



An Roinn Airgeadais
Department of Finance

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Circular 24/2002: Diversity in the Civil Service - A Policy on Equality of Opportunity

A Dhuine Uasail

1. I am directed by the Minister for Finance to inform you that a new Diversity Policy for the Civil Service has been developed and agreed with the Civil Service Staff Unions under the Civil Service Conciliation and Arbitration Scheme. The new policy was formally launched by the Minister for Finance on Wednesday 10 July 2002. *Diversity in the Civil Service* sets out the Civil Service policy on implementing equality of opportunity and, together with the Gender Equality Policy, replaces the 1986 Equal Opportunity Policy and Guidelines for the Civil Service.

2. The new policy will be issued to all staff shortly and should be issued to all new entrants to the Civil Service from now on and their attention drawn to the principles outlined in it.

3. The Civil Service is strongly committed to equality of opportunity in all its employment practices. As an employer, the Civil Service must fulfil its obligations under equality legislation, particularly the Employment Equality Act 1998. While recognising that people are different, employment practices must ensure that these differences do not lead to unlawful discrimination in the workplace.

Equality of Opportunity

4. Equality of opportunity in the Civil Service means that:

- all Civil Servants can be confident that their rights under the Employment Equality Act are guaranteed and that no-one will receive less favourable treatment than someone else because of their gender, marital or family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race or membership of the Traveller community;

- throughout their working lives, Civil Servants can be assured of equality of participation in their Department¹, regardless of gender, marital or family status, sexual orientation, religious belief, age, disability, race or membership of the Traveller community;
- all Civil Servants have a responsibility to create a working environment in which differences are respected and in which all people - staff, clients and customers - are valued as individuals;
- as an employer, the Civil Service will strive to achieve real equality of opportunity by continuously monitoring its employment practices to ensure that they do not perpetuate existing inequalities.

Equality of Opportunity in the Key Human Resource Areas

5. As in the case of gender equality, the Civil Service is committed to ensuring equality of opportunity in the key human resource areas. These are:

- Recruitment
- Promotion
- Placement and mobility policies
- Training and development
- Family friendly working arrangements and achieving work/life balance
- Realisation of a positive working environment, free of harassment, sexual harassment and bullying
- Elimination of discriminatory language.
- Retention of staff

6. The Civil Service recognises the importance and, in some cases, the necessity, of positive action in accordance with the law, in creating real equality of opportunity. Nothing in this policy shall preclude the Civil Service or individual Government Departments from taking positive action, as permitted under the Employment Equality Act 1998, in respect of :

- persons who have attained the age of 50 years;
- persons with a disability; or
- members of the Traveller community.

¹For Department read Department/Office throughout this circular

Responsibility for the Policy on Equality of Opportunity

7. Departments, as employers, have a duty of care towards their staff and are responsible in law for upholding equality legislation. Departments may have their actions reviewed by the Office of the Director of Equality Investigations, the Labour Court and the Courts on the basis of complaints from individuals who consider that they have been subject to discrimination contrary to the Employment Equality Act 1998 or to the Equal Status Act 2000. In addition, the Equality Authority may carry out inquiries and issue recommendations for the purpose of eliminating discrimination or promoting equal opportunities. The Equality Authority may also carry out equality reviews and prepare equality action plans and codes of practice in furtherance of the elimination of discrimination in employment or the promotion of equality of opportunity in employment.

8. The Department of Finance, in consultation with the Civil Service unions, is responsible for developing policy and promoting best practice in equality of opportunity across the Civil Service.

9. Responsibility for the implementation of equality of opportunity lies with the Head of Department or a person designated by the Head of Department. Clear and effective designation of responsibility and accountability is critical to the effective implementation of the policy.

10. Implementing equality of opportunity requires action by Departments. Appendix A of *Diversity in the Civil Service*, sets out in detail the steps that Departments may take to put this policy into practice.

Review of Policy

11. The Department of Finance, in consultation with the Civil Service unions, will commission a formal evaluation of the Policy on Equality of Opportunity after 5 years.

Mise le meas

Joe McGovern

Asst. Secretary