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## Public service unions urged to enter talks on new pay agreement

Pat Leahy

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Public service unions should enter into talks on a new pay deal, according to Minister for Public Expenditure [Jack Chambers](#), who warned that any new agreement must be “sustainable and affordable”.

The expiring deal, which ran for the past 2½ years and finished yesterday, saw public servants receive increases of more than 10 per cent during that time.

The public services committee of the [Irish Congress of Trade Unions](#) (Ictu) last month said it had decided [there was no basis for talks](#) on a new agreement. This statement followed engagements with [Department of Public Expenditure](#) officials.

Unions indicated that they would begin a series of local claims, raising fears in Government of a free-for-all across the public service as different groups of workers press for pay increases.

Chambers has issued a fresh appeal to the unions to join talks on a new agreement, indicating that he wants a deal finalised so the cost can be included in the budget in October. He assured unions that “all matters are open for discussion”.

[Writing in The Irish Times today](#), Chambers says: “Government is clear – we are ready, willing and available for intensive discussions with a view to building consensus towards a new agreement. All of the issues of importance to both sides can and should be discussed as part of any engagement – that is the very nature of collective bargaining.

“Agreements are not achieved in isolation. They require engagement, dialogue and negotiation and setting preconditions or barriers to engagement does not assist the process of building consensus and agreement,” he says.

[ [Jack Chambers: We’re ready to do a deal on public servants’ pay – and everything is on the table](#)[Opens in new window](#) ]

“The prize is an outcome that provides certainty and stability for public servants and the taxpayer – something all sides I think could agree on. For its part, Government has made clear its position that all matters are open for discussion at this stage.”

However, Chambers also stresses that the Government is not offering a blank cheque. He says public sector pay claims “must be considered in the context of a wide range of

competing priorities, including social welfare, health, housing and other essential public services”.

The Minister also points out that the public pay bill has increased by 55 per cent since 2020, with more than 70,000 additional public servants employed than at that time. Lower-paid public servants have seen their pay increased by more than 30 per cent in the same period, he notes.

Kevin Callinan, chair of the Ictu public services committee, said the unions had argued for pay to be dealt with at the beginning of talks on a broader deal.

[ [Unions told to prepare for strike ballot as no basis for public sector pay talks in place](#)Opens in new window ]

“People will want to know how losses against inflation over the last five years will be addressed and how pay will relate to movement in prices over the duration of any agreement,” he said. “Without this it’s hard to see how a multi-annual deal is possible.”