

Short Guide to Managing the Change Process with Staff

Delivering on the potential under the Public Service Agreement 2010 – 2014 will involve substantial change for many public servants, including some redeploying to new roles, locations and even organisations and adopting new work practices and technologies. It is normal for many people to be nervous of major change in their lives in the initial stages. Engaging staff in this process is the best way to deliver substantial change in work as smoothly as possible, to secure their acceptance to the proposals and to focus their attention on outcomes.

While maintaining legitimate management prerogatives in relation to implementation of policy, delivery of change and organisation of work, management in each public service body should engage with staff and their representatives at an early stage in the decision-making process, to enable them to engage on the development of the proposals, and to continue to communicate with them as the strategy is developed and implemented.

Following each of the steps set out below can help with the delivery of a substantial change programme:

1. Assess at a very early stage the likely impact on staff of any change proposal, including how jobs might change in functions or locations, the number of jobs that might be surplus, the number of staff who may have to be redeployed, and the reemployment options. At the early stage it may not be possible to have the answers to all of the likely questions or to identify down to the individuals involved, which will often depend on the choices they make, but it should be possible to give a general picture of likely outcomes. The important thing is a very early indication to staff of the nature of the proposed change so as to avoid untrue, unhelpful and worrying rumours for staff.
2. Communication with staff and their representatives is essential at a very early stage of the plan of action, to set out the scope and timing of change. Initially, verbal communication of the plan in simple terms by management is the preferred way to do it. Some managers may need particular support in communicating the change affecting their area - ensure that they have it, through HR, Finance, IT or other resources.
3. Give staff, and their representatives, the opportunity to discuss with and contribute to the development of proposals thus encouraging ownership. If staff are to buy in, they must understand why the change/plan is needed and how it will impact on them.
4. Maintain a regular flow of consistent verbal and written information to all staff involved and their representatives, even if the content is limited and has to be cautious. It is correct to identify something as not known, if it is not, rather than to speculate, and to identify and acknowledge necessary changes in the strategy.
5. If there is to be a reduction of staff in an area, ensure the concerns of the staff directly affected and those remaining behind are considered. Be aware of and

adhere to the consultation requirements under the Croke Park Agreement in relation to redeployment, job security and outsourcing which will arise for all major change proposals. In the context of the current commitment to deliver Public Services directly to the greatest possible extent consistent with efficient and effective delivery, there are also specific protections set out in the Appendix to the Agreement where a change to service delivery options, in particular through outsourcing, is being considered