

PUBLIC SERVICE EXECUTIVE UNION

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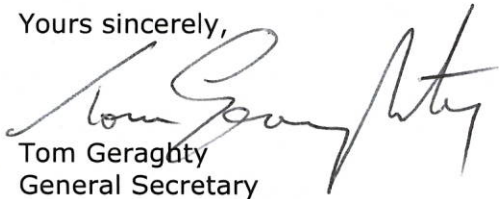
27 November 2017

Dear Mr Duffy,



I enclose a submission by this Union on issues related to recruitment and retention for the Civil Service Grades of Executive Officer and Administrative Officer.

Yours sincerely,



Tom Geraghty
General Secretary

Mr Kevin Duffy,
Chairman,
Public Service Pay Commission,
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PUBLIC SERVICE PAY COMMISSION

Initial Submission

November, 2017

PUBLIC SERVICE EXECUTIVE UNION

INITIAL SUBMISSION TO PUBLIC SERVICE PAY COMMISSION

1. INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The Public Service Executive Union represents middle management grades in the Civil Service.
- 1.2 The main grades involved are as follows:
- Executive Officer
 - Higher Executive Officer
 - Administrative Officer
- 1.3 This submission is concerned with recruitment to the Executive Officer and Administrative Officer Grades.

2. Nature & Work of the Grades

Executive Officer

- 2.1 The Executive Officer grade has been a most important source of quality staff for the Civil Service. A high proportion of the most senior civil servants have entered the service at this level. At one time Executive Officer recruitment was aimed primarily at school leavers with very high results in the Leaving Certificate but changing educational patterns have altered this position and most new entrants as Executive Officer are now graduates. They are also recruited by promotion from within the Civil Service from amongst high quality staff who have proved themselves in promotion competitions.
- 2.2 Executive Officer work requires judgement, initiative, resourcefulness and creative thought. Executive Officers are engaged in critical analysis of proposals and reports and in examining the more complex, non-routine cases on which decisions are required. Executive Officers and Higher Executive Officers (a grade to which Executive Officers may be promoted after five years and which is equivalent to the Administrative Officer grade) also have a number of specialist roles, for example, as Systems Analysts in the Information Technology area or as training officers in the departmental training centres. Some Executive Officers have a management role, organising and supervising the work of clerical staff.
- 2.3 Executive Officers work in all Departments. Recruits can thus be assigned to a very wide range of functional responsibilities dealing with, for example, education, the health service, environmental protection,

industrial development, worker protection or the development of marine resources. This, combined with the grade's being the basic managerial recruitment grade, has generated the need to ensure that staff of very high calibre are appointed.

- 2.4 In recruiting Executive Officers the Public Appointments Service are conscious of the fact that most of the senior positions in the service will, in time, be filled by people recruited at this level. For this reason, they seek people who show the potential to take on high level responsibilities in the management of public services and the analysis of policy issues. They are thus seeking to establish that candidates
- can think clearly and logically
 - are capable of identifying options and proposing and making balanced decisions
 - are articulate and can write clearly and concisely
 - can relate successfully to and work with people from a variety of backgrounds
 - have an interest in public affairs and a commitment to the concept of public service.
- 2.5 As regards the educational standards required, they are, essentially holding a degree or a very high level Leaving Certificate – in practice, as mentioned above, they are now almost all degree holders on appointment from the open competition.
- 2.6 Executive Officers normally work under the supervision of Higher Executive Officers.
- 2.7 Executive class work requires judgement, initiative, resourceful and creative thought. It also involves critical examination of cases not clearly within the scope of approved regulations or general decisions.
- 2.8 Work appropriate to the Executive Officer grade includes presenting all the important facets of a complicated case in a readable and logical sequence, summarising accurately the issues involved, recommending a course of action where there are a number of options, drafting briefs and original correspondence, analysing statistical material and accounting for unusual developments.
- 2.9 Amongst the functions are:
- Critical examination of conventions, reports, proposals not clearly within the scope of regulations or general precedents where creative thought is required, the preparation of submissions, memoranda, correspondence etc. involving interpretation and application of policy, regulations etc.

- Drafting official briefs, agendas etc. for meetings, conferences, etc., acting as Secretary to such and drafting reports.
- Authorising payment of minor accounts, balancing and reconciling more complex accounts.
- Preparing and analysing annual and forecast estimates and drafting observations and explanatory notes on them, compiling appropriation accounts
- Compiling and interpreting sophisticated statistics.
- Deciding grant allocations, income tax refunds within delegated limits, claims to pensions, allowances etc. where interpretation of complex legal requirements is involved.
- Preparing comprehensive instructions to the Department's legal advisors and solicitors.
- Compiling material for reply to Parliamentary Questions and drafting replies to same, drafting more difficult letters, drafting brochures, circulars, forms, explanatory leaflets, advertisements, press releases relating to matters of public interest, preparation of returns and materials for annual departmental reports, preparation of material for Ministerial speeches. Co-ordination of replies and material from other sections, international bodies etc, interpretation of legal documents
- Managing and supervising the work of clerical staff

Administrative Officer

- 2.10 The Administrative Officer grade is the highest level to which staff are regularly recruited to the general administrative grades. They are recruited essentially in a "cadet" role with a view to rapid advancement to the higher grades and, as such, are not intended to spend any significant time in the Administrative Officer grade. It is from this grade, which is small in numbers that the most senior posts, especially in the Departments of Finance, Public Expenditure and Reform and the Taoiseach, are filled.
- 2.11 Administrative Officers are usually engaged on critical analysis and research over a wide range of government activities. In their initial assignments they work closely with experienced officials. As they gain in experience they may be assigned to a broader range of duties involving, for example, the drafting of briefing and other documents for Ministers and the Government and contacts with other Departments, professional bodies or international organisations.
- 2.12 As Administrative Officers are employed in most Departments, they can be assigned to a wide variety of functional responsibilities - the

development of the health services, education policy, environmental protection, industrial development, to name but a few. The greatest number are appointed to the Department of Finance where they could be involved with such matters as short-term management of the economy, the allocation of financial resources or the development of human resources policy and practice in the Civil Service.

2.13 In general, the functions of Administrative Officers are similar to those of Higher Executive Officers and cover a broad range of duties including:

- Overall supervision, direction and control of staff, including staff training and development, review of existing procedures and determination of new procedures and methods of working; checking and examination of duties of and submissions by subordinate staff.
- Preparation of reports on individual staff performance for incremental, promotion etc. purposes.
- Examination and approval of Executive Officer work. Preparation of memoranda or complicated briefs or commenting on proposals involving, for example, changes in legislation, introduction of new schemes, salary revision, conciliation and arbitration, etc. pointing out repercussions of various courses of action.
- Drafting Heads of Bills and new regulations; preparing memos for Government; drafting Ministerial speeches; preparing replies to Parliamentary Questions.
- Assisting higher grade officers in the analytical and research work associated with policy development and formulation.
- Signatures of letters to members of public, solicitors etc., signatures of warrants, certificates, deeds, increment forms etc., certification of various payments; design of forms and information leaflets; giving public talks on factual matters concerning his/her own Department.
- Acting as Private Secretary to Ministers, O & M. and Training Officers in Departments; acting as Secretary to Conferences and meetings (usually inter-Departmental.)
- Examination and decisions on matters involving the interpretation of law, where no clear cut precedents exist or where expenditure above a specified limit is being incurred.
- Acting as Internal Auditors; inspections of outdoor offices.
- Attendance at meetings and discussions with outside bodies, attendance on Committees and preparation of briefs, agenda and reports

- Representing Ireland at meetings abroad, either with more senior Officials or on their own

2.14 While the emphasis is on policy work and less on staff management, many Administrative Officers have responsibility for staff management, particularly in Departments outside Finance, Public Expenditure & Reform and Taoiseach. Posts are generally interchangeable as between the Higher Executive Officer and the Administrative Officer.

2.15 In recruiting Administrative Officers, the Public Appointments Service seeks graduates who show the potential to undertake the most demanding duties at the highest level of the service. The objective is to recruit the next generation of senior managers for the service. For this reason, a high level of academic attainment (a first or second class honours degree or qualification as a Solicitor, Barrister or Accountant) is required but candidates are also expected to demonstrate a wide range of skills and abilities in the course of the selection process, including the following:

- a high level of analytical ability and, in particular, the capacity to apply intellectual competence to practical problems
- excellent communications skills, both oral and written
- an ability to relate successfully to and work with people from a variety of backgrounds
- an interest in public affairs and a commitment to the concept of public service.

Third Secretary, Department of Foreign Affairs

2.16 The Third Secretary Grade is linked to the Administrative Officer for pay purposes and is mentioned here to give an indication of the character of the grade.

2.17 The Third Secretary is the recruitment level for the Irish diplomatic service and is the first step towards more senior posts in the Department of Foreign Affairs.

2.18 Following recruitment, Third Secretaries are initially assigned, usually for about 1/2 years, to a range of responsibilities in the headquarters of the Department in Dublin. During this period, under the guidance of experienced colleagues, they are involved in aspects of the work of a number of divisions of the Department and receive on-the-job training in such areas as the preparation of analysis and research papers; drafting of briefing material for the Minister and for EU meetings; liaison with Irish missions abroad and with other Government Departments, etc.

2.19 While in Dublin, Third Secretaries are assigned the function of "Duty Officer" on a rota basis as a result of which they have responsibility for

all aspects of the Department's work outside normal office hours, both in respect of the issue of Passports and policy and operational issues.

- 2.20 On being posted to an Irish Embassy or Consulate abroad, the Third Secretary will become involved in many aspects of the mission's activities, particularly such areas as the provision of consular assistance to Irish citizens; assisting Irish business contacts in local markets and generally in the promotion of foreign earnings; trade and economic reporting to the Department in Dublin; providing information on Ireland and briefing the foreign press on Irish affairs. While abroad, they will have responsibility for representing Ireland at meetings of various sorts and also have responsibility for local staff, local IT systems, local accounts etc. in most missions.
- 2.21 In addition to postings abroad, Third Secretaries also work in the Irish Government's Office in Northern Ireland.
- 2.22 A Third Secretary can expect to divide his/her career between service in the Department in Dublin and in over 40 Irish missions abroad. The Civil Service Commissioners seek graduates who have the skills to undertake the demanding and varying responsibilities of the position and also demonstrate that they have the potential to represent Ireland abroad and to progress to the most senior positions of the diplomatic service. A good third level degree (first or second class honours or qualification as a Solicitor/Barrister) is required.
- 2.23 The qualities sought by the Public Appointments Service in recruiting Third Secretaries are:
- the ability to analyse complex situations and to put forward practical recommendations for action
 - the capacity to make effective presentations and to communicate well, both orally and in writing
 - an interest in Irish public affairs and in international relations
 - an ability to work independently and to deal effectively with people.

Knowledge of foreign languages is an advantage.

3. **Recruitment and Retention Issues**

3.1 The tasks assigned to the Executive Grades are very demanding and, in line with developments in the society which they serve, increasingly complex. If the Executive Grades are to carry out these tasks to the high level which society has a right to expect, then the staff required need to be of the very highest quality. Even the briefest glance at Section 2 of this submission on the Nature and Work of the Grades shows clearly that very high quality staff are needed.

3.2 It is evidenced from data on rates of leaving the Civil Service amongst recent recruits to the Civil Service.

3.3 The following data from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform highlights the issue:

Grade	Assigned 2015	Assigned 2016	in Assigned 2017	Total Assigned
Executive Officer	107	445	159	711
	0	0	448	448
Administrative Officer	0	157	0	157
	0	0	190	190

3.4 Of the total number of Executive Officers assigned between 2015 and 2017 (1159) 112 or 9.66% are no longer in the Civil Service. Indeed, in 2017 alone 29 (4.77%) of the 607 assignments have left the Civil Service.

3.5 In the case of the Administrative Office grade, 29 people appointed between 2015 and 2017 have left the Civil Service which represents 8.35% of the numbers of persons appointed.

3.6 While figures are not immediately to hand in respect of the Third Secretary grade reports from that Department indicate equivalent levels of departure from that grade in the initial appointment years.

3.6 In the case of the Executive Officer grade, figures prepared by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform record that there were 5283.73 full time equivalents in the Civil Service in 2017 compared to 4970.2 in 2016 – a difference of 313.53 . In 2017 there were 607 appointments to the grade indicating a significant level of turnover in the grade

3.7 In the case of the Administrative Officer Grade, figures prepared by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform record that there were 641.61 full time equivalents in the Civil Service in 2017 compared to 555.8 in 2016 – a difference of 85.81 In 2017there were 190

appointments to the grade indicating a significant level of turnover in the grade

- 3.8 An issue of relevance in this connection also is the structure of the Administrative Officer scale compared to that of the Higher Executive Officer. The salary scales are as follows:

Administrative Officer	Higher Executive Officer
€31,221	
€33,575	
€34,247	
€37,194	€47,081
€40,967	€48,458
€43,838	€49,831
€46,711	€51,204
€49,593	€52,581
€52,466	€53,955
€55,329	€55,329
€57,314 ¹	€57,314 ¹
€59,294 ²	€59,294 ²

¹After 3 years on the maximum point

² After 6 years on the maximum point

- 3.9 It will be seen that the Administrative Officer scale, after seven years of service, is €46,711, which is still below the minimum point of the Higher Executive Officer scale despite the fact that the two grades are fully interchangeable. Allowing for the fact that the Administrative Officer Grade is a recruitment grade, it is still somewhat incongruous that after seven years of service the Administrative Officer will not have achieved pay parity with the equivalent person in the Higher Executive Officer grade.
- 3.10 One consequence of this is a significant demand on the part of Administrative Officers to compete in "promotion" competitions for appointment to the Higher Executive Officer grade. This demand is being resisted by the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform on the basis that the two grades are equivalent. For the Administrative Officer this "equivalence" does not begin until after seven years of service.
- 3.11 Another issue which the Union wishes to highlight is the total inflexibility of the employer in terms of entry pay. At both Executive Officer and Administrative Officer level entry to the salary scale for external recruits is only permitted at the minimum point. In the case of the Administrative Officer this is €31,221 and in the case of the Executive Officer this is €28,739. This is a significant disincentive to citizens with considerable experience in outside employment taking up positions in the Civil Service. Indeed, it seems incredible that the Civil Service, as an employer, simply ignores the existing pay levels of such individuals when offering them appointment to positions in the Civil Service.

- 3.12 The Union also believes that the particular position of Information Technology staff – an important and growing segment of the grades as a whole – needs to be examined. There is little evidence to demonstrate that the Civil Service is in a position to recruit and retain highly qualified specialist staff in this area and, in fact, anecdotal evidence suggests that the Civil Service is simply not at the races when it comes to recruiting, motivating and retaining IT specialists. These staff have generally been recruited to the Executive Officer and Administrative Officer grades and the ever increasing reliance of Civil Service Departments on external consultancy contracts to deliver IT solutions is indicative of the problems it faces in this area.
- 3.13 Part of the recruitment process involves assigning staff to Departments.
- 3.14 While the Union does not have figures in respect of the numbers who actually take up assignments (it appears that such statistics are not maintained), there is plenty of anecdotal evidence of a Department being advised of an assignment by the Public Appointments Service but the person in question never actually arriving in the Department. There is also such evidence of people who did actually arrive leaving again very quickly.
- 3.15 In addition, it appears to the Union from anecdotal evidence that very many of the people who actually do take up appointments - and stay - are people who were previously Civil Servants and that relatively few are people who were not Civil Servants. In addition, many appear to have been employed elsewhere in the Public Service.
- 3.16 Needless to say, such people are far less likely to leave again than people who are recruited directly as new entrants to the Civil Service and it raises a fundamental question about the whole recruitment process. If the process results in recruiting people who are substantially existing Civil Servants, then the whole purpose of the open recruitment process, which is to recruit high quality staff from outside the Civil Service to perform the tasks summarised in Section 2 above, is set at naught.
- 3.17 The significance of pay for recruitment and retention purposes is highlighted by the fact that the cost of house purchase is now well beyond the means of the Executive Grades. In the past, members of the grades were in a position to purchase homes based on their salaries. The current position is that this has become an utter impossibility and the impact of this needs to be taken into account in setting entry level salaries.

4. **Summary and Conclusions**

- 4.1 In this submission, the Union has given a brief description of the nature and work of the grades of Executive Officer, and Administrative Officer. This description highlights the complex and demanding role carried out by the Grades across the entire gamut of work in the Civil Service. Their

role is a varied one. It covers every function of Government, at home and abroad, and a great variety of roles, including policy formulation, case-work, staff management, operational tasks, specialist work such as IT and, essentially, service delivery.

- 4.2 As the very title suggests, the essential role of the members of the grades is to translate broad goals into meaningful service delivery.
- 4.3 This is a complex role and one which requires high quality people with commitment.
- 4.4 In turn this requires that they be well paid so that they can be recruited, retained and well-motivated.
- 4.5 The Union looks to the Public Service Pay Commission to make recommendations on the pay of these Grades which will establish scale structures which, when put in association with the overall levels of pay, facilitate the recruitment of the top-quality staff needed to carry out the very complex and demanding work of the grades.
- 4.6 The Union looks forward to co-operating with the Commission in its work.

27 November 2017