

E100/9/01

23 July 2007

Circular 27/2007:
Confined competition for appointment as Higher Executive Officer to serve as Employee Assistance Officer in the Employee Assistance Service of the Civil Service

A Dhuine Uasail,

I am directed by the Minister for Finance to announce the holding of an interdepartmental competition by the Public Appointments Service to establish panels for appointments to the post of Employee Assistance Officer (EAO) at the grade of Higher Executive Officer (HEO) in the Civil Service. The Civil Service is committed to a policy of equal opportunity.

Posts to be filled from the competition

1.1 The validity period of the panels set up under the terms of this circular will extend to **30 June 2009** 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.

1.2 Successful candidates will be placed on panels for appointment to Departments where vacancies arise during the period set out at 1.1 above. Regional panels will be set up and, subject to the number of vacancies arising some appointments may be made in the East Coast Region including Dublin. Appointments to the East Coast Region including Dublin, will only arise in instances where there are no EAOs available through the Dublin Arrangements¹ at that time to fill a vacancy in that region.

1.3 The period of validity of the panels may be varied by agreement between the Department of Finance and the relevant Civil Service unions.

Decentralisation

2. Candidates attention is drawn to the conditions applying to appointments in the context of the Decentralisation Programme as set out at paragraphs 11 and 12 below.

General information

3. The Civil Service has a long established tradition in the provision of an occupational welfare service for its staff. **Circular 35/97 the Employee Assistance Service** sets out details of the services available to staff from the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (EAS). In recent years the service has been undergoing expansion and development in order to provide more comprehensive coverage to civil servants in all locations. The service provides confidential assistance and a wide range of supports to staff and management in relation to personal or job-related problems. The provision of a service of this nature arises from the recognition that staff are a valued resource whose continued well-being contributes to the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the Civil Service.

4. Employee Assistance Officers are assigned to a designated parent Department/Office, but may be required to provide a service for staff in other Departments/Offices on a shared basis. Appointments from this competition may be made to a head-quarters based office or to an office in a regional location in Ireland. Currently, there are 16 Higher Executive Officer/Employee Assistance Officers based in Dublin and 6 based in Cork, Limerick, Sligo, Portlaoise, Mayo and Kilkenny. This distribution of EAOs across the country will be liable to change over the coming period due to the relocation of posts from Dublin to regional locations under the Government's decentralisation programme.

Job Description

5.1 The Employee Assistance Service is a work based support service, designed to assist staff in managing personal difficulties which may, if left unattended, adversely affect their work performance and/or attendance and their quality of life. The Service provides confidential assistance and a wide range of supports to staff and management in relation to personal or job-related problems.

5.2 The work of the EAO involves the provision of a confidential support and referral service to staff and management on a wide variety of problems and difficulties arising both within and outside the workplace. This service includes assisting staff in evaluating and assessing personal difficulties and problems, supporting them in the planning and structuring of ways to resolve such difficulties and following up with contact and support. In addition, Employee Assistance Officers promote, co-ordinate and disseminate practical advice and information to staff and management on a wide range of issues relating to health and welfare. In order to discharge their duties effectively, Employee Assistance Officers develop contacts with a range of welfare agencies and specialist services outside their Departments/Offices and also maintain effective liaison with line management and staff. Among the issues dealt with by the Employee Assistance Officers are:

- work-related issues (human aspects of work, e.g. interpersonal difficulties, harassment, balancing work with domestic responsibilities, general dissatisfaction)
- stress
- health issues (physical, emotional, psychiatric and psychological)
- family and marital issues (domestic violence, separation, relationships, secondary family issues)
- financial problems (debts, budgeting, probate)
- addiction (alcohol, gambling, drugs)
- bereavement (coping with loss/grief, suicide, practical information following a bereavement);

- pre-retirement planning

6. In carrying out the duties of the position, Employee Assistance Officers will be required to:

- liaise with staff, line management, Personnel Sections/Divisions, relatives of employees, outside agencies, specialist services and any other contacts as necessary
- participate in any training and development programmes which may be considered necessary to help carry out the duties effectively. Training takes the form of formal courses, on-the-job training (including ongoing group training), peer support and professional supervision
- discharge their work in an ethical fashion in accordance with the provisions of *Circular 26/04: Civil Service Code of Standards and Behaviour*, in particular paragraph 14 of the Code - Conflicts of interest; and adhere to the requirements of *Code of Practice – Civil Service Employee Assistance Officers*
- undertake official travel as required; the extent of travel required will vary depending on the geographical spread of the Department(s)/Office(s) to which the Employee Assistance Officer is assigned and the requirements of management
- undertake work which does not always conform to normal working hours
- monitor the effective implementation of the Employee Assistance Programme in the Department(s)/Office(s) to which s/he is assigned.

Personal Requirements

7. To perform effectively as an Employee Assistance Officer it is desirable that appointees should possess the following qualities:

- a mature outlook
- a genuine and proven interest and concern for the well-being of others
- capacity to empathise with others and their situations and circumstances but also bring an objective perspective to bear
- an aptitude for communicating effectively, in particular for developing relationships of trust and confidence
- ability to adapt approach and style to the individual and situation being dealt with
- sound judgement
- good listening skills
- an objective and non-directive approach to dealing with other people's problems
- the ability to display initiative and efficiency in setting priorities and balancing demands
- willingness to be part of a team
- relevant experience
- knowledge of IT and presentation skills.

A diploma in employee assistance practice, counselling or other relevant third level qualification is desirable. Relevant work experience would be an advantage.

8. In addition to having the capacity to carry out the duties outlined in paragraphs 5 and 6 above, appointees should be capable of dealing with all aspects of work at Higher Executive Officer level and be committed to ongoing personal and professional development.

Eligibility

9. Applications are invited from officers serving in grades with a salary scale up to that of the maximum of the Higher Executive Officer.

Candidates must:

(a) on the date they apply for the competition, be serving in an established, un-established or acting capacity in the civil service

and

(b) on **13 September 2007** have not less than two years' service in their existing grade or an aggregate of two years' service in eligible grades.

Conditions of Appointment

10.1 A candidate who is already serving as Higher Executive Officer may not be required to compete in some tests set by the Public Appointment.

10.2 Where an officer was acting or on contract and was subsequently appointed in a substantive capacity, eligibility can be based on the aggregate service e.g. six months in an acting capacity or on contract and eighteen months in a substantive capacity, can be aggregated to give two years service.

10.3 Where an officer's eligibility is based on aggregate service, the officer must be serving on the eligibility date and have one year of continuous service immediately prior to the eligibility date of the competition.

10.4 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 to terms of Department of Finance Circular 18/98 and if they are otherwise eligible.

General Council Agreement on Decentralisation - Dublin Arrangements

11.1 Candidates attention is drawn to the agreement reached at General Council in February 2006 that all posts being filled from interdepartmental competitions will be existing regional posts or posts that will be decentralised. The agreement applies to appointments under this Circular.

11.2 Candidates should note that where a post that would normally be due to be filled from the interdepartmental panel and is located in a Department/Office that is remaining in Dublin, it will be filled in accordance with separate Arrangements agreed at General Council for the filling of such Dublin-based posts.

11.3 These separate Arrangements provide that the first call in filling such a post will be to the Dublin Arrangements. In summary, where an officer relocates under the Dublin Arrangements, the panel liability will transfer to the donor Department/Office. The donor Department/Office must, in the first instance, seek to fill the consequent vacancy through the Central Applications Facility (CAF). Where no officer is available on the CAF, the vacancy may be filled from the Interdepartmental Panel, with a decentralisation commitment.

11.4 Appointments in the East Coast Region - Subject to the number of vacancies in the post of Employee Assistance Officer, some appointments may be made in the East Coast Region including Dublin. Appointments to the East Coast Region including Dublin, will only arise in instances where there are no EAOs available through the Dublin Arrangements¹ at that time to fill a vacancy in that region.

Decentralisation – General Provisions

12.1 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.

12.2 Where an offer of appointment is to a post in a Department/Office that it 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 decentralised 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 decentralised location as required to do so by the appointing Department.

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

12.4 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 a decentralised location, before being eligible for transfer to another location would be the period served in Dublin plus 2 years in the decentralised location.

12.5 Where the appointee is required to serve a period of greater than 2 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 4 years.

12.7 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 all 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.

12.8 Candidates should note removal expenses will not apply to any appointment arising from this competition.

Salary

13.1 Starting pay for successful candidates will be calculated in accordance with the provisions of *Circular 34 of 1977 - Starting Pay on Promotion or Establishment*. A successful candidate who is on a salary scale the maximum of which is equal to or above that of the Higher Executive Officer maximum will enter the Higher Executive

¹ The Dublin Arrangements refer to the arrangements agreed at General Council to place staff who are currently in posts which are due to decentralise but who wish to remain in Dublin.

Officer scale at the minimum of the scale or at existing pay plus accrued increment, whichever is the greater, subject to the maximum of the Higher Executive Officer scale not being exceeded.

13.2 The post of EAO attracts an allowance €5,700 per annum for officers on the modified scale and an allowance €6,000 per annum for officers on the integrated scale who are making a Personal Pension Contribution and are on the PPC Scale.

General:

14. All officers appointed from this competition will be assigned as Employee Assistance Officers.

15. Offers of appointment will be made from the panel in order of merit. An officer will have five working days after receipt of an offer to accept or reject; 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.

16.1 Appointments will be to the post of Employee Assistance Officer and will be subject to the usual conditions governing promotion as set out in the Department of Finance Guidelines on Probation. On appointment, officers will serve a one year probationary period in the grade of Employee Assistance Officer. At the end of this period, a decision will be made on substantive appointment to the grade. It is envisaged that such appointments will be subject to the PMDS procedures in relation to performance monitoring and to probationary reviews. During the probationary period, the appointee will be assessed to determine whether s/he:

- has demonstrated the capacity to undertake the duties of Employee Assistance Officer and
- has performed the duties in a satisfactory manner, and
- has been satisfactory in general conduct.

16.2 An officer whose service is not satisfactory will be notified of the action to be taken.

16.3 Where a decision is made not to confirm an appointee in the new grade, the Personnel Officer may be asked by the appointee to request that the Civil Service Disciplinary Code Appeal Board review the decision. (Ref. Circular 14/2006 Civil Service Disciplinary Code, paragraphs 11 and 50 (ii)).

16.4 In the event of reversion an officer will, where practicable, return to fill a vacancy in the grade and Department/Office in which he or she served prior to promotion. The vacancy thus created will be filled again under the terms of this Circular without affecting the sequence of appointments in that Department/Office provided the reversion occurred before the expiry of the panel. Any extra payment arising from the assignment would then cease.

17. Officers appointed as Employee Assistance Officers will be eligible at all times, subject to being qualified in all other respects, to apply for entry to interdepartmental competitions open to Higher Executive Officers.

18. A candidate who resigns, retires or is dismissed from his/her post will cease to be eligible for appointment from this competition.

19. Officers appointed under this Circular will be expected to serve as an Employee Assistance Officer for at least five years. The Head of the Department may decide to allow an officer to continue to serve as Employee Assistance Officer beyond the five-year period. In the fifth year of service, the appointment shall be reviewed by the employing Department in consultation with the Employee Assistance Officer with a view to deciding if the appointment should continue. Further reviews will be carried at appropriate intervals to be determined by each Department/Office.

20. Officers appointed to positions based outside Dublin may be required to undergo a preliminary training period in Dublin.

21. Candidates will be required to specify, on a form to be supplied by the Public Appointments Service, the provincial regions where they would be prepared to serve. A candidate who refuses an offer of appointment to a location within their selected region(s) will not be considered further for that particular location but may remain eligible for consideration for appointment to any other location within the region(s) which they have specified.

22. An officer who refused an appointment under the provisions of paragraph 21 above and who has not been promoted at the expiry of the panel set up from this competition will have no claim to promotion thereafter because of having been on the panel.

Codes of Practice applying to Promotion in the Civil Service

23.1 The selection process for appointment to this position shall 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 (CPSA).

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*

23.2 Selection processes conducted by the PAS are subject to audit by the CPSA. Candidates are advised to familiarise themselves with the contents of the CPSA Codes of Practice on promotion including, inter alia, the provisions in relation to the responsibilities placed on candidates who participate in the recruitment and selection process.

23.3 Complaints and Requests for Review: Complaints/requests for review will be considered by the Public Appointments Service in accordance with the procedures set out at Appendix 2.

23.4 The Codes of Practice may be accessed by visiting www.cpsa-online.ie or by contacting directly the Commission for Public Service Appointments, Chapter House, 26-30 Upper Abbey Street, Dublin 1.

Selection Process:

In the event that a large number of candidates will meet the minimum eligibility requirements for the post, the Public Appointments Service may decide to invite a

smaller number of candidates to the various stages of the selection process. This is not to suggest that other candidates are necessarily unsuitable or incapable of undertaking the job, rather that there are some candidates who are, prima facie, better qualified and/or have more relevant experience.

In assessing candidates for the competition, candidates' qualifications and/or experience will be taken into account (e.g. qualifications in employee assistance, counselling or psychology, relevant work experience and/or active involvement with voluntary, charitable or support organisations).

The methods used to select the successful candidate for this post may include:-

- Tests and /or instruments exploring skills, motives and /or personality,
- Assessment exercises
- Short listing of candidates on the basis of the information contained in their application

During any short listing exercise that may be employed, the Public Appointments Service are guided by an expert board who examine the application forms and assess them against pre-determined criteria based on the requirements of the position. It is therefore in your own interests to provide a detailed and accurate account of your qualifications/ experience on the application form.

Following tests/ assessments and/ or shortlisting the top candidates of those deemed suitable will be invited to competitive interview, possibly including a presentation by the candidate.

A Preliminary Interview may be held to reduce the numbers of candidates to a more manageable level for the competitive interview board.

Credit for Proficiency in both Irish and English

25.1 Credit for proficiency in Irish and English will be given in accordance with Department of the Public Service Circular 43/75 and Department of Finance Circular 30/90.

25.2 In placing candidates in the order of merit, credit due under the above Circulars will apply only to those candidates who are successful at interview.

Applications

26. Application forms will be available online at www.publicjobs.ie and must be returned by **13 September 2007**. **This closing date must be strictly observed.** An applicant, who has not heard from the Public Appointments Service by **2 October 2007**, should contact that office immediately [phone 01-8587553].

27. The Personnel Officer of a Department/Office will be required to certify, on a form to be supplied by the Public Appointments Service, that a candidate:

- has worked well and has been satisfactory in his/her present grade;
- has been satisfactory in general conduct;
- is suitable from the point of view of health with particular regard to sick leave; in relation to health and sick leave the procedures set out in Department of the Public Service Circular 34/76 (as amended by Department of Finance Circular 32/91, 33/99 and 17/03) must be followed;
- fulfils the conditions of eligibility set out in paragraphs 9-10 above;

- has the personal qualities outlined in paragraph 7 above.

28. Candidates should note that eligibility for the competition and the level of sick leave are not verified by the Public Appointments Service until a candidate comes under consideration for appointment. Admission to the competition therefore does not imply acceptance by the Public Appointments Service that a candidate is eligible to compete in the competition. If candidates have doubts about any aspect of their eligibility, they are advised to clarify their position with their Personnel Section before proceeding with the application.

Information on Panels

29. The information on 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 will be asked to agree to the same information being made available to the relevant Civil Service unions for the purpose of monitoring appointments made under this Circular.

Circulation and further information

30. Personnel Sections should bring this circular to the notice of all eligible officers serving in their Departments and associated offices without delay, including eligible fixed term workers, officers on term time, secondment, 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 Public Appointments Service.

31. If candidates have any queries about this circular, they should contact their Personnel Section. Subsequent enquiries about their candidature should be addressed directly to the Public Appointments Service.

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Michael Errity
Assistant Secretary

Appendix 1

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.

Appendix 2

Candidates' Rights - Review Procedures in relation to the Selection Process

The Public Appointments Service will consider requests for review in accordance with the provisions of the codes of practice published by the CPSA. The Codes of Practice are available on the website of the Commission for Public Service Appointments at WWW.CPSA-online.ie

Initial Review

The candidate must address his/her concerns in relation to the process in writing, setting out the basis for the complaint being made, to the Chief Executive in the first instance. A complaint or request for review must be made within 10 working days of the notification of the initial decision or within 5 working days of the outcome of the informal review stage, if availed of. However, where the decision being conveyed relates to an interim stage of a selection process, the candidate should be informed that a request for review must be received within 3 working days of the date of receipt of the decision or within 3 working days of receipt of a decision under the informal process; candidates electing to use the informal process at the interim stage must do so within 2 working days of communication of the decision to them. Any extension of these time limits will only be granted in the most exceptional of circumstances and will be at the sole discretion of the Chief Executive.

Upon receipt of the request for review, the Chief Executive should issue an acknowledgement within 3 working days.

The case should be reviewed by a person other than the individual who made the decision in question.

The person conducting the initial review (the "reviewer") should consider any written submissions made by the candidate, and all other relevant information, including any emails, notes or memoranda held by the Chief Executive in respect of the selection process. Where necessary, the reviewer should meet with the personnel of the Chief Executive involved in the selection process and/or the candidate for the purpose of eliciting further information. Subject to any statutory (or other relevant) restrictions on disclosure, the reviewer shall provide the candidate with any relevant and material emails, notes or memoranda held by the personnel of the Chief Executive in respect of the selection process, on request.

The outcome must be notified to the candidate within 20 working days of receipt of the complaint or request for review. Where the investigation does not allow a decision within this timeframe, the initial reviewer must keep the candidate informed of the status of the review and the reasons for the delay.

In communicating the outcome to the candidate, which will be done by means of written report, the initial reviewer should indicate that he/she may seek further review by referring the matter to the Decision Arbitrator and that a request to do so must be made with 7 working days of receipt of the outcome of the initial review.

Review by the Decision Arbitrator

The Decision Arbitrator is appointed by the Chief Executive. This person is unconnected with the selection process and he/she will adjudicate on requests for review in cases where a candidate is not satisfied with the outcome of the initial review.

The request must be received within 7 working days of the notification of the outcome of the initial review. Upon receipt of the request for review, the Decision Arbitrator should issue an acknowledgement within 3 working days.

The outcome of the investigation must be notified to the candidate in the form of a written report within 10 working days.

The decision of the Decision Arbitrator in relation to such matters is final. The Decision Arbitrator will make his/her decision on the basis of any written information available in respect of the matter, or written submissions made, and will not generally conduct interviews, although he/she may do so if felt warranted by the particular circumstances of individual cases.

Candidates' Obligations

Candidates should note that canvassing will disqualify and will result in their exclusion from the process.

Candidates must not:

- knowingly or recklessly provide false information
- canvass any person with or without inducements
- personate a candidate at any stage of the process
- interfere with or compromise the process in any way

Any person who contravenes the above provisions or who assists another person in contravening the above provisions, is guilty of an offence. A person who is found guilty of an offence is liable to a fine/or imprisonment. In addition, where a person found guilty of an offence was or is a candidate at a recruitment process, then:

where he/she has not been appointed to a post, he/she will be disqualified as a candidate; and

- where he/she has been appointed subsequently to the recruitment process in question, he/she shall forfeit that appointment.

Admission without liability

The admission of a person to a competition is not to be taken as implying that the Public Appointments Service is satisfied that such person fulfils the requirements of the competition or is not disqualified by law from holding the position.

Deeming of candidature to be withdrawn

Candidates who do not attend for interview or other test when and where required by the Public Appointments Service, or who do not, when requested, furnish such evidence, as the Public Appointments Service require in regard to any matter relevant to their candidature, will have no further claim to consideration.

Quality Customer Service

We aim to provide an excellent quality service to all our customers. If, for whatever reason, you are unhappy with any aspect of the service you receive from us, we urge you to bring this to the attention of the unit or staff member concerned. This is important as it ensures that we are aware of the problem and can take the appropriate steps to resolve it.

Data Protection Act

When your application form is received, we create a computer record in your name that contains much of the personal information you have supplied. This personal record is used solely in processing your candidature and is updated as the competition progresses.

Such information held on computer is subject to the rights and obligations set out in the Data Protection Act, 1988 & 2003. You are entitled under this Act to obtain a copy of information about you that is kept on computer at any time. The Public Appointments Service charge a fee of €6.35 for each request. You should enclose a cheque or postal order and address your request to: *The Data Protection Co-ordinator, Public Appointments Service, "Chapter House", 26-30 Abbey Street Upper, DUBLIN.*