



An Roinn Airgeadais
Department of Finance

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Circular 23/2003: Competition for promotion to Assistant Principal (higher scale) in the Civil Service

A Dhuine Uasail,

1. I am directed by the Minister for Finance to state that, by agreement between the Official and Staff Sides, an interdepartmental competition will be held for promotion to Assistant Principal (higher scale) posts in the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Finance. The role of an Assistant Principal (higher scale) in the Department of the Taoiseach and the Department of Finance is set out in **Appendix I** and **Appendix II** respectively.

Filling of posts

2. A "fillable vacancy" is defined as a vacancy (in a new or existing post) which is to be filled by promotion to the grade of Assistant Principal (higher scale) level. Posts filled by special interdepartmental competition will not count as fillable vacancies.

3. Candidates successful at the final stage of the competition will be placed on the main panel, known as **Panel B**. This panel will be used to fill every second and fourth fillable vacancy in a sequence of five in each department (see paragraph 7 of this circular on Sustaining Progress). A further panel, **Panel A**, will consist of candidates on Panel B who are Higher Executive Officers or Administrative Officers in the Department of the Taoiseach or the Department of Finance. Panel A will be used to fill every fifth fillable vacancy in a sequence of five in each department. The sequence for filling posts in the Assistant Principal (higher) grade will, therefore, be as follows: Internal, Panel B, Internal, Panel B, Panel A.

Details of the competition

4. The competition, which will be run by the Civil Service Commission, will have two stages:

Stage 1 will consist of a shortlisting exercise and is expected to take place in early October 2003. Candidates will be shortlisted on the basis of a detailed application form which they will have completed and returned to the Commission. The form is designed to allow candidates to present their relevant skills and experience to best effect.

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

Stage 2 will consist of a competitive structured interview, and will be open to candidates shortlisted from Stage 1. The interview board(s) will be set up by the Commission, and will consist of persons who have been fully trained in the structured interview technique.

The competency areas, which will be examined at the shortlisting and interview stage, are set out in **Appendix III**.

Interviews are expected to take place in mid/late October 2003. Further details of Stages 1 and 2, including in particular the competencies to be assessed, are given in notes attached to the application form.

5. In ranking the candidates considered best qualified for appointment, the Commission will give credit for proficiency in both Irish and English, in accordance with the relevant circulars, to candidates qualified for such credit on or before the conclusion of the Stage 2 interviews (or such other date as may be agreed between the Official and Staff Sides).

Eligibility

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

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

- Assistant Principal (standard scale) including the former Inspector of Taxes Higher grade
- 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
- Investigator in the Offices of the Ombudsman and Information Commissioner

or

(b) (i) be serving in an established capacity in the civil service in one of the following grades:

- Higher Executive Officer (including HEO/Systems Analyst and the former grade of Inspector of Taxes)
- 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

and

(ii) **on 1 January, 2004** have at least two years' service in their existing grade or an aggregate of two years' service in eligible grades set out at (b) (i). In this context, credit is given for all work-sharing service on the same basis as full-time service. Service in the former Inspector of Taxes grade is treated as HEO service for this purpose.

7. In keeping with the commitment to improving promotion systems in the Civil Service, Sustaining Progress 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) of the Agreement 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) of the Agreement refers).*

These new arrangements apply to this competition and will take effect when the panels become valid (see paragraph 18 of the circular). The change regarding the filling of posts (33.3% to 40%) will require two vacancies in every five to be filled and means that the second and fourth vacancy in a sequence of five will be filled from the interdepartmental main panel (Panel B). This proportion will be increased to 50% from the date equating to the commencement of the next subsequent competition for promotion to Principal level and this in effect means from 1 January 2007. The sequence for filling posts in the Assistant Principal (higher grade) is outlined in paragraph 3 of the circular.

8. 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.

9. Officers on special leave with pay may apply, if otherwise eligible, as may officers on secondment to FÁS from the civil service. 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.

10. The eligibility of any particular grade or group for appointment under the terms of the competition applies exclusively to the posts covered by the competition, as set out in paragraphs 2 and 3 above.

Appointments

11. Offers of appointment will be made from the panels 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. An officer who reverts 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.

12. The panels will be promotion panels. This means that empanelled officers who accept promotion to Assistant Principal (higher scale) level, whether such promotion derives from their panel placement or otherwise, will effectively remove themselves from the panels.

13. 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 (higher scale), will not be eligible to be placed on the panels.

Refusal of appointments

14. An officer who refuses an offer of appointment from the panels will not receive another offer from the panels, unless the basis of refusal is geographic location.

Applications

15. Candidates should obtain 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 (along with 5 copies) directly to the **Chief Executive Officer, Office of the Civil Service Commission, Chapter House, 26-30 Abbey Street Upper, Dublin 1** or by e-mail to: **AP@publicjobs.ie** to arrive not later than **5.30 p.m. on Monday 22 September 2003**. The closing date must be strictly observed, since late applications will not be accepted. Candidates should use only one means of application i.e. hardcopy **or** e-mail.

16. 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 asked to give the Commission an assessment of the candidate's suitability for promotion on a form supplied by the Commission. The Personnel Officer will also be required to certify, in respect of each candidate being called to competitive interview, 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** for the competition (see paragraphs 6-10 above).

17. Candidates should note that (i) eligibility to compete, and (ii) 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 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, 33/99 and 17/03. Candidates with doubts about any aspect of their eligibility should clarify their position with their Personnel Section before applying.

Duration of panels

18. The panels set up from this competition will become valid from 1 January 2004 or from the exhaustion date of the equivalent panels set up under the terms of the relevant Department of Finance Circular 16/2002, whichever is the earlier. The validity period of the panels will extend to 31 December 2004, or until their exhaustion dates, whichever is the earlier.

Steering Committee

19. A Steering Committee, representative of the Official and Staff Sides, will monitor the progress of the panels with a view to resolving individual problems and addressing general issues which may arise. The Committee will, in particular, consult on the steps to be taken in the event that the panels become exhausted before their due expiry dates, or appear likely to do so.

Reservations

20. The Minister for Finance reserves the right to suspend or modify the arrangements set out above 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 (higher 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.

Circulation and further information

21. 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.

22. 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

Appendix I

Department of the Taoiseach

The Department of the Taoiseach operates at the heart of Government, deriving its mandate from the roles of the Taoiseach, as Head of Government, and of the Government Chief Whip. The Department's mission is to provide the Taoiseach and Chief Whip with the policy advice, information and support necessary for the effective leadership, co-ordination and strategic direction of Government policy - from policy formulation through to decision-making, implementation and monitoring.

The Department is involved in the key policy priorities of the Government of the day, and Assistant Principals have a central role in supporting key aspects of national policy, currently including:

- Developing the national infrastructure necessary for continued economic progress
- Maintaining and developing social partnership
- Promoting public service modernisation
- Pursuing social inclusion measures to ensure the benefits of success are fairly shared
- Progressing implementation of the *Good Friday Agreement* and Irish interests in European and international circles
- Ensuring that Ireland takes advantage of the challenges and opportunities offered by the Information Society

Assistant Principals also lead teams working on certain tasks which are central to the role of the Department, such as providing a Secretariat to the Government, liaising with the President and the Houses of the Oireachtas, provision of Government press and information services and of protocol, corporate support and private office services.

The Department aims to achieve its objectives through the creation of a working environment based on partnership, with each member of staff being encouraged to participate in the setting of objectives, in shaping the means by which they are to be achieved and being supported by training and development to realise his/her potential.

The competency areas, which will be examined at the shortlisting and interview stage, are set out in **Appendix III**

Further information on the work and the organisation of the Department of the Taoiseach is available on our web site <http://www.taoiseach.gov.ie>

Appendix II

Department of Finance

The Department of Finance has a central role in implementing government policy and in advising and supporting the government on the economic and financial management of the state and the overall management and development of the public sector. Its mission is “to promote a growing economy which will deliver a high level of sustainable employment, social progress and living standards.” This involves promoting policies which deliver international competitiveness and internal efficiency; advising the government on, and managing, the overall process of resource allocation and generation to secure sustainable economic and social benefits; and achieving ongoing improvements in efficiency and effectiveness across the public sector.

The typical work of the Assistant Principal in the Department is challenging and developmental. Assistant Principals lead teams working on certain tasks which are central to the role of the Department. They are closely involved in the development and implementation of national policy on a number of fronts including:

- The annual Budget Statement and the Finance Act.
- Macroeconomic policy
- Implementation of the National Development Plan
- Formulation of the Irish policy stance at EU and other international forums
- Promotion of North-South co-operation
- Promotion of public service modernisation
- Determination and application of policy on public sector pay and conditions
- The annual Expenditure Estimates and Appropriation Act

The Department works closely with other Government Departments and many other organisations, both in the public and private sector, and at EU and international level.

The Department has developed a comprehensive human resource management policy, in conjunction with staff. This involves substantial investment in staff training and development, the aim being that all members of staff are given the support and training necessary to perform their duties and for ongoing career development and realisation of their potential. The Department has recently agreed an Equality and Diversity policy and promotes family friendly policies such as term time, flexi time (up to and including AP level), and work sharing.

The competency areas, which will be examined at the shortlisting and interview stage, are set out in **Appendix III**

Further information on the work and the organisation of the Department of Finance is available on our web site <http://www.irlgov.ie/finance>.

Appendix III

The competency areas which will be examined in the selection process are:

- **Analytical Evaluation** – must be able to identify relevant information sources, to objectively analyse and evaluate large amounts of complex information (including numerical data), and to identify the key issue(s) and to make appropriate recommendations.
- **Influencing and Negotiating skills** - must be skilled in presenting a case and influencing others to support a particular point of view/course of action. This requires the use of persuasive arguments, listening to others, selling the benefits of a proposed course of action and tailoring an approach to take account of others perspective's. There is also a need to emphasise shared objectives, to compromise where appropriate and to focus on achieving consensus.
- **Commitment to Quality Results** - must take responsibility for producing high quality work at all times, even when working under pressure or to tight deadlines. It is important to pay attention to detail and to put in extra effort when required to ensure a high quality outcome.
- **Organising Resources** – must be capable of organising resources effectively in order to ensure tasks are completed in accordance with deadlines. It is important to prioritise and plan work, identifying possible problem areas and developing contingency plans where necessary. An AP1 must monitor how work is progressing in accordance with plans.
- **People Skills** – must be able to interact effectively with a wide range of people. It is important that he/she listens to and understands the needs and concerns of different individuals/parties, and adapt his/her approach accordingly. An AP1 must motivate and encourage people and must be willing to deal with conflict if it arises.
- **Decision Making/ Judgement** – must make independent decisions on issues based on his/her research. It is important that in making the decision he/she takes a strategic/long-term view of issues and considers the wider implications of taking a particular approach or course of action. An AP1 must make clear and realistic decisions and provide recommendations in a timely manner and must be able to justify their decisions with supporting arguments.
- **Innovation/Ability to adapt** - must be capable of using his/her initiative and of proactively identifying and implementing appropriate improvements in his/her own area of responsibility. It is important to have a positive approach to change and to continually seek to develop his/her own skills and to keep up to date with developments in relevant areas.