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Note from the editor

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It has been a pleasure to edit this special edition of *Administration* to mark the retirement from the Institute of Public Administration (IPA), after thirty-five years, of Dr Richard Boyle. When I initially considered that a special edition of the Journal would be a fitting tribute for Richard, who for the past decade has been Director of Research and Publishing, my first task was to approach possible contributors. I hoped that these would include both senior practitioners and academics with an interest in the public service, reflecting one of the objectives of the IPA Research Division – to bridge the gap between academia and the public service. The esteem in which Richard is held is evidenced in the fact that all those I approached were delighted to contribute. Indeed, we could probably have filled two special editions, such is the breadth of Richard’s interests and collaborations. It was a similar experience when I came to finding peer reviewers. This is the task that editors dread most, but again it was pushing an open door. As soon as Richard’s name was mentioned, notwithstanding the unprecedented busyness of autumn 2020 for many in education and the public service, those asked readily agreed to peer review the papers in this edition and support an initiative in tribute to Richard. Reviews were done in a very rigorous manner and greatly assisted the authors in finalising their contributions.

The edition was framed around key public service reform and policy challenges. The areas chosen are ones which we regard as

particularly pertinent and, where possible, the objective was to indicate ways forward in addition to reflecting backward. Our realisation that December 2020 marked a decade since the troika bailout provided a useful reference point for reflections. Having emerged from the years of austerity and, notwithstanding Brexit, with a reasonably positive economic outlook, it seemed likely that papers would conclude on a fairly positive note. However, in March 2020 the Covid-19 pandemic took centre stage in an absolutely unimaginable manner. The impact on the Irish economy and society has been seismic. While most of the papers reference Covid-19, such is the scale of its impact, it is impossible at this point to assess its effect in any meaningful way. However, the conclusions of many of the papers highlight ways in which the capacity of the public service could be enhanced. Undoubtedly, building capacity will help the state confront the many challenges of a post-Covid world.

The twelve papers in this special edition are grouped into three sections. The first set of papers draw on a wealth of experience of the Irish public service – Richard's own reflections, and those of Robert Watt & Michael Perkins, Dermot McCarthy, Muiris MacCarthaigh and Peter Thomas. These papers review public service reform over the past decade and provide some valuable insights and challenges. The second group of papers look at specific aspects of the reform agenda requiring further energy – William Roche & Joanna O'Riordan look at people issues, Mary Murphy & John Hogan focus on policy analysis, Gerry McNamara and colleagues examine performance management, Aidan Horan & Michael Mulreany look at governance issues, while John Healy & Madeleine Clarke reflect on citizen engagement. The final group of papers, by Mark Callanan, and Paul Umfreville & Lorcan Sirr, provide overviews, respectively, of reform in the key sectors of local government and housing. I would like to take this opportunity to thank all the contributors for their insightful contributions, which I believe have immense value for the public service.

I noted above the breadth of Richard's interest in and contribution to research on the public service. I think this is best reflected in the fact that all of the topics covered in this special edition are topics on which Richard himself has actively researched and written about in the course of his career. In addition to his research and writing, he has a long track record of supporting the public service through active involvement with a wide range of committees, including most recently the *Our Public Service 2020* management board.

Richard has also contributed immensely to the IPA. While he was willing to represent the Institute publicly or in the media when occasion required it, more typically it was behind the scenes, supporting the education, training and publishing dimensions of the Institute's work. On a personal level, having worked with Richard for twenty years, I have learned immensely from him. He has never been less than supportive, loyal and generous. The latter almost to a fault – my credentials to be the co-author of certain papers were marginal!

Richard, with very best wishes from your colleagues for what we know will be an active retirement!