



An Roinn Airgeadais  
Department of Finance

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E 100/9/01

14 December 2001

**Circular 52/2001: Confined competition for appointment as Higher Executive Officer to serve as Employee Assistance Officer in the Civil Service**

A Dhuine Uasail,

1. I am directed by the Minister for Finance to announce the holding, by the Civil Service Commission, of an interdepartmental competition to establish a panel for appointments as Employee Assistance Officer at Higher Executive Officer (HEO) level in the Civil Service.

**Posts to be filled from the competition**

2. Successful candidates will be placed on a panel from which they may be appointed to any department where suitable vacancies exist. It is likely that the panel will be valid for two years.

**General information**

3. The Civil Service has a long established tradition in the provision of an occupational welfare service for its staff. In recent years the service has been undergoing expansion and development to provide more comprehensive coverage to civil servants in all locations. The service provides confidential assistance and a wide range of supports to staff and management in relation to personal or job-related problems. The provision of a service of this nature arises from a recognition that staff are a valued resource whose continued well-being contributes to the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the Civil Service.

4. Employee Assistance Officers are assigned to a designated parent Department, but may be required to provide a service for staff in other Departments also. (Appointees from this competition may be assigned to a Dublin-based office or to an office in any other location in Ireland). At present there are eighteen HEO/Employee Assistance Officers based in Dublin, and one each based in Cork, Limerick, Sligo and Wexford.

**TO ALL DEPARTMENTS**

**[For Department, read Department/Office throughout this Circular.]**

### **Job Description**

5. The work of an Employee Assistance Officer involves the provision of a confidential support and referral service to staff and management on a wide variety of problems and difficulties arising both within and outside the workplace. This service includes assisting staff in evaluating and assessing personal difficulties and problems, supporting them in the planning and structuring of ways to resolve such difficulties and following up with contact and support. In addition, Employee Assistance Officers are to promote, co-ordinate and disseminate practical advice and information to staff and management on a wide range of issues relating to health and welfare. In order to discharge their duties effectively, Employee Assistance Officers develop contacts with a range of welfare agencies and specialist services outside their Departments and also maintain effective liaison with line management and staff.

Among the issues dealt with by Employee Assistance Officers are:

- Work-related issues (issues relating to human aspects of work, e.g. interpersonal difficulties, harassment, balancing work with domestic responsibilities, general dissatisfaction)
- Stress
- Health issues (physical, emotional, psychiatric and psychological)
- Family and marital issues (domestic violence, separation, relationships, secondary family issues)
- Financial problems (debts, budgeting)
- Addiction (alcohol, gambling, drugs)
- Bereavement (how to cope with loss/grief, practical information on probate).

6. In carrying out the duties of the position, Employee Assistance Officers will be required to:

- Liaise with employees, line management, Personnel, relatives of employees, outside agencies, specialist services and any other contacts as necessary
- Participate in any training and development programmes which may be considered necessary to help carry out the duties effectively. The training takes the form of formal courses, on-the-job training (including ongoing group training), peer support and professional supervision
- Undertake official travel as required; the extent of travel required will vary depending on the geographical spread of the Department(s) to which the Employee Assistance Officer is assigned and the requirements of management
- Undertake work which does not always conform to normal working hours
- Monitor the effective implementation of the Employee Assistance Programme in the Department(s) to which he or she is assigned.

### **Personal Requirements**

7. To serve effectively as an Employee Assistance Officer, it is desirable that appointees should possess the following qualities:

- a mature outlook
- a concern for the well-being of others
- an aptitude for communicating effectively, in particular for developing relationships of trust and confidence
- sound judgement
- good listening skills
- an objective and non-directive approach to dealing with other people's problems

- the ability to display initiative and efficiency in setting priorities and balancing demands
- the willingness to be part of a team
- knowledge of IT and presentation skills.

A diploma in counselling or relevant qualification would be an advantage. Relevant work experience would also be an advantage.

8. In addition to having the capacity to carry out the duties outlined in paragraphs 5 and 6 above, appointees should be capable of dealing with all aspects of work at HEO level.

### **Eligibility**

9. The Civil Service is committed to a policy of equal opportunity.

10. Candidates must be serving in an established capacity in the Civil Service on the date they apply for this competition and on 1 December 2001 have at least 7 years' service in an established capacity in the Civil Service.

11. Officers on probation are not eligible to compete excepting where they would have been eligible had they remained in their previous grade and 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 career break may apply if the terms of their career break conform with the provisions of Department of Finance Circular 18/98 and if they are otherwise eligible. Officers on special leave without pay (e.g. to serve with the EU) may be eligible; Personnel Sections should check individual cases not covered by Department of Finance Circular 33/91 with this department.

### **Conditions of Appointment – Salary**

13. A successful candidate who is on a salary scale the maximum of which is equal to or above that of the HEO maximum, will enter the HEO scale at the minimum or at existing pay plus accrued increment, whichever is the greater, subject to the maximum of the HEO scale not being exceeded.

14. If a successful candidate is on a salary scale the maximum of which is equal to or above that of the maximum of the Executive Officer (EO) scale, but below that of the maximum of the HEO scale, the following conditions will apply:

- (a) if he or she has completed the minimum period of service for promotion to HEO or such minimum period as may be determined as appropriate, will be offered appointment as a HEO

**OR**

- (b) if he or she has not completed the minimum period of service for promotion to HEO or such minimum period as may be determined as appropriate, will be paid an allowance calculated in accordance with Circular 21/74 (as amended by Circular 29/80) for carrying out the duties of the post; the allowance will be paid

subject to the usual conditions. On completion of the requisite service he or she will be offered appointment as a HEO and payment of the allowance will cease.

15. A successful candidate who is on a salary scale the maximum of which is below that of the maximum of the EO scale will be appointed as an EO and paid an appropriate allowance calculated in accordance with Circular 21/74 (as amended by Circular 29/80) for carrying out the duties of the post pending completion of such minimum period of service as may be determined as appropriate for appointment as HEO. At the expiration of such minimum period the officer will be offered appointment as Higher Executive Officer and payment of the allowance will cease.

### **Conditions of Appointment – General**

16. All officers appointed from this competition will be assigned as Employee Assistance Officers.

17. Offers of appointments will be made from the panel in order of merit. An officer will have five working days after receipt of an offer to accept or reject it; failure by the officer to decide within that time-frame may be construed as a rejection of the offer. Officers not promoted at the expiry of the panels will have no claim to promotion thereafter because of having been on the panels.

18. All appointments will be on an acting basis for at least one year. An officer whose service is not satisfactory, or who opts not to remain on Employee Assistance Officer work, may, at any time up to the end of twelve months, be returned to his or her parent department and/or duties in the former grade; any extra payment arising from the assignment would then cease.

19. Officers appointed as Employee Assistance Officers will be eligible at all times, subject to being qualified in all other respects, to apply for entry to interdepartmental competitions for which they are eligible.

20. A candidate who resigns, retires, is suspended or dismissed from his or her post will cease to be eligible for appointment from this competition.

21. Officers appointed under this Circular will be expected to serve as an Employee Assistance Officer for at least five years. Officers appointed to positions based outside Dublin may be required to undergo a preliminary training period in Dublin. The Head of the Department may decide to allow an officer to continue to serve as Employee Assistance Officer beyond the five-year period.

22. Candidates will be required to specify, on a form to be supplied by the Commission, the provincial locations (if any) where they would be prepared to serve. Candidates placed on the panels will be offered appointments to Dublin and such provincial locations so specified, should appointments in those locations arise. An officer may refuse an offer of appointment on grounds of geographic location; he or she will not be offered an appointment again in that location but will remain on that panel for appointments that may arise in other locations.

23. An officer, who refuses an appointment under the provisions of paragraph 22 above and who has not been promoted at the expiry of the panel set up from this competition, will have no claim to promotion thereafter because of having been on the panel.

### **The Competition**

24. Selection, which will consist of a competitive interview, will be by means of a competition to be conducted by the Civil Service Commission (CSC). The CSC may, on the advice of the interview board following examination of the applications of all candidates by reference to the nature of the duties and the candidates' experience, decide that a number only of the candidates shall be invited to attend before the board for interview. In addition, the CSC may, at their discretion, on the advice of the interview board, require candidates to undergo a preliminary interview and invite only those who reach the requisite standard to attend for competitive interview, which will determine which candidates are fully qualified for appointment. The interview(s) will be conducted by a board(s) to be set up by the CSC. The interviews will commence as soon as possible after the closing date.

25. In assessing candidates for the competition, candidates' qualifications and/or experience will be taken into account (e.g. qualifications in counselling or psychology or active involvement with voluntary charitable or support organisations).

26. In placing in order of merit the candidates considered best qualified for appointment, the CSC will give credit for proficiency in both Irish and English (in accordance with the terms of Department of the Public Service Circular 43/75 and Department of Finance Circular 30/90) to candidates qualified for the award of such credit on or before the date of the competitive interview, or such other date as may be agreed between the Official and Staff Sides. A candidate who does not already qualify for such credit and who wishes to be assessed for this purpose may take a special oral test to be arranged by the CSC. Only candidates who reach the requisite standard at the preliminary interview and/or who are called to the competitive interview may take the special oral test.

### **Applications**

27. Candidates should obtain application forms from their own Personnel Section. The Civil Service Commission will supply application forms to Personnel Sections on request.

Applications can be made by:

- (a) submitting the original application **plus three photocopies** addressed to the Chief Executive Officer, Office of the Civil Service and Local Appointments Commissioners, 1 Lower Grand Canal Street, Dublin 2 to arrive there as soon as possible but not later than **5.30 p.m. on Wednesday 16 January 2002**

**OR**

- (b) e-mail to **EAO2002@cslac.irlgov.ie** to arrive as soon as possible but not later than **5.30 p.m. on Wednesday 16 January 2002**.

Where a candidate is on loan from another Department, the Head of the Department should forward the original application **plus three photocopies** to the Chief Executive Officer, Office of the Civil Service and Local Appointments Commissioners, 1 Lower Grand Canal Street, Dublin 2 to arrive there not later than **5.30 p.m. on Wednesday 16 January 2002**.

**This closing date must be strictly observed.**

28. It would greatly assist the CSC if Personnel Sections were to forward applications as they receive them, rather than holding back the applications to send them together in one batch.

29. The Head of a Department will be required to certify, on a form to be supplied by the CSC, that the candidates

- have worked well and been satisfactory in their present grade
- have been satisfactory in general conduct
- are suitable from the point of view of health with particular regard to sick leave; in relation to health and sick leave the procedures set out in Department of the Public Service Circular 34/76 (as amended by Department of Finance Circular 32/91 and 33/99) must be followed; particular regard should be paid to paragraph 3.3 of that Circular
- fulfil the conditions of eligibility set out in paragraphs 9 - 12 above
- have the personal qualities outlined in paragraphs 7 and 8 above.

30. Candidates should note that eligibility for the competition and the level of sick leave is not verified by the CSC until a candidate comes under consideration for appointment. Admission to the competition therefore does not imply acceptance by the CSC. If candidates have doubts about any aspect of their eligibility, they are advised to clarify their position with their Personnel Section before proceeding with the application.

**Circulation and further information**

31. Personnel Sections should bring this Circular to the notice of all eligible officers serving in their Departments and associated Offices without delay, including eligible officers on maternity leave, career break, term time leave or other forms of leave. If candidates have any queries about this Circular, they should contact their Personnel Section. Subsequent enquiries about their candidature should be addressed to the Civil Service Commission.

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Joe McGovern  
Assistant Secretary