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Civil service, 2018

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Recruitment

Recruitment to the civil service continues to increase, with numbers employed by late 2018 surpassing 2008 employment levels for the first time at 40,207.¹

New entrants

In March the Minister for Finance and Public Expenditure and Reform submitted a report to the Oireachtas examining salary-scale issues for post-2011 recruits at entry grades. The report shows that ‘new entrants’ make up 19 per cent of staff in the public sector, and estimates the costs associated with a two-point incremental adjustment for these 60,500 staff at approximately €200 million. It is intended that the report will provide the evidence base for further engagement between the parties signed up to the *Public Service Stability Agreement 2018–2020* to explore how the matter can be addressed in line with the terms of the agreement.

Top-level recruitment

In its annual report to the minister, the Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC) reported that a record number of appointments were made in 2017 (TLAC, 2018). There were thirty-nine

¹ Figure quoted refers to number of staff on a whole-time equivalent basis; see databank.per.gov.ie for latest figures.

competitions and thirty-seven appointments. In comparison, the average over the previous six years was twenty-six appointments per annum. In 2017 competitions were held for five secretary general level posts, two deputy secretaries, twenty-three assistant secretaries and nine specialist roles at assistant secretary level. Figures compiled show a continuing decline in the number of applicants from the 'private/other' sector; shortlisted candidates from the private/other sector decreased from a high of 21 per cent in 2014 to 10 per cent in 2017. A significant proportion of appointments continue to be made from within the home department (TLAC, 2018).

In terms of gender balance, 31 per cent of applicants were female, which is the largest proportion in six years. Analysis shows that female candidates progress at a higher rate than their male counterparts, with 4.8 per cent of female applicants being recommended for appointment in comparison to 2.8 per cent for males (TLAC, 2018, p. 18).

Civil service renewal

In December 2017 a new overall strategy for development and innovation, *Our Public Service 2020* (Government of Ireland, 2017), was launched. 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 is informed by engagement across the civil and public service and by a 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'. There are eighteen headline actions identified under these pillars. A Public Service Leadership Board has been established to drive the reform agenda across the public service and to lead on the implementation of the eighteen actions. The board brings together leaders from both the civil and the public service for the first time.

The *Civil Service Renewal Plan* (Government of Ireland, 2014) was developed as a three-year plan running up to December 2017. Implementation continued in 2018 to embed and consolidate the progress made under the plan across the civil service. Renewal

continues to be driven by the Civil Service Management Board (CSMB) and work is advancing on a new plan. The CSMB, established in 2014, consists of the secretaries general of each department, the director general of the Central Statistics Office, the chairman of the Office of Public Works and the chief executive of the Public Appointments Service. The group met eight times in 2018.

The new phase of renewal, under the framework of *Our Public Service 2020*, should 'reflect the strong commitment to service delivery and connecting the lives of the citizens served by the Civil Service' and the 'changing expectations of our citizens and our changing workforce' (CSMB, 2018, p. 18).

Civil service mobility

In September, after some delays, Phase 1A of a new mobility scheme was launched. Civil service mobility (i.e. staff transfers) is a priority under both the *Civil Service Renewal Plan* (Government of Ireland, 2014) and the *People Strategy for the Civil Service 2017–2020* (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2017). The new scheme replaces all previous mechanisms for availing of mobility opportunities, and a new online system was introduced in December. Phase 1A facilitates only clerical officer and executive officer grades, and excludes movements within the county of Dublin. It is planned to open up the scheme for movements within Dublin following a review of the initial phase. Phase 2 will then facilitate civil servants at higher executive officer, administrative officer and assistant principal level.

It is intended that organisations will fill a certain percentage of vacant posts through mobility. Vacancies at clerical officer grade will be evenly split between mobility and open competition. At executive officer level, 40 per cent will be filled through open competition, 30 per cent internal and 30 per cent interdepartmental (with one in every two of interdepartmental vacancies to be filled through the mobility scheme).

Shared services

On 1 January 2018 the National Shared Services Office (NSSO) was established as a separate civil service office, under the National Shared Services Office Act, 2017. It was originally set up in 2014 on an administrative basis within the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Some of the key achievements reported by the NSSO during 2017 were as follows:

- NSSO customer numbers reached almost 125,000, with the addition of nine public service bodies as clients of the NSSO, representing a further 21,500 customers;
- establishment of a process automation team, to increase process efficiencies in HR and pensions shared services;
- completion of the Payroll Shared Services Project – the last of the fifty-two in-scope public service organisations migrated their payroll and related services into the NSSO;
- the Financial Management Shared Services Project moved into the build phase, in preparation for the transitioning of the first wave of government departments (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2018a).

Civil service employee engagement survey

An employee engagement survey was carried out in late 2017 and published in March. This is the second in a series of three surveys to be carried out under the *Civil Service Renewal Plan*. Overall, the results were seen as positive and welcomed by the ministers and senior civil servants involved. Developed and run by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Central Statistics Office, the survey asks civil servants for their views on working in the civil service, focusing on areas such as employee engagement, well-being, coping with change, and commitment to the organisation. Over 21,300 civil servants completed the survey, a 17 per cent increase on 2015, when the last such survey was completed. The full report is available online. Twelve key messages were highlighted to demonstrate changes between 2015 and 2017:

1. the overall results of the 2017 survey are very positive;
2. civil servants continue to be highly engaged;
3. staff feel an increased level of support from their organisations;
4. themes which had lower scores in 2015 have experienced the highest increases;
5. civil servants continue to feel more positive about their own work and areas over which they have individual control;
6. staff feel less positive about their organisations than their individual areas of work;

7. staff continue to feel that there is not a sufficient culture of involvement;
8. staff still feel that the public does not value their contribution;
9. staff at lower grades feel less positive than those at higher grades;
10. staff do not feel their organisation supports a culture of innovation;
11. staff do not see any meaningful improvements in the management of poor performance;
12. internationally, the civil service compares favourably in some areas but not in all (Government of Ireland, 2018a).

Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards 2018

The annual Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards continued in 2018. Seventy nominations were received and thirty projects were shortlisted; the eleven winning projects are included in Table 1.

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.

Legislation

The Public Service Superannuation (Age of Retirement) Bill, 2018, was signed into law on 26 December. The purpose of the bill is to provide for an increase in the compulsory retirement age to seventy for the majority of public servants recruited prior to 1 April 2004, most of whom currently have a compulsory retirement age of sixty-five; to provide the minister with the power to further increase that compulsory retirement age, by order, in the future under certain circumstances; and to provide that the additional service over the age of sixty-five will attract pension accrual subject to the statutory maximum of forty years' service (Government of Ireland, 2018b).

The drafting of a new Civil Service Regulation (Amendment) Bill commenced in 2018 to allow greater devolution of management and disciplinary functions in the civil service. The bill arises from Action 11.3 of the *Civil Service Renewal Plan* to 'strengthen the disciplinary code to enable managers to take more effective and decisive action as required to tackle underperformance, including exits'. A review of the current disciplinary framework and procedures has determined that legislation is required in order to streamline the decision-making and

Table 1: Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards, 2018

<i>Award</i>	<i>Department</i>	<i>Project</i>
Leading Civil Service Renewal	Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment	Employee Engagement Programme
Digital Excellence	Office of the Revenue Commissioners	Redesign of the Revenue website
Research, Analytics and Insight	Department of Culture, Heritage and the Gaeltacht	The Great Irish Famine Online
Excellence in Customer Service	Department of Rural and Community Development	My Open Library
Excellence in Policy	Department of Housing, Planning and Local Government	The National Planning Framework
Excellence in Innovation	Forensic Science Ireland	Leading Europe in the interpretation of complex DNA evidence
Excellence in People, Skills and Organisational Development	Department of Justice and Equality	Joint-Agency Response to Crime (J-ARC)
Excellence Through Collaboration	Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade	Access to Chinese market for beef First direct air routes from Ireland to Beijing and Hong Kong
Citizen Impact	Department of Children and Youth Affairs	AIM for preschool children
World Class Civil Service	Department of the Taoiseach	The Citizens' Assembly

appeals process, and to bring civil service practice more in line with external practice (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2018b).

Senior appointments

There were a number of appointments at secretary general level in the last year:

- Brendan Gleeson, Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine;
- Kevin McCarthy, Department of Rural and Community Development;
- Aidan O'Driscoll, formerly secretary general of the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine was appointed as secretary general of the Department of Justice and Equality.

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