

Towards Simpler Administration

A framework for identifying institutional duplication in Ireland

Independent, non-governmental research initiative.

Purpose

Administrative simplification should not begin with an assumption that repeated activity is wasteful. Repetition may protect independence, provide appeal, manage risk, preserve privacy or allow a genuinely separate verification. The purpose of this framework is therefore to identify where administrative effort is repeated, establish why it is repeated, and ask whether the same public value could be achieved with less total effort.

Functions before institutions

The Review begins with functions rather than organisations. A citizen may encounter several bodies during one administrative journey, but the useful analytical question is not simply how many bodies are involved. It is what each body asks the citizen or another institution to do, and what public value that action produces.

Six forms of potential duplication

The framework distinguishes six forms of potential duplication: information duplication; verification duplication; procedural duplication; functional duplication; coordination duplication; and citizen-mediated duplication. Finding repetition establishes a question for investigation, not a conclusion that the activity is unnecessary.

The Duplication Map

A journey can be mapped stage by stage and each repeated element marked by type. The map records what information is requested, what evidence is verified, what procedures recur, where functions overlap, where coordination activity is generated, and where the citizen is required to carry information or responsibility between institutions.

The Public Value Test

For each repeated action the Review asks: Is it legally necessary? Does it preserve independence? Does it manage a material risk? Does it provide new information? What additional public value does it create? Who bears the burden of producing that value?

The Journey Test

Institutional processes should also be examined horizontally from the citizen's perspective. The Journey Test records repeated requests, hand-offs, documents carried between organisations, repeated

explanations, responsibility ambiguity and the time required to keep the process moving.

The Counterfactual Test

A useful diagnostic is to ask what would happen if a repeated step disappeared. Would a safeguard be lost, a risk become unmanaged or an independent judgment disappear? For citizen-mediated administration, the sharper version is: if the citizen stopped carrying the information or prompting the next organisation, would the process continue?

The Burden Transfer Test

A process can appear more efficient inside an institution while becoming more demanding for the citizen. The relevant question is therefore: has administrative work been removed, or merely relocated? Moving work is not the same as removing work.

Administrative archaeology

Duplication often accumulates through layers of individually reasonable decisions. A new safeguard is added, a new organisation created, a new digital system introduced or a new reporting requirement imposed. The framework treats simplification as administrative archaeology rather than a search for incompetence.

A proposed pilot

An initial Irish Duplication Review could examine a small number of ordinary administrative journeys. It would record the number of institutions and stages involved, information requests, repeated requests, verifications, citizen-managed hand-offs, documents carried, responsibility ambiguity, assistance required and the time borne by the citizen.

Seven questions

What is the objective? What work is required? What is repeated? Why is it repeated? What additional public value does the repetition produce? Who bears the burden? Could the same public value be achieved with less total administrative effort?

Conclusion

Do not remove an administrative step until you understand what public value it produces. Do not retain an administrative burden merely because nobody has recently asked why it is there.

The practical question at the heart of the Review is simple: Why are we doing this twice?

Irish Office for Administrative Simplification

Independent, non-governmental research initiative.

This paper is intended to clarify problems and develop questions for further research rather than prescribe institutional arrangements.