

Civil and public servants

Sir, – Una Mullally (Opinion & Analysis, January 10th) engages in the current discussion on the operation of and decision-making in the civil and public service. This debate – albeit rather crudely expressed – is always welcome. In fact, it is an ongoing process, given the wide-ranging reform agenda that has been under way over the last decade. This reform process has seen many positive changes. Jobs and opportunities have been opened up. More modern and innovative work practices have been introduced. Decision-making has been streamlined and improved in line with best international practice.

As with many other sectors in Ireland, lessons have been learned from previous mistakes in an effort to improve the administration of the State to the greatest extent possible.

Yes, there is more to do. There always will be. In many ways the civil and public service will always be open to accusations of being bloated, inefficient and bureaucratic. And no matter how many rounds of reform we engage in, how many lengthy hours we work, or how our workloads have dramatically increased as we kept the State functioning during this once in a lifetime pandemic, we know we will continue to face them. Yet there is no evidence

that private-sector workers work harder or longer and a recent survey of our members showed over 90 per cent working well over contracted hours.

But Una Mullally's comments regarding gender inequality in the civil service must be challenged by the facts. At the principal officer and assistant principal officer grades that our association represents, we have effective 50:50 gender balance and equal representation. From this pool, talented civil servants progress to the higher grades of assistant secretary and secretary general. While, unfortunately, we don't as yet have the same levels of gender balance at those grades, significant improvements continue to be made and that gap will inevitably narrow further.

Further, as reported previously in *The Irish Times* and elsewhere, gender diversity is much greater across the civil and public service than in the private sector.

The pace of reform across the civil and public service will not satisfy everyone. But the changes are real. Acknowledging those positive changes must also form part of the wider public debate. – Yours, etc,

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