



An Roinn Airgeadais  
Department of Finance

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**Circular 3/2003: Competitions for appointment to posts at Principal (Standard Scale) level and Principal (Higher scale) level**

A Dhuine Uasail,

1. I am directed by the Minister for Finance to refer to the attached Scheme for interdepartmental promotion to posts at Principal level which has been agreed with the Association of Higher Civil and Public Servants (AHCPS). Under the terms of that Scheme, this Circular announces competitions, to be run by the Civil Service Commission, for the establishment of panels for appointment to Principal (Standard Scale) level posts and Principal (Higher Scale) level posts.

**The scheme**

2. Eligible officers who are interested in participating in the competitions should familiarise themselves with the Scheme, which sets out the key features of the competitions, including the scope and application of the Scheme itself, the nature of work at Principal level, eligibility, selection procedures and appointments.

**Duration of panels**

3. The Principal (Standard Scale) panel will be formed by means of a two-stage interview-based competition. Preliminary interviews are expected to commence in **March 2003** with the main interviews in **April 2003**. The panel should be available towards the end of **May 2003**, and the related Counsellor panel available shortly afterwards. Each of these panels will be valid from its formation date as the equivalent panels set up under Department of Finance Circular 33/2000 have now expired.

4. The Principal (Higher Scale) panel will be formed through a competition, consisting of a single competitive interview stage, confined to those called to final interview for Principal (Standard Scale) and to officers already serving at that level. The timing of those interviews has yet to be determined and eligible candidates will be notified at a later stage. The Principal (Higher Scale) panel will also be valid from its formation date.

5. The validity of all panels set up under the terms of this circular will extend to **31 December 2004** or until the date on which the lowest-ranked candidate on a particular panel is assigned to a post from that panel, whichever is the earlier.

**TO ALL DEPARTMENTS** [For Department read Department/Office throughout this Circular.]

6. The validity periods (start and end dates) of the panels formed under the terms of the Circular may be altered by agreement between the Department of Finance and the AHCPS.

### **Applications**

7. Application forms are available from Personnel Sections or, alternatively, candidates can apply online or via e-mail. The Civil Service 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 Commissioners, Chapter House, 26-30 Abbey Street Upper, Dublin 1** or online at [www.publicjobs.ie](http://www.publicjobs.ie) or via e-mail to: [PO@publicjobs.ie](mailto:PO@publicjobs.ie) to arrive not later than **5.15 p.m. on Friday 21 February 2003**. This closing date must be strictly observed, since late applications will not be accepted. Candidates should use only one means of application i.e. hardcopy, online or e-mail.

8. Candidates must, no later than **21 February 2003**, inform the Personnel Officer of their serving department that they have entered the competition(s). This should be done on a notification slip which every candidate will receive with their application form. For each candidate entering the competition(s), the Personnel Officer should provide the Commission with an assessment of suitability for promotion on a form to be supplied by the Commission.

9. Candidates should note that (i) eligibility for the competitions and (ii) health and the level of sick leave are not verified by the Commission until a candidate comes under consideration for appointment. Admission to the competitions and interview does not imply acceptance by the Commission. In considering a successful 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**

10. 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 any other relevant 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.

11. The Civil Service is an equal opportunity employer. Promotion within the service is made on the basis of qualifications and the ability to carry out the responsibilities of the grade or post.

Mise le meas,

Joe McGovern  
Assistant Secretary

## Scheme for interdepartmental promotion to posts at Principal level

### **DEFINITION**

1. "Department" includes any office such as the Central Statistics Office, the Office of the Revenue Commissioners, the Office of Public Works and the Civil Service Commission which is normally treated as a separate nominating unit for the purpose of interdepartmental competitions.

### **SCOPE AND APPLICATION OF THE SCHEME**

2. The following posts will be filled under the Scheme:

- (a) Every third promotion to an existing post in the grade of Principal (Standard Scale) in each department (excluding the Department of Finance and the Department of the Taoiseach) and every third promotion to an existing post in the grade of Principal (Higher Scale) in the Department of Finance and the Department of the Taoiseach.
- (b) Every third promotion to an existing post in each of the grades listed in **Appendix 1** to this scheme.
- (c) Every new post in the grades of Principal (Standard Scale) and Principal (Higher Scale) that is filled by promotion.
- (d) Every new post in each of the grades listed in **Appendix 1** to this scheme that is filled by promotion.
- (e) Every promotion to the grades of Principal (Standard Scale) or Principal (Higher Scale), or to any of the grades listed in **Appendix 1** to this scheme, arising as a consequence of the former occupant of the post taking up appointment at Assistant Secretary level or higher in a department other than his or her parent department.

3. For the purpose of paragraph 2(a) and (b) above, the grades of Principal (Standard Scale), Principal (Higher Scale) and each of the grades listed in **Appendix 1** to this scheme will be given separate sequences within each department. Posts filled under paragraph 2 (c), (d) and (e) above, or under paragraph 33 below will not reckon in the sequence of promotions; neither will posts which have traditionally been filled by special interdepartmental competition.

4. For the purpose of paragraph 2(c) above, new posts may, in certain circumstances, be deemed not to include certain posts which originate in the promotion *in situ* of officers at Assistant Principal level who have effectively filled those posts on the basis of a higher duties / ex gratia allowance for Principal-level duties for a lengthy period. The exemption of posts in this way will be considered on a case-by-case basis by the Department of Finance, which will consult with the AHCPS and individual departments as appropriate.

### **DURATION OF THE PANELS SET UP UNDER THE SCHEME**

5. The panels of qualified candidates will be established through interview-based competition (see paragraphs 11-17 below) and will be valid for a period to be specified in the competition Circular. The period of validity may be varied by agreement between the Department of Finance and the AHCPS.

## **NATURE OF WORK**

6. The duties of posts at Principal level are broad-ranging, the main functions generally being as follows:

- Responsibility for the general management of specific areas of Government activities and for representation of these areas internationally and domestically as appropriate.
- Policy work relating to broad national issues, including the review of current policies, strategies and legislation and the development of new initiatives in the light of Government and ministerial policy and agreed objectives and priorities.
- Advising Ministers in relation to issues arising within their areas of responsibility.

## **ELIGIBILITY**

7. For **Principal (Standard Scale)** level posts, candidates must,

(a) be serving in an established capacity in the civil service in one of the following grades;

- Assistant Principal (Standard Scale)
- Assistant Principal (Higher Scale)
- a Departmental grade listed in paragraph 1 of **Appendix 2** to this Scheme
- Assistant Principal on secondment to the Health and Safety Authority from the Civil Service
- Assistant Regional Director or Regional Director on secondment to FÁS from the Civil Service

**and**

(b) on **1 May 2003** have not less than three years' service in their existing grade or an aggregate of three years' service in eligible grades set out at (a). In this context, credit is given for all job-sharing service on the same basis as full-time service,

**and**

(c) be certified by the Personnel Officer as being suitable for consideration with regard to;

- performance of work in the present grade,
- general conduct, and
- health, especially sick leave.

8. For **Principal (Higher Scale)** level posts, candidates must,

(a) be serving in an established capacity in the civil service in the grade of Principal (Standard Scale) or in a Departmental grade listed in paragraph 2 of **Appendix 2** to this scheme,

**or**

have competed in the competition for Principal (Standard Scale) and have been called by the Civil Service Commission to final interview in that competition,

**and**

(b) be certified by the Personnel Officer as being suitable for consideration with regard to:

- performance of work in the present grade,
- general conduct, and
- health, especially sick leave.

9. 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 individual cases with this Department if they are not covered by Department of Finance Circular 33/91. 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.

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

### **SELECTION PROCEDURES**

11. Selection for the Principal (Standard Scale) panel will be by means of a two-stage interview-based competition:

- **Stage 1** will consist of a preliminary interview by one of a number of boards set up by the Civil Service Commission. All eligible candidates will be entitled to an interview at this stage. The Commission will determine the number of such boards and will invite approximately the same number of candidates (probably between 40 and 50) for interview by each board. Those candidates will be placed in rank order by each board. All candidates will be issued with their placing at the end of Stage 1. Subject to paragraph 13 below, the Commission will decide that a certain number of the highest-ranked candidates from each preliminary board will be invited to interview at Stage 2. For example, if there are ten boards at Stage 1 then the number of candidates to be forwarded by each board to Stage 2 is likely to be between four and six.
- **Stage 2** will consist of a competitive interview by a single final board set up by the Civil Service Commission. This board will interview those candidates who have been selected to proceed from Stage 1, as outlined above. The final board will determine which candidates are qualified for promotion to Principal (Standard Scale) and will place these qualified candidates in rank order on the panel.

12. If there is a possibility that the Principal (Standard Scale) panel may expire before its end-date of **31 December 2004**, then it may be replenished by the calling to interview, by a reconvened final board, of a “second batch” of candidates comprised of the highest-ranked candidates at Stage 1 who were not originally invited to Stage 2. Subject to paragraph 13 below, each Stage 1 board would supply the same number of candidates to be invited for interview at this reconvened Stage 2 with the exact number per board determined by the Civil Service Commission. The lifetime of the “second batch” panel would not extend beyond **31 December 2004**. The reconvened final interview board would not necessarily have the same membership as the original one.

13. Candidates will be called to final interview on the basis of *equivalent ranked groups from each Stage 1 board*. For example, those candidates ranked one to five by each Stage 1 board might be called to final interview to form the original panel (i.e. the first batch). If however one of those candidates, in the case of a particular board, had, in the period between Stage 1 and being called to final interview, been promoted internally, then he or she would not be entitled to proceed to final interview (see paragraph 19), and so only four candidates from that particular board would be invited to final interview. This principle of equivalent ranked groups would also apply to the calling to interview of candidates to form a “second batch”.

14. The Commission interview boards will regard candidates as suitable for placing on the interdepartmental panel for promotion to Principal (Standard Scale) level posts only if they are satisfied, on the basis of the interview and the candidates' careers to date, that they

(a) possess the necessary skills to successfully undertake the duties of Principal-level posts, particularly as regards;

- the critical analysis of complex policy and organisational issues,
- planning and organisation of large blocks of work,
- the motivation and management of people, and
- effective communications, both within the organisation and with relevant outside bodies,

**and**

(b) have a proven record of;

- commitment and diligence
- decisiveness
- readiness to adopt a proactive approach
- resilience under pressure
- adaptability
- personal effectiveness, and
- delivering results.

15. Selection for the Principal (Higher Scale) competition will be by a competitive semi-structured interview conducted by the Civil Service Commission. The Commission may, at its discretion, require candidates to undergo a preliminary interview and invite only those who reach the requisite standard to attend for competitive interview. The board conducting the competitive interviews will form a panel in order of merit. Interviews will be conducted by a board or boards to be set up by the Commission and the selection criteria will be based on the following:

- § ability to analyse critical complex policy and organisational issues
- § ability to plan and organise large blocks of work
- § ability to motivate and manage people
- § ability to communicate effectively, both within the Department and with outside bodies
- § ability to manage in the environment in which the Department of Finance and the Department of the Taoiseach operates (for example, economic and social matters, international dimension including EU, Public Service change).

16. In placing candidates considered best qualified for appointment in order of merit, the Civil Service 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 the award of such credit on or before the date of the competitive interview, or such other date as may be agreed between the Department of Finance and the AHCPS.

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

## **APPOINTMENTS**

18. Subject to the provisions of paragraphs 19-22 below, each appointment to a post which must be filled from a panel formed under the scheme will be offered to the candidate who is, at the time of making the offer, highest placed on the order of merit on the appropriate panel. Appointments will be in an acting capacity in the first instance and will be subject to the usual conditions governing such appointments. Officers not promoted at the expiry of the panel will have no claim to promotion thereafter because of their having been on the panel. In the event of reversion an officer will, where practicable, return to fill a vacancy in the grade and department in which he or she served prior to promotion. The vacancy thus created will be filled again under the terms of the scheme without affecting the sequence of appointments in that department provided the reversion occurred before the expiry of the panel.

19. 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 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.

20. Knowledge of Irish: It is recognised that the position in relation to the performance of certain duties in the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs, the Department of Education and Science 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 a candidate's competence in that respect is sought, it will be effected by the Commission on the basis of a test held specifically for this purpose.

21. Department of Foreign Affairs: Candidates who indicate on their application forms that they are interested in being considered for appointment as Counsellor in the Department of Foreign Affairs and who are successful in being placed on the Principal (Standard Scale) panel, will have discussions subsequently with a separate board consisting of a representative of the Department of Foreign Affairs and a person nominated by the Civil Service Commission. This board will confirm their suitability for the diplomatic service having regard to the particular work requirements and terms and conditions of employment, including the onerous and continuing liability for service abroad, which apply in the diplomatic service. (The Commission, may, at its discretion, decide that officers serving in the Department of Foreign Affairs in the Assistant Principal and First Secretary grades who

are placed on the Principal (Standard Scale) panel can be deemed to be qualified for the diplomatic service without having to attend for further interview.) Assignments to the post of Counsellor, should a vacancy arise, will be made from those candidates who have been confirmed suitable for the post, in accordance with their order of merit on the Principal (Standard Scale) panel. A decision by the board that an individual candidate is not suitable for assignment to the diplomatic service, or any agreement between the board and a candidate that the candidate will not proceed with his/her application in the light of the discussions with the board, will not, of course, interfere in any way with the candidate's place on the Principal (Standard Scale) panel.

22. Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General: The following procedure will apply where a post of Deputy Director of Audit in the Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General falls to be filled under the scheme:

- (a) The post will be advertised, and all officers who, under the terms of this scheme, are eligible to apply for Principal (Standard Scale) posts will be eligible to apply for the Deputy Director of Audit post.
- (b) Selection will be by means of competitive interview conducted by the Civil Service Commission. The Commission may, on the advice of the interview board following examination of the applications of all candidates by reference to the nature of the duties of the post and the candidates' experience and qualifications, decide that not all of the candidates will be invited to interview and invite only those who reach the requisite standard to attend for competitive interview.

### **REFUSAL OF APPOINTMENTS**

23. An officer who refuses an offer of appointment on grounds of the grade of the post offered will not be offered an appointment to that grade again, but will remain on the panel for appointment to other grades. Similarly, an officer who refuses an offer of appointment on grounds of the location of the post offered will not be offered an appointment to that location again, but will remain on the panel for appointment to other locations. However, an officer who refuses an offer of appointment to a post made following a competition held under paragraph 22 above will not be considered for any further appointment under the scheme during the lifetime of the panel.

24. An officer who refuses an offer of appointment on grounds of grade or location and who has not been promoted at the expiry of the relevant panel will have no claim on promotion thereafter because of having been on the panel.

25. Where an offer of appointment is refused, the post will be offered successively in order of merit to the remaining candidates on the relevant panel until it is filled. If no candidate accepts the post, it may be filled by internal promotion in the department concerned and that department will be deemed to have satisfied its liability to the scheme in respect of the vacancy in question.

26. An officer who is found not suitable for appointment to a particular post because of the Irish language requirement in paragraph 20 will retain his or her place on the relevant panel. If, on expiry of the panel, such an officer has not been promoted and it is established that he or she would have been promoted from the panel but for the operation of the Irish language

requirement, then that officer would be offered the first appointment which would fall to be filled from the next equivalent panel to which the Irish requirement does not apply.

27. When an offer of appointment is made, an officer will have a maximum of **five working days** after receipt of the offer from the Department with the promotional vacancy to accept or reject the promotion. Failure to respond to the offer will be deemed to constitute a refusal of the offer.

### **PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL**

28. For each candidate, the Personnel Officer should provide the Civil Service Commission with an assessment of suitability for promotion on a form to be supplied by the Commission. Where a candidate is subject to a scheme of performance appraisal within his or her department, the promotion potential form in that 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 sufficient reason to believe that the candidate's performance in the interim period merits a change in the assessment, then a current appraisal should be made.

### **CAREER DEVELOPMENT AND TRAINING**

29. Where an officer is promoted from a departmental grade to a general service grade or vice versa under this scheme, that officer 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**

30. A Steering Committee, representative of the Department of Finance and the AHCPS, will monitor the progress of the scheme with a view to resolving issues which may arise in relation to its operation.

### **REVIEW**

31. The Department of Finance and the AHCPS will review general matters arising from the operation of this scheme.

### **RESERVATIONS**

32. 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.

33. The Minister for Finance also reserves the right to arrange for the filling, by separate interdepartmental competition or otherwise, of vacancies at Principal (Standard or Higher Scale) level for which special circumstances exist. Before an interdepartmental competition is initiated, in any case where special circumstances are deemed to exist, there shall be consultation between the Department of Finance and the AHCPS.

34. Staffing proposals relating to special circumstances from Departments must be raised with Personnel and Remuneration Division of the Department of Finance prior to those Departments entering into any further discussions on this issue.

January 2003

## **APPENDIX 1**

### **DEPARTMENTAL GRADES IN WHICH POSTS MAY BE FILLED**

#### **Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General**

Deputy Director of Audit

#### **Department of Foreign Affairs**

Counsellor

#### **Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas**

Principal Committee Clerk

#### **Office of the Ombudsman - Office of the Information Commissioner**

Senior Investigator

## **APPENDIX 2**

### **DEPARTMENTAL GRADES ELIGIBLE TO COMPETE**

#### **1. .... FOR PRINCIPAL (STANDARD SCALE) LEVEL POSTS**

##### **Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General**

Senior Auditor

##### **Department of Foreign Affairs**

First Secretary

##### **Courts Service**

Any grade at Assistant Principal level in the Courts Service

##### **Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas**

Principal Clerk

Assistant Principal Committee Clerk

##### **Office of the Ombudsman - Office of the Information Commissioner**

Investigator

#### **2. .... FOR PRINCIPAL (HIGHER SCALE) LEVEL POSTS**

##### **Office of the Comptroller and Auditor General**

Deputy Director of Audit

##### **Department of Foreign Affairs**

Counsellor

##### **Department of Justice, Equality and Law Reform**

Co-ordinator of Work and Training

Co-ordinator of Education

##### **Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas**

Principal Committee Clerk

Clerk Assistant of the Seanad

##### **Office of the Ombudsman - Office of the Information Commissioner**

Senior Investigator