



An Roinn Airgeadais
Department of Finance

E109/74/03

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5-9,
Sráid Freidric Theas,
Baile Átha Cliath 2,
Éire.

5-9,
South Fredrick Street,
Dublin 2,
Ireland.

Telephone: 353-1-676 7571
Facsimile: 353-1-604 5399
LoCall: 1890 66 10 10
VPN: 8109
<http://www.irlgov.ie/finance>

Circular 16/2003: Confined Competition for promotion to Higher Executive Officer in the Civil Service

A Dhuine Uasail,

1. I am directed by the Minister for Finance to refer to the attached scheme of promotion to Higher Executive Officer, 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 Higher Executive Officer. Officers interested in competing should become familiar with the scheme, especially with the sections on eligibility (paragraphs 11-14) and selection procedures (paragraphs 18-20).

The competition

2. The HEO competition will be a two-stage competition which will assess the competencies identified by a thorough Job Analysis study as being relevant to effective performance in the HEO role.

Stage 1: Candidates will sit Stage 1 during a half day testing session. This stage will take place nationwide commencing on 17 July 2003 and candidates will be required to complete a numeric test, a verbal reasoning test and a job scenarios test. The first two tasks involve analysis and interpretation of information and the third task measures decision making, managing individuals and teams and interpersonal skills.

Only candidates who reach a satisfactory standard on the three exercises will be invited to Stage 2. Candidates' order of merit at Stage 1 will be based on their performance on the verbal and job scenarios tests. The numeric test serves as a qualifying test.

Stage 2, which will commence towards the end of August 2003, will involve a competitive competency-based interview, an oral presentation to a board and a short written exercise.

3. Further details of the format and structure of the different stages of the competition will be issued to candidates, where appropriate, in advance.

TO ALL DEPARTMENTS

[For department read department/office throughout this circular.]

Duration of panels

4. The panels formed under the terms of this circular will become valid from 1 January 2004, or from the exhaustion date of the equivalent panels set up under the terms of relevant Department of Finance Circular (10/2002), whichever is the earlier.

5. The validity period of the panels set up under the terms of this circular will extend to 31 December 2004, or until the exhaustion dates of those panels, whichever is the earlier.

Applications

6. Applications will be taken over the phone and candidates will be asked to provide their PPS number. To apply for this competition, candidates must call 1890 261 000 before **5.15 p.m. on Friday 20 June 2003**. ***This closing date must be strictly observed.*** An applicant who has not heard from the Commission by 10th July 2003 should contact that office immediately.

7. The Civil Service Commission will contact Personnel Sections in respect of candidates being called to Stage 2 of the competition (structured interview, oral presentation and short written exercise). For each candidate called to this stage the Personnel Officer will be required to certify that the candidate;

- has been satisfactory and worked well in his/her present grade,
- has been satisfactory in general conduct, and
- fulfils the conditions of eligibility specified in paragraphs 11-14 of the scheme.

8. Eligibility to compete, health and level of sick leave, are not verified by the Commission until a candidate comes under consideration for appointment after Stage 2. Therefore, admission to the competition and placement on a panel does 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

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.

10 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.

John O'Connell
Assistant Secretary

Scheme of interdepartmental promotion to posts at Higher Executive Officer level

Definitions

1 A "department" includes any office such as the Office of Public Works or the Central Statistics Office which is normally treated as a separate nominating unit for interdepartmental competitions. It also includes FÁS.

A "provincial location" means a location outside of Dublin.

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 and departments/bodies listed below:

- (a) All departments: Higher Executive Officer.
- (b) Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas: Senior Clerk.
- (c) FÁS: Higher Executive Officer.

Posts which have traditionally been filled by special interdepartmental competition shall not reckon as vacancies for the purposes of this scheme.

Sustaining Progress

2 In the context of addressing skills shortages and strengthening recruitment practices in the Civil Service, the Sustaining Progress Agreement provides for the greater use of open recruitment for appointments above existing entry levels (paragraph 22.10 refers). The following are some of the agreed measures outlined in paragraph 22.11:

- *Beginning with the IT, HR and financial management areas, open recruitment will be introduced in those areas as part of the solution to address skills shortages and ultimately ensure delivery of a quality service to the public.*
- *The Civil Service may recruit in any year a number of staff at the level of Higher Executive Officer, Assistant Principal and Principal Officer (and equivalent grades) equal to the number of staff in those grades who had resigned from the Civil Service in the previous year to take up positions in the private sector or elsewhere in the public sector.*
- *Where posts, which are normally filled by promotion, are filled under the terms of the above arrangements by open competition, they will be regarded as fulfilling the requirements to fill posts by interdepartmental competitions and will also count towards the fulfilment of quotas of posts to be filled by open recruitment at lower levels where appropriate.*

In keeping with the commitment to improving promotion systems in the Civil Service, Sustaining Progress also provides that:

- *All existing service requirements in respect of eligibility for promotion will be reduced by one year subject to a minimum of two years service, by mid-2003 (paragraph 22.17(i) refers),*

- *The proportion of posts filled under mobility provisions of interdepartmental promotion competitions will be increased from 33.3% to 40% from the beginning of the next competitions to be held under the existing arrangements for interdepartmental promotion schemes (paragraph 22.17(ii) refers).*

This new arrangement applies to this competition and will take effect when the panels become valid (see paragraph 4 of this circular). The change will require two vacancies in every five to be filled under the scheme and means that in a sequence of five, the second and fourth vacancy will be filled from the interdepartmental panel.

This proportion will be increased to 50% from the date equating to the commencement of the next subsequent competition for promotion to Principal level.

Scope and Application of the Scheme:

3. The following posts, therefore, will be filled under the scheme:

- Every second and fourth fillable vacancy in a sequence of five in the grade of Higher Executive Officer in all departments except the Land Registry/Registry of Deeds (but see (d) below)
- Every second and fourth fillable vacancy in a sequence of five in the grade of Senior Clerk in the Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas.
- Fillable vacancies in the grade of Higher Executive Officer in departments having an import quota: the number of vacancies to be filled in this manner will be determined by reference to the import quota assigned to individual departments (see paragraph 15).
- The non-specialist Higher Executive Officer post in the Land Registry/Registry of Deeds.
- One fillable vacancy in the grade of Higher Executive Officer in FAS for each officer serving in FAS who is appointed under the terms of this scheme.

The sequence for filling posts in the Higher Executive Officer grade in each Department (apart from posts to be filled under the "Import/Export arrangements) will be as follows:

Internal, Panel B, Internal, Panel B, Internal.

However, where a Department is assigned an "Export" quota of 2 or more they will substitute internal promotions to a number equal to the "Export" quota for appointments which would otherwise have been filled from Panel "B" on the basis that every second post which would otherwise have been filled from Panel "B" is filled by internal promotion. As an example, in the case of a Department with an "Export" quota of 2, the sequence for filling posts would be as follows:

Internal, panel B, internal, internal (first panel B substitute), **internal**

Internal, panel B, internal, internal (second panel B substitute), **internal.**

In the event that a Higher Executive Officer post in a Department is filled from an open competition held under the terms set out in Sustaining Progress, that filling shall reckon as having fulfilled the Department's liability to fill a post which would otherwise have been filled from panel "B".

4 In calculating the sequence of vacancies for these purposes, posts filled under paragraph 35 will not reckon.

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 all qualified candidates. The panel will be drawn from in order of merit to fill posts under paragraph 3(a), (b), (d), and (e).

Panel A: This panel will be formed from among all qualified candidates on Panel B and who are Executive Officers whose parent departments (when they apply for the competition) are assigned an export quota (see paragraph 15). The number of candidates on this panel from any department will not exceed four times that department's export quota. The panel will be drawn from in order of merit to fill every post falling to be filled under paragraph 3(c). Appointments will be made from the panels strictly in accordance with the order in which vacancies fall to be filled.

6 Candidates who have been **qualified for appointment** will be required to specify the provincial locations, (if any), where they would be prepared to serve, on a form to be supplied by the Commission. Candidates **placed on the panels** will be offered appointments to Dublin and such provincial locations so specified, should appointments in those locations arise. Candidates on the panels will not be offered appointments to provincial locations which they have not specified. However, should an appointment arise in a location which has not been listed on the form supplied by the Commission, it will be offered, in order of merit, to officers on the panels and will not affect the position regarding refusals of appointments as set out in paragraph 27. Candidates can be given no assurances that even one appointment to any particular location will be available. Appointments to an office relocated under the current decentralisation programme will not be offered from this competition while positions in that office are being filled from special panels set up under the decentralisation programme.

7 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.

8 If Panel A is exhausted before all import quotas have been satisfied, any subsequent Panel A liabilities will be met by appointment of candidates from exporting departments placed on Panel B but excluded from Panel A due to the export quota limitation set out in paragraph 5. If no such candidates remain on Panel B at that stage, Panel A liabilities will be met by appointment of candidates from Panel B in order of merit. If Panel B is exhausted prior to its expiry date the Official and Staff Sides will consult on the arrangements to apply for the outstanding period.

9 If a post cannot be filled from a panel **on grounds of grade** or because it is in **FÁS** (see paragraphs 25-30), 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, however, a post in a provincial location cannot be filled from a panel on **grounds of geographic location** and it cannot subsequently be filled under the provisions of paragraph 29(b), it may then be filled internally in the department concerned but that department will carry a debt forward, for that particular location, to the next equivalent panel established under this scheme. The next fillable vacancy that arises in that particular location in the department concerned during the

life of the subsequent panel will be due to be filled from the panel; if it cannot be filled in this manner, the debt will lapse. If a post in **Dublin** cannot be filled from a panel on **grounds of geographic location** it may then be filled internally in the department concerned but that department will carry a debt forward, for Dublin, to the next equivalent panel established under this scheme. The next fillable vacancy that arises in Dublin in that department during the life of the subsequent panel will be due to be filled from the panel.

10. An Executive Officer promoted to Higher Executive Officer under Department of Finance Circular 30/65 or any later circular containing similar provisions governing the return of an officer to fill a post of Higher Executive Officer in his/her parent department, will, on his/her return to such department, be regarded as filling the next vacancy which would normally be due to be filled from Panel B.

Eligibility

11. Candidates must,

(a) on the date they apply for the competition be serving in an established capacity in the civil service as an Executive Officer or a Junior Clerk in the Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas or an Executive Officer on secondment to FÁS from the civil service,

and

(b) on 1 January 2004 have not less than **two** years' service in their existing grade **or** an aggregate of two years' service in eligible grades set out at (a).

12. Officers on probation are ineligible unless they would have been eligible had they remained in their previous grade and they have served continuously since satisfactorily completing a probation period; special leave without pay does not break continuity of service for this purpose.

13. 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.

14. 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.

Import/Export quotas

15. Departments will be assigned (and informed of) an import/export quota based on promotion trends to Higher Executive Officer. In determining these quotas, all Executive Officer to Higher Executive Officer promotions (including promotions to HEO/Systems Analyst) will be counted. The Land Registry/Registry of Deeds, the Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas and FÁS will not be assigned an import/export quota.

16. Import/export quotas will be calculated from time to time, generally on an annual basis. Departments which in the preceding period of three years had more or less than the average

number of promotions to HEO (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 assigned import or export quotas respectively, the satisfaction of which will make good the departures from the average. Quotas of less than 0.5 will be disregarded and other quotas will be rounded to the nearest whole number.

17. Where a department has been divided or amalgamated during the three-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

18. Selection will be by means of a Civil Service Commission competition. The final stage of the competition will be a competitive interview, an oral presentation and a short written exercise, conducted by a board or boards set up by the Commission. This stage will determine which candidates are fully qualified for appointment. Panels will be drawn up, in order of merit, from among these qualified candidates.

19. 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 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.

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

Knowledge of Irish

21. It is recognised that the performance of duties in the Department of Education and Science, the Department of Community, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs 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 by means of a special test. An officer found not to be qualified for appointment because of this Irish requirement will retain his/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 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 Irish requirement does not apply.

Appointments

22. Offers of appointment 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 their 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.

23. 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 appointment 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.

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

Refusal of appointments

25. Appointments will be offered, in order of merit, to officers on the panels set up as a result of the interdepartmental competition. An officer may refuse an appointment on grounds of grade offered or geographic location. An officer may also refuse an appointment to FÁS.

26. An officer who refuses appointment **on grounds of the grade offered** will not be offered an appointment to that grade again but will remain on the panel for appointments to other grades.

27. An officer who refuses an offer of appointment to **Dublin on grounds of geographic location** will not subsequently be offered an appointment to Dublin again but will remain eligible for appointment to such provincial locations as he or she has specified should appointments arise in those locations. Likewise, an officer who refuses an offer of appointment **on grounds of geographical location to a provincial location** which the officer has specified will remain eligible for appointment to Dublin but will not be offered appointment to a provincial location again, except that an officer stationed in a provincial location who has specified that location may refuse an offer of appointment to another provincial location and remain eligible for appointment in the location where he or she is stationed. In light of the foregoing, candidates are advised that when specifying provincial locations (if any), as provided for at paragraph 6, they should list only those locations in which they are prepared to serve.

28. 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.

29. An appointment refused under the provisions of paragraph 25 will be offered successively in order of merit to the remaining candidates on the appropriate panel until the post is filled. If the appropriate panel is Panel A and if no candidate accepts the position, it will be offered to those candidates from exporting departments placed on Panel B but excluded from Panel A

because of the export quota limitation referred to in paragraph 5. If there are no candidates from exporting departments remaining on Panel B at that stage or if none of them accept the position, the appointment will be offered in order of merit to those remaining on Panel B. In the event that the post cannot be filled in this way and,

(a) **the appointment has been refused on grounds of grade or because it is in FÁS**, it will be filled by internal promotion in the department concerned and that department will be deemed to have satisfied its panel liabilities in respect of the vacancy in question,

(b) **the appointment is to a provincial location and has been refused on grounds of geographic location**, it may be filled internally in the department concerned but that department will carry a debt forward, for that particular location, to the next equivalent panel established under this scheme. The next fillable vacancy that arises in that particular location in the department concerned during the life of the subsequent panel will be due to be filled from the panel; if it cannot be filled in this manner, the debt will lapse, and

(c) **the appointment is to Dublin and has been refused on grounds of geographic location**, it will be filled by internal promotion in the department concerned but that department will carry a debt forward, for Dublin, to the next equivalent panel established under this scheme. The next fillable vacancy that arises in Dublin in the department concerned during the life of the subsequent panel will be due to be filled from the panel.

30. An officer who refuses an offer of appointment under the provisions of paragraph 25 and who has not been promoted at the expiry of the relevant panel will have no claim to promotion thereafter because of having been on the panel.

Performance appraisal

31. For each candidate called to competitive interview and oral presentation, 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.

35 The Minister for Finance also reserves the right to arrange for the filling, by separate interdepartmental competition or otherwise, of vacancies at Higher Executive Officer level for which special qualifications are deemed necessary or in respect of which other 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 Official and Staff Sides.

June 2003