Senior civil servants warn about plans to reduce staff

MARTIN WALL

SENIOR CIVIL servants have warned that the Government’s initiatives for reducing numbers on the State payroll could cause huge problems particularly in the Revenue Commissioners and the Department of Social and Family Affairs if personnel who retire early or go on career breaks are not replaced.

The president of the Association of Higher Civil and Public Servants, Peadar Carpenter, said yesterday that in Revenue there was a need for tax inspectors to carry out and be seen to be carrying out checks while in social welfare there was already a shortage of staff.

The Government last week announced the details of an early retirement scheme as well as a new financial incentive programme to encourage staff to take a three-year career break.

Speaking at a press briefing in advance of the associations annual conference later this week, Mr Carpenter said that there were two schemes “to sweat people off the books” and that their effects may be felt in departments that offered frontline services to the public.

He said most departments engaged and interacted directly with the public in some ways.

The association’s secretary general Dave Thomas said it had been told that there had been a big interest in the courts service in the early retirement scheme.

He said that there was an expectation that some applications would have to be refused by secretaries general if the staff concerned were doing key jobs and would not be replaced.

Mr Thomas said the association was concerned about the effects of the schemes on people left behind who may have to carry an increased workload as well as in relation to areas where staff would have to be replaced.

“The Courts Service is one in particular. If you do not have a clerk or a registrar in a courtroom then the judge cannot sit,” he said.

The association’s members voted in March not to take part in the one-day strike proposed by the Irish Congress of Trade Unions and Mr Thomas said that he could not see the association looking again at industrial action in the short term.
Mr Carpenter said one issue that could prompt members to take industrial action would be any move by the Government to tax lump sums paid on retirement.

Mr Thomas also criticised the Government’s plans on decentralisation. He said the policy had been introduced in a chaotic manner and was now being abandoned in a similarly chaotic manner.