



An Roinn Airgeadais  
Department of Finance

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### **Circular 12/2001: Competition for promotion to Assistant Principal (standard scale) level**

A Dhuine Uasail.

1. I am directed by the Minister for Finance to refer to the attached scheme of promotion to Assistant Principal (standard scale) which has been agreed between the Official and Staff Sides. Under the terms of the scheme, this circular announces a Civil Service Commission competition to set up panels for interdepartmental promotion to Assistant Principal (standard scale) and certain related grades. Officers interested in competing should study the scheme, especially the sections on eligibility (paragraphs 9-14) and selection procedures (paragraphs 19-23).

#### **Duration of panels**

2. The panels formed under the terms of this circular will become valid from 1 March 2002 or from the exhaustion date of the equivalent panels set up under the terms of Department of Finance Circular 8/2000, whichever is the earlier. The panel for Dublin vacancies is likely to become operative immediately after its formation (which is expected around June 2001).

3. The validity period of the panels formed under the terms of this circular will extend to 31 December 2002, or until the exhaustion dates of those panels, whichever is the earlier.

#### **The competition**

4. Selection will be by means of a competition run by the Civil Service Commission. The competition will be based on a competency methodology and will have three stages:

- **Stages 1 and 2** will be held on the same day in the week commencing 19 March 2001. **Stage 1**, which will be a qualifying stage, will consist of multiple-choice numeric and verbal reasoning tests, and a job-simulation exercise.
- **Stage 2** will be a qualifying written test, consisting of a work-related case-study paper. **Only candidates who reach a satisfactory standard at Stage 1 will have their Stage 2 scripts corrected. Only candidates who reach a satisfactory standard at Stage 2 will be called to the next stage.**
- **Stage 3** will consist of a competitive interview. Interviews are expected to be held in May 2001.

**TO ALL DEPARTMENTS** [For department read department/office throughout this circular.]

5. Further details of the format and structure of the written tests will, where appropriate, be issued to candidates in advance by the Civil Service Commission. At Stage 3, the interview board will be given a detailed breakdown of the range of competencies required for effective performance in Assistant Principal (standard scale) level posts which are appropriate for assessment at that stage of the competition.

### **Applications**

6. Candidates should get their application forms from the Personnel Section of their serving department. The Commission will supply application forms to Personnel Sections on request. Candidates should return their completed application forms directly to the **Chief Executive Officer, Office of the Civil Service and Local Appointments Commissioners, 1 Lower Grand Canal Street, Dublin 2** to arrive not later than 5.30 p.m. on **Thursday 22 February 2001**. This closing date must be strictly observed, since late applications will not be accepted. An applicant who has not heard from the Commission by 14 March 2001 should contact that office immediately.

7. The Civil Service Commission will contact Personnel Sections in respect of candidates being called to competitive interview. For each candidate called to competitive interview the Personnel Officer will be required to certify that the candidate;

- has been satisfactory and worked well in his or her present grade,
- has been satisfactory in general conduct, and
- fulfils the conditions of eligibility specified in paragraphs 9-14 of the scheme.

8. Eligibility to compete, and health and the level of sick leave, are not verified by the Civil Service Commission until a candidate comes under consideration for appointment after Stage 3. So admission to the competition and placement on a panel do not imply that a candidate meets the health and sick leave criteria. In considering a candidate's suitability for appointment in terms of health and sick leave, the Commission will have regard to Department of the Public Service Circular 34/76, as amended by Department of Finance Circulars 32/91 and 33/99. Candidates with doubts about any aspect of their eligibility should clarify their position with their Personnel Section before applying.

### **Circulation and further information**

9. Personnel Sections should bring this circular to the notice of all eligible officers serving in their departments and associated offices without delay, including officers on maternity leave, career break and other relevant forms of leave. If candidates have any queries about the circular they should contact their Personnel Section. Subsequent enquiries about their candidature should be addressed to the Civil Service Commission.

Mise le meas,

Joe McGovern  
Assistant Secretary

## **Interdepartmental promotion scheme to posts at Assistant Principal (standard scale) level**

### **Definitions**

1. A "department" includes any office such as the Office of the Revenue Commissioners or the Central Statistics Office which is normally treated as a separate nominating unit for interdepartmental competitions.
  2. A "fillable vacancy" only arises in respect of posts which are to be filled by promotion. It includes newly created posts, along with vacancies in existing posts, in the grades listed below:
    - Assistant Principal (standard scale) in all departments except the Department of the Taoiseach, the Department of Finance and the Land Registry/Registry of Deeds.
    - Senior Auditor in the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General.
    - First Secretary in the Department of Foreign Affairs.
    - Assistant Principal Committee Clerk in the Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas.
- Posts filled by special interdepartmental competition will not reckon as vacancies for the purposes of this scheme.

### **Scope and application of the scheme**

3. Every third fillable vacancy in the grades listed in paragraph 2 will be filled under the scheme.
4. Departments which have been assigned an import quota (see paragraphs 15-18) will be required to fill certain additional vacancies under the scheme.
5. An interdepartmental competition will be held to fill all vacancies within the meaning of the scheme. Two panels of qualified candidates, placed in order of merit, will be set up as follows:
  - **Panel B:** This will be the main panel; it will be formed from among those candidates qualified at the competitive interview stage of the competition (Stage 3). It will be drawn from in order of merit to fill posts under paragraph 3.
  - **Panel A:** This panel will be formed from among all qualified candidates on Panel B who are Higher Executive Officers or Administrative Officers whose parent departments are assigned an export quota, excluding Administrative Officers in the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Finance. The number of candidates on this panel from any department will not exceed four times' the export quota of that department. The panel will be drawn from in order of merit to fill posts under paragraph 4. A candidate's parent department will be the parent department at the time of application for the competition.

Appointments will be made from the panels strictly in accordance with the order in which vacancies fall to be filled. Where a vacancy falls to be filled from both Panel A and Panel B, it will be filled from Panel A, thereby also discharging the liability to Panel B.
6. If Panel A is exhausted before all import quotas have been satisfied, any subsequent Panel A liabilities will be filled by the appointment of candidates from exporting departments placed on Panel B but excluded from Panel A due to the export quota limit set out in paragraph 5. If there are no such candidates remaining on Panel B at that stage or if no such candidate accepts the post, it will be offered to those remaining on Panel B in order of merit. If Panel B is exhausted before its expiry date the Official and Staff Sides will consult on the arrangements to apply for the outstanding period.

7. If a post cannot be filled from a panel it may then be filled internally in the department concerned, and this will be deemed to satisfy that department's obligation to the panel in that instance. If an internal appointment is made in this manner, then the panel will be deemed to have expired for the relevant grade or geographical location. However, within two months of the expiry date of Panel B, should a post subsequently arise in that grade or geographical location that is due to be filled from the panel, then the department concerned may fill the post internally but will carry a debt to the panel.

8. For each officer in FÁS appointed under the scheme, one fillable vacancy in the grade of Assistant Principal (standard scale) in FÁS will be filled under the scheme.

### **Eligibility**

9. In order to be eligible to compete, prospective candidates must,

(a) on the date they apply for the competition be serving in an established capacity in the civil service (or be on secondment to FÁS from the civil service) in one of the following grades:

- Higher Executive Officer (including HEO/Systems Analyst).
- Administrative Officer.
- Third Secretary in the Department of Foreign Affairs.
- Auditor in the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General.
- Senior Clerk in the Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas.
- Systems Analyst in the IT and Telecommunications Division at Garda Headquarters of the Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform.
- Social Welfare Officer in the Department of Social, Community and Family Affairs.

#### **AND**

(b) on **1 March 2002** have at least three years' service in their existing grade or an aggregate of three years' service in eligible grades (set out at (a)), except in the case of a Social Welfare Officer or a Higher Executive Officer or an Administrative Officer who has prior service in the Social Welfare Officer grade or the former grade of Higher Officer of Customs & Excise (see paragraph 10).

10. Social Welfare Officers must have at least eight years' service to be eligible to compete, and may count up to five years' service in the Executive Officer grade as service in the Social Welfare Officer grade for this purpose. Former Social Welfare Officers and former Higher Officers of Customs & Excise who have been recertified as Higher Executive Officers and/or appointed as Administrative Officers **and** who have less than three years' service in those recertified grades, must have an aggregate of at least eight years' service in eligible grades in order to compete. Service in the former grade of Higher Officer of Customs & Excise will count as service in an eligible grade. Former Higher Officers of Customs & Excise may count up to five years' service in the Executive Officer grade or in the former grades of Officer and Indoor Officer of Customs & Excise as service in the Higher Officer grade for this purpose.

11. Officers on probation are not eligible to compete except where they would have been eligible had they remained in their previous grade and they have served continuously since satisfactorily completing a period of probation. Periods of special leave without pay should not be considered to break continuity of service for this purpose.

12. Officers on special leave with pay may apply, if otherwise eligible. Officers on special leave without pay (e.g. to serve with the EU) may be eligible; Personnel Sections should check cases not covered by Department of Finance Circular 33/91 with this department. Officers on career break may apply if their career break conforms with the terms of Department of Finance Circular 18/98 and if they are otherwise eligible.

13. The eligibility of any particular grade or group for appointment to any grade under the competition held under this scheme applies exclusively in the context of the scheme.

14. Officers serving in the Land Registry/Registry of Deeds are not eligible to compete.

### **Import/export quotas**

15. Departments will be assigned (and informed of) an import/export quota based on promotion trends to Assistant Principal (standard and higher scale). The Land Registry/Registry of Deeds, the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General and the Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas will not be assigned a quota.

16. Departments which in the preceding five-year period had more or less than the average number of promotions to Assistant Principal (calculated by multiplying the annual average of eligible officers in each department by the ratio which the number of promotions to the grade service-wide bore to the number of eligible officers service-wide) will be given import or export quotas respectively, the satisfaction of which will make good the departures from average. Quotas below 0.5 will be disregarded and other quotas will be rounded to the nearest integer.

17. In determining import/export quotas, all promotions of Higher Executive Officers and Administrative Officers (excluding Administrative Officers in the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Finance) to Assistant Principal (standard or higher scale) will be counted.

18. Where a department has been divided or amalgamated during the five-year period referred to in paragraph 16, that department's quota will relate to the functional area for which it is now responsible. The quota will be calculated by reference to the numbers of eligible officers and promotions in the individual branch/division involved in the interdepartmental reorganisation.

### **Selection procedures**

19. Selection will be by means of a Civil Service Commission competition. The final stage of the competition will be a competitive interview, conducted by a board or boards set up by the Commission. Candidates will be required to undergo preliminary tests (run by the Commission), and only those who reach the requisite standard in those tests will be invited to competitive interview, which will determine which candidates are fully qualified for appointment. Panels will be drawn up, in order of merit, from among these qualified candidates.

20. In ranking the candidates considered best qualified for appointment, the Commission will give credit for proficiency in both Irish and English, in accordance with Department of the Public Service Circular 43/75 and Department of Finance Circular 30/90 and any other relevant

instruction to candidates qualified for such credit on or before the date of the competitive interview, or such other date as the Official and Staff Sides may agree.

21. Competitive interview boards will consist of board members who have been fully trained in the structured interview technique.

22. Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General: Candidates who indicate an interest in being considered for Senior Auditor appointments in the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General, and who are placed on Panel B, will be interviewed subsequently by a separate board to establish whether they are qualified for the Senior Auditor grade. This board will consist of a representative of the Comptroller and Auditor General's Office and a Civil Service Commission nominee. A panel of qualified candidates, if any, will be drawn up from those interviewed. (The Commission may, at its discretion, decide that Auditors placed on Panel B are qualified for Senior Auditor without attending for further interview.) Senior Auditor assignments, should vacancies arise, will be made from those candidates deemed suitable for the grade, in accordance with their Panel B ranking. Candidates interested in being considered for Senior Auditor appointments should note that they will be expected to have some knowledge of public sector accounting and financial procedures; they will also be expected to be able to demonstrate an understanding and appreciation of current accounting and auditing standards.

23. Department of Foreign Affairs: Candidates who indicate an interest in being considered for First Secretary appointments in the Department of Foreign Affairs and who are placed on Panel B, will be interviewed subsequently by a separate board to establish their suitability for the First Secretary grade. This board will consist of a Department of Foreign Affairs representative and a Civil Service Commission nominee. A panel of qualified candidates, if any, will be drawn up from those interviewed. (The Commission may, at its discretion, decide that Third Secretaries placed on Panel B are qualified for First Secretary without attending for further interview.) First Secretary assignments, should vacancies arise, will be made from those candidates deemed suitable for the grade, in accordance with their Panel B ranking.

### **Appointments**

24. Offers of appointments will be made from the panels in order of merit. An officer will have a maximum of five working days after receipt of an offer to accept or reject it. Appointments will be in an acting capacity for at least one year and will be subject to the usual conditions governing such appointments. Officers not promoted at the expiry of the panels will have no claim to promotion thereafter because of having been on the panels. In the event of reversion an officer will return to fill a vacancy in the grade previously held in the parent department just prior to promotion. The next person on the relevant panel will be appointed to the vacancy thus created without affecting the sequence of appointments in that department provided the reversion occurred before the expiry of the relevant panel.

25. Officers on the panels will continue to be eligible for promotion in the normal course in their own department but in the event of any such officer accepting an offer of promotion made in the normal course or under the scheme or to a grade covered by the scheme he or she will no longer be offered appointment to posts at or below that level under the scheme.

26. Any candidate who (a) resigns, retires, is suspended or is dismissed from his or her post or (b) is not qualified by the interview board as being suitable for promotion to Assistant Principal (standard scale) level, will not be eligible to be placed on the panels.

27. Knowledge of Irish: It is recognised that the performance of duties in the Department of Education and Science, the Department of Arts, Heritage, Gaeltacht and the Islands and the Civil Service Commission through the medium of Irish could present special difficulties. Those departments may therefore, as an exceptional arrangement, satisfy themselves as to the competence of any candidate due to be assigned to them to undertake such duties through the medium of Irish. If further appraisal of such competence is sought, it will be effected by the Commission on the basis of a test held specifically for this purpose. An officer found not to be qualified for appointment because of this special Irish language requirement will retain his or her place on the relevant panel. If on expiry of that panel the officer has not been promoted and it is established that he or she would have been promoted from the panel but for the special Irish language requirement, then that officer will be offered the first appointment falling to be filled from the next equivalent panel set up under this scheme to which the special Irish language requirement does not apply.

### **Refusal of appointments**

28. An officer may refuse an offer of appointment from the panels on grounds of grade offered or on grounds of geographic location. An officer may also refuse an appointment to FÁS.

29. An officer who refuses appointment on grounds of grade will not be offered an appointment to that grade again but will remain on the panel for appointments to other grades. Similarly, an officer who refuses appointment on grounds of geographic location will not be offered an appointment in that location again but will remain on the panel for other locations. An officer who refuses an appointment in FÁS will not be offered another appointment in that body but will remain on the panel for other appointments.

30. An officer who refuses an offer of appointment under paragraph 28 and has not been promoted when the relevant panel expires will have no claim to promotion thereafter because of having been on the panel.

### **Performance appraisal**

31. For each candidate called to competitive interview, the Personnel Officer will give the Commission an assessment of the candidate's suitability for promotion on a form supplied by the Commission. The promotion potential form in the relevant scheme of performance appraisal as completed at the last appraisal before the date of the competition circular should be used when completing that form. Where a sufficiently long period, say about nine months, has elapsed since the candidate's appraisal, and where there is reason to believe that the candidate's performance in the meantime merits a change in the assessment, then a current appraisal should be made.

### **Career development and training**

32. An officer promoted from a departmental grade to a general service grade, or vice versa, under this scheme will have career development opportunities equivalent to other members of the grade. Subject to the demands of the job having priority, any desirable induction training (formal and on-the-job) should also be provided as soon as practicable.

### **Steering Committee**

33. A Steering Committee, representative of the Official and Staff Sides, will monitor the progress of the scheme with a view to resolving individual problems and addressing general issues which may arise in relation to its operation.

### **Reservations**

34. The Minister for Finance reserves the right to suspend or modify the scheme in the event of redundancy which has to be dealt with on a general service-wide basis. The Minister also reserves the right to arrange for the filling, by separate interdepartmental competition or otherwise, of vacancies at Assistant Principal (standard scale) level for which special circumstances exist. Before an interdepartmental competition is initiated in any such case, there will be consultation between the Official and Staff Sides.

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