

Grievance procedure for civil servants ‘impossible’ to use – AHCPs

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The current grievance procedure in the civil service is “impossible to use, not just for those with a grievance, but also for trade union officials”, according to the General Secretary of the AHCPs, Ciaran Rohan.

Addressing the Association’s annual conference in Portlaoise last Friday, Mr Rohan said there is “no end result from the procedure. You have nowhere to go”.

He said that one of the central planks of the proposed review of the civil service Conciliation and Arbitration (C&A) scheme is going to be third party resolution.

“Civil servants have no access to the WRC and that needs to be resolved but probably not in the short-term”, said Mr Rohan. Access to the WRC probably won’t be in the outcome of the review of the C&A scheme but there will have to be third party access, he said.

The Association’s Deputy General Secretary, Paul Malone, said that the union was also “very concerned” about a Bill which proposes to assign authority to dismiss to those below the head of the organisation.

Mr Malone said that currently the power of dismissal rests with the Minister where Principal Officer grades are concerned, with dismissal of other grades resting with the Secretary General.

If the power of dismissal of Assistant Principals was delegated to Principal Officers, it would alter the relationship between these two grades. Such power, at the very least, should rest with the Assistant Secretary.

Mr Malone said that the number of civil servants considered for dismissal every year is very small. He acknowledged that the system needs “tweaking” but said that the proposals in the Civil Service Regulation and Public Service Management (Amendment) and Miscellaneous Provisions Bill, were “unwarranted”.

REMOTE WORKING

The Association, which currently has more than 4,000 Assistant Principal (AP) and Principal Officer (PO) members in the civil service, was also rigidly opposed to any unilateral changes to the Blended Working Framework in the Civil Service. The conference passed a number of motions which condemned unilateral changes to the scheme, as happened earlier this year in the Department of Social Protection.

The DSP proposed to cut the number of days staff were allowed to work remotely but withdrew the plan, following wide-scale union opposition.

Mr Malone said that remote working is too important “to be left to the whim of a Secretary General”. He said that the Association will be working with Fórsa to defend the current scheme and will insist that any changes can only follow consultation and agreement with the unions.

PAY SCALES

On pay, General Secretary, Ciaran Rohan, said the Association is actively working on the local bargaining clause in the current Public Service Pay Agreement “particularly around issues like higher scales and fairer progression pathways”.

Currently, there are 4 scales for APs and POs: AP, AP (Higher), PO and PO (Higher), with a difference of around €10,000 per annum between the higher and standard grade.

One motion passed by conference sought to merge the standard AP and PO scales with the relevant higher scales. Another motion passed sought to replace the long service increments with normal progressive increments on the AP and PO scales.

The conference also debated the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on the future of work. Last week, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform, Jack Chambers, published Guidelines for the Responsible use of Artificial Intelligence in the Public Service. DPER said that the guidelines were developed “to actively empower public servants to use AI in the delivery of services. By firmly placing the human in the process, these guidelines aim to enhance public trust in how Government uses AI.”

Speaking to the debate, Mr Rohan said as AI becomes increasingly embedded in public service delivery, “we must ensure that this transformation upholds our values – not undermines them”.

“We support innovation – but not at the cost of job quality, accountability or fairness” said Mr Rohan.

The General Secretary also addressed the issue of different flexi-leave entitlements for APs appointed after July 2013. “Two colleagues, same job, same department – different entitlements. It’s not just demotivating – it’s wrong. Our members don’t ask for much – just fair pay, decent conditions, and the same flexi-leave as the person sitting 18 inches to their left”, said Mr Rohan.