

Topical Issues Briefing for Sec-Gen at PAC Thursday 3 April 2014

Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS) Subhead B14 2012 (B10 2013, B8 2014)

Background

The CSEAS forms an important shared service element of the Human Resource structure in the Civil Service. It is a key element in a strategy for targeting reduction in staff absence due to sick leave and assisting in managing underperformance. Working closely with HR Divisions, the CSEAS engages in early interventions to help to minimize sick leave absences, assist in return to work and help restore work capacity. Governance is provided by an Advisory Committee, chaired by DPER, comprising the Chief Medical Officer for the Civil Service, representatives from the Personnel Officers' Network and the General Staff Panel.

The restructure of the CSEAS formed part of the reform agenda under the Croke Park Agreement and was complete by mid-2012. The outturn (€995k) for 2012 was less than that estimated (€1.515m) due to delay in staff appointments, sourcing accommodation and the non-filling of all anticipated and approved vacancies. Government Departments/Offices were levied on budget and ECFs to ensure a cost neutral provision of the new service.

2013 Budgetary Position

2013 was the first full year of roll out of the new restructured service and provided a benchmark to inform budgetary needs going forward. The outturn for 2013 (€1.276m) was less than that estimated (€1.34m) mainly because it was the first full year of operation with no previous full year benchmark to inform requirements. Informed by the outturn in 2013, we can now more accurately estimate actual requirements for 2014.

2014 Budgetary Position

The 2014 budget is intended to cover full year costs associated with salaries, travel and subsistence, training and related expenses for the 20 CSEAS staff. Employee Assistance Services are provided on a regionalised basis, under central management, to all Civil Service Departments/Offices as a shared service.

A total of €1.307m has been allocated to the CSEAS for 2014. The main expenditure will be on salaries.

Priorities for 2014 include

- Delivery of a quality service to all CSEAS stakeholders

- Ongoing development of governance policies and internal systems to standardise and enhance service delivery across the Civil Service
- Continuing the implementation of a structured communications strategy to embed the restructured CSEAS across the Civil Service
- Developing stakeholder linkages (e.g. HR Divisions, Chief Medical Officer) to assist in development and enhancement of service delivery
- Reappraising customer service on foot of analysis of responses to customer/HR surveys undertaken in late 2013.

Speaking notes on the CSEAS

The CSEAS is an important element of the human resource structure in the Civil Service. Operating as a shared service to all Civil Service Departments/Offices, the CSEAS forms an important component of an ethos of promoting employee wellness and organisational effectiveness, augmenting and supplementing the work of HR Divisions and line management. Within the remit of the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform, the CSEAS supports the HR function

- In assisting with the employer's duty of care to its employees under Health & Safety legislation in the area of psychosocial issues such as stress, bullying and harassment;
- By providing support to HR Divisions and/or line managers in relation to relevant policies/guides pertaining to staff issues in the workplace (e.g. Sick Leave, Positive Working Environment, Alcohol and Drug Misuse in the Workplace, Underperformance);
- By providing direct services to Civil Servants to positively enhance the well-being of individuals which in turn contributes to overall organisational effectiveness.

Providing services to line managers and HR personnel, the CSEAS can work in tandem to help in situations where factors may be impacting on an employee's ability to attend, perform and behave at work to the best of his/her capacity.