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Circular 18/2004:- Career Progression of People with a Disability in the Irish Civil Service

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29 July 2004

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A Dhuine Uasail

Summary

1. The Government's 3% target for the employment in the public service of people with a disability was announced in 1977. A Code of Practice on the Employment of People with a Disability in the Civil Service has been in place since 1994.

2. As part of the Modernisation programme for the Civil Service, the Department of Finance, in agreement with the staff unions, commissioned Goodbody Economic Consultants to undertake research on the career progression of people with a disability in the Civil Service.

3. The Report entitled "Employment and Career Progression of People with a Disability in the Irish Civil Service" proposes a new approach which maintains the policy of giving priority in employment to people with a disability. The new approach emphasises the two separate aspects of the policy: first, an increased emphasis on recruitment with special competitions being arranged from time to time and, second, the need to take special measures to identify and support existing staff with a disability.

4. The Government has accepted the main recommendations of the Report and agreement has been reached with the staff unions at General Council on the implementation of the Government decision.

Main Conclusions and Recommendations of the Research Report

5. The Report found that the existing policy on disability was not working effectively for a number of reasons:

the system of recruitment did not deal adequately with the placement of persons with a disability within Departments and Offices,

the monitoring arrangements in relation to staff with a disability were inconsistent and probably did not identify staff with disability, making it difficult for Departments to put in place suitable support arrangements tied to the actual needs of staff, and

there was no effective policy in place to support the career progression of civil servants with disabilities within the Civil Service.

6. The Government has accepted the main recommendations of the Report in relation to improving the operation of the policy on the employment of people with a disability in the Civil Service, namely:

[i] the present Civil Service Code on the employment of people with a disability, drawn up in 1994, should be revised, in conjunction with the Civil Service unions, to put in place modern policies to positively manage over 2,300 civil servants with a disability (approximately 7% of existing staff),

[ii] new monitoring, reporting and recording arrangements in relation to staff with a disability in Government Departments and Offices are required to accurately record progress and employment trends, including a move towards self disclosure using an appropriate format, these arrangements to be discussed and agreed in consultation with the Civil Service unions,

[iii] the revision of the Code to emphasise, in particular, policies to improve the career progression of people with a disability,

[iv] the appointment of one full-time Disability Advisory Officer (DAO), in addition to the existing part-time Departmental Disability Liaison Officers, to advise and assist Departments in developing and implementing policies for existing and new staff with disabilities, and supporting individual civil servants with disabilities; it is proposed that the DAO will be part of the Equality Unit in the Department of Finance, and

[v] the adoption of a new approach to the recruitment of people with a disability under which special competitions or sub-panels will be held from time to time to ensure that 3% of all recruits to the Civil Service are people with a disability.

Implementing the recommendations

7. The following are the main areas where action will be taken to implement the Government decision.

Code of Practice

8. A new Code of Practice for the employment and career progression of people with a disability in the Civil Service will be developed, in conjunction with the Civil Service unions through the Disability Sub-Committee of General Council.

9. The new Code will place special emphasis on implementation by Departments of appropriate measures and the need to monitor progress and to change the arrangements if necessary. The code will draw on the codes of practice developed by the National Disability Authority, the Equality Authority and other relevant bodies.

Monitoring

10. A more effective approach to monitoring staff with a disability will be developed. For this new approach to work successfully, it will be necessary to consider the use of a survey based on voluntary self-disclosure both for new staff on appointment and for existing staff. As this gives rise to a number of complex issues about confidentiality and the use of information, it is proposed that specific guidelines on these matters will be developed as part of the new code of practice for the Civil Service.

Appointment of a full-time Disability Advisory Officer

11. A full-time, suitably qualified and experienced Disability Advisory Officer (DAO) will be appointed to build up a body of expertise which can be drawn on by Departments and individuals. The DAO will be part of the Equality Unit in the Department of Finance. The Departmental Disability Liaison Officers (DLOs)

will continue to be responsible for providing information and assistance, as required, to staff with disabilities and to supervisors to whom someone with a disability is being assigned, so as to ensure that staff with a disability can contribute equally to the business objectives of the organisation.

12. It is envisaged that the DAO will provide specialist expertise and support in a range of areas, including:

Developing the proposed new Code of Practice

Developing and piloting the new monitoring system and methods of recording data

Advising on measures to support placement

Supporting and developing the role of the Departmental DLOs

Advising on supports available to facilitate the employment and integration of staff with a disability

Promoting awareness of the Civil Service's responsibilities in this area and of the roles and responsibilities of individual managers and of personnel functions in ensuring that the proposed new Code of Practice is implemented.

New recruitment arrangements

13. A new approach to the recruitment of people with a disability into the Civil Service will be adopted. This will include special competitions or sub-panels being held from time to time with the aim of ensuring that 3% of all recruits to the Civil Service are people with a disability. A special competition for people with a disability at EO and AO level will be held with the aim of achieving an initial boost to the number of people with a disability working at these levels and above within the service.

14. The new recruitment approach will continue to support the Government's policy to create job opportunities for people with a disability that might not otherwise exist and will aim to attract applicants from as many suitable men and women with a disability as possible.

15. Recruitment into the Civil Service, regardless of disability status, will continue to be based on the normal selection criteria and educational standards, and new recruits will be expected to perform to the standard required for the job. In relation specifically to people with a disability, the focus will be on the provision of the necessary supports that will enable such staff to perform their assigned job to the standard required.

Obtaining the research

16. An executive summary of the research is on the Department of Finance website: www.finance.gov.ie. Copies of the research report can be obtained from your Personnel Section or Disability Liaison Officer.

17. Queries from individuals in relation to this circular should be addressed in the first instance to your Personnel Section or Disability Liaison Officer.

18. Queries from Departments /Offices in relation to this circular should be addressed to the Civil Service Equality Unit, Department of Finance.

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John O'Connell
Assistant Secretary
Personnel and Remuneration Division

20 Actions for 2004

20 Positive Actions for Departments/Offices to initiate in 2004
to support staff with a disability in the Civil Service

Disability Liaison Officer (DLO)

Issue an annual reminder to all staff of the contact details of the Disability Liaison Officer (DLO) and the role of the DLO.

DLO should be represented on Decentralisation committees to ensure that the needs of staff with a disability in the context of decentralisation are taken into consideration. For example, people may have to move to new locations, buildings and jobs which may not be as suitable as their current arrangement if they wish to remain working in Dublin.

DLO should liaise with the local staff side reps on a regular basis, preferably once each quarter.

Accommodation Unit - checklist

DLO should be formally consulted in writing by the Accommodation Unit when making decisions around the accommodation for the organisation, especially during renovations.

Ensure that where the entrance to any building is not accessible to people whose mobility is impaired (for example, person with a broken leg or person using a wheelchair) there is a bell to the reception desk.

Lifts: the emergency telephone needs to be at a height that is accessible by a wheelchair user. Lifts should have an emergency button to reception so that the deaf and hard-of-hearing can let it be known that they are stuck in the lift.

Unmanned areas, such as car parks, should be evaluated with a view to determining the need for a call button to reception.

Organise a poster or sticker campaign to raise awareness of the need to keep floor space and access routes tidy, out of consideration for the safety of vision and mobility impaired staff and customers.

The position of the electronic eye for swipe cards to open doors needs to be suitable for all users: both in terms of height and distance from the door.

HR Management

If there is an equality sub-committee of DPC, ensure that that there is a mix of staff on the committee to reflect the make up of the staff in the organisation: male/female, age, disabled, etc..

Consider asking an existing member of staff who has a disability to give a short talk (5 -10 minutes) on their area of work at the induction course for staff new to your organisation. This assumes that the induction course already covers equality issues in the QCS or other modules.

Ensure that all staff who are vision impaired or blind can touch type and have appropriate assistive technology. Offer the opportunity to do the ECDL to all vision impaired and deaf staff. Give priority in the Departmental Training plan to this training.

Arrange disability awareness training for managers of staff with a disability AND require the managers to attend.

Ensure that all Department web sites meet web standards guidelines for people with disabilities. (You may wish to contact VICS for advice: VICS is the Visually-Impaired Computer Society of Ireland and is a Special Interest Group of the Irish Computer Society).

When purchasing new software for the organisation, investigate how accessible it is.

Line Managers

Ensure that the training and development aspects of PMDS are given particular emphasis for staff with a disability, including encouragement to take up available training and promotion opportunities.

Ensure that there is a mechanism for a person with a disability to formally identify special needs requirements and to discuss these with the manager or DLO.

Ensure that staff with a visual or hearing disability who are new to your area are familiar with the layout of the office/building and particularly with the procedures on fire drills, location of toilets, canteen, etc.

Ensure that names of staff are on the doors to offices – this is particularly important for the deaf and hard-of-hearing.

Ensure that the desk of someone who is deaf/hard-of-hearing is positioned so as to avoid the situation where people come up 'behind' them.

Deirdre MacRory
Civil Service Equality Unit
29 July 2004

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Re: Research Report on the Employment & Career Progression of People with a Disability in the Irish Civil Service

To all Personnel Officers and Disability Liaison Officers

Research Report

Please find enclosed two copies of the research report: *Employment & Career Progression of People with a Disability in the Irish Civil Service*. The research was undertaken by Goodbody Economic Consultants on behalf of the Department of Finance. Further copies will be delivered to you shortly.

The report proposes a new approach to the implementation of Government policy on the employment of people with disabilities in the Civil Service. The Government has accepted the main recommendations of the Report and

agreement has been reached with the staff unions at General Council on the implementation of the Government decision.

The **executive summary** of the research can be found on the Department of Finance website www.finance.gov.ie. If you require additional copies of the report please contact the Civil Service Equality Unit, Department of Finance.

Circular 18/04: Career Progression of People with a Disability in the Irish Civil Service

A Circular on the research report will issue to all staff shortly – see copy attached. The Circular sets out the main conclusions and recommendations of the Research Report and highlights the key areas where actions will be taken to implement the recommendations: a new Code of Practice, new monitoring arrangements, a new approach to recruitment and placement, and the appointment of a full-time Disability Advisory Officer to build up a body of expertise which can be drawn on by Departments and individuals.

Work on the recruitment of a Disability Advisory Officer is currently underway.

‘20 Actions for 2004’

The initial work on the implementation of the recommendations will be undertaken mainly at central policy level. However there are actions which Departments and Offices can take in the short term to support staff with a disability. A number of suggestions are set out in the attached list of practical steps entitled ‘20 Actions for 2004’ which was drawn up by the Equality Unit with input from individual staff with disabilities, and agreed with the staff side at the Disability Subcommittee of General Council.

Departments and Offices may wish to note that the implementation of the initiatives suggested in ‘20 Actions for 2004’ may form part of future reports on equality initiatives undertaken.

Yours sincerely,

Marie McLaughlin
Principal
Civil Service Equality Unit
Personnel and Remuneration Division