

October target for ‘re-modelled’ civil service dispute resolution scheme

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There is “verbal agreement” between management and unions on a re-modelled conciliation and arbitration scheme in the civil service which would allow for the involvement of WRC adjudicators.

While not formally agreed yet, there is a target date of October this year for the revised C&A scheme to come into effect.

The C&A scheme in the civil service has long been the subject of criticism, primarily to do with delays in getting disputes heard and resolved. The largest public service union, Fórsa, had been seeking for the right of civil servants to be granted access to the Workplace Relations Commission.

The Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform (DPENDPR), however, maintained that the IR Act would have to be amended to facilitate civil servants’ access to the WRC; with no sign of any legislative amendment on the books.

It has since been agreed to take a different approach, which would essentially allow for new adjudication and arbitration processes within the C&A scheme, with such services to be provided by WRC adjudicators.

The intent of this re-modelled scheme is to mirror the standards of the WRC by producing time-efficient adjudication and arbitration processes.

The broad changes to the scheme are described hereunder:

- A new dispute resolution process in respect of trade disputes not prohibited by the public service agreement terms. This process to be facilitated by officers of the WRC.
- A new grievance procedure which allows a pathway for adjudication if matters remain unresolved in the internal staged process.
- Adjudication and arbitration processes which mirror those available to other workers in the state whereby the timeframe efficiency would be similar to WRC/Labour Court timeframes.
- Independent chairing of General Council by an officer of the WRC.

CONSTRUCTIVE TALKS

DPENDPR and the civil service staff panel had been in discussions on reforming the C&A scheme since November 2023 but the issue stems back much longer than that.

Recent engagements on the matter between the Department and the staff panel were described as being “highly constructive”.

There is a target date of 1 October 2025 to launch the remodelled scheme (coincidentally the 10-year anniversary of the WRC). As the changes would require the services of the WRC, it will likely necessitate the Commission to be granted more resources.