

Circular Title: Civil Service Employee Assistance
Service (CSEAS)

File Reference: DPE 058/003/14

I am directed by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform to advise that the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service has been restructured as a centralised, regionalised, shared service within the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

Circular Number: Circular 09/2014

Purpose: To set out the details of the restructured Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS) effective from June 2012

Status: This Circular hereby revokes Circular 35/1997

Circular Application: All Civil Servants

Date: 28 April 2014

Circular 09/14: Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS)

Introduction

1. The Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS) is a staff¹ support service for civil servants which plays a key role in promoting employee wellness and organisational effectiveness. The CSEAS augments and supplements the work of HR Divisions and line management. Working with HR Divisions, the CSEAS aims to assist in HR strategies to maintain/enhance performance, minimise sick leave absences and provide help in return to work interventions. The CSEAS also has a role to play in Civil Service policies that address dignity at work and the fostering of a positive working environment, alcohol and drug misuse, managing underperformance and managing sick leave. Confidential² assistance is provided to staff and management across the Civil Service which aims to assist staff to manage work and life difficulties which, if left unattended, could adversely affect work performance and/or attendance. Provision of a service of this nature arises from a recognition that staff are a valued resource, whose continued well-being contributes to the overall efficiency and effectiveness of the Civil Service.

Shared Service

2. A new model of shared service delivery came into effect in mid-2012. The CSEAS was restructured as a regionalised shared service, under central management within the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform. The CSEAS provides employee assistance services to all Departments/Offices across the Civil Service. Employee Assistance Officers (EAOs) are located in regional offices in Dublin (Head Office), Castlebar, Cork, Limerick, Sligo and Tullamore.

¹ Reference within this circular to staff/staff member(s) and employee(s) means Civil Servant(s).

² See paragraph 18 for details on confidentiality and the exceptions thereto.

CSEAS Staff

3. The CSEAS manager oversees the day-today running of the Service, with administrative support provided in Dublin Head Office. A team of Employee Assistance Officers (EAOs) are based in the regions mentioned above in paragraph 2. EAOs have gained relevant qualifications and/or experience prior to and since appointment, and are committed to on-going continuing professional development.

CSEAS Governance, Roles and Structure

4. The CSEAS Advisory Committee provides governance and comprises a representative from the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, who chairs the committee, the Chief Medical Officer for the Civil Service, representatives from the Personnel Officers' Network and the Secretary to the Civil Service General Council Staff Panel.

The role of the committee is

- To advise on, and approve the overall strategy for CSEAS policy development
 - To review and advise on the operation and effectiveness of the CSEAS.
5. The CSEAS manager, reporting to a Principal Officer in the HR Directorate in the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform, is responsible for the day-to-day management of the CSEAS. The manager reports to the CSEAS Advisory Committee, as required, on matters relating to policy and overall service delivery.

Supporting the HR function

6. The CSEAS supports the HR function by

- 6.1.** Supporting line managers and HR Divisions, in the management of sick leave, underperformance, disciplinary issues, inter-personal issues and other welfare related concerns which have the potential to impact on the individual and/or the workplace. Related Civil Service policies address dignity at work and the fostering of a positive working environment, alcohol and drug misuse, managing underperformance and managing sick leave
- 6.2.** Supporting the employer's duty of care for its employees' welfare under health & safety legislation
- 6.3.** Supporting the employer's role in making reasonable accommodation for the needs of persons with alcohol and/or drug dependency in light of the decision taken by the Equality Tribunal that alcoholism is a disability within the meaning of the Employment Equality Act 1998
- 6.4.** Providing support to civil servants at times of personal and/or work-related challenges/difficulties.

Supporting the Individual

7. The CSEAS can support individual civil servants by providing

- Assistance in evaluating and assessing difficulties

- Help in planning a structured approach to coping with and/or resolving difficulties
 - Follow-up contact and support
 - Short-term solution-focused issue resolution
 - Referral³ to external professionals or agencies as considered appropriate and in agreement with the staff member
 - Signposting to other information and support resources
 - Information on a wide range of topics in the area of social services, health/social welfare entitlements and helping agencies
 - Advice and support to managers and supervisors
8. Civil servants are encouraged to approach the CSEAS at an early stage if they are concerned about personal and/or work-related issues. Where there is concern about a work colleague, the matter can be discussed with an EAO for guidance and support. Early intervention is advisable.

Referrals to the CSEAS

9. **Self-referrals.** A staff member can self-refer to the CSEAS by making direct contact.
10. **Suggested referrals** can arise where a staff member discloses to the HR Division or line management that he/she is experiencing personal and/or work-related challenges, or where the HR Division or line management becomes aware of such a situation. The HR Division or line manager may suggest that contact with the CSEAS may be helpful and leave it to the staff member to contact the CSEAS. Suggested referrals can also be made by PeoplePoint, the HR Shared Service Centre for the Civil Service, when

³ Any costs in attending outside agencies or professionals are the responsibility of the staff member

communicating with civil servants. Suggested referrals may also be made by the Chief Medical Officer (CMO). In any of these suggested referrals, there will be no feedback to HR Division, PeoplePoint, CMO or line manager.

Other parties, for example, work colleagues, trade union representatives and/or others who have a concern about a staff member may recommend the CSEAS to the individual.

11. Formal referrals can arise when a HR Division, line management or the Chief Medical Officer (CMO) for the Civil Service becomes aware that an issue is impacting on a staff member and/or his/her work performance. HR Division, line manager or the CMO may formally refer the staff member to the CSEAS for support. It is in the staff member's interest to avail of the support of the CSEAS as it provides an opportunity to discuss matters confidentially⁴, which might have a bearing on the circumstances.

12. When a formal referral has been made by HR Divisions, line management or the Chief Medical Officer, confirmation of attendance/engagement will be provided to the referring party and any proposed feedback or progress reports will be agreed with the staff member. If the referred staff member chooses not to avail of the support of the CSEAS, this will be communicated to the referring party.

⁴ See paragraph 18 for details on confidentiality and the exceptions thereto.

When might a civil servant contact the CSEAS?

13. A staff member may find it helpful to confidentially⁵ discuss issues that are causing concern. The CSEAS provides a useful setting for civil servants to obtain guidance and support in assessing the situation and developing the skills to help deal with these concerns. Issues arising may be either work-related or personal.

13.1. **Work-related issues** including (but not limited to)

- Workplace conflict
- Interpersonal misunderstandings or arguments
- Bullying and/or harassment concerns
- Sexual harassment concerns
- Workplace attributed stress due to, for example, work pressure, exhaustion, imbalance between work and personal life, difficulties in adjusting to organisational change, interpersonal difficulties at work. Workplace attributed stress can lead to absenteeism, low morale, problems with concentration and poor decision-making, all of which can adversely affect organisational effectiveness
- A death-in-service
- Traumatic workplace incidents
- Planning for retirement

13.2. **Personal Issues** including (but not limited to)

- Financial matters, including budgeting and guidance on managing debt
- Substance abuse relating to alcohol and/or drugs

⁵ See paragraph 18 for details on confidentiality and the exceptions thereto.

- Gambling
- Eating disorders
- Bereavement – coping with grief and loss, practical information following bereavement, death-in-service, suicide issues
- Family/relationship issues – separation, domestic violence, secondary family issues
- Health issues – physical or mental health where CSEAS support in the workplace might be helpful

The CSEAS can support line managers as follows

14. Line managers may contact the CSEAS if they have concerns about a staff member. Line managers will be given the opportunity to discuss the issue in a confidential⁶ and supportive environment, with the option of referring the individual staff member to the CSEAS (see paragraphs 10 to 12 above relating to referrals).

Proactive initiatives

15. The CSEAS adopts a proactive approach to staff well-being by promoting and highlighting issues of relevance to staff, through, for example, circulation of material via HR Divisions, departmental and union magazines, electronic media and the CSEAS website www.cseas.per.gov.ie

16. When requested by Departments/Offices, EAOs will deliver presentations within courses such as induction, management training and retirement planning. Tailored presentations can be delivered, as requested, on topics such as Dignity at Work, Stress Management, Conflict Resolution and Health & Well-being.

⁶ See paragraph 18 for details on confidentiality and the exceptions thereto.

Response to Critical Incidents in the Workplace

17. When requested by Departments/Offices, the CSEAS will provide a response to critical incidents arising in the workplace. The nature of the response is tailored to suit the incident, in consultation with the Department or Office concerned.

Confidentiality

18. Within the CSEAS confidentiality is between the individual using the service and the CSEAS. Information and personal data disclosed by civil servants to the CSEAS remain confidential (exceptions are listed below) and will not be disclosed to a third party outside of the CSEAS without the prior knowledge and consent of the individual. This is in keeping with normal professional standards in relation to confidentiality.

18.1. Exceptions to confidentiality

- Life-threatening situations to the individual, other parties or the public
- Where there is a statutory responsibility to report
- Where required by a court or legal process to do so
- Where non-disclosure of information could compromise the CSEAS
- Where the CSEAS becomes aware of a breach in criminal law, disclosure may be necessary

CSEAS Contact Details – Head Office

Address



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(CSEAS)**

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Protocols on service delivery

19. Full details on CSEAS service delivery can be viewed in the CSEAS Protocols on Service Delivery document available to view on the CSEAS website www.cseas.per.gov.ie

Circulation

20. This circular should be brought to the attention of all civil servants.

**William Beausang
Assistant Secretary**

28 April 2014