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Civil service, 2015

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Throughout 2015 the focus was ‘to drive the reform agenda, both in terms of ensuring delivery of the reforms set out in the *Public Service Reform Plan 2014–2016* and the *Civil Service Renewal Plan*, and in ensuring implementation of the organisation and sector specific reforms set out in the Integrated Reform Delivery Plans of Departments and Offices for 2015’ (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2015a). In July a progress report was published regarding the *Civil Service Renewal Plan*, which had outlined detailed commitments to deliver six priority actions within the ‘first 200 days’ of implementation of the plan (Government of Ireland, 2014). Since its publication in October 2014, 23 of the plan’s 25 major actions have been initiated and 14 of the 104 specific sub-actions have been completed, with 54 underway.

The progress report highlights that projects to implement all six priority actions are ongoing and on schedule for delivery (Government of Ireland, 2015). To date, progress includes the following:

- An Accountability Board has been established to bring together civil service, ministerial and external perspectives on civil service performance (Action 1).
- The Civil Service Management Board (CSMB) has been established to bring together all heads of departments and major offices into a cohesive whole-of-government executive management team (Action 2).

- A performance-review process for secretaries general has been approved and will be introduced in 2016 (Action 12).
- Options to strengthen the disciplinary code have been identified and a revised code has been drafted which will be subject to consultation (Action 11).
- Open recruitment campaigns have been held for principal, assistant principal, administrative officer, executive officer and clerical officer grades in the civil service. This builds on the existing arrangements for open competition at top management levels (Action 8).
- The first employee engagement survey across the civil service has been piloted by more than 700 staff, and was issued to all civil servants in Q3 2015 (Action 25).

In addition to the six priority actions, progress has also been noted in other areas:

- A common corporate governance standard for all government departments and offices has been developed for the first time and finalised following public consultation (Action 3).
- An enhanced performance-review process for assistant secretaries has been developed, and was piloted by four government departments in 2015 (Action 12).
- A proposed model for learning and development to improve capability through enhanced procurement and shared delivery of training across the civil service has been agreed and is at business case evaluation stage (Action 9).
- A civil service customer satisfaction survey was completed by 2,000 customers and published in Q2 2015 (Action 23).
- Eleven open policy debates have been held to date, involving policy networks of practitioners, academics and experts in a range of policy issues across government, including education reform, the national risk assessment, the labour market symposium and future investment in early years education (Action 22).
- An ICT strategy to deliver better outcomes and efficiency through innovation and excellence in ICT was published in Q1 2015, and implementation is underway (Action 19).
- A chief human resources officer for the civil service was appointed, taking up the post in Q3 2015 (Actions 7 and 14).
- Building on the existing arrangements for mobility at assistant secretary level, the first mobility policy for senior managers at

principal level has been agreed and the first moves took place in Q3 2015 (Action 15).

Annual progress report on public service reform published

In January 2014 the government published its second *Public Service Reform Plan*, covering the period 2014 to 2016, and building on the first *Public Service Reform Plan*, published in November 2011. The new plan placed a specific emphasis on improved service delivery, coupled with maintaining focus on increased efficiency, and contained more than 230 actions.

Just over a year on from its publication, and as part of a specific commitment in the plan, the first annual progress report on its implementation was published, in March. The report provides an overview of the progress made across the 13 cross-cutting areas set out in the plan, as well as some 150 examples of progress and good practice from across the public service under these 13 headings (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2015a).

An Accountability Board established for the civil service

In May the Taoiseach, Enda Kenny, TD, and the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Brendan Howlin, TD, announced the formal establishment of the Accountability Board for the Civil Service. The Accountability Board has been provided for under the *Civil Service Renewal Plan*, following on from a recommendation of the Independent Panel on Strengthening Civil Service Accountability and Performance. The membership of the Accountability Board comprises:

- Taoiseach Enda Kenny, TD (chair);
- Tánaiste and Minister for Social Protection Joan Burton, TD;
- Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform Brendan Howlin, TD;
- Minister for Finance Michael Noonan, TD;
- Martin Fraser, secretary general, Department of the Taoiseach;
- Robert Watt, secretary general, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform;
- Seán Ó Foghlú, secretary general, Department of Education and Skills;
- Niall Cody, chairman, Revenue Commissioners;
- Paul Farrell, GBS Leader for the UK and Ireland, IBM Europe;

- Dr Dorothy Scally, chairperson, Top Level Appointments Committee;
- Bernie Gray, partner, Better Boards;
- Shane Bissett, director, Royal Mint, UK.

The terms of reference for the board are:

- to have an overall governance role across the civil service, and advise on and support the development of the capacity and capability of the civil service;
- to provide oversight and review of proposals for a new performance management system for secretaries general and the effective implementation and operation of the system across the civil service;
- to provide oversight and review of the new programme of organisational capability reviews, including implementation of recommendations arising from them;
- to oversee civil service capability in implementing cross-cutting priorities set by government or other system-wide issues – this may involve considering individual case studies to promote learning and highlight best practice.

The new board, which will operate on a non-statutory basis, includes independent members who are not part of the civil service in order to bring an external perspective to its role. The independent external members were appointed following an open process by the Public Appointments Service (PAS).

The Civil Service Management Board

Established in 2014, the CSMB is made up of all secretaries general and heads of major offices – twenty-one members in total – and is chaired by the secretary general to the government. The board has been assigned collective responsibility for implementing the *Civil Service Renewal Plan*. All members of the board have been assigned responsibility to lead one or more of the plan's actions.

The board's immediate focus is overseeing the implementation of the priorities set out in the *Civil Service Renewal Plan*, and three sub-groups have been formed to drive progress on the actions under the headings of 'people', 'systems' and 'governance'. The minutes of the meetings of the board and its sub-groups are published on the Civil Service Renewal portal, and on the website of the Department of

Public Expenditure and Reform at <http://www.per.gov.ie/en/civil-service-management-board>.

Targeted programme of open recruitment to the civil service

A targeted programme of recruitment commenced in 2014 to address service needs and a shortfall in key skills consistent with the maintenance of appropriate controls on public service numbers, in line with the resources available for the public service pay bill overall. In November it was noted that open recruitment campaigns had been held for principal officer, assistant principal officer, administrative officer, junior diplomats, trainee auditor, executive officer and clerical officer grades (see Table 1). The PAS was responsible for the running of these competitions and selection processes were open to all eligible applicants who met minimum entry criteria. The PAS had completed over 150 open recruitment campaigns up to mid November for a range of diverse positions, including solicitors and accountants, statisticians and meteorologists, as well as running all general recruitment competitions for the civil and public service.

Table 1: Open recruitment to civil service, 2015

Open civil service recruitment				
<i>Grade</i>	<i>Advertised</i>	<i>Applied</i>	<i>Panel</i>	<i>Assigned</i>
Clerical officer	20/6/14	28,000	Oct 2014	1,300+
Executive officer	11/12/14	13,622	Q3 2015	150
				(to be assigned)
Administrative officer	03/10/14	5,316	Q1 2015	75
Temp. clerical officer	03/10/14	14,153		1,600+

Open assistant principal competition – results announced 5 November 2015

<i>On panel</i>	<i>Male (%)</i>	<i>Female (%)</i>	<i>Civil service (%)</i>	<i>External (%)</i>
90	45	55	80	20

Open principal officer competition – results announced 17 June 2015

<i>On panel</i>	<i>Male (%)</i>	<i>Female (%)</i>	<i>Civil service (%)</i>	<i>External (%)</i>
164	55	45	75	25

In July the Civil Service Arbitration Board, following consideration of the cases put forward by management and unions, decided that the

sequence of promotions at principal officer level should be open and departmental (i.e. internal), with no inter-departmental component. It was further decided that the sequence of promotions at assistant principal level should be open, inter-departmental and departmental.

In mid September the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform announced proposals to help increase female participation at senior levels in the civil service. To this end, the *Civil Service Renewal Plan* contains a commitment to improve gender balance at each level by reviewing supports and policies to ensure these are impactful and measurable.

Recently the Department of Justice and Equality, with the assistance of funding from the EU's PROGRESS programme and supported by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, has undertaken a pilot mentoring and leadership development programme to increase the number of women in the top decision-making levels of the civil service. The pilot was cross-departmental, with female principal officers from each of the sixteen government departments participating in the programme. The participants received executive coaching, mentoring and leadership development training which was focused at the competencies required at the assistant secretary general grade. The Department of Public Expenditure and Reform has indicated that it will support the mainstreaming of this programme more widely across departments and offices in conjunction with a renewed Learning and Development Model for the Civil Service, which is currently being developed. The programme will be complementary to a new approach to developing future leaders at senior levels in the civil service, as part of the renewal plan.

Corporate governance standard for the civil service

In November Minister Howlin announced the publication of a corporate governance standard for the civil service. This is the first time that such a standard has been produced for the civil service as a whole. The standard sets out the key elements of governance that departments and offices must now document and publish, including how each department and office does its work and how it operates to deliver on its mandate and functions. This will ensure that the way in which the civil service takes decisions and implements policies will be more transparent to citizens. Establishing a common governance standard for the civil service was one of the key actions of the *Civil Service Renewal Plan*.

Legislation

At the end of December Minister Howlin published the Public Sector Standards Bill, 2015. The key reforms are:

- the introduction of a Public Sector Standards Commissioner, to replace the Standards in Public Office Commission and to oversee a reformed complaints and investigations process;
- the establishment in legislation of a set of integrity principles for all public officials;
- the strengthening of the legal obligation for public officials to disclose, as a matter of routine, actual and potential conflicts of interest, with a significant extension of the personal and material scope of disclosures for public officials and graduated disclosure requirements;
- the establishment of a more effective (IT-based) process for the submission of periodic statements of interests;
- the imposition of statutory prohibitions on the use of insider information, on the seeking by public officials of benefits to further their private interests, and on local elected representatives from dealing professionally with land in certain circumstances;
- the establishment of a new statutory board to address potential conflicts of interest as public officials take up roles in the private sector.

The publishing of this bill addresses the commitment in the updated programme for government to publish legislation to consolidate local and national ethics requirements and give effect to the recommendations of the tribunals.

Other developments

First Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards

The 2015 Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards took place on 3 December in Dublin Castle. From the ninety-four projects submitted, thirty-two were shortlisted across ten award categories, showcasing innovations in policy and service delivery across the civil service. The ten award winners are listed in Table 2.

Results of a civil service customer satisfaction survey

In May Minister Howlin published the results of a survey of civil service customers, commissioned by his department. The purpose of the survey was to ascertain satisfaction levels with services received, as

Table 2: Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards, 2015

<i>Project name</i>	<i>Department</i>	<i>Award</i>
Introducing Payroll Shared Services for the civil service	Payroll Shared Services Centre – Department of Public Expenditure and Reform	Leading Civil Service Renewal
Introducing METweb for public services	Department of the Environment, Community and Local Government	Digital Excellence
Utilising digital geosciences through Tellus	Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources	Insight & Analysis
Modernising Irish family law to achieve social change 2015	Department of Justice and Equality	Excellence in Policy
Delivering a single secure access point for Revenue customers	Revenue Commissioners	Excellence in Customer Service
Community Return Programme: Enhancing ex-prisoner resettlement into communities	The Probation Service and the Irish Prison Service (Department of Justice and Equality)	Excellence in Innovation
Improving education through the use of technology	Department of Communications, Energy and Natural Resources	Excellence in Skills Development
Facilitating compliance within the building industry	Department of Environment, Community and Local Government	Excellence through Collaboration
The Irish EU presidency	Department of the Taoiseach – Whole of Government	World Class Civil Service
Establishing Intreo – A national employment and entitlements service	Department of Social Protection	Outstanding Contribution

well as more general perceptions of, and attitudes to, the civil service. The survey was carried out to meet a commitment in the *Public Service Reform Plan 2014–2016* to ‘run regular surveys of civil service customers to more fully understand user experiences, expectations and requirements’ (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2015c). Undertaken by Ipsos MRBI, the survey showed that over three quarters of customers were satisfied with both the service received and the outcome of their most recent contact, and felt that service levels are mostly meeting or exceeding expectations. These figures are consistent with the last such survey, undertaken in 2009.

Some key results are listed below.

Contact

- Half of those surveyed had contacted a civil service department or office in the previous twelve months, marginally up on previous years.
- The percentage of respondents who had had contact with the Department of Social Protection was 20 per cent (down from 26 per cent in 2009), while the percentage for the Revenue Commissioners was 15 per cent (up from 11 per cent in 2009).
- The most common types of recent contact were ‘enquiring about a particular service/entitlement/application’ (25 per cent) and ‘seeking general information’ (22 per cent).
- When asked about convenient methods of contact, 83 per cent of respondents identified the telephone, 64 per cent in writing, 60 per cent email, 58 per cent online via a PC/laptop and 51 per cent in person.
- Although contact by phone (44 per cent) was still the most common channel for customers’ most recent interaction, contact via email or online (16 per cent) had increased, particularly among younger customers, resulting in a decline in both written and in-person contact.
- The main reasons cited for not accessing services online were ‘prefer phone interaction’ (27 per cent) and ‘prefer face-to-face interaction’ (24 per cent).

Satisfaction

- Consistent with the previous survey, over three in four customers were satisfied with both the service received (77 per cent) and the outcome of their most recent contact (76 per cent), and service levels were mostly meeting or exceeding expectations (83 per cent).

- Dissatisfaction with any aspect of the service/contact received from a department/office fell from 31 per cent in 2009 to 28 per cent in 2015.
- Satisfaction with Irish language services has increased, as has satisfaction with access to services among respondents whose first language is something other than Irish or English.

Attitudes and perceptions

- The proportion of customers that would 'speak highly of the civil service' has increased (from 28 per cent in 2009 to 32 per cent).
- Perceptions of overall efficiency from all respondents remained stable (at 57 per cent).
- The percentage of people who would be critical of the civil service has fallen from 21 per cent to 17 per cent.
- The number of respondents who would 'speak highly of the civil service' was considerably higher among those who had had contact with the civil service in the previous twelve months, than for those who had not.
- 50 per cent of respondents agreed with the statement 'I feel that the service provided by the civil service has improved in the last five years', with 16 per cent stating that it had not improved.
- 50 per cent of respondents agreed that 'the Civil Service is independent and trustworthy', with 19 per cent disagreeing.
- Favourability (favourable opinion of the way in which the civil service meets the needs of the public) ratings for the civil service remained the same as for 2009, at 52 per cent.

Institute of Directors research findings

At the end of November, marking the first anniversary since the publication of *Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards*, Minister Howlin welcomed the findings of research undertaken by the Institute of Directors in Ireland (IOD), which indicates that 'substantial progress has been made and that the effects of the new guidelines are filtering through and resulting in real change in the composition of State boards in Ireland and their overall performance' (Institute of Directors in Ireland, 2015).

The guidelines provide that appointments to state boards must be advertised openly on the state boards portal at www.stateboards.ie, which is operated by the PAS. They aim to increase access to participation on state boards, ensuring an open and transparent assessment process, contributing to strengthening in the calibre and quality of appointments.

Among the findings of the IOD research are:

- ‘a seismic shift in attitudes since 2012 in terms of the perceived fairness and transparency in the process of appointments to State boards’, with ‘70 per cent now considering the process to be fair and transparent, compared with just 26 per cent of State board members in 2012’;
- a significant majority of respondents reporting that ‘the board on which they sit has the right mix of skills, knowledge and experience to deliver the agreed strategy over the next 3 to 5 years’, representing a 32 per cent increase on 2012 findings;
- ‘a significant increase in those considering their boards to be sufficiently diverse, with 77 per cent of respondents of this view compared with 49 per cent in 2012’ (Institute of Directors in Ireland, 2015).

Target of 40 per cent representation of females on state boards

The *Guidelines on Appointments to State Boards* reiterate the government’s decision of July 2014 to seek to achieve 40 per cent representation of females on state boards within the lifetime of the government. An examination of appointments made to state boards under the revised approach provided for in the guidelines indicated that, up to the beginning of November 2015, 235 vacancies had been advertised on 62 state boards, and that 170 appointments had been made to 45 boards. Of the almost 2,500 applications received for completed campaigns, 31 per cent came from women, and 45 per cent of the appointments were female (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2015d; see Table 3).

Over 4,000 people are registered on www.stateboards.ie, and are notified of vacancies arising on state boards. Of those who specified their gender (97.5 per cent), 59 per cent are male and 41 per cent female. The PAS is engaged in a communications programme to encourage women and men to register their interest. This involves briefings with representative groups, community organisations and such like, as well as sharing information and drawing on best practice from organisations and individuals with experience and expertise in this area; for example, the 30% Club – a global movement aimed at achieving better gender balance in business, which in Ireland has affirmed its commitment to creating a better gender balance at the helm of Irish organisations.

Table 3: Appointments to state boards, 2015

<i>State boards completed (6/11/15)</i>	<i>Unique applications</i>			<i>Selected applications</i>			<i>Appointed</i>		
	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>	<i>Male</i>	<i>Female</i>	<i>Total</i>
45	1,701	752	2,453	453	257	710	94	76	170
	69%	31%		64%	36%		55%	45%	

Publication of the model publication scheme

October saw the publication of the model publication scheme under the Freedom of Information Act, 2014. The scheme and related guidance were developed through a consultative process involving all freedom of information (FOI) bodies and the Office of the Information Commissioner, as well as public consultation.

The scheme sets out information to be published about the FOI body under six headings (making information available and easy to find):

- i. what we are and what we do;
- ii. services provided to the public;
- iii. decision-making processes for major policy proposals;
- iv. what we spend and how we spend;
- v. information on procurement;
- vi. other information that the FOI body intends to publish routinely (Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, 2015b).

FOI bodies will now have six months to prepare and publish their own publication schemes together with the underlying documentation.

October marked one year since the Freedom of Information Act, 2014, entered into force. The publication of the model publication scheme concludes a significant requirement under the Act and will ensure that FOI bodies are more active in the publication of official information, which should, in turn, lessen the need for such information to be sought via FOI. The date of the model’s publication, 14 October, was also significant in terms of the delivery of the commitment in the programme for government to extend FOI, as it came into effect for An Garda Síochána, Iarnród Éireann, Gas Networks Ireland, EirGrid plc and ESB Networks Ltd. The five bodies became public bodies for the purposes of FOI on that day, meaning

records created or held by the five bodies may be sought with retrospection, applying to the standard date set out in the Act – 21 April 2008.

Ireland's first register of lobbying launched

In April the Standards in Public Office Commission launched the register of lobbying activity: www.lobbying.ie. The register, which identifies to the public who is communicating with government and senior civil and public servants on public policy matters, was established under the recently enacted Regulation of Lobbying Act, 2015, signed by President Michael D. Higgins on 11 March 2015. Those who may need to register lobbying activity can now begin to use the website. They are obliged by law to register lobbying activity that has taken place since 1 September. They must make returns of lobbying activity every four months, with the first returns due by 21 January 2016. These are then published on the online register.

The Standards in Public Office Commission is the independent body charged with oversight of the ethics, electoral and lobbying legislation. The members of the commission are:

- Mr Justice Daniel O'Keeffe, chairperson;
- Mr Seamus McCarthy, Comptroller and Auditor General;
- Mr Peter Tyndall, Ombudsman;
- Mr Peter Finnegan, clerk assistant of Dáil Éireann;
- Ms Deirdre Lane, clerk of Seanad Éireann;
- Mr Jim O'Keeffe, former minister and TD.

Senior appointments

Lastly, there were a number of senior appointments in 2015.

David Cagney was appointed as Chief Human Resources Officer for the Civil Service, and took up his post in Q3, 2015.

Sherry Perreault was appointed Head of Lobbying Regulation with the Standards in Public Office Commission, and took up her position on 25 May. Ms Perreault's previous role was as director of policy, research and communications with Canada's Office of the Conflict of Interest and Ethics Commissioner.

At the end of October the Open Data Governance Board members were announced. The board will provide a strategic vision and leadership for Ireland's Open Data Initiative. Emer Coleman was appointed as the chair of the board. Open data is concerned with

making data held by public bodies available and easily accessible online for reuse and redistribution.

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