

Seirbhís Chúnaimh  
d'Fhostaithe na Státseirbhíse



Civil Service Employee  
Assistance Service

**ANNUAL REPORT 2011**

# CSEAS Annual Report

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## Foreword

I am pleased to present the 2011 Annual Report of the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS). Having been appointed as Manager of the CSEAS during 2011, I am delighted to be working as part of the CSEAS team which provides work based support services to assist Civil Servants during times of difficulty and challenge in their personal and/or working lives.

Forming an important part of the Human Resource function in the Civil Service, the CSEAS contributes to the employer ethos of promoting employee wellness and organisational effectiveness, by supporting staff experiencing life challenges. Where difficulties are not addressed, an individual's health and well-being could be adversely affected and ultimately his/her ability to perform to full potential at work. A resource such as the CSEAS seeks to provide opportunities for staff to address issues early, seek help and move towards a resolution.

As part of the reform and modernisation programme in the Civil Service, considerable progress was made during 2011 to implement a restructure of the CSEAS to a regionalised shared service, under central management, within the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. Policy and governance matters were addressed by the CSEAS Advisory Committee and a manager was appointed to further the restructure and develop systems for service delivery. Appointments of new Employee Assistance Officers (EAOs) and EAO assignments on a regional basis have begun.

This is a time of great challenge, both nationally and individually, with the economic downturn presenting financial and other difficulties for both staff members and their families; and also in the workplace with adjustments in staffing levels, redeployment and work practices. I would like to thank the EAOs and acknowledge their continued commitment and dedication to service provision during 2011. While undoubtedly there will be challenges in the year ahead with the finalisation of the restructuring of the service, it presents an exciting opportunity to enhance service delivery, create greater accessibility to Civil Service staff, and assist further in organisational efficiency and effectiveness.

Lorus Collum  
Manager CSEAS  
July 2012

# **Civil Service Employee Assistance Service**

## **Mission Statement**

*“To offer a quality resource and support service for all staff  
which positively affects both individual health and well-being  
and organisational effectiveness”*

# **CIVIL SERVICE EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE SERVICE**

## **ANNUAL REPORT 2011**

### **1 Introduction**

- 1.2** The Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS) is an important shared service element of the human resource structure in the Civil Service. It plays a key role in an ethos of promoting employee wellness and organisational effectiveness. The CSEAS provides a wide range of confidential supports to staff and management designed to assist employees to manage work and life difficulties, which, if left unaddressed could adversely affect work performance and quality of life.
- 1.3** The work of the CSEAS supports the principles of Civil Service policies/circulars such as:
- Positive Working Environment Policy
  - Civil Service Alcohol and Drug Misuse Policy
  - Guidelines for Managing Underperformance in the Civil Service
  - Managing Sick Leave
- 1.4** Employee Assistance Officers (EAOs) work to a high level of professionalism and ethical confidentiality. Exceptions to confidentiality are;
- life threatening situations
  - where the EAO becomes aware of a breach of criminal law
  - where concealment of information would compromise the EAO
- 1.5** This report reflects the work of the CSEAS in 2011, providing an analysis and description of casework and other activities carried out during the year.
- 1.6** During 2011 a total of 3,506 civil service staff made contact with the CSEAS (i.e. 11 % usage throughout the Civil Service).
- 1.7** Due to EAO retirements and reassignments, the number of EAOs decreased from 16 EAOs to 13 by the end of the year.

# **1 Summary of CSEAS Activity in 2011**

## **2.1 Casework Activity**

Work carried out during the year by EAOs mainly involved assisting individual staff members in resolving or effectively managing both work-related and personal issues. These issues, if left unaddressed, could have the potential to adversely affect work performance, attendance and organisational productivity. Casework involved both face-to-face and telephone contact, sometimes over a number of sessions.

## **2.2 Information and Correspondence contact**

In addition to casework EAOs provided an information resource as a support to staff. They also corresponded with staff to offer support where it was considered by HR or managers that CSEAS involvement might be beneficial.

CSEAS information queries and correspondence contacts are not included in the casework analysis and percentage breakdown in this report.

## **2.3 Additional Activities**

In addition to individual casework EAOs were actively involved in:

- liaison with the Office of the Chief Medical Officer (CMO), the Public Service Friendly Society (PSFS), the Office of the Paymaster General and professional external agencies
- ongoing professional training and development
- delivery of presentations in the Civil Service Training & Development Centre (CSTDC)
- providing workshops and presentations in Departments to promote staff well-being thereby enhancing staff productivity and organisational effectiveness

### **3 Overview of Casework**

**3.1** In this Annual Report CSEAS casework analysis has been divided as follows:

1. Work-related casework (including Advice/Support to Managers)
2. Personal casework

**3.2** Staff using the CSEAS for work-related and/or personal issues may attend an EAO for either one or a multiple of sessions, depending on the presenting issue(s). The statistics used in this Annual Report are based on quantitative analysis and do not reflect the qualitative aspect of the work of the EAOs (i.e. the nature, depth and complexity of the issues presenting).

**3.3** There can be an overlap between work-related issues and personal issues. Unresolved issues in one area can impact on the other e.g. a member of staff may attend the CSEAS due to alcohol dependency affecting work performance. It may emerge during contact with the EAO that the staff member is also going through a separation. EAOs are in a unique position to help employees achieve better understanding of how to manage their own wellbeing when either their personal or work life is challenging. Such support enables staff to work to their optimum and contribute to the overall effectiveness of the workplace.

**3.4** The EAO takes time to assist the member of staff by listening, reflecting, clarifying and exploring various options available in order to resolve or manage the presenting problem more effectively. Where appropriate, a referral to an external support agency e.g. GP, counsellor, psychologist or HSE support services may be suggested.

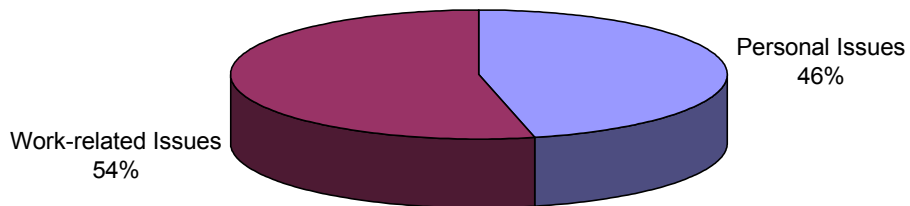
The following charts summarise the breakdown of casework in 2011 by category, grade, gender, referral source and location.

## 4 Casework Breakdown

### 4.1 Casework in 2011

In 2011 2,169 staff attended the CSEAS with work-related and/or personal issues. This compares with 2,615 staff attending in 2010. The decrease in casework in 2011 can be attributed to the reduction in EAO staff due to retirements and reassignments during the year.

Note: Casework does not include information queries and correspondence contact.



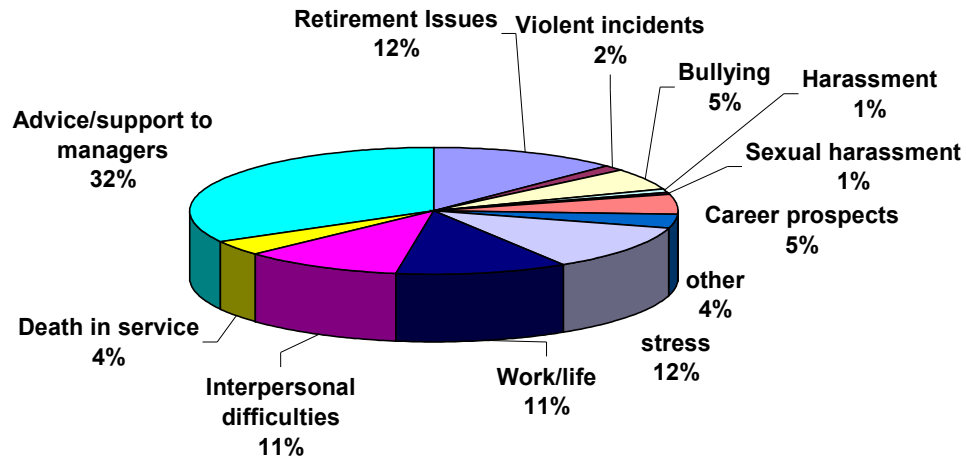
### 4.2 Work-related and Personal Issues:

The chart above indicates the percentage of CSEAS casework for 2011 which was work-related (54%) and those which were of a personal nature (46%). There is a further breakdown of this casework in the charts to follow. Breakdown for 2010 was 53% work-related and 47% personal issues.



## 5 Work-related Casework

1,161 staff members in the civil service attended the CSEAS with regard to work-related issues. This represented 54% of casework. The following is a breakdown of the categories of work-related issues.



### 5.2 Managers' Advice and Support

32% of work-related casework in 2011 represented CSEAS usage by managers across all departments for advice and support. This compares to 38% of work-related casework in 2010. Managers may contact the Service for advice if they are concerned about a staff member. The manager may also refer the individual to the CSEAS where personal and/or work-related issues may be affecting attendance or work performance. Over the years the CSEAS has proven to be a valuable resource for managers and is likely to continue to be so in the challenging years that lie ahead.

### 5.3 Work-related Stress

The percentage of staff attending the CSEAS for support in relation to work-related stress increased from 7% of total work-related casework in 2010 to 12% in 2011. It is possible this may be a reflection of the pressures individuals find themselves under including (i)

work-life balance issues **(ii)** financial constraints **(iii)** increased workload resulting from reduction in staff numbers and **(iv)** unemployment within the family. For the EAO factors that need to be taken into account when helping staff members manage stress includes differing personalities and how each individual responds to or copes with stressful situations. Work related change such as redeployment, lateral mobility and retirement can be a cause of stress. HR and/or the CMO may refer staff members to the EAO where work-related stress is the cause of absence.

#### **5.4 Planning for Retirement Issues**

In 2011 the percentage of serving staff using the EAS in relation to retirement issues remained the same as in 2010 at 12%. Staff members considering retirement can use the CSEAS to discuss and plan for their lives post retirement. EAOs continue to deliver presentations at Planning for Retirement courses held both in-house and in the Civil Service Training & Development Centre. EAOs also provide support to staff retiring on ill health grounds.

#### **5.5 Interpersonal Difficulties**

At 11%, the percentage for interpersonal difficulties remains the same as in 2010. Stress levels, different personalities and work/life pressures can cause or contribute to interpersonal conflict within the workplace. Within the Civil Service there is an increasing responsibility on managers to use conflict resolution skills and techniques to help the parties resolve any such issues. EAOs may, within the parameters of confidentiality, liaise with local management and/or HR to assist in moving towards an acceptable resolution to the matter.

#### **5.6 Work-Life Balance Issues**

There was a slight increase in the work-life balance issues from 10% in 2010 to 11% in 2011. Work-sharing and other family friendly options may not be as readily available to staff as in previous years. This is perhaps due to the reduction in staff numbers in the Civil Service. Also, the financial circumstances of staff members may preclude them from availing of these family friendly schemes. The EAO can assist staff members in assessing the underlying factors and explore other options for alleviating the difficulties.

#### **5.7 Bullying, Harassment & Sexual Harassment**

Bullying, harassment and sexual harassment accounted for 7% of work-related cases. The figure for bullying remains the same as in 2010 at 5%. Harassment & sexual harassment totalling 2% again remains static compared to 2010 figures. The Positive Working Environment Policy (PWE) continues to provide an awareness of what constitutes acceptable behaviour in the workplace. Using the CSEAS provides an opportunity for staff members to talk confidentially about such issues and to seek support and information on options available to them such as the PWE Policy.

## **5.8 Career Prospects**

The 2011 figure in this category remained the same as in 2010 at 5%. The CSEAS is a resource for staff and can provide support in a time of change and uncertainty.

## **5.9 Death-in-Service**

Again, as in 2010, 4% of work-related casework in 2011 was related to deaths-in-service. Where a staff member dies in service, the EAO is available to provide support and assistance to the bereaved family and to colleagues. The EAO may make contact with the family of the deceased member of staff and offer support, practical help and advice on entitlements. Where a member of staff dies in service the EAO, through local management, may offer relevant support to his/her colleagues.

## **5.10 Violent / Critical Incidents in the Workplace**

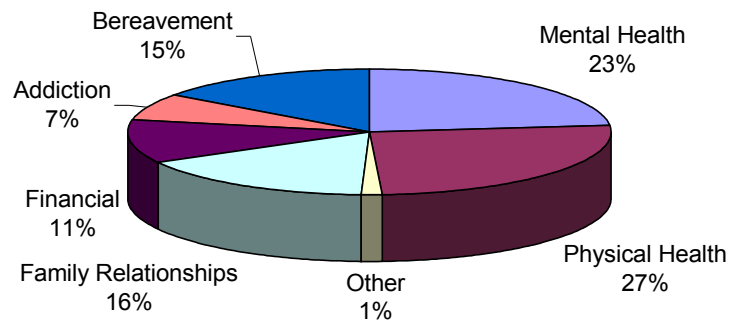
This figure is up by one percentage point on the previous year to 2%. Violent or critical incidents in the workplace can include situations where a member of staff feels or is threatened. Under Section 8 of the Safety, Health & Welfare at Work Act 2005 an employer has a duty of care for the physical and psychological wellbeing of all staff. A manager may refer any staff member(s) who has been involved in a violent or critical incident in the workplace to the CSEAS. The EAO can offer appropriate support and follow-up contact where necessary. A number of EAOs are trained in Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM) to provide information and appropriate support to both staff and management following a violent/traumatic incident in the workplace.

## **5.11 Other**

The cases in this category decreased from 5% in 2010 to 4% in 2011. Some of these cases are multifaceted and do not fall easily into the categories already outlined.

## 6 Personal Issues Casework

During the year 1,008 staff accessed the CSEAS seeking support and help for their own personal issues. This represented 46% of casework. Difficulties in a staff member's life e.g. bereavement, addiction, ill health or financial issues can impact on the individual's work life. The CSEAS is there to help staff resolve or effectively manage these issues so as to facilitate them in achieving their full potential both in their working and personal lives.



### 6.2 Physical Health Issues

Physical health issues accounted for 27% of personal issues which was a 1% increase on 2010 figures. Staff on long term sick leave may seek the assistance and support of the CSEAS during their illness through self referral. Under attendance management policies it is the practice of HR divisions to inform the EAO of staff who are on long term sick leave. The purpose of these referrals is to provide early intervention and ongoing support to the staff member during their absence. The CMO, where appropriate, may refer the staff member to the CSEAS where it is felt that contact with the EAO would be beneficial in helping the staff member return to work.

### 6.3 Mental Health Issues

Staff with mental health issues who contacted the CSEAS represented 23% of personal issues compared to 20% in 2010. Such issues may be a cause of absence from work at times. The assistance of the CSEAS in offering support during absence may enhance a

staff member's prospect of a return to work. Staff experiencing mental health problems may require intermittent CSEAS support during periods of their working lives.

#### **6.4 Family/Relationship**

The percentage of members of staff using the CSEAS for family or relationship issues decreased slightly from 17% of personal casework in 2010 to 16% in 2011. Marriage and relationship difficulties, separation/divorce and elderly care were among the issues presented in this category. In many cases the individual needs time and space to explore how they are feeling, consider options and source information available on how to proceed. The EAO can provide the above and also information and referral for specialist advice to agencies such as; Legal Aid Board, Citizens Information Centres, Department of Social Protection, Family Mediation Service, Relationship Counselling Services, HSE and Treoir.

#### **6.5 Bereavement**

The percentage in this category increased from 14% in 2010 to 15% in 2011. Sadly all members of staff will suffer bereavement at some stage during their career. The CSEAS provides bereavement support and also practical information. The EAO can also refer the member of staff to bereavement counselling, if required.

#### **6.6 Financial**

The percentage usage of the CSEAS for financial reasons decreased from 14% in 2010 to 11% in 2011. The role of the EAO in these cases is to assist the staff member in assessing the extent of the problem. The EAO can provide information on support organisations and refer staff to relevant agencies such as the Public Service Friendly Society (PSFS) Money Advice & Budgeting Service (MABS) or the Credit Union as appropriate. The EAO can also provide information on budgeting. In addition, current media publicity on financial matters has heightened staff members' awareness and ability to directly access relevant services themselves.

#### **6.7 Addiction**

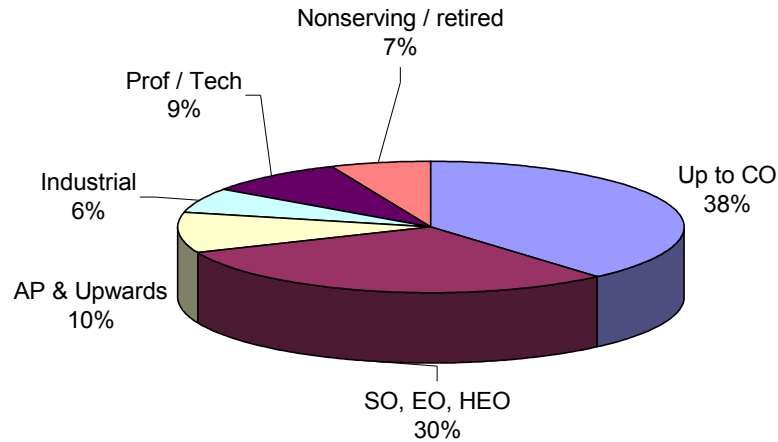
Addiction cases remained the same as 2010 at 7% of total personal issues. Under *The Civil Service Policy on Alcohol & Drug Misuse in the Workplace* published in 2010, members of staff who may have an alcohol or drug related problem are encouraged to use the CSEAS or may be formally referred to the service for support. The EAO can provide information on Addiction Treatment Programmes and can also provide support to staff and managers where a staff member is in recovery following professional treatment. Part of the 'Return to Work Agreement Undertaking' in the policy includes a commitment on the part of the staff member to regularly attend the CSEAS for ongoing support.

## **6.8 Other**

This category records personal issues which do not fall easily into the aforementioned categories. They also reflect the ambiguity and range of personal issues and difficulties encountered by the EAOs. This represented 1% of total personal casework.

## 7 Casework by Grade, Referral Source, Gender and Location

### 7.1 Casework by Employment Grade



Casework figures (2,169 cases) relating to the usage of the CSEAS by all grades across the Civil Service in 2011 was mainly representative of the percentage breakdown of staff in each grade. Casework figure in 2010 was 2,615. Grades up to Clerical Officer represent 36% of the Civil Service workforce and accounted for 38% of CSEAS casework. 44% of civil servants are employed at SO to HEO grade and represented 30% of total CSEAS casework. Likewise, 19% of casework came from the grades of AP upwards and equivalent grades which represent 15% of total Civil Service staff. Industrial staff account for 5% of total civil servants and represented 6% of CSEAS casework. The remaining 7% represented usage of the CSEAS by non-serving and retired staff.

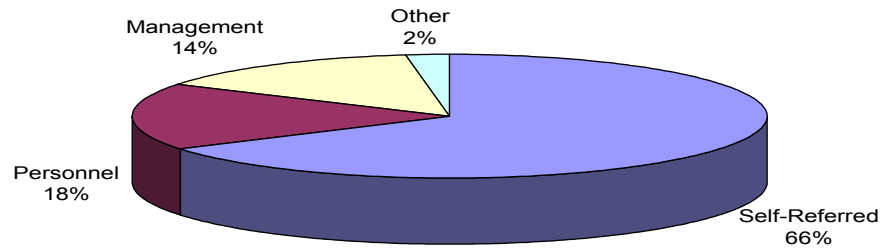
### 7.2 CSEAS usage across Civil Service grades

Usage of the CSEAS per grade as a percentage of total staffing in each grade is as follows:

- Grades up to Clerical Officer - 7%
- Grades from Staff Officer to HEO - 5%

- Grades AP upwards and equivalent - 8%
- Industrial grades - 9%

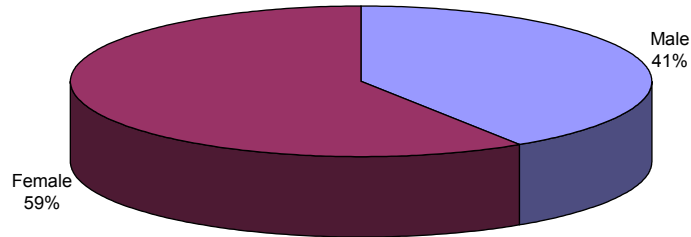
### 7.3 Casework by Referral Source



In 2011, again as in previous years the majority of staff who used the CSEAS did so by self referral (66%) indicating that staff members view the service as a vital in-house resource in helping them deal with both personal and work-related issues. Line management and HR consistently refer staff to the CSEAS as a means of support for those who may be experiencing serious illness, personal and/or work related difficulties.

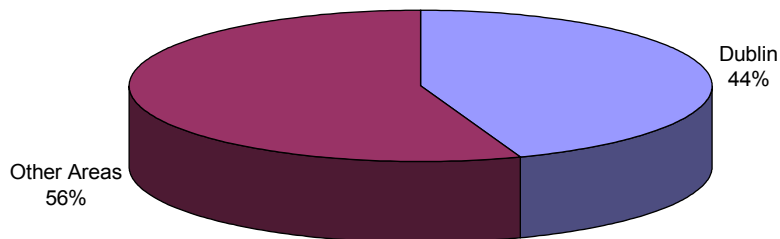
### 7.4 Casework by Gender





In 2011 59% of staff using the CSEAS were female reflecting the greater number of women generally working within the Civil Service. However, at 41% more male staff used the service in 2011, an increase of 1% on the previous year.

### 7.5 Casework by Location



44% of casework related to staff located in the greater Dublin area while 56% represented CSEAS cases outside Dublin. These figures correspond with overall Civil Service location statistics, in that 48% of all civil servants work in the greater Dublin area with the balance of 52% located in other areas. This overall usage of the CSEAS indicates an

active awareness and appreciation of the service by both staff and management throughout the 26 counties.

## **8 Information and Correspondence Contact**

Information queries may necessitate the EAO accessing the relevant information or enabling the individual to do so. Depending on the nature of the query, these cases can require a considerable amount of time and work.

EAOs may be requested by Human Resources to communicate with members of staff for a number of reasons including sick leave absence, where a staff member has experienced a bereavement or trauma or where it is felt that CSEAS support might be appropriate. The purpose of this is to advise the staff member of the availability of the EAO as a resource and support.

## **9 Additional Activities**

**9.1** EAOs delivered presentations and workshops within individual Departments and in

the Civil Service Training and Development Centre (CSTDC)

Presentation topics included:

- Stress management
- Planning for Retirement
- Training for Managers
- Bereavement issues
- Budgeting and Debt Management
- Effective Communication
- Work/Life Balance
- Child protection
- The role of the line manager in the management of sick leave

### **9.2 Training and Professional Development 2011**

The EAOs are trained to a highly professional level and are affiliated with the Irish Chapter of the Employee Assistance Professional Association (EAPA Ireland).

EAOs regularly engaged in ongoing training and development and participated in professional supervision sessions.

Training undertaken by EAOs in 2011 included topics such as;

- Addiction
- Counselling / Psychotherapy / Coaching
- Bereavement & Suicide
- Supporting staff through Illness and Retirement

### **9.3 CSEAS liaison with the Public Service Friendly Society**

A number of EAOs were members of the Committee of Management of the Public Service Friendly Society (PSFS) during 2011. The help of the PSFS is a vital component in supporting staff who are experiencing financial difficulties.

### **9.4 CSEAS liaison with the Office of the CMO and HR divisions**

EAOs liaised with the Office of the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) and HR Divisions in 2011, where appropriate, to facilitate a co-ordinated approach to supporting staff and management.

## 10 Conclusion

The 2011 Annual Report statistics indicate a significant rise in the percentage of staff who presented to the CSEAS with stress issues under the work-related category (i.e. an increase from 7% in 2010 to 12% in 2011). Given the difficulties being experienced by staff members both inside and outside of the workplace due to **(i)** the current economic recession **(ii)** reduced pay **(iii)** increased unemployment **(iv)** reduced staff numbers and **(v)** budgetary constraints, this increase in stress levels is not surprising. In such a climate there is an even greater need for staff and management to be provided with support and assistance through the CSEAS to help find new and creative ways to get through these difficult times.

The year 2011 proved to be a year of new challenges and changing environments for all civil servants, including the EAOs. Progression continued during 2011 on the restructure of the CSEAS as a centralised regionalised shared service within the Department of Public Expenditure & Reform. Developments included;

- the appointment of a manager to oversee and implement the decision to restructure the service delivery model
- conclusion of a competition to recruit new EAOs
- development of a governance structure and policy by the CSEAS Advisory Committee
- plans to appoint new EAOs and relocate the service.

The EAOs remain committed to providing a highly professional, efficient and cost effective service under the guidance of the new management structure and the CSEAS Advisory Committee. The modernisation of the CSEAS as a shared service model heralds a new, exciting and challenging future for the service.