



An Roinn Caiteachais Phoiblí  
Sheachadadh PFN agus Athchóirithe  
Department of Public Expenditure  
NDP Delivery and Reform

# Designing Better Public Services: The Irish Life Event Approach

**Marianne Cassidy**

Assistant Secretary - Public Service Transformation  
Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery & Reform



Serbhísí **Better**  
Poiblí **Public**  
Níos Fearr **Services**

**For the past two years, Ireland  
has been working to embed  
Human-Centred Design across  
the Public Sector.**

**Today I will;**

- Set the Context
- Speak about our Design Foundations
- The OECD Recommendation of the Council on Human-Centred Public Administrative Services
- Our Life Events Programme
- And Share some Reflections





# Setting the Context





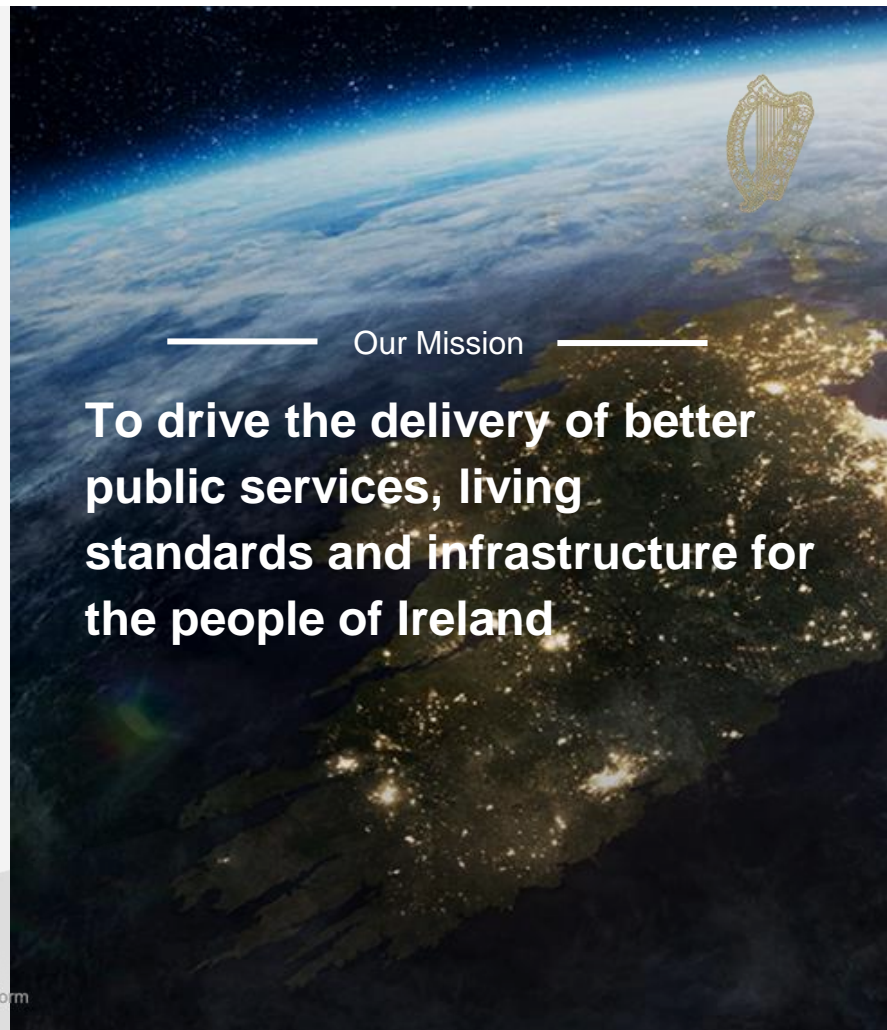
“We need to get excited about the future that’s just around the corner. We need a more imagined future. We need to talk more about where we want to be.”

MARY ROBINSON,  
FORMER PRESIDENT OF IRELAND AND CHAIR OF ‘THE ELDERS’,

# The Department of Public Expenditure, National Development Plan Delivery & Reform

## 11 divisions

- Climate Division
- Corporate Office
- Expenditure Policy Division
- Human Resources Strategy Unit
- Office of the Chief Medical Officer
- Office of the Government Chief Information Officer
- Office of Government Procurement
- Public Service Delivery Division
- Public Service Resourcing Division
- Public Service Transformation Division
- Public Service Workforce Division
- Work and Pensions Division





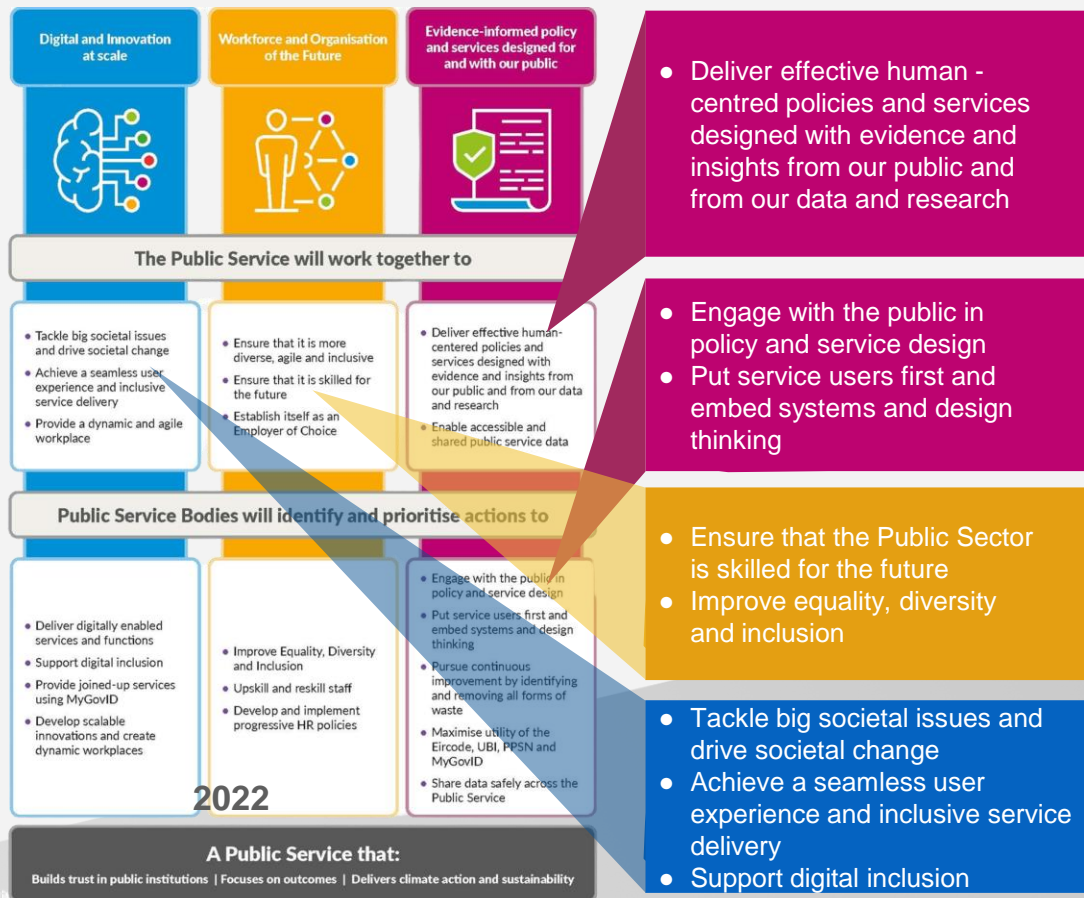
## Policy Context:

**Better Public Services:** A transformation strategy to deliver for the public and build trust

Rialtas na hÉireann  
Government of Ireland

**Better Public Services**  
A transformation strategy to deliver for the public and build trust

An Roinn Caiteachais Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe | Department of Public Expenditure and Reform





Q

"What are the fundamental changes needed to make public services truly 'better'?"



# Design Foundations

An Roinn Caiteachais Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe | Department of Public Expenditure, GDP Delivery and Reform



OFFICIAL



# Design Principles for Government in Ireland

The Design Principles for Government (2022) ensure public services are simpler, more inclusive, and human-centred, guiding how government designs services, policies, and processes to build trust and meet real user needs.

- Signalled the intent to embed design in government and identify design-conscious public servants.
- Developed using a design approach, informed by international exemplars, research, co-creation, and iteration.
- Shaped by a collaborative group of civil servants, design academics, and practitioners.
- Approved by Cabinet and embedded in public service modernisation.
- Applied across government, particularly in Life Events projects.





## Demonstrate Design Commitment

- Creation of a Central Design Unit
- New Funding Mechanisms
- Cross Government Support to embed Design

## Increase Design Capability

- Design Procurement Framework
- Specialist Design Role Descriptions
- Design Capability Building, Resources etc.

## Foster a Design Culture

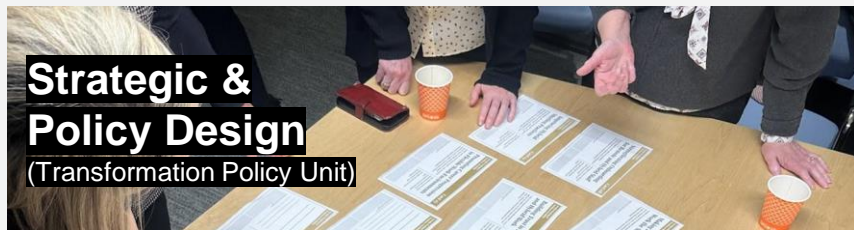
- Facilitate Design Challenges & Projects
- Promote Design Successes
- Deep collaboration with Design Sector (HEI's etc.)

# Dual-Focus Design Approach

The Dual-Focus Design Approach ensures that design is embedded across both policy and strategy and service delivery. Sitting between the Transformation Policy Unit and the Transformation Delivery Unit, it champions design values and principles across government.

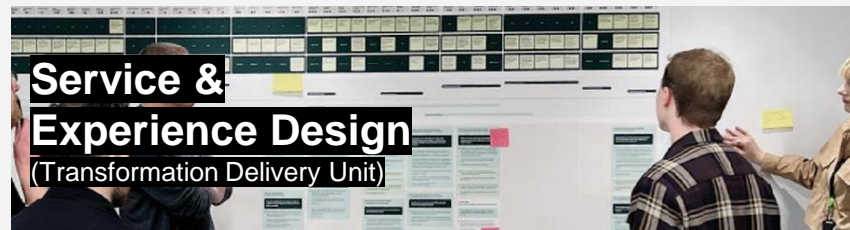


## Central Design Unit



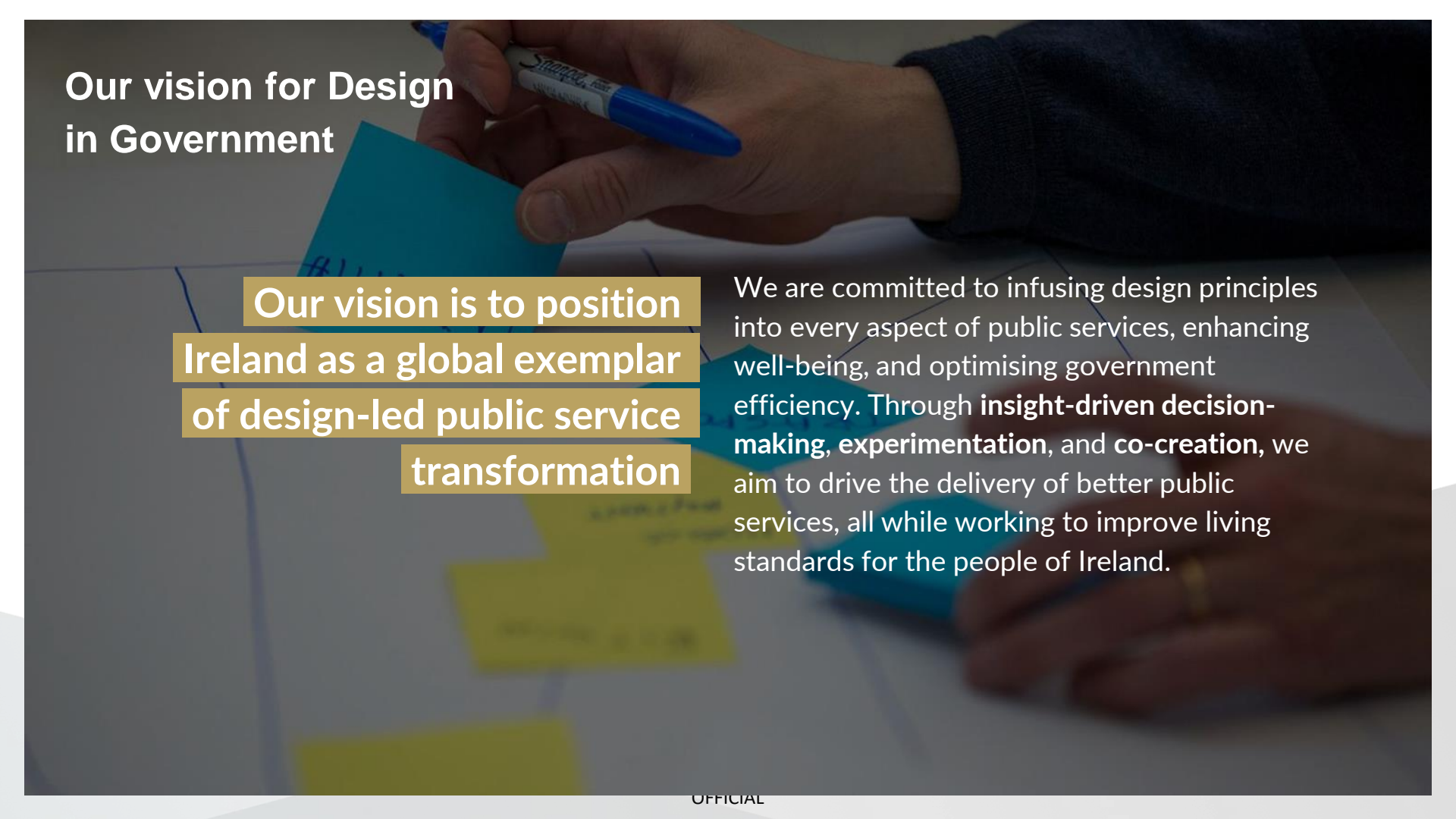
**Leading the implementation of the Action Plan for Designing Better Public Services, embedding design in policy, strategy, and government transformation.**

- Embedding Design in Policy & Strategy
- Building Public Sector Design Capability
- Supporting Major Reform & Innovation
- Strengthening Collaboration & Advocacy
- Building Design Community & Networks



**Leading the redesign of public services for simplicity, accessibility, and better experiences, with a focus on the Life Events programme.**

- Delivering Human-Centred Public Services
- Leading the Life Events Programme
- Enhancing Service Integration & Accessibility
- Driving Co-Creation & User Engagement
- Ensuring Continuous Improvement



## Our vision for Design in Government

Our vision is to position  
Ireland as a global exemplar  
of design-led public service  
transformation

We are committed to infusing design principles into every aspect of public services, enhancing well-being, and optimising government efficiency. Through **insight-driven decision-making**, **experimentation**, and **co-creation**, we aim to drive the delivery of better public services, all while working to improve living standards for the people of Ireland.



**Q** In your experience, what is the most important enabler for scaling design across government?





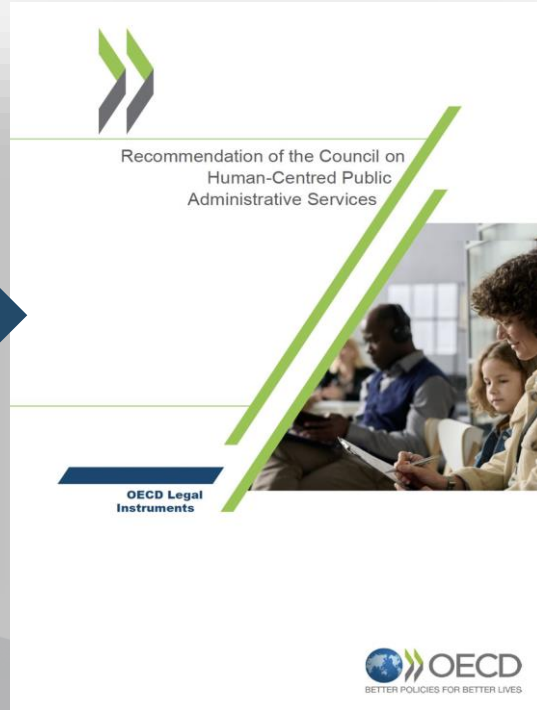
# OECD Recommendation on Human-Centred Public Administrative Services

An Roinn Caiteachais Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe | Department of Public Expenditure, GDP Delivery and Reform



OFFICIAL

# OECD Recommendation on Human-Centred Public Administrative Services



“Governments invest significant resources in service delivery. Thoughtful, evidence-based design ensures those resources create maximum impact, improving efficiency and effectiveness.”

*OECD, Recommendation on Human-Centred Public Administrative Services, (2025)*

# OECD Key Recommendations

- Adopted by the OECD Council on 17 September 2024
- Recommendation provides a common policy framework to help governments develop and implement services designed around people's needs.
- Reinforces the importance of trust, accessibility, and reliability in public administrative services across locations, channels, and sectors.
- The Recommendation is structured around four pillars that guide governments in delivering trusted, effective, and people-centred public services.

## Strategic Vision, Values & Rights

- Establish a whole-of-government approach to human-centred service delivery.
- Align services with fundamental rights, transparency, and trust.

## Core Foundations

- Define leadership roles and responsibilities for service design.
- Build public sector skills to support HCD
- Ensure inclusive, secure, and interoperable digital infrastructure.

## Seamless & Accessible Services

- Design services around user needs, life events, and major interactions.
- Use plain language, proactive delivery, and an omni-channel approach.

## Measurement, Engagement & Improvement

- Track performance and user experience.
- Use data and feedback for continuous improvement.
- Strengthen collaboration across sectors



# Ireland's Life events Programme

An Roinn Caiteachais Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe | Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform



OFFICIAL

# Life Events

A **Life Event** is a **major moment or transition** in a person's life that requires interaction with public services. It should be **seamless, proactive, and above all, human-centred**, ensuring support is easy to access and designed around real needs, not government structures.

- Ireland has committed to delivering a Government Life Events Programme, ensuring public services are accessible, reliable, and responsive to people's needs.
- The Global Life Event examines how people experience public services across life events, public attitudes towards government, the level of service integration, and the overall look and feel of service delivery.

In Progress

In Review

## Global Life Event



Welcoming a  
New Child



Becoming a  
Licensed Driver



Becoming a  
Student



Finding a  
Place to Live

Transitioning to  
Retirement

Taking on a  
Caring Role

Experiencing  
Crime & Seeking  
Support

Losing a  
Loved One

Managing Your  
Health and  
Wellbeing

Starting or  
Losing a Job

Getting Married,  
separated or  
Divorced

Starting and  
Running a  
Business

Voting for the  
First Time

Beginning School  
Life

Experiencing a  
Severe Weather  
Event

Becoming  
an adult



# Building a Connected, Life Events-Led Service Ecosystem

To move beyond department-focused service delivery, Ireland is adopting an integrated approach that ensures coordinated, user-centred, and accessible public services. These four pillars establish the foundation for a seamless, trusted, and efficient service ecosystem, designed around people's real-life needs.

## Services and Organisations

- Ensure coordination between government bodies and service providers.
- Define clear roles, responsibilities, and governance for efficient service delivery.
- Establish structured practices for continuous service improvement.

## Digital Products and Services

- Develop user-centric digital services as the foundation of an integrated system.
- Implement technical frameworks for seamless data sharing.
- Advance towards a life events-led model for service delivery.

## Service Environments

- Provide multi-channel service options beyond digital interactions.
- Ensure in-person and digital services are accessible, welcoming, and well-located.
- Maintain clear service standards that reflect core values.

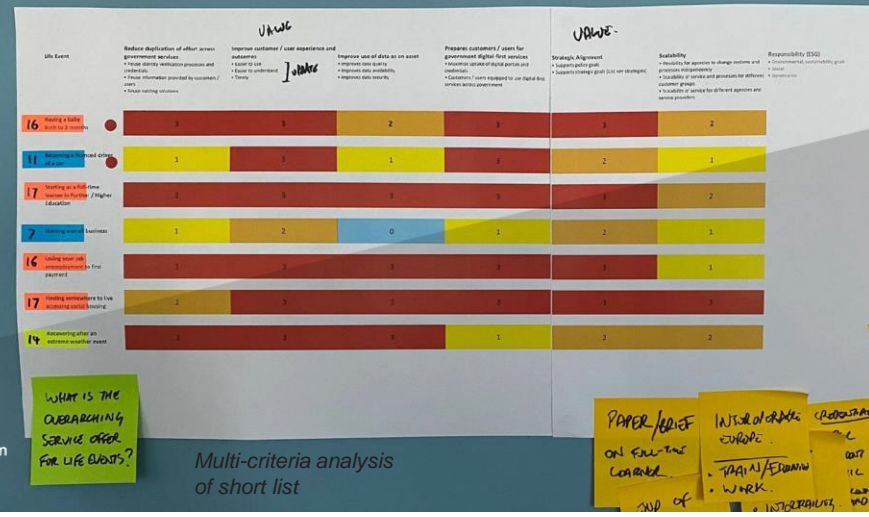
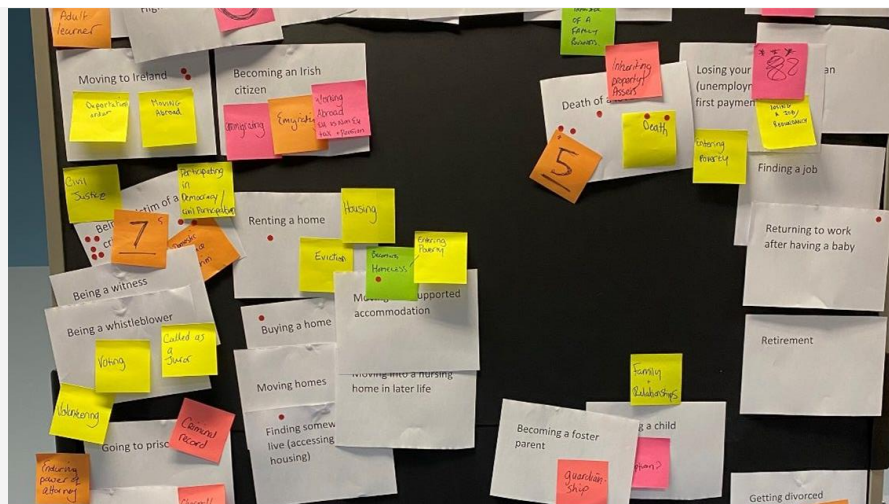
## Values, Identity & Content

- Establish and maintain strong service values and a clear visual identity.
- Implement a consistent language framework to enhance trust and clarity.
- Ensure alignment across services to maintain a cohesive user experience.

# Prioritising Ireland's Life Events

We have taken a systematic approach to identifying the key Life Events, drawing on international examples, public engagement, and structured analysis to refine our focus.

- Desk research and review of international exemplars
- Public consultation with ~3000 responses
- Policy sprint with Civil and public servants
- Multi-criteria analysis of the short-list
- Generation of an extensive long list, theming exercise, and dot voting by the Public Service Transformation Delivery Unit



# Generative Design Research

## Birth Life Event



### Service Users

1:1 research sessions with 5 mothers and 1 father, 2 of whom had a premature baby, and 1 of whom was recruited through Vision Ireland.



### Service Providers

1:1 research sessions with 2 service providers currently supporting women during birth.



### One Family

1:1 research session with 1 member who advocates for equality and inclusion for one-parent families.



Ask the Midwife

### Mother and Baby Groups

1:1 research and testing sessions with 8 mothers (7 first-time / 1 non-Irish).



### National Advocacy Service

Remote focus group with 2 members who provide free advocacy services to adults with disabilities.



### Pavee Point

Remote focus group with 3 members who address Traveller and Roma inequalities.



"Postnatal care is very baby-focussed. When I went to my GP for my baby's 6 week check, he asked me was I ok and that was it. It was a tickbox exercise and you don't feel very cared for."

"There's no connection between services. If something like a document is missing, nothing happens until you follow up. It almost feels like you're doing the job for them."

"As a mum you forget everything. I write a list for everything because I won't remember it otherwise."

"I started feeling so lonely carrying the tasks from breakfast to bedtime. I felt so burned out by the standards that I set for myself and I started feeling resentful towards my partner who appeared to be disengaged from the challenges that the baby and I were facing."

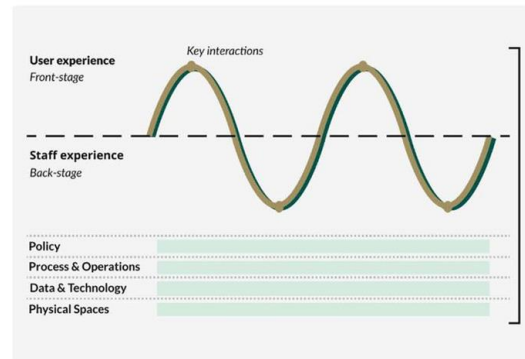


# Mapping As-is Journeys

## Driving Life Event

Mapped the As-Is Journey to understand user interactions, challenges, and pain points across the full "Driver" Life Event, informing deeper research and persona development.

Service Design explores the end-to-end experience



# Persona Development

## Student Life Event

Developed diverse personas to represent core and edge case users in the 'Driver' Life Event, ensuring design decisions were user-centred and aligned with real-world needs.

**Service User**  
**Eoin**  
Commuting to university in Dublin to study History

Eoin is 19 years old and sat his Leaving Certificate in June. He has just received a post-natal grant offer through the DARE scheme for his first choice of History in Dublin and is planning his next steps. Eoin currently lives with his parents in Athlone and wants to leave the world after university. He plans to commute from Athlone to Dublin for his first year to save money but it means he will be on public transport or in his car for 4 hours each day.

**Scenario**  
Lives in Athlone and commutes to Dublin each day. He feels as though the long commute hinders his ability to connect with classmates and make friends.

Eoin is also part of the LGBTQ+ community and would love to meet like-minded people. These are his priorities at his future university but he is worried that having to commute to and from Dublin each day will impact the ability to make friends. He wonders whether living and working near the university would be better for his long-term relationships and mental health and whether he will be able to continue attending university with the long commute.

**Pain Points**

**Financials and knowledge**  
Students with disabilities need to between saving money and living at home, or sacrificing other things and leaving more money. Some students experience while living at home and working after their parents being able to socialise makes him feel more lonely.

**Long commute to university**  
Eoin's 4-hour commute makes the time he has to study and negatively impacts his social experience at uni. Some universities need a 2-year waiting list for some students as without the existing technology and support they need.

**Disability assessments**  
Students with disabilities often struggle to get the support they need. The HEAC and DARE schemes are less known and there are other schemes such as the Student Assistance Fund that are less known again.

**Knowledge of supports**  
The SAG grant is well known amongst students. The HEAC and DARE schemes are less known and there are other schemes such as the Student Assistance Fund that are less known again.

**Needs**

**Financial and financial support**  
**Affordable accommodation options**  
**Timely disability support services**  
**Single source for financial supports**

*"I lost out on a social life as there's no late buses home, and I lose study time too which only adds to the stress. I love the course content, I just wish there was a bit more of a social life."*

**Service User**  
**Aoife**  
Moving to university in Galway to study Engineering

Aoife is 18 years old and sat her Leaving Certificate in June. She received an offer to study Engineering in Galway but her mother, a single parent, believes she should be supporting the household financially and such unemployment rather than attending university. Aoife's mother will not be able to support her financially and she will need to find her own accommodation and support herself. She also has a long-term illness which requires a check-up with the GP every 2 months which she is having to be possible to do in Galway.

**Scenario**  
Moving from Westford to Galway for university and a part-time job as her mother isn't able to support her financially.

Aoife has heard about accommodation exams and will be wary of them but is worried that her desperation to find accommodation as cheap as possible will lead to her living somewhere unsuitable. She has also researched financial grants and supports that are available to her personally. However, she is not eligible for all of them as her mother's income just exceeds the threshold. This is despite Aoife's mother not being able to support her financially.

**Pain Points**

**Lack of parental support**  
A lack of financial support from her mother will not mean parents are able to support her financially and she is having to work longer hours throughout the week. This could impact her studies, her mental health, and take away from her career prospects.

**Accessing financial supports**  
Aoife's mother's income exceeds the threshold for some financial supports and although Aoife does not directly benefit from it, it results in her not qualifying for some of the financial supports that are most essential to her.

**Finding accommodation**  
In order to attend university, Aoife needs to find accommodation. This is a stressful and time-consuming task. This desperation and lack of experience makes her more susceptible to scams and she is being more vulnerable of easily recognising rental properties.

**Access to Medical Services**  
Aoife does not know if her university GP will be able to conduct the necessary checks for her long-term illness which makes her worried that she will need to travel back to Westford for it.

**Needs**

**Comprehensive emotional and financial support**  
**Inclusive financial support eligibility**  
**Safe and secure accommodation**  
**Continuity of medical care**

*"My mother isn't doing well financially and is unable to help me after my Leaving Cert. I need to arrange accommodation and everything but I don't know if I can afford it."*

**Service User**  
**Ann**  
Aoife's mother, supporting her during the transition to university

Ann is a single parent who has raised her daughter Aoife on her own. She works full-time and has always prioritised Aoife's education. Ann is proud of Aoife for wanting to pursue education at university, but she is concerned about the financial implications and how she will manage to support her daughter through the transition and work full-time employment after attending university.

**Scenario**  
Supporting her daughter, Aoife, who is moving from Westford to Galway to study Engineering in university and to find a part-time job.

Due to financial constraints, Ann is unable to support Aoife financially, meaning that she will need to support herself and find her own accommodation. Ann is also concerned about Aoife's long-term illness and the necessary for regular check-ups. She is worried that Aoife's long-term illness will impact her ability to work full-time and manage to support herself through the transition from secondary school to university.

**Pain Points**

**Financial constraints**  
Ann is unable to provide financial support to Aoife and Aoife's need to find her own accommodation and her first part-time job, which could impact her academic performance and future career prospects.

**Eligibility for support**  
Ann's income exceeds the threshold for some financial supports, which means Aoife is not eligible for the maximum rate of financial assistance.

**Accommodation risks**  
Ann is worried about Aoife's need to find her own accommodation and the risk of her falling into an unsafe living conditions.

**Continuity of medical care**  
Ann is concerned about whether Aoife will be able to continue her long-term illness with a doctor in Galway or if she will need to travel back to Westford.

**Needs**

**Practical support and guidance**  
**Inclusive financial support**  
**Safe and secure accommodation**  
**Continuity of medical care**

*"I had a lot of the information that Aoife needed to complete the support applications for university. It was tedious but I always set down with her to make sure it was done properly."*

**Service User**  
**Marcus**  
Moving from Germany to Dublin to study Computer Science

Marcus is 22 years old and currently lives in a rented house in Germany. He completed an ordinary teacher degree (Abitur) at a support centre. He wants to complete an honours teacher degree at a support centre. He is currently working in an administrative role at a support centre. He is considering moving to Dublin to study Computer Science and is looking for a part-time job to support himself. He is also looking for a part-time job to support himself.

**Scenario**  
Moving to Dublin from Germany for advanced entry into a level 6 course. He is hoping to live in student accommodation and get the full university experience.

Marcus has been worried about the housing crisis and how badly it is affecting his ability to get accommodation. He is also worried about the cost of living in Dublin and the university experience. He is also worried about the cost of living in Dublin and the university experience. He is also worried about the cost of living in Dublin and the university experience.

**Pain Points**

**Finding accommodation**  
Marcus needs to find a place to live in Dublin which will be a significant extra burden and need to register for new accounts for his new GP application. Some universities have a waiting list for accommodation and Marcus needs to be able to find a place to live in Dublin which will be a significant extra burden and need to register for new accounts for his new GP application.

**Administrative burden**  
Before moving from abroad he needs to register for a PPS Number which can only be done after he has moved into his accommodation. He also needs to be able to find a place to live in Dublin which will be a significant extra burden and need to register for new accounts for his new GP application.

**Registering with the state**  
Before moving for a job, Marcus needs to register for a PPS Number which can only be done after he has moved into his accommodation. He also needs to be able to find a place to live in Dublin which will be a significant extra burden and need to register for new accounts for his new GP application.

**Making new friends**  
In order to attend accommodation, Marcus needs to work on some social skills and be able to make new friends in this case.

**Needs**

**Virtual housing for EU students**  
**EU-wide account registration**  
**Fewer interdependencies between departments**  
**Flexible social activities**

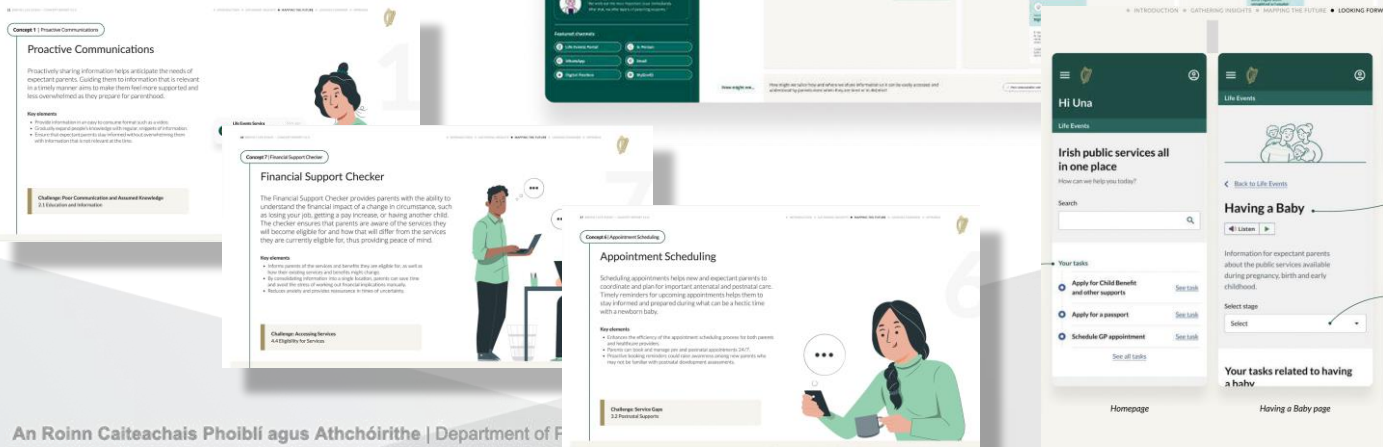
*"I already applied for student accommodation at the university I hope to attend but I don't get a place as I'm expected to live in a hostel for a few weeks."*



# Future-State Mapping

## Birth Life Event

Developed and tested future state concepts for the 'Birth' Life Event, generating over 100 ideas and prototyping 7 solutions to improve user navigation and service access.





“

It's **such a blur in those early weeks**, you forget how you applied for things.

Being able to **see** what I have to do and **when** instead of having to remember it myself would be **invaluable**.

– New mother



Q

In a world of increasingly complex geopolitical, economic, and societal challenges, how can design help us shape the future we want?



# Reflections

An Roinn Caiteachais Phoiblí agus Athchóirithe | Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform



OFFICIAL

# My Reflections After two Years Embedding Design



- **Powerful and impactful methodology for change and collaboration.**
- **Remember how far you have come.**
- **The importance of rallying your coalition at national and international level to scale the approach**
- **Enjoy and keep learning.**
- **The importance to get someone who can show the design relevance and make it accessible**