



An Roinn Airgeadais  
Department of Finance

E109/74/03

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**Circular 26/2005: 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 announce details of a competition, to be run by the Public Appointments Service, to set up panels for interdepartmental promotion to Higher Executive Officer. The attached scheme of promotion to Higher Executive Officer has been discussed between the Official and Staff Sides. Officers interested in competing should study the scheme, in particular, the section on selection procedures (paragraphs 14-16).

**Details of the Competition**

2. The HEO competition will be a two-stage competition which will assess the appropriate competencies identified as being relevant to effective performance in the HEO role (see Appendix I).

**Stage 1:** will take place country wide week commencing 10 October and in Dublin week commencing 17 October, 2005 and will consist of an integrated 'Business Challenge Exercise' which candidates will sit during a half day testing session. For this exercise, candidates will be presented with a set of background information based on a fictional Government Department and will be asked to carry out three tasks on the basis of this information.

- Task One involves analysis and interpretation of information
- Task Two involves making decisions on an issue and planning and prioritising activities
- Task Three involves completing a job scenario questionnaire.

Candidates' order of merit at Stage 1 will be based on their performance on two of these exercises, the analysis and interpretation exercise and the job scenario exercise. Only candidates who reach a satisfactory standard on both of these tasks will be invited to Stage 2.

**Stage 2:** will commence towards the end of November, 2005 and will involve a competitive competency-based interview, an oral presentation to a board or boards and a short written exercise.

For candidates who progress to Stage Two of the competition, scores on Task Two of Stage One - the Decision Making and Planning exercise - will be taken into account at this stage and will influence placings on the final order of merit. However it is important to be aware that no candidate will fail Stage 2 solely on the basis of their performance on this task.

3. Test Familiarisation material will be available a month prior to the test date.

#### **Eligibility**

4. Candidates must:

(a) on the date they apply for the competition, be serving in an established or unestablished (see c below) capacity in the civil service as:

- Executive Officer in the Civil Service **or**
- Junior Clerk in the Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas **or**
- Executive Officer on secondment to FÁS from the Civil Service;

**and**

(b) on 1 September, 2005 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).

(c) Unestablished officers may compete in the competition provided they fulfil the eligibility requirements set out above, subject to having a minimum of one year's continuous service in one of the grades concerned. An unestablished officer who is successful in the competition will be required to satisfy an establishment element in order to be appointed to an established post.

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

6. 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.

7. 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.

8. Eligibility to compete, health and level of sick leave, are not verified by the Public Appointments Service 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 Public Appointments Service will have regard to the 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.

### **Applications**

9. Application forms will be available on [www.publicjobs.ie](http://www.publicjobs.ie) and must be returned by 16 September, 2005. **This closing date must be strictly observed.** An applicant, who has not heard from the Public Appointments Service by 7 October, 2005 should contact that office immediately.

10. The Public Appointments Service will contact Personnel Sections in respect of candidates being called to Stage 2 of the competition (competency based 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 4-8 of the Circular.

### **Duration of panels**

11. The panels formed under the terms of this circular will become valid on 1 July, 2005, as the current panel set up under the terms of Department of Finance Circular 16/2003, was extended to 30 June 2005.

12. The validity period of the panels set up under the terms of this circular will extend to 28 February 2007, or until the exhaustion of the panels, whichever is the earlier. Candidates who have not been promoted at the expiry of the relevant panel will have no claim to promotion thereafter because of having been on the panel.

### **Codes of Practice**

13. The recruitment and selection process for appointment to this position will be conducted in accordance with the Code of Practice titled *Selection of Persons for Appointment on Promotion to Positions in the Civil Service (No. 02/04)* published by the Commission for Public Service Appointments.

The Code of Practice reflects the following core principles:

- *Probity*
- *Appointments Made on Merit*
- *An Appointments Process in Line with Best Practice*
- *A Fair Appointments Process Applied with Consistency*
- *Appointments Made in an Open, Accountable and Transparent Manner*

Candidates are advised to familiarise themselves with the contents of the Code of Practice including, inter alia, the provisions in relation to the responsibilities placed on candidates who participate in the recruitment and selection process.

14. Complaints and Requests for Review: Complaints/requests for review will be considered by the Public Appointments Service in accordance with the procedures set out in the Code of Practice.

15. The Code of Practice may be accessed by visiting [www.cpsa-online.ie](http://www.cpsa-online.ie) or by contacting directly the Commission for Public Service Appointments, Chapter House, 26-30 Upper Abbey Street, Dublin 1.

#### **Information on Panels**

16. The information on the panel(s) formed as a result of this competition will be made available to Personnel Officers in all Departments/Offices and Careers and Appointments Section in the Department of Finance. In addition, candidates being invited to Stage 2 will be asked to agree to the same information being made available to the relevant civil service unions for the purpose of monitoring the operation of the scheme.

#### **Circulation and further information**

17. 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, term time, contract, secondment 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 Public Appointments Service.

18. 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 "vacancy to be filled" 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.

### **Scope and Application of the Scheme**

2.1 The proportion of posts to be filled from interdepartmental promotion competitions at HEO level remains at 40% as agreed under the terms of Sustaining Progress (Paragraph 22.17(ii)). This means that in a sequence of five vacancies, the second and fourth will be filled from the interdepartmental panel.

2.2 Departments will only be allowed to depart from this sequence where it is necessary to make any promotions as a result of the agreement reached at General Council whereby individuals who had been in receipt of allowances for 'acting up' to higher duties for two years or more are to be promoted before completing a CAF transfer. In such circumstances the Departments involved may make these promotions on the basis that any resulting liability to the Interdepartmental Panel must be discharged at the earliest opportunity. This would normally be within the lifetime of the current panel, however a portion of the liability may exceptionally be carried over to the following panel where the Department concerned has obtained the sanction of the Department of Finance, on the basis that it will be able to discharge this liability in full in the course of the next panel (e.g. as a result of anticipated retirements).

2.3 The proportion of interdepartmental promotions will be increased to 50% from the date equating to the commencement of the next subsequent competition for promotion to Principal Officer level i.e. 1 January 2007.

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

- (a) Every second and fourth vacancy in a sequence of five in the grade of Higher Executive Officer to be filled in all departments except the Land Registry / Registry of Deeds (but see (d) below).
- (b) Every second and fourth vacancy in a sequence of five in the grade of Senior Clerk to be filled in the Office of the Houses of the Oireachtas.
- (c) Vacancies in the grade of Higher Executive Officer to be filled 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 paragraphs 11-13 of the Scheme**).

- (d) The non-specialist Higher Executive Officer post to be filled in the Land Registry /Registry of Deeds.
- (e) One vacancy in the grade of Higher Executive Officer to be filled in FÁS for each officer serving in FÁS who is appointed under the terms of this scheme.
- (f) 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**.
- (g) However, where a Department is assigned an "Export" quota of two 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 two, 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**.
- (h) A Higher Executive Officer post that is filled in a Department from an open competition held under the terms set out in Sustaining Progress, shall reckon as having fulfilled the Department's liability to fill a post which would otherwise have been filled from panel "B".

4. Where a post is filled by a special interdepartmental competition, provided for under paragraph 37 below, it will be regarded as fulfilling the requirements to fill posts by interdepartmental competitions.

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 11). 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 are deemed to be **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 Public Appointments Service. 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 Public Appointments Service, 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 28 below. Candidates can be given no assurances that even one appointment to any particular location will be available.

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. Where 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.

9. Where a post cannot be filled from a panel **on grounds of grade** or because it is in **FÁS** (see paragraphs 26-31), it may then be filled internally in the department concerned and this will be deemed to satisfy that department's obligation to the interdepartmental 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 25(b) below, 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 vacancy to be filled 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 vacancy to be filled 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.

### **Import/Export quotas**

11. 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.

12. Import/export quotas are calculated 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.

13. Where a department has been divided or amalgamated during the three-year period referred to in paragraph 12 above, 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**

14. Selection will be by means of a two-stage competition as outlined in paragraph 2 of the circular. 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 Public Appointments Service. 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.

15. In ranking the candidates considered best qualified for appointment, the Public Appointments Service 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.

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

### **Knowledge of Irish**

17. 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 Public Appointments Service 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 assessed by the Public Appointments Service 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.

### **Conditions of Appointment**

#### **Decentralisation:**

18. In Budget 2004, the Government announced a major programme of decentralisation of Government Departments and other agencies from Dublin to locations around Ireland. In a decentralised civil and public service, offers of



employment may be conditional on the appointee undertaking to work in a particular decentralised location where required to do so by the appointing Department.

19. Where an offer of appointment is to a post in a Department/Office that is planned to be decentralised, **or to an existing provincial location**, such offers of appointment will be made on condition that appointees are prepared to relocate to a particular location with the appointing Department/Office. In such cases, appointees will be required to sign an undertaking on taking up duty that they are prepared to relocate to a particular location as required to do so by the appointing Department.

20.1 Appointees will be required to serve a **minimum period of 2 years** in a decentralised location before they would be eligible for a transfer to another location and they will be required to sign an undertaking on appointment to this effect.

20.2 Where the appointee is required to serve a period of less than or equal to 2 years in Dublin prior to decentralisation, the total period, including the period in the decentralised location, before being eligible for transfer to another location would be the period served in Dublin plus 2 years in the decentralised location.

20.3 Where the appointee is required to serve a period of greater than two years in Dublin prior to decentralisation, the maximum total period, including the period in a decentralised location, before being eligible for transfer to another location, would be four years.

21. Candidates who do not accept an offer of appointment on this basis will remain on the panel for consideration for further offer(s) of appointment, should these arise. However, it should be noted that any further offer(s) of appointment will also be made on condition of the candidate's undertaking that they are prepared to work in a particular decentralised location. However they will not receive further offers of appointment to a location which they have previously turned down.

**22. Candidates should note that the provisions of Circular 6/89, Removal Expenses, will not apply to any offers of appointment arising from this competition.**

23. 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.

24. 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.

25. 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**

26. 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, geographic location or that the appointment is to a post in FÁS.

27. 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.

28. An officer who refuses an offer of appointment **on grounds of geographic location** will not subsequently be offered an appointment to the same location but will remain eligible for appointment to such other locations as he or she has specified should appointments arise in those locations. Candidates are advised that when specifying provincial locations (if any), as provided for at paragraph 6 above, they should list only those locations in which they are prepared to serve.

29. 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.

30. An appointment refused under the provisions of paragraph 26 above 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 above. If there are no candidates from exporting departments remaining on Panel B 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 interdepartmental 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 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 vacancy to be filled

that arises in Dublin in the department concerned during the life of the subsequent panel will be due to be filled from the panel.

31. An officer who refuses an offer of appointment under the provisions of paragraph 26 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**

32. For each candidate called to competitive interview and oral presentation, the Personnel Officer will give the Public Appointments Service an assessment of the candidate's suitability for promotion on a form supplied by the Public Appointments Service. The promotion potential form in the PMDS 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**

33. 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**

34. 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**

35. 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, or in the event of any future Government decisions.

36. 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.

July, 2005

## **APPENDIX I**

Competencies identified as being relevant to the HEO grade

### **1. *Organising and Planning***

A Higher Executive Officer must structure and organise their own work effectively, in addition to planning and organising resources and people, in order to meet objectives within agreed time-scales. An effective Higher Executive Officer will accurately assess and prioritise plans, taking account of longer-term issues and business goals and will monitor progress against objectives, taking into account potential obstacles and reviewing plans where necessary.

### **2. Commitment to Achieving Quality Results**

A Higher Executive Officer must demonstrate persistence, determination and commitment to achieving the objectives of the department/unit. It is important that a Higher Executive Officer takes responsibility and is accountable for the work produced on behalf of the department/unit and strives for quality results by monitoring progress against targets and ensuring standards are adhered to.

### **3. Openness to Change**

The effective Higher Executive Officer proactively identifies and suggests areas for improvement and is enthusiastic about and strives to effectively implement new developments/changing work practices. A Higher Executive Officer must review own performance regularly and continuously seek to develop at a personal level. He/ she must also be open to modern technology and aware of the impact it can have on work practices.

### **4. People Skills**

An effective Higher Executive Officer must initiate and maintain good relations with people, displaying diplomacy and courtesy even in emotionally charged situations. It is important to monitor, encourage and develop each team member, treating everyone in a consistent and sensitive manner. Higher Executive Officers need to be customer-oriented and be able to promote and advance the aims of the department/unit. In dealing with others, it is important to be able to show that they are aware of the impact that issues/developments in the public sector will have on their own unit/department.

### **5. Research, Analysis & Decision Making**

An effective Higher Executive Officer seeks all relevant information to help overcome existing or potential problems, analyses and interprets information gathered and takes account of the critical factors including the 'bigger picture'. S/he puts forward practical and realistic recommendations to progress forward. It is important that a Higher Executive Officer makes decisions, utilising resources and expertise available to the maximum, whilst also recognising time constraints.