

Civil Service numbers have grown 46% in 10 years

### **Brian Sheehan**

**The number of civil servants in February of this year stood at 50,512, up by 46% (15,975) over the 34,537 that were employed within the Civil Service ten years ago.**

Across all parts of the public service – with the exception of Defence – more people are employed today compared than in the last quarter of 2013, when public service employment was at its lowest level in recent times.

On April 3, in a set of parliamentary questions, Deputy John McGuinness asked Jack Chambers, the Minister for Public Expenditure, about the number of staff in the civil service on March 1, 2025 compared with March 1, 2020 and March 1, 2015.

He also asked Minister Chambers if there is a strategy in relation to staffing numbers in the Civil Service in the years ahead.

In terms of Civil Service numbers, the Minister said there were 50,512 employed at end-February 2025, which includes 3,555 prison staff that are included within the category of civil servants.

This is an increase of 9,575 over the end-February 2020 total of 40,937 (includes 3,269 prison staff), and an increase of 15,975 over the 34,537 (includes 3,247 prison staff) employed at end-February 2015.

These figures are represented in full-time equivalent terms and are the most recent figures currently available to his Department, the Minister explained.

Separately, late last year, the Parliamentary Budget Office estimated the gross pay reported in the Revised Estimates 2025 for the public service as a whole at €32.69 billion for around 393,410 employees, a figure that rises to around 425,000 when local authority staff (around 31,984 Whole Time Equivalents in Q2 2024) are added.

Of the €32.69 billion pay total, €1.2 billion of this will be a result of the Public Service Pay Agreement (inclusive of pension costs) for this year.

### **LIMITS TO 'DELEGATED SANCTION'**

Minister Chambers said that 'delegated sanction' was introduced by Government in 2015 to provide Offices and Departments with flexibility to manage identified business needs subject to remaining within overall pay ceilings.

Delegated sanction permits Departments to fill vacancies through recruitment and/or promotion in "specified, designated grades up to and including Principal Officer (PO) standard or equivalent".

The Minister explained that the policy was revised in October 2024 to extend to previously sanctioned posts at grades at Principal Officer higher level, and equivalent grades, and Assistant Secretary level, "subject to there being no change to the job specification and/or the terms and conditions attaching to the vacant post being filled".

Mr Chambers continued that new posts at these levels and changes to the job specification and/or terms and conditions of previously sanctioned posts, “continue to require the prior, explicit consent of the Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform”.

Delegated sanction is also subject to the overall pay bill ceiling as set out in the Revised Estimates Volume. “Projected staffing numbers and composition should fall within the parameters of the Department’s pay bill. Failure to remain within a given Exchequer pay bill allocation may result in the withdrawal of delegated sanction”, the Minister added.