

PAC – April 2014
Senior Public Service

The Senior Public Service (SPS) was established with the aim of strengthening senior management and leadership across the civil service, and ultimately the public service. Membership is currently comprised of all serving and newly appointed civil servants at Secretary General, Deputy and Assistant Secretary and Director levels and related Departmental and professional grades. The SPS is overseen by the SPS Management Committee, which is chaired by Secretary General Watt. An SPS Secretariat within D/PER supports the management committee and draws up and implements SPS development and mobility initiatives.

The Leadership Development Strategy, which sets out the development programmes which will be implemented for the SPS during the period 2013-2015, was published in April 2013. The Strategy identifies six key objectives to support lasting change at an individual, organisational and civil service level.

Coaching: A successful pilot coaching programme for SPS members was run in 2012. A more extensive programme, was run in 2013, with 39 participants at both Assistant Secretary and Secretary General level from a wide range of Departments/Offices across the civil service. The second tranche of this programme, which will shortly get underway, has been opened out to include the CEOs of the Non Commercial State Agencies. There has been strong interest in the coaching programme from among this cohort and also from senior management across the Civil Service. There will be some 50 participants in total in the next tranche of the programme. It is also planned to roll the coaching programme out to the Principal Officer group later this year.

Mobility: Since 2012 a formal process has been in place whereby vacancies at Assistant Secretary level are, where appropriate, open to expressions of interest from serving Assistant Secretaries. The Mobility process is overseen by an SPS subgroup, chaired by Secretary General Watt. To date there have been seven moves under the process. Proposals to further strengthen mobility at Assistant Secretary level are being developed both as a means of broadening experience for senior managers and to ensure a significant proportion of each Department's Management Board has experience at a senior level outside their current Department. A pilot programme for mobility at Principal Officer level will also be developed.

Networking: SPS networking events are coordinated by the Secretariat and have been taking place on a quarterly basis. These provide an opportunity for senior staff to meet outside of the normal work environment. The SPS secretariat also supports the Assistant Secretary Network annual conference, which will take place on 4 April in Farmleigh.

Performance: The performance of senior managers is critical to supporting the delivery of public services, particularly at a time of reduced resources. Following a joint review by the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform and the Public Appointments Service, a revised competency model for Assistant Secretaries in the civil service was introduced last year. The new model better reflects the qualities needed by senior management in the civil service in dealing with current and emerging challenges. This updated model will provide a cornerstone for future organisational and talent management developments in areas such as recruitment, performance management and the identification of potential leaders.

Against this background, and in line with the Haddington Road Agreement performance agreements will be delivered at senior levels.
[€148,000 has been allocated for SPS expenditure in 2014, the majority of which will relate to the coaching programme.]