

The purpose of this second bulletin to schools and staff is to provide a further update on progress related to the implementation of the Agreement on terms and conditions of grant funded school secretaries.

OPERATIONAL UPDATE ON CERTAIN ASPECTS OF THE AGREEMENT:

School secretaries who accept the agreement will be paid on the Department's NTS Payroll from September 2023.

Taking into account the aims and spirit of the agreement that was reached with Fórsa in February 2022, and following on from the publication of [Circular 0036/2022](#), Department officials have been reviewing the operational implications, and current payroll infrastructure and mechanisms for the onboarding of school secretaries to the Department's payroll.

Following this in-depth review, it emerged that the proposed arrangements for the treatment of i) Maternity/Adoptive Leave and ii) Sick Leave under the agreement were inconsistent with what is currently being operated for other cohorts of staff on the Department's payrolls. As such, the Department intends to implement these aspects of the agreement as follows:

MATERNITY/ADOPTIVE LEAVE TOP UP PAYMENT:

The offer made in Circular 0036/2022 includes the following aspect in relation to maternity leave, *'Maternity leave will mirror the statutory maternity benefit of 26 weeks but includes a 'top up' of the statutory maternity benefit to 100% of wages, subject to a ceiling of €150 a week from employers (i.e., €150 on top of the statutory benefit).'*

As it is unclear how this 'top-up' would operate in practice (e.g. whether it would be subject to statutory deductions etc.), the Department intends to implement the above piece of the agreement by replicating the existing procedures on both OLCS and IT payroll systems, and what is in existence across the payroll, paying secretaries joining the DE payroll their full salary, minus the DSP Maternity/Adoptive Benefit (which they will apply to and receive from DSP), during the 26 week statutory Maternity Leave period and 24 week statutory Adoptive Leave period.

The result of this implementation means no secretary will be disadvantaged in comparison to what was set out in the Circular, and each secretary will receive Maternity/Adoptive Benefit of €262 (from DSP) and the balance of their pay, fortnightly, from the DE for the 26 weeks Maternity Leave duration.

SICK LEAVE:

Following the agreement reached with Fórsa, - and as outlined in Circular 0036/2022, certain Sick Leave arrangements will apply from the 2023/24 school year and onwards.

The Sick Leave provisions for a secretary in each school year, are as detailed below. Where the Sick Leave entitlement is exceeded in each school year, the Department will cease remuneration for any further Sick Leave taken in that school year.

2023/24 school year

- ✓ Paid Sick Leave for up to a maximum of 5 working days in the school year

2024/25 school year

- ✓ Paid Sick Leave for up to a maximum of 7 working days in the school year

2025/26 school year

- ✓ Paid Sick Leave for up to a maximum of 10 working days in the school year.

Paid Sick Leave will cease for a school secretary on day 6 (for the school year 2023/2024, day 8 for 2024/2025 and day 11 for 2025/26 onwards).

The Sick Leave provisions to be introduced are in line with the statutory Sick Pay Scheme. However, a secretary may retain their pre-existing Sick Leave entitlement as may be provided for in their current contract of employment, where it is more advantageous than the statutory Sick Leave provision.

The Department is currently in the process of drafting a Circular on leave entitlements (including Sick Leave) for secretaries, which will set out the terms and conditions for each leave type. It is planned to publish this Circular ahead of the 2023/24 school year, which will also set out the steps to be followed by a school in the case of a secretary who has pre-existing contractual sick leave arrangements.

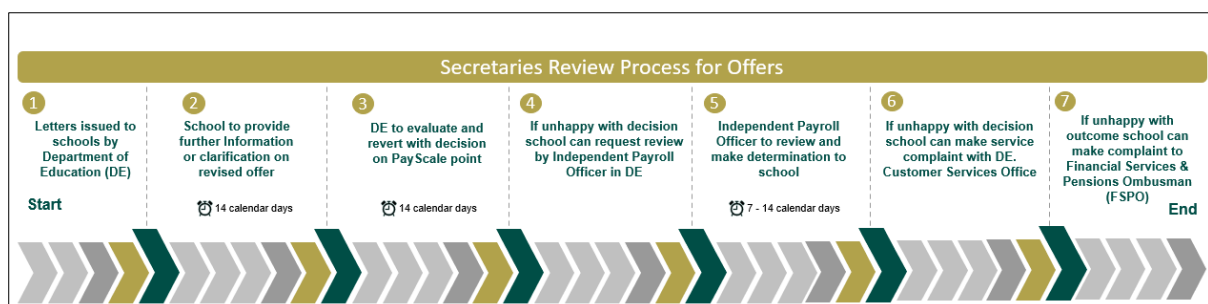
UPDATE ON SECRETARY SURVEY AND REVIEW PROCESS:

A Survey issued from Payroll Division to all schools in November 2022, seeking details of the offers made by schools to secretaries under the methodology provided for in Circular 0036/2022. The survey closed in December 2022 and based on the returns received, 2,864 secretaries accepted the offer made by their schools.

Since then, the Secretary Returns Team have been analysing the survey data received, to verify the correct point on pay scale for each secretary. In April 2023 – as a first step – letters issued to 670 schools where it appeared that the original offer made by the schools was incorrect and placed those secretaries on points of the salary scale either lower or higher than they should have been under the terms of Circular 0036/2022.

Whilst there are still a number of these 670 schools who still have to reply to the Department, a sizeable proportion of those who have done so, have indicated that the secretary concerned has accepted the revised offer. In addition, a small number of secretaries have decided not to accept the revised offer and now wish to revert to their original employment and pay arrangements.

In some cases, individual secretaries have asked for their case to be further reviewed. The process to apply in these reviews is laid out below.



Analysis of the survey data has been completed by Payroll staff. Records have been either updated or further information/clarification has been sought from individual schools. In addition to the 670 mentioned above, there are additional cases where it appears that the original offer made by schools was incorrect. These schools will be contacted shortly.

In many cases, the original offer made by schools was correct or outstanding issues have been satisfactorily resolved. The Department intends to contact these schools confirming individual secretary points on the salary scale. These confirmation letters will start issuing shortly.

DSP BENEFIT ASSIMILATION INTO PAY:

The following approach to mechanise the DSP benefit assimilation as set out in the agreement and related Circular, for secretaries employed for less than 48 weeks of the year will apply:

- An Onboarding Allowance will be offered to those secretaries who were not originally contracted for 52 weeks as they signed on for DSP entitlements during school closure periods.
- The assimilated allowance will only be payable to school secretaries employed before 01/09/2023 and who have opted to move to annualised pay.
- Secretaries who avail of the allowance will be paid on annualised 52-week basis from September 2023.

How will this operate?

As per all secretaries being assimilated, it will be paid through the Department's Non-Teaching Staff (NTS) payroll for 26.09 pay issues of the year.

What the allowance will be based on?

Secretaries availing of the Onboarding Allowance will be using a flat rate for DSP (DSP Payment equivalent allowance). It is proposed that the allowance will be €220 per week for these secretaries. If any secretary increases their number of weeks worked, the amount of any allowance to cover their DSP entitlement will be reduced accordingly.

PRSA:

Appropriate PRSA arrangements, where required, will be put in place. Forsa has been consulted on this issue and has nominated a service provider. Steps to give effect to an appropriate arrangement are ongoing.

ARRANGEMENTS FOR SUMMER:

As part of the implementation of the agreement on school secretaries, and in continuance of the instruction issued on February 10th 2022, any grant-funded secretary who would normally be laid off for the summer period, and who is opting to have their salary annualised by the Department, should instead be paid their usual weekly wage for the summer closure. Secretaries do not need to use any of their allocated paid annual leave for this summer closure. This is the final interim measure to ensure that grant funded secretaries, who have indicated their acceptance to be paid via a payroll operated by the Department of Education and to be paid on an annualised basis, do not have to apply to the Department of Social Protection for benefits whilst arrangements for the implementation for the transfer to a Department payroll are being put in place.

The costs associated with this further interim measure are being managed retrospectively by the Department as part of the wider arrangements to cover requirements for back-pay arising from the official date of implementation of the agreement. It is intended by the DE that the arrears for this back-pay will be paid to schools in the coming weeks, to cover up to the period 31st August 2023. There may be delays in payment of these arrears to schools where the information requested by the Payroll Division has not been received by the DE.

All those secretaries who are joining the payroll but who do not wish to have their salaries annualised, and therefore wish to continue to apply to the DSP for payment, should also apply to DSP for their benefits for this summer, 2023.

SALARY ARREARS TO BE PAID VIA THE GRANT PAYMENT SYSTEM:

The Department is continuing work on the verification of the correct pay scale data for the school secretaries provided by schools as well as a model which will be used to generate any salary arrears due to these secretaries. Significant progress has been made to date and these arrears will be issued to schools through the grants payment system as soon as possible.

A further communication will issue providing details of the arrangements in advance of these payments.

INTERIM ARRANGEMENTS FOR GRANT FUNDING FOR ANCILLARY SERVICES TO 31ST AUGUST 2023:

Arrangements have been finalised for the payment of ancillary services grants to Primary and Voluntary Secondary schools up to September 2023 when grant funded secretaries who accepted the new terms and conditions are placed on a payroll operated by this Department. Details of these arrangements were provided to these schools in April last.

Arrangements for the payment of the June instalment of the grant for schools in the Community and Comprehensive Sector have also been finalised recently and details of these arrangements will be provided to schools in advance of the payment of this grant.

GRANT FUNDING FOR ANCILLARY SERVICES FROM SEPTEMBER 2023:

Details of the arrangements for the payment of ancillary services grants due from September 2023 will be provided to schools as soon as they are available. Based on the information currently available:

- It is expected that any remaining ancillary grant funding that was due for payment to Primary schools in March 2023 will be paid as soon as possible in the 2023/24 school year. However, this payment will be reduced to take account of grant funded secretaries that will have transferred to a Department Payroll from September 2023.
- Further details of the arrangements for future ancillary services grant funding will be provided to schools as soon as they become available.

ALLOCATION MODEL:

A proposal has been drafted to outline the allocation of secretarial resourcing in FTE (WTE) terms for each school within both primary and post primary sections.

Analysing the data gleaned from the recent survey that was sent to all schools, the proposal has been developed using criteria based on pupil enrolment numbers. The model is split into particular ranges based on pupil enrolment numbers. Each superior range (i.e., schools with greater pupil enrolment numbers) receives an additional allowance of secretarial FTE (WTE). With a focus on assimilation, the criteria mentioned above is closely aligned with the model that is used by the ETB sector. i.e., pupil enrolment numbers vs FTE (WTE) allowance.

In terms of next steps, a briefing note outlining the above is being prepared for review by the Secretary general and Minister of Education.

SALARY PAYMENT:

Secretaries who have accepted the offer made to them by their schools under the terms of Circular 0036/2022 will be paid on the Non-Teaching Staff (NTS) Payroll from September 2023. The first

payment date will be Thursday, 14th September. The payroll operates on a fortnightly basis. It covers a 14-day period up to and including the Monday prior to the date of salary issue.

Salary is calculated two weeks in advance of every pay-day therefore any amendments notified to the Payroll Section may not be reflected in the next immediate pay issue.