

Reference No: E109/41/81; **Date:** 20/11/84

Circular 33/1984:- A programme to deal with the problem of alcoholism in the civil service

A Dhuine Uasail

I am directed by the Minister for the Public Service to say that he has accepted an agreed recommendation by the General Council under the Scheme of Conciliation and Arbitration for the Civil Service (Report 992) on the introduction of a programme to deal with the problem of alcoholism in the civil service. Cases should be dealt with in accordance with the procedures set out in the agreed programme attached to the report. A copy of the report is enclosed.

2. A booklet entitled "Civil Service Programme to deal with Alcoholism will shortly be distributed to every civil servant. This booklet contains a copy of the agreed programme together with useful advice on safe drinking and on the dangers of alcohol. Because of the key role which supervisors will play in implementing this programme, it is intended to run short information courses (lasting about two hours) for them. These courses will be run in association with the Irish National Council on Alcoholism and will be arranged locally. Every effort should be made to ensure that all supervisors attend.

3. Any enquiries from Departments about this circular should be made to Mr Cyril McHugh (Extension 214).

Mise le meas,

P Gaffey
Deputy Secretary

Civil Service Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme
General Council Report 992
(Meetings of 27 October 1982, 22 December 1982 and 30 November 1983)

A programme to deal with the problem of alcoholism in the civil service

1. In introducing this claim at the meeting of 27 October 1982 the Staff Side said that, as a programme on alcoholism was already agreed and in operation in the Department of Posts and Telegraphs, that Department would be excluded from this claim. At the meeting of 22 December 1982 the Official Side said that it was in favour of having a programme to deal with the problem of alcoholism and it was decided that a sub-committee be set up to consider the matter and, if possible, to draw up a draft programme.
2. At the meeting of 30 November 1983 a report (copy attached) of the sub-committee was before the Council. It was agreed to recommend that effect be given to the sub-committee's report.
3. This report was adopted on 30 November 1983.

Report of Sub-committee of the General Council set up to consider the possibility of introducing a programme to deal with the Problem of alcoholism in the civil service (apart from the Department of Posts and Telegraphs where such a programme already exists).

1. At its first meeting on 10 March 1983 the sub-committee discussed the main issues arising and appointed a drafting committee to draw up a draft programme on alcoholism. The drafting committee reported on 14 September 1983.
2. Further meetings of the sub-committee on 3 October 1983 and 2 November 1983 discussed this draft programme and, in particular, areas on which agreement had not been reached by the drafting committee. Arising out of the discussions agreement was reached on the draft programme attached.
3. The sub-committee submits this draft programme on alcoholism to the General Council and recommends that it be brought into operation.

Programme to deal with Alcoholism in the Civil Service

The Official and Staff Sides of the General Council agree to co-operate in a programme to deal with alcoholism including problem drinking in the civil service (excluding the Department of Posts and Telegraphs where a separate programme exists) as follows:

1. Policy
 - 1.1. Alcoholism is an illness of a special nature for which the individual affected must bear partial responsibility and which requires a special effort on his/her part, if recovery is to be achieved and sustained. Unless treated, alcoholism can cause serious physical, mental, social and economic problems for the individual involved, can result in impaired work performance and may ultimately render the alcoholic unsuitable for retention in employment.
 - 1.2. Both the Official and Staff Sides therefore recognise the need for procedures to prevent the onset of alcoholism and to bring about an early identification of individuals at risk and for supportive measures to enable alcoholics and problem drinkers to avail of suitable treatment.

2. Objective

2.1 The objective of this programme is to help the problem drinker or the alcoholic employee to

- (i) identify the problem
- (ii) receive appropriate treatment
- (iii) control the problem by ceasing to drink alcohol so that the individual's health is restored and a normal productive input made to the work of the Department.

3. Features of the Programme

3.1 The Official Side will take a sympathetic view of alcoholism and problem drinking provided appropriate treatment is undertaken and persevered in. The Official and Staff Sides, through this programme, will give every encouragement to alcoholics or problem drinkers to seek appropriate treatment for their problem and advise them of the various facilities available for this purpose.

3.2 The assistance offered in this programme can be availed of by any individual civil servant who requires it. The responsibility for seeking assistance through this programme and for availing of and following through with a prescribed course of treatment rests ultimately with the individual officer who has a drinking problem.

3.3 Alcoholism will, subject to the other provisions of this programme, be approached in a similar fashion to illness. This approach involves the grant of sick leave for treatment in accordance with the normal sick leave regulations. As with other illnesses, medical certificates and notes of attendances at treatment centres or for counselling will be required. The costs of treatment will be the responsibility of the individual.

3.4 A course of treatment would normally include an aftercare programme. Such a programme can involve regular attendance at outpatient clinics etc. Proof of such attendance may be required to ensure adherence to the individual's rehabilitation programme. During the recovery period, after returning to work, the officer concerned will have the support and help of his superior officers, his colleagues, the Welfare Officer and union officials to complete the rehabilitation process.

3.5 The promotion or employment prospects of an individual suffering from alcoholism or problem drinking who participates fully in a course of treatment (or who has successfully completed it) will not be prejudiced by virtue of his alcoholism, provided recovery is achieved and sustained.

3.6 The confidential nature of matters arising from the working of this programme will be fully respected so as to protect the dignity of the individual concerned to the greatest possible extent.

3.7 Supervisors will have a key role in the operation of this programme. They will be informed about the early identification of signs of drinking problems and about how best to advise and motivate affected staff to seek help within this programme. Details of further education and training relating to the programme are set out in paragraph 6.

4. Procedures

4.1 The programme will operate through Welfare Officers, Personnel Officers and the Chief Medical Officer.

4.2 Participation in the programme may arise on the initiative of

(a) individuals who recognise or suspect that they have or are developing a drinking problem, or their families or doctor,

(b) management or supervisory officers who may become aware of a problem by reason of the officer's behaviour, poor work performance, attendance record and/or relationships with others at work,

(c) the Welfare Officer, Personnel Officer, the Chief Medical Officer,

(d) colleagues or union officials who are concerned about the individual's drinking problem.

4.3 (i) Where under 4.2(b) above management or supervisory officers consider the drinking habits of a member of their staff to be contributing to an unsatisfactory work performance or poor relationships with others at work, they should bring this programme to the attention of the employee involved and recommend that he/she participate in it as a means of dealing with the problem and of improving work performance. If the employee agrees to participate the supervisory officer will contact the Welfare Officer who will advise the individual as to treatment etc. If the employee refuses to participate and work performance does not improve immediately, the supervisory officer will refer the case to the Welfare Officer who will attempt to persuade the individual concerned to participate in the programme.

(ii) Where at this stage the employee persists in refusing to participate in the programme his/her case will be referred immediately by the Welfare Officer to the Personnel Officer who will attempt to persuade the employee to take part in the programme. An officer who refuses to participate at this stage will be subject to normal disciplinary procedures.

(iii) While it is expected that the approach outlined in 3(i) and (ii) above will become the standard approach, circumstances may require that the supervisory officer refer the case directly to either the Welfare Officer or the Personnel Officer.

4.4 Any officer who, having become involved in the programme, shows a lack of determination to control the drinking problem, e.g. by poor attendance at clinics or renewed drinking, will of course be subject to normal disciplinary procedures.

5. Individuals suffering from alcoholism or problem drinking are of course free to make their own private arrangements regarding advice and treatment.

6. Training and Education

Induction courses will include a session on the dangers of alcohol as will other local courses where appropriate. Supervisors will have a key role to play in the process of combatting alcoholism and special training, including the dissemination of literature, will be arranged to better enable them to identify the early signs of drinking problems emerging among staff and to advise and motivate affected staff to seek remedial aid. There will be a continuation of the training of Welfare Officers to ensure that they have the necessary skills to carry out their role in this programme.

7. General

While management will take sympathetic view of alcoholism and problem drinking nothing in this programme is to be interpreted as constituting a waiver of management's responsibility to maintain discipline or its right to take disciplinary measures under normal disciplinary procedures.