

Reference No: E109/20/48; **Date:** 18/09/77

Circular 32/1977:- Dealings with the public

A Dhuine Uasail

I am directed by the Minister for the Public Service to say that, over the years, circulars and other instructions have been issued to the civil service about courtesy in dealing with the public and about the appropriate procedures to be followed in certain such dealings, e.g. in letters to solicitors.

2. As part of the process of consolidating and renewing circulars of general and permanent application it has been decided to reissue and, to some extent, to supplement the existing instructions on these matters (the relevant references are contained in the final paragraph of this circular).

General

3. While the Minister has no reason to believe that the present instructions about courtesy in dealing with the public are not being scrupulously followed, he thinks it well to stress how important it is that members of the public should at all times and in all places be treated by civil servants with the utmost consideration.

4. The instructions in this circular are designed to help the smooth despatch of public business with the minimum of inconvenience to the public. A civil servant must always remember that procedures and practices which to him, as a trained and experienced public official, seem obvious may be found irksome and complicated to the person affected unless care is taken to explain, with tact and courtesy, why they are necessary.

Correspondence between Departments/Offices and the public

5. Letters from the public, whether they are enquiries, complaints or applications, should always be acknowledged unless a reply, if called for, can be sent within a few days. Where delay is unavoidable the desirability of sending an interim reply or replies should be borne in mind.

6. Replies to letters should be capable of being easily understood by any layman. All the relevant advice to civil servants about writing is contained in the booklet, "Write it Better", which was published by this Department's Training Section in 1968. Heads of Departments should see that copies of this booklet (the Training Section have a stock) are readily available in their Departments and that officers use it.

7. Where an application has to be refused (either in writing or orally) it is desirable that the reasons for this decision should be given, whether these reasons arise from statutory prohibitions or from administrative rules or practices. A member of the public has every ground for feeling aggrieved if he is refused something without being told why.

8. Departments should consider adopting the practice of having the name of the signing officer typed below the signature to a letter - especially when the recipient is not likely to recognise the signature.

9. In replies to letters from solicitors the title of the case and the solicitor's reference number should (in compliance with the wishes of the Incorporated Law Society) be cited as a heading.

Callers to Departments and Offices

10. Persons who visit Departments and Offices for information should be seen with the minimum of delay. Where for good and sufficient reason an interview cannot be arranged, the circumstances should be explained and, if possible, a definite appointment made for an interview later.

11. Some Departments are, unfortunately, housed in different buildings widely separated from each other. Where a person calls to the wrong building, the officer who directs him to the correct building should make every effort to arrange by telephone that the caller will be seen by an appropriate officer at the other building. These courtesies are specially important for elderly, disabled or disadvantaged persons.

Telephone calls

12. Telephone callers are entitled to be helped in every way to make speedy contact with the section in the Department (or, preferably, with the actual officer) who is best in a position to deal with their enquiry. Where a call has to be switched from one section to another, the caller should be told why this is necessary and he should also be given the name (and, if possible, the extension number) of the section to which he is being transferred.

13. An officer should not be slow to give his name to telephone callers (or to visitors) so as to make it easier for them to make follow-up enquiries if they should find this necessary.

Circulation

14. This circular should be brought to the notice of all officers currently serving in your Department and new officers on appointment.

Previous instructions

15. Finance Circular 8/48 and Confidential Circulars 8/48, 13/59 and 9/63 are superseded accordingly.

Mise le meas,

S Mac Gamhna