

Managing your Money: Budgeting Information and Assistance - Article by the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS)

This article contains information and assistance on money management and budgeting. We hope the information contained will be helpful to those experiencing difficult financial times.

Assessing the Situation

When starting a financial plan it is imperative to evaluate your current financial position.

It is important to deal with the situation as early as possible especially if you are missing loan repayments or are using your credit card for day to day expenses. It can be very helpful to draw up a detailed list/table of your income and expenditure. Use your bank statements, payslips, and household bills to assist you. Seeing your income and expenditure on paper can bring clarity to your situation and help you to identify where the difficulty/problem lies. Take time to do this.

Take Note

You use these analytical skills every day in your work as a Civil Servant; don't forget to apply them when managing your own money.

The Next Step

Once you have identified the problem, you can then decide what aspects you can deal with yourself

and/or what you need to get help with. Put in place a detailed and specific plan of action. This plan has to work for you personally and should not add to those worries or pressures that already exist. Don't carry the worry on your own, share it with those close to you.

Setting Goals

We all have different goals. For some it is living day to day while for others it is saving for a holiday, paying off a credit card, or having an educational fund. Goals are achievable only if they are realistic. When you are surviving day to day, it is important to make realistic agreements to pay outstanding bills such as credit cards and utilities.

Examples of Personal Goals

Short-term (0-3 years)

- Meet every day expenditure

Medium-term (3-10 years)

- Save for your children's education

Long-term (10 years plus)

- Pay off your mortgage early

Bear in mind, there are times when you may have to reassess your goals, depending on your financial situation. For example in 2002 you may have decided to pay extra into your mortgage, but now you find yourself struggling financially. Consider

reviewing this decision and getting expert advice.

Budgeting Effectively

This means having enough money to meet daily expenses as well as having some money put aside for expected and unexpected expenditure, if possible. Below are some tips to help with your daily budgeting.

Daily Budgeting Tips

- Shopping lists;
- Supermarket Loyalty Cards;
- Supermarket reward schemes;
- Vouchers;
- Saving Schemes.

The following are tips to assist you in budgeting in the longer term.

Longer term Budgeting Tips

- Shop around for your banking and health insurance needs.
- Examine your utility bills to ensure best value.
- Check out the services available from your local credit union e.g. loans and bursaries.
- Wait for a sale to purchase/replace appliances.

Spending Calendar

Some months can be more demanding financially than others. Be mindful of both monthly and annual payments as the latter can hit you unexpectedly, if unprepared. A sample spending calendar like the one below can be very helpful.

Month	Expected Annual Expenditure
January	Property Tax
February	House Insurance
March	Car Tax
April	TV Licence
May	Car NCT
June	Health Insurance
July	Car Insurance
August	Family Holiday
September	School Expenses
October	Refuse Charges
November	Life Assurance
December	Christmas Costs

Increasing your Income

It can be useful to check periodically that you are receiving all of the tax credits, reliefs and Social Welfare benefits that you are entitled to. If in doubt, seek clarity from:

www.revenue.ie

www.welfare.ie

To free up disposable income, you could consider selling items you no longer want on an internet auction site/at a car boot sale and/or cancelling any unused subscriptions e.g. gym memberships. You may wish to review your health insurance policy to ensure you are getting optimum benefits at the best price. The Health Insurance Authority website www.hia.ie may assist you with this.

Decreasing your Outgoings

It may be helpful to differentiate between expenses that are fixed e.g. rent and those that are variable e.g. utility bills. The Commission for Energy Regulation's website www.energycustomers.ie provides information on your rights as an energy customer and help in understanding electricity and natural gas charges.

While you may be able to negotiate a reduction in fixed payments, it may be easier and more effective to look at economising where possible by shopping around for better value goods and services. Try comparison sites such as www.consumerhelp.ie.

Curtail expenditure on non-essential items such as entertainment by seeking out low cost or free events happening in your locality.

Money Saving Tips

Break Habits

In place of the newspaper, scone or morning latte, save the money over a period of one month and treat yourself.

Exercise

Walk or cycle instead of driving or taking the bus. If too far, park up, or get off the bus a few stops early, this helps to save money and keep fit.

Interest Free

Look out for *interest free* purchases especially on furniture and electrical goods. Of course, be mindful of the small print.

Getting Help

Many organisations provide free information and assistance around budgeting and money management. What follows is an example of some of the services available to Civil Servants.

The Public Service Friendly Society (PSFS) www.psfs.ie is a non-profit organisation which operates within the Civil Service and approved Public Bodies. Using the contributions made by members, they adopt an altruistic approach by providing confidential assistance to those members and their dependants in times of need.

The Civil Service Credit Union (CSCU) www.cscu.ie encourages thrift and careful management of personal finances by its members and provides a source of low cost credit.

CANA Credit Union www.canacu.ie is available to staff of the Revenue Commissioners. It provides a range of services for its members including various savings accounts, loans for a wide variety of purposes and a Budget Account Scheme.

If you are a member of another Credit Union, you may wish to look further into the available services.

It is important to keep up to date on relevant

information and the various services and benefits available to you through membership of your Trade Union.

The Money Advice and Budgeting Service (MABS) www.mabs.ie is a free, confidential, independent and non-judgmental service for people in debt, or in danger of getting into debt, in Ireland.

The National Consumer Agency (NCA) www.nca.ie is a statutory body established by the Irish Government. It provides

information about your consumer rights and personal finances. The website contains useful tools and information which may help you get the most from your money and make smart decisions.

The Citizens Information Board is a statutory body www.citizensinformation.ie which supports the provision of information, advice and advocacy on a broad range of public and social services. It has a dedicated Mortgage Arrears Information Helpline 0761 074050.

Conclusion

We hope that this CSEAS article has given you some information and assistance on money management and budgeting.

Always remember that the Civil Service Employee Assistance Service (CSEAS) is available and willing to help you deal with the practical and emotional impact of your financial situation.

Visit www.cseas.per.gov.ie for further information on the CSEAS.



Contact Details for the CSEAS:

Ph. 0761 000 030 or e-mail: cseas@per.gov.ie or Address: CSEAS, Dept. Public Expenditure & Reform, 3rd Floor St. Stephen's Green House, Earlsfort Terrace, Dublin 2.

- to make an appointment with an EAO in any region
- to arrange a telephone consultation with an EAO in any region
- to make a general enquiry

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