Security (13 Staff)** - Providing the relevant architectural and security foundations on which to provide the CSO's digital services;
- **Data Science (3 Staff)** - Promoting and co-ordinating data science tools across the office and enhancing the office's capabilities in this area;
- **Methodology (9 Staff)** - Ensuring that the best and most appropriate statistical policies, procedures, skills and tools are available in the CSO and the wider Irish Statistical System (ISS);
- **Life Events & Demography (19 Staff)** - Compiling and disseminating life events and demographic statistics, such as births, deaths and marriages.

4.7.1 Technology Strategy, Governance and Capability

(i) **Technology Strategy:** The current CSO Technology Strategy (2021-2023) is based on delivery of the five strategic aims of the organisation as set out in the Statement of Strategy 2020-2023, and focuses on transforming digital services for CSO customers and modernising the technology and services used by the organisation.

The Technology Strategy, together with the CSO Methodology Strategy 2021-2023, and the CSO Quality Strategy, 2020-2023,⁷⁴ sets out the vision of how statistical quality will continue to be improved across the CSO and the Irish Statistical System (ISS), providing the strategic direction for the new Technology and Statistical Services Directorate. This joined up approach is progressing positively with an acknowledgement that the technology field is a constantly evolving space which requires ongoing focused attention and review. It is noted that a new Technology Strategy is currently being drafted which will reflect the aims of the new Statement of Strategy 2024-2025.

(ii) **Technology Governance:** All major ICT projects are subject to oversight and monitoring by the Project Oversight Board (POB) (Section 3.3.1). Current projects under the remit of the Board include the transition to R; the online Digital Census; the transition to Cloud First; and the Lotus Notes Migration. IT security is the highest risk on the CSO Corporate Register and is regularly reviewed by the Risk Board (Section 3.7.1) and also by the Audit Committee (Section 3.7.3). In addition, the SMG Technology Subgroup was established in 2024 with representatives from each Directorate across the organisation. It acts as a user engagement panel to input into technology decisions at a strategic level, represent the voice of the user and provide feedback on related issues, including the implications of technology decisions. It is noted however that while all major ICT projects are subject to oversight and monitoring

⁷⁴ [CSO Quality Strategy, 2020-2023](#)

by the POB, there is an absence of a dedicated ICT Governance or Steering Committee in the organisation. Such a forum would serve to oversee the information technology investment priorities for the CSO and would normally form a component of organisational ICT governance structures.

(iii) **ICT Skills:** The Technology Directorate has a varied workforce in terms of skills, with a policy of continuous training and development in place. Staff training needs are identified through the Performance Management and Development System (PMDS) and staff upskilling is ongoing, including in relation to emerging technologies such as 'cloud'. While recruitment of ICT staff is a challenge this is being addressed through the running of recruitment competitions in-house, with the overall perception that the Directorate has sufficiently skilled staff in place at present although some areas, such as the Data and Analytics Service, employ skills via external consultants where necessary, in addition to utilising in-house resources. In the longer term there will be a need for current staff to adapt to new technologies and for the employment of staff with specialist skills such as Artificial Intelligence (AI), Geographic Information Systems (GIS), Cybersecurity and Cloud expertise, as well as ensuring that there are sufficient staff with knowledge of legacy systems to ensure knowledge retention on foot of staff mobility.

4.7.2 Build-to-Share Applications

The CSO is open to using the OGCIO 'Build to Share'⁷⁵ platforms subject to their suitability and availability. At present a limited number of applications including the HIVE and eRisk are in use, with SharePoint due to be introduced imminently. Consideration will be given to expanding the range used once the transition to SharePoint takes place.

4.7.3 ICT Business Continuity: The critical elements of ICT delivery and disaster recovery are part of the CSO's ongoing business continuity planning process. This is an area of critical importance to the organisation given the ever present threats to cyber security. The CSO has a Business Continuity Plan in place which is reviewed annually and audited on a three-year basis through the European Statistical System Audit process.

4.7.4 ICT Service Support

ICT service support is provided in-house through a helpdesk service which is considered responsive, helpful and efficient. The ICT Service Manager monitors and analyses service-desk calls to assess and resolve recurring issues. Staff in particular mentioned the excellent service provided throughout the COVID-19 pandemic. It is noted however that there is no out-of-hours ICT support in place in the CSO, including for field staff who work atypical hours and as a result rely on their Coordinators to deal with issues arising with phones and laptops outside of standard office hours.

4.7.5 Development of New ICT Solutions

The Management Board has a good understanding of the use of ICT as a business tool and an enabler for business, hence investment in ICT is prioritised as much as is feasible within budgetary constraints. The Technology Directorate holds annual meetings with business units to review ICT priorities for the year ahead with projects prioritised and budgets allocated accordingly. These usually coincide with the annual business planning process (Section 2.1.4). Some business areas raised the possibility of the introduction of mid-year review meetings to discuss progress and any change in ICT priorities at business unit level.

⁷⁵ Through the 'Build to Share programme', the Office of the Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO) is delivering a suite of corporate support applications common across government bodies, for example: ePQs, eSubmissions, eFOI, eRisk and eDocs.

There is a need for particular consideration to be given to the importance of timely and regular communication with staff on the development of new ICT solutions, with the current change to the new Altair Platform a recurring issue raised by staff during the course of this review. A further issue requiring consideration is the ongoing use of Lotus Notes across the organisation which is considered outdated in terms of both business and staff needs.

4.7.6 Cybersecurity

Cybersecurity is a significant risk as a cyberattack would hugely impact on organisational reputation which is a critical success factor for the CSO (Section 3.7.5). The CSO has been designated an essential entity under the NIS2 Directive⁷⁶, which is currently being transposed into national legislation. The organisation is also an active participant of the Irish Government Cyber Core Group, which meets regularly to collaborate and exchange information. The CSO continues to implement the National Cyber Security Centre of Ireland (NCSC) Baseline Standard Requirements and has a Cybersecurity Risk Register in place. In addition, the CSO developed a formal Cyber Incident Response Plan in 2023 and was a member of the working group that developed the new European Statistical System (ESS) Security Framework. Nevertheless, the organisation does not have a specific Cybersecurity Strategy in place, although one has been developed for Census 2027, informed by insights and learnings from other National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) who have previously developed Census Cybersecurity strategies.

Staff awareness is constantly prioritised, with cybersecurity events, phishing exercises, and mandatory training employed to instil the importance of cybersecurity organisation wide. Staff interviewed had a very good level of understanding of the importance of cybersecurity, however there were reports of staff still 'falling' for phishing emails with some concern expressed about the lack of consequences for breaches. This matter has recently been addressed by the Management Board however, with the introduction of a policy to apply Performance Improvement Plans (PIPs) in the case of repeated ICT security breaches.

It is important that resources are in place to ensure maximum data security and this has been supported by budget allocations in the most recent Estimates cycle.

FINDINGS: CAPABILITY IN INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (ICT)

F4.28 The CSO operates in an increasingly complex ICT environment. The organisation has responded to this environment through the establishment of a new Technology and Statistical Services Directorate, supported by strategic structures and leadership including the SMG Technology Subgroup. While all major ICT projects are subject to oversight and monitoring by the POB, there is an absence of a dedicated ICT Governance or Steering Committee in the organisation. Such a forum would serve to oversee the information technology investment priorities for the CSO and would normally form a component of organisational ICT governance structures.

F4.29 The organisation has a very efficient ICT service support in place, however support to field staff out of hours' warrants review to establish if an additional layer of support on a needs basis can be introduced.

F4.30 The CSO currently makes limited use of 'Build to Share' applications. However, there are plans to keep this under review. This is an issue that will require attention by the organisation.

⁷⁶ NIS2 is the EU-wide legislation on cybersecurity which updates the 2016 Network and Information Systems (NIS) Directive.

F4.31 Challenges in the recruitment of specialist ICT staff are a reality for the CSO, however this challenge is being met by the organisation through the running of recruitment competitions in-house and the use of external contactors when absolutely necessary. It is a reality that specialised skills such as AI, GIS and Cloud will be required by the organisation in the near future.

F4.32 Cybersecurity will continue as a paramount risk to the CSO. While a Cybersecurity Strategy has been developed for the Census 2027, an organisation wide strategic approach remains outstanding. In addition, and crucially, the matter of adequate resourcing for cybersecurity will require future-focused engagement during the Estimates process to ensure the required investment to mitigate against the risk is achieved.

4.8 CAPABILITY IN FINANCE

This section of the review considers the capability of the finance function in meeting current and future needs of the CSO. The CSO's relationship with the relevant Vote Team in the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform is addressed in Section 1.4.2.

4.8.1 Finance Function

(i) **Finance Unit:** The Finance Unit is based within the Corporate Affairs Directorate, led by a Principal Officer. The Unit has a staffing complement of 12 with overall responsibility for:

- Financial governance and leadership;
- Financial planning and reporting;
- Financial operations including payroll, payment and travel and subsistence;
- Annual Estimates process;
- Financial information for decision-making.

The Finance Unit is well regarded across the organisation; however, it is noted that there is a need for increased understanding of budgets at business unit level which the Finance Unit should consider providing leadership on.

While the CSO is considered effective at managing its budget within the annual allocation, underspend of annual budgets was noted. The question also arose during the review as to whether the organisation articulates its budgetary needs during the Estimates process in as forward-looking a manner as might be required. This is a highly significant strategic issue for the organisation that warrants immediate attention at senior management level.

The CSO does on occasion seek resources from Public Service organisations when work is undertaken on their behalf, however further engagement is required with the Vote Team in DPENDR to agree a consistent approach to costing of services, together with a framework document for vote transfer. There is merit in the CSO also engaging with colleagues in the Vote Team to brief them and discuss all fiscal related recommendations of the ESS Peer Review 2022.

(ii) **Professionalisation and Skills:** The staffing complement of the Finance Unit includes four qualified accountants. The accountants work on budget prioritisation and reporting and also work on social data and the cost of carrying out surveys.

An external review of the Finance function has been conducted however the final report was unavailable at the time of this review. The review was commissioned to provide an assessment of the CSO's Finance function and highlight areas for potential improvements in the short, medium and long-term.

(iii) Management Reporting: The Finance Unit provides a monthly financial update to the Management Board. However, the ageing financial management system (Section 4.8.2 below) means that the full range of specialist accounting skills cannot be exploited and financial reporting is currently burdensome. As such, financial data and reporting could be improved, as evidenced by the budget surplus at year-end. Consideration needs to be given to a more strategic approach to ensure consistent optimum use of available resources.

4.8.2 Financial Systems

The Financial Management System (FMS) currently used by the CSO is in place for some 30 years and is considered outdated. While the system is considered stable, it has limited user functionality and reporting capability. The CSO also carries an additional risk as the system is completely reliant on user support from one external provider. Clearly this situation is unsustainable. The system also adds to processing times as some functions such as invoicing remain paper-based, with MS Excel also widely used for financial work across the organisation. Such practices can be viewed as a risk to the organisation and are not viable or sustainable in the current fast-paced financial environment in which the CSO operates.

The proposed transition to the Civil Service Financial Management Shared Service (FMSS) has prevented the CSO from updating their financial management system so they are now working with the current system 'as is'. The latest information on the transition to the FMSS indicates a further delay to the migration date to 2026, which is significantly later than initially expected by the CSO. Action is required immediately by the organisation on an interim measure, given the impact the current financial management system is having on its capacity to effectively plan and report financially.

FINDINGS: CAPABILITY IN FINANCE

F4.33 The Finance Unit is professionalised and well regarded. However, an outdated financial management system and an ongoing delay in transitioning to the Civil Service Financial Management Shared Service (FMSS) is compromising the capability of the CSO in its financial planning and reporting, together with slowing down financial operations and placing an unnecessary time burden on staff through the need to rely on manual paper-based and Ms Excel systems. Collectively, such matters are deemed to pose a risk to the organisation and must be addressed as a matter of urgency.

F4.34 There is an urgent requirement for the Management Board to lead on a more strategic approach to ensure the consistent optimum use of available resources, coupled with a revised strategic approach of more forward looking engagement with the Vote Team in DPENDR during the Estimates process.

F4.35 The consistent management of pricing of services to external organisations and an agreed framework for vote transfers requires priority action.

4.9 CAPABILITY IN KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

The success of knowledge management in an organisation depends on a comprehensive knowledge management system that facilitates the sharing of experience, information and knowledge to inform decision-making and reduce the requirement to rediscover knowledge. This section examines policies and procedures relating to the CSO's approach to knowledge management and records management.

4.9.1 Knowledge Management Strategy

A Knowledge Management Strategy is best understood as a plan for organising, capturing, sharing and using the collective knowledge, information and expertise of an organisation to improve its performance and achieve its goals. The CSO currently does not have a specific Knowledge Management Strategy in place. However, the documentation of statistical and non- statistical processes and procedures has improved significantly in recent times with the introduction of the Quality Management Framework which also supports succession planning.

(i) CSO Quality Management Framework (QMF) and Quality Information System (QIS)

The CSO Quality Management Framework (QMF) is an extensive and long-term programme introduced to ensure that the statistical production standards applied in the CSO achieve the highest standards of quality and efficiency. The need for statistical areas to have process mapping and documentation in place is one of the key elements of the QMF actioned by the CSO to date.

The CSO Quality Information System (QIS) is a central repository of quality documentation accessible to all staff organisation-wide and underpins the QMF by ensuring that best practice, guidance and support in relation to statistical production is shared across the organisation. The QIS contains survey documentation and process maps from each statistical area so improvements in quality and efficiency made in one area can be quickly replicated across the organisation. Process maps and documentation also clarify duties and responsibilities, support staff training, and enable smooth transfer of responsibility without compromising quality or efficiency. All statistical products in the CSO have now been process mapped and are available on the QIS so that similar processes can be compared. The QIS is also used to process map and document some non-statistical processes across the CSO.

4.9.2 Records Management Policy

A Records Management Policy acts as a formal document that sets out an organisation's procedures for managing its records and addresses how records are created, stored and accessed as well as how they are destroyed or archived.

The CSO does not have a Records Management Policy in place or a uniform structured approach to records management across the organisation at this current time. There are two systems in place for managing, storing and archiving electronic records, File Share and Lotus Notes, with the latter being the primary repository for non-statistical data. The CSO is currently introducing SharePoint with the transition expected to take place over a period of 6-9 months. The introduction of SharePoint could provide a technical solution to facilitate the development of a more structured uniformed approach to records management. The organisation does not have any immediate plans to transition to the eDocs record management system.

4.9.3 Succession Planning and Job Documentation

Notwithstanding the effectiveness of the aforementioned Quality Management Framework (QMF) for the statistical areas across the CSO, the development of a Knowledge Management Strategy spanning the full organisation that specifically encompasses succession planning and job documentation would be of benefit.

(i) **Succession Planning:** Mechanisms that ensure seamless continuity of service delivery arising from staff departures, either planned or unplanned, are a baseline requirement to minimise organisational risk and maximise effectiveness. There are mixed views at senior management level on the organisation's

capability in succession planning however there is no doubt that it is an area requiring continued focus, a view also evidenced across the more junior grades in the organisation. While the CSO has made progress in its approach to Strategic Workforce Planning, similar progress is now required in the area of succession planning. Where succession planning is in place, it is on an individual basis rather than due to a structured approach across the organisation.

At Management Board level succession planning in terms of external responsibilities is adequately covered through, for example, attendance at European and international fora dispersed among the ADG staff cohort. Some Management Board members are very clear however that detailed job documentation is not available for their roles in the event of a sudden or unplanned departure thus adversely impacting succession planning capability.

In terms of the IGSS staff, generally, there is no handover when a seconded Statistician leaves an organisation, again most often due to delays in recruitment. However, while not ideal, this is not considered a highly significant issue, with existing teams within the organisation supporting new staff members.

(ii) **Job Documentation:** As discussed, despite the very positive initiatives in the statistical areas, the issue of job documentation across the organisation more widely requires to be addressed as part of a Knowledge Management Strategy.

FINDINGS: CAPABILITY IN KNOWLEDGE MANAGEMENT

F4.36 The CSO has a very comprehensive knowledge management system in place for its statistical areas, which is also used to document some non-statistical processes. However, non-statistical areas require a similar more systematic focus which should be supported by an over-arching Knowledge Management Strategy for the full organisation as a whole.

F4.37 A Records Management Strategy, again encompassing all records in the organisations, requires development. The CSO does not have any current plan to transition to the eDocs records management system.

F4.38 There is evidence of a mixed approach to job documentation in the CSO. This should be addressed organisation wide in the aforementioned Knowledge Management Strategy.

F4.39 The area of succession planning across all staff grades requires priority focus organisation wide. A lack of such focus will expose the organisation to the loss of mission critical skills and the emergence of new risks.

4.10 CAPABILITY IN DATA MANAGEMENT

The governance and management of data is central to the agenda of the CSO as a leader in the Irish Statistical ecosystem and internationally. This section of the review considers structures, policies and procedures in relation to data management in the CSO.

4.10.1 Data Management Policy

While the Statistics Act 1993 and the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) are the key texts controlling how the CSO manages and controls data, the Data Management Policy guides the

operationalisation of the legislation organisation-wide, acting as the overarching policy framework for the management of data in the organisation.

The Data Management Policy, prepared by the Data Office and approved by the Confidentiality and Data Security Committee (CDSC), is considered a living document, subject to regular review, which:

- Creates a data management and governance framework for the CSO;
- Defines minimum controls required to reduce risk and protect the CSO's data and information assets;
- Provides guidelines and instructions for the ownership, management, storage, retention, protection, destruction and security of CSO data; and
- Outlines key related business and technology processes and procedures.

The policy encompasses all information systems owned or operated by the CSO; all data (paper or electronic) held by the CSO; all employees of the CSO and all contractors engaged by the CSO. Implementation of the Data Management Policy is part of the ongoing implementation of the Quality Management Framework (QMF) (Section 4.9.1) and demonstrates compliance with elements of the European Statistical System (ESS) Information Security Framework.

The priority attaching to data management is actively communicated by the Management Board and instilled in staff on a consistent basis. However, members of the IGSS, when interviewed, were generally not aware of the CSO Data Management Policy. Notwithstanding this, CSO staff were of the view that data management is very well governed in the organisation, with significant progress achieved over recent years and a comprehensive whole of organisation approach evident.

4.10.2 Data Management Governance Framework

(i) Management Board: The Management Board has overall responsibility and accountability for the implementation of the Data Management Policy and has devolved specific governance responsibilities to a number of boards and committees, including the Confidentiality and Data Security Committee (CDSC). Items are referred by the Management Board between these boards and committees as appropriate.

(ii) Confidentiality and Data Security Committee: The Confidentiality and Data Security Committee (CDSC) co-ordinates the implementation by the CSO of its obligations relating to statistical confidentiality and data security in line with the requirements of the Statistics Act 1993 and Data Protection legislation. The CDSC acts as the internal authority for all confidentiality, security, data management and data protection issues, with the focus of the committee on office policies and rules, education and awareness, and compliance.

The CDSC is chaired by a member of the Management Board. It reports bi-annually to the Board and is fully empowered to make corporate decisions on policies relating to statistical confidentiality and data security. The Head of the Data Office fulfils the role of Secretary to the Committee, and advances its work on policies, training and compliance, including the Data Management Policy.

4.10.3 CSO Data Office

The CSO Data Office, a unit of the Enforcement, Legal and Governance Division in the Corporate Affairs Directorate, holds policy responsibility for compliance with the legislation by interpreting the laws,

advising on the development of related policies for the organisation, working with the support functions and statistical areas to drive compliance, and providing training to staff on the suite of data management policies and procedures.

The Data Office works in partnership with the business areas to ensure that data governance is carried out correctly. In practice, this means that data is only used for the purpose agreed; that necessity and proportionality is applied; that the correct processes such as Data Protection Impact Assessments are adhered to; and that risk assessments and mitigations are completed. All Data Protection Impact Assessments are signed off by the Data Protection Officer and are required to reach a very high sign-off standard.

4.10.4 CSO Data Management Policies, Guidelines and Procedures

The CSO has developed a suite of internal policies, guidelines and procedures to ensure the highest level of compliance with legal obligations in the management of data held by the organisation. The range of areas covered by such policies include:

- CSO Data Classification Scheme;
- Data Protection Guidelines;
- User Access Management (Internal);
- Password Security Policy;
- Data Retention and Destruction Policy;
- Data Archiving/Long-Term Storage Policy;
- Data Backup and Restore Policy;
- Mobile Device Security Policy;
- Redaction Procedure;
- Administrative Data Governance and Analysis Centre Data Policy;
- Research Microdata Files Policy;
- Cryptography; and
- Statistical Disclosure Control (SDC).

The roles and responsibilities of all staff, managers, units, divisions and external contractors are clearly defined and explained in the overarching Data Management Policy, with each individual staff member responsible for making themselves familiar with these data management policies and procedures as they relate to their work.

4.10.5 Data Protection

Concerns about data protection are increasing generally hence it is key that the CSO maintains the trust of all sectors of the community in this regard. The Code of Practice on Statistical Confidentiality⁷⁷ reinforces existing legal assurances and outlines the practical steps CSO takes to protect confidential data.

The Head of Enforcement, Legal and Governance is designated as the Data Protection Officer (DPO) by the Management Board. The DPO has overall responsibility for managing the organisation's data protection framework and compliance activities and is supported by the Data Office. Data protection training is compulsory for all staff and this is reinforced on a regular basis by reminders to staff of their data protection obligations through internal communication channels such as 'CSO Connect'. All new

⁷⁷ [Code of Practice on Statistical Confidentiality](#)

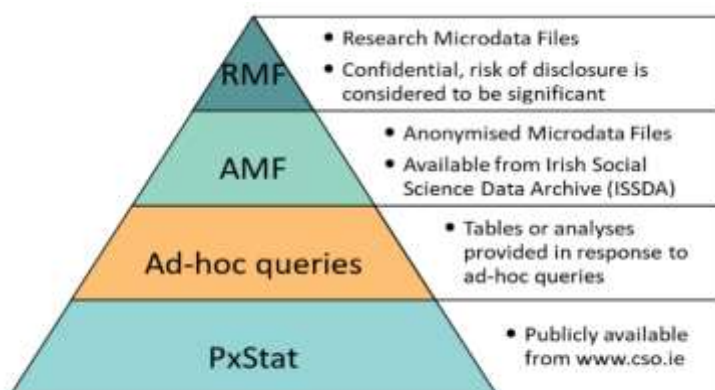
entrants to the CSO receive data protection training as part of their induction programme while bespoke training is also provided to all newly appointed staff at Senior Statistician level, with this training focusing on their responsibilities in their new roles.

4.10.6 Data Sharing

The CSO wants to ensure that maximum usage is made of the data it collects as this supports the objective of evidence-based policymaking, has the potential to reduce the cost of research, and also helps to avoid duplicate data collections. The information available to the CSO, whether directly or indirectly, is used by the Office for statistical purposes only.

The levels of data available from the CSO, and the level of access permitted under the Statistics Act 1993, can be viewed as a pyramid shown in Figure 4.9 below:

Figure 4.9: Levels of Data Access under the Statistics Act 1993



(i) **CSO Data:** CSO data can be accessed by a wide range of people including members of the public, students, researchers, and both private sector and public sector organisations. The CSO utilises different approaches to provide access to the data that it holds, depending on the data type:

- Publicly available data-sets are accessed via the PxStat database on the CSO website;
- Anonymised Microdata Files⁷⁸ (AMFs) are available on the Irish Social Science Data Archive; and
- Research Microdata Files⁷⁹ (RMFs) are subject to strict controls and accessed via CSO Researcher Data Portal.

The CSO website sets out the procedure for applying for access to both AMFs and RMFs. In the case of the latter, the application, approval and access process was streamlined in late 2022 with the introduction of a new online system – the Researcher Online System for Applications (ROSA). External stakeholders commented positively on ROSA, noting the significant improvement compared to the

⁷⁸ Anonymised microdata files contain microdata that are provided for statistical/research purposes only in such a form that the information related to an identifiable entity/person cannot be directly or indirectly identified. Access is provided for under Section 34 of the Statistics Act 1993 and the datasets are available for non-commercial research purposes only, with users required to sign a contract in advance covering the conditions under which they may use the data.

⁷⁹ RMFs are unit record files that do not contain direct identifiers but where the risk of disclosure through indirect identification is considered to be significant. Access to RMFs is strictly controlled and can only be granted within the framework of the Statistics Act, 1993 (Section 20(C)), with such approval granted by a Statistician, a Senior Statistician, a Director/Assistant Director General and by the Director General of the CSO.

previous paper-based system and positive engagement by the CSO with stakeholders during the system development and roll-out. In terms of possible system improvements, it was noted that at present access approval must be requested on an annual basis, whereas multi-annual approval would be helpful for researchers undertaking multi-annual research projects.

Researchers can also request specific tables or analyses in the form of ad-hoc queries, which can include reviews of their own analysis of CSO microdata by a CSO Statistician before that analysis can be published. However, some researchers have noted that as there is no agreed timeframe for the provision of this service, there can be significant variations across CSO divisions with some outputs cleared within 24 hours and others taking significantly longer, which can result in challenges for researchers working to tight timelines.

An aspect of data access that arose during the external stakeholder interviews was awareness of CSO data holdings. It was noted that, in order to access data, it is necessary to know whether the data exists and is available, and some contributors noted that it would be helpful for the CSO to maintain a data catalogue, not just of its own data holdings but also of the administrative data held by other Government bodies. This could also facilitate discussion about the potential uses of this data to support increased evidence-informed policymaking and multi-disciplinary work across the sector. The CSO has commenced work on developing a public-facing metadata catalogue to document the scale of the data holdings across the Irish Statistical System. This catalogue will meet increased user demands as outlined above, complement the existing OGCI Public Service data catalogue, and assist in the development of an integrated national data catalogue over time.

(ii) **External Data:** A significant number of CSO staff and external stakeholders referenced the challenges faced by the CSO in importing data safely from external organisations, with many holding the view that there is a need for the CSO to lead in this area to encourage government organisations on the permissibility of data sharing, particularly in relation to allaying concerns about data protection.

FINDINGS: CAPABILITY IN DATA MANAGEMENT

F4.40 The CSO has a comprehensive approach to data management organisation-wide with an overarching Data Management Policy supported by robust governance and operational structures and incorporating a suite of data management policies, guidelines and protocols.

F4.41 The CSO Data Office, a unit of the Enforcement, Legal and Governance division, provides advice on data management policies, working with other corporate support and statistical areas to drive compliance and provide training and promotion of CSO policies.

F4.42 Data protection is prioritised across the CSO with a Data Protection Officer (DPO) in place. Training for all staff is mandatory and enforcement of the legislation closely monitored.

F4.43 Processes supporting the sharing of data externally by the CSO garners mixed views depending on the category of user and the data sought. The development of the ROSA system in particular is viewed as highly positive, however time delays and inconsistent response times across divisions in the processing of requests is deemed extremely challenging for some users. Issues regarding the CSO importing data also require review in terms of the need to provide leadership to allay the data protection concerns of external organisations.

4A CRITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

R4.1 Cyber Security: The risk of a cyberattack to the CSO and the associated required investment in mitigations demands continued intense focus and should be clearly and confidently costed, detailed and presented by the organisation during the annual Estimates process. An organisation-wide Cyber Security Strategy should be developed, informed by the experiences of counterparts in the European Statistical System (ESS).

R4.2 ICT Governance: The CSO should establish an ICT Steering Committee at very senior level in the organisation with the specific role of overseeing the information technology investment priorities for the CSO, forming a vital component of the organisation's ICT governance framework. The strategic positioning of this structure alongside the current SMG Technology Subgroup will require consideration.

R4.3 HRM Function: In recognition of the need for particular focus on progressing strategic HRM across the organisation, continuing to increase the expertise and capability of the HRM team in strategic HR should be prioritised. An Organisational Development (OD) exercise to review the capacity of the HRM function may assist in this regard. The acting capacity of the Head of HRM should be addressed as soon as is operationally viable.

R4.4 Strategic Workforce Planning: The Management Board should maintain momentum with the recent work on strategic workforce planning with a concentrated focus on recruitment and retention across all staff grades. Strategic workforce planning should also be employed to address succession planning; the retirement cliff; and issues specific to the Statistician grade. Such planning should be supported by the work of the recently established SMG Subgroup to Review the Statistician Grade with action required on this specific area as a matter of priority. The CSO should also continue to engage with the Public Appointments Service (PAS) to explore the possibility of increased utilisation of the recruitment shared service. Finally, the proactive pursuit of a STEM identity for the organisation that will highlight to emerging graduates the attractiveness of a career in statistics should be adopted.

R4.5 Skills Management: The CSO is required to prioritise skills management across the full staff cohort rather than a more concentrated focus on the statistical staff. This work should prioritise a skills audit together with identifying skills gaps for the future across the realms of statistical skills; administrative skills; and new specialist and developing skills such as Artificial Intelligence (AI); Geographic Information Systems (GIS); Cybersecurity; Data Science and Data Analysis. The development of a skills register for all CSO staff should be prioritised in preparation for the imminent move of the register from the Lotus Notes platform. This should support the introduction of an integrated talent management system for the organisation which similarly requires prioritisation and investment.

R4.6 Culture and Values Review: On the commencement in post of the new Director General, the review of culture and values across the organisation, previously paused, should be reconsidered.

R4.7 Career Progression: A priority focus is required on appropriate training and development structures and opportunities for the Senior Statistician staff grade to support career progression. Learnings and experience from other Civil Service organisations who employ specialist grades may assist in this regard.

R4.8 Field Staff: Issues across the field staff cohort namely low morale; and health & safety training and support structures require attention. In addition, HRM support for Field Coordinators in dealing with staff probation and underperformance; HRM communications and engagement; improved management training supports for Field Coordinators; and ICT support outside of office hours also require consideration by the organisation.

R4.9 Finance Function: The CSO should immediately implement a revised strategic, forward-looking approach to engagement with the Vote Team in DPENDR during the Estimates process. This engagement should be underlined by a clear articulation of organisational strategic priorities and budgetary requirements to support the organisation in achieving its operational and strategic objectives. In addition, engagement with the Vote Team in DPENDR to agree a framework document for the vote transfer process requires priority action, together with engagement on the fiscal related recommendations of the ESS Peer Review 2022.

R4.10 Financial Management System: The current financial management system in the CSO urgently requires focus. This will necessitate immediate consideration of the timescale for the transition to the Civil Service Financial Management Shared Service (FMSS) and decisions at Management Board level regarding the implications of this timescale for the organisation and the consideration of possible urgent interim solutions.

R4.11 People Management: The CSO should seek to continue to improve compliance with the PMDS process while prioritising greater HRM and L&D support for all management grades in the management of underperformance.

4B IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS

R4.12 HRM Function: Increased clarity regarding roles and responsibilities within the HRM Unit is required in order to enhance staff engagement, supported by the introduction of a HRM business partner approach organisation-wide within a six-month timeframe.

R4.13 Financial Planning & Reporting: A more strategic approach to financial planning and reporting in the organisation should be pursued to ensure the consistent optimum use of available resources.

R4.14 Clerical Officer Contracts and Reassignments: The CSO should review the process for managing the extension of temporary Clerical Officer contracts to ensure that timely renewal is given priority attention. In addition, the reassignment of permanent Clerical Officer Staff undertaking census work also requires proactive management together with enhanced communication with impacted staff.

R4.15 Blended Working: The Management Board should review the decision to pause the work of the SMG Subgroup to Monitor the Implementation of the Blended Working Pilot. If re-established, this Subgroup should look to the experience and learnings of other National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) and peer organisations in their management of blended working in the post-pandemic period. This work should also feed into the recommended broader review on culture and values in the organisation. Greater communication with staff on the nature and duration of the current blended working pilot also requires focus.

R4.16 Coaching and Mentoring: The CSO should build on the positive progress achieved to date in the roll-out of coaching and mentoring, with a particular focus on coaching opportunities for managers at Assistant Principal Officer and Statistician grades.

R4.17 Internal Staff Mobility: The Internal Mobility Policy should be reviewed and should demonstrate greater clarity and transparency on how the policy is applied organisation-wide.

R4.18 Knowledge Management: The CSO should prioritise knowledge management for non-statistical business areas of the organisation, supported by an over-arching Knowledge Management Strategy. Such a strategy should specifically address job documentation across all job roles and grades.

R4.19 Records Management: A Records Management Strategy, encompassing management of all records in the organisation, should be developed. In undertaking this work the CSO should consider the potential of a transition to the eDocs records management system.

R4.20 Build to Share Applications: The CSO should conduct a review of available build to share applications and establish the benefits of expanding the range of applications in use across the organisation.

R4.21 Data Management: The CSO should review the processes for researcher access to Research Microdata Files (RMF) to ensure consistent and timely responses to all researchers across all divisions. The CSO should also communicate the comprehensive data governance structures in place, and provide leadership to the civil and Public Service and to other external data providers to allay any data protection concerns around submitting data to the CSO.

Appendix 1: List of Recommendations

CHAPTER 1 RECOMMENDATIONS - LEADERSHIP

1A CRITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

R1.1 Communications Function: The external-facing Communications and Dissemination Division should be merged with the Internal Communications and Engagement (ICE) Unit immediately in order to professionalise both functions and align all CSO communications from an operational and strategic perspective. This action is required before finalisation of the Communications and Dissemination Strategy which is currently under development.

R1.2 Communications Strategy: The new Communications Strategy for the organisation should encompass external and internal communications and should be developed alongside a Website Strategy and Social Media Strategy that will consider how the organisation can engage more cohesively across all social media platforms. The Communications Strategy should also specifically consider engagement and communication strategies to build a single corporate identity and address the current sense of disconnection expressed by both the field staff and some elements of the Swords based staff in the organisation.

R1.3 Internal Communications: The multiple communication platforms in operation in the CSO should be reconstituted into one overarching CSO staff portal that will launch immediately on staff log in. This portal should act as the sole communication platform for CSO staff, with the continued availability of those communication initiatives currently working positively (Vlogs; Information Sessions; Links to Staff Newsletter). Improved awareness amongst CSO staff of Management Board decisions and current CSO challenges, successes and initiatives should be supported by the continued timely publication of the minutes of Management Board meetings and priority circulation of internal staff notices. In addition, a formal policy on staff meetings across directorates, divisions, units and teams within the CSO should be introduced to ensure consistency and the setting of minimum standards that will support more effective internal communication.

R1.4 Prioritisation: The CSO should further develop the articulation, consolidation and reporting of CSO operational and strategic priorities on an annual basis to enhance the process of prioritisation across the organisation. This matter is further addressed in R2.1. The CSO should also build capability in clearly articulating future focused organisational priorities and funding needs during the annual Estimates process (R4.9).

1B IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS

R1.5 Review of Organisational Structures: The Management Board of the CSO should continue to periodically review the structure of the organisation in line with its strategic objectives. In particular, the current review of the Social Statistics Directorate should continue to be prioritised with a finalisation date agreed for early 2025.

R1.6 Communications Business Partner Model: The reconstituted Communications Function should consider if the introduction of a structured business partner model would add value to the achievement of its strategic aims, in addition to building relationships and enhancing communication internally. Such

an approach would significantly support the requirement to particularly improve communications and engagement with the field staff and staff based in the Swords office. It would also support and promote the development of a single corporate identity and the delivery of the new Communications Strategy.

R1.7 Statistical Releases: The CSO should consider providing more contextual and explanatory information with its statistical releases in order to facilitate greater stakeholder and general public understanding.

R1.8 Staff Partnership Charter: The CSO should build on the good work of the Staff Engagement and Innovation Committee (SEIC) by developing the Terms of Reference of the Committee into a Staff Partnership Charter.

R1.9 Internal Cross-Collaborative Working: The CSO should continue to ensure that opportunities for internal cross-collaborative working are maximised. In particular, opportunities for collaboration should be communicated widely to increase staff awareness and consideration should be given to adopting a more structured approach to the establishment of Communities of Practice.

R1.10 Staff Networks: The CSO should ensure that Terms of Reference are in place, and adhered to, for all staff networks. These should be subject to regular review and should clearly set out how each network will support the strategic objectives of the CSO and position managers and staff as co-creators and co-owners in shaping the future direction of the organisation. The General Management Forum should also consider if more frequent in-person events can be developed to enhance networking and collaboration across the management grades. Finally, the Field Operations Review Group (FORG) requires particular review in terms of structure, remit and effectiveness in meeting both the needs of the organisation and the field interviewer and field coordinator staff cohorts.

R1.11 External Stakeholder Engagement: The CSO should consider the scheduling of more frequent seminars and conferences to enhance communications with external stakeholders and showcase the innovative work being carried out.

CHAPTER 2 RECOMMENDATIONS – STRATEGY AND CONTRIBUTION TO POLICYMAKING

2A CRITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

R2.1 Annual CSO Work Plan: The CSO should introduce an Annual Organisational Work Plan to support its strategic and business planning processes and align with the current annual Statistical Work Programme (which details the annual production of official statistics across the Irish Statistical Service). This work plan, which could be developed from the current Plan for Statistics, should be prepared at the start of each year and flow directly from the three-year Statement of Strategy. It should clearly articulate under each strategic theme the actions and sub-actions that will be taken; the directorate, business area and team responsible; and the timelines for delivery. Such a document should act as a tracker of strategy implementation; should inform meetings with the Minister of State, the Department of the Taoiseach, DPENDR and the OGCI; and should be published at the start of each year.

R2.2 Data Stewardship Role: As the CSO continues to develop its data stewardship role, issues regarding resourcing, role clarification and prioritisation will become increasingly important and indeed challenging. In meeting this challenge the CSO will be required to articulate absolute clarity on the data stewardship

role and ensure consistency and depth of understanding across internal and external stakeholders. This issue will particularly require continued positive engagement, clarity, and relationship building with colleagues across Government.

R2.3 National Data and Statistical Strategies: The CSO should engage across Government to progress clarity on the role of the organisation in the drafting and implementation of national data and statistical strategies. In doing so the potential for overlap or gaps between both the work of the CSO and the OGCIO, and in terms of the legislation, between the Statistics Act 1993 and the Data Governance Act 2013, should be considered.

R2.4 National Data Infrastructure (NDI): The CSO should aim to utilise its full powers under the legislation to secure the full adoption of the NDI, in order to solidify its data stewardship role, continue to improve data quality and standards, and pursue opportunities for greater interoperability across the civil and Public Service. This is fundamentally important in support of the organisation as it rolls out the NDI+.

R2.5 Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS): The CSO should seek to review the IGSS programme, before expanding further the reach of the programme across the Civil and Public Service. In doing so the full potential of the programme should be realised through ensuring that each host organisation is adequately strategically prepared to accept one or more IGSS secondees, who should be appropriately placed in Strategic Policy Units where they exist. Such Units should facilitate collaboratively working between IGSS staff and colleagues such as IGEES and research staff engaged in the policy development process. The CSO should also ensure that more experienced rather than newly recruited staff are seconded.

R2.6 Strategic Engagement with Policy Development Leaders: In order to ensure that data is adequately and appropriately considered at the correct stage of the policy development process, the Management Board should establish a programme of strategic, consistent engagement with colleagues at senior management level in policy development departments. Such strategic engagement will also help to provide clarity on the parameters of the CSO role in policy development; enable the timely assessment of data needs of departments; understand future policy development plans and facilitate sharing of information on the data holdings of each organisation. The CSO should also pursue the requirement for Government organisations to consider emerging statistical needs as a component of the three-year strategic planning process, followed by engagement with the CSO as appropriate.

2B IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS

R2.7 Business Planning: The Divisional Action Plan (DAP) and Local Business Plan (LBP) templates should be further developed to facilitate the capturing of resource data (staffing needs; skills gaps; financial data; L&D requirements) that will assist broader strategic planning across the organisation.

R2.8 Evaluation Processes: The CSO should renew its focus on organisation-wide compliance with its many evaluation processes and procedures so as to ensure appropriate priority is attached to evaluation by all directorates and business areas, with staff awareness and engagement a fundamental priority.

R2.9 Spending Reviews: The CSO should consider participating in the next round of Spending Reviews, in collaboration with DPENDR.

CHAPTER 3 RECOMMENDATIONS - DELIVERY

3A CRITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

R3.1 Health & Safety: The CSO should ensure that the Organisational Safety Statement is updated annually to reflect the fast-paced changes in the operating environment of the organisation. The CSO should also prioritise the drafting of a comprehensive Health & Safety Strategy in order to strengthen the existing Health & Safety Framework, outline clear H&S objectives for the organisation, and detail actions required with timelines for delivery. A review of health and safety training requirements for the field staff should be undertaken as a matter of priority.

R3.2 Governance of IGSS: The MoUs across the Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS) should be reviewed with host organisations and updated to reflect a refocus on the appropriate placement of seconded staff in strategic policy areas and include detail on the role of seconded staff in improving the statistical expertise of the host organisation. All MoUs, once refreshed, should be reviewed on an annual basis, with such reviews incorporating feedback from all seconded staff. This work should be supported by a review of the collaboration and interaction between the IGSS and IGESS Programmes to ensure maximum benefit is being realised.

R3.3 Project Management: The CSO should continue to pursue its maturity journey in project management by considering whether the Governance Support Unit (GSU) requires further development into a centralised Project Management Office (PMO) that will give practical guidance on all organisational projects, large and small, while delivering a consistency of approach organisation-wide. The Management Board also should ensure that the Project Oversight Board (POB) has a critical understanding of the fundamentals of good project management and are guiding the Management Board in that respect.

R3.4 Project Management Training: Focus is required on the identification of project management training programmes that meet the needs of the CSO across its range of projects, large and small. Roll-out of this training should be driven centrally by the L&D Unit to ensure that all staff grades, as appropriate, are trained in a consistent project management approach. Such training should be further supplemented through the establishment of an internal Project Management Network.

R3.5 Developments in the Data Ecosystem: The CSO should ensure that it is strategically aligned and adequately resourced to meet the significant delivery challenges such as the transition to a digital census and the forthcoming right of access to privately held data.

3B IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS

R3.6 Governance: The CSO should continue to build on its robust governance framework by ensuring that Chairs of all committees are rotated on a defined basis.

R3.7 Innovation and Continuous Improvement: The Communications Unit should advise the Management Board on how better to communicate the innovation message to all stakeholders and the progress achieved by the organisation to date.

R3.8 Customer Service: The Customer Service Action Plan should be updated regularly to reflect the developments made by the organisation in customer service practices and processes.

R3.9 Procurement: The potential for full centralisation of the procurement function in the CSO should be reviewed. In addition, regular training opportunities for staff involved in procurement activity at business level should be made available in order to increase the knowledge base and reduce the level of demand on the Procurement Units.

R3.10 External Stakeholder Engagement: Opportunities for structured feedback from external stakeholders should be developed, scheduled on a set-basis and communicated effectively at the right level. The new Communications Strategy should address engagement with external stakeholders, encompassing the Civil and Public Service, national and international organisations, researchers, academia, the media and the general public, and drawing on the results of the 2022 User and Non-User Survey and feedback received through informal channels.

CHAPTER 4 RECOMMENDATIONS – BUSINESS SUPPORT FUNCTIONS

4A CRITICAL RECOMMENDATIONS

R4.1 Cyber Security: The risk of a cyberattack to the CSO and the associated required investment in mitigations demands continued intense focus and should be clearly and confidently costed, detailed and presented by the organisation during the annual Estimates process. An organisation-wide Cyber Security Strategy should be developed, informed by the experiences of counterparts in the European Statistical System (ESS).

R4.2 ICT Governance: The CSO should establish an ICT Steering Committee at very senior level in the organisation with the specific role of overseeing the information technology investment priorities for the CSO, forming a vital component of the organisation’s ICT governance framework. The strategic positioning of this structure alongside the current SMG Technology Subgroup will require consideration.

R4.3 HRM Function: In recognition of the need for particular focus on progressing strategic HRM across the organisation, continuing to increase the expertise and capability of the HRM team in strategic HR should be prioritised. An Organisational Development (OD) exercise to review the capacity of the HRM function may assist in this regard. The acting capacity of the Head of HRM should be addressed as soon as is operationally viable.

R4.4 Strategic Workforce Planning: The Management Board should maintain momentum with the recent work on strategic workforce planning with a concentrated focus on recruitment and retention across all staff grades. Strategic workforce planning should also be employed to address succession planning; the retirement cliff; and issues specific to the Statistician grade. Such planning should be supported by the work of the recently established SMG Subgroup to Review the Statistician Grade with action required on this specific area as a matter of priority. The CSO should also continue to engage with the Public Appointments Service (PAS) to explore the possibility of increased utilisation of the recruitment shared service. Finally, the proactive pursuit of a STEM identity for the organisation that will highlight to emerging graduates the attractiveness of a career in statistics should be adopted.

R4.5 Skills Management: The CSO is required to prioritise skills management across the full staff cohort rather than a more concentrated focus on the statistical staff. This work should prioritise a skills audit together with identifying skills gaps for the future across the realms of statistical skills; administrative skills; and new specialist and developing skills such as Artificial Intelligence (AI); Geographic Information

Systems (GIS); Cybersecurity; Data Science and Data Analysis. The development of a skills register for all CSO staff should be prioritised in preparation for the imminent move of the register from the Lotus Notes platform. This should support the introduction of an integrated talent management system for the organisation which similarly requires prioritisation and investment.

R4.6 Culture and Values Review: On the commencement in post of the new Director General, the review of culture and values across the organisation, previously paused, should be reconsidered.

R4.7 Career Progression: A priority focus is required on appropriate training and development structures and opportunities for the Senior Statistician staff grade to support career progression. Learnings and experience from other Civil Service organisations who employ specialist grades may assist in this regard.

R4.8 Field Staff: Issues across the field staff cohort namely low morale; job viability into the future; and health and safety training and support structures require attention. In addition, HRM support for Coordinators in dealing with staff probation and underperformance; HRM communications and engagement; improved management training supports for coordinators; and ICT support outside of office hours also require consideration by the organisation.

R4.9 Finance Function: The CSO should immediately implement a revised strategic, forward-looking approach to engagement with the Vote Team in DPENDR during the Estimates process. This engagement should be underlined by a clear articulation of organisational strategic priorities and budgetary requirements to support the organisation in achieving its operational and strategic objectives. In addition, engagement with the Vote Team in DPENDR to agree a framework document for the vote transfer process requires priority action, together with engagement on the fiscal related recommendations of the ESS Peer Review 2022.

R4.10 Financial Management System: The current financial management system in the CSO urgently requires focus. This will necessitate immediate consideration of the timescale for the transition to the Civil Service Financial Management Shared Service (FMSS) and decisions at Management Board level regarding the implications of this timescale for the organisation and the consideration of possible urgent interim solutions.

R4.11 People Management: The CSO should seek to continue to improve compliance with the PMDS process while prioritising greater HRM and L&D support for all management grades in the management of underperformance.

4B IMPORTANT RECOMMENDATIONS

R4.12 HRM Function: Increased clarity regarding roles and responsibilities within the HRM Unit is required in order to enhance staff engagement, supported by the introduction of a HRM business partner approach organisation-wide within a six-month timeframe.

R4.13 Financial Planning & Reporting: A more strategic approach to financial planning and reporting in the organisation should be pursued to ensure the consistent optimum use of available resources.

R4.14 Clerical Officer Contracts and Reassignments: The CSO should review the process for managing the extension of temporary Clerical Officer contracts to ensure that timely renewal is given priority

attention. In addition, the reassignment of permanent Clerical Officer Staff undertaking census work also requires proactive management together with enhanced communication with impacted staff.

R4.15 Blended Working: The Management Board should review the decision to pause the work of the SMG Subgroup to Monitor the Implementation of the Blended Working Pilot. If re-established, this Subgroup should look to the experience and learnings of other National Statistical Institutes (NSIs) and peer organisations in their management of blended working in the post-pandemic period. This work should also feed into the recommended broader review on culture and values in the organisation. Greater communication with staff on the nature and duration of the current blended working pilot also requires focus.

R4.16 Coaching and Mentoring: The CSO should build on the positive progress achieved to date in the roll-out of coaching and mentoring, with a particular focus on coaching opportunities for managers at Assistant Principal Officer and Statistician grades.

R4.17 Internal Staff Mobility: The Internal Mobility Policy should be reviewed and should demonstrate greater clarity and transparency on how the policy is applied organisation-wide.

R4.18 Knowledge Management: The CSO should prioritise knowledge management for non-statistical business areas of the organisation, supported by an over-arching Knowledge Management Strategy. Such a strategy should specifically address job documentation across all job roles and grades.

R4.19 Records Management: A Records Management Strategy, encompassing management of all records in the organisation, should be developed. In undertaking this work the CSO should consider the potential of a transition to the eDocs records management system.

R4.20 Build to Share Applications: The CSO should conduct a review of available build to share applications and establish the benefits of expanding the range of applications in use across the organisation.

R4.21 Data Management: The CSO should review the processes for researcher access to Research Microdata Files (RMF) to ensure consistent and timely responses to all researchers across all divisions. The CSO should also communicate the comprehensive data governance structures in place, and provide leadership to the Civil and Public Service and to other external data providers to allay any data protection concerns around submitting data to the CSO.

Appendix 2: List of External Stakeholders Interviewed

National Statistics Board (NSB) Members

An Garda Síochána

Department of An Taoiseach

Department of Social Protection

Department of Finance

Department of Health

Department of Justice

Department of Children, Disability, Integration and Youth Affairs

Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform – Vote Section; Public Service Transformation Division and IGEES

Office of Government Chief Information Officer (OGCIO)

Irish Business and Employers Confederation (IBEC)

Economic and Social Research Institute (ESRI)

Eurostat

Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD)

United Nations Economic Commission for Europe (UNECE)

The Journal News Website

Appendix 3: Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS) Staff Placements (March 2024)

Department/Office/Agency	Statistician	Senior Statistician	Graduate
Dept. Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science	1		
Dept. Children, Equality, Disability, Integration & Youth	3	1	1
Dept. Education	4	1	1
Dept. Enterprise, Trade & Employment	1		
Dept. Environment, Climate & Communications	1		
Dept. Finance	2		
Dept. Foreign Affairs	1		
Dept. Health	6	1	2
Dept. Housing, Local Government & Heritage	2		1
Dept. Justice	1		
Dept. Social Protection	3	1	1
Dept. Transport	2	1	
Dept. Agriculture, Food and Marine	3		1
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	1		
Office of the Revenue Commissioners	2		
Road Safety Authority (RSA)	1		
Probation Service	1		

Vacancies	Statistician	Senior Statistician	Graduate
Dept. Further & Higher Education, Research, Innovation & Science	1		
Dept. Social Protection		1	
National Transport Authority	1		
Pensions Authority	1		
Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)	1		
An Garda Síochána	1		
Dept. Health	2		
Health & Safety Authority (HAS)	1		

Appendix 4: Services Delivered by the CSO in line with Delivery Drivers

Service	Customer(s)
Publication of CSO statistical outputs in accessible formats on the CSO website, including infographics, dashboards, apps, data hubs, and the PxStat Open Data statistical database	Members of the public; researchers; academic communities; primary & secondary schools; civil society; private sector organisations; the media; Civil & Public Service bodies
Provision of seconded Statisticians through the Irish Government Statistical Service	Government Departments, Offices & Agencies
Provision of short term, specialist statistical support (hit squad)	Government Departments, Offices & Agencies
Pathfinder projects (policy-relevant research projects that bring together data from CSO and administrative sources)	Government Departments
Expert advice on data quality and common data standards	Other National Authorities; Government Departments, Offices & Agencies; Public Service bodies
Promotion of the National Data Infrastructure and the development of NDI+ and the incorporation of unique identifiers in administrative data sets	Other National Authorities; Government Departments, Offices & Agencies; Public Service bodies
Access to research microdata files (RMF) and provision of the Researcher Online System for Applications (ROSA) for those seeking RMF access	Researchers; academics; Government Departments, Offices & Agencies
Education and learning resources, including competitions & awards	Primary & secondary school students and teachers
Development & delivery of the Professional Diploma in Official Statistics for Policy Evaluation in conjunction with the IPA	Public Service staff
Auditing of official statistics produced by other producers against the ISSCoP standard	Other producers of official statistics

Appendix 5: List of Inter-Departmental and Cross-Sector Fora with CSO Representation

a) Senior Officials Groups

- Senior Official Group on Humanitarian Response to the Ukrainian Crisis
- Senior Officials Group on Climate and Environment

b) Steering Groups

- Growing up in Ireland Survey Steering Group
- Sexual Violence Survey (SVS) Steering Group

c) Working Groups

- Agricultural Statistics Working Group
- Balance of Payments Working Group (Eurostat)
- CSO Housing Statistical Working Group
- Enterprise Statistics Working Group
- International Trade in Services Working Group (Eurostat)

d) Task Forces

- ECE Task Force on Measuring Hazardous Events and Disasters (UN)
- Eurostat Task Force on Ecosystem Accounting
- Eurostat Task Force on Foreign Direct Investment
- Eurostat Task Force - ICW (Income, Consumption, Wealth) Staff Engagement
- UNECE Task Force on the Role of National Statistical Offices in achieving climate objectives (UN)

e) Liaison Groups

- Agricultural Statistics Liaison Group
- All-Island Tourism Statistics
- CSO-An Garda Síochána Liaison Group
- CSO-Dept Social Protection Liaison Group
- CSO-Dept of Health (Health Data) Liaison Group
- CSO/EPA Liaison
- CSO-Revenue Liaison Group
- CSO-SEAI Liaison Group
- CSO-Suicide Mortality Statistics Liaison Group
- Central Bank Liaison group Labour Market and Earnings
- Crime Statistics Group
- Census Homeless Methodology Liaison Group
- Enterprise Statistics Liaison Group
- Education Statistics Liaison Group
- Formal Statistician Liaison Group
- Forest Statistics Liaison Group
- Household Budget Survey (HBS) Eurostat
- Government Finance Statistics Liaison Committee
- Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS)
- Macroeconomic Statistics Liaison Group (CSO)

- National Residential Property Group
- National Data Infrastructure Champions Group
- Programme of International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC) Liaison Group
- System of Health Accounts Liaison Group
- Transport Statistics Liaison Group

e) Ethics Groups

- Social Survey Ethics Advisory Group

f) Data Governance Boards

- Data Architecture and Technical Committee
- Data Governance Board
- Open Data Governance Board

g) Miscellaneous

- CSMB Subgroup on Strengthening Policymaking
- Directors Macroeconomic Statistics (DMES) - Executive Body (Eurostat)
- General Government Debt Expert Group (CSO)
- Irish Government Statistical Service (IGSS) IGSS
- Labour Market and Earnings and DSP Labour Market and Earnings
- Local Authority Network
- Local government expert group
- UNECE Expert Meeting on Statistics for Sustainable Development Goals