

Callinan's call on public service entry rate mindful of Living Wage barrier

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The Fórsa General Secretary has called on the Government to further act on lower pay in the public service, pointing out that the first point on the scale for new entrants remains lower than it should be because of decisions made as a result of the global financial crisis.

Kevin Callinan's plea, following fast on the heels of the massive backing by trade union members for the new public service agreement, has been met with some confusion. This is because a 2018 agreement appeared to have dealt with the issue of lower entry scales, which were introduced as an emergency measure.

But it seems that the first point on the scale for new entrants remained lower than it would otherwise have been as a direct consequence of the lower entry scales introduced in 2011.

It is an issue that is likely to be flagged up at trade union conferences this Spring, though it is entirely separate to the just-agreed public service agreement. With an election due within the year, however, the issue may be taken up by opposition parties in the Dáil.

Mr Callinan posted on X (formerly Twitter) earlier this week:

"This would send a strong signal to young people that we want them to stay in our country and to help build up our public services ... It would also be a practical way of ensuring that many public servants don't end up below the living wage (unless, of course, the government don't intend to honour their commitments). And it can be done for minimal cost if measured over a 7 year period ... It's also the right thing to do."

THE EARLY YEARS

Two different pay scales (i.e. the old pre-2011 and lower post-2011 entry scales) were merged in 2013 as pay restoration began. Then, in 2018, agreement was reached to skip points 4 and 8 that year, eliminating the long-term disadvantage for those recruited after 2011.

But Fórsa says those new to public service employment continue to experience a disadvantage in the early years of their career, and there is a concern that new entrants in

lower paid grades would be earning less than the National Living Wage after its scheduled introduction in 2026.

Mr Callinan was expressing the view that, in order to eliminate that “ongoing disadvantage” for those in the earliest stages of their employment, it would make sense to shorten the existing pay scale by eliminating the first two points, and thereby eliminate the need to skip the later scale points.

This is, he clarified, a policy issue for Government, and “within its means to deliver,” while at the same time having the potential to send a “strong signal to young people that they’re needed at home to help build our public services”.

VULNERABLE?

Equally, given what the trade unions see as growing push back by the employer groups against the scheduled introduction of the NLW, and protestations against recent or planned improvements like statutory sick pay, increased minimum wage and pensions auto-enrolment, there is a concern among unions that the NLW schedule might become politically vulnerable.

Ultimately, it is understood that the trade unions want to ensure the NLW will be implemented as scheduled, and public service unions want to ensure that nobody in public service employment falls behind the NLW by way of a policy oversight.

The NLW target is to be 60% of gross median earnings by 2026. This is the implied target under the EU Directive on Adequate Minimum Wages. The 2024 increase in the national minimum wage, to €12.70 per hour, is likely to have brought Ireland closer to the 60% target than previously forecast (see [IRN 37/2023](#))

(See also [‘New entrant’ deal ahead of schedule, reflects economic recovery’ in IRN 35 - 27/09/2018](#))