

Civil service, 2023

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Introduction

In 2023 public service reform was a prominent priority for the Irish civil service. The civil service continues to perform well in international comparative and statistical indicators. Trust in public institutions in Ireland is comparatively high compared to other European countries. However, citizen satisfaction with administrative services is towards the lower end of European countries, demonstrating the need to transform and provide more effective, high-quality public services (Boyle et al., 2023).

Public Service Performance Report

The *Public Service Performance Report* for 2022, published in June 2023, provides, in a clear and accessible manner, an overview of how public funds (total gross expenditure in 2022 was €88.14 million) were allocated in 2022 (Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDR), 2023h). The report includes overviews on the growth of public sector staffing levels and the whole-of-government response to the Ukraine crisis in 2022.

Covering a population of over 5 million, the report shows that in 2022 over 1.5 million people were covered by a medical card, 964,590 students were in primary and post-primary education, and 13.6 million people visited staffed Heritage Service sites in Ireland. In terms of climate, the report shows that there were just over 10,000 domestic

solar PV installations along with 37.9 per cent of electricity demand being generated from renewable resources. The report also outlines how An Garda Síochána's overall workforce reached 17,826 (including 14,235 Garda members and 3,168 civilian staff) and the number of primary and post-primary teachers reached 74,628.

The report demonstrates supports regarding the Ukraine crisis in 2022 and shows that there were 48,136 Ukrainian beneficiaries of temporary protection who were provided with short-term accommodation out of a total 70,492 beneficiaries who received support from Ireland. There were 51,300 medical cards issued to Ukrainians and 13,700 Ukrainian children attended primary and secondary school in Ireland.

Gender Pay Gap Report

The *Gender Pay Gap Report 2023* outlines the analysis and results of payroll metrics from 1 July 2022 up to 23 June 2023 (DPENDR, 2023e). One of the main findings in the report includes the indication that, on average, men are paid 2.57 per cent higher than women, as shown by the mean (average hourly pay point) gender pay gap. This compares with a figure of 5.71 per cent in the 2022 *Gender Pay Gap Report*. The median (midpoint hourly pay rate) gender pay gap indicates that, on average, women are paid 1.56 per cent higher than men. The mean hourly gender pay gap for part-time employees shows that women are paid 33.29 per cent higher than men and the median hourly gender pay gap for part-time shows that women are paid 20.87 per cent more than men. The report provides further reasoning for the differences relating to remuneration:

- In the civil service, pay rates for each grade are set out in published pay scales which apply to all staff. As such, the gender pay gap arises as a result of the differences in the proportion of male and female employees at particular grades.
- In relation to the part-time employee figures, the majority of staff who work on a part-time basis are female (86 per cent). This statistic is further impacted by the fact that a large majority of senior staff who work part-time are female (94 per cent).

In its concluding section, the report outlines the measures that DPENDR is taking to eliminate or reduce the differences in pay. While the proportion of female staff at higher grades availing of flexible working options is higher than their male counterparts, all

flexible working options are available to staff at all grades. The department is also preparing a new HR strategy that will focus on further embedding equality, diversity and inclusion as well as blended working to ensure there is no unconscious bias in relation to staff seeking to avail of flexible working options. Promotional opportunities are also available to all staff, and office notices clearly affirm that senior management are supportive of flexible arrangements.

Recruitment

Final Report of Independent Review Panel on Senior Public Service Recruitment and Pay Processes

The Independent Review Panel on Senior Public Service Recruitment and Pay Processes, which was established in March 2022 following a government decision, published its final report in June 2023 (DPENDR, 2023i). The panel was tasked with examining the following:

- the current recruitment process at the senior management level in the public service;
- the process for determining pay and the related terms and conditions for senior public service posts;
- the arrangements for secretaries general once they have reached the end of their term in post.

The report found that there is a need for greater transparency and clear ownership of the overall recruitment and appointment process. It recommends that the existing roles and procedures document be revised to clarify responsibilities and processes in detail, and a revised process was introduced for appointments to the Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC). It was found that a fifth of TLAC competitions can take over nine months, which is not satisfactory, and the panel recommends that the process should take no more than sixteen weeks, with recommendations to enhance the process included in the report.

In relation to pay determination processes, the panel recommends that the Review Body on Higher Remuneration be re-established to advise the minister on total remuneration arrangements for senior posts in the public service and for chief executive officers of commercial state bodies. The body should be established on a legal basis.

The report recommends that newly appointed secretaries general be given a fixed term of seven years as well as a number of improvements to the appointment process to strengthen clarity and transparency. There has been no independent review process examining the overall grading of secretaries general since 2007. The panel recommends that the Review Body on Higher Remuneration be tasked to review the grading of secretaries general as a priority.

Expanded eligibility requirements introduced to promote greater diversity in the Irish civil service

In May the Minister for Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform announced the expansion of the eligibility requirements to apply to civil service jobs. Potential candidates holding Stamp 4 permission will now be able to pursue civil servant roles in government departments. The initiative has been developed by DPENDR and the Public Appointments Service. It progresses the public-service-wide goal of being an employer of choice by promoting diversity and inclusivity, as outlined in the Public Service Transformation Strategy, *Better Public Services*.

The expanded eligibility requirements follow research undertaken by the Public Appointments Service and work carried out by an interdepartmental working group to increase diversity across the civil service and better reflect the society it serves.

Government approval for new Government Science Advisor

In August the Minister for Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science, Simon Harris, welcomed government approval to proceed with the appointment of a new Government Science Advisor. They will be selected as part of the new science advice structures that will assist in informing responses to complex and challenging policy issues such as climate change, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity and other needs identified by ministers and government departments. The Government Science Advisor will support the need to integrate scientific research into the general policymaking process and provide cross-sectoral and multidisciplinary science advice to the government. They will also chair the new National Science Advice Forum. The selection process will take place through the TLAC and was advertised through the Public Appointments Service.

First Impact 2030 annual progress report

Minister Harris welcomed the publication of the first annual progress report of *Impact 2030: Ireland's Research and Innovation Strategy*,

which was originally launched in May 2022 (DFHERIS, 2023). *Impact 2030* puts research and innovation at the heart of Ireland's response to social, economic and environmental challenges. The report shows that by 31 May 2023, twenty-nine of *Impact 2030*'s thirty flagship initiatives have been well progressed or delivered, with one remaining flagship initiative not yet due to start.

The Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science (DFHERIS) plays a central system role in bringing research funding and performing departments and agencies together to ensure a cohesive, whole-of-government approach. Delivery of *Impact 2030* is a collective effort by a range of government departments and their agencies, each of which is responsible for driving the research and innovation agenda in the sectors under their remits.

Progress over the last twelve months includes approval of the Heads of the Research and Innovation Bill 2023, which will amalgamate Science Foundation Ireland and the Irish Research Council; the North–South Research Programme funding sixty-two projects to a value of over €37 million in 2022, and the launch, with Northern Ireland and Great Britain, of the €74 million Co-Centre Programme; funding the implementation of the €65 million National Challenge Fund; and securing funding of almost €84 million over the period 2021–7 to expand technological university research capabilities.

A notable example of progress over the past twelve months is that DFHERIS, in association with the Civil Service Management Board, established the Civil Service Research Network, which connects civil servants involved in research and policy development with researchers in the higher education research sector.

New research and innovation funding agency

It was announced in November 2023 that the new agency to be created on the passing of the Research and Innovation Bill 2023 will be named Taighde Éireann – Research Ireland, the new research and innovation funding agency. The legislation will amalgamate the activities and functions of the Irish Research Council and Science Foundation Ireland to create a new competitive funding agency for research and innovation. The new agency will fund research and innovation excellence in all disciplines across the spectrum of arts, engineering, humanities, mathematics, science, social sciences, technology and others. The Research and Innovation Bill 2023 will place arts,

humanities and social sciences research on a statutory footing for the first time. In making competitive funding awards across all disciplines and of varying sizes, the agency will significantly broaden the access of researchers in all areas to an improved range of research funding programmes. It is expected that Taighde Éireann – Research Ireland will come into operation in 2024.

Better Public Services – The Public Service Transformation 2030 Strategy

Better Public Services, a new strategy to 2030 for the public service aimed at delivering for the public and building trust, was launched in May 2023 (DPENDR, 2023b). The vision set out in the strategy is for inclusive, high-quality and integrated public service provision that meets the needs, and improves the lives, of the people of Ireland. The Public Service Transformation Framework, which is at the core of the strategy, comprises three central themes: digital and innovation at scale; workforce and organisation of the future; and evidence-informed policies and services designed for and with our public.

The framework is a clear direction of reform for the public service to 2030. Making progress under these themes will support sectoral-level reform programmes already underway in the public service.

Action Plan for Designing Better Public Services

In December the *Action Plan for Designing Better Public Services: A Roadmap for Embedding Design in the Public Service* was published (DPENDR, 2023a). The plan provides a practical and comprehensive pathway for how government will integrate design principles across the public service, leading to more people-centred, inclusive, user-friendly and effective public services. The plan, which will support the delivery of the *Better Public Services* transformation strategy, has clustered sixteen national actions under three key themes:

1. Demonstrate design commitment: by offering central design support, establishing funding mechanisms, streamlining design procurement, and integrating design throughout, we are underlining our steadfast commitment to design.
2. Increase design capability: through upskilling programmes, facilitating skill-transfer, providing learning resources, and defining role descriptions, we are bolstering our design capabilities across the Public Service.

3. Foster design culture: we will champion a thriving design culture by celebrating successes, showcasing standout projects, organising design challenges and forming event partnerships.

Public Service Innovation Fund

The Public Service Innovation Fund 2024 was launched, which aims to support innovative, technology-based projects from across the public service that provide better public services. The new fund places a strong focus on cross-organisational digital transformation, to meet the vision for a digital public service as set out in the *Better Public Services* strategy, and the fund will support projects that deliver across the themes of the strategy.

Projects should contribute toward delivering on the government's vision of inclusive, high-quality and integrated public service provision that meets the needs and improves the lives of people in Ireland. Funding of between €75,000 and €100,000 is available in 2024 for innovative projects that have a strong focus on outcomes, impacts and collaboration across sectors, and that contribute to the target of building globally recognised digital services using technology and data.

Digital for Good: Ireland's Digital Inclusion Roadmap

In August Ireland's *Digital Inclusion Roadmap* was published (DPENDR, 2023c). *Digital For Good* sets out key supplementary measures to achieve digital inclusion through better skills, access and infrastructure across government. The goals of the roadmap are to make Ireland one of the most digitally inclusive states in the EU and to ensure that everyone has the opportunity to use digital services, including digital public services, in a meaningful way.

Some of the measures included are:

- fostering and encouraging public, private and voluntary sector organisations to demonstrate their commitment to supporting the digital inclusion of their employees and customers by signing a Charter for Digital Inclusion that will enable them to share their activities;
- setting out the structures and measures through which the state will tackle harmful online content and misinformation and disinformation, including the Online Safety and Media Regulation Act 2022, the establishment of Coimisiún na Meán,

and appointment of an Online Safety Commissioner and a Digital Services Commissioner;

- committing to continually improving connectivity through the National Broadband Plan, broadband connection points and the local library network;
- supporting over 100 ICT apprentices on their two-year pathway to becoming full-time members of the civil service digital workforce and supporting other areas of the public service in implementing similar programmes;
- committing to extending facilities available at the Department of Social Protection's sixty-three Intreo centres to facilitate access to the www.MyWelfare.ie portal, including establishing a MyGovID account;
- developing an action plan to embed design techniques in the delivery of services to the public, following the principles set out in *Designing Better Public Services*;
- committing to expanding the languages supported on the gov.ie portal as part of the 2023 enhancement programme.

Civil service policy

A number of policies and policy frameworks have been developed for the civil service that are driven by the commitments found in the *Better Public Service* strategy and the *Civil Service Renewal 2030 Strategy* under the pillar of 'Workforce, Workplace and Organisation of the Future', of which the aim is to foster workplace equality, diversity, inclusion and well-being for all civil servants.

Domestic violence and abuse policy for the civil service

In September a domestic violence and abuse policy was launched for the civil service that sets out statutory entitlements to domestic violence leave and other employment supports for civil servants (DPENDR, 2023d). With government approval to publish the Domestic, Sexual, and Gender-Based Violence Agency Bill, this policy further supports the commitment to deliver on commitments under *Zero Tolerance: Third National Strategy on Domestic, Sexual and Gender-Based Violence*, as well as a commitment to creating a safe and secure working environment.

The policy is accompanied by a detailed guide for civil service employers as well as a programme of training and awareness raising. The policy circular outlines and promotes the role of the Civil Service

Employee Assistance Programme (CSEAS) and how it provides support, guidance and direction to specialist support services for domestic violence. The CSEAS is a confidential and free service available to all civil servants.

Menopause in the Workplace Policy Framework for civil service

The *Menopause in the Workplace Policy Framework* commits all civil service employers to recognise the impact of menopause and actively support all employees who are affected (DPENDR, 2023g). The framework provides an overarching structure to guide civil service organisations when developing menopause policies and it identifies ways that they can support employees such as offering workplace adjustments.

The framework details support provisions, including:

- comprehensive definitions and overview of key stages of menopause transition and related symptoms;
- overview of roles and responsibilities of HR, line managers and employers in relation to the provision of menopause supports in the workplace;
- guidance on workplace adjustments and supports for employees directly affected by menopause.

The CSEAS has developed guidance to assist managers and employees in fostering an inclusive environment where employees can openly and comfortably engage in discussion about menopause and its impact.

The framework was developed in partnership with the Women's Health Taskforce in the Department of Health under the guidance of clinical leads in women's health and occupational health in the HSE and civil service. All civil service organisations are asked to have a menopause policy in place by the end of quarter 2 2024.

Amendments to the Public Service Sick Leave Scheme

In September amendments to the Public Service Sick Leave Scheme were published. The changes bring about a number of improvements to the scheme and will increase equity of access, ensuring high levels of protection for staff experiencing illness. The civil service is committed to providing efficient and well-managed services to the public and is also committed to supporting the health and well-being of its staff. Details of the changes to the scheme include:

- A flat rate for Temporary Rehabilitation Remuneration (TRR) (which is a form of extended support payment during illness) of 37.5 per cent of remuneration is being introduced for all public servants. A transitional arrangement will apply for five years for those whose rate would otherwise be higher than 37.5 per cent.
- Where access to full and half rates of paid sick leave are exhausted, a three-day waiting period is being introduced for each relevant absence before TRR can be paid.
- All forms of sick leave support payments (full pay, half pay & TRR) are to be included in review calculations when determining access to sick leave. Periods of nil pay are to be excluded.
- The review is to be extended for any relevant breaks in service when calculating access to sick leave. These breaks in service must not be less than six months, must be unpaid, must not accrue annual leave and must not reckon towards pensions (DPENDR, 2023f).

Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards, 2023

The Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards were established under the 2014 *Civil Service Renewal Plan* to recognise the achievements of civil servants and showcase examples of best practice and innovation in government departments and offices. This year, the award categories were aligned to reflect the *Civil Service Renewal 2030 Strategy* and *2024 Action Plan*. Categories included ‘Digital First’, ‘Excellence through Collaboration’ and ‘World Class Civil Service’. This year, ninety nominations were received, and thirty-three projects were shortlisted. The eleven winning projects are included in Table 1.

Public Sector Trends report, 2023

The Institute of Public Administration published its annual review of trends in the Irish public service in December (Boyle et al., 2023). The report provides information and trends on (i) the size and cost of the public sector, (ii) the quality and efficiency of public administration, and (iii) levels of trust and confidence in public administration. The aim of the report is to help inform the debate on Ireland’s public sector and public administration, along with its role in Irish society.

The size, cost and inputs of the public sector

- Average government spending per person was €21,240 per head in 2022. This is up significantly from 2019, reflecting the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, and is slightly up on the 2021 figure.

Table 1: Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards, 2023

<i>Award category</i>	<i>Department</i>	<i>Project</i>
Digital First	DPENDR	Future Tech Challenge
Embedding Innovation	Department of Education	North East Inner City Multi-Disciplinary Team
Workforce of the Future	Department of Social Protection	Suite of 7 QQI Accredited Training Programmes for Frontline Roles in the Department of Social Protection
Workplace and Organisation of the Future	Houses of the Oireachtas Services	Oireachtas Work Learning (OWL) Training and Graduate Programme
Strategic Policy Development	Department of Finance; Office of the Revenue Commissioners; Department of Social Protection	Secretariat to the Commission on Taxation and Welfare: Support Strategic Policy Development
Insights-driven Decision-making	Office of the Government Chief Information Officer	Data at the Heart of Government: The Establishment of a Data-Sharing Framework for the Public Service
Leading Reform during a Crisis	Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth	Ukraine Crisis Temporary Accommodation Team
Excellence through Collaboration	Department of Rural and Community Development; Foróige	Increasing Youth Social Enterprise Awareness
Citizen Impact and Customer Service	Department of Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science; Science Foundation Ireland	Creating our Future: A National Conversation on Research in Ireland
World Class Civil Service	Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage	Coordination of Humanitarian Donations to Ukraine and Medevac Operations
Climate Action	Department of Enterprise, Trade and Employment; Department of the Environment, Climate and Communications	Climate Toolkit 4 Business

- Ireland remains a very centralised state, with almost 80 per cent of expenditure undertaken by central government. In Denmark, by contrast, almost two-thirds of general government expenditure is the responsibility of local government.
- Spending on public service pay and pensions has increased each year since 2014. Spending stands at almost €26.6 billion in 2023.

The quality and efficiency of public administration

- 55 per cent of all people surveyed said that the provision of public services in Ireland was good. This is a lower level than in many European countries; for example, the figure is 82 per cent in the Netherlands.
- People in Ireland have a high expectation compared to other European countries that applications for government benefits or services will be treated fairly.
- Individual use of the internet to interact with public authorities in Ireland is very high by European standards.

Trust, satisfaction and confidence in public administration

- Trust in public institutions in Ireland is comparatively high compared to other European countries.
- Trust in local authorities has risen above the European average in recent years.
- Citizen satisfaction with administrative services is towards the lower end of European countries surveyed. Satisfaction is particularly low amongst the 18–29 age group.

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