

Reference No: E103/4/78; **Date:** 04/11/97

04/11/1997 LP:- Re: Arrangements for Public Service Volunteers on Special Leave with Agency for Personal Services Overseas (APSO) and the Establishment of a Rapid Response Unit

I am directed by the Minister for Finance to say that in the White Paper on Foreign Policy, the Government outlined its intention "to identify personnel from the public service and elsewhere who would be available for speedy deployment for emergency relief activities".

As a result of this commitment in the White Paper, arrangements are currently being finalised by the Department of Foreign Affairs to put in place a "Rapid Response Register" of personnel who would be suitable for deployment in the event of a humanitarian crisis arising. In order to facilitate this process, this Department has undertaken to notify Departments of the arrangements for officers availing of special leave for overseas development work, including personnel selected for inclusion on the Rapid Response Register, and to ask for your assistance in ensuring that the relevant staff are released from their duties in the event of them being required to assist in dealing with a humanitarian emergency.

It is envisaged by the Department of Foreign Affairs that around 150 personnel will be identified, by the Agency for Personal Services Overseas (APSO), for inclusion on the register. It is APSO's intention to ensure that the register is composed of highly motivated, well skilled people, with the personal attributes required to enable them adjust to and perform effectively in an emergency situation. While most of the personnel involved will be health services employees, there will also be some employees from other sectors of the public sector on the register (e.g. local authorities, civil service and state bodies etc) as well as a small number of private sector employees.

Once the Rapid Response Unit has been established, APSO will consult with the relevant Departments and Agencies to establish procedures for communication regarding employees' applications to APSO. While the conditions governing the granting of special leave of absence for overseas development work have been set out in circulars issued by this Department from time to time, they are now consolidated in the attached appendices, inclusive of some provisions applicable only to officers on the Rapid Response Register, for ease of reference.

I am also to ask that you bring the attached arrangements to the attention of all of the bodies under the aegis of your Department.

Any queries about this letter should be addressed to Mr. Pat Fitzsimons, GTN. 7109 Extn. 5445. (Direct dial 604-5445) or to Ms. Deirdre Hanlon, GTN. 7109 Extn. 5448 (Direct dial 604-5448).

Liam Drain
Principal

Appendix 1: Conditions Governing Special Leave of Absence for Humanitarian Emergencies/Overseas Development Work.

1. Duration and Nature of Special Leave of Absence

Special leave, without pay, may be granted for a period or periods up to a limit of five years in total.*

2. Special Leave for Training Courses

It is envisaged

emergency assignment of six months or less, no change should be made to the officer's incremental date.

4. Superannuation Credit.

The arrangements for providing superannuation credit for periods on special leave are set out in Appendix II).

5. Replacement of Staff on Special Leave.

Subject to prevailing policy on civil service numbers, staff released for deployment to deal with humanitarian emergencies may be replaced initially on a higher duties allowance basis.

Consequential vacancies "down the line" may also be filled on the same basis, subject to the lowest graded post being left vacant. Where the person on special leave is **absent for more than 6 months, the vacancy in the lowest graded post may be filled on a supernumerary basis.**

On the return of the officer on special leave, payment of the relevant higher duties allowance(s) should cease and the person serving in a supernumerary capacity in the lower grade will either be absorbed into the "core" staffing complement of the relevant Department/Office, if a suitable vacancy is available at that stage, or will be assigned to another Department from the redeployment pool.

(It is possible to implement the foregoing arrangements in the civil service because a redeployment facility is available. However, in other areas of the public sector, where no such facility is available, staff released for humanitarian emergencies may be replaced on a temporary basis only for the duration of their special leave. Where higher duties allowances are involved, the payment of such allowances should be specifically linked to the period of special leave and no commitment to continue payment of the allowances after an officer returns from special leave should be given).

Appendix II.

Superannuation Arrangements for Public Service Volunteers with the Agency for Personal Services Overseas.

1. Irish public servants on voluntary service abroad with the Agency for Personal Services Overseas (APSO) can have such service abroad reckonable for superannuation purposes on a limited basis.

2. Qualifying Conditions

In order to qualify under the arrangements, volunteers with APSO must meet the following conditions:

- at the time of their assignment overseas, they must be serving in a pensionable capacity in any of the following areas of the Irish public service; Civil service, teachers, health service, local authorities, Garda Siochana, Defence Forces or non-commercial semi-state bodies and have been granted authorised absence in respect of the assignment with APSO,
- they must be approved and funded as volunteer development workers by APSO,
- they must work in a developing country as defined by the Minister for Foreign Affairs in consultation with the Minister for Finance.

3. Superannuation Benefits

Volunteer workers who meet the qualifying conditions at paragraph 2 above will be entitled to have their period of volunteer service reckoned as pensionable service for all purposes, where a benefit becomes payable by reference to their actual service, subject to the following:-

- the maximum period of volunteer service which any volunteer may have reckoned for superannuation purposes under these arrangements is 3 years,
- only volunteer service given after 1 January 1995 will be reckonable,
- volunteer service assignments of less than six months will not normally be reckonable. However, in the case of an officer on the rapid response register, if s/he has a series of short-term assignments overseas, which exceed six months in aggregate over a three year period, all such service may be reckonable.

4. Superannuation Costs

APSO will make the appropriate superannuation contributions in respect of the service of eligible volunteers directly to their employers. Contributions at the rate of 18 1/6% for a member of the spouses and childrens scheme, and 15 1/6% for a non-member, will be levied on the uprated equivalent of the officer's salary on his/her last day of paid service prior to commencement of service with APSO (with appropriate adjustments where the person concerned is not in the "modified PRSI" category).

(Any periods of special leave which may not be covered by the foregoing arrangements can be dealt with under the existing scheme for the purchase of notional service for superannuation purposes provided that the officers concerned satisfy the conditions governing the scheme. (In such circumstances, the individual officers will be responsible for meeting the cost of purchase of the notional service involved)).