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## Civil service, 2016

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In May a new partnership government was formed, comprising Fine Gael, members of the Independent Alliance and a number of other independent TDs. The following departments were renamed:

- Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (formerly Arts, Heritage and the Gaeltacht);
- Communications, Climate Action and Environment (formerly Communications, Energy and Natural Resources);
- Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (formerly Environment, Community and Local Government).

Environment functions were transferred to the Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment, although water functions remain the responsibility of the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government.

### Civil service renewal

The focus on reform and renewal continued throughout 2016. In July the second progress report on implementation of the *Civil Service Renewal Plan* was published, which focused on the second phase of implementation (Government of Ireland, 2016). The following are the details of progress on the actions that were prioritised during this phase:

- The government agreed a common governance standard for the civil service. Departments published their governance frameworks in accordance with the standard (Action 3).

- A new performance management policy was developed with the introduction of a new two-point rating format for the Performance Management and Development System, which identifies satisfactory and unsatisfactory performance (Action 11).
- A new performance review process for secretaries general is being developed. An enhanced performance review process for assistant secretaries is being implemented this year following a pilot programme in 2015 (Action 12).
- The second annual Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards ceremony was held in December (see Table 1 for a list of award winners) (Action 13).
- Guiding principles for the development of a staff mobility scheme across the civil service were approved by the Civil Service Management Board, following the implementation of an interdepartmental principal officer mobility policy in July 2015. Plans to pilot this scheme for clerical officers and executive officers are well advanced (Action 15).
- A new programme of organisational capability reviews commenced with a pilot review of the Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport (Action 20).
- A programme of engagement and communications with staff has been framed around the results of the first ever Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey (see further details below), along with town hall meetings at various locations across the country (Action 23).

Progress in other areas included the following:

- Open recruitment campaigns were held for most general service grades, as well as for specialised posts in the civil service (Action 8).
- A project management leaders/advisory service has been established, which will form the core of a broader project management network for the civil service. The inaugural Civil Service Project Management Network Conference took place on 19 December in Dublin Castle (Action 17).
- The *Transfer of Functions Guidelines and Best Practice Handbook*, which provides a standardised approach for managing the efficient reorganisation of departmental structures or functions when requested by government, was published in April (Action 21).
- Twenty-nine open policy debates have been held to date to engage policy networks of practitioners, academics and experts in a range

of policy issues, including education reform, the national risk assessment, the labour market symposium and future investment in early years education (Action 22).<sup>1</sup>

The Civil Service Management Board agreed priorities for the next phase of civil service renewal. Full implementation of Phase One and Two actions within departments, with a focus on delivering on human resource (HR) actions that will impact directly on staff, will remain a priority. The following specific actions will also be prioritised for Phase Three (Civil Service Management Board, 2016a):

- whole-of-government pathfinder learning outcomes (Action 5);
- developing strategic HR capability (Action 7);
- learning and development (Action 9);
- talent management programmes (Action 10);
- improving project management capacity (Action 17);
- strengthening policymaking skills (Action 22).

## **Employee engagement survey**

In January the results of the first ever employee engagement survey were published (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2016b). This survey is a key action in the *Civil Service Renewal Plan*. The survey, which was launched in September 2015, asked civil servants 112 questions about their views on working in the civil service. Over 15,500 Irish civil servants worldwide took part, providing their views on areas such as employee engagement, well-being, coping with change and commitment to the organisation. Some key results are listed below:<sup>2</sup>

- Civil servants are confident in their ability and skills to carry out the work required in their role (competence: 80 per cent).
- Staff feel they can realise their own potential and cope with the normal stresses of life (well-being: 75 per cent).
- Staff have a sense of energy, connection and fulfilment with their work (engagement: 70 per cent).

<sup>1</sup> Twenty-one in 2015 and eight up to October 2016 (Civil Service Management Board, 2016b).

<sup>2</sup> The percentages listed represent the average score for the corresponding outcome or theme. A score over 50 per cent means that more staff selected positive responses. A score under 50 per cent means that more staff selected negative responses.

- Staff feel they have the opportunities to develop close relationships at work (social support: 70 per cent).
- Staff feel they can cope with change, including managing any negative emotions (coping with change: 69 per cent).
- Civil servants do not feel they are valued by the general public (public perception: 33 per cent).
- Staff do not feel that they are openly involved in decision-making in their organisation (involvement climate: 36 per cent).
- Staff do not feel fairly rewarded for their efforts and contributions at work, and in comparison to others doing similar work (pay: 42 per cent).
- Staff do not feel that their organisation values their contribution and cares for their well-being (organisational support: 44 per cent).
- Staff do not feel that there are sufficient opportunities for career development, learning, mobility and promotion in the civil service (career development and mobility: 44 per cent).

## **Civil Service Excellence and Innovation awards**

The second annual Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards were held on 6 December in the Royal Hospital Kilmainham. Seventy-four nominations were received and thirty projects were shortlisted. The ten award winners are listed in Table 1.

## **Shared services**

The government approved the publication of the National Shared Services Office Bill in January, which provided for the establishment of the National Shared Services Office (NSSO) as a separate civil service office under the aegis of the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, with its own accounting officer. The NSSO was established in 2014 with responsibility for leading shared service strategy and implementation across the civil service, and providing guidance and support to other public service sectors in progressing their shared service commitments under the reform plan.

There are currently two shared services organisations in operation in the civil service: PeoplePoint (the HR and pensions administration shared service centre) and the Payroll Shared Service Centre. Progress is being made on a third organisation, a Financial Management Shared Services Centre. The implementation phase of this project has now commenced, following government approval to proceed to the

**Table 1: Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards, 2016**

<i>Project name</i>	<i>Department</i>	<i>Award</i>
Engagement and Innovation: Results Focused Partnership	Department of Social Protection	Leading Civil Service Renewal
Common Agricultural Policy – Direct Payments Systems	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine	Digital Excellence
Identifying New Designer Drugs in Post-Mortem Forensic Toxicology	The State Laboratory	Insight & Analysis
Early-Years Education-Focused Inspection	Department of Education and Skills	Excellence in Policy
Euro 2016	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	Excellence in Customer Service
Catchments.ie – Water from Source to Sea	Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government	Excellence in Innovation
Investment in New Recruits	Office of the Revenue Commissioners	Excellence in Skills Development
‘Digital First’ – Spatial Data Solution	Property Registration Authority	Excellence through Collaboration
MyGovID – SAFE	Department of Social Protection	World Class Civil Service
Ireland 2016 Centenary Programme	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade; Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs; Department of Education and Skills; Department of the Taoiseach; Department of Defence; Office of Public Works	Citizen Impact

next phase of the project. The development of a new finance technology solution for government has begun, which intends to replace thirty-one existing finance systems across government departments and offices, and facilitate transaction processing in the Financial Management Shared Services Centre.

## **Annual Progress Report on the Public Service Reform Plan 2014–16**

The second *Annual Progress Report on the Public Service Reform Plan 2014–16* was published in April (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2016a), setting out the progress made over the previous year in implementing the cross-cutting reform actions detailed in the plan. The report is structured around the four key areas of reform: service users; efficiency; openness, transparency and accountability; and leadership, renewal and organisational reform.

This year brings an end to the existing phase of public service reform. The next phase of reform, to cover 2017 through 2019, is currently being developed. Initial efforts are aimed at identifying which cross-cutting priorities should be included in the new plan. Part of this process has involved workshops with representatives from government departments and from a range of public service bodies.

### **Public service pay**

There were a number of public service pay disputes in 2016. In November the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Paschal Donohoe, TD, outlined a two-phased approach to securing the future of collective pay agreements.

Firstly, in October, the minister established a Public Service Pay Commission, which will be advisory in nature and will provide an initial report in the second quarter of 2017. The commission will not duplicate the work of the state's existing industrial relations bodies: the Workplace Relations Commission and the Labour Court. Its role will be to provide evidence-based, objective analysis on pay matters to assist department officials in discharging their negotiation function on behalf of government. For its initial report, the commission will provide input on how the unwinding of the Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest legislation should proceed. This is expected to inform any future engagement with staff representatives in

relation to pay. The members of the commission are Kevin Duffy (chair), Marian Corcoran, Ultan Courtney, Ruth Curran, Noel Dowling, Seán Lyons and Peter McLoone.

Separately, in November the minister announced that, following consideration by government, his department will invite the parties to the Lansdowne Road Agreement to discussions under Section Six (oversight and governance arrangements) of the agreement. These discussions will seek to address anomalies arising from the recent recommendations issued by the Labour Court in relation to the industrial relations disputes with members of An Garda Síochána.

## **Other developments**

Following the reform of the Public Service Sick Leave Scheme in 2015, the rate of sick leave across the public service fell below 4 per cent for the first time, according to figures published by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform in July. In the civil service the 2015 rate of sick leave was reported at 4.4 per cent, down just 0.1 per cent since 2013. The total cost of sick leave to the civil service in 2015 was reported as €38.9 million, a reduction of €10.4 million since 2013.

## **Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service**

The Irish Government Economic and Evaluation Service (IGEES) is an integrated cross-government service that was established in 2012 to support better policy formulation and implementation in the civil service through economic analysis and evaluation.

The IGEES medium-term strategy for 2016 to 2019 was launched on 27 October. The focus of the IGEES will be:

- to have a greater input into and impact on the policy analysis process;
- to generate an increased level of high-quality IGEES output to inform the policy debate.

The responsibility for achieving these aims will rest with the IGEES as a whole supported by a revised set of governance arrangements. With a view to fostering a coherent approach across the service, an IGEES business plan will form the basis for the output of the service year to year.



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