



An Roinn Coimirce Sóisialaí
Department of Social Protection



Rialtas na hÉireann
Government of Ireland



Department of Social Protection
People Strategy 2020-2023





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Foreword by Secretary General

The staff of this Department is its biggest asset - all of us committed to doing what we can to improve the lives of the people we serve. In doing that we know that we are better prepared to support our clients if we are working at our best. The purpose of this Strategy - to help us all work at our best; to ensure staff are supported and developed, to help our clients as much as possible and to contribute to a positive and vibrant workplace.

Over the last few years you have shared your views on the support you need and on areas where we need to focus. Some of the objectives in our People Strategy are based on the feedback we have received from you. We will continue to listen to your feedback, including the results from the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey(s) and will include the results in our objectives.

As a Department we continue to develop and the next few years will be no different as we move to increasingly online service delivery, with all the internal change that

brings. The implementation of this Strategy will ensure that we are equipped to thrive in an online world and continue to excel at face to face customer service. As an organisation we rose to the challenges COVID-19 brought in 2020 and demonstrated the ability, commitment and public service values of our staff. We will continue to face challenges over the coming few years. I look forward to working with you to continue to strive for excellence in public service and thank you for your continued commitment in serving your organisation and your clients.



John McKeon

Secretary General

Introduction

The Civil Service People Strategy 2017-2020, sets the Strategic Human Resources (HR) agenda for the civil service and focuses on three cross-cutting priorities; being an employer of choice; building the workforce of the future and building, supporting and valuing managers as people developers.

These priorities will be supported in their delivery by an enabling priority which is the positioning of HR as a strategic driver within organisations. This overarching strategy has helped set the direction for our People Strategy and will ensure alignment with the wider programme of civil service renewal.

The move to a shared services model for HR transactional tasks was a first step in developing HR across the civil service to become more strategically focused on people development and organisational performance. In line with the commitments in the Civil Service Renewal Plan to strengthen corporate expertise, there is also a need to further professionalise the HR function. Commencing in 2020 (paused during COVID-19), the Department was selected to engage in a proof of concept pilot project for the introduction of a new HR Operating Model (HROM), working with the project sponsor, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER). The aim of the project, supported and directly funded by the EU, is to develop a fit for purpose HR operating model to facilitate and support the development of a wider strategic HR capability in DSP and across the wider civil service.

This project will explore and trial the introduction of a HR Business Partner structure in DSP which will provide an enhanced structured support to business areas and their people managers.

HR is an enabler for all business areas in the Department in achieving its goals and it is essential that it can demonstrate flexibility and agility to support the changing environment for our business areas needs. The onset of the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in a rapid and highly effective restructuring of front line services during 2020, including new working arrangements, redeployment, cross training and accommodation changes enabling social distancing for our staff. As part of this strategy, we must now plan and implement new ways of working which must have staff safety and wellbeing at the forefront of our plans. Overseen by the Department's internal Organisational Transition Board, we are developing a strategy which will help to implement plans and supports to further develop new ways of working and to assist our managers and staff to continue to deliver for the citizens of the State in a safe environment. (Appendix 1).

This strategy is informed by the values of the Department and aligned with the broader business strategy.



The Four Priorities

There are 4 priority areas in this Strategy, with associated goals, actions and timelines for completion.



A man and a woman in business attire are looking at a tablet together. The woman is on the left, wearing a brown blazer over a white blouse. The man is on the right, wearing a dark suit, white shirt, and dark tie. They are both looking down at the tablet held by the man. The background is a blurred office setting. A large red speech bubble is overlaid on the left side of the image, containing the text 'PRIORITY 1' and 'Our People'.

PRIORITY 1

**Our
People**

PRIORITY 1

Our People

The Department strives to create a work environment in which staff are enabled to perform to the best of their abilities in support of the provision of a high quality public service.

The role of the manager is vital to improving performance of the business area and of the individual staff members. We will ensure that Line Managers and Leaders have the right tools in the form of policies, procedure, guidance and skills, through effective learning, development and training. We will support with expert HR advice and assistance to lead people and manage change effectively.

HR, in line with best practice, have adopted a case management approach to monitoring and managing attendance. High levels of absenteeism can be an indicator of poor staff well-being which can have a demoralising effect on staff and their teams. Throughout the life time of this Strategy, HR will further strengthen this approach to assist local managers.

HR will continue to play an integral part in organisational business continuity by aiding the transition from working in an office environment to working remotely. This includes supporting both people managers and officers regarding health and wellbeing; performance management; training needs; and other supports.

Strategic objectives:

- To support staff in their development throughout their career
- To support and develop people managers
- To equip HR to support people managers in the effective implementation of HR policies
- To guide and support managers and staff in the development and introduction of new ways of working in DSP



GOAL 1

Support Staff

No	Action	Start Date	Finish Date	Action Owners/ Responsible
1	Continue to provide support, advice and assistance to staff in HR matters. Develop new approaches to communicate and inform staff of new HR support initiatives to enable our people to do their best work within the context of new working arrangements	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR
2	Provide the necessary supports for managers to manage, support and develop their teams locally and remotely by the provision of information and advice on HR areas and encompassing central HR strategy and plans to improve in this area	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR
3.	Implement HR policies to ensure our people enjoy a positive working environment through the provision of awareness, education and support for our managers and staff e.g. family friendly, remote working, flexible working, equality, diversity & inclusion, wellbeing policies	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR
4	Continue to put in place the resources and supports for staff to attain their maximum career potential by the provision of opportunities in the areas of mobility, learning and development programmes, promotion and staff engagement.	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR/SDU

GOAL 2

Management of Performance

No	Action	Start Date	Finish Date	Action Owners/ Responsible
1	Continue to provide L&D and other supports to managers in new and innovative ways to build on previous management of performance training to all managers	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR/SDU
2	HR and its Business Partners will provide the necessary supports to managers to assist in the optimal performance of staff across the organisation through regular engagement with and advice to local managers	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR
3	HR will use a case management approach to provide the necessary guidance and support for managers who are implementing Performance Improvement Plans in an effort to deal with under performance and relevant training to be provided by OneLearning	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR/SDU
4	HR will support managers to effectively work with staff on ensuring the right outcomes during the probation process for both parties and the organisation. HR will work to provide solutions to probation monitoring and assessments in changing working environments	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR
5	As part of the new business partnering model, HR will extend the engagement and collaboration with business areas, staff and managers. This approach will aim to recognise and resolve issues, identify and source learning and development and assess resourcing requirements.	Q1 2022	Q4 2022	HR
6	Equipping and supporting managers to promote effective performance management via the PMDS process and regular feedback through effective engagement with staff	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR/SDU

GOAL 3

Support local managers to effectively manage staff attendance

No	Action	Start Date	Finish Date	Action owners/ Responsible
1	Develop and provide appropriate and timely attendance/absenteeism reporting to enable managers to deal with attendance management issues	Q4 2020	Q2 2021	HR
2	Assist managers in the implementation of DPER policy in relation to managing attendance by the provision of case management support to managers, advice and support to staff, timely data reports and liaison with other support stakeholders e.g. CMO, EAS to help identify and address attendance issues	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR

GOAL 4:

Support staff and managers in New Ways of Working

No	Action	Start Date	Finish Date	Action owners/ Responsible
1	Implement and communicate relevant advice provided by DPER, Public Health Guidance; and Health and Safety advice to support safe and productive working environments for all including home, office and blended working	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR
2	Develop and implement remote working policies to guide and support our staff and managers in the transition to longer term remote/blended working	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR
3	Support staff and managers in moving to new ways of working through effective communications, information and training initiatives	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR/SDU



PRIORITY 2

Strategic Workforce Planning

PRIORITY 2

Strategic Workforce Planning

With a competitive labour market and a Civil Service-wide retirement “cliff”, the Department faces challenges to ensure that we strategically manage the current and future workforce.

Effective strategic workforce planning will ensure that we recruit and retain the right number of people with appropriate skills, qualifications and experience, deployed in sufficient numbers to achieve organisational objectives.

Strategic objectives:

- **Have the right people with the right skills in the right place at the right time**
- **Support managers to deliver business goals**
- **Develop skills and knowledge across the workforce to meet current and future needs**

Over the period of our People Strategy, we will focus on ongoing strategic workforce planning, through improved business intelligence and a greater level of engagement with the business areas of the Department to identify their needs in delivering service during rapidly changing times. We will also work with the Management Board to ensure that appropriate review and evaluation are part of the process.



GOAL 1

Strengthen Workforce Planning

No	Action	Start Date	Finish Date	Action Owners/ Responsible
1	Strengthen workforce planning with data management and business partnering engagement with local business areas to ensure resourcing requirements are met	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR
2	Align talent management and mobility with strategic workforce planning which will facilitate staff development, upskilling for business needs and overall alignment with HR policies	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR
3	Use front loading/bulk recruitment to effectively manage staff turnover	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR
4	Use the potential for extending apprenticeships as an effective recruitment option	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR
5	Identify future skills requirements to meet changing needs of the Department and the digital environment through engagement and partnering with business managers on a regular basis	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR
6	Further develop agile working to assist recruitment and retention of staff in a competitive labour market	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR
7	Use internal mobility policy to facilitate staff development, corporate knowledge and staff retention	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR
8	DPER Organisation Review - HR to lead relevant change initiatives identified as part of the planned DPER sponsored review of DSP	TBC	TBC	HR/SDU
9	Embed strategic workforce planning approaches by working with DPER on the implementation of the new Human Capital Management system.	Roll out dates tbc	2023	

GOAL 2

Review and Improve Recruitment and Promotion Systems

No	Action	Start Date	Finish Date	Action Owners/ Responsible
1	Review our internal recruitment process and their interaction with external process (in collaboration with the Public Appointments Service) to improve process and ensure timely placement of staff for business areas	Q4 2020	Q1 2021	HR
2	Support the strengthening of professional expertise in the specialist areas such as HR, ICT and Financial Management	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR
3	Ensure promotion policies and practices are responding to organisational need by continuous engagement with business managers and senior management reporting on this area	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR
4	Ensure that promotion practices are adapted to adhere to Public Health Guidelines including the facilitating of interviews using on-line technologies for as long as relevant	Q4 2020	For duration of public health restrictions	HR



PRIORITY 3
**Learning
and
Development**

PRIORITY 3

Learning and Development

A strategic approach to Learning and Development builds individual and organisational knowledge, skills and behaviours to meet current and future strategic priorities.

The Department's strategic approach aims to further embed a learning and development culture within the Department, underpinned by our core values of Public Service, Customer Focus, Total Professionalism, Engaged Staff, and Innovation. Effective learning and development is necessary to embed and live these values and to deliver excellent customer service to our clients.

The Department is adopting a consistent approach to the design and delivery of its learning and development programmes, including accredited learning for front line roles in association with the National College of Ireland. This has enabled staff gain a professional qualification, while developing a more effective and consistent approach to customer service across the roles. With the emergence of COVID-19 the Staff Development Unit has put in place mechanisms to review the delivery of learning, going forward. A strong focus on blended learning encompassing the delivery of virtual and elearning modules is planned, to be hosted on the One Learning site and available to all staff.

Strategic Objectives

- **To develop learning systems and processes where opportunities will be available to all staff to reach their potential.**
- **To embed a strategic learning and development approach across the Department for staff.**



GOAL 1

Develop a Career and Capability Framework

No	Action	Start Date	Finish Date	Action owners/ Responsible
1	Continue to deliver learning to support career development in the attainment of the competencies required for the current and future role	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR/SDU
2	Identify and develop organisational job clusters, role deliverables, competencies etc; in order to ensure that the Department has identified all the appropriate learning from the competencies defined for roles and where we can then match learning to groups (Deciding officers for example) across the Department	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR
3	Engage and implement the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform's review of the competency framework.	TBC	2023	HR

GOAL 2

Optimise Work-Based Learning

No	Action	Start Date	Finish Date	Action owners/ Responsible
1	Identify training needs through the PMDS System to be delivered through OneLearning in order to support relevant work-based training and management/leadership programmes.	Q4 2020	Annually	HR/SDU
2	Develop "Action Learning" as a Learning & Development tool to support work-based learning while addressing organisational challenges	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR/SDU
3	Implement, promote and support mentoring for all staff through the completion of leadership/management development programmes	Q4 2020	Q4 2022	HR/SDU
4	Develop the suite of training available through e-learning as an alternative and complement to other initiatives. A stronger emphasis has been placed on the delivery of blended L&D options including virtual delivery methods, eLearning and where possible, consideration of a return to face to face learning (in accordance with HSE/Public Health advice)	Q4 2020	Q1 2021	HR/SDU
5	Evaluate and analyse all learning undertaken to inform future planning, design and delivery, to ensure value for money for all L&D expenditure and to monitor outcomes for business areas. SDU in-house courses will be evaluated to level 3 of the Kirkpatrick evaluation model	Q4 2020	Ongoing	
6.	Draw on strategic workforce planning insights to inform training, learning and development programmes	2023	3 Year plan	

GOAL 3

Build Accredited Learning

No	Action	Start Date	Finish Date	Action owners/ Responsible
1	Promote and support the Refund of Fees scheme for relevant study and to build staff knowledge and capability	Q4 2020	Annually	HR/SDU
2	Extend the range of accredited training to build the Department as a learning organisation	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR/SDU
3	Evaluate and analyse all learning undertaken to inform future planning, design and delivery. NCI accredited learning is evaluated at the evaluation standards set by Quality and Qualifications Ireland (QQI) and SDU will monitor these reports to ensure continued effectiveness of these front-line learning programmes.	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR/SDU



PRIORITY 4

**Staff
Engagement,
Diversity and
Inclusion**

PRIORITY 4

Staff Engagement, Diversity and Inclusion

Employee engagement aims to empower people by giving them a voice and creating an environment where employees can input into improvements and changes in the workplace which ultimately results in improved performance and development culture within the organisation

The people strategy is guided by feedback received from staff in various surveys including the Civil Service Engagement Survey (2017) and Departmental surveys such as the Wellness Pulse Survey (2020). Areas such as involvement in change, level of commitment to wellbeing of staff and opportunities to engage with management have consistently being highlighted as an issue.

During the lifetime of this Strategy, the Department is committed to developing staff participation through the Engagement and Innovation process, employee engagement for a, good industrial relations structures and the promotion of wellbeing and a healthy and safe working environment. The approaches are based on trust, integrity and a two way commitment and communication between an organisation and its people. It is an approach that increases the chances of business success, contributing to organisational and individual performance, productivity and well-being. Increasing Diversity in Irish society means a more diverse customer base and workforce.

Awareness and education is key to ensuring our staff are equipped with the knowledge and skillset to create an environment where all are treated equally, without bias, feel confident within their workplace and bring their whole selves to work. We will promote the positive behaviours we expect of all our people for an inclusive culture which is intolerant of discrimination, bullying and harassment. In line with the commitments identified in the People Strategy of the Civil Service 2017/2020, a dedicated Equality,



Diversity and Inclusion function in Irish society will be established in HR Division, incorporating the existing work of the DLO (Disability Liaison Officer), but with a full remit for developing this strategy to build and promote greater equality, diversity and support inclusion. The Department is also establishing a dedicated Wellness unit within HR which is representative of the importance of staff health and wellbeing within this strategy. The strategy commits to a structured and collaborative approach in ensuring that all staff are supported in achieving a healthy, work-life balance.

Strategic Objectives:

- **To promote and continuously improve employee engagement in this Department**
- **To be informed by the work of the Engagement and Innovation process and projects**
- **To promote a healthy and safe working environment**
- **To work effectively with the industrial relations processes within the Department**
- **To foster workforce diversity, inclusion and wellbeing**

GOAL 1

Increase levels of staff engagement

No	Action	Start Date	Finish Date	Action owners/ Responsible
1	Promote the participation in and address the outcomes of the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey 2020. Engagement and town hall events for staff will be scheduled using innovative communication approaches to reach office based and remote workers. Establish a publicity campaign across the Department Consult staff representative partners (such as E&I , Seconded Officers) Promote and showcase best practice employee engagement with staff and management	Q4 2020	Q2 2021	HR/SDU
2	Continue to support the rollout of CO, EO, HEO staff for a - where possible including virtual engagement sessions and webinars though the increased use of technology, Hold Annual AP Forum (cancelled in 2020 due to COVID-19)	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR/SDU HR/SDU
3	Work with our E&I seconded officers in FORSA and other stakeholders to promote engagement and innovation across the Department	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR/IR
4	Develop a framework to promote well-being and support staff in the areas of physical health, mental health and emotional health, informed by the output of the engagement and innovation project on wellbeing	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR/ED&I
5	Provide supports to build employee resilience during changing or challenging times	Q4 2020	2023	HR/Wellbeing Unit

GOAL 2

Staff Participation and Recognition

No	Action	Start Date	Finish Date	Action Owners/ Responsible
1	Review existing engagement and innovation processes to increase participation of all grades/ locations across the Department	Q4 2020	Q2 2021	HR/SDU
2	Continue to promote the E&I scheme and encourage staff from all areas and grades to participate in the various projects	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR/SDU
3	Enhance One DSP awards process and continue to promote this initiative to showcase and reward staff and team initiatives in the Department	Q4 2020	Annually	HR/SDU
4	Work to improve the formal industrial relations mechanisms in the Department, including consultation with unions on relevant sections of the Department's Action Plan in relation to business improvements/efficiencies and service initiatives	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR/IR

GOAL 3

Support Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

No	Action	Start Date	Finish Date	Action Owners/ Responsible
1	Conduct an annual census for people who wish to disclose a disability to enable the Department to provide the necessary supports required	Q4 2020	Annually	HR
2	Support the work of the Department's Disability Consultative Committee and develop the role of the Disability Liaison Officer	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR
3	Implement the proposals as relevant of the Engagement and Innovation project on Supporting People with Disabilities	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR/SDU
4	Develop a policy and action plan to promote and support equality, diversity and inclusion in the workplace	Q4 2020	Q1 2021	HR
5.	Implement the proposals as relevant of the Engagement and Innovation project on supporting LGBT+ staff in the organisation; Support the development of the LGBT+ staff network.	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR / LGBT+ Network
6	Propose, Plan and Implement a number of education and awareness events to highlight diversity and inclusion themes to foster an open, positive, inclusive, and supportive workplace culture	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR/DDI Unit
7	Set and deliver on targets agreed with DPER to appropriately reflect modern Irish society in the workforce	2023	TBC	
8	Eliminate discrimination, promote equality of opportunity and protect human rights of staff as set out in Section 42 of the Irish Human Rights and Equality Commission Act	Q4 2020	ongoing	HR/ED&I unit

GOAL 4

Staff Wellbeing

No	Action	Start Date	Finish Date	Action Owners/ Responsible
1	Review E&I Wellbeing group report and outcomes of Wellness Pulse Survey published in 2020 to provide a platform to devise a strategy for staff wellbeing in the Department	Q4 2020	Q4 2020	HR
2	Publish a Wellbeing strategy and plan of action and events for 2020/21	Q4 2020	Q4 2020	HR
3	Establish a network of Wellbeing champions across the Department supported by the central HR Wellbeing Unit	Q4 2020	Q4 2020	HR
4	Commence an awareness campaign and stage a number of wellness related events following consultation Q3 2020	Q4 2020	Ongoing	HR

Appendix 1

ORGANISATION TRANSITION BOARD

Adapting to changes and Work Practices

The impact of the COVID-19 crisis has brought challenges in how the work of the Department has continued to be delivered or is resumed or extended to meet the needs of our customers.

The Organisation Transition Board (OTB) was set up in April 2020 to look at how we work as an organisation and what changes we will need to how we organise our work and our physical offices to cope with the new reality of COVID-19 restrictions.

The guiding principle for the OTB is that we address business continuity in the context of compliance with Public Health direction and harness efficiencies achieved.

The OTB first met on the 30th April 2020 and has met fortnightly since. The Board is comprised of member representatives from every Assistant Secretary area to facilitate a collaborative and joint problem-solving approach.

Since last April, the OTB has developed and published a set of OTB Framework Documents, which set out the key cross-cutting issues to guide the Department in transitioning coherently and safely to full business resumption where possible in the COVID-19 environment, identifying the supports required and embracing and promoting new ways of working.

OTB Frameworks



The OTB will continue to focus on the Department's business continuity and ways of working in the context of the Government's 'Living with COVID-19 Plan for Resilience and Recovery' and review and update existing sectoral protocols and ensure contingency plans are aligned with the framework for reactive restrictions.



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