

The Irish State Administration Database

Background to the Database

June 2014

Introduction

To date there has been a significant dearth of data on the evolution of the Irish state's administrative apparatus. This has obvious implications not only for understanding existing state structures and their evolution, but also for assessing the capacity of the state to perform a wide range of activities and to ensure the integrity of the policy-making process.

The purpose of creating the *Irish State Administration Database* or **ISAD** was to address this gap and to begin the analysis of the state's administrative capacity and 'reach' over time. In other words, what does the Irish public administration do, how does it do it, and how has it evolved? To this end, the database contains a wide variety of descriptive data on the state's administrative apparatus, and has also been developed in a manner that will facilitate researchers to conduct their own data searches. It will therefore provide a platform for future research. While considerable efforts have been made to make the database as comprehensive and accurate as possible, there will always be scope for greater refinement. The database has been designed in a manner that will allow it to expand over time, and in terms of the depth and quality of information available. It will also be possible to link the data contained in it to other databases, as is already the case with the *Irish Statute Book*.

The sections below provide a brief summary of the project's evolution, core concepts, and the sources used.

Funding and organisation of the project

The **Irish State Administration Database** has been developed as part of the 'Mapping the Irish State' project located at the Geary Institute, University College Dublin (<http://geary.ucd.ie/>).

The 'Mapping the Irish State' project was funded by a Thematic Project Grant awarded by the Irish Research Council for Humanities and Social Sciences (IRCHSS), to the value of €225,000, from 2007 to 2010.

The 'Mapping the Irish State' project was led by a core research team consisting of Dr Niamh Hardiman (Principal Investigator), Dr Muiris MacCarthaigh and Prof Colin Scott. The database infrastructure has been designed and managed by Mark Hargaden.

A number of research assistants have also been centrally involved in the project over the course of its development: Diarmuid Torney, Ken McDonagh, Ecaterina McDonagh and Mary Shayne Brophy.

The data: Core concepts

The information in the database has been captured through two sets of related data:

- 1) The population of organisations or ‘units’ involved in public services
- 2) The collective set of ‘events’ that happened to each of these individual organisations at different stages of their development.

By allocating attributes to each unit and collating the evolution of all units, we have been able to develop a detailed picture of the Irish state’s administrative apparatus over time.

Units

Deciding on what exactly constitutes a public body or organisation is a subject of some considerable debate. There is no consistent Irish definition. This issue has been addressed in Working Papers by Hardiman and Scott (<http://ideas.repec.org/p/ucd/wpaper/200907.html>) and Scott (<http://ideas.repec.org/p/ucd/wpaper/200804.html>). The subject is also contested in international research; for an overview of some of these debates, see Roness 2007¹.

This project has identified a range of criteria that determine the status of national-level state institutions, including legal form, function, accountability and policy domain (for more on these criteria please see the Database Codebook). Also, for the purposes of capturing the full range of organisational forms used in national government, as well as the forms of relationship between them, we have included government departments as a type of ‘agency’ albeit a type which is multi-functional.

While every effort has been made to closely define the boundaries of inclusion for entry to the database, the variety of organisations utilised by Irish governments since independence presents obvious difficulties. For example, we have chosen to include both statutory and non-statutory adjudicatory tribunals, such as the Equality Tribunal and the Criminal Injuries Compensation Tribunal, but we have excluded investigatory tribunals such as the Mahon or Beef Tribunals. Likewise, while task forces and ad-hoc advisory committees have often been created as a means of pre-legislative policy development by governments or departments, some meet infrequently and exist for a short period while others have existed for a considerable time and have been the source of important policy changes or were the direct predecessor of formal statutory bodies. In the case of bodies that had been in existence for five years or longer, or which had clear regulatory or advisory functions, such bodies were included in the database. Having a statutory basis is likewise always a justification for inclusion, even if the body in question had a short existence, as it demonstrates a government commitment that must be reflected in the database.

Some organisations whose existence originated as private or professional bodies operate under delegated public authority and carry out important public functions.

¹ Roness, P.G. (2007) ‘Types of State Organizations: Arguments, Doctrines and Changes beyond New Public Management’ in Christensen, T. and Laegreid, P. (eds) *Transcending New Public Management: The Transformation of Public Sector Reforms* (Aldershot: Ashgate), pp.65-88

These have also been included. We have chosen not to include organisations solely on the basis of receipt of public funding. Funding does not necessarily indicate the performance of a public function or subjection to government oversight and audit. Moreover, while many voluntary sector bodies are in receipt of public funding under contract to deliver services, or as a grant toward their primarily voluntary activities, the source of the funding alone does not turn them into state agencies. Organisational structures, ministerially-appointed boards, and statutory delegated responsibilities have also been used as grounds for inclusion.

The state owns shares in a large variety of companies, and many companies are engaged in work that could be considered a public function, but not all of these are included in the database. Companies for which the government has ownership of majority of shares or possession of a ‘golden’ share are included, as are companies set up by statute or those with statutory authority for their actions. Aer Lingus, for example, is listed in the database up to the point at which the state lost its majority shareholding.

Where two or more units have existed under the same name, they have each been given a roman numeral suffix for identification purposes, with the earliest body labelled (I).

For the purposes of the database, we consider an organisation to have become a new unit when it undergoes a major shift in structure, function, legal form, and/or name. One exception to this is when a non-statutory organisation is given a statutory basis with no other changes. Additionally, some units take on new names during their existence as a ‘rebranding’ with no other changes. These new names are added as ‘Additional Names’, but the unit is considered continuous.

In the case of departments, each time a department undergoes a statutory alteration of departmental name and title of minister, it is considered to be a new unit. Mapping the departments in this way provided the clearest picture of the frequent shifting of groupings in policy areas.

Events

Defining the changes that happen to organisations is rarely straightforward. Several related events, such as mergers, privatisation, splits, or transfer of function, may occur at the same time. We have developed a set of twelve event types which we believe accurately captures the nature of change (for more please see the Database Codebook). When an event results from a piece of primary or secondary legislation, the name of that legislation is used to denote the event. In other cases, a name has been developed to reflect the event.

We have chosen an event framework that addresses events as integrated wholes, such that one event can encompass changes to several units. The Broadcasting Act 2009 event, for instance, is the merging of the Broadcasting Complaints Commission (BCC) and the Broadcasting Commission of Ireland (BCI) to form the Broadcasting Authority of Ireland (BAI). It encompasses the dissolution of BCC and BCI and the creation of BAI.

A Working Paper by Rolland and Roness on classifying event types is available at:
<http://ideas.repec.org/p/ucd/wpaper/200909.html>

In some cases, formal or legal changes follow informal changes by several months, or even years. In these instances, the formal changes are recorded, with a note on the informal changes added to the relevant unit description.

Where new organisations replace others, we also show this 'lineage' on the unit page. In some cases, organisations replace others which existed solely under British administration prior to 1922 and are therefore outside the scope of this database. In these cases, the creation of the replacement body is treated as a birth.

Linking related events

Where a number of related events occur, we found it insufficient to provide a single event description. We have avoided using a category for 'complex reorganisation' in an attempt to more accurately portray the interplay between the individual changes which can be identified under the normal event categorisation. Instead, a number of discrete events are 'linked' to each other. These events can be identified by a name under the 'Linkage' column on each Event page. The majority of these 'linked' events relate to changes of government, which increasingly involve extensive reorganisation of government departments and redistribution of functions between them.

For example, in 1993, following the change of government in 1992, responsibility for forestry transferred from Department of Energy to the Department of Agriculture and Food, which became the Department of Agriculture, Food and Forestry (under S.I. 11/1993). The functions remaining with the Department of Energy were transferred to Department of Tourism, Transport and Communications, which became the Department of Transport, Energy and Communications (under S.I. 17/1993). These events have been linked under the title 'Departmental Reorganisation 1993'.

Reports

The database provides for the creation of reports to provide time-series overviews of the data and to facilitate comparative analysis. For each year, the chosen date on which to calculate the number of agencies then in existence is 1st January.

Charts

As well as identifying numbers, ISAD allows for the identification of trends over time in graphical form. Choosing the option 'Charts' will bring the user to a number of pre-defined options, including the number of agencies by decade according to primary function and policy domain, as well as the different legal forms adopted by agencies performing different functions.

Sources for data entry

The sources of information for the data entered in the database are varied but can be categorised according to primary and secondary sources. All relevant sources of information for data entries are recorded in each case in the database. Source material has dramatically improved over the last 20 years, and some reliable sources stretch back to the 1960s. But for the early decades of the state's existence, the material is less comprehensive and complete.

Primary sources

The Irish Statute Book. The online searchable Statute Book is hosted by the Office of the Attorney-General at www.irishstatutebook.ie. It contains all primary and secondary legislation which is responsible for much of the administrative evolution captured in the database and, where relevant, links to individual piece of such legislation are provided by hyperlink. It should be noted that some organisations existed prior to the enactment of enabling legislation, while others predate the starting period of the Statute Book, 1922. Users are also asked to note the Disclaimer from the Office of the Attorney General in relation to the Irish Statute book: <http://www.irishstatutebook.ie/disclaimer.html>

Dáil and Seanad Debates. Online records of parliamentary debates and responses to parliamentary questions provide an excellent source of information. They are at <http://historical-debates.oireachtas.ie/index.html>, <http://debates.oireachtas.ie/>, and <http://oireachtasdebates.oireachtas.ie>

Institute of Public Administration (IPA) Yearbook and Diary 1967-2009. This volume is published annually and contains information on all government departments and state bodies, commercial and non-commercial, although the criteria for inclusion of bodies are not the same as those of the Mapping project. The quality of information and level of detail has varied over the years, and sometimes there are discrepancies between the information recorded and official report and answers to parliamentary questions. In general, however, the Diary provides an excellent annual snapshot of the state administration.

Thom's Directory (Civil Service) 1922-64. Normally known as a source for business listings and property ownerships, Thom's directory, which dates back to the mid-19th century, also provides a useful source of information on public organisations, especially in Dublin. The Directory also gives an indication of organisational structure and staff numbers within listed bodies.

The *Blue Notes*, prepared in 1937 by all Government Departments and collated by the Department of Finance, give enormous detail on the development of public administration in Ireland from 1922/3 until 1935/6. The book is organised by expenditure vote and therefore covers state bodies under the remit of Departments (e.g. the Land Commission, the Local Government Board, Universities, the National Gallery). For each Department or public body, the *Blue Notes* give historical background, functions, organisation, along with details of the changes in each subhead of the vote for each of the years in question.

Archives of national newspapers, these often provide reports on the establishment of and changes to Departments and other State bodies.

Official Reports

The *State Directory* was first published under the title *Directory of State Services* in 1966. It continued under this name until 1975. In 1976 the name of the publication changed to *State Directory*. It was published every year from 1976 to 1986, then in 1988, 1991, 1992, 1993, 1995 and 2000. The *State Directory* gives, for every Department and a couple of other bodies such as the State Laboratory and the Revenue Commissioners, details of department structure (divisions, sections, units, branches, etc.) staffing levels in the Department as a whole and in each unit, and names (and, more recently, telephone numbers) of members of staff.

Iris Oifigiúil is the official Irish State Gazette. Published since 1922 by the Stationery Office, it captures official state information such as appointments to boards and senior executive positions of public bodies; legal notices such as the appointment of receivers to private companies; and statutory instruments.

Government Department Annual Reports. There is a wide variety in the chronological range of Departmental reports. The Department of Agriculture, Local Government and Education produced regular reports from an early date. However it is only since the enactment of the Public Service Management Act 1997 that Departments have issued detailed annual reports on a more consistent basis.

Annual Reports of State Bodies. Again, there is a wide variety in the quality and consistency of these reports.

Other official reports. Certain parliamentary reports by bodies such as the *Joint Committee on State-Sponsored bodies* (1979-99) provide information on individual state agencies and commercial enterprises. Other reports commissioned by government, such as the *1935 Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Civil Service, 1932-1935*, also provide useful data.

Office of the Attorney-General. The 2002 publication titled *Departments of State, their functions as affected by transfer orders under section 6(1) Minister and Secretaries Act 1939 and other enactments* provides a useful source of information concerning the evolution of government departments.

The *Companies Registration Office (CRO)* provides information about the official creation and dissolution of public companies, as well as registered addresses (www.cro.ie).

Secondary Sources

A number of publications have provided lists of agencies in Ireland, albeit with widely varying systems of selection, classification and enumeration. These include:

Clancy, P. and Murphy, G. 2006. *Outsourcing Government: Public Bodies and Accountability*. Dublin, Tasc/New Island.

FitzGerald, G. 1963. *State-Sponsored Bodies*. Dublin, Institute of Public Administration.

King, F. C. (Ed). 1954. *Public Administration in Ireland*. Dublin, Civics Institute of Ireland.

Leon, D. E. 1963. *Advisory Bodies in Irish Government*. Dublin, Institute of Public Administration.

Litton, F. 1980. *The Structural Characteristics of State Bodies*. Dublin, Institute of Public Administration.

MacCarthaigh, M. 2010 'National non-commercial State Agencies in Ireland' *Institute of Public Administration State of the Public Service Series*, Institute of Public Administration, Research Paper No.1.

MacCarthaigh, M. 2009. *The Corporate Governance of Commercial State-Owned Enterprises in Ireland*. Dublin, IPA/CPMR Research Report No.9

McGauran, A-M; Verhoest, K and Humphreys. 2005. *The Corporate Governance of State Agencies in Ireland: Non-commercial national agencies*. Dublin, IPA/CPMR Research Report No.6

Other important reference works for this database include:

Coakley, J. 'Appendices' in Coakley, J. and Gallagher, M. (eds) 2005. *Politics in the Republic of Ireland*, 4th ed. London, Routledge pp.462-90

Chubb, B. 1992. *The Government and Politics of Ireland* (3rd ed.). London, Longman.

Public Services Organisation Review Group (1969). *Report of the Public Services Organisation Review Group, 1966-1969*. Dublin, Stationery Office.

Uí Mhaoldúin, D. 2007 'Alignment and realignment of the functions of government departments in Ireland' *Administration* Vol.55 (1): 5-46