

Philanthropy Working with Government:
A Case Study of The Atlantic Philanthropies'
Partnership with the Irish Government

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Executive summary

This study examined the extent to which The Atlantic Philanthropies' approach of working with government to influence policy and practice, with a particular focus on public service reform, can be considered innovative and successful. The study focused on the period from 2003 to 2014.

The study concludes that Atlantic has made a significant contribution to influencing government policy and practice. This is not to say that Atlantic is the only or even the main influence in most areas of its engagement with government. Rather that Atlantic has contributed in a way that has made a difference. For example, Atlantic's work has had a direct influence on key government policy statements such as *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures* (a national policy framework for children and young people), the *Irish National Dementia Strategy* and the *National Positive Ageing Strategy*.

The study examined three main areas of activity: the development of a partnership approach, the development and use of evidence and the reform of service delivery. The main conclusions as to how Atlantic has made a contribution are set out below.

Development of a partnership approach

- Atlantic showed it understands how government works and developed good working relationships with senior officials.
- A particular strength was in brokering relationships with and between government agencies and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs) and creating neutral, safe spaces where participants could come together and work on resource allocation and delivery targets.
- Several interviewees noted the importance of Atlantic ensuring a 'firm' side of partnership through the use of memoranda of understanding and performance-oriented agreements that were focused on outcomes to be achieved to complement the 'softer' side of developing working relationships.
- The partnership approach was seen as encouraging a shift in the minds of policymakers and NGOs from a focus on activities and resource allocation to developing a shared perspective on what the outcomes should be and how best to achieve those outcomes.
- Challenges with the approach include the difficulty for policymakers of managing the expectations of those outside the partnership (including expecting equal treatment even though resources may not have been allocated to those outside the partnership) and overcoming traditional reservations between the statutory and non-statutory sectors.

Development and use of evidence

- A central benefit of Atlantic involvement has been the additional rigour brought to bear within government on the need for good quality evidence. Rigour is a word that came up spontaneously in a number of the interviews.
- A level of analysis has been undertaken that wouldn't have happened otherwise. The creation and existence of Irish cases where there is strong evidence of what works and what doesn't is viewed very positively by policymakers.
- It was a widespread view that the evidence bases created will remain and provide frameworks for analysis into the future and for the production of guidance for practitioners.
- The approach to evidence generation and gathering promoted by Atlantic has introduced a level of analysis into government policy making that wouldn't have happened otherwise. There is a greater awareness amongst some officials of the possibility of testing programme expenditure and openness to shifting resources to areas where they may be more productively used. However, shifting expenditure on a large scale remains a challenging and politically sensitive task.
- At times, some in the government viewed the approach to evidence generation and gathering as burdensome. Policymakers favour short, focused research pieces more attuned to the demands of the policy environment rather than the longer, more academic papers that some of Atlantic's grantees produced.
- Work supported by Atlantic fed into wider government reform initiatives that seek to enhance the evidence base, such as comprehensive reviews of expenditure and the operation of the Irish government economic and evaluation service.

Reform of service delivery

- The evidence suggests that reform efforts such as the use of alternative service delivery mechanisms, a stronger focus on commissioning and competing for outcomes and moving to more individualised services and away from institutional settings, would have been the direction of travel in any event. Atlantic's contribution has been in making things happen more quickly and more comprehensively than they would have otherwise.
- Atlantic has had a clear influence in shaping policy in the areas it has worked in, which in turn will shape service provision into the future.
- Atlantic's involvement in alternative service delivery approaches has influenced government policy with regard to public sector wide reform initiatives. A particularly strong aspect of Atlantic's involvement is that it provided practical examples of change which illustrate the benefits of alternative service delivery approaches.
- In contentious policy areas, such as civil partnership and gay marriage, Atlantic's involvement

in supporting reform initiatives has been subject to public criticism. Being clear and open about what activities the funding supports and why can counter uninformed criticism.

- Mainstreaming policy and practice change is the big challenge. Resistance to change across the public system can be strong. Progress has been made but overall has been somewhat slower than anticipated. In part this is due to the effects of the recession and cutbacks in public funding. It also reflects the difficulty in changing entrenched cultural and historical patterns of working.
- In order to further the mainstreaming of programmes, Atlantic has been active in working with leaders in the public sector to secure commitments to achieving its goals. Atlantic has encouraged the development and use of implementation science (the study of the best methods for improving implementation quality) amongst public servants as a way of addressing resistance to change and managing the change process.
- As it begins to withdraw supports in line with its limited life requirement, Atlantic has also put more effort into trying to ensure that the changes it is promoting live on within the public sector and that structured efforts are made to support promoters of change and influence resisters.

Lessons Learned

For policymakers

- The public sector tends to be driven to find quick solutions. But spending time at the start developing theories of change and examining what the evidence shows before committing investments can save time later.
- Rather than getting caught up solely in discussions on resources and activities, it is important to focus on agreeing on the outcomes to be achieved and determining an appropriate governance framework for a partnership with philanthropies and NGOs.
- Think through the challenges of implementation. In particular, ensure authoritative and accountable leadership of the programme and identify resisters and approaches to overcoming resistance. Initiatives can be hard won but easily lost.

For NGOs

- Working together is not in the culture of many NGOs which tend to have been set up to address specific challenges rather than collaborate with other NGOs to address broader, systemic issues. But collaboration can be more effective in building a coherent case for interventions that government might listen to.
- NGOs can often see policymakers in an adversarial light as the protectors of the status quo.

Yet developing good working relationships with policymakers can enhance the chances of policy goals being achieved.

- Getting issues into the Programme for Government (which involves contact with all political parties who may be involved) gives an impetus for reform at both political and official level.

For philanthropies

- Working with government offers the opportunity to spread the benefits of investment beyond specific projects and help create lasting change.
- Having a clear view on desired outcomes and processes is important as is using a mechanism such as a memorandum of understanding to agree on an approach with government.
- Co-funding of initiatives is more likely to secure government commitment than simply funding on one's own and hoping that the government will take up the work later.
- Showing working examples is a powerful tool for changing public sector practice.
- Putting emphasis on evidence generation and use can fill needed gaps when seeking to work with governments.
- Working in the early stages of a programme with NGOs can build their ability to collaborate with one another and with government.
- Building capacity in government, not just in NGOs, in the spheres of activity of most importance is crucial for mainstreaming.
- Building connections between the worlds of policy, practice and research is important in order to secure more evidence-informed practice.
- Involving government from early in the process increases the chances of their engagement being meaningful and lasting.

A current study extends and builds on this research to examine the work of Atlantic with government in its final phase of grant giving. Since 2012 Atlantic has supported nineteen co-investments with government in the Republic of Ireland. Atlantic's €99m investment in the areas of children and youth, dementia and disability has leveraged €260m in public funding. Atlantic's work with government is one of the most distinctive features of its funding approach, and this review is intended to allow Atlantic to communicate this model to others and complete the story of co-investment with government. That study will be completed in 2017.

Chapter 1

Study background and approach

1.1 Study background

This study examined the extent to which The Atlantic Philanthropies' approach of working with government to influence government policy and practice, with a particular focus on public service reform, can be considered innovative and successful. The study focused on the period from 2003 to 2014. This research was commissioned by The Atlantic Philanthropies (hereafter referred to as Atlantic), a limited life foundation.

Atlantic in Ireland has taken the view that working with government and its agencies supports the delivery of its goals. This study considers the way in which Atlantic's approach and the partnership style fostered through its grantees has coalesced with and influenced the government's public sector reform agenda. The aims of the study are to:

- Reflect on how a model of partnership involving government, philanthropy and grantees can not only bring about change but, in an environment where resources are constrained, do so in a cost-effective and scalable manner
- Consider the way in which Atlantic funding has consistently emphasised the evidence or research base so as to provide a robust sense of what works (and what may not work) in service commissioning, design and delivery
- Consider the way in which Atlantic funding has demonstrated alternative ways of working in the commissioning, developing and delivering of services for children and youth, older adults and people with a disability

The study intends to inform immediate and longer term practice amongst a number of key groups, notably:

- a) Policymakers by making them more aware of the benefits and challenges of partnership-

based working, the opportunities provided for alternative service delivery and enhanced evidence to inform policy

- b) Grantees by highlighting the lessons learned from working with government to achieve their aims
- c) Other philanthropic bodies by drawing out lessons from the practice of working with government and how to influence public service reform

1.2 Brief overview of The Atlantic Philanthropies and its involvement with government in Ireland¹

The Atlantic Philanthropies, established in 1982 by Irish-American businessman Chuck Feeney, is a global foundation dedicated to bringing about lasting changes in the lives of disadvantaged and vulnerable people. It has operated in Australia, Bermuda, Northern Ireland, Republic of Ireland, South Africa, the United States and Vietnam, and has made grants totalling more than \$7.2bn to date, with over \$1.2bn invested in the Republic of Ireland.

Atlantic's grantmaking in the Republic of Ireland began in 1987. In the first phase, up to 2003, the focus was on higher education with initial investments in physical infrastructure across university campuses. This phase culminated in a signature investment in the Programme for Research in Third Level Institutions (PRTL), co-funded with the Irish government. The partnership with government on PRTL was the first time that Atlantic had worked directly with a government anywhere. The aim was to transform Ireland's capacity to undertake world-class research. Beginning in 1999, Atlantic co-funded the first three cycles of PRTL with government funding a further two cycles to date.

In his book on Chuck Feeney, Conor O'Clery (2007: 267-276) sets out the steps leading up to the establishment of the PRTL and notes that: 'For the first time in history, Atlantic was aiming to enter direct negotiations with a sovereign government, to do a matching deal'. Extensive and at times challenging negotiations took place at both administrative and political levels which eventually led to the PRTL. O'Clery quotes Tom Mitchell, former Provost of Trinity College Dublin and subsequently an Atlantic board member, on the effect of the investment: 'It was Chuck's biggest legacy ... It revolutionised research in Ireland. It was the perfect example of leverage. They put money on the table and said to the government – you have got to perform. It was a model of how a foundation can combine with government and use its leverage with government to change policy. This was social change in a very significant way'.

Over the five cycles, the PRTL has helped to establish Ireland as a premier location for carrying out

¹ This section is derived largely from Sutton, 2011

world-class research and development. This has been achieved by significant investments in human and physical infrastructure. Independent studies have shown that the PRTL I has resulted in substantial impacts including a major increase in both the quantity and quality of research outputs, and direct commercial and economic impacts including many new patent applications (International Assessment Committee, 2004; PA Consulting Group 2011).

Phase two of Atlantic's grantmaking in Ireland began in 2003. Since then Atlantic has concentrated on three areas: ageing, children and youth and reconciliation and human rights. The main interest of this study is on these investments. The report examines the work of Atlantic with government from 2003 to 2014. Atlantic is now in its final phase of grantmaking. Final grants will be made in 2016.

As context for the government's interest in working with philanthropy it should be noted that the domestic and international fiscal crisis of the late 2000s hit Ireland's public sector particularly badly. Since 2011, as spending reductions introduced by the government came into effect, government expenditure as a percentage of GDP fell considerably. In 2014, Ireland's public spending at 39 per cent of GDP was significantly below the European average of 48 per cent.

Part of this drop in expenditure is accounted for by a reduction in the number of public servants. The total number of people employed in the public service has dropped from its peak of 320,000 in 2008 to 288,000 in 2014, a decrease of 10 per cent. A combination of a shrinking public workforce and a growing population means that public service employees per 000 population has also been dropping as the demand for services has been increasing.

These figures provide a context for understanding recent government engagement with philanthropy and NGOs as it looked for ways to continue service provision and promote policy development in an unfavourable economic climate.

1.3 Study approach

The study of the influence of Atlantic on government policy, practice and public service reform presents methodological challenges. These include taking into account the role of other factors or conditions, attribution, the long time scale over which change takes place and organisational capacity and engagement. In these circumstances, what the study aims to achieve is to provide rigorous evidence of movement and progress and the contribution made by Atlantic. Key questions to be addressed include:

- What are the factors shaping the context for Atlantic's interventions?
- What changes have occurred to the design and delivery of public services through developing a partnership-based approach, evidence building and promoting alternative models of service delivery?

- What contribution have these changes made to how public services are delivered, the use of evidence-informed policy and public service reform more generally?

To address these challenges and questions an approach based on contribution analysis was used. Contribution analysis is an approach developed by Mayne (2001) whereby on the basis of evidence gathered, a reasonable person can draw conclusions as to the contribution an intervention has made to effectiveness and impact. Patton (2008: 4) has a helpful description:

'Where attribution requires making a cause/effect determination, contribution analysis focuses on identifying *likely influences*. Contribution analysis, like detective work, requires connecting the dots between what was done and what resulted, examining a multitude of interacting variables and factors, and considering alternative explanations and hypotheses, so that in the end, we can reach an independent, reasonable, and evidence-based judgement based on the cumulative evidence'.

With regard to tools and techniques the following were used:

- *Key informant interviews*. Interviews with stakeholders are an important source of information on the issues addressed in the study. Interviewees included members of Atlantic, selected grantees and, primarily, a range of officials from selected government departments and agencies (see Appendix 1). A total of 26 interviews were carried out. As part of this process, a number of structured interviews were conducted with 'bellwethers' – influential people in the public sector who are thought leaders and whose opinions about policy issues carry weight and predictive value (UNICEF, 2010: 34). These were used to help determine how well Atlantic has managed to communicate its message and get it onto the broad policy agenda of public service reform.
- *Case vignettes*. Using this approach, particular interventions are examined and highlighted, to illustrate what contributed to their success or failure with regard to their impact on public service provision and reform. These case vignettes are presented in boxed text throughout the report.
- *Documentary analysis*. Careful review of relevant documentation (evaluation reports, government policy papers, academic literature, etc.) was undertaken to provide supportive evidence of the contribution made by Atlantic to government reform.

These approaches were used to provide evidence to support or refute the theory of change established for the study as outlined in Figure 1.1 (on page 14). This theory of change is designed to show how the interventions of Atlantic were intended to influence government policy with regard to public service reform. The theory is that Atlantic grant giving to service providers in the areas of children and youth, ageing, and disability results in:

- Innovative, alternative methods of service delivery; a partnership approach to service provision by government, grantees and Atlantic; and enhanced evidence generation and gathering.

These activities in turn result in:

- Changes in capacity, attitudes and behaviour of policymakers, policy deliverers and grantees with regard to policy; and an enhanced evidence base to inform policy. These changes in turn result in further outcomes in the form of:
- Changes to policy and practice both (a) directly for children and youth, older adults and people with disabilities and (b) for general public service reform initiatives. These outcomes ultimately result in:
- Enhanced prospects of delivery on Atlantic's social justice goals.

The focus of this study is on the immediate and intermediate outcomes. There is also a focus on the ageing and children and youth programmes (though other activities in other programmes are also covered) as it is in these programmes that Atlantic has worked most directly with government in Ireland.

1.4 Overview of activities examined

A brief note of some of the main grant initiatives of particular relevance to the study is set out below, and provides a context for the remainder of the report.

- **The ageing programme.** The ageing programme was established by Atlantic in 2003 to enhance the rights of all older people to health and economic security and to enable them to advocate for a better quality of life for themselves and their peers. In the early years of the programme, from 2004-2008, the main grants issued tended to focus on capital support and capacity building. Two limited life umbrella organisations - Older & Bolder and the Ageing Well Network - were supported with a view to enhancing cooperation and coordination amongst the voluntary and community, private and government sectors and to place the needs of older people more firmly on the government agenda (both closed in 2013).

From 2008 Atlantic's grantmaking under the ageing programme has focused on three main objectives: building a more enduring capacity in the age sector; strengthening the voice and social action of older people; and improving health and economic security for older people.

Three particularly important initiatives from the point of view of this study are the setting up of the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA), a focus on dementia and the establishment of the Ageing Well Network (see Kearney et. al., 2011; Proscio, 2014; and Parker, 2015a for details).

- **The children and youth programme.** The goal of Atlantic's children and youth programme is to improve the health and development of children. The programme aims to secure

demonstrable gains in children's health, educational achievement and their sense of belonging to the communities in which they live.

The objectives of the children and youth programme, and a detailed account of grantees and their area of work are presented in Mathematica Policy Research evaluations conducted in 2008 and 2011 (Mathematic Policy Research, 2009 and 2012). An overview of Atlantic's work in building capacity in the field of children and youth is provided by Rafferty and Colgan (forthcoming).

Initiatives of particular interest with regard to this study include area-based prevention and early intervention programmes. The key focus of Atlantic's work here was in encouraging the government to shift its funding toward early intervention and prevention for all children, rather than directing resources towards intervening when difficulties had already become complex and entrenched, which had been the practice. Other initiatives of interest include infant health and wellbeing and mainstreaming of a prevention, partnership and family support model.

- **Other programme funding.** While the main interest of this study is on the ageing and children and youth programmes, where working with government has been most comprehensively built into the programmes, other work supported by Atlantic is also explored. For example, Atlantic supported the organisation Genio, an NGO that works with government and funders to develop better ways to support disadvantaged people to live full lives in their communities. It specifically seeks to demonstrate cost-effective alternative service delivery approaches that support transition from institutional to person-centred models of care in disability and mental health services. Working with the Department of Health and the Health Service Executive is an important element of the work.

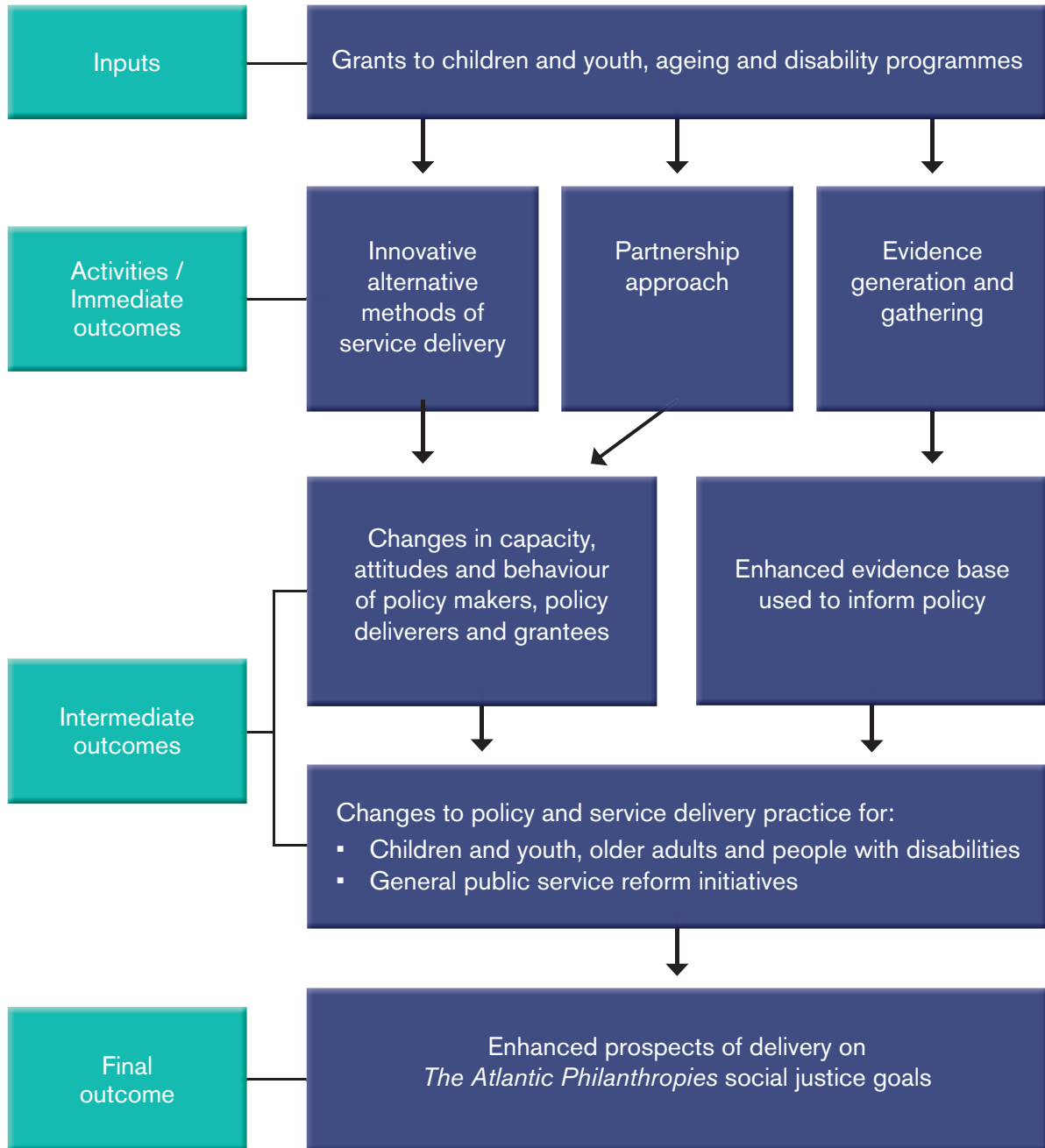
In addition, some of the initiatives undertaken by Atlantic in the human rights programme involved supporting NGOs working with government with the intention of reforming the way the public sector addresses issues. For example, NGOs were supported to lobby and work with government in the areas of civil partnership and migration policy.

1.5 Report structure

The remainder of this report addresses the aims of the study as set out in section 1.1. Chapter 2 examines the partnership-based approach between Atlantic and government. Chapter 3 explores the influence of evidence on government policy and public sector reform. Chapter 4 looks at how service delivery has been affected by Atlantic's work with government including the issue of mainstreaming. Finally, Chapter 5 draws conclusions and identifies lessons learned.

Figure 1.1

Theory of change for The Atlantic Philanthropies influence on government policy regarding public service reform



Chapter 2

A partnership-based approach

Atlantic in Ireland took the view that working in partnership with government and its agencies was important if it was to achieve its objectives. This meant working directly with government on programme development and encouraging grantees to work together where appropriate to influence government policy. Atlantic also encouraged grantees to work in partnership with government and its agencies in order to secure effective service delivery and inform discourse with regard to policy making. Partnership-based working is not new to government and NGOs in Ireland, but Atlantic brought its own perspective and contribution to the development of partnership.

2.1 Partnership between Atlantic and government

Partnership between government and philanthropy offers the potential for addressing shared goals. However, differences between the two in their approach, outlook and governance norms may constrain their ability to work together. As one study has shown, government and philanthropy increasingly view partnerships as critical to increasing their impact but seldom understand how the other operates or what an effective philanthropic-government partnership might look like (The Center on Philanthropy and Public Policy, 2012).

In the case of Atlantic, working in partnership with government in Ireland has long been seen as a means of delivering its goals, recognising the key role government plays in the development and implementation of policy and practice in the areas of interest to Atlantic. Grant funding of activity in the ageing and children and youth programmes is largely based on an approach where matching funding by government is required for the initiative to proceed.

The partnership approach between Atlantic and government has evolved over time. At the start there was suspicion of Atlantic in some government circles. For Atlantic's part it appeared to be content to stay in the background and to work through NGOs. When Atlantic worked directly with the government it was often in private. As Atlantic staff and government officials grew more

comfortable working together, the relationship developed and became more public. There is now more direct engagement between government and Atlantic.

In interviews with policymakers, the consensus was that the Atlantic approach to partnership with government is both positive and pragmatic. Policymakers welcomed the fact that Atlantic had an understanding of how government works including the political realities and context for decisions. There was seen to be a good working relationship at a high level in the system. Atlantic's Board met on occasion with senior government ministers and top officials from the main government departments. There was also good contact on a more regular basis between senior Atlantic staff in Ireland and senior officials from the government departments involved in delivery in the programme areas. Public officials clearly understood Atlantic's position that it would only engage in these partnerships if the government was willing to work in a context of genuine dialogue and partnership. Thus from the start there was a sound basis for the partnership approach to evolve.

Having clear, performance-oriented agreements between government and Atlantic was seen as a plus by policymakers, reflecting the more 'formal' side of partnership. All partnerships had a memorandum of understanding (MOU), which was agreed and signed by both Atlantic and government agency senior personnel and which provided the framework for the work (see Case Vignette 2.1). MOUs were seen as important in clarifying expectations. The focus on performance and outcomes in the MOU were also viewed as helpful in providing a clear sense of direction for the partnership.

Case Vignette 2.1

Using a Memorandum of Understanding to Clarify Expectations

Typical headings in a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) agreed between Atlantic and government agencies were:

- **Purpose of the programme.** This is set out in terms of desired outcomes and often accompanied by a logic model.
- **Committed investment.** The level and timescale of investment agreed by all parties.
- **Funding draw down.** The requirements to be satisfied for funding to be drawn down.
- **Governance arrangements.** The governance arrangements for the programme.
- **Disputes resolution.** The procedures to be followed in the event of a dispute.
- **Public communication.** The procedures for press releases or similar statements.

Whilst broadly viewed as positive, a partnership with Atlantic was also seen by policymakers as presenting some challenges. A finite pool of public funding existed which was reduced even more during the recession starting in 2008. During this cash-strapped period, additional public funding was ring-fenced for joint programmes with Atlantic, which meant that this money was not available to meet other demands. Some policymakers mentioned that at times personnel in statutory agencies that weren't part of these joint programmes felt that Atlantic-supported projects were getting attention and resources that should have been devoted to addressing their needs.

It was also felt by a couple of those interviewed that Atlantic had more limited engagement with middle management in government agencies, and instead focused most of its attention on building relationships with senior management. These interviewees pointed out that it is often at this middle management level that programmes can be made or broken, and that effective partnership requires effort at this level also.

But in general the view of those interviewed was that partnership with Atlantic had been a positive experience. It facilitated clear expectations of what was to be delivered for agreed levels of funding, and provided the basis for a good working relationship.

2.2 Partnership and collaboration between Atlantic grantees

Atlantic encouraged partnership between grantees in the NGO sector as a way of enhancing its capacity to inform government policy. For example, in the ageing sector, Cochrane et al. (2013:14) note that prior to Atlantic's involvement 'public advocacy for older people was undertaken by a very small number of largely fragmented and un-coordinated organisations and agencies, with an attendant lack of effective advocacy for vulnerable older people'. Atlantic supported the establishment in 2006 of Older and Bolder as a limited life 'umbrella' organisation for a number of NGOs to develop and strengthen the advocacy and policy capacity of its members. Older and Bolder successfully campaigned to protect the level of the state pension provision, which had been under threat in a number of government budgets. Cochrane et al. (2013: 17) note: 'Importantly, the ability of the alliance to present agreed policy positions has reduced the risk of "many competing voices" presenting a disparate range of issues'.

The Prevention & Early Intervention Network, meanwhile, (www.pein.ie) is a network of evidence-based practice, advocacy and research nongovernmental organisations across the Republic of Ireland that share a commitment to improving outcomes for children, young people and their communities. The network, funded through Atlantic's children and youth programme, provides opportunities for activities such as joint research and advocacy.

Similarly, in migration policy Atlantic's programme had as one of its aims the development of a consolidated strategy for the sector and building a network of domestic and European advocates and expertise. The intention of this partnership approach, apart from improving collaboration itself, was to further the advocacy objectives of civil society organisations and enhance their effectiveness

in supporting migrants including informing government migration policy. Here, collaboration already existed but Atlantic's intervention further developed joint working (see Case Vignette 2.2).

Case Vignette 2.2

Joint Working Amongst NGOs Working with Migrants

Rand Europe (2015) conducted interviews with NGOs that had received Atlantic funding as part of a study into the effect of their work with migrants. As part of this study they assessed the degree of joint working amongst NGOs that had been encouraged by the support provided by Atlantic:

'During interviews in 2013, six out of 13 grantees in the migration field said that they had already some pre-established partners, connections or networks prior to receiving funding from Atlantic, but most organisations also reported some change to their network through new interactions with other Atlantic-funded organisations. Of the grantees interviewed, seven out of 13 stated that the most significant change they had seen in relation to joint working was the number of collaborative projects, studies and activities that they undertook with partners and collaborators. Four out of 13 reported they developed contacts and sought project partners outside their usual circles ... Interviewees explained that by working with others they were able to achieve much more. For example, two organisations collaborated in a submission of an appeal to European Union (EU) institutions to maintain the presumption against detention in EU asylum legislation as well as uphold related safeguards. The appeal was endorsed by 166 organisations and well received by Members of the European Parliament involved in the negotiations'.

Source: Rand Europe (forthcoming), Evaluation of the Atlantic Migration Programme.

In general, engagement between grantees has been positive. But it has tended to be strongest when one or more grantee has an explicit need that requires engagement with other grantees and there is a danger it will not be sustained. Also, inevitably partnerships will always be somewhat tense because the NGOs are often in effect in competition with each other.

2.3 Partnership between Atlantic grantees and government

In addition to joint working between Atlantic grantees in the NGO sector, Atlantic encouraged partnership between grantees and government agencies to promote better policy development and delivery. For example, Genio has worked with the Health Service Executive (HSE) to promote more personalised, community-based services for older people and people with disabilities. Whilst this has been challenging at times for Genio and the HSE which have been critical of each other, it is also seen as having contributed to positive outcomes by interviewees. This confirms the view of the external evaluators of Genio (MorrowGilchrist Associates, 2014: 81) that ‘... HSE foresee the partnership consolidating and view Genio as a key component of the ‘change architecture’ required to drive the fundamental system-wide reform’.

Morrow Gilchrist Associates (2014: 58-59) also note the role Genio played as an independent body facilitating partnership arrangements with and between government and NGOs:

‘A strength of the Genio model in contributing to public sector reform intentions is its juxtaposition between the private and public sectors. This positioning (and the degree of independence it offers) has enabled Genio to gain a perspective on barriers to change and then create pressure within the system/HSE... Indeed it is clear that the status of support from Genio, backed by HSE and the Department of Health, yet independent of both, has been important in providing “respected space for innovation” to test reform intentions.’

A common element of many of these partnerships was the ability to convene in a neutral space, where decisions could be made on things like resource distribution in a fair and objective manner without political pressure. One interviewee noted that Atlantic has been very effective in brokering relationships with government agencies and NGOs and encouraging strong relationships between partners with the use of an independent and respected chair in some projects. This facilitated engagement was often based on the use of the Chatham House rule whereby positions could be challenged and debated before they appeared in the public domain. The interviewee contrasted this approach with that of an inter-departmental committee (a common form of joint working within the public service) where there is usually one lead department and often reluctant engagement on the part of other government participants. A particular strength of the partnership approach adopted is that it has encouraged good working relationships through enhancing clarity about the nature of the partnership and partners’ roles. As one interviewee noted, this does not mean that all participants are equal – some are more powerful than others – but it helps them work in a collegial manner.

This idea of brokering relationships between government and NGOs in a partnership-based approach is illustrated by the Ageing Well Network (see Case Vignette 2.3). This network, composed of top managers from central and local government, the corporate sector, academia and the voluntary sector, was influential in a number of policy initiatives. One of the best examples of the usefulness of its role came in response to a government desire to establish a national strategy on older people. The government put out an invitation to provide submissions to help develop the

strategy. Providing input into a National Strategy on Positive Ageing was a natural step for the Ageing Well Network, which had access to expertise in its members and an infrastructure to carry out research. The network developed several influential position papers, which were published as a report, *The New Agenda on Ageing*.

Two of the network's most important contributions in that report was to broaden the view of ageing beyond health and to provide a perspective of older people as contributors to society, not burdens. The network also created a model based on eight aspects of ageing. The model was largely adopted in the government's *National Positive Ageing Strategy*.

The network was also influential in establishing the Age Friendly Cities and Counties Programme (see section 4.2).

Case Vignette 2.3

The Ageing Well Network – Partnership in Practice

Atlantic created the Ageing Well Network in 2007 with the primary aim of acting as a leadership network and think tank for leaders in the ageing sector in which members could learn from each other and from national and international thinkers and practitioners. Its members were top executives from 75 organisations representing all elements of government, business and civil society.

The Ageing Well Network had several key and unique features, which were crucial to the later success of the network, several participants said. These included:

- **Inviting only senior executives to participate.** Network organisers wanted participants who were in positions to make decisions and ensure their implementation.
- **Creating a multi-sectoral network that included representatives from academia, nongovernmental organisations, government and business.**
- **Including top government officials across departments and agencies.** Any real change in the approach to older adults would have to include the government so it was crucial to have government officials involved.
- **Working for change within the system rather than focusing on an advocacy capacity.** Because government officials were involved in the network, a crucial focus was to find ways to work with those officers, rather than in an advocacy and potentially adversarial role.

- **Holding off-site retreats using the Chatham House rule.** For the first three years, the network held overnight retreats for its members under the Chatham House rule, a principle borrowed from international diplomacy in which no news media are present and no one will be quoted by name or affiliation.
- **Creating working groups on areas of interest to members.** Much of the real work took place in smaller working groups that emerged out of the interests of the members and addressed challenges they faced in their day jobs.
- **Setting up an infrastructure for the network, including an executive director and staff.**
- **Limited life.** Atlantic envisioned the network to be operational for a limited though unspecified time - enough time to help spark conversations and help build a leadership sector in ageing but not enough time for it to become institutionalised.

Source: Adapted from Parker (2015a)

This is not to say that the partnership approach always ran smoothly. Within both the NGO and statutory sector there were traditional reservations about interaction and views that one side did not really understand the other. Interviewees from the statutory sector noted that some staff from their organisations looked on with some jealousy at the resources devoted to Atlantic grantees and projects as their budgets were being cut. Some NGO participants found statutory organisations to be bureaucratic and resistant to changing traditional ways of doing things at times and hard to deal with in this context. Elements of partnership suffered as a result of the recession, with the retrenchment by government, more centralisation of decision-making and control and less collaboration.

In part, such challenges reflect the continuing and long-standing dilemma of establishing an appropriate balance between the autonomy of NGOs and the public accountability requirements of government agencies (Boyle and Butler, 2003). The Ageing Well Network, for example, faced challenges of government officials becoming less involved over time and NGOs perceiving their voice as being less valued than those of government participants (Parker, 2015a: 13).

Partnership arrangements between NGOs and government agencies are intended to have a positive outcome on service delivery as well as on relationships between partners. Case Vignette 2.4 provides the example of the outcomes achieved by the Longford-Westmeath Positive Parenting Partnership.

Case Vignette 2.4

Longford-Westmeath Positive Parenting Partnership

The Triple P (Positive Parenting Programme) is a parenting and family support system designed to prevent as well as treat behavioural and emotional problems in children and teenagers. Triple P is delivered to parents of children up to 12 years, with Teen Triple P for parents of 12 to 16 year olds and other specialist Triple P programmes.

Triple P was purposely set up as a partnership because Atlantic, the HSE and Longford Westmeath Parenting Partnership felt that such an arrangement could draw on the strengths of government and NGOs to provide needed services to parents.

A range of Triple P programmes of differing intensity were provided free to all parents of children aged seven and younger in counties Longford and Westmeath between 2010 and 2013. The programmes were delivered by the Longford-Westmeath Parenting Partnership, a partnership of voluntary, statutory and community agencies, to around 4500 parents. The HSE had the largest number of representatives on the partnership, with a range of disciplines and departments represented from within the HSE: public health, public health nursing, health promotion, child care, family support, psychology, social work and disability services. Given its central role, the HSE committed in the agreed memorandum of understanding to participate as an equal member of the partnership rather than take the lead role and to manage its status with sensitivity.

An independent evaluation of Triple P found that the numbers of children with clinically elevated social, emotional and behavioural problems reduced by 37.5 per cent after the Triple P rollout. Parents' reported rates of psychological distress and stress (mild and moderate) decreased by 30 per cent.

According to representatives, the partnership increased programme reach and acceptance, ensured population-wide coverage, improved networking between agencies and enhanced the value of individual partners' work. The evaluation showed the partners developed an integrated and collaborative approach to service delivery that maximised the use of all core competencies among the partnership members.

Source: Fives et al. 2014

However, the impact of partnership on desired outcomes may be limited in some circumstances. The reasons for this are varied, and not always down to the success of the partnership approach adopted between organisations. As McKeown (2012) notes sometimes it is not the partnership approach itself that is a limiting factor, but the ability and capacity of individual organisations to take on and progress the necessary work.

2.4 Conclusions

The partnership approach is not a panacea. Nonetheless, the evidence from the interviews and documentation is that on balance it has made a positive contribution to many aspects of Atlantic's work with government. The approach has been built in to programmes of activity agreed with government. It has also influenced policymakers working with Atlantic grantees. Several interviewees noted that Atlantic's involvement had helped change the relationship between policymakers and NGO providers in many cases. From being focused on the activities undertaken and the resources allocated, more attention is now given to developing a shared perspective focused on what the outcomes should be and working towards those outcomes.

Chapter 3

Evidence, policy and public sector reform

Atlantic has put significant effort into enhancing the evidence base used to inform policy development. With regards to the programme for children, for example, Little and Abunimah (2007: 61) note in relation to both the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland:

'In designing the programme, many influences were brought to bear but two stood out strongly. First, it was clear that there was potential to bring a new perspective to ideas around community engagement. Second, it was considered that government expenditure would not be swayed by community engagement alone – that there was a need for high-quality evidence. The hypothesis was that governments on the island would take notice if rigorous and independent evidence showed that innovations for children and young people were having an impact on health and development. The marrying of community engagement and serious evaluation was never going to be easy, especially on an island where, as far as can be ascertained, there had previously only been a single experimental evaluation of a programme intended to improve children's health and development'.

With regard to the ageing programme, Cochrane et al. (2013: 14) indicate the effect of limitations in the evidence base on the development of policy for the ageing population in the early 2000s:

'... it has been argued that overall, there has been a low level of awareness of ageing as a core government policy issue (O'Neill, Twomey and O'Shea 2009: 283). The subsequent lack of planning and provision for an ageing population has been further hampered by a lack of national datasets, with a dearth of information about the experience of ageing in Ireland (O'Shea and Conboy, 2005: 4)'.

Atlantic made significant investment in the monitoring and evaluation of programmes; the development of longitudinal studies and robust indicator sets; the building of academic capacity in research and evaluation; and the creation of mechanisms to connect evidence with practice. These initiatives have been undertaken with a view to developing an enhanced evidence base to inform

government policy and practice. An important intention behind the investment in evidence was that policymakers would make use of this evidence base to inform thinking about policy development and investment decisions.

3.1 Enhancing the evidence base

Atlantic put effort into building robust evaluation practice in the programmes it supports, including the use of randomised control trials (RCTs) to better illustrate what works and what doesn't, and direct investment into those services shown to be more effective. Until Atlantic's investment, the use of RCTs in social interventions was relatively unheard of in Ireland. Since Atlantic's investment, more than twenty RCTs have been undertaken to help show what works and what doesn't (see Case Vignette 3.1).

Case Vignette 3.1

Using Randomised Control Trials to Show What Works

The Childhood Development Initiative (CDI) in West Tallaght, Dublin, was part of the prevention and early intervention programme, a joint initiative of the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and Atlantic. CDI was one of the initiative's front-line demonstration sites that was aimed at providing evidence of the difference that prevention and early intervention services make in the lives of children. CDI supports the delivery of a range of early intervention and prevention programmes to improve outcomes for children in disadvantaged areas, including childhood care and education, child development courses, parental support and community programmes.

Amongst the projects supported by CDI were Mate-Tricks and Doodle Den. Mate-Tricks was an after-school programme designed to promote pro-social behaviour amongst children aged 9-10. The evaluation included a randomised controlled trial to measure the effects of the programme on child outcomes and a process evaluation that investigated its implementation. The evaluation found that even though it was positively received by participants, Mate-Tricks did not achieve the changes in behaviour which it was designed to support (O'Hare et al., 2012). In fact, the evaluation found that the programme was worse than ineffective—it actually had the opposite effect of what it intended. Participating children reported an increase in their own anti-social behavior and in authoritarian parenting. Based on the evaluations' findings CDI discontinued the initiative.

Doodle Den aimed at improving literacy outcomes for young children in a disadvantaged community through an after-school literacy programme. Using a randomised control trial, the evaluation found improvements in children's overall literacy ability. The evaluation also found that Doodle Den led to improved concentration and reduced problem behaviours in school, an increase in family library activity, and in the child's reading at home (Biggart et al., 2012). Since completion of the evaluation, CDI has continued the delivery of Doodle Den in the seven participating schools. It has also been extended to a number of locations outside Tallaght.

Source: Boyle (2014)

A particular benefit noted from the evidence generation was the creation of *Irish* cases that have been researched and documented (this applies not only to RCTs but to other evaluation reports of various projects). This is seen as a big plus by many policymakers. While policymakers draw lessons using evidence from abroad, such studies can also face challenges and resistance because some question the applicability of these cases in an Irish context. Having 'home grown' cases of the evidence of policy impact is important in persuading policymakers as to what works and what doesn't (see Case Vignette 3.2).

Case Vignette 3.2

Assessing the Effect of Providing Personalised Services to Disadvantaged Citizens

Genio provides a good example of generating evidence to influence policymakers with regard to public sector reform. Evaluation data showed that personalised supports aimed at supporting independent living for people with disabilities, mental health problems and dementia produced better outcomes than those produced by the more traditional supports provided in congregated settings or in group homes. The evidence also showed that, overall, personalised supports were much less costly for the same people than when they resided in congregated settings (though there were a few cases where the arrangements resulted in higher costs). As Healy and Keogh (2014: 79-80) note:

‘... In terms of assessing the case for this new paradigm, there is a need to test whether it is more beneficial for service users and also if it is more cost-effective. Evidence was seen as central to this new paradigm, and that therefore there was a need to ‘walk the walk’ on this. Having hard evidence of impact was also seen as important to enlisting the support of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and private funders’.

In part based on the evidence produced, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform became a supporter of the Genio approach and has promoted its role in public service provision (see Chapter 4 for more details).

On the less positive side, several policymakers interviewed mentioned that they felt the approach adopted by Atlantic to evidence generation and gathering could at times be seen as burdensome and overly academic in nature (this despite the fact that the research approach was agreed between Atlantic and government at the outset of all programmes). Some interviewees said they needed shorter research or ongoing research briefs more attuned to the demands of the policy environment. Much of the research and evaluation work was carried out by academics in third-level institutions. These academics are driven, in terms of career development, to produce reports for high impact academic journals. By their nature, such reports are often not easily accessible or readily digestible by policymakers. Case Vignette 3.3, illustrates how academics can engage with policymakers if willing to make the effort.

Case Vignette 3.3

Linking Academic Research with Policy

Carefully researched studies are essential for advocates to make persuasive arguments to legislators and for policymakers to make informed decisions. But often academic research is disconnected from the real-world concerns of those who make or wish to influence policy and practice.

In 2006, the UN adopted the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, which marked a paradigm shift. Rather than viewing people with disabilities as objects in need of charity, it recognised people with disabilities as subjects with rights, including

making decisions for what's best for their lives. However, there was little guidance about how to translate the generalities of the convention into practical law reform.

In 2008, Atlantic provided a three-year, €2.8 million grant to establish a Centre for Disability Law & Policy at National University of Ireland, Galway to help fill that gap.

Unlike many researchers, the centre staff see one of their jobs as working closely with policymakers when they are developing disability policy. The centre prepares submissions that respond to proposed legislation, produces reports on areas of disability law and writes policy briefs aimed at reaching a wider audience. This approach has made the centre one of the go-to places for policymakers working on disability rights.

The centre has helped in developing an enhanced understanding of the convention as a framework, guiding how legislation or laws should evolve. As an example, the centre published *From Rhetoric to Action: Implementing the UN Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities*. The vice chairperson of the UN Committee on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities stated that this publication is looked to by many people in government as the guidebook for how to make an action plan to implement the UN Convention.

Despite these positive examples, managing the centre's role with the government presents a challenge. The centre both provides research and briefings to help the government in its policy on disability issues and challenges the government at times. The centre's director has observed that it can be hard for the government to see the centre as a resource when they are challenging government at the same time.

Source: Adapted from Parker, 2015b

With regard to RCTs, while the contribution they made was welcomed, policymakers tended to say that there could have been fewer of them, as the evidence from a smaller number would have been sufficient to make the case, and they could have been mixed with other approaches that were less costly and more timely in terms of influencing policy. Several interviewees made the point that there are often limited windows of opportunity to influence political thinking with regard to policy, and if evidence is not available at these times, it can be hard to incorporate it later. From Atlantic's perspective, however, it is important that robust evaluation be incorporated into service delivery in order to ensure that the services delivered are effective. Without including some type of evaluation for each of the prevention and early intervention programs it would have been difficult to know which ones were delivering the intended outcomes and should be continued and which ones were not.

A couple of interviewees also felt that in some cases there is a danger that the emphasis on evidence gathering and results-based reporting might make participants more risk averse. The knowledge that they would be judged on specified results might make them less inclined to take chances and innovate.

These more negative points reflect a wider international debate on the relationship between research, evidence and policy (see for example Nutley, Walter and Davies, 2007 and Ruane, 2012). They were made in a general context where the evidence-informed approach promoted by Atlantic was seen as welcome and important. It was more a question of balance from the perspective of policymakers as to the level and quality of evidence needed, not the need for evidence itself, which was universally welcomed.

3.1.1 TILDA

Atlantic has made a considerable commitment to developing research capacity in the ageing sector. Of particular prominence is the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA) jointly funded by Atlantic, the Department of Health and Irish Life, which is compiling 10-plus years of data on a cohort of Irish people age 50 and older, including a wide range of information on their health, medical care and socio-economic status over time. TILDA is the most comprehensive ageing study ever to be undertaken in Ireland and aims to gain a better understanding of the lives of older people so that policy, research and resources can target the greatest needed. TILDA is carried out over a number of 'waves' so as to provide data and trends over time. Wave 1 was completed in 2011, Wave 2 in 2013 and Wave 3 commenced in 2014. Cochrane et al. (2013: 16) note:

'While it is difficult to determine a direct link between Atlantic's investment and the general growth of ageing research across various institutions in Ireland, it seems likely that high profile, cross disciplinary and inter institutional initiatives supported by Atlantic, such as the Irish Longitudinal Study on Ageing (TILDA), have done much to establish ageing as a research priority across the country. Importantly, TILDA will continue to provide a vital piece of knowledge infrastructure that will improve the evidence base for planning, policy and research into the future ... The ability to identify policy related issues, such as the need for regular health assessments, and to track any subsequent effects of policy changes, are significant benefits of this study'.

The annual report of the Mercer Institute for Research on Ageing does note several diverse policy impacts achieved by TILDA including influencing policy on pensions provision, working on pedestrian light settings with Dublin City Council and informing forecasts of the likely demand implications of a movement towards universal GP care (Mercers Institute for Research on Ageing, 2014: 38-40). Those interviewed who were familiar with TILDA, however, suggested that its impact so far has been greater in the academic field than with policymakers. The influence on policy is seen as a gradual process, with most attention to date on medical and academic-oriented research outputs.

This relatively limited impact on policymakers to date in part can be explained by the fact that what is of most interest to policymakers is evidence that emerges from trends over time, which will require information from a couple of 'waves' at least. Plans are also in place to integrate evidence from TILDA more closely into government policy development. For example, TILDA is a key component of the recently-established healthy and positive ageing outcomes initiative (a joint initiative between the Department of Health, Atlantic, the health and wellbeing division of the HSE and Age Friendly Ireland) to measure the implementation of the *National Positive Ageing Strategy* (NPAS). A dedicated member of the TILDA team is involved in extracting data with which to monitor progress towards the goals and objectives of the NPAS.

In the view of several of those interviewed, some of the work associated with TILDA may have happened without Atlantic's involvement, but more slowly than they hoped. A longitudinal study would not have been a priority of the Department of Health so the contribution of Atlantic was significant in getting it up and running.

3.1.2 Centre for Effective Services

The Centre for Effective Services (CES) is an independent, not-for-profit body established in 2008. CES operates on an all-island basis with the aim of promoting the development of an evidence-informed approach to policy and practice with those working with children, families and communities. The work of the centre is jointly funded by Atlantic and the Department of Children and Youth Affairs. It describes itself as part of a new generation of intermediary organisations working in the areas of evidence translation and implementation science.

The aim was that CES would work with policymakers to provide evidence as to programme effectiveness, support implementation, and highlight what does and doesn't work with a view to securing improved outcomes.

Case Study Vignette 3.4

Influencing a New National Strategy on Children

A key component of Atlantic's work in its children and youth programme was trying to instil a greater use of evidence-based prevention and early intervention programmes. In addition to the front-line demonstrations it funded, Atlantic also invested in establishing a research infrastructure that could evaluate the effectiveness of these programmes.

The investments included two university-based research centres and the Centre for Effective Services (CES).

CES helped children, youth and community services to make better use of evidence of what works so they can deliver more effective services. CES also synthesised learning from the initiative and elsewhere to support policymakers and organisations with effective implementation.

One of its notable reports, *Ten Years of Learning* (Rochford et al., 2014) summarised learning from the prevention and early intervention initiative and informed the development of the government's *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures* policy statement in 2014, which was the first overarching national policy framework for children and young people. Much of emphasis in *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures* is on the type of prevention and early intervention services that Atlantic championed in its programme.

Additionally, a new government initiative, the Area Based Childhood (ABC) Programme, is a cross-departmental initiative targeting investment in effective services to improve the outcomes for children and families living in areas of disadvantage. It focuses on implementation of interventions and approaches that have been to be effective, much of which were funded in Atlantic's prevention and early intervention initiative and were synthesised by CES. It is being supported by Atlantic and the government. CES was asked by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs and Atlantic to jointly manage the ABC programme with Pobal, a not-for-profit company that manages programmes on behalf of the Irish Government and the EU.

There were mixed views emerging from the interviews regarding the effectiveness of CES, particularly in its early years of existence. In general terms, its work with regard to the children's programmes with the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (and before that with the Office of the Minister for Children) has been consistently well received and regarded as influential. The production of the *Ten Years of Learning* report was cited as an example of this, feeding as it did into the *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures* policy statement and the development of the ABC programme. A confluence of a new department open to new ways of working and to evidence generation and a new body such as CES provided a good platform for positive collaboration. CES was also seen to have expertise in this area and to be good at capturing relevant information and reporting on it in an accessible manner.

In contrast, early experience with CES in the fields of education and community development were less well regarded by policymakers. The work done was seen as of limited use from a policy

perspective and did not display particular knowledge or expertise of the policy fields concerned from the perspective of some interviewees. It failed to connect with the people best placed to effect reform. There was also a general concern amongst several policymakers interviewed about outsourcing policy knowledge and expertise, which they felt might be better located within government to build up capacity there rather than with a separate body.

CES responded to these concerns and there was a recognition in the interviews that the relationship with CES across a number of government departments has been more productive of late. One policymaker noted that there was a need for a bridging mechanism between academics and policymakers and that CES has helped get alignment between them, providing some understanding between the two worlds. At the start, they were seen as closer to the academic world, but they have now got a better balance. In this context there was a view expressed that CES should be part of the capacity building support framework for the civil service through the use of placements, internships, lateral mobility, etc.

Also in recent times, CES has become more involved in producing material directly linked to the broader public sector reform efforts of government. For example, it has produced a primer on implementing whole of government approaches (Colgan et al. 2014). CES also produced a case study on the implementation of Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI, which took over the processing of student grants from local authorities) to document the learning from the implementation of SUSI and wider lessons for public service reform in a systematic way, using an implementation science framework (Centre for Effective Services, 2015). It is too early to assess the impact of these interventions, though the SUSI case study has gained initial traction in government departments and elicited a good degree of interest.

3.2 Linking evidence and policy outcomes

Reference has been made earlier to the role evidence generated with the support of Atlantic has played in influencing policy and practice. This section covers the issues in more detail, with an explicit focus on how the evidence generated is feeding in to the policy and reform process.

3.2.1 *Influencing policy development*

The approach to evidence generation influenced policy documents produced by government and intended to help shape reform efforts associated with the policy. For example, Atlantic's support for a major research study on dementia (Cahill et al. 2012) provided evidence in the context of current and future demographic trends that:

- Produced estimates of current and future dementia prevalence for those aged 65 and over and for younger people
- Specified the main economic costs of dementia care

- Reviewed current service availability and estimated future demand for services
- Reviewed best practice in dementia care locally and internationally

This evidence fed directly in to the development of the *Irish National Dementia Strategy*. The strategy itself explicitly notes that it drew on this research in its production (Department of Health, 2014: 8). Cochrane et al (2013) state that without the intervention of Atlantic, it is likely that the strategy would have been subject to delay.

Case Vignette 3.5 show some extracts from the *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures* policy framework for children and younger people which further illustrate the point with regard to how the need for rigorous evidence promoted by Atlantic is being built in to policy statements. Much of the language in the policy framework is drawn directly from the work of Atlantic's grantees in prevention and early intervention and, more broadly, the initiative's explicit focus on the importance of evidence.

Case Vignette 3.5

The Importance of Evidence in *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures*

The following extracts illustrate references to the role and importance of evidence in the policy framework:

Principle: To be effective, policies and services must be evidence-informed and outcomes focused (p. 21).

'Ensuring that the road to a better future for Ireland's children is not just paved with good intentions means basing investment in evidence-based policies. ... Through our investment in the Prevention and Early Intervention Programmes and other initiatives, we have emerging Irish evidence as to what works in supporting children and young people and their parents to achieve better outcomes. This is guiding decisions on where we put our money. The evidence tells us that investment in early years care and education reaps significant dividends throughout a child's life and to society as a result of better outcomes. The evidence confirms the importance of parents particularly in the early years of a child's life and the importance of friendships as children grow into adolescence (p. ix)'.

'Research in Ireland and internationally is increasingly pointing to the returns that can accrue from investing in the early years – from supporting children's early cognitive,

social and emotional development, to enhancing school readiness and to generating longer term returns to the State and society. This Framework seeks to promote a shift in policy toward earlier intervention and to ensure the provision of quality early years services and interventions, aimed at promoting best outcomes for children and disrupting the emergence of poor outcomes (p. xi)'.

The next critical step is better collection, coordination and use of real-time data to inform decision-making, planning, resourcing and policy. With better use of data, we will be able to be more responsive to changing demographics and emerging needs, and to ensure decision-making is based on evidence. Combining learning from research studies conducted in Ireland and internationally on 'what works' (and in what circumstances) should enable more efficient and effective use of resources and lead to better outcomes for children and young people (p. 41)'.

Source: Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014

Of course, there is no guarantee that just because evidence and its importance are cited in policy statements it will be used in practice. But it is an important first step.

Atlantic's influence, at least indirectly, can be seen in other government initiatives as well. The government's general public sector reform plans have put increased emphasis on the need for good quality evidence (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2014). The government is committed to developing a number of evidence-informed practices in the context of a revised budgetary and expenditure framework. Evaluations are to be conducted to inform the periodic comprehensive reviews of expenditure. An Irish government economic and evaluation service has been introduced to enhance the role of value for money analysis in policy making. A public spending code has been developed and a public service evaluation network created to help provide guidance and build capacity. The influence of Atlantic on these developments is unclear, and many other factors have influenced them, not least the imperatives of the fiscal crisis. But interviews with officials indicated that the evidence generation work of Atlantic and its grantees had been a contributory factor in determining the evolution of this approach to building the evidence base across government.

3.2.2 *Influencing and tracking policy practice*

One notable example of evidence generated that influenced policy and practice is illustrated by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) submission to the government's comprehensive review of expenditure (CRE). The CRE is intended to examine all areas of government spending and assess the effectiveness of spending programmes with a view to determining budget priorities

for the coming years. It is therefore an important exercise in determining which programmes will continue, and the amount of resources to be devoted to those programmes. In its submission to the CRE the DCYA cited evidence quantifying the benefits of early years' interventions in terms of improving children's outcomes and in delivering significant economic and societal return to the State in justifying the need to develop a national Early Years Strategy. It also used evidence from the Atlantic-funded prevention and early intervention programme to support the justification for the funding of the ABC programme (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014: 40):

'The ABC programme builds on the learning from the Prevention and Early Intervention Programme (PEIP) 2006-2013, which was co-funded (€36 million) by DCYA and Atlantic Philanthropies and delivered across three areas in Dublin: Ballymun (youngballymun), Dublin Northside (Preparing for Life) and Tallaght West (Childhood Development Initiative). The PEIP involved the evaluation of a diverse range of prevention and early intervention approaches and learning to date has demonstrated significant improvements in outcomes in the domains of child behaviour, parenting, child health and development and learning'.

Another example of government accepting the importance of evidence to track the effect of policy, influenced by Atlantic engagement on the issue, is illustrated in Case Vignette 3.6 which shows how the effects of the *National Positive Ageing Strategy* will be tracked by a healthy and positive ageing outcomes initiative focused on providing evidence as to the effectiveness and efficiency of the strategy.

Case Vignette 3.6

Healthy and Positive Ageing Outcomes Initiative

The Department of Health, together with The Atlantic Philanthropies, the HSE's Health and Wellbeing Division and Age Friendly Ireland have agreed on a joint programme to monitor and promote older people's health and wellbeing in Ireland. This programme (the Healthy and Positive Ageing Outcomes Initiative) is intended to measure the implementation of the *National Positive Ageing Strategy* (NPAS). Its activities will include:

- Formulation of key national indicators of older people's Healthy and Positive Ageing, using research and data already developed especially by TILDA, as well as the Central Statistics Office and the HSE's Health & Wellbeing Directorate
- Establishment of a research fund to commission additional once-off research to fill identified gaps in existing data required to cover all indicators, relevant to the design or configuration of future services and supports for older people

- Publication of a biennial 'State of the Nation's Older Persons' reports, topic reports, etc. linking the changes in older people's wellbeing to policy development
- Cascading of national data to the county level, supplemented by local data collection, and compilation of County Reports in selected counties
- A physical activity communications programme targeted at older people

Oversight of the Programme will be provided by a group chaired by the Assistant Secretary for Social Care, Department of Health.

Source: <http://agefriendlyireland.ie/healthy-and-positive-ageing-outcomes-initiative-hapai/>

A further example of where evidence prompted by Atlantic is feeding into wider government policy and practice is the Meitheal model and toolkit developed by Tusla, the child and family agency. To help embed early intervention and prevention in Tusla, Atlantic provided €8.3 million in funding that would, in part, establish the Meitheal model. That model, which uses an old Irish term describing how neighbours would come together to assist in harvesting of crops or other tasks, aims to ensure that children and families receive support and help in an integrated and coordinated way that is easily accessible to them.

The support offered is personalised and directed by the child or young person and their family (Tusla, 2013). Meitheal is part of a package of national family and community support guidance documents produced by Tusla. Interviewees working in this area acknowledged the importance of the support of Atlantic and noted that the evidence-informed documents produced are hugely appreciated by staff, and have already been influential in the debate about what works.

Finally in this section, Case Vignette 3.7 sets out the role of publicpolicy.ie, an independent body fully funded by Atlantic, in producing evidence to inform policy debate and practice.

Case Vignette 3.7

Publicpolicy.ie and Evidence-informed Policy Tracking

Publicpolicy.ie is a small organisation with a goal of conducting research and communicating the results to make it as easy as possible for interested citizens to understand the choices involved in addressing public policy issues and their implications. Publicpolicy.ie puts particular emphasis on the value of evidence in helping to make the right policy choices.

Amongst its activities that have affected government policy and practice are:

- Pensions reform. Commissioned research found that fiscal incentives for retirement savings in the Irish pension system are progressive and compare well internationally but that proposed changes could discourage long-term saving. This fed into a paper by the Department of Finance on the incentive regime for pension saving (<http://www.finance.gov.ie/sites/default/files/12%2021%20Pension%20Taxation%20Issues.pdf>)
- Property tax. A submission to the expert group on property tax in 2012 and subsequent work showed the benefits and challenges of local property tax and its administration.
- Taxation of self-employed. The organisation produced evidence showing tax discrimination against low income self-employed. The government has committed to address this.
- Service delivery commissioning. Work with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform on creating a framework to allow line departments to provide new or review existing services in the best way. A draft framework has been developed which is being tested in a number of government departments.

3.3 Conclusions

A central benefit of Atlantic involvement has been the additional rigour brought to bear within government on the need for good quality evidence. Rigour is a word that came up spontaneously in a number of the interviews.

A level of analysis has been undertaken that wouldn't have happened otherwise. The creation and existence of Irish cases where there is strong evidence of what works and what doesn't is viewed very positively by policymakers.

It was a widespread view that the evidence bases created will remain and provide frameworks for analysis into the future and for the production of guidance for practitioners such as the Tusla family and community support guidance documents.

Chapter 4

The reform of service delivery

Sylda Langford, when director general of the then Office of the Minister for Children, noted a key challenge from a government perspective of working with philanthropies and grantees with regard to service delivery. She was talking in the context of three demonstration sites established under the prevention and early intervention programme (Kaoukji and Little, 2007: 72):

'The work with philanthropy is exciting but it also represents an act of faith that the sites will be able to implement, evaluate and mainstream their most effective services, that we will be able to keep the best of all of existing services going and that we will be able to learn sufficient to mainstream some combination of the two, both in the three communities and elsewhere in the country'.

With regard to service delivery, a central goal for Atlantic was that through working with government their investments would not only benefit the NGO grantees and their service users, but they would also influence the way the public sector provides services. This would be done in two ways: influencing policy which directs the way services are delivered, and encouraging the development and use of alternative service delivery approaches within the public sector. This was seen as crucial to securing the mission of Atlantic to bring about lasting changes in the lives of disadvantaged and vulnerable people. Atlantic's investments, though substantial, are only a small fraction of what the government spends in the provision of services for children and older people. Achieving lasting change in services for the disadvantaged requires change to be adopted across the public sector, not just in isolated pockets.

4.1 Influencing policy on service delivery

Interviewees cited the work of Atlantic as influencing policy developments. While it was not the only influence it was seen as an important contributor. Other influencers, such as international developments and other stakeholders, were also key players, but Atlantic's role was seen as significant.

There are clear examples of the impact of Atlantic's involvement with government on policy. *Better Outcomes Brighter Futures* and the *Irish National Dementia Strategy* were the two examples most frequently cited in the interviews with policymakers where it was felt Atlantic's influence had been strong. Other examples were also cited, such as the *National Positive Ageing Strategy* and policies under development such as the national Early Years Strategy.

The precise nature of Atlantic's influence is harder to define. Views were expressed by those interviewed that policy change wouldn't have happened, would have happened slower or wouldn't have survived without Atlantic. The most common and generally expressed view is that in most areas Atlantic has been involved, some policy change along the lines that have developed would have occurred anyway. This is because it was seen to be timely or important politically, or movements and trends in Europe or elsewhere would have prompted change. But it would have happened slower and to a lesser extent, without the same evidence base to support the direction of change.

Atlantic has supported policy change in other areas, often through the funding of advocacy groups. Case Vignette 4.1 illustrates one such example in relation to civil partnership that shows how the grantee worked with government to achieve its policy goal.

Case Vignette 4.1

Introducing Civil Partnership in Ireland

In 2010, the Civil Partnership and Certain Rights of Cohabitants Act was introduced. It would allow same-sex couples in Ireland to enter a civil partnership, which carries an extensive range of marriage-like rights and obligations. A small NGO -- the Gay and Lesbian Equality Network (GLEN) --with core support from Atlantic worked extensively to achieve this goal. A wide range of actions were undertaken, and challenges faced along the way. Of particular note with regard to working with government to secure change were the following:

- GLEN knew that in order to get legislation through Parliament, the best bet was to have a government minister introduce it because the government controls much of the legislative agenda.
- In early 2006, the Minister for Justice announced the creation of a Working Group on Domestic Partnership. It was chaired by a former parliamentarian and composed of top civil servants and others, many of whom would later play key roles in drafting civil partnership legislation. A GLEN staff member also was appointed to the group.

- GLEN developed strong relationships with civil servants. GLEN's policy liaison within the Department of Justice, Equality, and Law Reform led a series of meetings with government departments to discuss lesbian and gay issues and the role of the respective departments in promoting inclusion and equality.
- Following a general election where GLEN was successful in persuading all the main political parties to include legal recognition for same sex couples in their written manifestos, GLEN sought an agreement to include legal recognition for same-sex couples in the new Programme for Government. A Programme for Government is a much stronger commitment than a manifesto. The government programme stated that its commitment was to civil partnership rather than to marriage.
- GLEN's style of not attacking public officials helped to get the new minister's support in introducing a civil partnership bill.
- A key GLEN strategy was to provide research to inform legislation and help build the case for legal protections.

In general terms the lesson learned was to work within the system rather than against it. GLEN understood how the political system worked and where the pressures points were. GLEN representatives took the time to get to know government departments and the people who worked in them. They learned the language and framed their social agenda in terms the government could understand. At times this brought GLEN into conflict with other advocacy groups that took a more robust approach to dealing with government, and this required effort to maintain working relationships with these other NGOs.

This work came to fruition when in 2010, some of the most far-reaching protections for gay and lesbian couples in the world were signed into law by the president of Ireland under the Civil Partnership Act. That paved the way for a referendum on same-sex marriage. In 2015, Ireland became the first country in the world to bring in same-sex marriage by a popular vote.

Source: adapted from Center for Evaluation Innovation, 2012.

Atlantic's support of GLEN also illustrates that attempts to work with NGOs to influence government policy are not without controversy. In the build up to the referendum on gay marriage, some of those opposing gay marriage publicly criticised the role of Atlantic in supporting groups such as GLEN and described it as attempting to influence the democratic process (McDonald, 2015; O'Brien, 2015). Though grantees were able to show that none of the money provided by Atlantic had gone to fund the referendum campaign, it remained a source of contention. While most of Atlantic's

funding has been welcomed as supporting activities for which there is overwhelming public and political support, in some cases it can be seen by those opposed as undue interference in the policy process. In such contentious cases it is important that there is transparency of philanthropic funding and clarity about its uses, as was the case with the Atlantic grants. In this way, the factual situation is clearly available if disputes arise as to the nature of philanthropic involvement in a policy issue.

More broadly, Atlantic's involvement in alternative service delivery approaches has been a contributory influence on government policy in public sector wide reform initiatives. The Programme for Government (Department of the Taoiseach, 2011) includes a section on choice and voice for service users that states: 'Rather than giving fixed budgets to traditional public service providers like the HSE ... we will put resources into the hands of citizens to acquire services that are tailored to better suit their needs and less expensive for the taxpayer'.

The *Public Service Reform Plan* (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2014: 14) has a section on alternative models of service delivery which states:

'Government is committed to driving greater use of alternative service delivery models. New and existing services are being examined to identify the optimal method of delivery. This may include partnerships with private enterprise, voluntary organisations and community groups.

Central to this strategy will be the creation of a new framework of competition for public services. The Public Service must begin to transition away from the traditional system of block grants to organisations providing public services and move instead to a new approach based on releasing funds in return for delivering specified outcomes'...

The plan goes on to cite Genio and the CES as examples of the new approach to service delivery the government intends to promote.

4.2 Influencing alternative service delivery approaches

As well as influencing policy, Atlantic has had an influence on practice on the ground with regard to alternative service delivery. The Genio model is one of the clearest illustrations of this (see case Vignette 4.2).

Case Vignette 4.2

The Genio Model

The Genio approach to service delivery for the groups it supports (people with disabilities, mental health difficulties and dementia) has three main elements: (a) innovation funding where funds are distributed on a competitive basis to providers to encourage innovation and cost-effectiveness; (b) support and training of key stakeholders to manage and implement required changes; and (c) undertaking and commissioning research to measure impact. The success of this approach is illustrated by the following extracts from the analysis by Healy and Keogh (2014):

'The ability of Genio to provide resources back into the system to incentivise these reforms was seen as one of the key aspects of why the model had gained traction to date. As a senior civil servant noted, the perceived success of the model to date could not have been achieved from within a government department ...

This chimed with a recurring theme throughout the interviews that the funding provided the resources and the space for HSE staff and service providers who wanted to move towards a more user-centric model of operating to do so. Some interviewees referred to the need to reach a tipping point where the new beliefs and practices take hold ...

One of the key findings from analysing the frames of actors within the health system was that they felt having a mechanism independent of their direct control to fund back into the systems was crucial to the success of Genio. This independence was seen as incentivising those that want to move towards implementing the agreed policies, but it was equally important that a competitive ethos was introduced to provide the best model of 'person-centred' care, away from more provider-driven models...

Overall, one of the main reasons cited as to why the Genio model has gained traction is that it allows reform-minded service providers and civil servants to come to the fore by providing them with the financial and human resources capacity to implement espoused policy. Having political and civil service backing at the outset was seen as important. The pressure created by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform for change was seen by some as also helpful'.

Another example of on the ground changes in service delivery is presented by the Age Friendly Cities and Counties programme which is focused on transforming communities to make them as age friendly as possible. Through the Atlantic-funded Ageing Well Network, the programme was piloted in Louth where the interest was in looking for easy-to-implement ways to help older people stay in their homes, feel safer in their homes and in the community and assist them to get out to where they wanted to go. As noted by Parker (2015a: 10): 'Many of the changes were simple, such as altering a bus route so it dropped people off in front of the hospital rather than at the bottom of a hill, or issuing official cards for workers who might come to an older person's door with a number to call to verify their identity. But these changes had a major impact on the quality of older people's lives'. The programme has subsequently been rolled out across the country and will be in all counties and cities in Ireland by the end of 2015.

Frameworks and guidelines produced with the support of Atlantic funding have also been influential in promoting evidence-informed approaches to service delivery and in shifting service delivery practice. In addition to the examples noted, the Irish Heart Foundation was involved in the development of national clinical guidelines on the treatment of strokes which have contributed to more effective treatment and management (Lynch, 2013). This guidance is feeding into practice and supporting the development of alternative service delivery approaches across the system based on evidence and targeted at the needs of individuals.

One interviewee stated that 'show don't tell' has been the big advantage of the Atlantic approach to convincing policymakers that services can be delivered differently. Policymakers are more likely to be convinced by demonstrations of the effects of policy rather than general statements in support of a particular approach to service delivery. Atlantic has been strong here in supporting NGOs to provide evidence, rigorously test assumptions and engage with government on the analysis and use of data relating to service delivery approaches and models.

4.3 Mainstreaming

Perhaps the biggest challenge as Atlantic winds down its operations is to ensure that good practice identified in its programmes is mainstreamed as far as possible into the wider public sector. Many of the interviewees commented on the challenges associated with mainstreaming and the issue of the 'scalability' of the Atlantic supported programmes. MorrowGilchrist Associates (2014: 56) note the challenges of mainstreaming the Genio approach:

'Despite the stated policy intentions the reallocation of resources (towards person centred models/individualised supports) has not yet occurred at scale and has not yet achieved significant momentum. For instance, stakeholders interviewed in the disability arena cited that only an estimated 3% of the disability budget was linked to individualised models and that only an estimated 300 PWD (people with disabilities) in Ireland were currently accessing individualised funding. A related issue highlighted by stakeholders is that it is very difficult to get a composite picture of the extent to which there has been any

reallocation of resources and therefore hard to assess the impact that Genio has had/is having in changing the system in this respect.'

Some interviewees highlighted the dangers of what one referred to as the possible creation of small pockets of excellence in a sea of muddling through. Reference was occasionally made in some interviews to the view that funding provided by Atlantic to grantees enabled them to provide services, conduct research or pay staff at levels that would not be sustainable if mainstreamed across the public sector. Resistance to change across the public system was seen as strong (in areas such as the move to individualised and community-based care and away from institutional settings for example) and requiring a concerted effort to overcome. NGOs were concerned about their future role in the context of losing funding support and in a commissioning environment which they were worried might focus on lowest price at the expense of other outcomes. In general, many interviewees, whilst positive about the potential for mainstreaming, noted that progress had been slower than anticipated. This was partly resource driven, given the scale of economic adjustment and cutbacks in public spending associated with the financial collapse in Ireland since 2008. But it was also partly associated with the challenge of changing culture and practice in a rigid system.

A couple of interviewees stressed the importance of having government involved from the beginning, and that it is unlikely to get support for mainstreaming an initiative 'down the road'. Government partners need to be involved from the design stage as it gets progressively more difficult to get acceptance, even of good ideas, if government have not had an involvement.

In a review of determinants of implementation of policy, Johnston (2014) identified many important variables affecting implementation. However, she noted two variables as fundamentally important: authoritative and accountable leadership and identifying and addressing resisters. In the context of the mainstreaming of Atlantic's programmes and initiatives, it is useful to examine how these variables are being addressed and consequently how they may impact on the chances of mainstreaming.

4.3.1 *Developing authoritative and accountable leadership*

The authoritative leader is one who mobilises a team towards a common vision and focuses on end goals, leaving the means up to each individual (Goleman, 2000). The accountable leader in this context refers to ensuring the personal accountability of leaders with regard to implementation.

Atlantic has been active in working with leaders in the public sector to secure commitment to achieving their goals. One interviewee from the public sector commented that there is now a 'pool' of public servants who 'get' issues such as alternative service delivery, commissioning for outcomes, the need for evidence and so on. They are champions in the system for the kind of change being supported by Atlantic, working to embed change in the system. These are people in senior positions (secretary general and assistant secretary general in the civil service for example) with the authority to promote mainstreaming of service changes. Leaders in the Department of Public Expenditure

and Reform (DPER), for example, have bought into the Genio and CES experience and are pushing it as part of their public service reform programme. However, there is a danger that across the public sector DPER may be viewed as associated with an over focus on cost saving rather than equally being concerned with achieving desired outcomes.

Whilst influential, the number of senior managers who could be seen as advocates for the kind of approaches to service delivery advocated by Atlantic are relatively small, and tend to be concentrated in a limited number of organisations across the public sector where Atlantic has focused its efforts. To this extent, it is questionable if a 'critical mass' has been reached which could be self-perpetuating across the public sector. If key leaders who have been influenced by their engagement with Atlantic were to leave the public sector, impetus for change could stall. One interviewee made the comment that it can be 'hard to knit but quick to unravel'.

DPER sees a role for itself in building leadership capacity beyond the group of officials who have worked with Atlantic. It is using initiatives in the public sector reform plan such as the creation of a senior public service, the government economic and evaluation service and other capacity building initiatives to promote activities such as engaging with evidence, commissioning for service delivery based on outcomes and so on. While government agencies have taken these and other initiatives, there is certainly still work to do on developing authoritative and accountable leaders across the public sector.

Some positive signs are emerging. In the course of conducting an external evaluation of Genio, MorrowGilchrist Associates (2014: 57) found changes in accountability practice in the health services:

'Without underestimating the continuing challenges, it was reported that the outlook in terms of progress against AVFC (A Vision for Change) and embedding change is a little more optimistic as a result of changes in the accountability arrangements within the HSE. There is more emphasis now on outcome based targets and accountability rather than simply "balancing the books". Managers are increasingly held accountable for what they have done to deliver community-based care and recovery model outcomes'.

4.3.2 Addressing resistors to change

Johnston's (2014) other main finding is the need to identify and address vested interests or the main resistors to change who may not wish to implement policy for a variety of reasons. In the case of policies she examined that were successfully implemented, interest groups that would be disadvantaged or negatively affected by the implementation of the policy were identified early on and informed, persuaded or 'faced down'. MorrowGilchrist Associates (2014: 59) refer to this issue in their evaluation of Genio and the approach it took to grant disbursement:

'A further strength is the level of competition within the performance managed grants and the fact that it's time limited, then evaluated and, if not working. not funded further. This

has been important in driving innovation and change and in taking on the vested interests (e.g., trade unions or current recipients of public funds). Confronting these vested interests and finding out what is in the public interest in this way is viewed to be necessary to accelerating the closure of institutions and moving more people into community settings with individualised, person-centred solutions...

... There was a concern expressed given the slow pace of reform, that Government funding of Genio could be perceived as a 'cover for inaction' and therefore an excuse not to deliver on the system-wide public sector reform intentions. Within this the power of the largest disability service providers was acknowledged as a potential barrier to bringing the critical mass of change about. The main mitigating factor to address this concern is the 'three-pronged' focus of Genio in that the capacity building and evidence gathering (over and above the performance managed grants) are critical elements to credibly influence those who make the decisions at senior levels in the system'.

There is awareness within government of the challenge to mainstreaming posed by resisters in the system: The *Public Service Reform Plan 2014-2016* (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2014: 15) notes that: 'Communities and individual service users will become more involved in the design and delivery of services, especially social services. Any barriers to the implementation of these alternative models will need to be addressed'. And there is a commitment to mainstreaming (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2014: 37):

'Service reform: to deliver a new, less hospital focused model of care, which treats patients safely, at the right time, with value for money, with the right service and as close to home as possible. An example of this is how the HSE is working with organisations such as the Genio Trust, a registered charity, to develop new ways of providing services to people in the community, such as people with dementia. It is proposed to expand these projects to include hospitals. The lessons learned will be applied more broadly to the development of health services'.

The approach adopted of commissioning for alternative service delivery models creates both winners and losers. Managing this transition presents difficulties for policymakers. The logic that there will be losers and that resources will be diverted away from some programmes is not yet embedded in the system. These winners and losers may be found both within the public sector (for example, health service providers, local staff in facilities, etc.) and within the NGO sector (different service providers bidding to win contracts for service provision).

Atlantic has strongly encouraged the development and use of implementation science amongst public servants as a way of addressing resistance to change and managing the change process. A number of public servants have been sponsored to attend global implementation science conferences, and much of the work of CES is based on implementation science. For example, the study referred to earlier of the creation and development of the Student Universal Support Ireland (SUSI) shared service for distributing student grants used an implementation science framework to

identify the wider lessons for public sector reform (Centre for Effective Services, 2015). The report emphasised the critical influence of realistic initial conceptualisation and planning of large-scale projects, the requirement for accurate baseline data and the central role of effective management and leadership relationships.

As it begins to withdraw supports in line with its limited life requirement, Atlantic is putting concerted effort into trying to ensure that the changes it is promoting live on within the public sector and that structured efforts are made to support promoters of change and influence resisters. Atlantic and the government established the Service Reform Fund in 2015 to support the implementation of reforms in disability and mental health services. The fund represents a combined investment of €45m by the funding partners from 2015 to 2017, of which Atlantic will invest €15 million and the Department of Health €30 million. The intention is that the fund will support the move away from a centre-based approach to more individualised and community orientated models of service. In a similar vein, as illustrated in Case Vignette 4.3. Atlantic is supporting Tusla to mainstream the implementation of the prevention, partnership and family support model by training and development and other supports for all staff.

An intention of these initiatives is to work with service providers in the mainstream to influence the way they think about and practice service delivery. Building capacity and leadership development is at the heart of this effort.

Case Vignette 4.3

Mainstreaming in Tusla - Implementation of the Prevention, Partnership and Family Support Model

The Prevention, Partnership and Family Support model involves TUSLA working with the UNESCO Child and Family Research Centre, NUI Galway, and with service providers, through a programme of training, coaching, mentoring, technical support, research and evaluation. The aim is to create a new capability within TUSLA to commission both universal and targeted services for children, parents and families that are informed by evidence, and that deliver improved outcomes. A potential population of 13,000 staff will participate in the programme, comprising 4,000 TUSLA staff, 4,000 staff of commissioned agencies and 5,000 staff of collaborating agencies. Atlantic is supporting the programme with a grant of €8.3 million.

The initiative involves the creation of 26 new posts, 24 of which Tusla has committed to maintaining after the initial three-year period with an aim of ensuring the continuation of the programme in the long-term.

4.4 Conclusions

Atlantic's contribution to the reform of service delivery has been significant. That is not to say that reform would not have taken place without Atlantic. Nor has reform been without controversy in some instances. The evidence suggests that reform efforts such as moving to more individualised services and away from institutional settings, and more of a focus on commissioning and competing for outcomes, would have been the direction of travel in any event. Amongst Atlantic's particular contributions has been to make things happen more quickly and comprehensively than they would have otherwise, and influencing the shaping of policy and subsequent service delivery practice.

Chapter 5

Conclusions

As Atlantic prepares to exit the field in Ireland, what conclusions can be drawn as to the influence on government policy and practice in Ireland with particular regard to public sector reform?

5.1 Main Conclusions

Atlantic has made a significant contribution to influencing government policy and practice. This is not to say that Atlantic is the only or even the main influence in most areas of its engagement with government. Rather that Atlantic has contributed in a way that has made a difference. Some of the main contributions are captured in Table 5.1, based on the evidence gathered for this study and set out based on the intermediate outcomes in the theory of change established in Figure 1.1.

Table 5.1 Illustrative contributions of Atlantic to influencing government policy and practice

Changes in attitudes and behaviour of policymakers, policy deliverers and grantees	Promoted good working relationships through creation of neutral, safe spaces for dialogue
	Encouraged shift in mind-set of policymakers and NGOs from a focus on activities undertaken and resources allocated to developing a shared perspective focused also on outcomes to be achieved
	More willingness on the part of some officials to examine resource allocation including where resources can be shown to be used more productively elsewhere
	Establishment of clear performance-oriented agreements focused on outcomes in the form of memoranda of understanding
	Development of a small number of senior public servants who are champions of change regarding alternative service delivery, commissioning for outcomes and more evidence-informed policy
	Awareness raised amongst officials of the impact of demographic change on policy for different age groups

Enhanced evidence base used to inform policy	Production of Irish cases that have been well researched and documented, particularly through the promotion of rigorous techniques such as the use of randomised control trials
	Establishment of enhanced data sets to inform policy as in the case of the national strategy on dementia
	Setting up of TILDA as a longitudinal data source
	Creation of the Centre for Effective Services and publicpolicy.ie as intermediary organisations producing evidence to inform policymakers
Changes to policy and practice	Direct influence on government policy statements such as <i>Better Outcomes Brighter Futures</i> , <i>Irish National Dementia Strategy</i> and the <i>National Positive Ageing Strategy</i>
	Influence on public sector reform plans agreed by government
	On the ground changes in service delivery based on alternative models of service delivery and commissioning of services
	Practical examples of change that illustrate the benefits of alternative service delivery approaches

With regard to the three main areas of activity examined: the development of a partnership approach, the development and use of evidence, and the reform of service delivery, the main conclusions are set out below.

Development of a partnership approach

- Atlantic showed it understands how government works, and developed good working relationships with senior officials.
- A particular strength was in brokering relationships with and between government agencies and NGOs and creating neutral, safe spaces (often with an independent chair) where participants could come together and work on resource allocation and delivery targets.
- Several interviewees noted the importance of Atlantic ensuring a 'firm' side of partnership through the use of memoranda of understanding and performance-oriented agreements that focused on outcomes to be achieved to complement the 'softer' side of developing working relationships.
- The approach was seen as encouraging a shift in the minds of policymakers and NGOs from focusing in the past more on the activities undertaken and the resources allocated to now developing a shared perspective focused on what the outcomes should be and how best to achieve those outcomes.
- Challenges associated with the approach include the difficulty for policymakers of managing the expectations of those outside the partnership and overcoming the traditional reservations between the statutory and non-statutory sectors.

Development and use of evidence

- A central benefit of Atlantic involvement has been the additional rigour brought to bear within government on the need for good quality evidence. Rigour is a word that came up spontaneously in a number of the interviews.
- A level of analysis has been undertaken that wouldn't have happened otherwise. The creation and existence of Irish cases where there is strong evidence of what works and what doesn't is viewed very positively by policymakers.
- At times, the approach to evidence generation and gathering was seen as burdensome and overly academic in nature. Policymakers favour shorter, focused research pieces more attuned to the demands of the policy environment rather than long, academic reports. To this end, Atlantic is seen as being more successful in building research and evaluation expertise in academia and NGOs than it has been within government itself.
- It was a widespread view that the evidence bases created will remain and provide frameworks for analysis into the future and for the production of guidance for practitioners, such as the Tusla family and community support guidance documents.
- The approach to evidence generation and gathering promoted by Atlantic has introduced a level of analysis into government policy making that wouldn't have happened otherwise. There is a greater awareness amongst some officials of the possibility of testing programme expenditure and openness to shifting resources elsewhere where they may be more productively used. However, shifting expenditure on a large scale remains a challenging and politically sensitive task.
- Work supported by Atlantic has fed into wider government reform initiatives with regard to enhancing the evidence base, such as the comprehensive reviews of expenditure and the operation of the Irish government economic and evaluation service.

Reform of service delivery

- The evidence suggests that reform efforts such as the use of alternative service delivery mechanisms, a focus on commissioning and competing for outcomes and moving to more individualised services and away from institutional settings would have been the direction of travel in any event. Atlantic's contribution has been in making things happen more quickly and more comprehensively than they would have otherwise.
- Atlantic has had a clear influence in shaping policy in the areas it has worked in, which in turn will shape service provision into the future. It has helped demonstrate the importance, for example, of keeping older people in the community and identifying and demonstrating ways this can be done.
- Atlantic's involvement in alternative service delivery approaches has influenced government

policy with regard to public sector wide reform initiatives. A particularly strong aspect of Atlantic's involvement is that it has provided practical examples of change which illustrate the benefits of alternative service delivery approaches.

- In contentious policy areas such as civil partnership and gay marriage, Atlantic's involvement in supporting reform initiatives has been subject to public criticism. In these circumstances, being clear and transparent about the nature of the supports provided is important. In this way, the factual situation is clearly available if disputes arise as to aspects of philanthropic involvement in a policy issue.
- Mainstreaming is the big challenge. Resistance to change across the public system can be strong. Progress has been made but overall has been somewhat slower than anticipated. In part this is due to the effects of the recession and cutbacks in public funding; in part it reflects the difficulty in changing entrenched cultural and historical patterns of working.
- In order to further the mainstreaming of programmes, Atlantic has been active in working with leaders in the public sector to secure commitment to achieving its goals. Atlantic has strongly encouraged the development and use of implementation science amongst public servants as a way of addressing resistance to change and managing the change process.
- As it begins to withdraw supports in line with its limited life requirement, Atlantic has also put more concerted effort into trying to ensure that the changes it is promoting live on within the public sector and that structured efforts are made to support promoters of change and influence resisters.

5.2 Lessons Learned

This section summarises some of the lessons learned from the Atlantic experience of working with government for stakeholder groups in the future.

For policymakers

- The public sector tends to be driven to find quick solutions. But in practice spending time at the start developing theories of change, and examining what the evidence shows before committing investments can save time later.
- Rather than getting caught up solely in discussions on resources and activities, it is important to focus on agreeing on the outcomes to be achieved and determining an appropriate governance framework for the partnership with philanthropies and NGOs.
- Think through the challenges of implementation. In particular, ensure authoritative and accountable leadership of the programme and identify resisters and approaches to overcoming resistance. Initiatives can be hard won but easily lost.

For NGOs

- Working together is not in the culture of many NGOs which tend to have been set up to address specific challenges rather than collaborate with other NGOs to address broader, systematic issues. But collaboration can be more effective in building a coherent case for interventions that government might listen to.
- NGOs can often see policymakers in an adversarial light, as the protectors of the status quo. Yet developing good working relationships with policymakers can enhance the chances of policy goals being achieved.
- Getting issues into the Programme for Government (which involves contact with all political parties who may be involved) gives an impetus for reform at both political and official level.

For philanthropies

- Working with government offers the opportunity to spread the benefits of investment beyond specific projects and help create lasting change.
- Having a clear view on desired outcomes and processes is important as is using a mechanism such as a memorandum of understanding to agree on an approach with government.
- Co-funding of initiatives is more likely to secure government commitment.
- Showing working examples is a powerful tool for changing public sector practice.
- Putting emphasis on evidence generation and use can fill needed gaps when seeking to work with governments.
- Working in the early stages of a programme with NGOs can build their ability to collaborate with one another and with government.
- Building capacity in government, not just in NGOs, in the spheres of activity of most importance is crucial for mainstreaming.
- Building connections between the worlds of policy, practice and research is important in order to secure more evidence-informed practice.
- Involving government from early in the process to increase the chances of their engagement being meaningful and lasting.

5.3 A final word

Atlantic's work with government has been very well received by policymakers in the main. It has been seen to be a good working relationship, with benefits for Atlantic, government, and the NGOs supported by Atlantic. There is clear evidence that the goals of Atlantic have fed into the thinking of policymakers, and led to changes in policy and practice.

The timing of Atlantic's investments in programmes for children and youth, older people and people with disabilities has influenced the nature of government response. Coinciding as it did with the economic recession, the financial support provided by Atlantic was welcome as an additional source of funding. But equally importantly, the government was more open to new ways of working, especially if they were shown to be cost efficient, in the context of the fiscal challenges facing government.

The emphasis on evidence and research prompted by Atlantic has been welcomed by government and has prompted a level of analysis in government that wasn't there before. The generation of evidence from Irish cases is seen as being particularly valuable. Atlantic is seen as having created and supporting a more rigorous approach to evidence generation and gathering that is taking root and spreading across wide areas of the public service.

Atlantic's emphasis on demonstrating the effects of change and willingness to identify what works and what doesn't have been influential in generating support for their work from government.

A current study extends and builds on this research to examine the work of Atlantic with government in its final phase of grant giving. Since 2012 Atlantic has supported nineteen co-investments with government in the Republic of Ireland. Atlantic's €99m investment in the areas of children and youth, dementia and disability has leveraged €260m in public funding. Atlantic's work with government is one of the most distinctive features of its funding approach, and this review is intended to allow Atlantic to communicate this model to others and complete the story of co-investment with government. That study will be completed in 2017.

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Appendix 1 List of interviewees

Bairbre nic Aongusa, assistant secretary general, Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government

Jim Breslin, secretary general, Department of Health

Donal de Buitleir, chief executive, publicpolicy.ie

Liz Canavan, assistant secretary general, Department of Children and Youth Affairs

Madeleine Clarke, chief executive, Genio

Kevin Daly, principal officer, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform

Nuala Doherty, chief executive, Centre for Effective Services

Mary Doyle, deputy secretary general, Department of Education and Skills

Fergus Finlay, chief executive, Barnardos

Martin Fraser, secretary general, Department of the Taoiseach

Aisling Gillen, national policy development manager family support, Tusla

Gordon Jeyes, chief executive, Tusla

Eileen Kehoe, principal officer, Department of the Taoiseach

Fiona Keogh, director of research and evidence, Genio

Sylda Langford, retired (former director general Office of the Minister for Children)

Denis Leamy, chief executive, Pobal

Clodagh McDonnell, principal officer, Department of Children and Youth Affairs

Eleanor McGrory, chief executive, youngballymun

Barry Murphy, principal officer, Department of Health

Conn Murray, chief executive, Limerick City and County Council

Aileen O'Donoghue, chief executive, Archways

Stephanie O'Keeffe, national director health and wellbeing HSE

Paul Reid, chief executive, Fingal County Council (formerly Department of Public Expenditure and Reform)

Conor Rowley, principal officer, Department of Children and Youth Affairs

John Shaw, assistant secretary general, Department of the Taoiseach

Robert Watt, secretary general, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform



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