



DE GRUYTER  
OPEN

*Administration*, vol. 66, no. 1 (2018), pp. 9–16  
doi: 10.2478/admin-2018-0002

## Civil service, 2017

**Laura Shannon**

*Institute of Public Administration, Ireland*

With the election of a new Taoiseach, Leo Varadkar, TD, in June 2017, a number of changes were made to government departments. A new Department of Rural and Community Development was established, taking functions from the Department of Arts, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs (renamed the Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht), and from the Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government (renamed the Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government). The employment brief was moved to the Department of Social Protection to create the Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection. Finally, the Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation was renamed the Department of Business, Enterprise and Innovation.

### Civil service renewal

The *Civil Service Renewal Plan* (Government of Ireland, 2014) is currently in its final phase of delivery. In June the third progress report was launched, focusing on actions prioritised during the third phase of implementation. This phase centred on actions that directly impacted on staff, enhancing the capability of all civil servants and supporting the development of a high-performing and more accountable workforce. Six actions were prioritised in this phase:

- Action 5 – Improve the delivery of shared whole-of-government projects: Three pathfinder projects are piloting new ways for delivering whole-of-government work – the Public Services Card, the National Cyber Security Strategy and Youth Mental Health.
- Action 7 – Significantly develop strategic HR capability: A human resources strategy for the civil service was published in October, entitled *People Strategy for the Civil Service 2017–2020* (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2017). The strategy outlines forty actions under four headings: (i) be an employer of choice, (ii) build the workforce of the future, (iii) build, support and value managers as people developers, (iv) position HR as a strategic driver.
- Action 9 – Establish a new shared model for delivering learning and development: A core curriculum has been approved and contracts have been awarded to training providers across a range of courses. The service has been branded ‘OneLearning’.
- Action 10 – Introduce structured and transparent talent management programmes to develop future leaders: Pilot executive leadership programmes for assistant secretary and principal officer levels have been introduced. Work is underway on a framework to support the development of emerging leaders at all grades up to assistant principal level.
- Action 17 – Improve project management capacity: The Civil Service Project Management Leaders and Advisory Service and a Project Managers’ Network (PMN) have been established. The inaugural conference of the civil service PMN included the launch of a new project management handbook for the civil service. An online portal has been developed that provides access to project management guidance and resources.
- Action 22 – Strengthen policymaking skills and develop more open approaches to policymaking: Work is advancing on the development of a guidance framework for policymaking to support departments on the fundamental stages of policymaking. Open policy debates continue to be held and involve a network of practitioners, academics and experts in developing and debating policy options.

## Public sector reform

Across the wider public sector, a new overall strategy for development and innovation, *Our Public Service 2020* (Government of Ireland,

2017), was launched in December. The new policy framework is designed to build on previous reform initiatives while expanding the scope of reform to focus on collaboration, innovation and evaluation. As such, the framework encompasses many ongoing reform initiatives and strategies, including those related to ICT, HR and civil service renewal.

The new framework has been informed by engagement across the civil and public service and by public consultation. It has also been informed by an OECD assessment of the previous reform plan (OECD, 2017), particularly around outcomes, evidence, governance and innovation. The framework is built on three key pillars: delivering for our public, innovating for our future, and developing our people and organisations. Eighteen headline actions have been identified under these pillars. For the first time, a Public Service Leadership Board will be established to drive the reform agenda across the public service and to lead on the implementation of the eighteen actions.

### **Gender balance in the civil service**

In an effort to improve gender balance in the civil service, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform announced a new range of initiatives in January. These new measures are particularly aimed at the senior level, where women are under-represented. In 2016 the Public Appointments Service (PAS) completed nineteen campaigns for the Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC), from which appointments were made to senior management roles in the civil service. Women accounted for 33 per cent of the successful candidates, which was the same level as in 2015 (Public Appointments Service, 2017).

The new measures include a target of 50/50 gender balance for appointments at senior levels. The merit-based approach of ‘best person for the job’ will continue to apply. However, in cases where candidates who compete for TLAC positions are of equal merit, then priority would be given to the female candidate where females are under-represented on the management board of the department/office in question.

Leadership programmes have also been launched for the senior public service and principal officer level (on a pilot basis). The civil service will also participate in the programme of work being undertaken by the OECD on gender balance and learn from international best practice.

Alongside this, the Economic and Social Research Institute was commissioned to undertake research based on the 2015 *Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey* (CSEES). The research was published in December (Russell et al., 2017). In addition to analysis of the CSEES, the study also included in-depth work-history interviews with fifty senior civil servants across four departments and with eleven staff working in HR functions across departments, including the PAS. The study found that women currently make up 63 per cent of civil servants but only 33 per cent of assistant secretaries and 21 per cent of secretaries general (see Table 1 for a breakdown of female share at each civil service grade).

**Table 1: Overall number of civil servants by gender and grade, 2016**

<i>Grade (incl. equiv.)</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Female share (%)</i>
Secretary general	26	7	33	21.2
Second secretary	2	1	3	33.3
Deputy secretary	16	6	22	27.3
Assistant secretary	142	70	212	33.0
Principal officer	796	532	1,328	40.1
Assistant principal	1,991	1,835	3,826	48.0
Administrative officer	1,178	1,069	2,247	47.6
Higher executive officer	1,952	2,700	4,652	58.0
Executive officer	2,638	4,061	6,699	60.6
Staff officer	317	1,199	1,516	79.1
Clerical officer	3,216	9,500	12,716	74.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,274</b>	<b>20,980</b>	<b>33,254</b>	<b>63.1</b>

*Source:* Russell et al. (2017, p. 16).

*Note:* Data refer to total headcount numbers at October 2016. Excluded cases are: 25 cases of unknown gender, 4 cases of unknown grade and 1,236 ‘other’ grades.

**Civil service customer satisfaction surveys**

Two surveys were published in line with commitments in the *Civil Service Renewal Plan* to ‘run regular surveys of civil service customers to more fully understand user experiences, expectations and requirements’ (Government of Ireland, 2014, p. 33).

***Civil Service Business Customer Survey***

A representative survey of 534 Irish businesses was conducted during September and October 2016. The survey examined the interactions

that businesses have with the civil service, the level of satisfaction with the service provided and the overall satisfaction. The last such survey was conducted in 2009, and considerable change was reported in the methods used to contact the civil service. Some of the findings highlighted were as follows:

- 97 per cent of businesses have interacted with the civil service within the last twelve months; 32 per cent made contact via their accountant or other business professional.
- 83 per cent of businesses have interacted via online services, compared to 33 per cent in 2009.
- 82 per cent of businesses were satisfied with the service they received during their last transaction and 82 per cent were satisfied with the outcome of this interaction.
- When asked how they would speak of the civil service, 30 per cent of businesses said they would be advocates while 17 per cent would be critics; over half (53 per cent) would be neutral.
- Around seven in ten agreed that the civil service deals with businesses in a fair and equal way (71 per cent).
- The majority of respondents agreed (61 per cent) that the service provided by the civil service has improved in the last five years.

### ***Customer Satisfaction Survey 2017***

A similar survey was conducted with the general public customers of the civil service; this was the seventh such survey to be completed. The fieldwork was carried out in January and February 2017, with over 2,000 face-to-face interviews conducted nationwide. The main findings were as follows:

- Overall satisfaction levels for service delivery and outcome were the highest recorded to date. 83 per cent of customers were satisfied with the service they received (up from 76 per cent in 2015). 82 per cent were satisfied with the outcome of their most recent contact (also up from 76 per cent in 2015), and 87 per cent said service levels are mostly meeting or exceeding expectations (up from 83 per cent in 2015).
- The service delivered by civil service staff continues to rate favourably, while interactions in person show particularly strong improvements.
- The public's perceptions of civil service efficiency, trust, independence and equality have all increased.

An employee engagement survey was also conducted in late 2017, with results expected to be published in 2018. Over 21,300 civil servants from 51 departments/offices took part in the survey, which represents an increase of 5,847 respondents since 2015.

## **Legislation**

In November the Public Service Pay and Pensions Bill, 2017, was published. The bill gives effect to the provisions of the *Public Service Stability Agreement 2018–2020*, which was approved by government in June and ratified by the Public Services Committee of the Irish Congress of Trade Unions in September.

The Public Service Stability Agreement has a cost over the 2018–2020 period of €887 million. The benefits to different income groups range from 7.4 per cent for the lower paid to 6.2 per cent for the higher paid, over three years. They include restoration of pay cuts and the conversion of the existing FEMPI (Financial Emergency Measures in the Public Interest) Act's Pension Related Deduction into a permanent Additional Superannuation Contribution (ASC). At the end of this agreement pay cuts will be restored to all public servants earning up to €70,000, which is equal to almost 90 per cent of public servants. The ASC measures will ensure that over 70 per cent of public servants will be making a further permanent contribution to their pensions.

## **Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards 2017**

The winners of the Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards 2017 were announced on 27 November (see Table 2). The awards were established under the *Civil Service Renewal Plan* to recognise the achievements of civil servants and showcase examples of best practice and innovation in government departments and offices.

## **Other developments**

### ***Retirement age***

In December it was announced that the compulsory retirement age for public sector workers recruited before April 2004 will rise from sixty-five to seventy. Legislation will be necessary to effect these changes. The change removes an anomaly for those forced to retire at sixty-five but who are not eligible for the state pension until their sixty-sixth birthday.

**Table 2: Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards 2017**

<i>Award</i>	<i>Department</i>	<i>Project</i>
Citizen Impact	Office of the Revenue Commissioners	Enhanced online services for customers
Excellence in Customer Service	Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection	Social Insurance Statement
Excellence in Policy	Department of Health	National Cancer Strategy 2017–2026
Excellence in Innovation	Department of Children and Youth Affairs; Department of Health; Department of Education and Skills	A new model for allocation of special education teachers to schools
Digital Excellence	Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment	High Speed Broadband Map
Research, Analytics and Insight	Met Éireann; Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government	MÉRA (Met Éireann ReAnalysis)
Excellence Through Collaboration	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine; Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment	Farm Hazardous Waste Collection Scheme 2015–2016
Excellence in People, Skills and Organisational Development	Central Statistics Office	Better Data/Better Lives – Delivery of statistical and analytical expertise to the civil service
Leading Civil Service Renewal	Office of the Government Chief Information Officer; Department of Public Expenditure and Reform	Build to Share applications
World Class Civil Service	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	Online Passport Renewal

### ***Performance management***

A new two-point Performance Management and Development System rating format was introduced in 2016. The Civil Service Disciplinary Code came into effect in September 2016 and was accompanied by a handbook for line managers. The new management of under-performance policy came into effect from January 2017. Training has been made available to HR units and to line managers to support the management of performance. Over 5,000 civil servants have availed of this training to date.

### ***Senior appointments***

Three appointments were made at secretary general level this year:

- John McKeon, Department of Employment Affairs and Social Protection;
- Katherine Licken, Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht;
- Elizabeth Canavan, Department of Rural and Community Development (Acting).

## **References**

- Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. (2017). *People strategy for the civil service 2017–2020*. Dublin: Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.
- Government of Ireland. (2014). *The civil service renewal plan. A vision and three year action plan for the civil service*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- Government of Ireland. (2017). *Our public service 2020*. Dublin: The Stationery Office.
- OECD. (2017). *OECD assessment of Ireland's second Public Service Reform Plan 2014–16*. Paris: OECD Publishing.
- Public Appointments Service. (2017). *Annual report 2016*. Retrieved from [https://www.publicjobs.ie/publicjobs/publication/document/Annual\\_Report\\_2016.pdf](https://www.publicjobs.ie/publicjobs/publication/document/Annual_Report_2016.pdf) [8 December 2017].
- Russell, H., Smyth, E., McCoy, S., Grotti, R., Watson, D., & Kenny O. (2017). *A study of gender in senior civil service positions in Ireland* [Research series number 66]. Dublin: Economic and Social Research Institute.