

Decentralisation – human resource policy – transfers, promotion and recruitment

Department of Finance – Discussion paper

Introduction

1. The Government's decentralisation programme provides for the transfer of 10,300 public sector posts from Dublin to other locations. Almost all Government Departments are involved, either wholly or partly, and all will be affected in one way or another. In accordance with the Government decision, all transfers are to be on a voluntary basis.
2. The process will necessarily involve extensive reassignments of staff between Departments. It must also be expected that in some locations the number of total current staff volunteering to transfer will fall short initially of the number required. In other locations, it is likely that there will be more people applying than there are posts available in the relevant grades.
3. In view of the scale of what is involved, measures must be taken now to redirect policy on appointments and promotions to facilitate the earliest possible achievement of the decentralisation targets in an efficient manner.
4. To ensure that the decentralisation programme is implemented effectively, arrangements must also be put in place as soon as possible to give staff who wish to relocate outside Dublin the opportunity to transfer to a post which is being relocated as part of the programme. Departments have already indicated that a number of staff have expressed an interest in moving to new locations both in their own Departments and elsewhere.
5. By putting such arrangements in place,
 - staff who are relocating could begin planning accommodation, schools, etc, and
 - Departmental management will be given an opportunity to give staff the maximum training and experience in advance of the relocation.
6. In the light of these general principles, it is proposed that the following arrangements will apply.

Transfers

7. All staff will be given an opportunity to apply centrally for transfer to a decentralised/ provincial location and those who wish to do so may state their preferences in respect of:

[a] internal transfers at the current grade to posts being decentralised in their parent Department or organisation; and

[b] transfers at their current grade to posts in other Departments and organisations being decentralised as part of the programme.

8. To provide adequate information about the full range of options available under the programme, staff will, at the same time, be supplied with:

[a] Details of the work units, grades and numbers of jobs within each Department and agency being transferred to the new locations. This information may be subject to change as Departments and organisations further refine their decentralisation plans;

[b] An indication of the timing of the decentralisation of posts following the report of the Flynn Committee; and

[c] Information on the main facilities available in each of the destination towns including practical information about local schools, housing, amenities, etc.

Expression of preference – mechanism to be used

9. The approach will follow the model of the CAO system for the allocation of places in third level education.

It is recognised that some staff serving in existing decentralised/provincial offices may wish to apply for transfer to a location included in the new programme and that vacancies are, as a result, likely to arise in the existing decentralised locations. At this stage, applications cannot be made to transfer between Departments and agencies in the same geographical location. This matter will be reviewed further in the context of the discussions envisaged in paragraph 14 below with a view to increasing the options open to staff.

Expressions of interest and applications will be sought for:

Transfers to equivalent posts in other locations on the list announced by the Minister for Finance in Budget 2004, or another existing decentralised/ provincial location.

Staff may express a preference for up to a maximum of **ten** locations.

10. All staff will be allowed to express a preference for any location in the programme or for another existing decentralised/ provincial location: that is, civil servants will be able to express a preference for a transfer to a post in a non-civil service body or organisation being transferred, and non-civil service staff will be able to express a preference for a location to which a Civil Service Department or office is being transferred. **While expressions of preference will be sought and accepted on this basis, all transfers within the Civil Service between grades [other than in the case of recognised equivalent grades] and all transfers between the Civil Service and other agencies will be subject to further discussion between the official side and public service unions.**

11. It is proposed that the same arrangements will apply in the non-Civil Service agencies and organisations involved in the decentralisation programme. That is, these agencies and organisations will be asked to seek expressions of preference from staff at the same time and according to the same timetable as the exercise is undertaken in the Civil Service.

12. It is expected that some staff will decide to express a preference immediately, while others will require time to consider. It is proposed to move ahead as soon as possible with the transfer of those who express a preference for a transfer within their

own Departments. **In the case of civil servants making an application for a transfer to a civil service post being decentralised to a new location or to a post already decentralised or in a provincial location, it will be made clear that such an application will be treated as a definite application for a transfer to that post.** The ranking of preferences is set out below in paragraph 21.

Staff working on contract may also express an interest in a transfer under the system. However, such an application under the CAF system will carry no implications about the possible continuation of the existing contract or the negotiation of a new contract.

13. Applications will continue to be accepted for transfers to other Departments and organisations and will continue to be accepted until such time as the decentralisation programme is completed. However, as indicated at paragraph 21 below, after a specified date staff who apply earlier will be given preference over those who apply later.

Staff remaining in Dublin

14. Staff serving in areas which are being decentralised and who wish to remain in Dublin will also have to be reassigned, if possible, to other posts in their existing Departments and Offices or else to other Departments and Offices. Detailed arrangements for managing this will be discussed between the management and staff sides at a later stage when a clearer picture has been established of the numbers involved. The aim will be to ensure that, so far as possible, only one move between Departments takes place.

15. Where some but not all of the relevant staff in a grade are to be transferred to other posts in the Dublin area the selection of those to transfer will initially be done on the basis of volunteers. If there are insufficient volunteers, the “last in first out” principle will apply. A system will be put in place to allow staff to indicate preferences on where they would wish to transfer to although it must be recognised that it will not always be possible to meet these wishes.

ICT staff

16. Specific arrangements will also be agreed between the management and staff sides in respect of ICT staff. These arrangements will take account of the wishes of staff to transfer to a decentralising location expressed through the CAF system and the business needs of Departments.

Role of Civil Service Commission

17. The Civil Service Commission will act as the central “clearing-house” for the exercise and will operate the CAF system. It is intended that the application system will be based primarily on the internet. Arrangements will be made for staff who do not have access to the Web.

18. Work on the central applications system is proceeding on the basis that the application system will be a general source of information for staff on developments in the decentralisation process and on the locations in the programme.

19. In making an application under the system, staff will be requested to supply names, home and working addresses and telephone numbers, details of their Department, Office or organisation, length of service in their current grade, and their working arrangements, that is, whether they are working full-time or are worksharing.

The application system will give applicants the opportunity to set out any relevant comments they may wish to bring to attention, for example, in relation to worksharing options they might want to pursue in the receiving Department or organisation.

20. The application system will be open to all grades up to and including Principal Officer: separate arrangements will apply in the case of Assistant Secretary and higher level posts.

Ranking of preferences

21. Preferences supplied to the Civil Service Commission under the CAF system will be ranked by the Commission as follows:

- First preference will be given to staff currently serving in posts being decentralised;
- Second preference will be given to staff serving at the same grade in other posts in the same Department, Office or organisation;
- Third preference will be given to staff on existing transfer lists, including both internal and inter-Departmental transfer lists; inter-Departmental transfer lists are in place for both Clerical Officer and Staff Officer grades; all existing transfer lists will be closed with effect from the date when staff are asked to express a preference for a transfer;
- Fourth preference will be given to staff serving in the same or equivalent grade on the basis of seniority in the grade; in the case of the EO and HEO levels, grades that are eligible to compete for inter-departmental promotion to HEO and AP respectively will be regarded as equivalent grades for this purpose; a list of equivalent grades is to be drawn up and agreed between the official and staff sides; within this fourth category, preference will be given on the basis of seniority in the grade; and
- Fifth preference will be given to staff serving in other grades at corresponding levels; within this category preference will be given on the basis of seniority in the grade; **it should be noted that actual transfers based on these preferences are subject to agreement between the official and staff sides on the issues mentioned in paragraph 10 above.**

As mentioned in paragraph 12 above, applications from civil servants making an application for a transfer to a civil service post under the system will be treated as a definite application for a transfer to that post. After a date to be specified, preference will be given to those who apply after that date in the order of the date of application; if a number of applications for a location are made on the same day, the ranking will be on the basis of seniority.

It is recognised that re-locations will probably take place at different times. In view of that, it is accepted that situations could arise where officers will have accepted an offer to transfer and, subsequently, an opportunity to be accommodated in a location of higher preference may arise. In those circumstances, every reasonable effort will be made to accommodate officers in this position by offering them their higher preference.

Where a staff member has a partner who also wishes to move to a particular location, consideration will be given to facilitating both partners.

22. Up to the date of an acceptance by a staff member of a formal offer of a transfer, it is open to that staff member to withdraw their application for a particular location. For all transfers, a refusal by a staff member of a formal offer of transfer will lead to their being placed at the end of the transfer list for that location if they continue to express an interest in a transfer to a decentralising location.

Protocols on transfer

23. In accordance with the ranking of preferences set out above, where a staff member expresses a preference for a decentralised post within their parent Department or organisation, these transfers will take place as early as possible to allow for adequate training before the move to the relocated office. The necessary arrangements will be a matter for local management

24. It is proposed that all transfers must take place within 4 weeks of the staff member being informed by the Commission that the transfer is now to take place.

25. Transfers will be subject to an assessment of the sick leave and performance records of staff according to existing standards and procedures. Management reserves the right, at its discretion, to refuse to allow a transfer to proceed if this assessment indicates that this is necessary in the interests of the proper management of the service.

Transfer of service

26. In general, service in the current grade will be transferred to the new Department or Office. Different arrangements may apply in the case of grades represented by the CPSU.

Duration of transfer

27. Staff being transferred will be required to give a written commitment to remain in the decentralised location for a certain minimum period following the actual transfer of that post to the new location. The only exception to this rule will be moves resulting from promotion. For AP and equivalent grades and above, this minimum period will be 3 years; for HEO and equivalent grades and below, this minimum period will be 2 years.

Promotion

28. Promotions and related human resources practices must take account of decentralisation and the fact that, in a decentralised service, acceptance of a post whether as a result of promotion or of open recruitment is conditional on acceptance of working in a particular location.

29. However, in the short term, there are complex issues to be addressed in regard to promotion. It is proposed to begin discussions with the staff side with the aim of agreeing appropriate arrangements.

Recruitment

30. In the medium to longer-term, it will be necessary to consider the development of [a] regional recruitment systems building on the existing regional arrangements and [b] regional promotion structures across Departments. In accordance with the agreement in *Sustaining Progress*, the Minister for Finance will, in conjunction with the Civil Service Commission, put forward proposals for the development of such structures.

31. Acceptance that a post is in a specific location and will be occupied for a defined minimum period will become a condition of employment for all new entrant staff with effect from a date to be determined by the Minister for Finance.