

# *Cross-project issues in Ireland*

An examination of common project  
barriers and the project management  
lessons learned from them

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## Introduction

This paper examines four project case studies across Ireland which are well known to the public:

- The National Paediatric (Children's) Hospital Project
- the Arts Council Business Transformation Programme
- The Office of Public Works Leinster House Bicycle Shed Project
- RTÉ's Enterprise Resource Planning and IT System Project

All cases have faced challenges in the ways they have been managed and delivered. It is beyond the remit of this study to provide an in-depth full analysis of every aspect of each case. This paper instead, examines selected issues, themes, and trends, to understand the barriers to project delivery which are present in these cases, and more broadly in Ireland. The common issues discussed in this paper include governance and accountability; initiation, scope definition, and cost management; schedule and delivery delays; social, economic and political pressures; and procurement and contract management issues.

The paper goes on to consider what lessons can be learned from these cases and crucially, determines key recommendations that will help the Government to improve project delivery across Ireland through enhancing project decisions, improving project success rates, and making more effective and considered use of taxpayer's money.

### About APM

The Association for Project Management (APM) is the Chartered body for the project profession, with over 45,000 individual members and over 470 corporate partners. We aim for a world in which all projects succeed because, when they do, society benefits.

## Background

### The Arts Council's Business Transformation Programme Project

*Lifecycle type: Hybrid. (Intended Iterative, executed Linear)*

The Arts Council Executive and Senior Management were responsible for sponsoring, approving funding for, and delivering the taxpayer-funded Business Transformation Programme (BTP). The project relied on many stakeholders, with two external suppliers critical to its success: Expleo focused on quality assurance, whilst Codec focused on implementation<sup>1</sup>.

The BTP project was designed to replace the Art's Council's legacy grants system, with a modern digital platform, to enhance workflow relationship management and business processes. The project failed, which resulted in a loss valued at €5.3 million<sup>2</sup>. The Government ordered an external review into the Arts Council's operations in 2025.

The project delivery date was envisioned for between July 2019 and May 2021, however, it was paused in late 2023. After a cost-benefit analysis, the decision was made to discontinue it in June 2024<sup>3</sup>. If the project continued, it would not have been ready until 2028<sup>4</sup>. The initial budget was €3m<sup>5</sup>. The final expenditure totalled €6.67m and €1.2m of this was valued as 'reusable'<sup>6</sup>.

### The National Paediatric Hospital Project

*Lifecycle type: Linear. (Design-Bid-Build)*

The National Paediatric Hospital Project (NPH Project), also known as the 'Children's Hospital' is the most sizable investment programme ever conducted by Ireland's Healthcare system. It was designed to combine the services of three tertiary children's hospitals.

The project has faced many issues since its inception, which has led to mounting costs and delays and consequently, high levels of scrutiny of: the client; the National Paediatric Development Board (NPHDB); the main contractor BAM Ireland; Turner and Townsend, responsible for project management and cost control; Arup and AECOM, the design engineers; and O'Connell Mahon & NBBJ, the design Architects.

The project's original deadline was 2023, however, a time of writing it remains under construction on the campus of St. James's Hospital in Dublin. The initial budget was €790m, however, as of 2024 it was forecasted at €2.24bn, not accounting for additional contractor claims of €856m in 2025<sup>7</sup>.

<sup>1</sup> Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. 2025. [Examination of The Arts Council Business Transformation Programme \(BTP\)](#). 6 Feb.

<sup>2</sup> The Arts Council 2023. [Annual Report](#).

<sup>3</sup> Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. 2025. [Examination of The Arts Council Business Transformation Programme \(BTP\)](#). 6 Feb.

<sup>4</sup> Irish Independent. 2025. [Arts Council told minister it was following spending rules as failed IT upgrade costs hit €6m](#)

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> The Arts Council. 2025. [Statement from the Arts Council regarding 2023 Annual Report](#)

<sup>7</sup> Committee of Public Accounts. 2025. [Debate: National Paediatric Hospital Development Board and Children's Health Ireland: Discussion](#). 22 May

## The Office of Public Works' Leinster House Bicycle Shed Project

### *Lifecycle type: Linear*

The Office of Public Works (OPW), was responsible for planning, procuring, project managing and financially overseeing the delivery of a covered bicycle project, holding 36 bikes on the parliamentary complex, which was delivered by external contractors and suppliers.

This project differs from the others, in that it was delivered close to schedule (planned: mid-January 2024, delivered: mid-April 2024), budget (original: €350,000, exc. VAT, final: €336,000, inc. VAT), and scope (albeit an inadequate scope). The project gained notoriety due to its disproportionate original and final cost of €336,000 for a modest bicycle shed, which led to widespread public criticism. Further developments revealed that the project did not have a formal business case, it was procured through a standard OPW framework, and due to its budgetary value, no value-for-money assessment was officially required or used<sup>8</sup>.

OPW stated in September 2024 concern that: “this level of expenditure is not consistent with the scale of the project under consideration – a covered bicycle facility”<sup>9</sup>, and requested an audit be conducted<sup>10</sup>.

## RTÉ's Enterprise Resource Planning and IT system Project

### *Lifecycle type: Linear*

The broadcaster, RTÉ, developed an Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) and IT project which aimed to replace five legacy systems used by Finance and HR at RTÉ, which were at, or near, end of life. It was funded from the proceeds of RTÉ's land sale in 2017<sup>11</sup>.

<sup>12</sup> RTÉ's 'big bang' deployment approach intended to roll out both HR and Finance systems simultaneously, which ultimately was unsuccessful.

The ERP project was planned for 2021 but failed and was written off in April 2025. The initial budget for the project was undisclosed by RTÉ, but the final cost came to €3.6m<sup>13</sup>.

<sup>8</sup> OPW. 2024. [Review of the Covered Bicycle Parking Project – Leinster House](#). 24 Sept.

<sup>9</sup> BreakingNews.ie. 2024. ['Extraordinary' cost of Leinster House bike shelter was not acceptable, OPW chair says](#)

<sup>10</sup> OPW. 2024. [Review of the Covered Bicycle Parking Project – Leinster House](#). 24 Sept.

<sup>11</sup> RTÉ. 2025. [RTÉ Statement – Enterprise Resource Planning \(ERP\) project](#)

<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> PM 360 Consulting. 2025. [Another IT Failure RTE Dublin – Not surprising in the project world](#).

## Cross-project project management failings

This section explores the common project management failings that occurred across the case studies. Whilst the issues have been positioned in each subsection, those identified in one area will most certainly have influenced others.

### Governance and accountability

Project governance covers the framework of authority and accountability that defines and controls the outputs, outcomes and benefits from projects, programmes and portfolios<sup>14</sup>. Strong governance incorporates effective policies, regulations, processes, procedures and functions, and delegated responsibility. It is essential to success and providing confidence to stakeholders, yet each case revealed governance weaknesses.

At an Oireachtas Arts Committee meeting concerning the Arts Council Business Transformation Programme, the outgoing Council Director revealed that nearly 60 warning letters about the project sent to one senior civil servant were ignored, and not shared with high-ranking officials, which she said was “very disappointing and frustrating”<sup>15</sup>. The Department of Culture admitted this governance breakdown as its own failing, with the Secretary General of the Department stating “...we should have said stop much earlier”<sup>16</sup>. These Council’s governance shortcomings were in some instances “mirrored” in those oversight failings of the Department for Culture<sup>17</sup>, indicating governance vacuums are systemic problems. There were recurrent process failures from both directions: the Council did not seek sanctions to increase budgets and resources, correspondingly, the Department did not require the Council to seek authorisation<sup>18</sup>. Perhaps the most crucial failure, was the absence of a procedure to escalate cost overruns to the Secretary General, or Minister<sup>19</sup>. The fragmented oversight of the project and accountability gaps, as evidenced in a ‘blame game’, in this case, between civil servants, led the Committee to call into question the Department’s ability to effectively govern and operate<sup>20</sup>.

In the National Paediatric Hospital Project, the PwC review evidenced confusion and overlap in responsibilities<sup>21</sup>. This was an ominous sign, as the scale, delivery timeframe, and numerous stakeholders involved dictated strong coordination. There were multiple layers of oversight, without clarity of individual roles: accountability was split between the National Paediatric Development Board, the HSE and the Department of Health. Dáil Éireann’s Committee of Public Accounts (PAC) and PwC frequently critiqued the ambiguity over the liability for costs and cost escalation<sup>22</sup><sup>23</sup>. Moreover, the Oireachtas was not effectively informed transparently about the risks, as evidenced by insufficient reports to the PAC<sup>24</sup>. Finally, the HOC’s limited oversight of the project led to ineffective risk management and the significant public reaction to what was deemed as wasteful spending of public money on a high-profile site.

RTÉ wrote down €3.6m on its failed Enterprise Resource Planning and IT system Project, highlighting governance and oversight failures. Summaries of EY’s review found that whilst

<sup>14</sup> APM. 2025. *APM Body of Knowledge*. 8th edition.

<sup>15</sup> Joint Committee on Arts, Media, Communications, Culture and Sport. 2025. [Arts Council Grant Management IT System: Discussion](#)

<sup>16</sup> Irish Examiner. 2025. [‘Civil servant ignored 60 letters about issues with Arts Council’s failed IT project, committee told’](#)

<sup>17</sup> Joint Committee on Arts, Media, Communications, Culture and Sport. 2025. [Arts Council Grant Management IT System: Discussion](#)

<sup>18</sup> Ibid.

<sup>19</sup> Ibid.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> PWC. 2019. [New Children’s Hospital Independent review of escalation in costs](#).

<sup>22</sup> Ibid.

<sup>23</sup> Committee of Public Accounts. 2025. [Committee of Public Accounts \(PAC\) to examine 2023 Financial Statements of National Paediatric Hospital Development Board and Children’s Health Ireland](#)

<sup>24</sup> Irish Times. 2025. [Children’s hospital costs: Failure to inform official appearing at PAC about extra €107m ‘undermines public confidence’](#)

three project sponsors were identified, but there was no single primary owner<sup>25</sup>. Moreover, the project's steering committee "did not appear to consistently exercise its authority" over initiation and design decisions when delays were being reported<sup>26</sup>. EY also found that the 'big bang' deployment approach decision (a strategy suited to simpler concepts) evidenced limited consideration of the complexity or risk profile of the project itself, indicating that the steering committee was not adequately consulted, or engaged in this decision<sup>27</sup>. Overall, unclear lines of accountability diffused responsibility and made it more difficult to adjust and correct the direction of the project.

Within these cases, governance vacuums allowed scopes to shift, resulting in poor decision-making, blame-shifting, overlooking critical warnings and oversight breakdown. We repeatedly see an absence of a clear, single point of ownership and limited evidence of effective project sponsorship, further contributing to decision paralysis and derailing projects. These poor practices had severe consequences on project outcomes, such as reduced value for money, wasted funds and reputational damage.

### **Initiation, scope definition, and cost management**

A recurring theme throughout all these cases is the relationship between weak, undeveloped definitions across scopes, business cases and subsequent project management plans, leading to escalating costs. Ill-defined benefits and deliverables contributed to the risk of scope creep and disputes over requirements from the outset. Poorly communicated project updates undermined the initial baseline estimates, further complicating matters.

The Arts Council Business Transformation Programme intended to follow an iterative lifecycle approach, suited to software development. However, the Council was "not prepared for the scale of the project and did not put in place adequate resources to deliver it"<sup>28</sup>, for example, it was noted the Council underinvested in internal expertise and preferred external suppliers<sup>29</sup>. The idea to upgrade the IT systems was noted as an "entirely worthy objective"<sup>30</sup>, but the BTP project had no clear, measurable benefits baseline, or realisation plan to track if benefits were being achieved, evidencing poor scope and business case development, contributing to increased costs and risk<sup>31</sup>. Moreover, the business case did not set out the full costs, in direct contradiction of the Public Spending code, nor were these costs detailed before the procurement process began<sup>32</sup>.

The National Paediatric Hospital Project followed a traditional linear lifecycle of Design-Bid-Build that is typical of large public infrastructure projects. This model relied on design certainty before construction; however, the design was not fully finalised before construction began, which is why significant problems arose when design changes occurred mid-build<sup>33</sup>. The success of a linear approach is dependent on a constant scope and strong governance. The Definitive Business Case (DBC) contained errors and did not align with the Public Spending Code<sup>34</sup>. Moreover, the DBC overstated the maturity of project and confidence forecasts, whilst it understated complexity and risks<sup>35</sup>. The failure to create a detailed robust planning process to establish a Guaranteed Maximum Price (GMP), "created

<sup>25</sup> PM 360 Consulting. 2025. [Another IT Failure RTE Dublin – Not surprising in the project world](#).

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid.

<sup>28</sup> DCCS. 2025. [Statement by Minister O'Donovan on Arts Council 2023 Annual Report & Financial Statements](#)

<sup>29</sup> Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. 2025. [Examination of The Arts Council Business Transformation Programme \(BTP\)](#). 6 Feb.

<sup>30</sup> Joint Committee on Arts, Media, Communications, Culture and Sport. 2025. [Arts Council Grant Management IT System: Discussion](#)

<sup>31</sup> Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. 2025. [Examination of The Arts Council Business Transformation Programme \(BTP\)](#). 6 Feb.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid.

<sup>33</sup> PwC. 2019. [New Children's Hospital Independent review of escalation in costs](#). 5 April.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid.

a situation in which the approved project could never be delivered within the financial parameters agreed”<sup>36</sup>. The costs were underestimated from the onset and heightened by various changes to design and contractor claims. As of May 2025, 3,277 claims were received and the value of the substantiated claims totalled €856m<sup>37</sup>, evidencing significant cost escalation<sup>38</sup>. The NPH Project’s budget in 2013 (for initial plans at a different site) was €790m, the DBC then increased this number to €983m in 2017, by December 2018, costs rose to €1.43bn, and by 2019, an additional €293m was outlined as required, on top of the 2018 figure<sup>39</sup>. In 2024, the then Minister for Health confirmed the total approved budget was €2.24bn<sup>40</sup>, more than three times the original budget.

Whilst the OPW Leinster House Bicycle Shed project followed a practical linear approach suited to construction, the project’s scope was weak, and the design decisions were “conservation-led” to align with the “historic setting” of Parliament<sup>41</sup>. These problems, alongside the absence of a formal business case, essential to justifying the strategic rationale, contributed to the extraordinary cost. An internal review stated that the simple assessment OPW conducted should have placed “a greater emphasis on the value for money aspects of the project”<sup>42</sup>. There was no requirement to conduct a cost-benefit analysis of the shed, and Deloitte found no value-for-money assessment was used to determine if the benefits justified the costs, nor is this the standard for OPW projects below €500,000<sup>43</sup>. The original total cost estimate of €350,000 was noted as set “by the relevant officer within the defined OPW financial thresholds”<sup>44</sup>. As highlighted in the governance section, the OPW did not communicate an estimate of the costs to the Houses of the Oireachtas Commission (HOC) prior to the project’s approval being received, or at any stage of the project<sup>45</sup>, further reducing capacity to effectively manage costs.

RTÉ’s decision to use the ERP ‘Big Bang’ deployment approach (a plan to replace both the HR and Finance systems at the same time) was a risk heavy decision, as the broadcaster was found by EY to have limited experience of an ERP project of this scale<sup>46</sup>. This approach limited the flexibility that the project team needed, whilst an iterative rollout would have minimised the risk. The above decisions indicated the presence of optimism bias, and the absence of thorough project vetting, as reinforced by EY’s scepticism towards the business case, when EY questioned if it was “grounded in reality and tightly managed”<sup>47</sup>. This point is further reinforced by the justification of the procurement decision through the lens of economic viability<sup>48</sup> and the absence of effective consideration of the supplier’s delivery competence.

In each case, insufficient attention was devoted to the early phases of the projects, indicating limited project expertise, as evidenced by poor lifecycle decisions, weak business cases and underdeveloped definitions of the values and benefits to be delivered. These failures undermined the project teams and stakeholders understanding, leading to inaccuracies of the defined work and inadequate scrutiny of costs from the onset, undermined benefit realisation and cost escalation.

<sup>36</sup> PwC. 2019. [New Children’s Hospital Independent review of escalation in costs](#). 5 April.

<sup>37</sup> Committee of Public Accounts. 2025. [Debate: National Paediatric Hospital Development Board and Children’s Health Ireland: Discussion](#). 22 May

<sup>38</sup> PwC. 2019. [New Children’s Hospital Independent review of escalation in costs](#). 05 April.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid.

<sup>40</sup> Oireachtas. 2024. [Questions on the National Children’s Hospital](#). 7 Nov.

<sup>41</sup> OPW. 2024. [Review of the Covered Bicycle Parking Project – Leinster House](#). 24 Sept.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid.

<sup>43</sup> OPW and Deloitte. 2025. [Internal Audit Report - Capital Expenditure Review](#)

<sup>44</sup> OPW. 2024. [Review of the Covered Bicycle Parking Project – Leinster House](#). 24 Sept.

<sup>45</sup> OPW and Deloitte. 2025. [Internal Audit Report - Capital Expenditure Review](#)

<sup>46</sup> PM 360 Consulting. 2025. [Another IT Failure RTE Dublin – Not surprising in the project world](#).

<sup>47</sup> Ibid.

<sup>48</sup> RTÉ. 2025. [RTÉ Statement – Enterprise Resource Planning \(ERP\) project](#)

## Schedule and delivery delays

All four projects experienced some sort of schedule delay against the original timelines, signalling the presence of deeper project management issues. Poorly defined project management plans undermine project teams' understanding of the work and the deliverables. Poor schedule management can be evidenced by indications of weak or absent breakdown structures, resultant of unclear identification of the work to be delivered to meet the outputs.

The proposed "system that was later found to be complex, difficult to support and update, and identify and track defects"<sup>49</sup>, evidenced issues with work breakdown structures. It did not establish or maintain a complete cost breakdown structure (CBS), as evidenced by full costs not being set out in the business case and no final estimate of the project costs<sup>50</sup>. Moreover, the scopes were expanded or changed on several occasions without re-planning, indicating weak Product Breakdown Structure (PBS) and Work Breakdown Structures (WBS). Finally, the "project and timeline for implementation proved to be extremely challenging and possibly unrealistic"<sup>51</sup>, indicating that tasks were not effectively sequenced and lacked effective task planning, reinforcing a weak WBS and unstable schedule baseline.

The National Paediatric Hospital Project has just missed its 16<sup>th</sup> completion deadline<sup>52</sup> and some officials fear it may not fully reopen until 2027<sup>53</sup>. The PwC review indicated faults in the breakdown structure models: it found the original budget was flawed and risks were understated, with the process for determining the Guaranteed Maximum Price determined as "poorly coordinated and controlled"<sup>54</sup> suggesting the CBS was not effectively measured. Finally, the design remained to be finalised in the agreed packages of work for the main construction phase<sup>55</sup>, indicating the WBS was incomplete, and risk management processes were deemed ineffective.

Whilst the OPW Bicycle Shed project was delayed by mere months, the build time was disproportionately long for the size of the project, which in part was due to unforeseen site issues, evidencing insufficient attention dedicated to the planning phase of the project<sup>56</sup>.

RTÉ's Enterprise Resource Planning and IT System Project, which began in 2018, was behind schedule by January 2019, in part due to limited resources and over-ambitious timelines. The decision to go for the most cost-effective option led ultimately to the choice of supplier that would not be able to fulfil the complex project's timescales. The project was further derailed by the COVID-19 pandemic disruption in 2020. RTÉ terminated the contract with one supplier, which led to a settlement agreement and further delays. RTÉ worked with the other supplier to agree a plan to deliver the maximum possible value of the contract, however ultimately the project was written off in April 2025.

As outlined above, the delays present in each case were often predictable and a result of missed baselines, limitations in breakdown structures and the absence of clear delivery schedules and ownership.

<sup>49</sup> Department of Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport and Media. 2025. [Examination of The Arts Council Business Transformation Programme \(BTP\)](#). 6 Feb.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Irish Times. 2025. [New children's hospital misses 16th completion deadline, now three years behind schedule](#)

<sup>53</sup> Irish Independent. 2025. [Latest National Children's Hospital construction delay could push full opening to 2027](#)

<sup>54</sup> PWC. 2019. [New Children's Hospital Independent review of escalation in costs](#). 05 April.

<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> TheStory.ie. 2025. [OPW halted work on €336,000 Leinster House bicycle shelter after unexpected discovery of manhole on the site](#)

## Social, economic and political pressures

Whilst internal project-related decisions have a significant impact on project outcomes, the external social, economic and political context should not be underestimated. Big projects in the public eye face huge pressure and individuals can be crucial to championing projects and getting sponsors on board. They can often bow down to pressure and make quick decisions to redirect, pause, or even cancel<sup>57</sup>. We tend to see projects stand out in regions if they are unconventional and as a result these projects can face intense local scrutiny<sup>58</sup>. Financial influences, from inflation to financial crashes, further impact stakeholder confidence in projects. Finally, uncertainty due to ever changing and unpredictable global events impact supply chain stability, leading to delays with sometimes disastrous consequences.

As highlighted earlier, the Arts Council Business Transformation Programme project faced various governance challenges that appeared to be a systemic issue shared with the Department of Culture. These challenges impeded transparency and led to reduced Ministerial comprehension of the transformation programme and poor decision making. The Arts Council Director said the disruption caused by the COVID-19 pandemic contributed to the project's failure<sup>59</sup>. She described the intense pressure it put on the Department and stated it was partially responsible for the failure to share the critical warning correspondence<sup>60</sup>.

The long-term delivery timeframe of the National Paediatric Hospital Project meant that the project was delivered through various ministerial changes, with differing priorities and outlooks influencing the project. Projects which surpass election cycles risk inconsistent levels of support. This project, defined as one of the government's priorities by the PAC<sup>61</sup> and the most sizable investment into Ireland's healthcare system, was under significant pressure to progress rather than reassess, notwithstanding the significant costs. This is a common problem across major projects, where ministers persevere due to the pressure to 'deliver', rather than make the slower, calculated decisions that are central to effective project management practice. The project was also inhibited by the COVID-19 pandemic with construction work forced to halt on 31 March 2020<sup>62</sup>. The work had still not restarted seven weeks after restrictions on construction sites were lifted on 18 May 2020<sup>63</sup>. This delay was due to a dispute between the contractor and the board, related to accountability for the costs of closure and reopening of the site, this postponement alone was expected to cost up to €30m<sup>64</sup>.

The OPW Leinster House Bicycle Shed Project was poorly assessed in its scoping and early construction phases. It came under significant political scrutiny later, due to public outcry at the significant costs. This led to the OPW commissioning an audit from Deloitte. The audit led to the pausing of further related works as it "identified the absence of some fundamental good practices in how certain elective capital works (including the bike shelter) below the €500K threshold are being initiated, approved, managed and delivered"<sup>65</sup>. Whilst the impact on the project itself was negligible, as construction had finished, the wave of public fury at what was perceived as 'frivolous' spending of public money had serious reputational consequences for the OPW and the HOC.

<sup>57</sup> DODS. 2025. [The Politics of Projects in Westminster and Public Sector Initiatives](#).

<sup>58</sup> Ibid.

<sup>59</sup> Joint Committee on Arts, Media, Communications, Culture and Sport. (2025) [Arts Council Grant Management IT System: Discussion](#)

<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> Committee of Public Accounts. 2021 Accounts to the National Paediatric Hospital Development Board [R1298 PAC33](#)

<sup>62</sup> Irish Times. 2020. [Work on children's hospital halted over Covid-19 costs stand-off](#)

<sup>63</sup> Ibid.

<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> OPW and Deloitte. 2025. [Internal Audit Report - Capital Expenditure Review](#)

RTÉ is partially publicly funded body that faced significant political scrutiny from the public<sup>66</sup>, which amplified pressures on the respective project teams. RTÉ was already under significant strain, due to the payment scandal<sup>67</sup> revealed in 2023. This scandal may have influenced the broadcaster's cautious risk approach for costly projects and potentially led to the decision to proceed with the cheapest and least realistic proposal for the Enterprise Resource Planning and IT System Project<sup>68</sup>. Moreover, the ERP rollout was also further impacted by the COVID-19 disruptions<sup>69</sup>.

The cases illustrate the ways in which external influences have the potential to shape narratives around projects which, as a result, can lead to heightened pressure to perform and make decisions which may not align with best project practices, often to a project's detriment.

### Procurement and contract management issues

Project procurement and management of suppliers can influence the level of risk, whether it is shared and, consequently, how contractors deliver projects. Contractor changes result in new estimates of work to be delivered, cost escalations and delays.

Legal cases brought against the contractors in the Arts Council Business Transformation Programme amounted to €60,000 in June 2025 and were projected to rise to €119,000 as a result of procurement failures<sup>70</sup>. The programme demonstrated failures ranging from inadequate sanctions for budget and resources, to limitations in the understanding of the requirements, and poor assessments of the technical and financial feasibility<sup>71</sup>. The Arts Council Director stated that since the BTP's cancellation, the Council had recruited in-house expertise and tightened processes "in terms of contract management" which she identified as "a major failing of this [project]"<sup>72</sup>.

With regards to the Children's Hospital, PwC's review found that the significant underestimate of the outturn cost was attributed to problems with procurement, strategy and budgeting<sup>73</sup>. The understanding of "the risk profile associated with the procurement and contracting strategy was poor at all levels of the governance structure"<sup>74</sup>, this enabled disputes to go unaddressed until they became crises. The procurement strategy's mitigation option for the GMP process, was an "unrealistic option" that further increased risk in the process<sup>75</sup>. In response to that delay, the Health Minister stated that claims of near completion were "not credible" and expressed concern over the contractor's ability to meet its work programme<sup>76</sup>.

The Bicycle shed project's initial cost estimate was produced by a "relevant officer"<sup>77</sup> within the OPW. The project was not required to undergo a competitive bidding process but selected an existing supplier from a pre-approved list, following the OPW's approved Measured Term Maintenance Contract (MTMC) framework<sup>78</sup>. This framework was essential to the procurement process, as it enabled specified flexible suppliers to work in specific time

<sup>66</sup> The Currency. [RTÉ and Arts Council fiascos show the State is still far away from best practice on IT projects](#).

<sup>67</sup> BBC. 2023. [Ryan Tubridy: Why Ireland is gripped by the RTÉ pay scandal](#)

<sup>68</sup> RTÉ. 2025. [RTÉ Statement – Enterprise Resource Planning \(ERP\) project](#)

<sup>69</sup> RTÉ. 2025. [RTÉ confirms €3.6 million write-down over partly failed IT project](#)

<sup>70</sup> Breakingnews.ie. 2025. [Arts Council has spent €60,000 on legal action over failed grants system](#)

<sup>71</sup> Joint Committee on Arts, Media, Communications, Culture and Sport. (2025) [Arts Council Grant Management IT System: Discussion](#)

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> PWC. 2019. [New Children's Hospital Independent review of escalation in costs](#). 05 April.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid.

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

<sup>76</sup> Irish Times. 2025. [National children's hospital developer BAM's claims 'not credible', says Minister](#)

<sup>77</sup> OPW. 2024. [Review of the Covered Bicycle Parking Project – Leinster House](#). 24 Sept.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid.

periods, during recess periods. However, the pre-approved list reduced competition here, contributing towards the more competitive price.

RTÉ's main failing from a procurement standpoint was the decision to choose the lowest priced tender option for the project in 2018, which led to immediate issues, with the project behind schedule by January 2019<sup>79</sup>. The supplier was found by a summary of EY's review to have limited experience in HR systems<sup>80</sup>. Issues arose immediately due to insufficient resources allocation from both the suppliers and RTÉ<sup>81</sup>. The issues led to the termination of the contract with one of the selected suppliers, reinforcing that the contract was not effectively supervised<sup>82</sup>.

Weak procurement and contract management structures had negative impacts on project costs, scopes and schedules, as processes were often limited, or not followed, or not enforced effectively.

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<sup>79</sup> RTÉ. 2025. [RTÉ Statement – Enterprise Resource Planning \(ERP\) project](#)

<sup>80</sup> PM 360 Consulting. 2025. [Another IT Failure RTE Dublin – Not surprising in the project world](#).

<sup>81</sup> RTÉ. 2025. [RTÉ Statement – Enterprise Resource Planning \(ERP\) project](#).

<sup>82</sup> RTÉ. 2025. [RTÉ confirms €3.6 million write-down over partly failed IT project](#)

## Lessons learned

Projects appeared to suffer from fragmented authority structures and unclear escalation routes, possibly suggesting weak governance processes. These limitations led to scope drift and decision paralysis. Ambiguity and undocumented actions, where authority and accountability are concerned, leads to delay and confusion as the default. These cases demonstrated willingness to learn from these issues, for example, the Arts Council project led the PAC to recommend that the Department of Culture “must develop and enforce stronger oversight mechanisms for funded bodies”<sup>83</sup>, this was reinforced by the commissioning of a full review of Arts Council governance in early 2025<sup>84</sup>. Similarly, the PAC’s recognition of the National Paediatric Development Board’s testimony<sup>85</sup> further signalled growing official acceptance of the need to reform.

Early project decisions were poorly judged, leading to ill-defined scopes and weakened cost management. When vital project decisions are not thoroughly assessed, such as the project lifecycle design or benefits definitions, it signals insufficient competence and probable project breakdown. Businesses cases must be effectively justified, and costs must be scrutinised, even in small-scale projects, or we risk scope creep, leading to reputational damage and public mistrust. Positive steps towards enhancing early project decisions were taken by the OPW, which accepted Deloitte’s observation that the bicycle shed project did not demonstrate value for money<sup>86</sup>. Now, OPW is working to implement the audit’s recommendations to strengthen cost control measures of its sub-€500k projects<sup>87</sup>.

Limitations in agreements on an integrated baseline schedule impacted project delivery, led to the normalisation of delays and reduced efficiency in management of work packages. As a result, many project teams’ actions were reactive, rather than proactively and strategically planned.

Project teams must have the foresight to strategically prepare for volatility in projects, by considering potential external pressures influenced by political, environmental or financial factors. In many circumstances, projects experienced disruptions which could have been avoided if more time was spent evaluating and anticipating issues and risks.

Finally, projects need effective procurement and contract management measures, which set out clear requirements, documentation and oversight. Without these measures, we will continue to see weak working relationships, with poorly enforced contracts and heightened delivery risks. We see the ongoing impacts of poor contract management with regards to the National Paediatric Hospital Project, in the ongoing blame game between the contractor and state, evidencing the consequences of ineffective contemplation of scope, governance and risk.

<sup>83</sup> Committee of Public Accounts. 2025. [Report on the Examination of the 2023 Appropriation Account for Vote 33 – Tourism, Culture, Arts, Gaeltacht, Sport, and Media 2023, and the 2023 Financial Statements of the Arts Council and the National Gallery of Ireland](#). November.

<sup>84</sup> Department of Culture, Communications and Sport. 2025. [Statement by Minister O'Donovan on Arts Council 2023 Annual Report & Financial Statements](#)

<sup>85</sup> Committee of Public Accounts. 2025. [Debate: National Paediatric Hospital Development Board and Children's Health Ireland: Discussion](#). 22 May

<sup>86</sup> OPW and Deloitte. 2025. [Internal Audit Report - Capital Expenditure Review](#)

<sup>87</sup> OPW. 2025. [Statement on Internal Audit report](#). 15 May 2025

## Applying our lessons to future projects

Whilst the study's remit is limited, it has granted significant insight into common cross-project issues, which strikingly repeat across very different projects. These failings are not unique to Ireland. Every Government struggles with these issues. But in Ireland we see that the state has a receptiveness to change. To do this, officials must lead targeted, system-wide reform to enhance competence in projects and strengthen delivery outcomes.

### 1) A need for project authority and leadership

Targeting project teams to ensure they have adequate levels of competence to deliver is futile without considering the 'top' and how officials must lead by example. It is essential to consider the governance structures, sponsors and authorities that influence projects.

- Recommendation 1) An emphasis on accountability and transparency around public spending and communication of spending decisions. An examination of project standards and processes across all areas of projects. This could include:
  - Championing effective project sponsorship to uphold a high standard of governance across projects.
  - The application of sensible vetting procedures for publicly funded projects.
  - Appraisals of business case frameworks, reviews and related processes, and a greater focus on benefits realisation (economic, cultural, social and environmental).
  - Mandated high-level communication processes for project spending decisions.
  - A renewed focus on embracing a culture of accountability and transparency in projects and encouragement of embracing lessons learned.
- Recommendation 2) The Accelerating Infrastructure Taskforce must continue to consult project professionals from existing internal and external bodies on how the Government should lead project delivery. This could include:
  - A series of in-depth and far-reaching consultations covering project delivery across Ireland. In addition to engagement with expert project strategists from neighbouring and similar countries.
  - Consideration of the creation of a formal project-delivery authority in Government, charged with defining and upholding project standards. A new approach could be based upon the UK Government's National Infrastructure and Service Transformation Authority (NISTA), with whom Irish civil servants have been in contact.

### 2) An enhanced focus on skills development

Project skills did not meet the required standards of project delivery in any of the case studies and highlight the need to determine the correct levels of, and uphold, project competence.

- Recommendation 3) Research into, and investment in, project expertise in both Government-led projects and publicly funded projects. A focus on enhancing project disciplines where weaknesses have been identified. This could include:

- Mandates for proven levels of competence in projects of a certain calibre. Some Governments advocate for Senior Responsible Owners to be Chartered Project Professionals (ChPP), or the equivalent, for projects of a certain size<sup>88</sup>. Moreover, Government agencies recognise that the increased professionalisation associated with Chartered Project Professionals is an assurance of delivery<sup>89</sup>.
- Development of the MyProjectIreland interactive Map and Tracker. The addition of more and highly detailed data would grant greater insight into future skills needs - NISTA's new 10-year interactive infrastructure pipeline<sup>90</sup> is a good example of this.
- Recommendation 4) An enhanced focus on continuous professional development in projects. Consideration of the training and resource already available and development this across Government departments and public bodies. This could include:
  - revisions to guidance documents, such as 'Project Management Handbook' for Public Servants<sup>91</sup>, which are informed principally by consultation with Ireland-based project practitioners. These could for example be updated with improved guidance on cost management and risk management.
  - Integrating the Project Management Cases<sup>92</sup> study material that is already available into a user-friendly 'lessons learned' platform or website to enhance learning.
  - A move away from funding project skills purely on a 'case by case', or 'project by project' basis, (for example Project Ireland 2040's Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund<sup>93</sup>). Instead, considering country wide development and retention of project-related skills for the future, crucial to Ireland's development through a project 'skills pipeline' or similar.

<sup>88</sup> PA Consulting. 2024. APM Chartered Project Professional. Investigating the Return on Investment to APM Corporate Organisations (The study refers to specific departments within the UK Government)

<sup>89</sup> PA Consulting. 2024. APM Chartered Project Professional. Investigating the Return on Investment to APM Corporate Organisations

<sup>90</sup> NISTA. 2025. [Infrastructure Pipeline](#)

<sup>91</sup> Gov.ie. 2025. [Better Public Services: Project Management Resources](#)

<sup>92</sup> Ibid.

<sup>93</sup> Enterprise. 2025. [Disruptive Technologies Innovation Fund](#)