

Oireachtas Update

The Dáil has been adjourned until Tuesday April 16 2013. The Seanad has been adjourned until Wednesday April 17 2013 at 2.30pm.

News and public sector appointments

Residential Institutions Statutory Fund established and members appointed to board

The Residential Institutions Statutory Fund (RISF) has been officially established and has held its inaugural meeting this week, at which the Board agreed the appointment of Ms Mary Higgins as Chief Executive Officer, from April 2013. The Board has commenced work on the arrangements to be put in place for the operation of the Fund.

Ms Mary Higgins was most recently an independent management and social policy consultant. Previously she was the Director of the Homeless Agency and the earlier Homeless Initiative. She has also held the position of Director of Threshold with previous experience in Emigrant Advice and Cherish.

Ms Sylva Langford has been appointed as Chairperson to the Board. Ms Langford is a former Director General of the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs and was an Assistant Secretary General in the Department of Justice and Law Reform. She also has extensive experience in policy formulation and delivery and has a professional background in social policy and social work. She is currently Chair of the Citizen's Information Board and a member of the New School Establishment Group.

The following have been appointed as Ordinary Members (former residents of institutions): Mr Paddy Doyle, Ms Bernadette Fahy, Ms Phyllis Morgan and Mr Martin Power.

Other ordinary members include: Mr Damian Casey, Assistant National Director, Finance Shared Services in the HSE; Mr Austin Currie, Former TD and Minister of State 1994 to 1997; Mr Tom Daly, former teacher and adult education officer and education officer with

City of Cork VEC; and Ms Katherine Finn BL, Barrister specialising in Criminal Law.

The Board members are appointed for a four year term of office, commencing from March 25, 2013. The positions are not remunerated.

The RISF Board is a new body established under the provisions of the Residential Institutions Statutory Fund Act 2012. The Board will oversee the use of the cash contributions of up to €110m pledged by the religious congregations to support the needs of some 15,000 survivors of residential institutional child abuse. These survivors have received awards from the Residential Institutions Redress Board or equivalent court awards.

The support to be provided will include a range of approved services, including health and personal social services, education and housing services. To date, €40m in cash contributions have been received from the congregations and a further €27m is expected on the establishment of the Fund.

Minister for Education and Skills, Ruairi Quinn wished the Board well in their work and said "while the tasks facing the Fund are significant, I am confident that it will make a meaningful contribution to the wellbeing of the survivors of institutional abuse".

The Minister also commenced Part 4 of the 2012 Act, which dissolves the Education Finance Board and transfers its remaining functions and staff to the RISF, with effect from March 29 2013.

Two new Agriculture Attaché posts in Beijing and Moscow to be created

Two new Agriculture Attaché posts in the Irish Embassies in Beijing and Moscow are to be established according to the Minister for Agriculture, Simon Coveney TD. According to the Department, strengthening of these relationships will serve to assist Irish food, drinks, ingredients, genomics, feed and equine sectors in their efforts at building trading relationships in these two countries. The posts will have as their remit the goal to maintain and develop key strategic relationships at government and industry levels, facilitating trade and market access, in association with Bord Bia, and developing other key relationships with government, industry, educational and research institutes.

These Attaché posts have been established following an internal review of resources within the Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine, and will complement the existing diplomatic and Irish agency staff in both China and Russia and the additional resources recently allocated to Bord Bia in Asia and Germany.

According to the Minister, the Departments' focus "on emerging

markets and in particular the Chinese and Russian markets, is in line with the industry strategy outlined in Food Harvest 2020. We are actively seeking out and facilitating new trade opportunities in emerging export markets in light of the ambitious growth planned in production in the Irish meat, dairy, seafood and beverages sectors over the coming years. Ireland expects to increase its exports of food and beverages by 25 percent to €12bn by 2020 and is already on target in 2012, with exports of food and beverages reaching €9bn for the first time ever".

The Minister added: "We cannot underestimate the importance of the work which our diplomatic staff and the staff of Bord Bia undertake abroad. In facilitating growth in our exports to these countries and in maintaining Ireland's international reputation as a source of natural high quality food, drinks and ingredients, they are contributing to generating foreign earnings and maintaining jobs in Ireland".



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Aer Lingus CEO appointed as Chair of An Post

CEO of Aer Lingus, Mr Christoph Mueller has been appointed as Chair of An Post, it has been announced.

Mr Mueller joined Aer Lingus as its CEO in 2009 having previously held the position of Executive Aviation Director at TUI Travel plc., a FTSE 100 company. In 2006, he joined the Executive Committee of TUI AG, a DAX 30 company with responsibility for its flight division. He served as the Chief Financial Officer of DHL Worldwide from 2002 to 2004 and became a member of the Executive Committee of Deutsche Post AG in 2004 after the acquisition of DHL by

Deutsche Post AG. In 2012 Mr Mueller was appointed to the Board of Tourism Ireland. He has an MBA from the University of Cologne and has also completed an Advanced Management Program at Harvard Business School.

Speaking on the appointment, Minister for Communications, Pat Rabbitte TD mentioned the "significant challenges" faced by An Post in this internet era. He added however that Mr Mueller "will bring a valuable international perspective to the Board of An Post."

Derek Nolan TD elected Vice-Chairman of Committee on Public Service Oversight

Galway West TD, Derek Nolan has been elected Vice-Chairman of the Joint Oireachtas Committee on Public Service Oversight and Petitions at its meeting yesterday.

Upon his appointment, Deputy Nolan thanked his colleagues for electing him and said "the petitions system, for the first time, provides for members of the public to set the parliamentary agenda. The petitions our Committee has received so far raise important issues and, in considering petitions received, we examine the public service not from the perspective of the policy maker

or senior civil servant but through the lens of the citizen.

"The Committee also has an important role in public service oversight and, particularly, in interacting with the Ombudsman on citizens' concerns around delivery of public services. I look forward to making a contribution to a Committee, which is becoming a powerful and robust champion on behalf of the citizens we serve", he added.

Public Service meets 3 percent employment target of people with disabilities

The National Disability Authority (NDA) has published the 2011 Report on Compliance with Part 5 of the Disability Act 2005 on Employment of People with disabilities across the public service which shows that the Government has achieved a three percent target of employment of persons with disabilities in the public service as a whole, for the first year since the monitoring of employment targets began.

While there has been a reduction of more than 33,000 public sectors workers since 2007, there has been an increase in the number of people with disabilities working in the public service from 5,879 in 2007 to 6,171 in 2011, up 423 employees on 2010 figures.

Government departments continue to exceed the 3 percent target and 88 percent of local government organisations have reported that they had achieved or exceeded the three percent target.

The NDA report also outlines key goals to be pursued in the next year of the monitoring process, including a maintenance of the three percent target and if possible exceed this. The organisation also suggest an intensification of efforts to improve the performance of individual public bodies, with a specific focus on larger bodies and those which are recruiting; communication of specific guidance to public bodies on leadership, effective recruitment, retention, and workforce planning; and a strengthening of the monitoring process through better data collection.

The National Disability Authority will continue to work closely with all public bodies to build on the improvements made and to offer support and advice on how to achieve compliance during 2013.

Croke Park II

Croke Park II: A reflection from both sides

The most recent edition of the Public Affairs Ireland Journal featured two articles, both with staunchly differing views on the new Croke Park Agreement. Bernard Harbor from IMPACT Trade Union said that while the deal is "the most challenging proposition put to public servants in living memory" IMPACT urges a yes vote. On the other side, Mike Jennings, General Secretary of the Irish Federation of University Teachers suggests the deal should be declined and regards it as the "worst set of proposals ever voted on collectively by the Irish Trade Union Movement". Both of these articles are featured below. To view the March edition of the PAI Journal, click here.

Croke Park extension deal: Supporting a 'YES' vote

On entering the most recent Croke Park negotiations, IMPACT's general secretary Shay Cody described them as "probably the most difficult ever". By the conclusion of the talks, his prediction turned out to be accurate. The deal that has emerged from those negotiations is, without any doubt, the most challenging proposition put to public servants in living memory. IMPACT's Central Executive Committee (CEC) has recommended that our members accept the new proposals for an extension to the Croke Park agreement. The decision to make that recommendation was not taken lightly.

But IMPACT's elected leadership, composed of a diverse group of public servants from a wide variety of grades, believed the proposals

represented the best package that could be achieved through negotiation. And that is, in every respect, the crux of the issue when members are making their decision to vote for or against the agreement. Would it be possible to achieve something less painful and more palatable if the current deal was rejected? In our judgment, it is not.

There is no denying that the package will result in loss of income for a proportion of public servants, and changes in conditions for many more. It is a stark but undeniable reality that, faced with management's determination to make €1bn additional cuts to the pay bill, our task in negotiations was to minimise the adverse effects on our members and the services they provide. But

it was not possible to make that €1bn figure go away.

By negotiating however, we did achieve the following:

- The package contains measures that will eliminate the "two-tier" workforce introduced when the previous Government imposed an additional ten percent cut in pay scales for new entrants.
- On increments, unions successfully moved management from its position, which was that all increments should be frozen until the end of 2016.
- On premium payments, unions moved management from its position, which was that payment for working Sundays should be reduced from double time to time and a half, and that premiums for Saturday working should be abolished outright.

Overtime payments, which management wanted to abolish, have also been preserved in a modified form. • On flexi-time, unions were able to modify the management position on the grades to retain the facility. • The proposals will also see a small restoration of pension levy reductions for all public servants. • There will be no change to the 45km limit on redeployment. Management had sought a 100km radius.

Understanding the proposals

Some say that we would have been better off staying outside the talks, but that would have led to a €1bn extraction from the public payroll by way of the blunt instrument of legislation. This would have been an abdication of responsibility to our members. Therefore,

by negotiating, IMPACT and other unions have succeeded in reducing the severity of management proposals in every important area, and it is likely that deeper cuts will be imposed if this package is rejected. The priority right now is to ensure that public servants understand the proposals. Also, before members cast their votes, it is vital that they also understand the alternatives. If the current proposals pass, the savings that were sought by management will be achieved in a manner which best protects the lower paid. In addition, protection against compulsory redundancy will remain and 87 percent of public servants will avoid a pay cut.

Although unions have not accepted

Government plans to cut so-called “higher pay”, the negotiations resulted in less severe cuts, a higher threshold at which cuts are imposed, and a form of implementation that means pay can be restored in time for those who earn less than €100,000 a year. In the event that the deal is rejected and legislation is introduced, we have no influence over how, where or for how long those measures are applied. That is why it made sense to stay involved in the negotiations, and that is why we are asking members to vote yes.

Bernard Harbor is the National Secretary of IMPACT Trade Union.

Croke Park extension: The ‘NO’ side

The National Executive of the Irish Federation of University Teachers (IFUT) has decided unanimously to recommend a ‘no’ vote to IFUT members in the ballot which will take place in the next few weeks on extending the Croke Park Agreement. IFUT is calling on all of its members to reject the proposed agreement for reasons outlined below.

We cannot afford it and that is a fact IFUT members have already suffered a reduction in their earnings of the order of 25 percent. We simply cannot afford a further pay cut of 5.5 percent to 8 percent. IFUT has calculated that a combination of the proposed cuts and reductions over recent years will mean that every single pay increase achieved since the year 2000 will be more than wiped out for all academics below the level of professor (who constitute a small minority in any College). In fact, a college lecturer will earn 3.6 percent less than his/her equivalent back in April 2000 when adjustments are made for CPI increases since then. Despite all of these facts, there is still a gross misconception in the public mind that academics are highly paid. How many people know for instance that the starting salary of a lecturer is €34,386? And that is for a job which requires at least eight years of post-Leaving Certificate education to qualify for.

Many IFUT members are under a constant threat of compulsory redundancy. Almost uniquely in the public sector, significant numbers of staff in the universities and colleges face the threat of compulsory redundancy. IFUT has been forced to fight all such threats on a case by case basis and the Department of Education refused absolutely to insert any wording whatsoever into the new proposals which would give more job security to academics and researchers.

The savings we have already given are exceptional in both the public and private sectors. The cut backs proposed in the revised agreement will have a seriously disproportionate effect on higher education staff because of the massive amount of additional work they have had to take on arising from historically high enrolment

numbers combined with severe reductions in staff numbers. Our staff to student ratio has deteriorated alarmingly over the past few years. In 2008 there were 4,795 academics and 89,650 students. By 2011 the number of staff had fallen to 4,426, yet the number of students we teach had soared to 106,448 and this figure continues to increase. If we had an agreed student to staff ratio we would automatically have almost 900 extra colleagues to help us share the extra work we all have had to do for free.

The new proposals represent a shameful breach of faith by the Government. Ever since 2010, we have been giving huge concessions in return for a promise that there would be no pay cuts for four years. This commitment has been reneged upon in such a manner, that it renders meaningless the recent promises that the current proposals will last for three years. The existing agreement does not permit the Government to threaten us as they have done. The existing Croke Park Agreement says that it is binding for four years unless there is an “unforeseen budgetary deterioration”. Things are bad but there has been no deterioration, as we are told constantly when it suits the Government to say so.

Lack of balance IFUT accepts that the country is in dire financial straits (although for reasons entirely beyond our control or fault) and that, regrettably, sacrifices are called for by those who can afford them. What we cannot, and will not, accept is that these concessions are to be sought exclusively from public servants. If a person on €34K or €80K is being asked to contribute more than, in fairness, all people on €34K or €80K should be involved. The way to effect that is through a fair and progressive taxation system. Everyone, in both the public and private sectors, should be asked to contribute according to their means in a manner which does not victimise one section of society simply because they serve the public good.

The proposal was put together by two departments who have no idea of how universities operate. In Clause 2.3 of the

Agreement it says that the people who work 39 hours a week will not have extra hours to work. Yet in the same clause it says that “academic staff at third-level will work an additional 78 hours per annum”. How can that make sense unless the Department of Education thinks we work less than 39 hours? Especially when at least one university (NUIM), sent up a formal report to them confirming that academics there, work 55 hours per week. Also, in figures contained in her speech to the IFUT Annual Conference last April, Dr Marie Clarke of UCD provided proof that senior academics in Ireland work an average of 50 hours per week and junior academics an average of 47 hours per week. In both cases this was significantly higher than the European average (48 and 42). These are facts, not anecdotes and were established by a survey conducted across 12 European countries and involving more than 1,200 respondents in Ireland.

The proposals demand the elimination of exam fees despite the fact that only early-stage academics are paid these separately. More senior staff have their exam duties paid for as part of their basic salary. IFUT calculates that this measure could involve a loss of up to €2,250 per annum for academics who are already struggling on lower pay scales. The Department was unable to answer IFUT’s queries as to how they will manage should casual staff who are paid to mark exams no longer be available, owing to the fact that there will be no payment for this work.

Conclusion There has been much talk of late of “sweeteners” to entice unions to vote in favour of this dreadful deal which is easily, in our view, the worst deal ever voted on collectively by the Irish Trade Union Movement. To conclude, for IFUT members there have been no enticements and the deal is as bad today as it was in the early morning when it was finalised.

Mike Jennings is the General Secretary of the Irish Federation of University Teachers.