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# A STUDY OF GENDER IN SENIOR CIVIL SERVICE POSITIONS IN IRELAND

HELEN RUSSELL, EMER SMYTH, SELINA MCCOY,  
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DEPARTMENT OF JUSTICE AND EQUALITY



ECONOMIC & SOCIAL  
RESEARCH INSTITUTE

# **A STUDY OF GENDER IN SENIOR CIVIL SERVICE POSITIONS IN IRELAND**

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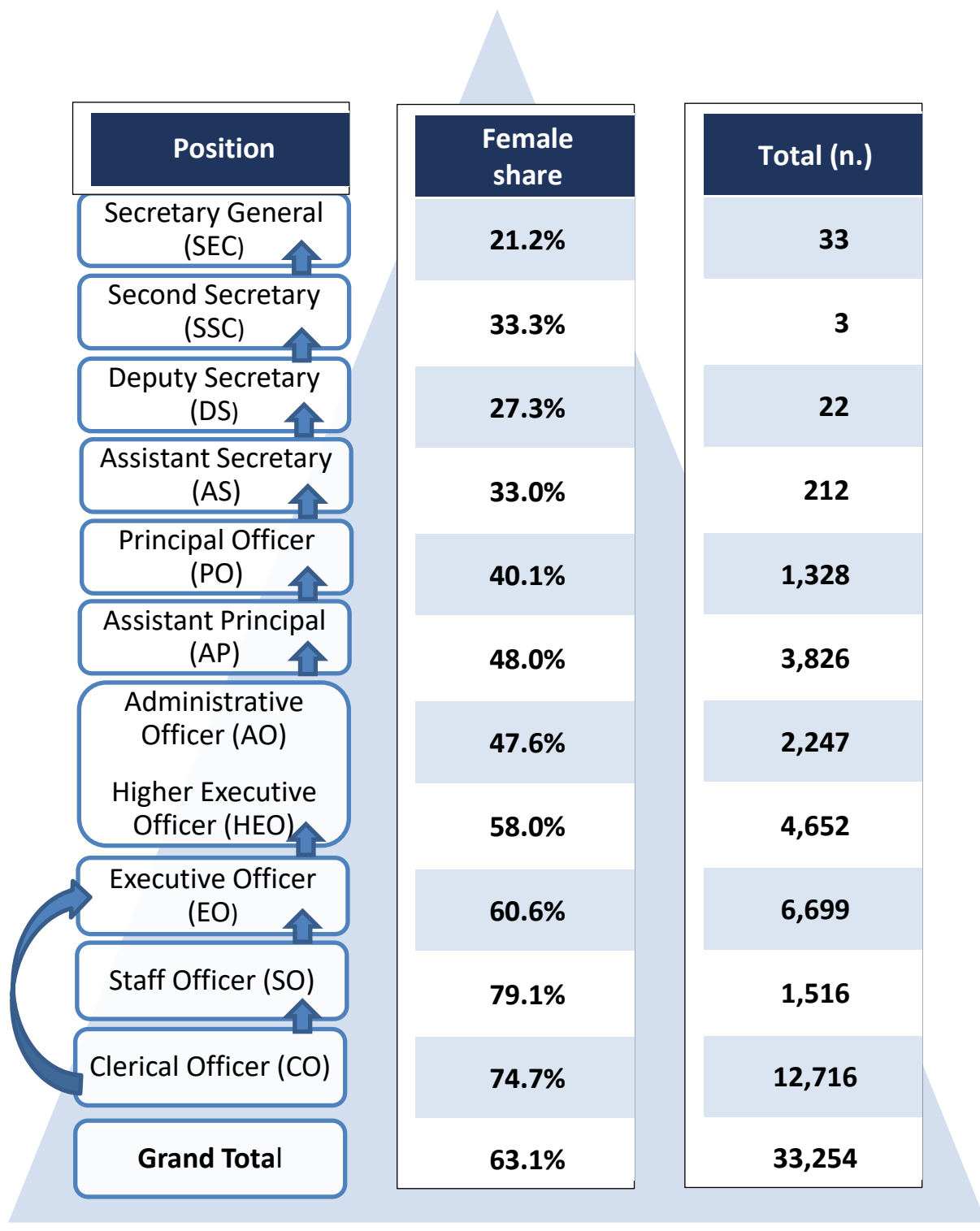
**ABBREVIATIONS**

CPSA	Commission for Public Service Appointments
CSEES	Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey
CSMB	Civil Service Management Board
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DCU	Dublin City University
DPER	Department of Public Expenditure and Reform
ESRI	Economic and Social Research Institute
FTE	Full-time equivalents
HRM	Human resource management
LFS	Labour Force Survey
OPW	Office of Public Works
OFMDFM	Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister (Northern Ireland)
PAS	Public Appointments Service
SMI	Strategic Management Initiative
TLAC	Top Level Appointments Committee

**Civil service staff levels**

AO	Administrative Officer
AP	Assistant Principal
AS	Assistant Secretary
CO	Clerical Officer
DS	Deputy Secretary
EO	Executive Officer
HEO	Higher Executive Officer
PO	Principal Officer
SEC	Secretary General
SO	Staff Officer
SSC	Second Secretary
SVO	Service Officer

FIGURE 1 HIERARCHICAL ORGANISATION OF GRADE LEVELS, FEMALE SHARE AND NUMBER OF CIVIL SERVANTS BY GRADE, 2016



Source: Civil Service Human Resource Management System.

Note: Data refer to total headcount numbers at October 2016. A further 25 cases of unknown gender, four cases of unknown grade and 1,236 'other' grades have been excluded here. Specialist staff are included at their equivalent grade based on salary scale.

## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

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Women make up the majority of those employed in the civil service but are under-represented at the most senior grades, where key policy and operational decisions are taken. Action 8 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan commits to improving gender balance at each level, including senior grades. The present study was commissioned by a high-level steering group set up to oversee implementation of this action. It draws on a combination of administrative data, reanalysis of the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey conducted in 2015, and in-depth work history interviews with 50 senior civil servants across four departments. In addition, in-depth interviews were conducted with staff involved in recruitment and promotion within the public service. This rich combination of data yields new insights into the processes shaping gender differences in representation at the most senior grades of the civil service and thus provides a strong evidence base to inform future policy and practice.

### CURRENT PATTERNS

Women currently make up 63 per cent of civil servants but only 33 per cent of Assistant Secretaries and 21 per cent of Secretary Generals, although there is significant variation in the representation of women at senior grades across government departments. Holding education, length of service and age constant, men are twice as likely to occupy the position of Principal Officer and above. Women have made up an increasing proportion of external appointees to the Principal Officer grade over time but remain under-represented in their appointment via promotion. From Executive Office level and above, men's advancement to senior grades is found to be 1.5 to three years faster than that of women in the same starting grades who achieve senior positions. Data for the period 2010 to 2015 show that women were much less likely to apply for Assistant Secretary or Secretary General positions than men but that those who did apply were somewhat more likely to be successful.

### PERCEPTIONS OF PROMOTION

Despite the pattern of gender differences in grades, the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey data show remarkably few differences between women and men in their perceptions of current promotion opportunities. It is worth noting, however, that only a minority of women and men felt they had all the opportunities they needed for promotion. The senior civil servants interviewed for the qualitative part of the study had experienced a variety of different approaches to promotion over their career, including internal, interdepartmental and external/open competitions. The approach taken was broadly seen as fair by women and men but interviewees highlighted concerns about the extent to which

standardised tests and competency-based interviews could reflect practice rather than work performance.

The decision to apply for promotion most commonly reflected feeling 'ready', that is, having been in the grade for a period of time and having acquired a range of skills and competencies. Very few adopted a strategic approach by setting out to acquire specific experience to enhance their promotion chances. Intrinsic interest played a significant role in the decision to apply for promotion to the grades of Assistant Secretary or Secretary General. Being familiar with the policy area or function appeared to play a stronger role in the likelihood of applying for promotion for women than men. Applying for promotion was often a highly public event, especially for internal competitions, with candidates receiving a good deal of support from their peers and managers in preparing for the process.

Self-confidence, strong communication skills and preparation (in terms of doing mock interviews, for example) were seen as important factors in promotion success. Even more crucially, having accumulated certain kinds of experience, especially high profile policy projects, contact with the Minister and external stakeholders, and the opportunity to 'act up' in a more senior grade, were seen as key factors in enhancing promotion chances. Many candidates, especially for the Assistant Secretary grade, had made a number of unsuccessful applications. This discouraged some candidates from applying again.

## POTENTIAL BARRIERS TO PROMOTION

The study highlighted a number of potential barriers to promotion that are particularly likely to have an impact on women. Firstly, the interviews indicated a **lack of structured handover and induction** with a 'sink or swim' approach common for those newly promoted to senior roles. In a context where women typically have lower self-confidence levels than men and reported higher workload intensity, a higher position may appear daunting, something that might discourage women from applying for promotion. Secondly, **lack of self-confidence** was itself a potential barrier, with women often feeling that they had to excel in relation to all of the specified criteria. Thirdly, and perhaps the most crucial issue, **lack of flexible working arrangements** at senior grades was viewed as a significant barrier. Administrative data show that women are much more likely to avail of such arrangements than men but that very few staff at senior grades work less than full-time hours. Interviews with human resources personnel further indicated that certain roles or policy areas are seen as less conducive to flexible working than others. Thus, women can be deterred from, or delay, applying for promotion because of the potential loss of the ability to combine paid work and child- or elder-care. This pattern is reinforced by the **long-hours culture** described by many interviewees and by the **high levels of work intensity** reported in the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey by those at senior grades, especially women. Fourthly, promotion chances are seen as being enhanced by having **certain kinds**

**of experience** in the current role. However, women at Principal Officer level are more likely than men at the same grade to be involved in service delivery or direct service to the public, roles that may lack the visibility to enhance promotion chances. Women at very senior levels (Director, Assistant Secretary or above) are markedly more likely than their male colleagues to work in service delivery or corporate support, so even very successful women may be more confined to certain occupational niches. Finally, the requirement to engage in foreign travel, spells abroad or movement within Ireland may impinge more on women with family responsibilities, thus restricting their ability to apply for certain positions.

## IMPLICATIONS FOR FUTURE POLICY AND PRACTICE

The study findings point to a number of factors that could facilitate the promotion opportunities of all staff but are likely to have particular benefits for women, given the barriers identified in the study. The confidence of staff, especially women, is likely to be enhanced by a structured **period of induction** and/or handover as staff move from one role to another, reinforced by **mentoring and coaching**. Such an approach is also likely to greatly enhance the effectiveness of the department or unit by ensuring the transfer of skills, expertise and contacts. Staff currently have little say in the roles to which they are allocated, highlighting the need for a **more systematic approach to career development**, involving a personal development plan designed to help staff develop skills and competencies across a range of functions.

Promotion procedures for senior grades – Higher Executive Officer to Assistant Secretary – are generally seen as fair. However, there is an argument for consideration to be given to taking account of **a candidate's work performance** in the promotion procedure, for example, by taking up references (as is done for Top Level Appointments Committee candidates). Rigorous **training of interview boards** for both external and internal promotion rounds is also crucial, while **greater feedback for unsuccessful candidates** could help build the resilience needed for repeated applications.

The lack of flexible working arrangements and heavy workload requiring long hours among those at senior grades raises a more general issue of the appropriate **nature of work organisation at senior levels**. To enhance the quality of work generally, and to achieve real gender equity, a **greater openness to flexible working arrangements** across grades and functions is required.

There is a need for **ongoing monitoring** of the profile of women and men applying for, and being successful in, promotion competitions. Information is needed not just on promotion rates by gender but on the profile of the potential pool, actual applicants and successful candidates in terms of age and family responsibilities. There is considerable potential to use the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey to monitor the profile of staff across different grades, thereby identifying

groups of staff who face barriers in applying for promotion, as well as those who succeed in doing so.

## CHAPTER 1

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### Gender balance in the civil service

#### 1.1 INTRODUCTION

This project sets out to investigate the factors associated with gender imbalance at the higher levels of the Irish civil service. Under-representation of women at the highest levels of the Irish civil service has been subject to scrutiny since the beginning of the 1990s (Mahon, 1991; Lynch, 1994). Although the presence of women in the top positions of the occupational hierarchy has increased in the last two decades, substantial gaps are still present.<sup>1</sup> In 2014, for example, while women accounted for almost two-thirds of the Irish civil service employees, they represented only one-third of those at the Principal Officer (PO) level or above (according to data from the Civil Service Human Resource Management System). The Civil Service Renewal Plan launched in 2014 contains a commitment to greater gender equality across the civil service. Article 8 of the plan commits to ‘Improving gender balance at each level by reviewing supports and policies to ensure these are impactful and measurable’. The current research study is part of the response to that challenge.<sup>2</sup>

Gender equality in the labour market – as well as in other life domains – is a goal that is still far from being achieved. Gender inequality in access to higher-level occupations is an important issue because of its individual and societal implications. At the individual level, occupational segregation of this kind places women in a disadvantaged position with respect to men concerning several aspects of job quality, including wages, opportunities for skills development and career prospects (i.e. promotion opportunities). At the societal level, the exclusion of women from the highest echelons of the occupational hierarchy also raises concerns about normative issues in terms of social justice, as well as efficiency issues in terms of (under)utilisation of human resources. The OECD (2012, 2014) has highlighted that gender equality in the labour market and the exploitation of women’s human capital potential would foster economic growth, national well-being and happiness.

The goal of gender equality in the labour market is even more pressing in the civil service because if top position holders reflect the composition of society, there is likely to be greater confidence in public institutions – something that contributes to social cohesion. In order to promote greater gender equality in the civil service, it is essential to understand the factors and mechanisms that prevent women from

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<sup>1</sup> Under-representation of women in the senior decision-making posts is a very widely observed phenomenon, one that is found across all OECD countries (Charles and Grusky, 2004; OECD, 2014). In the literature, this is termed vertical segregation.

<sup>2</sup> Additional actions under this heading are outlined in the annual progress reports.



reaching the top positions within departments/agencies. In identifying these processes, the research adopts a mixed-methods approach, drawing on data from the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey (CSEES) and from administrative records, as well as qualitative interviews with women and men in four government departments and key stakeholders involved in recruitment and promotion.

## **1.2 Processes associated with gender inequalities in reaching top positions**

Literature in the fields of economics and sociology has identified a range of processes or factors that can influence gender differences in occupational attainment, resulting in 'glass ceilings' or 'sticky floors' for women. The 'glass ceiling' metaphor draws our attention to the barriers and challenges that prevent women's advancement into top positions at the same rate as men. The 'sticky floor' metaphor focuses on the processes at the lower rungs of the occupational ladder; bottlenecks to women's advancement may occur throughout the organisational structure, contributing to gaps at the top. This concept also highlights the importance of understanding processes throughout an individual's career, an approach that is taken in the qualitative interviews.

The processes identified are individual, structural and cultural. The ways in which they can affect the allocation of men and women within an organisation are complex: processes may operate directly or indirectly, and may also interact. The processes or factors that are most prominent in the literature include education and training, gender stereotypes and discrimination, self-confidence, gender inequality in caring and domestic labour, organisational structure and culture.

### **1.2.1 Education and training**

Human capital theory posits that gender differences between individuals' occupational positions and career paths are due to differential investments in human capital. This 'human capital' is usually defined in terms of educational qualifications, training, and work experience (whether linear or with interruptions, for example, due to maternity leave) (Becker, 1985). According to this theory, gender differences in occupational position and promotion opportunities should disappear once individual human capital is taken into account. We should therefore not observe any difference between women and men with the same educational qualifications, experience and skills. The ways in which human capital accumulates are complex, and may be the result of the interaction of different processes working on different levels. For example, women may accumulate less human capital because they are employed in occupations or tasks that give them less access to training (as discussed below); or women might have decided to invest less in human capital because they are less career-oriented (either due to preferences or constraints). This is discussed in the context of caring responsibilities below.

### 1.2.2 Gender stereotypes and discrimination

Labour market processes are embedded in a broader culture that frames the way in which women and men are viewed in society. From infancy, children develop stereotyped notions of 'male' and 'female' from what they see and hear around them and attempt to behave in ways consistent with these conceptions (Bussey and Bandura, 1999). Gender stereotypes and the belief about 'natural' gender differences put women in a disadvantaged position for hiring and promotion processes (Ridgeway, 2011). For example, gender stereotypes still exist about men's greater suitability for positions of authority (Reskin and Padavic, 2002), and can thus relegate women to a 'woman's place' (Cockburn, 1991). This stereotyped evaluation was detected in previous studies of the Irish labour market (Lynch, 1993) and of the Irish civil service (Mahon, 1991). Such attitudes are unlikely to be expressed openly in the workplace but laboratory and field experiments show that women, and particularly mothers, are often judged less suitable for positions of authority than men with matched CVs (Correll, 2007; Rich, 2010). Such gendered stereotypes were also noted in research among Irish civil servants, which found that ambition was perceived as being 'positive and natural' for men while for women it was interpreted more negatively (Valiulis *et al.*, 2008).

### 1.2.3 Self-confidence

A further factor that enters into play in this complex relationship is perceived chance of success. A number of studies have found that women tend to apply less frequently for promotion even if they are eligible (see O'Connor 1998, pp. 238–239 for a review; and Valiulis *et al.* (2008) for qualitative evidence of this process in the civil service). Gender differences in self-evaluations of ability are evident from an early age and are influenced by broader socialisation processes within and outside the family. Gender stereotypes regarding subjects and occupations are found to be evident even among young children, who have quite fixed notions of the 'appropriate' jobs for men and women (Helwig, 1998; Miller and Budd, 1999). Organisational practices can also reproduce such gender differences in later life (see below). Delayed application for promotion may also be a rational response if women see their objective chances for success as being lower than men's chances. The OECD (2014) report, *Women, Government and Policy Making in OECD Countries*, also notes that women's under-representation, at senior level, is in part due to their lower self-confidence compared to men, which leads them to take less risky career choices. According to a study by Harvard Business Review, women tend to apply for promotion when they believe that they meet at least four out of five criteria, while men tend to apply if they meet two out of five (OECD, 2014). While women are seen as less likely to actively self-promote themselves as men, it has been found that women who do engage in this behaviour can be socially sanctioned for contravening gender norms (Heilman and Okimoto, 2007; Rudman and Glick, 2001).

### 1.2.4 Caring and career progression

There is an extensive literature that shows how childrearing and other caring responsibilities impact on women's careers (for example, England, 2005; Waldfogel *et al.*, 1999; and Gash, 2009; see Russell and Banks, 2011, for a review). The literature on both the wage penalty and discrimination is increasingly turning to motherhood, as opposed to gender, as a driver of inequality (for example, Budig and England, 2001; Corell *et al.*, 2007). Experimental studies have shown that mothers are given lower wage offers and are less likely to be selected for interview, hiring and promotion than childless women with matched characteristics, while fathers are rewarded relative to childless men (Corell *et al.*, 2007). Longitudinal studies find that breaks out of employment are associated with reduced career and wage progression in subsequent years (for example, Albrecht *et al.*, 1999), even within the same organisation (Beblo *et al.*, 2009). Shifts to part-time working or reduced hours were found to be central in this process in the UK (Connelly and Gregory, 2008; 2009). However, penalties are also found for mothers who work full-time in Germany (Beblo *et al.*, 2009). There is some debate in the literature as to whether women choose to trade-off greater convenience and flexibility for lower pay and advancement (Hakim, 2006; McRae, 2003). However, cross-national studies clearly demonstrate that women's participation in the labour market is strongly shaped by institutional supports such as childcare and maternity/parental leave policies (for example, Gornick, 2008; Waldfogel *et al.*, 1999). Moreover, the pay and career penalties of part-time work are not universal (for example, Warren, 2010), which suggests the extent of the 'trade-off' is dependent upon national policies and gender culture, as well as practices within organisations. The issue of the impact of organisational structure and culture is discussed further below.

The difficulty workers face in reconciling work and family demands is also captured in the concept of work-family conflict. There is growing evidence that the experience of work-family conflict is more strongly influenced by working conditions than by family characteristics, especially hours of work, work pressure and scheduling (Gallie and Russell, 2009; Gronlund, 2007). Where this conflict is too great, women may exit the labour market or may not apply for promotions. Other women may remain childless or postpone having children in order to pursue their careers. A study of women's under-representation in the higher levels of the legal profession in Ireland (Bacik and Drew, 2006) found that women in that profession were less likely to be married and more likely to have fewer children than men. The qualitative responses pointed to involuntary childlessness or 'postponed parenting' due to the negative effect of motherhood on career progression. An earlier study of academic staff in Ireland (HEA, 1987) similarly revealed lower levels of marriage and fewer children among women than men.

The extent to which caring responsibilities and gender equality issues are accommodated in the workplace are intertwined with the formal supports available and the informal culture that prevails.

### 1.2.5 Occupational structure

Gender stereotypes regarding the ‘appropriate’ jobs for women and men, along with gender differences in the types of education and training received, mean that women and men are often recruited into very different types of jobs, a process described in the research literature as horizontal segregation (Reskin and Padavic, 2002). This allocation within an organisation can also influence the progression of women and men into higher status jobs, a process termed vertical segregation.

Individuals’ capacity to enhance their skills depends on their distribution across different occupations or across different jobs/tasks within the same organisation. Women are, in this respect, more likely to occupy positions that prevent them from obtaining the job-specific skills, training and experience that enhance their human capital and that are valued for promotion. A recent study in Sweden found that occupation explains one-third of the gender gap in access to on-the-job training, and highlights that differential investment in training reinforces gender segregation (Gronlund, 2012). Previous research in the Irish civil service and public sector also suggested that women are less likely to occupy roles that involve high profile activities, financial decision-making, or policy development and were more concentrated on the operational side, which is less visible to senior management and Ministers (Humphreys *et al.*, 1999; O’Connor, 1996).

Those working part-time, a predominantly female group, are also restricted in terms of opportunity for training, skill development and promotion (Connolly and Gregory, 2008; Russell *et al.*, 2011). Di Prete and Soule (1988) suggest that the slower career advancement of part-time workers could be due to lower levels of human capital, because they accumulate on-the-job experience or training at a lower rate or because their progress is restricted by organisational rules. More qualitative research has shown that part-time workers are subjected to negative stereotypes about their commitment to the job and their abilities (Ballantine *et al.*, 2016), although their lower commitment is not confirmed by the data (Kalleberg, 1995). Such perceptions can affect personnel rules around working part-time at higher management.

Job positions have different opportunity structures, which in turn shapes the aspirations of the occupants (Kanter, 1976; 1977). Thus, the organisational structure can also play a role in women’s perceptions of promotion opportunities and willingness to apply. One such factor is the share of women employed at different levels of the occupational hierarchy (Cohen *et al.*, 1998). In particular, Cohen and colleagues found that promotion opportunities are higher if a consistent proportion of women are employed below the ‘focal job level’ (the level at which a job has to be filled) because of the large pool of qualified women. The presence of women in positions above the ‘focal job level’ has mixed effects. Women’s presence at higher levels may foster promotion chances in cases where women represent a minority, while it can impede promotion when women become

the majority.<sup>3</sup> More specifically, according to Cohen *et al.* (1998), the share of women may not have a linear effect on promotion, but rather an inverted U-shaped effect. When women's presence is too small, same-sex alliances cannot be created and women have less power to affect decisions about hiring and promotions. As the number of women increases, alliances strengthen and influence and power rise. However, this is only true up to a certain level – or 'threshold'. Once women are represented to the same extent as men, the creation of same-sex alliances is less likely and sex-based influence declines.

Women's presence at higher levels can operate by influencing perceptions within the organisation about women's capabilities, acting as role models or through diversifying networks (Reskin and Padavic, 2002). The presence of women at high levels of an organisation also means that women have the capacity to control or influence hiring and promotion processes. Several mechanisms may be at work here. When women (or men) control promotions and hiring processes, they will be more prone to fill job positions with similar individuals, namely women (or men). This tendency to recruit in one's own likeness is known as homophily (Ibarra, 1992) or homosocial reproduction (Kanter, 1977).<sup>4</sup> The reproduction of the occupational hierarchy may also derive from the existence of sex-biased information and support networks (Granovetter, 1985; van den Brink and Benschop, 2013; Forret and Dougherty, 2004).

A somewhat different dynamic occurs in female-typed jobs, namely those jobs that are considered to be 'feminine' in nature, such as those involving nurturing (cf. Maume, 1999). In this case, the share of women present in the occupation influences the perception that individuals, clients and employers have of the occupation. Men working in female occupations are viewed as deviant because they are not seen to possess those skills that are considered to be exclusive to women; moreover, men may face difficulties in constructing a male identity (Williams, 1992; England *et al.*, 1994). To ease these tensions, supervisors tend to promote men to higher-level/managerial positions. Therefore, in these occupations, women are in a disadvantaged position for promotions and continue to experience a 'glass ceiling', while men benefit from what Williams (1992) named the 'glass escalator' (Hultin, 2003).

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<sup>3</sup> In the context of changes to open up senior appointments in the civil service to external candidates, it is interesting that Reskin and McBrier (2000) found that internal promotion to managerial positions where there was a large pool of women in non-managerial positions was associated with greater female access to managerial positions than external recruitment.

<sup>4</sup> Reskin and McBrier (2000) interpret homosocial reproduction as a risk-averse behaviour. Filling high-level positions implies risks. Those who control the hiring and promotion process have often limited information about the candidates' competencies and productivity. This means that he/she will judge candidates similar to his or her self, on the basis of ascriptive characteristics such as gender, as better or less risky to hire. Reskin and McBrier mentioned these factors among the explanations for sex segregation in managerial jobs.

Overall, what emerges from the literature is that the impact of contextual characteristics, such as women's share in the organisation, on individual chances of being hired or promoted, is not clear-cut.

### 1.3 ORGANISATIONAL CULTURE

Gender differences in employment outcomes may be due not only to the presence of particular organisational structures but to less tangible organisational culture, that is, 'the relatively stable beliefs, attitudes and values which are part of the taken-for-granted reality in organisations and which are reflected in its structures and organisational procedures' (O'Connor, 1996). In a study of the Irish health services, O'Connor (1996) identified a number of practices that prevented women from obtaining promotion, including lack of communication about opportunities, stereotypical attitudes about women's abilities and career aspirations, and exclusion from informal male networks. Even taking the minimum maternity leave period was seen by female respondents as an obstacle to promotion (O'Connor, 1996, p. 223). Valiulis *et al.*, (2008) also identified such cultural barriers in a study of the Irish civil service, including the influence of informal male dominated networks at senior levels and a 'long-hours culture' in some departments. According to Kodz *et al.* (1998), 'a long hours culture is characterized by long hours being valued within an organization or interpreted as a sign of commitment' (Kodz *et al.*, 2003, p. 66). In such organisational contexts, availing of reduced hours and other forms of flexibility is interpreted as a signal of a lack of commitment (Valiulis *et al.*, 2008; Cahusac *et al.*, 2014; Ballantine *et al.*, 2016). In the UK, working long hours was found to boost chances of promotion (see Booth and Francesconi, 1998; Francesconi, 1999). The incompatibility between long working hours and caring led Cahusac and Kanji (2014; p59) to argue that 'The requirement to work long hours is an unstated, and hence cultural, affirmation that organizational cultures disdain care'.

The gender differences in care and domestic work mean that women are disadvantaged by long working hours cultures, though a long working hours culture has negative implications for work–life balance, and for the health of both women and men (Russell *et al.*, 2016). In the study by Valiulis *et al.* (2008) of the Irish civil service, the long-hours culture was seen to exclude those with greater caring responsibilities and benefit men with wives who did not work outside the home. Problems in trying to balance work and family life were mentioned by respondents as a reason why women's careers become 'side-tracked'. Similarly, respondents in Cahusac and Kanji's qualitative study (2014), who occupied professional and managerial jobs, felt they were pushed out of their jobs when they became mothers because they could not conform to the organisational culture. The women who reduced their hours were side-lined and lost status and responsibility. Expectations of excessive workloads and long hours for senior or managerial roles, as well as the use of long hours as a proxy for commitment, may therefore be a barrier for the equal promotion of women and men. In a review of gender balance

in Northern Ireland, Ballantine *et al.* (2016) found that women were significantly more likely to cite caring responsibilities for children or other dependents and the long-hours culture as reasons for 'opting out' of career progression, while men were more likely to opt out because they were considering retirement.

### 1.3.1 Organisational and policy responses

Greater gender equality in the public sector and specifically in the civil service, in terms of pay and female representation, especially at senior management level, is a goal to which all OECD countries are committed (OECD, 2014). A range of initiatives have been undertaken in different countries to foster gender equality.

Initiatives include: indirect measures such as monitoring and accountability, which are essential to keep gender equality in the spotlight and to foster policymakers' engagement (to this end, surveys, interviews and gender equality reviews have been shown to be effective in many countries); and fostering awareness of gender equality issues within organisations, which, by affecting organisational culture and unconscious biases, and breaking down stereotypes, should encourage a more positive view with respect to women in management positions.

Other measures that more directly impact on women's chances of reaching senior positions include the provision of leadership development and mentoring opportunities. These kinds of initiatives have been proven to improve gender balance at senior management levels in Australia and Sweden, among other countries (OECD, 2014). A number of countries have implemented work-life balance schemes specifically targeted at employees at the higher levels. In this regard, part-time work for senior civil servants has been implemented in Estonia, the Netherlands and Sweden. Sweden has also introduced the 'working time based on trust' arrangement, through which senior civil servants may freely decide their working time (Kuperus and Rode, 2010), although such arrangements can sometimes mean individuals working longer hours and experiencing greater work-family conflict (Russell *et al.*, 2009).

Mentoring has also been found to be important in the private sector. For example, Cross and Linehan (2006) highlight the benefit of mentoring for women trying to access managerial positions in the Irish high-tech sector. Mentoring was found to support both personal and professional development, providing emotional support and feedback, and guidelines about how the organisation in question works, as well as its informal rules (Dougherty and Dreher, 2007). Female managers interviewed by Cross and Linehan (2006) reported that employees with a mentor received more promotions and experienced faster career progression. Moreover, having a mentor was seen as instrumental to promotion because the mentoring relationship increased candidate's self-confidence – a decisive asset in deciding to apply for promotion (Helms *et al.*, 2016; OECD, 2014). In a study on gender equality in the Northern Irish public sector, both male and female interviewees reported



the importance of mentoring, with women placing greater emphasis on this as a key factor for career progression (Ballantine *et al.*, 2016).

#### **1.4 RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

These theories and research allow us to develop a number of research questions, which can be examined by drawing on an existing survey that was carried out across the Irish civil service in 2015 (the CSEES), as well as existing administrative data and qualitative interviews with civil servants.

The overarching aim of this research is to explore the processes and potential barriers that prevent equal representation of women and men at the higher levels of the civil service. This objective is broken down into a series of interlinked questions.

1. What is the scale and nature of gender differences in grade positions within the civil service and how has this changed over time?
2. How do women and men in the civil service differ in terms of age, experience, length of time to promotion and entry level?
3. To what extent are gender differences in grade level accounted for by differences in human capital (including job experience and level of education/qualifications)?
4. To what extent does the work experience of civil servants differ between women and men within and across grades in terms of: work intensity; autonomy; type of work tasks; managerial support; access to training; and working in a job related to experience and qualifications?
5. Are there differences in male and female perceptions of their promotion opportunities within different grades?
6. What are the factors that influence the decision to apply for promotion and the timing of that decision? Are there potential barriers to women's likelihood of applying for promotion?
7. How do women and men view the current promotion system? What factors are seen as associated with promotion success?
8. What implications do the results have for increasing gender balance at higher level in the civil service?



## 1.5 DATA AND METHODS

### 1.5.1 Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey (CSEES)

The CSEES was developed and administered by the Central Statistics Office (CSO) in collaboration with Dublin City University (DCU) on behalf of the Civil Service Management Board (CSMB). It was implemented under Action 25 of the Civil Service Renewal Plan (2014) and designed to measure areas such as leadership, engagement, performance and operation across the Irish civil service. Following an initial pilot stage in July 2015, the survey was launched in September 2015 and all civil servants were invited to participate. Respondents completed the survey either online via an individual anonymous link, or on a paper copy, which was returned to the CSO.

In total, there are 18,921 cases on the data file, but for almost 3,000 cases, values are missing on 50 per cent or more of items. The response rate is close to 50 per cent, considering the number of cases (18,921) over a population of around 38,100 (see Figure 2.2).<sup>5</sup> The analytical sample, however, drops if we consider the number of missing information for core variables. For example, 4,564 cases are missing information on gender, and 4,456 are missing information on grade (see Figure A1.1 in Appendix 1). The descriptive tables in Section 3.4 and Appendix 1 exclude cases missing on grade and gender. In the models in Chapter 4, respondents also drop out of the analysis if they have missing information on tenure, education and part-time or temporary contract.

The extent to which missing cases affect the CSEES sample is even more striking when variables are considered jointly. The sample drops from 18,921 to 14,357 when only gender is considered and to 13,693 when both gender and grade are taken into account (see Figure A1.2 in Appendix 1). Sample size continues to drop when further variables are included. The number of valid cases when the full set of variables is considered is 10,853. However, despite these issues, the sample available for analysis is broadly representative of the whole civil service population. Across a number of core variables (such as department, sex and part-time use), the usable CSEES sample closely resembles the distribution found in the administrative data (see Appendix 1 for a detailed discussion).

The survey was specifically designed to measure employee engagement and related themes based on a range of internationally tested questions. Although it was not intended as a tool for analysing gender differences within public sector employment, this survey allows access to important demographic data, including the department and grade of respondents, their gender, age, level of education,

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<sup>5</sup> The published report on results cite a total of 15,519 cases and a 39.2 per cent response rate based on an overall civil service population of 37,000 (See <http://www.per.gov.ie/en/civil-service-employee-engagement-survey/>).

full- or part-time and permanent or temporary work status, and job tenure. This information allows a descriptive analysis profiling women and men at each grade and across departments by characteristics such as those outlined above (see Section 3.4 and Appendix 1 for descriptive analysis).

The CSEES also includes responses to questions about a wide range of dimensions, including job–skills match, career and organisational support, learning and development, career mobility and, for those above PO grade, questions on leadership. Questions related to these dimensions have been used to construct a series of scales, which provide a more concise measurement of factors such as perceptions of job–skills match. (Scale construction is presented in Appendix 4.) Alongside this, we use additional data from the Civil Service Human Resource Management System. This gives us access to administrative information on departmental features, including the size of the agency or department, the proportion of women and how many hold senior positions, and the extent to which senior positions have been filled externally. (See Appendix 1 for a detailed comparison of the profile of CSEES respondents with human resources data from the DPER.)

It should be borne in mind that the CSEES data and the administrative data are cross-sectional; that is, they provide only a snapshot in time. As a result, there is no information on timing or previous promotions, which means we cannot examine promotion experiences directly. However, drawing from both data sources and using statistical modelling techniques, we can assess the degree to which these contextual features and organisational processes impact on attitudes and experiences in order to address the specific research questions outlined in Section 1.3.

The sample size, representativeness, topic coverage and timeliness of the CSEES together make it a useful source for this analysis. Nevertheless, because the survey was not designed to investigate career progression or gender inequalities in the civil service, it lacks information on a number of key variables, such as family commitments, usual hours of work and uptake of flexible working arrangements at present or in the past (except whether respondent is currently full-time). Moreover, neither the respondent's length of time at the current grade nor their experience of promotion is included. In addition, the level of item non-response is relatively high, indicating that many respondents began the survey but did not complete it. The high level of non-response on items such as gender, length of service and location in headquarters may suggest nervousness about identification. Experiences following the collection of the first round of the survey may help to assuage these concerns, if respondents can see that the data have been used in an anonymised way and that their anonymity has been protected. The checks on the representativeness of the data show that, even when we exclude

respondents where information on gender and grade are missing, the key features of the sample are close to those of the civil service as a whole.

The limitations of the CSEES are addressed by the adoption of a mixed-method approach (Johnson *et al.*, 2007) which combines original qualitative research with the analysis of the survey and administrative data. The qualitative methods provide insights into how and why people act in a particular way or hold particular views, while the quantitative part of the study allows us to generalise to the broader population of civil servants.

### 1.5.2 Qualitative study methodology

Secondary analyses of CSEES and administrative data have yielded significant insights into the distribution of women across grades and the extent to which they feel there are opportunities for promotion (see Chapters 3 and 4). However, this analysis was not designed to capture the factors influencing staff decisions to apply for promotion and their experiences of the promotion process itself. For this reason, the study has also involved qualitative interviews with civil servants and HR personnel, to explore these processes.

It can be difficult to glean information on decision-making processes through survey research, as such decisions can reflect multiple influences and be firmly located in the overall context within which people find themselves. For this reason, life history interviews are commonly used as a way to explore the key turning-points and decisions in a person's employment or educational career (see, for example, Thomson *et al.*, 2002; Goodson, 2008). This approach allows for a more open way of exploring people's perspectives on their own trajectories, placing emphasis on the factors they consider important. For this reason, it was decided to use a life history approach in tracing the experiences of civil servants.

Inevitably in qualitative research, there is a trade-off between the level of detail in the information collected and the scope of the interviews conducted. It was decided that a mixed-methods approach should be adopted. Interviewees were selected within four departments. Results from the CSEES and the administrative data were used to identify four departments that differed across relevant dimensions. The dimensions taken into account included: the proportion of women in the department as a whole; the proportion of women in senior grades; the size of the department; the proportion of staff working outside head office; and perceived promotion opportunities, as reported in the survey data. While the focus of policy concern has been on the under-representation of women at the grades of Assistant Secretary (AS) and Secretary General (SEC), it was felt that potential to reach these grades is very much dependent on the 'pipeline' through more junior grades. For this reason, interviews were conducted with those at the Higher Executive Officer (HEO), Assistant Principal Officer (AP), PO and AS grades. In order to tap into more general issues relating to promotion, interviews were

conducted with women and men in the relevant grades. Interviewees were randomly selected using information from the *Who Does What?* website and the IPA Yearbook and were approached directly by the researchers. Participants were guaranteed confidentiality. Because the sample included very senior civil servants, the interviews were conducted by senior researchers who had a strong track record of interviewing senior policy stakeholders.

The interviews were semi-structured in nature to ensure consistent coverage of topics across interviewees, while still allowing the flexibility to take account of the specific pathways and experiences of individuals. A timeline was used to guide the interviewee through their career moves (see Adriansen, 2012). The topics covered were informed by previous research on gender and promotions in Ireland and elsewhere (see above) and included:

- recruitment into the civil service;
- decision-making around applying for promotion;
- career development, including induction and handover;
- preparation for promotion process;
- experiences of the promotion process and preferences for the type of approach used; and
- perceptions of the skills needed at different grades.

The interviews were tailored to address topics not included in the CSEES and thus provided insights into the processes underlying the gender patterns revealed by the survey data and by administrative data on the distribution of women and men across grades (see Chapter 2).

Interviews were generally conducted in the office of the civil servant in question. Where civil servants shared an office and so could not be interviewed privately there, access to a meeting room was arranged. The length of interviews varied according to the number of moves across grades and number of applications for promotion experienced by respondents, but generally averaged one hour. A total of 36 women and 14 men were interviewed, a large number of interviews by the standards of qualitative research. The interviews captured a good deal of variation in the pathways taken, the kind of work in which staff were involved, their length of time in the civil service and the length of time since their most recent promotion (see Table 1.1). These interviews were transcribed and the content was analysed on the basis of the key themes emerging (see Chapters 5 and 6). Analyses examined the extent to which common issues were evident for women and men in relation to career development and promotion, as well as differences in experiences by gender and by department.

TABLE 1.1 PROFILE OF INTERVIEWEES (N.)

Length of time in current grade	Women	Men
<2 years	12	6
2–5 years	5	1
6–9 years	10	5
>10 years	9	2
<b>Total</b>	<b>36</b>	<b>14</b>

In addition to the interviews about personal work histories, interviews were conducted with 11 staff working in HR functions across departments, including the Public Appointments Service (PAS). These interviews explored the basis for deciding to run a promotion round, the approach used, the types of staff who applied for, and were successful in securing, promotion, and the potential barriers to women seeking promotion. Chapter 2 draws on this interview material in conjunction with administrative data to provide a detailed account of the promotion process.

## 1.6 OUTLINE OF THE REPORT

The research that follows is structured in the following way. Chapter 2 describes the employment and policy context of the Irish civil service and how it compares internationally. It does that by drawing on a wide range of data sources, including the Civil Service Human Resource Management System data and the CSEES, as well as the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS). Chapter 3 also draws on administrative data from the DPER and survey results from the CSEES to provide a profile of employees and to investigate gender differences in relation to the chances of reaching higher-level positions, holding length of service and qualifications constant. Chapter 4 also uses the CSEES to investigate a range of factors identified in the literature that might help or hinder career advancement, such as training, skills match and tasks, and to consider how these factors, as well as personal, job and organisational (Departmental) characteristics, are associated with perceptions of promotion. Chapter 5 draws on the qualitative research to explore the experience of the promotion process and in Chapter 6 the barriers to promotion identified through the qualitative interviews are discussed. Finally, Chapter 7 draws out the conclusions and policy implications of the research.

## CHAPTER 2

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### The Irish civil service

The Irish civil service is a large and complex organisation with a significant body of organisational policy that has developed over time. This chapter describes this organisational context, providing background for the rest of the report. It includes a description of the civil service structure and its changes over time. It also discusses the policies ruling the civil service and its processes and practices. The chapter concludes with a description of how the Irish civil service compares with other broad sectors in Ireland, as well as with other European countries.

#### 2.1 POLICY AND EMPLOYMENT CONTEXT

##### 2.1.1 Structure of the civil service

The Irish civil service consists of a core staff from 16 government departments and 214 specialised offices or agencies that fall under the aegis of these departments.<sup>6</sup> Staff across all departments and agencies are employed within a hierarchical grade structure that places broadly comparable roles together. Grade levels are determined centrally and define pay levels. Three grade streams operate in the civil service, outlined below. (See later sections for further detail on recruitment and promotion within the civil service.)

**Administrative grades:** These comprise generalist grades, which apply to any government department, and departmental grades, which are specific to certain departments (examples include Junior Diplomat in the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Inspector of Taxes).

**Professional/technical grades:** These include professional personnel who have graduated in particular specialisms.<sup>7</sup> These staff are recruited through open competition at the equivalent administrative grade commensurate with their level of education and experience. They can advance their career through the ranks within their specialism or can apply for open administrative position promotions throughout the civil service.

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<sup>6</sup> Source: <http://www.gov.ie/tag/departments/>, and <http://membership.stateboards.ie/>.

<sup>7</sup> Specialist roles may include engineers, planners, architects, economists, accountants/auditors, legal staff (solicitors, barristers, law clerks), environmental health officers, pharmacists and other specialist roles (source: [www.publicjobs.ie](http://www.publicjobs.ie)).

**Industrial grades:** These include civil servants with skills in trades and crafts, such as gardeners.<sup>8</sup>

### Overall figures

The most recent data (October 2016) from the Civil Service Human Resource Management System indicates that a total of 33,254 staff are currently employed in the civil service.<sup>9</sup> Table 2.1 shows the overall figures for these staff by gender and grade.<sup>10</sup> Professional and technical staff are included as equivalents in the grade in which they are working. As can be seen, overall, women represent the majority within the civil service (63.1 per cent). However, across grades, the share of women largely varies and ranges between 79 per cent among staff officers and 21 per cent at the very top position of the civil service – Secretary General (SEC) level. Women are thus more likely to occupy the lowest grades and are over-represented up to the level of Higher Executive Officer (HEO), while they are under-represented in higher grades.

TABLE 2.1 OVERALL NUMBER OF CIVIL SERVANTS BY GENDER AND GRADE, 2016

Grade (incl. equiv.)	Male (n.)	Female (n.)	Total (n.)	Female share (%)
Secretary General (SEC)	26	7	33	21.2
Second Secretary (SSC)	2	1	3	33.3
Deputy Secretary (DS)	16	6	22	27.3
Assistant Secretary (AS)	142	70	212	33.0
Principal Officer (PO)	796	532	1,328	40.1
Assistant Principal (AP)	1,991	1,835	3,826	48.0
Administrative Officer (AO)	1,178	1,069	2,247	47.6
Higher Executive Officer (HEO)	1,952	2,700	4,652	58.0
Executive Officer (EO)	2,638	4,061	6,699	60.6
Staff Officer (SO)	317	1,199	1,516	79.1
Clerical Officer (CO)	3,216	9,500	12,716	74.7
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,274</b>	<b>20,980</b>	<b>33,254</b>	<b>63.1</b>

Source: Civil Service Human Resource Management System.

Note: Data refer to total headcount numbers at October 2016. Excluded cases are: 25 cases of unknown gender; four cases of unknown grade and 1,236 'other' grades.

Technical and specialist staff are included in the grade that is equivalent to their salary scale, and this group cannot be identified separately in the administrative data presented here. Although the salary scale is a good proxy for responsibility,

<sup>8</sup> Source: <https://www.publicjobs.ie/publicjobs/who/civil-local/civil.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> Excluding 1,265 civil servants whose gender or grade is missing or whose grade is 'other'.

<sup>10</sup> Throughout the report, grades in the data from the Civil Service Human Resource Management System are specific to the primary salary scale descriptions (CO, EO, HEO, etc.). Some minor descriptors (e.g. political appointments) are excluded, as are prison officers, some categories of industrial staff, and Department of Foreign Affairs' local staff. The Assistant Secretary grade includes Directors, while Director General positions are included in Secretary General grade.

power and status characterising grades, they do not overlap perfectly. Moreover, the opportunity structure for specialist grades may differ from administrative grades. The gender composition of the recruitment pool for specialists will also vary by area. Specialist grades will also play a greater or lesser role in different departments.

In order to have a more complete picture of the segregation of women within the civil service, Table 2.2 reports female shares across grade disaggregated by department. We distinguish between main departments and departmental groups. The latter includes all the offices and agencies that belong to the departmental area but which are distinct from the main institution (the department).<sup>11</sup> Given the small size of some departments and grades, senior managerial positions (AS and above) and PO have been collapsed, as well as HEO and AO, and SO and CO.

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<sup>11</sup> For example, the Justice Group, which pertains to the area of justice but is distinct from the main department.



TABLE 2.2 FEMALE SHARE BY GRADE AND DEPARTMENT, 2016

Government department/agency	Less than AP	AP	PO	AS and above	ALL
<b>Agriculture</b>	50.6	33.3	26.1	25.0	46.9
<b>Arts</b>	58.0	39.6	28.6	0.0	53.0
<b>Children</b>	67.5	55.6	66.7	33.3	64.5
<b>Communications</b>	56.3	40.3	30.6	33.3	49.4
<b>Defence</b>	73.2	35.0	36.8	0.0	66.2
<b>Education</b>	73.9	71.0	60.8	18.2	71.2
<b>Environment</b>	52.3	41.0	20.8	55.6	46.6
<b>Finance</b>	55.6	40.6	23.1	14.3	48.0
<b>Foreign Affairs</b>	66.7	48.8	31.4	14.8	59.5
<b>Health</b>	64.5	57.7	62.2	30.0	61.7
<b>Jobs</b>	61.2	47.9	32.0	37.5	57.2
<b>Justice</b>	64.3	44.4	28.8	29.4	59.6
<b>Public Expenditure</b>	55.9	44.6	48.8	0.0	51.1
<b>Social Protection</b>	72.8	41.2	44.7	53.8	71.1
<b>Taoiseach</b>	70.9	63.4	63.2	10.0	65.2
<b>Transport</b>	55.9	36.0	38.2	28.6	50.6
<b>Office Public Works</b>	53.4	28.9	23.1	0.0	46.5
<b>Revenue</b>	65.7	44.8	35.9	11.1	63.5
<b>CSO</b>	64.7	46.0	24.0	33.3	62.2
<b>Education Group</b>	75.0	48.6	42.9	50.0	69.0
<b>Finance Group</b>	50.0	40.0	41.7	60.0	47.1
<b>Jobs Group</b>	68.0	32.0	45.5	40.0	63.3
<b>Justice Group</b>	75.5	58.7	42.4	37.5	73.1
<b>Public Expend Group</b>	60.5	55.3	53.1	75.0	59.7
<b>Taoiseach Group</b>	58.7	64.0	45.5	53.1	58.6
<b>Total</b>	66.6	48.0	40.1	31.1	63.1

Source: Civil Service Human Resource Management System.

Note: See notes for Figure 1, page vi. AS and above includes AS, Deputy Secretary (DS), SSC and SEC. Departments and offices/agencies have been distinguished in parent departments, groups belonging to the parent departments, and main offices (Central Statistics Office (CSO), Office of the Revenue Commissioners, and Office of Public Works).

Table 2.2 shows that women represent the majority of civil servants in most departments, at a rate of 19 out of every 25. However, if we focus on PO level or above, women outnumber men in only four departments. The share of women at higher levels is particularly low in the Department of Finance and in the Office of Public Works, where there is only one woman to every five men at the level of PO and above. The department that performs best in this respect is the Department of Children and Youth Affairs, where the share of women at PO level or above reaches 62.5 per cent.

Considerable variations across departments can be also observed in the overall size of grades. For example, as Table A2.1 in Appendix 2 shows, civil servants at AS level

or above represent 0.2 per cent of total employees in the Department of Social Protection compared to 5.3 per cent in the Department of the Taoiseach.

The pattern that has been observed above for the civil service overall, namely the decreasing share of women as grade increases, can be confirmed for most departments.

An initial insight into the potential promotion opportunities within the civil service occupational structure is provided by the grade ratios, that is the ratio of staff in the grade above, relative to the number employed in the grade below (Table 2.3). Accordingly, a ratio of 1 means that the grade above is as large as the reference or 'feeder' grade, while a ratio of 0.5 means that there is 1 position at the grade above for every 2 positions at the feeder grade below. Given that a larger pool of positions should imply a greater number of vacancies, a larger ratio should indicate greater chances of upward mobility. Where there is more than one feeder grade for the next grade, the groups are combined (e.g. HEO and AO).

TABLE 2.3 RATIO OF NUMBERS IN EACH GRADE RELATIVE TO THE GRADE ABOVE, 2016

Promotion grade	Ratio (grade above/grade)
PO to AS+SEC	0.20
AP to PO	0.35
HEO+AO to AP	0.55
EO to HEO	0.69
SO+CO to EO	0.47

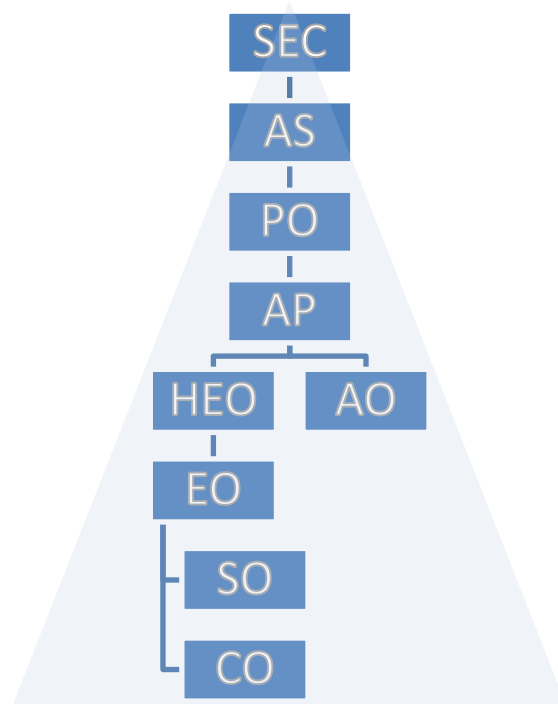
Source: Civil Service Human Resource Management System.

Table 2.3 shows that the ratio for all grades is lower than 1, indicating that at each step of the ladder the next grade is smaller than the current grade. Moreover, there is a trend towards lower ratios in the higher grades, meaning that the size of grades decrease in a non-proportional way. For example, for every two civil servants at HEO or AP level, there is one civil servant at the grade above (2/1), while these numbers are equal to 3/1 at AP level and 5/1 at PO level. However those at EO level and HEO/AO levels face more favourable grade ratios than those at CO/SO level. This structure characterises nearly all departments.

It should be noted that while the roles and functions of AOs and HEOs may differ, they share an equivalent position in the hierarchy (see Figure 2.1). Staff at both these grades can compete for promotion to AP. For this reason, numbers in the AO and HEO grades are added together when computing the ratio for promotion to AP level in Table 2.3. Similarly, COs can be promoted to the next grade of SO or directly

to Executive Officer (EO) level, so these grades are also combined. SVOs (Service Officer) are excluded as there is no promotion route at this grade level.<sup>12</sup>

FIGURE 2.1 HIERARCHICAL ORGANISATION OF GRADE LEVELS



### Change over time in the proportion of women at different grades

Figure 2.2 below shows changes in the proportion of women working at different grade levels over time. Overall, there would appear to be a slight fall in the female share of total employment in the civil service between the years 1987 to 2015, followed by an increase in 2016, bringing the total number of women back up to above 60 per cent.<sup>13</sup>

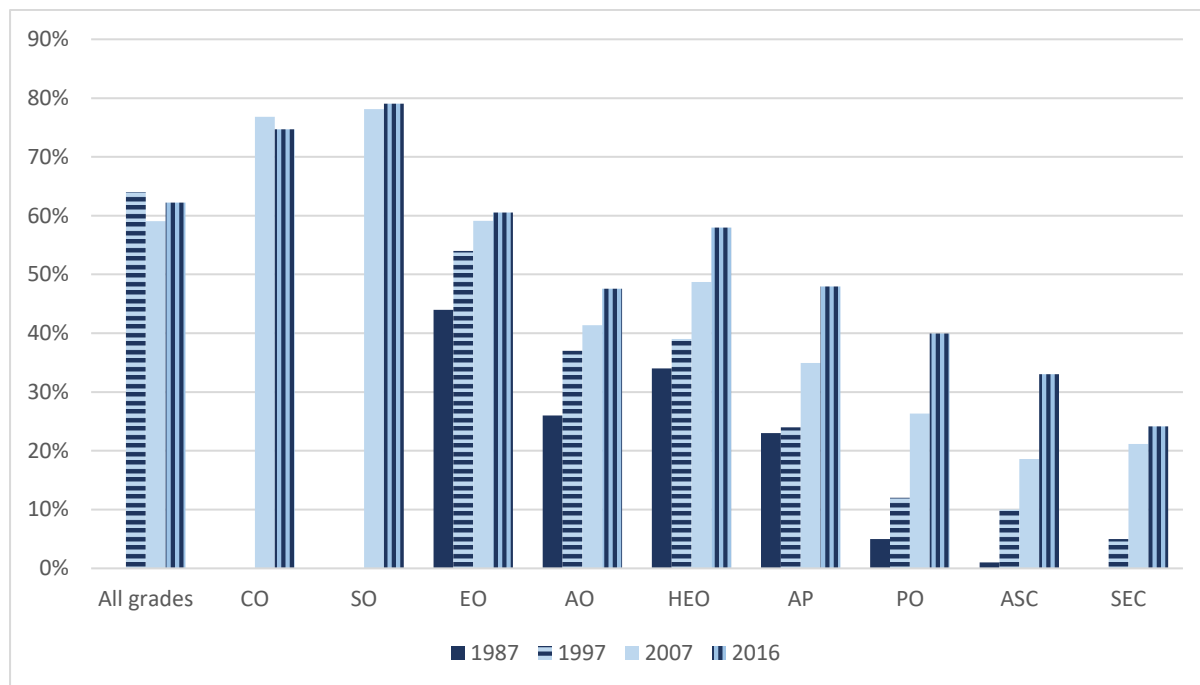
Over time, however, the pattern is one of rising proportions of women at the higher grades. For example, where there were no women in the position of SEC in 1987, the figure rose to five per cent in 1997 and increased dramatically to 24 per cent in 2014; it has fluctuated around this level since then. This pattern of large increases in the share of women between the late 1980s and the 1990s is repeated across the other senior grades of AS, PO and AP. The over-representation of women at the CO grades has declined marginally over the last ten years, while the SO grade has become slightly more feminised.

<sup>12</sup> Note regarding the SVO grade: The CSEES questionnaire describes this grade as 'support staff', while the CSEES report refers to it as Service Officer. Here, Service Officer is used.

<sup>13</sup> There are very large gaps in the year ranges here and there may be other fluctuations; for example, recession and boom in two periods, that we cannot see as a result.

However, notwithstanding that female representation at the highest level of the civil service has significantly increased over the last three decades, women still represent the minority at PO level and above.

FIGURE 2.2 CHANGE OVER TIME IN PROPORTION OF WOMEN WORKING AT DIFFERENT GRADES, 1987–2016



Sources: Data for 1987 and 1997 come from part three of the 1999 report by Humphreys, *Gender Analysis of Civil Service Employment Statistics*. Data for 2007 and 2016 come from the Civil Service Human Resource Management System.

### 2.1.2 Recruitment process and practice in the Irish civil service

The current agenda for reform within the Irish civil service was preceded by a systemic review of processes, carried out under the Strategic Management Initiative (SMI) in 1995. Its remit was to seek an understanding into the reasons for the significant under-representation of women at grades above HEO. This review informed the 1996 report, *Delivering Better Government*, which recognised the critical importance of effective human resource management (HRM) in addressing gender inequality. This report recommended a fundamental modernisation of the civil service, through the reduction of centrally regulated HR functions, allowing greater autonomy to departments and reforming recruitment, promotion and development procedures, in order to tackle gender imbalance. The effectiveness of the reform is reflected in Figure 2.2, which shows a significant increase in the share of women at senior level between 1997 and 2007.

The Public Service Management (Recruitment and Appointments) Act 2004 governs all recruitment to the civil service and a range of other public bodies. This Act established the Commission for Public Service Appointments (CPSA), which sets out the codes of practice and standards that must be observed by all departments and agencies involved in the public appointments processes. This body is responsible for ensuring that civil service departments and agencies make

appointments that uphold the principles of ‘probity, merit, equity and fairness in recruitment’ (CPSA, 2010, p. 3). Principle 2.2 (Appointments made on merit) of the Commission’s Codes of Practice states:

*appointment on merit means the appointment of the best person for any given post through a transparent, competitive recruitment process where the criteria for judging suitability of candidates can be related directly to the qualifications, attributes and skills required to fulfil the duties and responsibilities of the post. (CPSA, 2007, p. 12)*

The 2004 Act also established the Public Appointments Service (PAS), which acts as the centralised independent recruitment, assessment and selection body for the civil service and, where requested, for the local authorities, the HSE, an Garda Síochána and certain other public service bodies (Public Service Management Act, 2004).

Traditionally, recruitment into the civil service was via the entry level grades of CO, EO and AO, with higher grade level positions being filled through the promotion of personnel from lower grades (see next section for further discussion of promotion).<sup>14</sup> The social partnership framework set out in *Towards 2016* (Department of Taoiseach, 2006) recognised that, in the context of an ageing civil service and in order to ensure senior management posts could be filled by the best possible candidates, it was essential that a greater proportion of these senior grade positions be filled through open competition. There was, at the same time, recognition that recruitment from outside the civil service could affect movement from the lower feeder grades. For example, external recruitment to a PO post would reduce available vacancies at AO grade, thus limiting movement from the HEO grade (Department of Taoiseach, 2006). To deal with this ‘cascade’ effect, quotas were recommended so that, in any given year, open recruitment would be allowed as follows:

- two in nine PO vacancies, including equivalent professional and technical grades;
- one in five AP vacancies, including equivalents; and
- one in six HEO vacancies, including equivalents.

The Civil Service Renewal Plan launched in 2014 consists of a three-year action plan designed to deliver practical changes in the civil service. Action 8 of this plan aims to open up the recruitment and promotions process.<sup>15</sup> Specifically, this means moving towards a model whereby all vacancies, including those for senior management grades above that of PO, are filled either through open competition or civil service wide interdepartmental competition. Prior to 2011, promotion

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<sup>14</sup> Regarding CO level, entry was formerly also possible through the Clerical Assistant grade.

<sup>15</sup> See: <http://www.per.gov.ie/en/open-recruitment-to-the-civil-service/>.

opportunities could be restricted to those currently working within the department (see next section).

The Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC), established in 1984, has responsibility for recommending candidates to Ministers and government for the most senior positions in the civil service; that is, those at and above the level of AS. These posts must be filled through an open recruitment process and on the basis of merit.<sup>16</sup>

### 2.1.3 Promotion processes and practice in the Irish civil service

Promotions within the civil service had traditionally been made on the basis 'seniority/suitability', which meant that merit or interview processes were not taken into account. Provided a candidate was not deemed unsuitable for a position, the promotion was awarded to the civil servant with the longest service in the eligible grade.<sup>17</sup>

Responding to an OECD report (OECD, 2008), the Task Force on the Public Service was appointed by government to make recommendations on how efficiency and effectiveness could be improved in the public sector, particularly given the budgetary constraints it faced at the time. The theme of the importance of HRM reform, in particular fairness in recruitment and promotion, continued in this strategy.

As part of its auditing and assessment functions, the CPSA produced a report called *Internal Promotions and Recognition of Service (Seniority) in the Civil and Public Service* (CPSA, 2010). In this report, the CPSA recognises the efforts made by many civil service departments and offices in order to reduce the number of promotions awarded on the basis of 'seniority/suitability'. However, it notes that 'progress in this regard has been very slow' (ibid, p. 4). In a survey of all 37 departments and offices under their remit (with a 100 per cent response rate), this audit found that seniority/suitability processes were used to make permanent appointments on promotion in 18 departments (49 per cent) (ibid, p.6).

Following the receipt of four complaints from professional and technical staff between December 2010 and January 2011, the (CPSA) produced another audit report, this time called, *Eligibility Criteria for Promotion of Staff in Civil Service* (CPSA, 2011). This report concluded that the practice of confining appointment processes for promotion to those in general civil service administrative grades (and thereby excluding professional and technical staff) was a breach of the Commission's Codes of Practice). The 2011 audit report equally acknowledged that

<sup>16</sup> See [https://www.publicjobs.ie/publicjobs/publication/document/TLAC\\_Procedures\\_2016.pdf](https://www.publicjobs.ie/publicjobs/publication/document/TLAC_Procedures_2016.pdf).

<sup>17</sup> Candidates could be judged unsuitable where specialised expertise was required.

civil servants in administrative grades are ineligible for promotion to professional and technical positions because of their current grade position, even where they have the required professional qualifications.

Subsequent to considerations of this report by a sub-committee of the General Council, a letter was circulated to all Heads of HR/Personnel Officers in all departments and offices stating that, 'Previously eligibility for promotion was generally based on a defined period of service in the grade immediately below that of the post to be filled. This will no longer be the case ...'. The letter advised that future promotion competitions would no longer be restricted to service in particular grades, although applicants must still have two or more years of service in total in the civil service (DPER, 2014).

Promotion in the civil service now occurs via two routes: external competitions and internal or confined competitions.<sup>18</sup> External promotion processes are advertised through the PAS system in the form of 'open competitions', which are open to both existing civil servants and non-civil servants. The timing of competitions is agreed in consultation between the DPER and PAS, with a broad schedule of work determined over a period of two years or so. The interviews with HR staff highlighted the need for a greater emphasis on workforce planning.

*So that we're not doing an entirely inefficient wasting of time where people are being called forward for interview who never have a hope of getting a job. And also that we don't find ourselves in a situation where we're under-dimensioning competitions and don't have staff to appoint to roles. (HR staff)*

A competency framework has been established for every grade in the civil service based on a jobs analysis conducted by psychologists working for PAS.

For external competitions, candidates for grades at PO level and above are required to take standardised tests (which may be personality- or aptitude-based) and two rounds of competency-based interviews. Competitions at AP level involve a presentation and job simulation exercises, as well as an interview. The nature of tests used has been adapted over time.

*[Interview boards are] selected on the basis of their experience. There's always an independent Chair. ... Four in general on most boards, you know. And you might have a department nominee as well if the department want to be represented on it. ... And external expertise. ... And we look to age and gender in the composition of those boards. ... And then we provide them with training, which varies*

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<sup>18</sup> To be eligible for promotion, a candidate must receive a rating of three (fully acceptable) or higher on their PMDS. They must also have a sick leave record that is within acceptable limits (CPSA, 2010).

*depending on the level of the role. If you've got somebody coming in to sit on a Clerical Officer interview board they'll get very detailed training on "this is how you conduct interviews in this office", all the way up to the most senior level roles where the training is provided in much more group round table basis. (HR staff)*

Candidates are ranked on the basis of their performance and a panel is established, which is used to fill positions as they arise. A panel generally runs for two years. Candidates are given some feedback on their performance as a matter of course.

*If they get to interview stage they'll be given the results of their interview, pass/fail, what marks they got by various different competency areas and a feedback comment. Can we do better on the feedback comments? Yes. We're working very hard to try to improve the quality of the feedback we give people. (HR staff)*

However, it was noted that there needs to be a clearer distinction between the relative roles of the promotion board and the line manager in providing advice on career development.

*But at the end of the day again there's a clear misunderstanding between what candidates expect of us. They'd like us to tell them why they didn't get the job so that they can get it next time round and the role of the line manager to actually give developmental feedback to somebody. (HR staff)*

For TLAC competitions, that is, those for AS or SEC (or equivalent) roles, the first phase of selection is managed by PAS while the second phase of interviews is run by TLAC itself.

'Confined or internal competitions' are open to existing civil servants in a specific department only.<sup>19</sup> Internal promotions are open to all grades within individual departments and generally involve a competency-based interview. In smaller departments, this usually means that all applicants were interviewed. However, some larger departments have on occasion used the results of PAS tests to select candidates for interview, while others have selected candidates for interview on the basis of their application forms. The timing of internal competitions was generally determined by vacancies in the department but some staff also reported the need to achieve a balance for staff between internal and external competitions.

The kinds of supports offered to candidates appeared to differ across departments. Chapter 5 discusses staff reliance on informal support from peers and managers. However, some departments offered formal training for those interested in applying for promotion.

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<sup>19</sup> Special open competitions also operate; these relate to specific groups, for example, disabled persons.



*We always try now and maybe getting an interview specialist in before the competition is held. And people then are given the opportunity to get you know training and confidence. So we do that for the candidates. So that is probably very new but we kind of do that more or less as a matter of course now. (HR staff)*

#### **2.1.4 Austerity and the civil service**

During the first half of 2008, Ireland entered a period of deep economic recession. In response to this, a programme of austerity was initiated by the government. In March 2009, the DPER announced a moratorium on recruitment and promotion within the public sector (including temporary/fixed term appointments and renewals of such contracts). The moratorium applied to the civil service, local authorities, non-commercial state bodies, the Garda Síochána and the Permanent Defence Forces. Provision was made for vacancies to be filled by redeployment of staff from other departments or public bodies following sanction from the DPER. In very exceptional circumstances, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform had authority to fill essential positions. Adjustments to the moratorium were made, however, to allow the maintenance of key services in the health and education sectors.<sup>20</sup> During this period, very senior positions continued to be filled through the TLAC process and departments could make a business case to run internal promotion competitions.

Voluntary redundancy and early retirement schemes led to a reduction in total public service employment from 427,300 to 392,300 full-time equivalents (FTEs) between the years 2008 and 2011 (O’Connell, 2013).<sup>21</sup> When expressed as a percentage of the total labour force, public sector employment in Ireland accounted for 17.4 per cent in 2013 compared to an OECD average of 19.3 per cent (OECD, 2015).<sup>22</sup> Figure 2.3 below shows the total numbers of civil service employees up to the fourth quarter of 2016 and how this has changed over time between economic boom, recession and recovery.

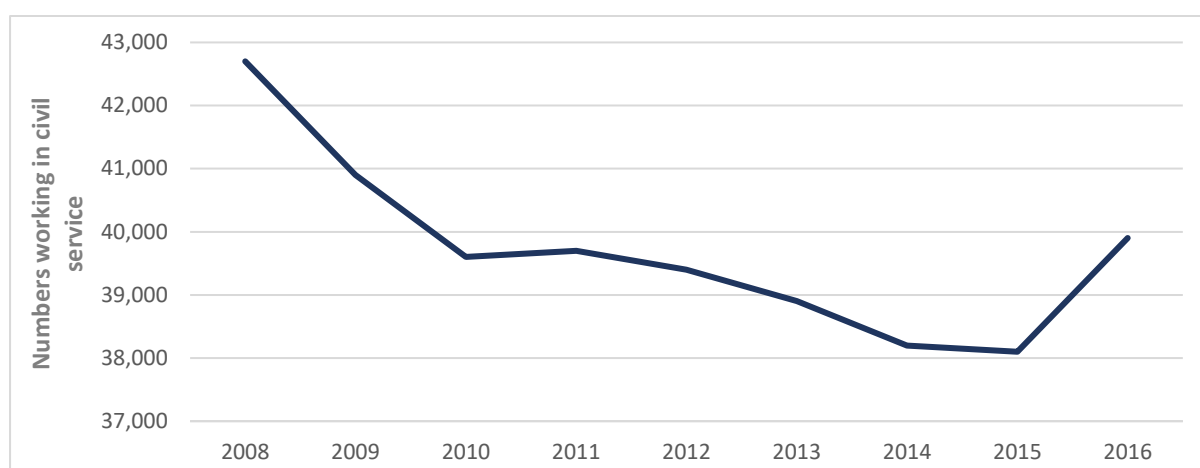
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<sup>20</sup> See <http://hr.per.gov.ie/recruitment/>.

<sup>21</sup> FTE is used to count part-time workers; for example, two people sharing a job = 1 FTE.

<sup>22</sup> In 2013, private sector employment levels had yet to recover from the recession.

FIGURE 2.3 CHANGE OVER TIME IN NUMBERS WORKING IN CIVIL SERVICE, 2008–2016



Source: CSO Quarterly Earnings Hours and Employment Costs Survey (EHECS).

Note: Data refer to Quarter 4 for each year shown and includes full-time employees (permanent and temporary); part-time employees; and persons on holidays, on maternity leave or temporarily absent due to illness. Full-time equivalents (FTEs) are used for part-time employees. Department of Foreign Affairs staff working abroad are included, as are civil servants working in other parts of the public sector and special advisors, etc., in Ministers' offices. Persons on long-term absence without pay (such as career breaks and secondments) and certain categories of part-time employees paid on a fee basis for occasional duties are excluded.

An end to the recruitment moratorium was announced in Budget 2014, along with plans for an overall reform of the public services sector, under the Civil Service Renewal Plan, to include the opening up of recruitment and promotions and to addressing long-established patterns of gender imbalance.

### 2.1.5 Flexible work policies in the civil service

Access to flexible working arrangements is more common in public sector employment than in the private sector (Drew *et al.*, 2003; Russell *et al.*, 2009). Russell *et al.* (2014) report higher levels of job sharing and part-time work among public sector employees; however, private sector workers were more likely to work from home, and levels of flexitime/flexible hours were very similar in the two sectors.

Forms of flexibility available within the civil service include: part-time hours, workshare, term-time working/shortened working year, e-working and flexitime.

The Shorter Working Year Scheme allows civil servants to take additional unpaid leave of between two and 13 weeks to 'reconcile work and other commitments, including school holidays' (Circular 14/2009). Employees are eligible for promotion while on leave.

The civil service also operates a career break scheme and provides an additional payment to those on maternity benefit. Civil servants are also entitled to statutory leave provisions, such as maternity leave, parental leave and paternity leave.

While such arrangements are important for reconciling work and family demands, their uptake tends to be strongly gendered (see Chapters 3 and 4). Moreover, as noted in the research discussed above, the opportunity for flexible work can be limited at higher levels of the occupational hierarchy and availing of part-time work options can have negative consequences for career development. The interviews with HR personnel conducted for this study indicated differences across departments in the extent to which they were willing to allow flexible work practices at higher grades. In one department, personnel reported that they had recently opened up such working practices to higher grades.

*The last competition now we ran for both HEO and PO ... we agreed that if people were appointed we would consider work sharing straight away. We hadn't done that up to about a year ago. (HR staff)*

In contrast, personnel in another department did not consider it feasible to have flexible arrangements, given the nature of their work.

*We don't have flexible working hours for the senior grades. ... We have to be available for international travel ... We're available for the Oireachtas, for briefing committees. They tend to meet late in the evening so we have to be available for those. (HR personnel)*

Term-time working and part-time hours capture only a part of working time and scheduling issues. Many civil servants are found to work significantly longer hours than their work contracts. Humphreys *et al.* (1999, p. 124) reported that at AP level, 85 per cent of women and 65 per cent of men report that they regularly work extra hours, while at EO level, the figure was 58 per cent for men and 37 per cent for women. Men were more likely to report that they were required to work over weekends or evenings, but this did not control for grade levels (*ibid.*, p. 126).

### **2.1.6 Gender balance initiatives undertaken in the Irish civil service**

A number of initiatives are already underway in the civil service to promote gender balance, though their impact has not yet been systematically evaluated. As far back as 1996, the *Delivering Better Government* report noted that although the civil service had instituted the *Equal Opportunity Policy and Guidelines* and put in place family-friendly policies such as flexi-time, job sharing and career breaks, women remained under-represented in senior positions (Department of the Taoiseach, 1996). Issues noted included the low participation rate of women in promotion competitions. The report recommended that each government department be obliged to draw up its own plan of actions to address gender balance issues within its remit.

The *Programme for Government 2011–2016* included a commitment to increase women's representation in decision-making on state boards (Department of the Taoiseach, 2011). More recently, with the assistance of EU PROGRESS funding

programme, the Department of Justice and Equality piloted a programme of mentoring and leadership development for female POs across the 16 government departments, the W-LEAD programme, which took place in 2014 and 2015 (Department of Justice and Equality, 2016).<sup>23</sup> The participants received executive coaching, mentoring and leadership development training, which emphasised the skills required at the AS grade level (O'Donnell, 2016). Other initiatives under this programme included conferences to promote and disseminate good practice on 'gender balanced leadership' and, with the participation of the National Women's Council of Ireland, a gender-sensitive awareness-raising campaign in the civil service.<sup>24</sup>

In January 2017, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform announced a series of measures to improve gender balance at senior levels, including having a target of 50/50 gender balance in senior appointments. Preference is to be given to a female candidate only in deciding between two equally qualified candidates where women are under-represented on the management board of the department or office in question. In addition, the Principal Officer Level Leadership Programme was rolled out in early 2017 on a pilot basis. Application to this programme was open to all POs who were interested in progression to a higher level to ensure that they were in a position to compete for senior level posts across the public service. Gender balance was to be one of the criteria taken into account in selecting the applicants to participate in the programme (Department of Finance, 2017).<sup>25</sup> As of the time of writing (mid-2017), individual departments have supported female staff to avail of leadership development courses, but this has not yet been systematically rolled out for male and female POs.

## 2.2 HOW DOES THE IRISH CIVIL SERVICE COMPARE WITH OTHER SECTORS AND WITH OTHER COUNTRIES?

The under-representation of women at senior levels within organisations remains a persistent feature of the labour market in the 21st century. Yet the degree of vertical gender segregation is known to vary across sectors and societies. In Ireland, there is evidence that gender differences in pay and in managerial positions are narrower among public sector than private sector employees (Russell *et al.*, 2014; Bergin *et al.*, 2012). Therefore, it is of interest to compare the gender balance in the Irish civil service to that prevailing in private organisations, in the broader public sector and in other countries.

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<sup>23</sup> See <http://www.justice.ie/en/JELR/Pages/PR15000474>.

<sup>24</sup> See <http://www.genderequality.ie/en/GE/Pages/WP14000010> [accessed 15 June 2017].

<sup>25</sup> See [http://www.merrionstreet.ie/en/News-Room/Releases/Minister\\_Donohoe\\_announces\\_new\\_initiatives\\_for\\_achieving\\_gender\\_balance\\_in\\_the\\_Civil\\_Service.html](http://www.merrionstreet.ie/en/News-Room/Releases/Minister_Donohoe_announces_new_initiatives_for_achieving_gender_balance_in_the_Civil_Service.html).

To place the findings regarding the civil service in the context of the labour market, we draw on data from the EU Labour Force Survey (EU-LFS).<sup>26</sup> The occupational categorisation used in the survey is the ISCO and managerial positions are defined as major group 1 ('Managers'). At this level of detail, the classification does not distinguish between senior and lower management, and it will therefore conceal gender differences in the level of responsibilities. Detailed census figures for 2006 show for example that while 42 per cent of managers/executives were female, they accounted for only 19 per cent of general managers in large companies (Russell *et al.*, 2009).

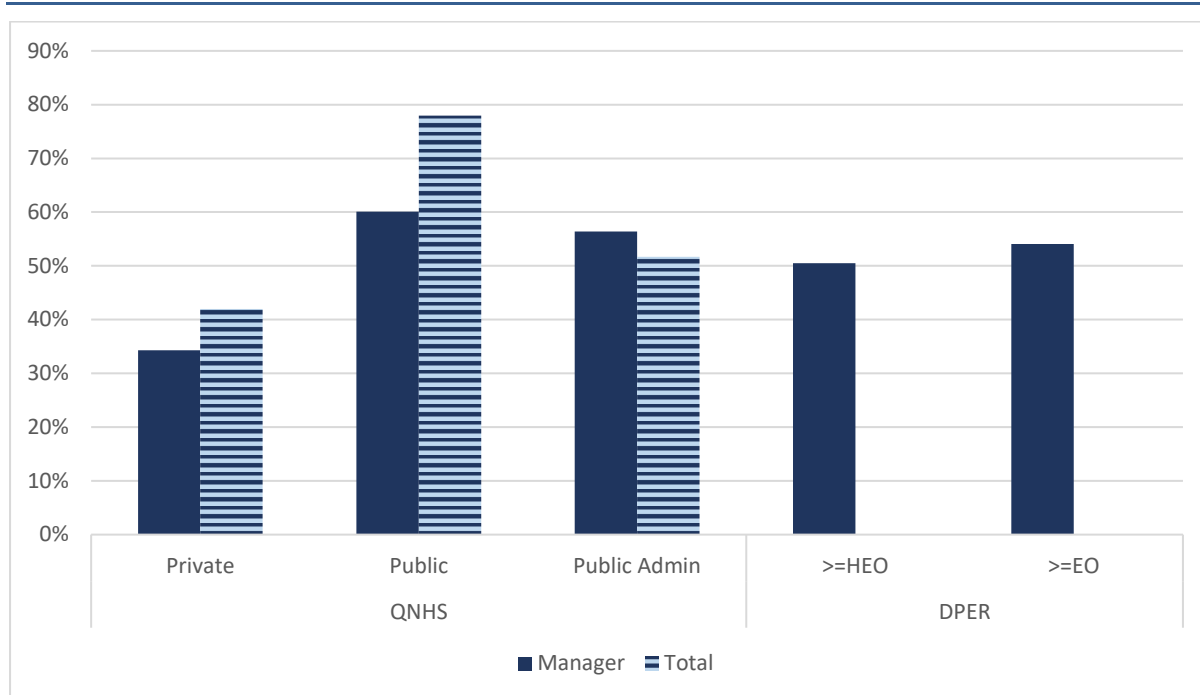
The results in Figure 2.4 show that the female share of managerial positions is significantly higher in the broader public sector (60 per cent) than in the private sector (34 per cent). However, the female share of all employment is also higher in the public sector (73 per cent) compared to the private sector (42 per cent) and therefore women's under-representation at higher levels within sectors is of a similar scale.<sup>27</sup> Civil servants are included in the public administration category; however, this category also includes 'Defence' and those working in local government. The female share of workers in public administration is 52 per cent, and 56 per cent of managers are female. Drawing on the DPER human resources data, we would have to include all employees at EO level or above as managers in order to reach a similar proportion (see Figure 2.3).

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<sup>26</sup> The Irish data in the EU LFS come from the Quarterly National Household Survey collected by the CSO.

<sup>27</sup> The ratio between the share of female managers and the overall share of females is 0.81 for the private sector and 0.77 for the public sector (excluding public administration).

FIGURE 2.4 FEMALE SHARE OF MANAGERIAL POSITIONS AND TOTAL EMPLOYMENT IN THE PRIVATE, PUBLIC, AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SECTORS, AND IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

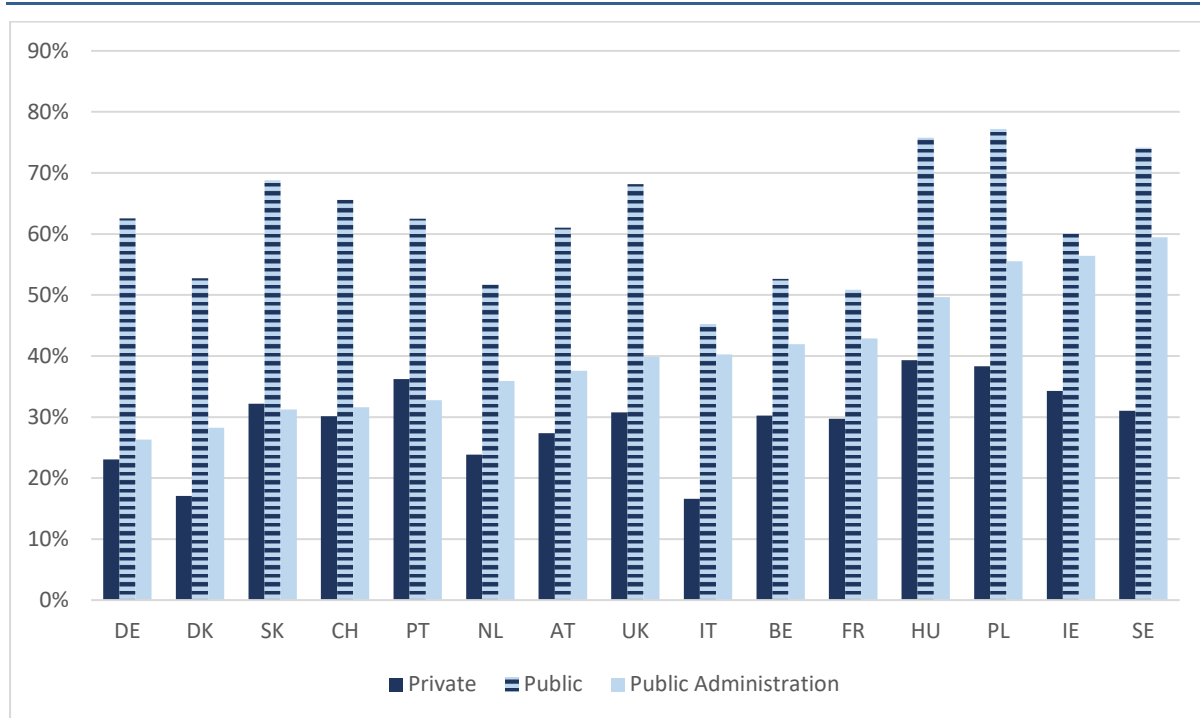


Sources: EU LFS, 2014, Civil Service Human Resource Management System, 2016.

Note: The category 'Public administration' refers to the section 'O – Public administration and defence' of the NACE-08 classification. 'Public sector' refers to section 'P – Education' and 'Q – Human health and social work activities'. 'Private sectors' include the other sectors.

This pattern of higher female representation in the public sector compared to the private sector is mirrored across Europe (see Figure 2.5). The share of managerial positions held by women in the private sector ranges from 17 per cent in Italy to 39 per cent in Hungary and in the public sector from a low of 45 per cent in Italy to 77 per cent in Poland. The gap between female managers in the private sector versus the public sector is particularly wide in Germany, where the figures are 23 per cent and 63 per cent respectively. In public administration and defence, the share of female managers ranges from 26 per cent in Germany to 59 per cent in Sweden. The comparative figures will be influenced by the proportion of women in the workforce overall and the sector sizes, but nevertheless show that, using a common definition, Ireland has one of the highest shares of female managers in public administration/defence and is around the middle of the table for female managers in the private and public sectors. The earlier caveat still applies and the figures may conceal country-level differences in women's representation at senior management. Research based on data from 2008 shows that Ireland was in the bottom five EU countries for female representation at the two highest ranking positions in the civil service (Kuperus and Rode, 2010).

FIGURE 2.5 FEMALE SHARE OF MANAGERIAL POSITIONS IN THE PRIVATE, PUBLIC, AND PUBLIC ADMINISTRATION SECTORS, BY COUNTRY



Source: EU Labour Force Survey, 2014

Note: See Figure 2.3 above for definitions.

## 2.3 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter describes the policy initiatives undertaken to promote gender equality within the civil service as well as the processes and practices relating to recruitments and promotions. It also provides a description of the structure of the Irish civil service. In particular, it shows that men and women are differently distributed along the hierarchical ladder. Women are over-represented in the lowest positions of the civil service, and under-represented at the top. This is true across all departments, although to a varying extent. Moreover, drawing on different sources, this chapter shows that, over time, female representation at the highest position has increased, although gender imbalance in senior positions is still significant.

## CHAPTER 3

### The position of women and men in the Irish civil service

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This chapter will firstly provide a description of recruitment and promotion statistics, drawing from data from the Civil Service Human Resource Management System. Secondly, employing data from the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey (CSEES), it will analyse male and female characteristics at each grade of the civil service's occupational structure. This will permit us to examine the factors influencing achievement of higher grade positions. Finally, the chapter will show the extent of gender imbalances at the top positions of the civil service hierarchy and whether and to what extent these are accounted for by differences in human capital.

#### 3.1 RECRUITMENT PROCESSES

As discussed in Section 2.1.2, in 2014 the Civil Service Renewal Plan was launched, which introduced some important changes in the Irish civil service. Among these changes, the plan set out that vacancies at senior management grade are to be filled via both interdepartmental competition and external competition.

External recruitment thus gained in importance as a route to access the highest positions in the civil service structure and also influenced the gender distribution at that level. Table 3.1 below shows the total number of male and female staff recruited externally to the civil service since 2015. Also shown in Table 3.1 is the female-to-male ratio for new recruits. Looking at the ratio for the total of new recruits, a higher proportion of new recruits were women (1.33 women for every one man). Focusing more specifically on grades, men and women are equally represented at Executive Officer (EO) and Administrative Officer (AO) levels, while women outnumber men among new recruits at the Clerical Officer (CO), Assistant Principal (AP) and Principal Officer (PO) levels. By contrast, women comprised a lower share of recruitment at the Higher Executive Officer (HEO) level and especially at very top of the hierarchy – at senior management positions.

The figures also show that women are somewhat more likely to enter the civil service at a lower grade than men: 69 per cent enter at CO level compared to 61 per cent of men. This means that even in a gender-neutral promotion system, differentials are likely to persist over time.



TABLE 3.1 STAFF RECRUITED AS 'NEW ENTRANTS' BY GRADE, 2015–2016

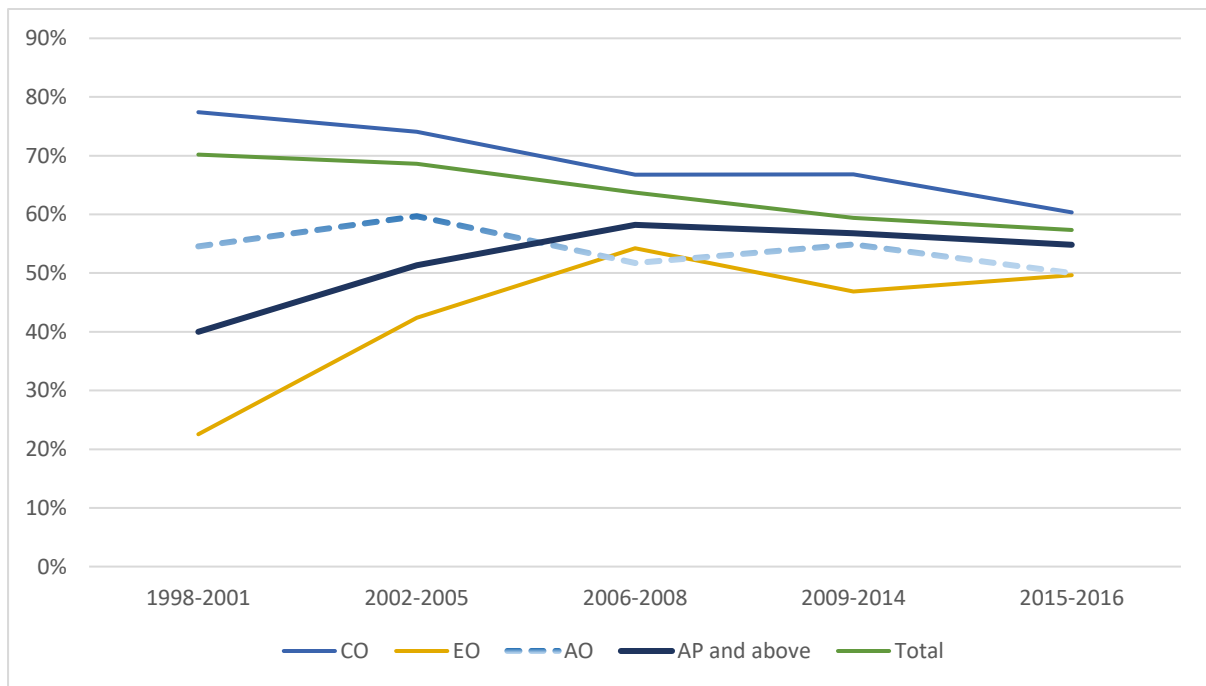
	Male		Female		Total	Ratio F/M	% Female
	N	%	N	%			
<b>Senior management</b>	7	0.6	5	0.3	12	0.71	41.7
<b>PO</b>	19	1.5	23	1.4	42	1.21	54.8
<b>AP</b>	105	8.3	131	7.8	236	1.25	55.5
<b>AO</b>	188	14.9	188	11.2	376	1.00	50.0
<b>HEO</b>	26	2.1	21	1.3	47	0.81	44.7
<b>EO</b>	149	11.8	147	8.8	296	0.99	49.7
<b>CO</b>	765	60.8	1164	69.3	1929	1.52	60.3
<b>Total</b>	1,259	100.0	1,679	100.0	2,947	1.33	57.0

*Source:* Civil Service Human Resource Management System.

*Notes:* The data in this table are based on staff whose start date in their current grade matches the date they started in the civil service (for general service grades and professional/technical equivalents). Missing cases are excluded. For general exclusions, see Figure 1. Staff Officer (SO) grade is excluded because this is a promotion grade. Specialists are included at the grade equivalent.

If we look at how the gender distribution of new recruits has evolved over the last two decades, significant changes can be observed. This is shown in Figure 3.1, which reports trends in the female share among new recruits. First of all, there has been an overall decline in the share of female recruits. This decline is largely driven by the declining share of women at the CO level, which accounts for the vast majority of recruitments. The female share among new recruits has, in contrast, increased at EO level and AP level and above; in both cases, however, the increase was concentrated in the first decade. It should be noted that recruitment at AP level or above is almost entirely represented by the AP level (this can be also observed in Table 3.1).

FIGURE 3.1 FEMALE SHARE OF NEW ENTRANTS BY GRADE AND PERIOD



*Source:* Civil Service Human Resource Management System.  
*Note:* The grade refers to the civil servants’ current grade at October 2016. ‘Period’ refers to the time in which civil servants have entered the civil service at that grade. AP, PO and senior management positions have been collapsed because of the low number of cases. HEO have been excluded because of the low number of cases over time.

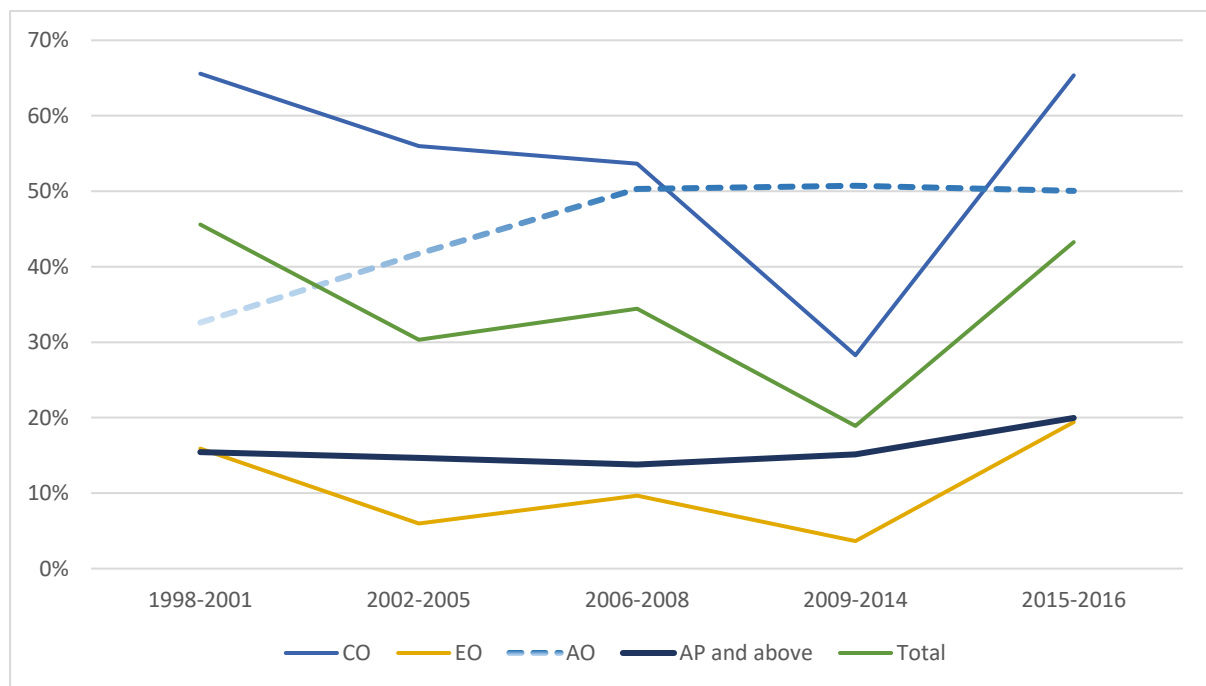
Overall, however, we observe a convergence between grades and a more equal distribution of men and women in the recruitment process over time. Indeed, while at the turn of the new millennium the female share of new recruits ranged from 20 to 80 per cent across grades, for the most recent period the figures ranged between 45 and 60 per cent.

In order to better understand the extent to which these changes may have impacted on the overall distribution of women within the civil service, we also have to consider how much of the inflow of civil servants in each grade comes from new recruitment and how much from internal promotions.

In this respect, Figure 3.2, reporting the share of new recruits among the overall inflow (newly recruited plus promoted) to each grade, shows considerable variation over time. The total share of new recruits experienced a sizeable drop of almost 30 percentage points in the first 15 years, and an increase later on. The overall trend has been driven by changes at the CO level. The very sharp drop from 2009 to 2014 reflects the recruitment embargo during this period (see Section

2.1.4 above). A restriction on promotion was also in place so that the total number of entries to each grade was low.<sup>28</sup>

FIGURE 3.2 SHARE OF ALL ENTRANTS EXTERNALLY RECRUITED AT EACH GRADE



Source: Civil Service Human Resource Management System.

Note: The grade refers to the civil servants' current grade at October 2016. 'Period' refers to the time in which civil servants have entered the civil service at that grade. AP, PO and senior management positions have been collapsed because of the low number of cases. HEO have been excluded because of the low number of cases over time.

It is also important to consider how trends have evolved at the higher levels of the civil service. If we focus on the AP level and above, we can see that the share of new recruits has only slightly increased over the last two decades, and currently new recruits account for 20 per cent of the inflow at that level.

Therefore, notwithstanding the fact that women's chances of being externally recruited have improved over time, its contribution to the overall distribution of women at the highest level of the civil service is still limited.

### 3.2 PROMOTION PROCESSES

The second and largest route into senior management positions and in general to advance in the civil service hierarchy is through promotion.

Table 3.2 shows the number of civil servants that have been promoted at each grade level by gender, for the years 2015 to 2016. The female-to-male ratios at

<sup>28</sup> In fact, while the total number of entrants over the three years period 2006–2008 is 5,113, it is 3,760 over the six-year period 2009–2014.

each level and for promotions are also shown in Table 3.2. In the highest grades (PO and Senior Manager), men are over-represented among the staff promoted, while in lower grades, women are more likely to have been promoted to their current level. In terms of recent policies regarding gender balance, it seems that while there may be some improvement in the recruitment of women to higher grades via open competition, promotions in these grades still tend to be male dominated. This may be linked to the historically low share of women in grades above PO (as shown in Table 2.1); in other words, there are currently fewer women in these grades to promote.

TABLE 3.2 STAFF PROMOTED, 2015–2016

Grade	Male	Female	Total	Ratio F/M
Senior management	32	17	49	0.53
PO	176	153	329	0.87
AP	362	423	785	1.17
AO	183	192	375	1.05
HEO	458	739	1,197	1.61
EO	500	729	1,229	1.46
SO	24	54	78	2.25
CO	367	656	1,023	1.79
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,102</b>	<b>2,963</b>	<b>5,065</b>	<b>1.41</b>

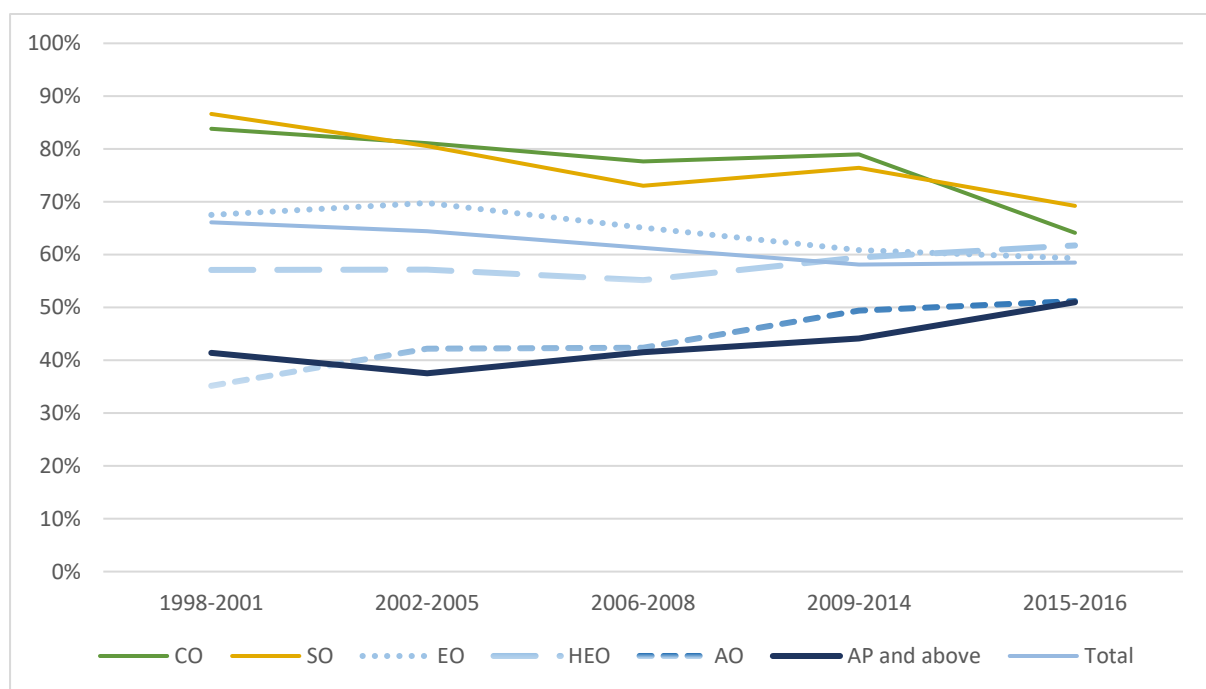
Source: Civil Service Human Resource Management System.

Notes: The data in this table are based on staff recorded as being appointed in their current grade having had a previous grade (for generalist only. Does not include technical/professional equivalents. Unknowns are excluded). The grade refers to the civil servants' current grade at October 2016.

Looking at the evolution over time in terms of women's chances of being promoted, important changes can be observed in Figure 3.3. While on the one hand, the share of women among all promoted staff declined (from 64 per cent to 58 per cent), on the other hand, improvements in the female share are visible for promotions at the highest grades. Figure 3.3 also shows that in the most recent period, women are at least as likely as men to be promoted at all levels. However, it has to be noted that grades at AP level and above have been collapsed and thus the trend for this group of grades is likely driven by AP.<sup>29</sup> In fact, as we have shown in Table 3.2, in 2015–2016, women are still disadvantaged in promotions compared to men at the levels of PO and above.

<sup>29</sup> The number of promotions at PO level and above is very small in several periods. Therefore, we collapsed these grades together with AP in order to maximise the comparability over time.

FIGURE 3.3 FEMALE SHARE OF PROMOTIONS BY GRADE AND PERIOD



Source: Civil Service Human Resource Management System.

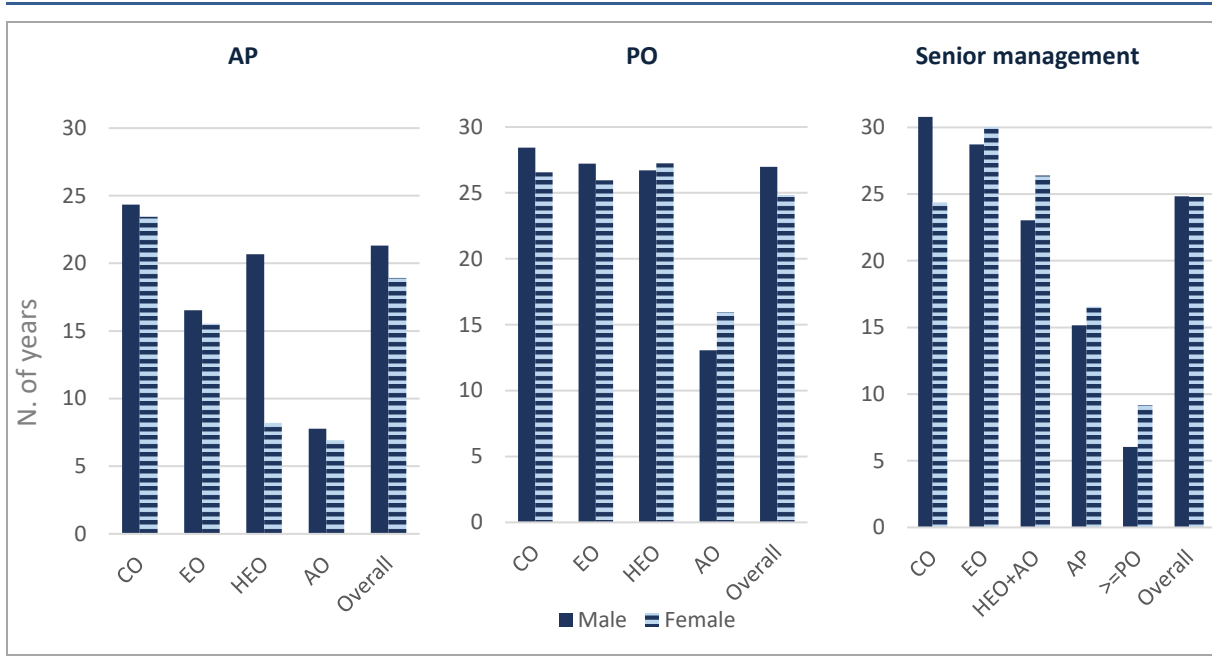
Note: The grade refers to civil servants' current grade at October 2016. 'Period' refers to the time in which civil servants have been promoted to that grade.

Overall, as in the case of new entrants, over time we observe a closing gap in the female share between grades: the share declined in the lowest grades while it increased in the highest grades. Nevertheless, at the very top of the civil service hierarchy, the majority of promoted employees are still men.

Another way to look at gender differences in promotion opportunities is by studying how long male and female civil servants take to reach the highest positions. Figure 3.4 reports the median number of years from when civil servants started working in the civil service to their current grade (at October 2016), by entry grade. Unfortunately, we cannot observe how civil servants' career paths developed, as we only have information on the date they entered the civil service and the date they were promoted to their current position. Because the data comprise a snapshot of people in higher positions in 2016 (AP and above) who previously occupied lower positions, it only counts those who have been upwardly mobile. Those who have not advanced are not included in these figures – therefore, they should be interpreted in conjunction with the figures on mean length of service at lower grade levels and promotion rates by gender.<sup>30</sup>

<sup>30</sup> Those externally recruited to AP level and above are also excluded from the figures.

FIGURE 3.4 MEDIAN YEARS TO PROMOTION (TO AP, PO, AND SENIOR MANAGEMENT POSITIONS) AMONG THE UPWARDLY MOBILE BY ENTRY GRADE



Source: Civil Service Human Resource Management System.

Note: Entry grade refers to the grade at which civil servants entered the civil service. Data refers to promotions since 1998. Number of promotions to senior management positions is very small; for this reason, some categories have been collapsed. The 'final' grade refers to that occupied in 2016.

First of all, as one would expect, we observe that the lower the starting position in the civil service, the longer the time it takes to reach the higher positions. Moreover, the length of time increases for promotion to the top positions. Given that women are more likely to enter the civil service at CO level than men (see Table 3.1), they will have further to climb to get to the top.

In Figure 3.4, we compare men and women who begin at the same starting point, and had successfully advanced to AP, PO or senior management by 2016. Among those who have been upwardly mobile, women's advancement to AP and PO positions is slightly faster than that of men, especially if they entered the civil service in the lowest grades. Given that a significantly lower proportion of female civil servants achieve these higher grades (AP, PO, senior management), there may be a positive selection process occurring, whereby only women with the highest skills advance; consequently, they advance more quickly.

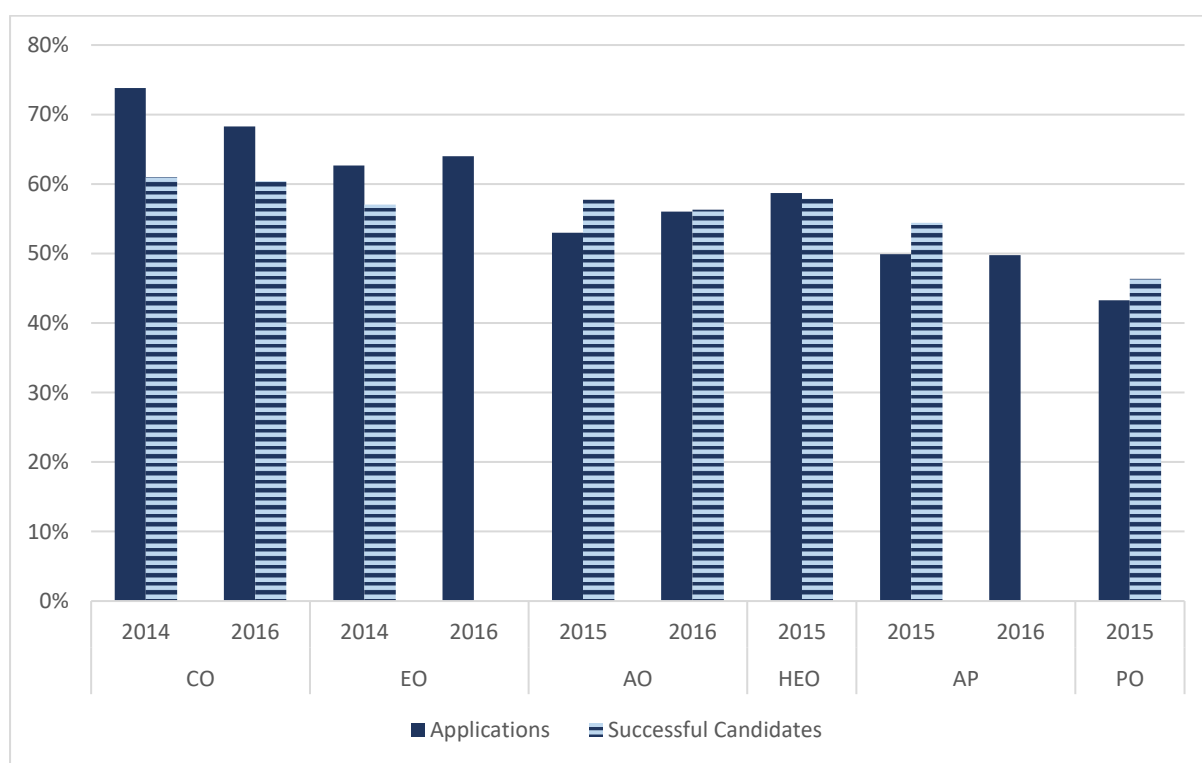
In contrast, men seem to need less time to access senior management positions. For those who started at EO level and above, men's advancement to senior management is between 1.5 and three years faster than that of women. The share of women among promoted civil servants follows a similar pattern, indicating that women face increasing barriers in reaching the top of the hierarchy. The exception is for those starting from CO level, among whom advancement for women occurs considerably faster than it does for men: 24 years versus 30 years (though the numbers here are small – 19 men and 11 women).

### 3.2.1 Applications and outcomes

The figures on the proportion of men and women who have been promoted and in the gender composition of grades do not reveal where in the process women are ‘falling out’. Does this happen at the point of deciding whether or not to apply for promotion, or during the selection process? Figures from the Public Appointments Service (PAS) shed some light on this issue. Figure 3.5 provides a gender breakdown of all applicants and successful applicants for competitions at different grades held in recent years. The figures include both existing civil servants and new recruits, and therefore combine recruitment and promotion processes.

The over-representation of women at CO level reflects a higher level of applications. In 2014, 74 per cent of CO applicants were female, dropping to 68 per cent in 2016; however, female candidates were less likely to be successful than male candidates. In both years, around 61 per cent of those recruited were female. Females also make up the majority of EO applicants, at 63 per cent in 2014, yet among those appointed, the proportion was 57 per cent in the same year, indicating that female applicants were less successful than male applicants.

FIGURE 3.5 FEMALE SHARE OF ALL APPLICANTS AND SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS BY GRADE LEVEL, PAS



Source: PAS statistics at 13 February 2017.

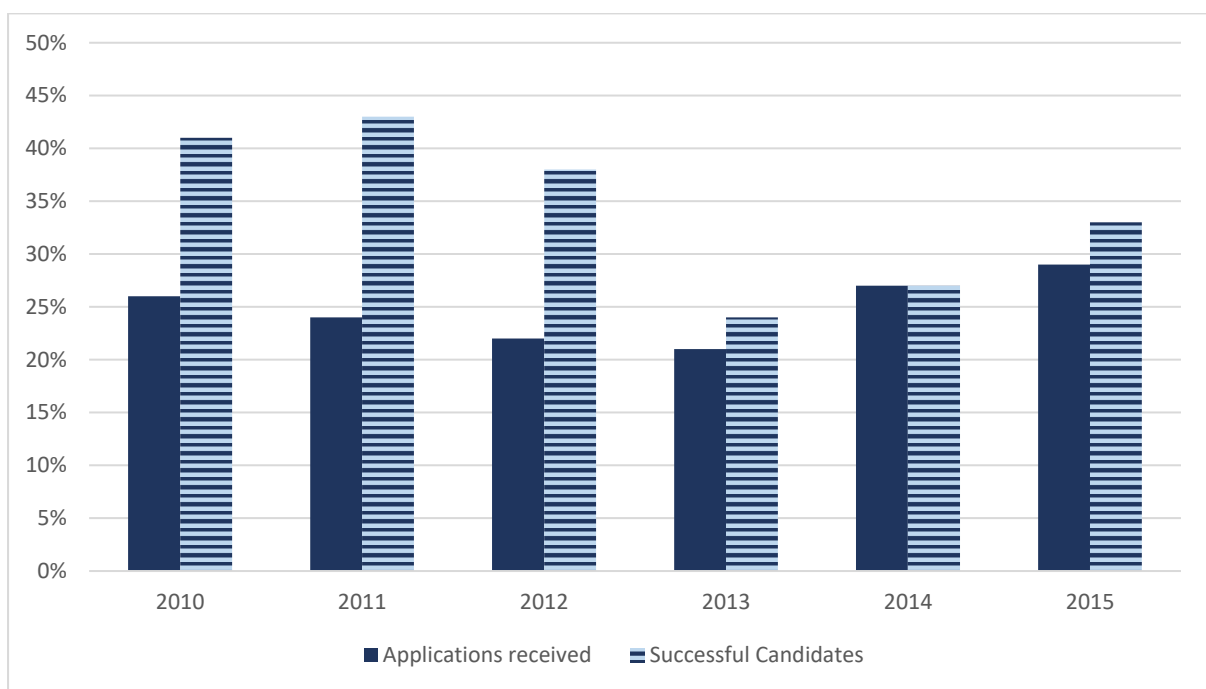
Note: Successful candidates include all those placed on the panel, though not all had been assigned positions at the time of reporting. Figures contain both internal applications (promotions) and external applications (new entrants). The proportion of successful candidates is missing for some of the recent competitions as the process was not complete.

At AO level, slightly more than half of applicants were female (53–56 per cent) in 2015 and 2016. In 2015, female candidates were more successful than male

candidates but in 2016, the female share of appointments matched the female share of applicants. This shows that the success rate was the same for men and women in the most recent year.

HEO is a promotion grade and therefore the statistics here refer only to the promotions process. In 2015, 59 per cent of applicants were female and 59 per cent of those appointed were female. This closely resembles the gender composition of the EO feeder grade, which was 61 per cent female in 2016 (see Figure 1). Assuming some stability in figures, the statistics suggest that female applicants were marginally under-represented among applicants for promotion to HEO. At AP and PO level, information is only available for 2015, when women were under-represented among applicants but were somewhat more successful than men.

FIGURE 3.6 FEMALE SHARE OF ALL APPLICANTS AND SUCCESSFUL APPLICANTS TO SENIOR POSITIONS (ASSISTANT SECRETARY AND ABOVE), TLAC, 2010–2015



Sources: Data from first and fourth reports by TLAC to the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform.

Note: Figures include both existing civil servants and those from other public service sectors and the private sector. The number of appointments were: 30 in 2015, 22 in 2014, 21 in 2013, and 35 from July 2011 to December 2012. No numbers are reported for 2010.

Examination of data from the reports to government by the Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC) allow a similar disentangling of the application and selection process as it applies to women engaging in competitions at and above Assistant Secretary (AS) level. Figure 3.6 shows that women were much less likely to apply for these top level posts, with between 21 per cent and 29 per cent of female applications received over the years 2010 and 2015. In the period 2010 to 2012, female candidates were more likely to be successful than male candidates;



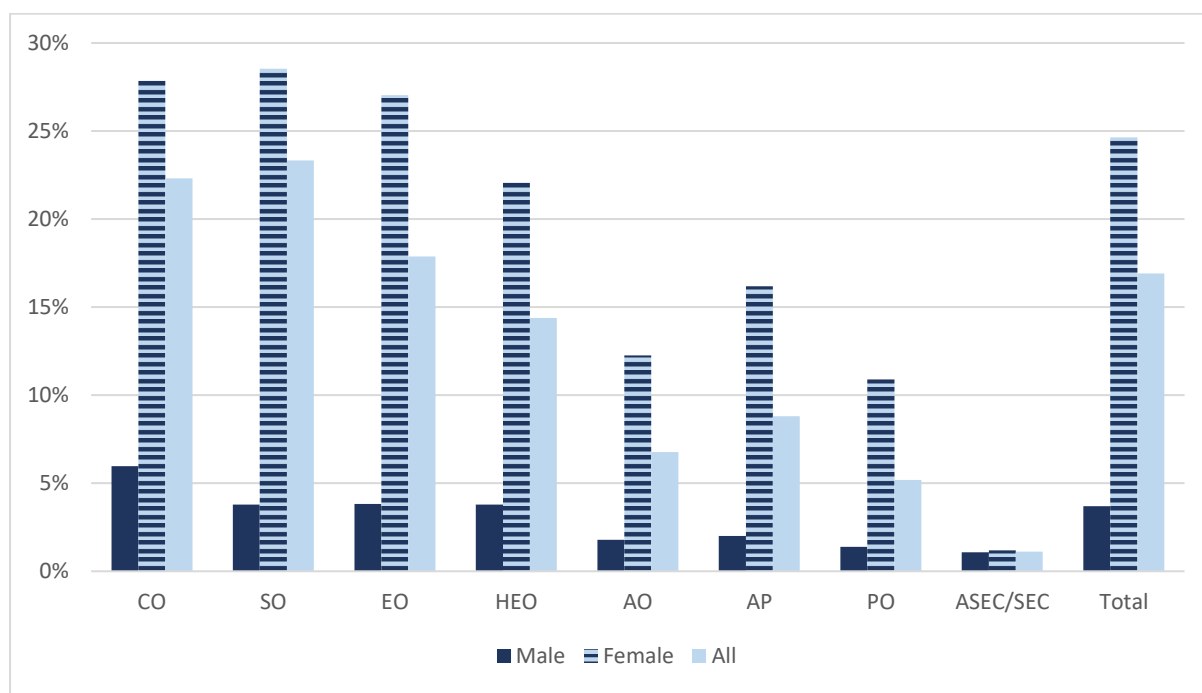
this is shown by the higher female share of successful candidates relative to the female share of applicants. In the more recent period of 2013–2015, the proportion of female appointments is much closer to the female share of applicants, suggesting male and female candidates have a similar success rate. Although informative, it should be noted that these figures only cover the most recent period and we cannot extrapolate past trends. Furthermore, the inflow into positions may not have a large impact on the overall composition of each grade (the ‘stock’) in the short term because the numbers involved are small and the composition is also influenced by outflows.

### 3.3 FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS

As stressed in Chapter 2 (Section 2.1.5), flexible working arrangements are usually stratified by grade, with the highest grades characterised by limited access to such arrangements. At the same time, flexible work tends to be more widespread among women as it enables reconciliation of family and work commitments. This is important; it means availing of flexible work options can have negative consequences for career development.

If we look at the Irish civil service, part-time employment is indeed strongly stratified by gender and grade. Overall, 25 per cent of women and four per cent of men work less than full-time hours (see Figure 3.7). The proportion working part-time falls sharply with grade level, from 22–23 per cent among COs and SOs, to only one per cent of those at AS level and above.

FIGURE 3.7 PROPORTION OF STAFF AT EACH GRADE WORKING PART-TIME, 2016

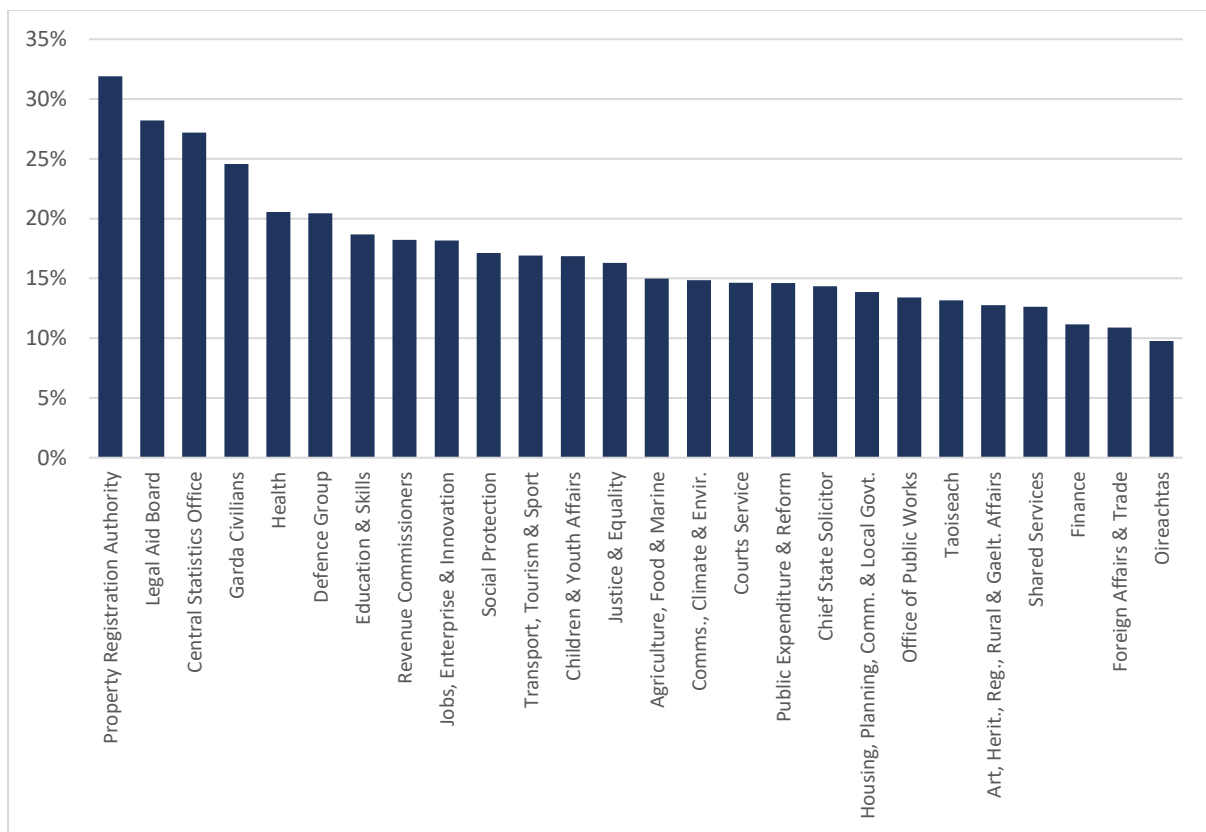


Source: Civil Service Human Resource Management System.

Note: ‘Part-time’ includes all those recorded as those working less than full-time hours (<1FTE).

The administrative data also reveal that the proportion of employees working part-time varies significantly across departments and agencies (Figure 3.8). The highest levels are recorded in the Property Registration Authority, the Legal Aid Board and the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and, among departments, the Department of Health. The lowest levels of part-time working are evident in the Oireachtas, the Department of Foreign Affairs and the Department of Finance. The level of variation suggests differences in organisational culture around flexible working across departments.

FIGURE 3.8 PROPORTION WORKING PART-TIME BY DEPARTMENT, 2016



Source: Civil Service Human Resource Management System.

Turning our attention to the Shorter Working Year Scheme (Figure 3.9), in 2016, 16 per cent of civil servants availed of the scheme: 23 per cent of female employees and seven per cent of male employees.<sup>31</sup> Therefore, the gender gap under this scheme is narrower than it is for part-time working.

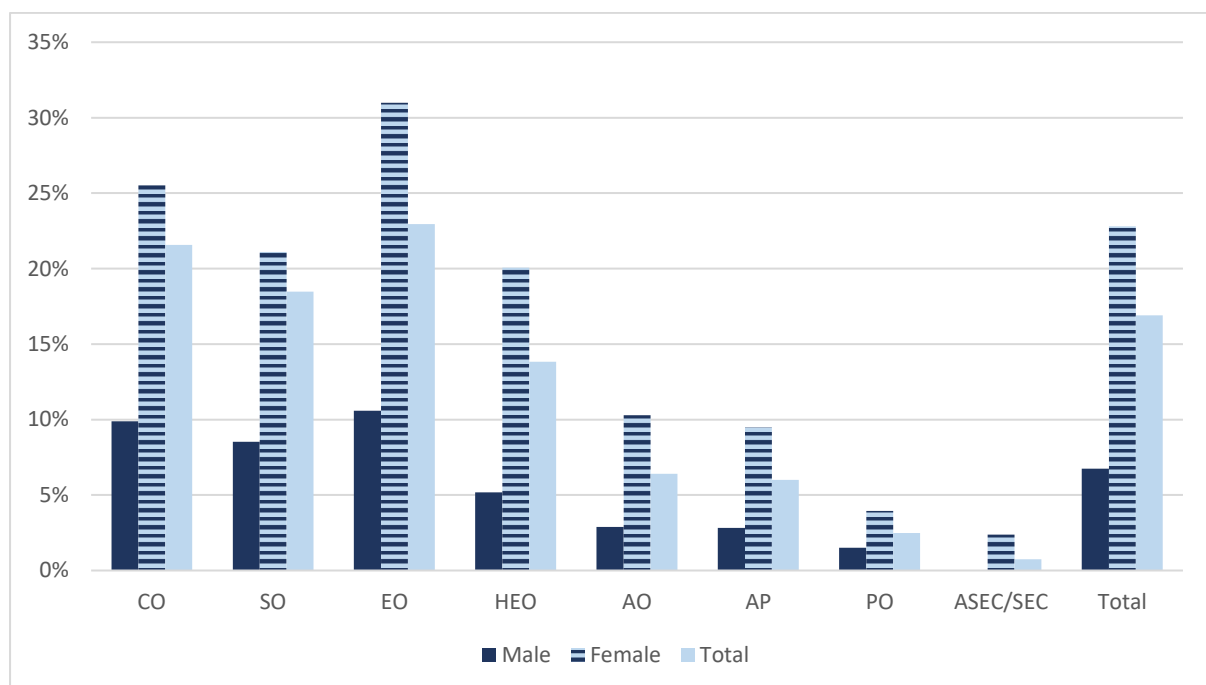
Again, take-up varied substantially across grades. The highest level of take-up of the shorter working year is among those at EO grade (23 per cent). Take-up falls

<sup>31</sup> Total proportion excludes 'other grades' e.g. industrial grades.

sharply for AO grades and above. Less than three per cent of POs and less than one per cent of those at AS or Secretary General (SEC) level avail of the scheme.

These patterns suggest that the opportunity to work flexibly diminishes significantly at higher levels of the civil service. Other forms of flexibility, such as flexitime arrangements, are not available for grades above HEO level (Circular 11/2013).<sup>32</sup> While shorter day/year options may be formally available to those at PO level and above, in practice it is clear that they are not availed of; the patterns suggest that factors such as organisational culture or workload militate against flexible working for the highest grades. This loss of flexibility is likely to discourage those with caring or other commitments from entering higher grades.

FIGURE 3.9 PROPORTION OF STAFF AT EACH GRADE WITH A SHORTER WORKING YEAR ARRANGEMENT



Source: Civil Service Human Resource Management System.

Note: Total excludes other grades, for example, industrial. For other notes, see Table 3.1.

Unfortunately, neither the administrative data available to us nor the CSEES contains information on take-up of career breaks or maternity leave.<sup>33</sup> Nevertheless, take-up of these types of leave may have significant consequences for individual career trajectories.

<sup>32</sup> Circular 11/2013, Revision of working hours and flexible working arrangements for civil servants.

<sup>33</sup> In answer to a parliamentary question, it was noted that there were 330 civil servants on a career break in early 2015 (Irish Examiner, 7 January 2015).

### 3.4 PROFILE OF MEN AND WOMEN IN THE CIVIL SERVICE

Here, we draw on the CSEES to describe whether and to what extent men and women at each grade of the civil service hierarchy differ in characteristics, in ways relevant to occupational outcomes. These characteristics mainly pertain to human capital and include level of education and tenure or length of service. (Note that this refers to tenure in the civil service rather than tenure in the current grade.)

Figure 3.10 reports the distribution of the level of education within grades by gender. The broad picture that emerges is that women occupying the highest grades tend to be more educated than men. For example, at the PO level or above, 59 per cent of women have a master's degree or a PhD, while the same figure for men is 51 per cent. The same pattern is also visible at the grade of AP and especially at AO level, where gender differences are even more striking. These patterns also hold concerning a primary degree or above. Interestingly, we also observe higher levels of education at AO than PO level. This could be due to the fact that the AO level was more open to external recruitment, implying an inflow of a younger cohort of employees characterised by higher levels of education.

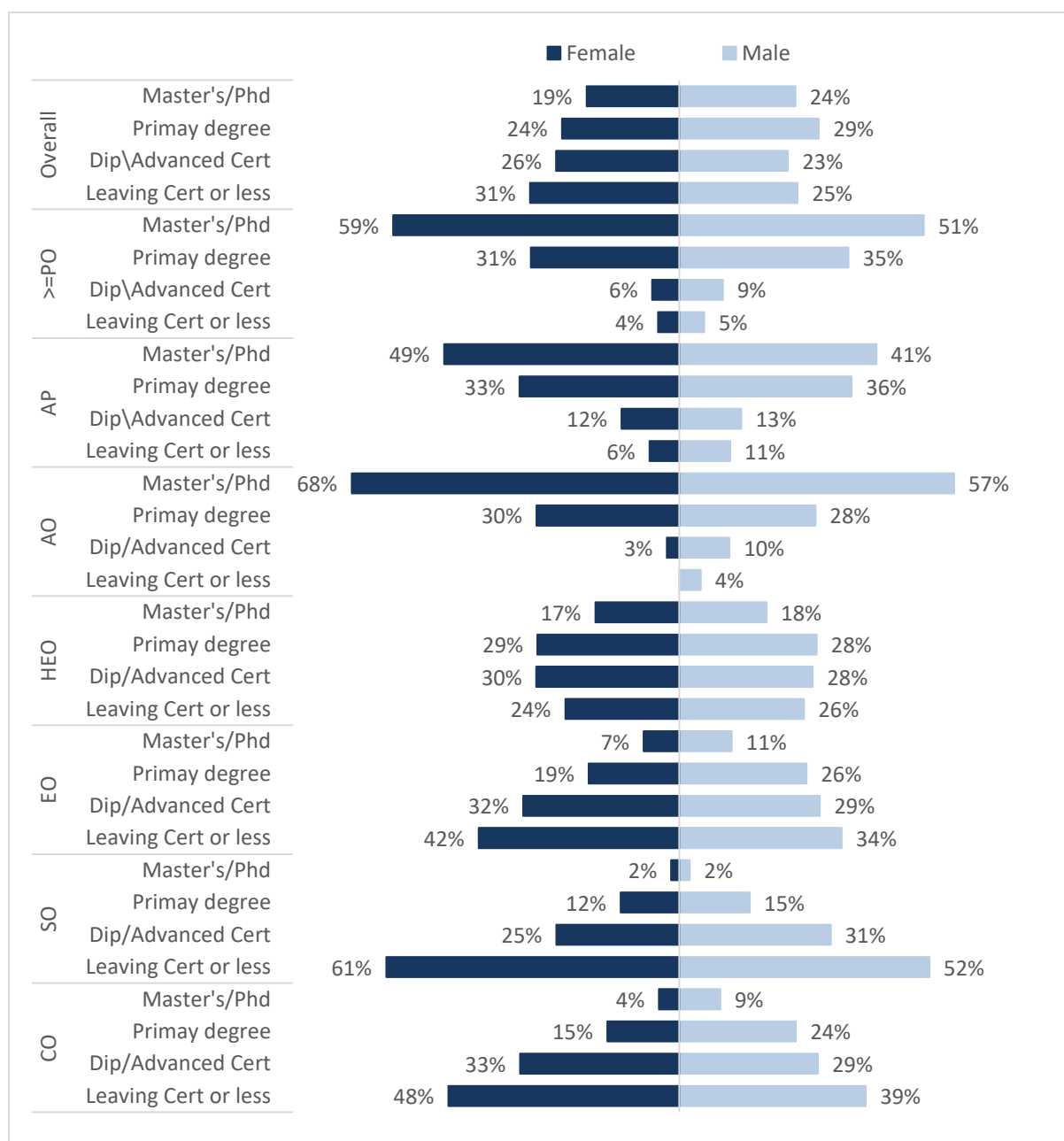
In contrast, if we look at the other end of the occupational ladder, men tend to be more educated than women. For example, 33 per cent of men at CO level have at least a primary degree, while the same figure for women is 19 per cent. This pattern is again likely to be related to the age profile of the two groups.

Marked gender differences are also visible for tenure/length of service in the civil service (Figure 3.11). First of all, we observe shorter tenure for women than for men in the top positions of the occupational ladder, while the opposite is true for the bottom positions. At the level of PO and above, 41 per cent of men are in the civil service for 30 years or more, while 26 per cent women within the same category have this length of service.

Moreover, while for men, the grade characterised by the longest tenure is PO or above (66 per cent of men in these positions are in the civil service for 20 years or more), for women, it is SO level (69 per cent with 20 years or more).

The grade characterised by the shortest tenure is AO: 45 per cent of women and 44 per cent of men at the AO level have been in the civil service for less than five years. As mentioned above, the AO grade is associated with large shares of new entrants from younger cohorts. (Note also that AO is the grade characterised by the youngest employees in terms of age; see Figure 3.12.)

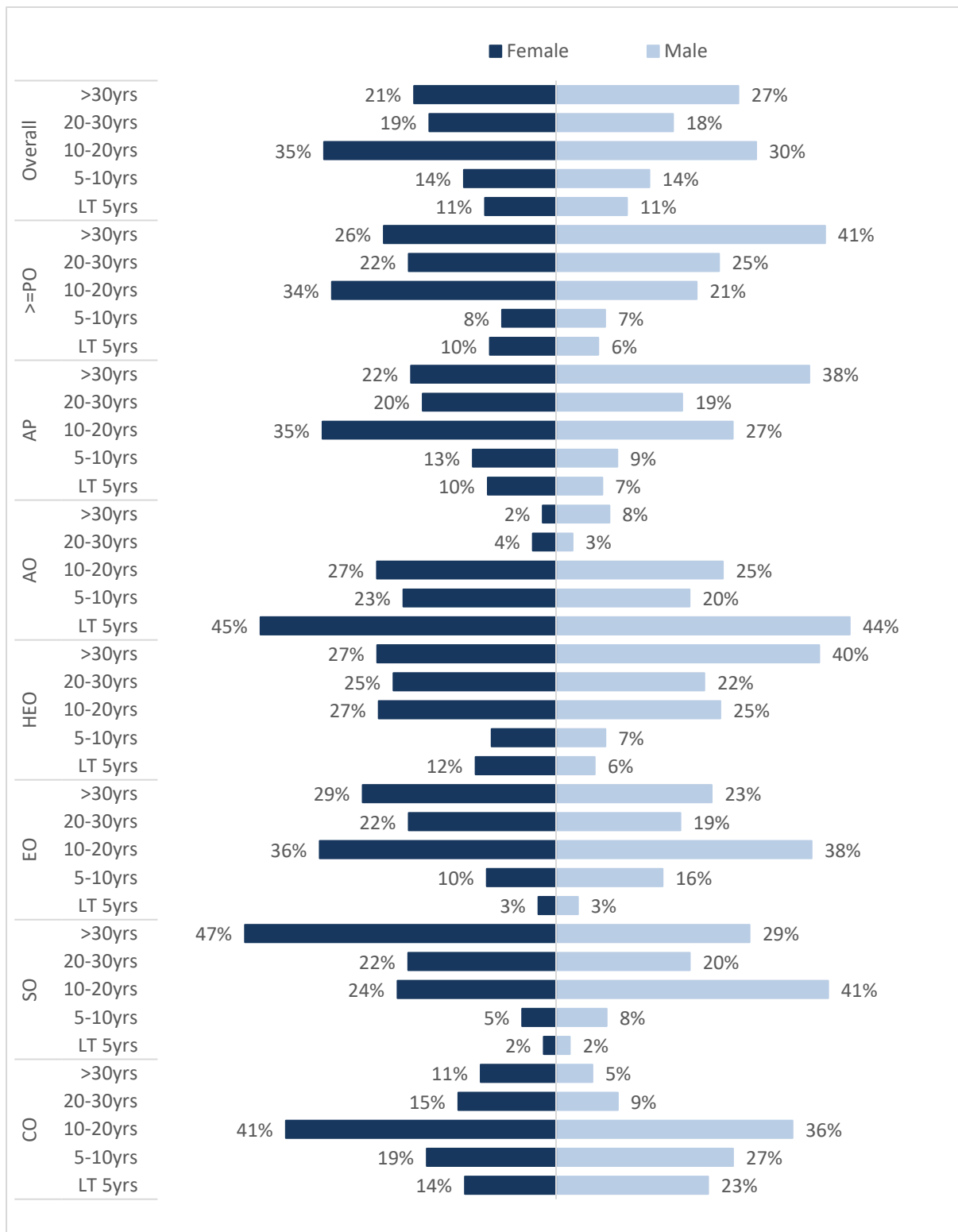
FIGURE 3.10 LEVEL OF EDUCATION BY GENDER AND GRADE



Source: CSEES (2015).

Note: Excludes 'other', SVO and industrial grades.

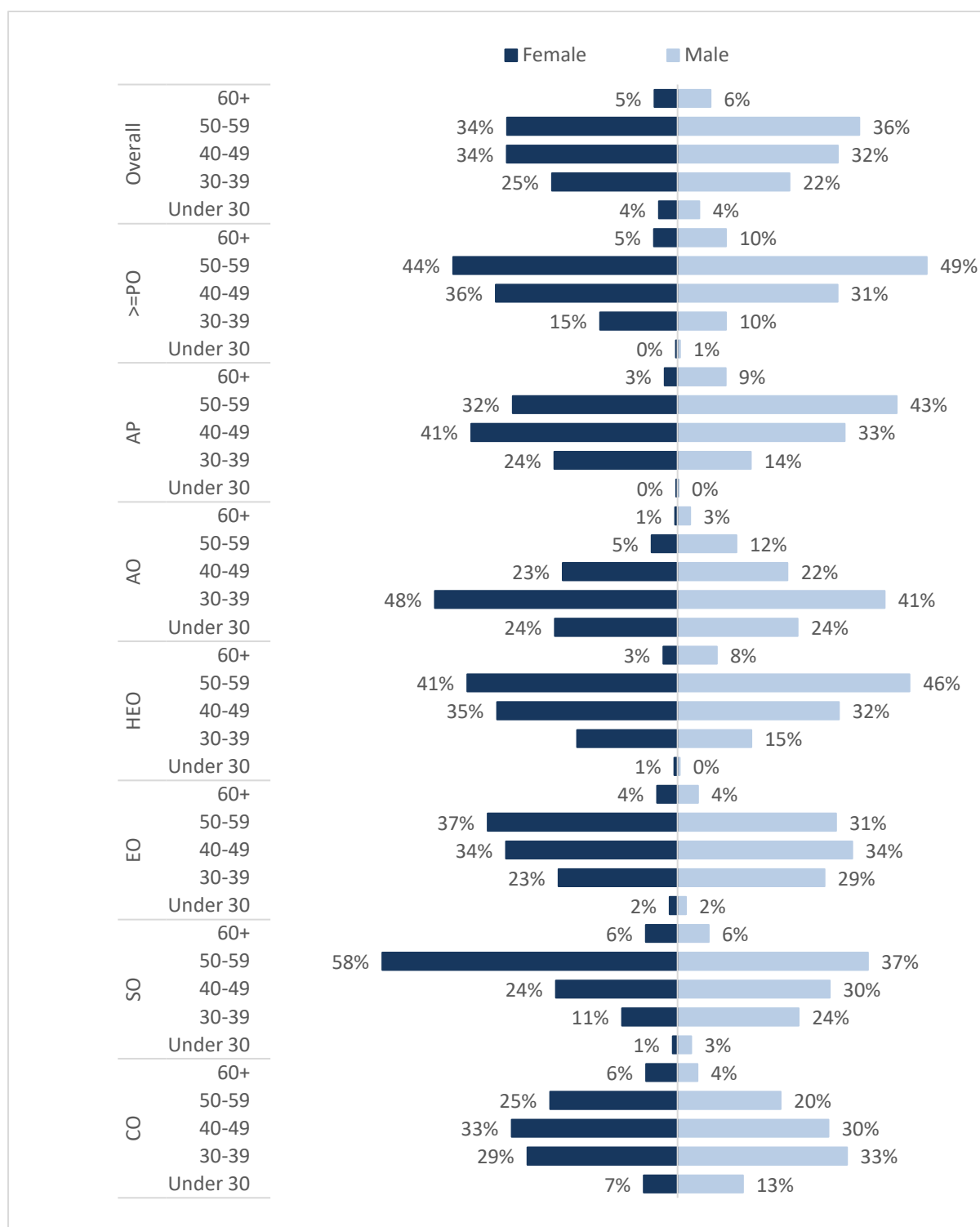
FIGURE 3.11 LENGTH OF SERVICE BY GENDER AND GRADE



Source: CSEES (2015).

Note: Excludes 'other', SVO and industrial grades.

FIGURE 3.12 AGE PROFILE BY GENDER AND GRADE



Source: CSEES (2015).  
 Note: Excludes 'other', SVO and Industrial grades.

Finally, gender differences across grades are not as striking in relation to age as they are for education and tenure. To a larger extent, the age profile follows the same pattern of tenure, with men older than women at the highest grades, although differences are narrower. The AO grade is characterised by the youngest employees; 72 per cent of women and 65 per cent of men at this grade are less than 40 years old. The most marked gender differences are visible at SO level,

where 64 per cent of women are 50 years or older, compared to 43 per cent of men, figures that also reflect the distribution observed for tenure.

Further, the distribution of men and women in the civil service also varies according to the location of the office in which they are employed. Women are less likely to work in the headquarters and are more likely to work outside Dublin than men. We find that 64.5 per cent of male civil servants are based in Dublin or in headquarters, rather than in peripheral offices, and 56 per cent of women are working in more central offices.

### 3.5 GENDER INEQUALITIES IN REACHING HIGHER GRADE POSITIONS

The last step in this chapter is to examine gender differences in the likelihood of reaching the highest grades of the civil service's occupational hierarchy, and investigating the extent to which these differences can be explained by differences in male and female characteristics, in terms of education, tenure and age. We do this through statistical models that permit us to evaluate the differences in the likelihood of men and women reaching high grades while keeping other characteristics constant.

Table 3.3 presents our investigation of the likelihood of occupying a PO or higher position rather than a lower one. The first row of the table tells us the extent to which men are more or less likely to occupy a PO position compared to women (who represent the reference group). The results are expressed as odds ratios: a value of one means that men have the same chance of occupying PO positions as women, values smaller than one mean that men are less likely to do so, and values greater than one indicate that men are more likely to do so. Focusing on Model 1, we observe an odds ratio of 2.9 for men, which shows men have almost three times the odds women have of occupying a PO position or above.

Model 2 controls for the level of education and shows that the odds of having reached a PO position increases with the level of education, up to almost 20 (19.1) times comparing civil servants with a master's degree or a PhD (high degree) to those with a Leaving Certificate. Once we control for education, we should observe an increasing gap between women and men, given the higher level of education among women at PO and above (Figure 3.10). However, the gender coefficient reduces to 2.4. Further analyses show that the male advantage differs across educational groups; it ranges from 4.3 for those with Leaving Certificate or diploma level qualifications, to 2.1 for those with degrees, to 1.5 for those with higher degrees.<sup>34</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Controlling for job tenure and age. All gender differences are statistically significant. Model available from authors.



When we also control for length of stay in the civil service (Model 3), which can be considered as a proxy for human capital accumulation, the male coefficient decreases even more. Now, comparing men and women with the same level of education and with the same length of stay, men's odds of having reached a PO or higher position is two times that of women. Model 3 also shows that the odds of occupying a high position increases with tenure, and it is almost seven (6.8) times higher for those who have been in the civil service for 30 years or more, compared to those who have been a civil servant for less than five years.

Finally, Model 4 also controls for age. Importantly, we can see that the coefficient for men does not change. Instead, age shows a considerable gradient in affecting the likelihood of reaching high positions. Moreover, being associated with tenure, its inclusion decreases tenure's direct effect. This association might also explain why the male coefficient does not vary when age is controlled for.

TABLE 3.3 LOGISTIC MODEL OF REACHING PO OR ABOVE

		Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
		Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.
<b>Gender</b> Ref = Female	Male	2.9	**	2.4	**	2.0	**	2.0	**
<b>Level of education</b> Ref = Leaving Certificate	Diploma			1.9	**	2.4	**	2.5	**
	Degree			8.5	**	13.1	**	13.3	**
	High degree			19.1	**	36.8	**	37.5	**
<b>Length of stay</b> Ref = <5 years	5–10 years					1.0		0.8	
	10–15 years					1.5	*	1.1	
	15–20 years					2.3	**	1.4	*
	20–25 years					4.1	**	2.2	**
	25–30 years					5.3	**	2.7	**
	>30 years					6.8	**	3.2	**
<b>Age</b> Ref = <30 years	30–39							5.6	**
	40–49							10.9	**
	50–59							13.8	**
	60+							12.2	**
	Constant	0.042	**	0.008	**	0.002	**	0.000	**
<b>N</b>	<b>13,615</b>		<b>13,615</b>		<b>13,615</b>		<b>13,615</b>		
	<b>Pseudo R2</b>	<b>0.043</b>		<b>0.193</b>		<b>0.260</b>		<b>0.273</b>	

Source: CSEES (2015)

Note: \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

In addition to this, we have also investigated the likelihood of occupying an AS position or higher, rather than occupying a lower position. Results, which are

reported in Table A3.1 in Appendix 3, show the same pattern observed in Table 3.3, although gender inequality in reaching the position is slightly higher. Male advantage ranges between 4.2 and 2.3 across the models.

While the models presented show that gender differences in accessing top positions persist when a number of key measures of human capital are held constant, they do not tell us what factors account for the remaining gender difference. These are likely to include the range of processes discussed in Section 1.2 above, and will be investigated in the following chapters using data from the CSEES and the in-depth interviews. The models are also limited in that the results cannot establish the direction of causality for some factors. For example, qualifications may have been acquired on appointment to senior positions. Similarly, we do not know what portion of the work tenure was accumulated before and after entry to the senior position, because the survey does not contain information on the length of time an individual has been in their current grade. Furthermore, the CSEES data do not contain information on number of children, breaks in employment or periods spent working part-time, which could provide further insights into the gender difference in outcomes.

### 3.6 CONCLUSIONS

While the majority of employees within the Irish civil service are women, female civil servants are under-represented at the highest ranks of the organisational structure. External recruitment and promotions continue to reproduce this structure. Indeed, although we observe an equalisation of male and female chances in accessing top positions over time, men are still over-represented among new entrants at senior manager positions, and among promoted staff at PO level and above.

This picture changes if we look at the likelihood of getting a high position among those who have applied for it. Information from the TLAC for the last five years shows that women have had an equal or somewhat higher chance of recruitment or promotion to senior management (AS and above) when they applied. This suggests that the gender difference in appointments is not due to a discriminatory promotion process that penalises female applicants, at least in recent years. This finding raises the question of why women are less likely to enter the competitions. One factor is eligibility. The proportion of female applicants is influenced by the characteristics of those in the feeder grade and only 40 per cent of those at PO level are female. This suggests that bottlenecks to promotion may occur further down the occupational hierarchy. The analysis of tenure at different grades suggests that there is a sticky floor for women in SO grades.

Another possible reason that women are less likely to apply is the lack of flexible working arrangements in top positions. The administrative data show that part-

time or shorter working year arrangements are not available in senior managerial positions.

According to the CSEES data, and controlling for relevant characteristics such as education, tenure, and age, men are at least twice as likely as women to occupy positions of PO and above. This analysis could be further enhanced if some additional information was collected in future waves of the survey. Information about respondents' starting grade within the civil service and the year they entered their current position would permit an investigation of the time taken to promotion. Gender differences in terms of length of time to promotion could be due to differences between men and women in their previous working trajectories in terms of career breaks or flexible arrangement, such as work sharing. This information would thus be instrumental in explaining women's disadvantage in accessing top positions. Moreover, the CSEES does not include information about previous applications for promotion, which are a precondition for reaching senior positions within the civil service.

At the same time, knowing whether civil servants have children, as well as the age(s) of their children, would permit further investigation of work–family conflict issues. These might affect the length of time to promotion and motivations for having applied for promotion, or not, in the past.

Having a better understanding of all these processes would allow the development of more focused and effective policies to reduce gender inequality in access to the highest echelons of the Irish civil service.

## CHAPTER 4

### Promotion levers, barriers and perceived promotion opportunities

In this chapter, we draw on evidence from the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey (CSEES) to investigate factors that the literature has identified as being associated with promotion. Firstly, we address various levers that are considered to assist promotion and that fall under the umbrella of human capital theory, namely training, managerial support and assignment of tasks conducive to career progression. Secondly, we address factors that may impede promotion, such as work intensity (overload) and job–skills mismatch. In the final section, we investigate perceptions of promotion opportunity among male and female civil servants. In the case of each of these factors, we consider whether gender differences exist within grade levels, and explore the role of individual and contextual features in accounting for such differences. Contextual factors capture differences across departments and agencies such as the size of the body, the gender composition of its senior positions, and location.

#### 4.1 TRAINING, MANAGERIAL SUPPORT AND SKILL DEVELOPMENT

As discussed in Chapter 3, occupational success – in this case, defined as access to the top positions within the civil service – is influenced by the amount of human capital that individuals possess. Moreover, human capital not only contributes to occupational success here and now, in terms of the position that individuals currently occupy within an organisation, but also shapes the chances and the opportunities of upward mobility within that organisation.

The usual indicator of human capital is taken as the highest level of education achieved in the educational system (see previous chapters for discussion of educational qualifications). Human capital accumulation, however, does not end when individuals leave the educational system, but continues throughout their working career. Individuals, indeed, may come back to the educational system during their working career in order to earn further educational credentials or, most importantly, accumulate human capital on the job.

The main channels through which individuals accumulate human capital are the investments that their organisation makes to support and train them. However, the extent to which employers invest in workers may vary according to the workers' position within the organisation's hierarchy and to the task performed. In this respect, the segregation of women in certain positions/tasks may hinder their chances to accumulate human capital valuable for promotion. In Chapter 2, we saw that men and women are unevenly distributed across the civil service occupational hierarchy, which may have implications for access to supports.

In this chapter, we focus on two channels that increase human capital: training opportunities within the civil service and the support that a civil servant's immediate manager provides. We discuss how these vary by gender and grade. Then we look at gender segregation in more depth, by analysing how tasks are allocated to men and women across grades. The task performed is strongly associated with the chance to accumulate human capital. Gender segregation with respect to task may thus intensify the disadvantaged position of women.

#### 4.1.1 Training opportunities

Training can be considered as one of the main channels to enhance human capital. The extent to which individuals have access to training is thus crucial to understanding their promotion prospects.

In Figure 4.1, we report the average scores for a scale that measures whether civil servants have had access to training. The scale of training opportunities is based on five items:

- I can access the right learning and development opportunities when I need to;
- Learning and development activities completed in the last 12 months helped improve my performance;
- Learning and development activities completed while working for department helping me to develop my career;
- I receive training to keep me up to date with developments in my department; and
- I receive the training that I need to do my job well.

The scale ranges from zero to ten, representing the minimum and maximum values of training respectively. A value of ten represents a case in which the respondent answered 'strongly agree' to all the five questions.<sup>35</sup> Conversely, a value of zero represents those who 'strongly disagree' with all five questions. In order to have a more direct idea of how positively or negatively civil servants feel concerning their training opportunities, Table A4.8 (in the appendix) shows that the share of respondents who agreed or strongly agreed with the five items ranges between 39 and 50 per cent. The same interpretation holds for all the scales presented below.

Concerning training opportunities across gender, the overall scores for men and women are 5.40 and 5.27 respectively. While the difference is small, it is statistically significant. However, gender differences become insignificant when we

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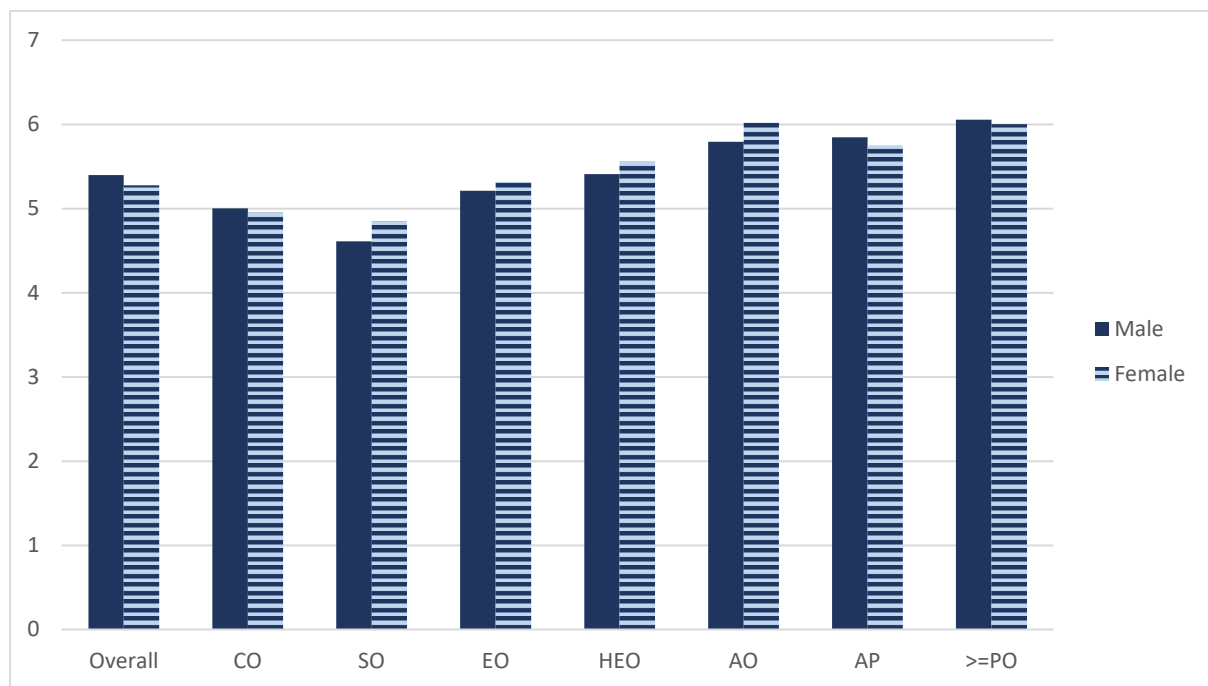
<sup>35</sup> Possible answers were: 'strongly disagree', 'disagree', 'neither agree nor disagree', 'agree' and 'strongly agree'.

take grade into account (Figure 4.1, see Table A4.1 in Appendix 4 for the full model).

Looking at the pattern across grades, the figure clearly shows that training opportunities increase over the occupational hierarchy. Civil servants at Clerical Officer (CO) and Staff Officer (SO) level, for example, report a score of five or lower on a scale of one to ten, while those at the highest levels of the hierarchy report a value of around six.

Finally, considering gender and grade jointly, we see that the overall gender differences in perceived training opportunities are explained by the fact that women are over-represented in lower grades, where opportunities are fewer. While there is no gender gap within grades, the fact that women are over-represented in the lowest grades, with less access to training, has implications for their promotion opportunities.

FIGURE 4.1 TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES SCALE ACROSS GRADE, BY GENDER



Source: Own calculation based on the CSEES.

Note: Mean scores on a scale ranging from zero to ten.

This pattern of increasing training opportunities over grades is also confirmed by multivariate analyses that show no difference between CO and SO, and then a

continuous increase over grades, which results in a gap of 1.25 points between CO and Principal Officer (PO) or above.<sup>36</sup>

This pattern suggests a form of ‘cumulative advantage’, given that those already occupying advantaged positions benefit most from training opportunities. The greater levels of training in the higher grades, where men are over-represented, may lead to the reproduction of gender inequality within the civil service.

#### 4.1.2 Managerial career support

A second factor that enhances human capital relates to the support for skills and career development that managers provide to employees. The scale we use to measure managerial support builds on four items, outlined below.

My immediate manager:

- takes an interest in my career development;
- makes sure I get credit for my achievements;
- gives me helpful feedback to improve my performance; and
- provides assignments that give me the opportunity to develop new skills.

Again, the scale ranges from zero to ten (see Table A4.9 in Appendix 4 for details).

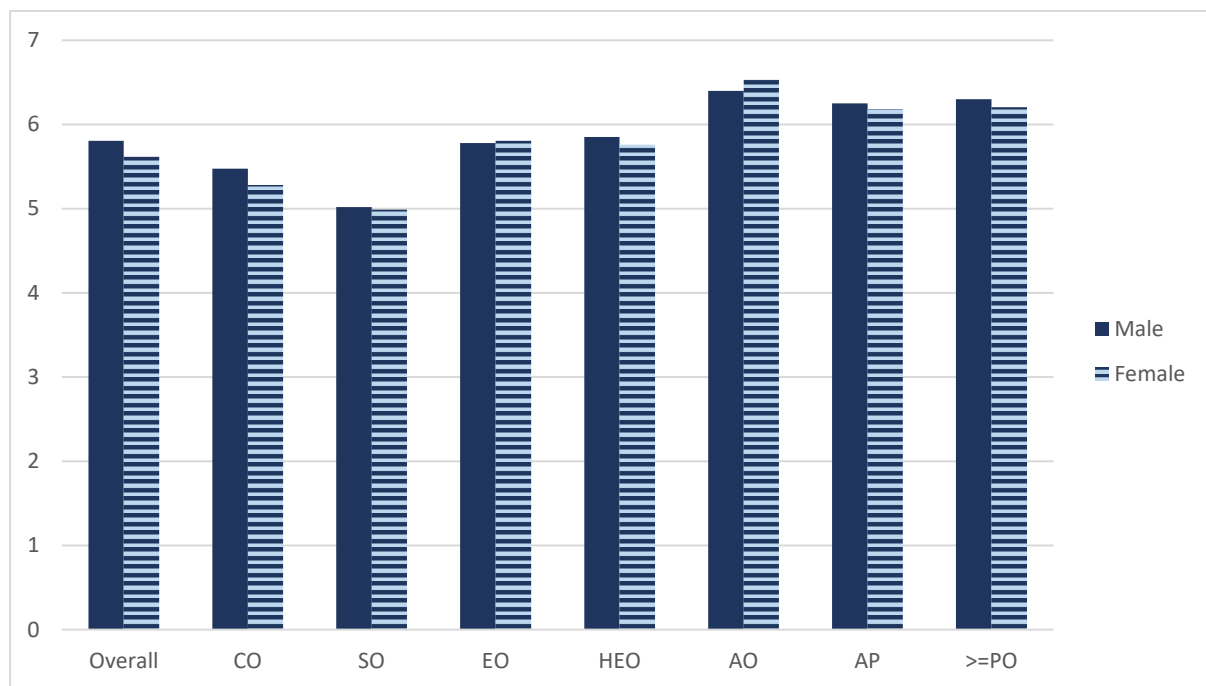
Considering the gender dimension, men report a higher average score of 5.8, compared to 5.6 for women, a gap that is statistically significant. However, once we take into account the grade, using multivariate analysis, the difference disappears (see Table A4.2 in the appendix). The overall gender difference can be attributed to the fact that women are more concentrated in the lower grades, where access to managerial support is less likely.

Concerning grade, the pattern is similar to that observed for training opportunities: the likelihood of receiving managerial support tends to increase over the organisational ladder. The opportunities to develop human capital are thus higher for the highest grades.

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<sup>36</sup> Multivariate analyses are reported in the appendix. Analyses are based on regression models that control for education, tenure, working arrangement, job contract, task, whether based in headquarters, whether based in Dublin or outside, and department.

FIGURE 4.2 MANAGERIAL CAREER SUPPORT SCALE ACROSS GRADE, BY GENDER



Source: Own calculation, based on the CSEES.

Note: Mean scores on a scale ranging from zero to ten.

The pattern estimated via multivariate analyses confirms these grade patterns: we do not find any statistically significant difference between CO and SO, while managerial support continuously increases for the subsequent grades.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, gender differences within grades are not statistically significant. Therefore, within grade, women report receiving as much support as men.

#### 4.1.3 Work tasks

Literature has shown that career development opportunities can also depend on the specific task in which employees are involved. This is because some tasks render employees more visible to senior managers, require continuing training or are seen to have a higher value within the organisation.

In Table 4.1, we investigate whether male and female employees within the same grade perform the same tasks. The results show a high degree of association between the grades that individuals occupy and the task performed. Civil servants at Administrative Officer (AO) level or above are more likely to perform tasks focused on policy, programme implementation and corporate support. At levels below AO, civil servants are mainly involved in service delivery. Roles that are likely

<sup>37</sup> Multivariate results are reported in the appendix. Control variables are the same as for models of training opportunities.



to involve high profile activities and better opportunities are thus more common within the higher grades.

TABLE 4.1 DISTRIBUTION OF TASKS ACROSS GRADES, BY GENDER (COLUMN %)

Men	CO	SO	EO	HEO	AO	AP	PO	AS and above
<b>Policy</b>	4.1	2.3	5.8	9.3	37.1	23.1	31.2	50.4
<b>Programme implementation</b>	3.3	3.98	6.1	10.9	8.2	14.8	13.6	9.9
<b>Corporate support</b>	14.4	10.6	21.2	22.9	11.3	16.7	15.5	10.8
<b>Service delivery</b>	36.3	43.9	33.4	29.3	18.0	25.0	21.0	16.2
<b>Direct service to the public</b>	24.9	29.5	19.4	17.5	7.2	7.6	9.2	2.7
<b>Other</b>	17.0	9.8	14.1	10.0	18.0	12.9	9.5	9.9
<b>Total</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Women	CO	SO	EO	HEO	AO	AP	PO	AS and above
<b>Policy</b>	3.2	3.1	7.2	11.5	38.0	26.4	32.3	27.5
<b>Programme implementation</b>	2.6	3.1	5.0	7.6	6.8	12.3	10.9	7.5
<b>Corporate support</b>	10.4	14.3	19.2	17.0	12.5	16.5	9.8	17.5
<b>Service delivery</b>	37.5	45.5	31.6	30.9	15.1	23.3	24.1	22.5
<b>Direct service to the public</b>	24.0	22.5	17.8	18.6	9.4	8.2	14.7	5.0
<b>Other</b>	22.2	11.3	19.2	14.4	18.2	13.5	8.3	20.0
<b>Total</b>	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0

Source: Own calculation, based on the CSEES.

Note: The number of male and female respondents at *Assistant Secretary (AS)* level or above are 111 and 40 respectively.

Concerning patterns by gender, the largest differences are visible at PO level and above. At PO level, women (39 per cent) are more likely to be involved in service delivery and frontline services than men (30 per cent). This may be related to the departments in which they are located. At the level of AS and above, gender differences are striking: 50 per cent of men are involved in policy tasks, compared with 27.5 per cent of women. In contrast, tasks performed by men and women are relatively similar at the bottom of the occupational ladder (i.e. CO level).

These results confirm previous research on the Irish civil service and public sector, which found women to be more likely to be concentrated on the operational side and less likely to occupy roles that involve high profile activities. This is true irrespective of their under-representation, at the top positions of the civil service ladder.

## 4.2 WORK INTENSITY

Alongside factors that may help civil servants to move up the occupational ladder, other factors may hinder these movements. One is work intensity, namely the extent to which a job is perceived as demanding in terms of amount of work and time involved.

One could expect work intensity to be negatively associated with perception of promotion opportunities and with the likelihood of applying for training or a promotion. Indeed, feeling high work pressure at their current position is likely to discourage civil servants from taking steps towards higher-level positions, where an even higher workload might be expected.

The aim here is to understand whether there are differences between men and women in the perception of work demand and if this may thus work as a barrier for female promotion to senior management positions.

The measure of work intensity that we use is based on a five-item scale covering aspects such as whether the amount of work is commensurate with the working time and if this permits employees to do the work well:

- It often seems like I have too much work for one person to do;
- There is too much work to do everything well;
- I never seem to have enough time to get everything done in my job;
- The amount of work I'm asked to do is fair; and
- I am given enough time to do what is expected of me in my job.

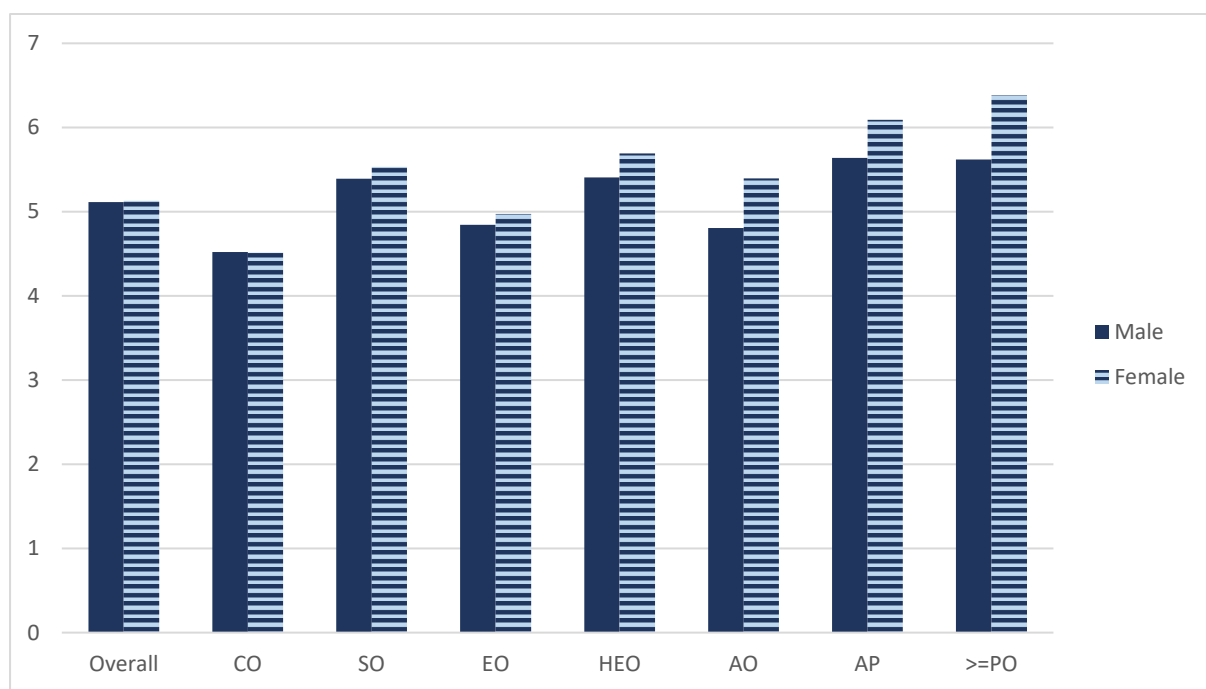
Here, again, the scale ranges from zero to ten, where ten represents the maximum level of work intensity (see Table A4.10 in Appendix 4 for details).

First of all, Figure 4.3 shows that the overall gender difference in work intensity is not statistically significant, with men reporting an average score of 5.11 and women one of 5.13.

Figure 4.3 also shows that work intensity increases over the occupational ladder. Differences in work intensity are particularly striking when comparing the two extremes of the ladder. Overall, at the CO level we observe an average score of work intensity of about 4.5 points, while at the very top (PO and above), we observe one of about six points. This shows that occupying the highest positions comes with the price of a higher demand for effort and time.

Multivariate analyses confirm these descriptive patterns. Considering gender differences within grades, they also show that the gap in work intensity between men and women increases over the occupational ladder, although only at Assistant Principal (AP) level and above are the differences statistically significant.

FIGURE 4.3 WORK INTENSITY SCALE ACROSS GRADE, BY GENDER



Source: Own calculation, based on the CSEES.

Note: Mean scores on a scale ranging from zero to ten.

As previous research also suggests, this could be explained by the fact that especially high positions tend to be characterised by heavy workload and a long working hours culture, which, in turn, may create tensions between work and family life (Valiulis *et al.*, 2008; see Chapter 1). Indeed, as Gallie and Russell (2009) found, studying male and female employees in couple households, longer working hours are associated with higher work–family conflict for both men and women. Studies have also found a clear association between work intensity/pressure and work–family conflict (Gallie and Russell, 2009; McGinnity and Russell, 2015).

The fact that women tend to report higher work intensity than men across all grades, and especially in the highest grades, adds another brick to the wall that obstructs women from reaching the top positions of the civil service hierarchy.

Although we cannot directly test whether gender differences in perceived work intensity are associated with work–family conflict, previous research suggests that helping women to balance work and family life might be a key factor in promoting their representation at the top positions of the civil service.

### 4.3 JOB–SKILLS MISMATCH

The concept of job–skills (mis)match refers to the relationship between the skills or qualification that a worker possesses, and the skills or qualification that are required to perform the job. In cases where job and skills are not matched, two

scenarios are possible: the worker may either possess more skills than the job requires, in which case they are considered to be ‘over-skilled’; or they may possess fewer skills than the job requires, in which case they are said to be ‘under-skilled’.<sup>38</sup> In the context of career advancement, we would expect that those who feel over-skilled for their current job would be more likely to apply for promotion; we therefore focus on measures that capture over-skilling.

The scale we use is based on three items:

- I feel that my work utilises my full abilities;
- My job gives me a chance to do the things I feel I do best; and
- I feel that my job and I are well matched.

See Table A4.11 in Appendix 4 for details of scale construction.

The items capture whether a civil servant’s abilities and their job are well matched and whether they have the opportunity to fully exploit their skills at work. The wording of the items allows us to interpret the scale as a proxy of ‘over-skilling’, whereby they possess more skills than those needed to perform their current job. Figure 4.4 reports average scores of over-skilling across gender, grade and level of education.<sup>39</sup>

We first investigate whether there are gender differences in the reported levels of over-skilling. There is no statistically significant difference in the overall scores of men and women, with men scoring 4.3 and women 4.2. Multivariate analysis shows that when individual and job characteristics are controlled for, women report significantly lower levels of mismatch compared to men (of 0.38 points). These gender differences can also be seen in Figure 4.5, where grade and education are held constant (Figure 4.5).

Concerning education, we observe that the higher the level of education, the higher the reported mismatch. Differences in over-skilling scores between levels of education are statistically significant and range from 3.8 for those with a Leaving Certificate or lower educational level, to 4.6 for those with a degree.

Average scores decrease over the occupational hierarchy, indicating that individuals occupying low-skilled positions report higher levels of over-skilling. Overall, differences between grades are statistically significant, with the exception of the differences between SO and Executive Officer (EO), and Higher Executive Officer (HEO) and AO. Finally, if we compare the two extremes of the hierarchy, we

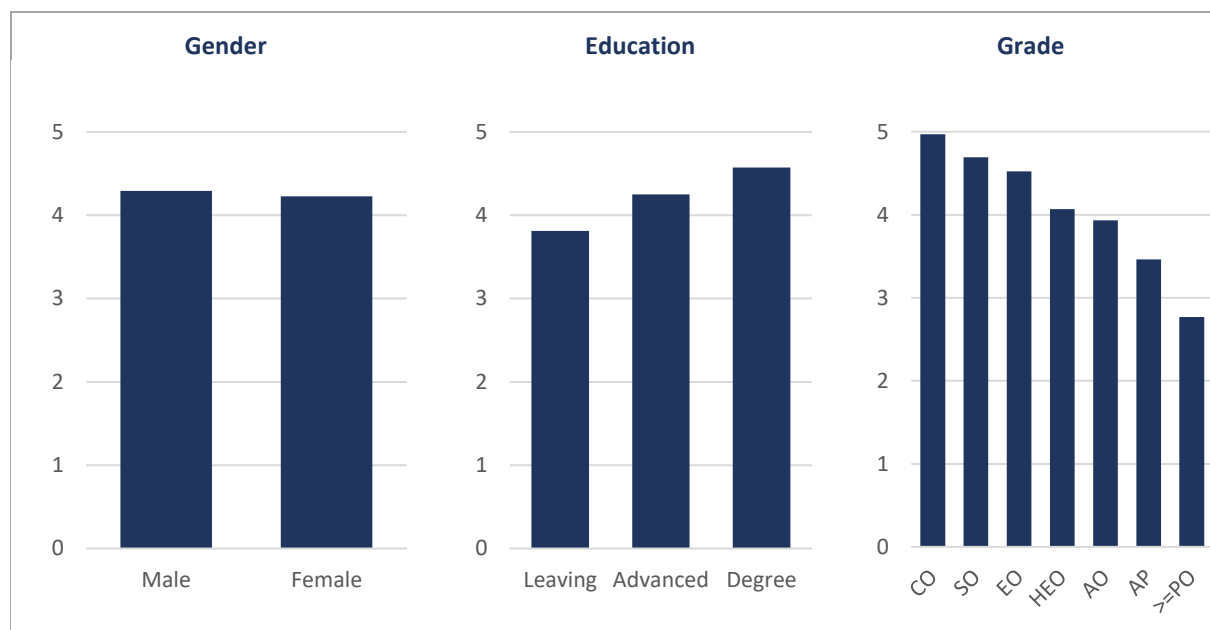
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<sup>38</sup> The CSEES does not include objective information on an individual’s skills or on those skills required by the job. However, the survey includes a number of questions that allow us to capture perception about job–skills match.

<sup>39</sup> Scores reported for grades are net of the effect of education, and vice versa.

observe a difference of 2.2 points on the ten-point scale (five at CO level and 2.8 at PO and above).

FIGURE 4.4 JOB OVER-SKILL SCALE ACROSS GENDER, EDUCATION AND GRADE



*Source:* Own calculation, based on the CSEES.  
*Note:* Mean scores on a scale ranging from zero to ten.

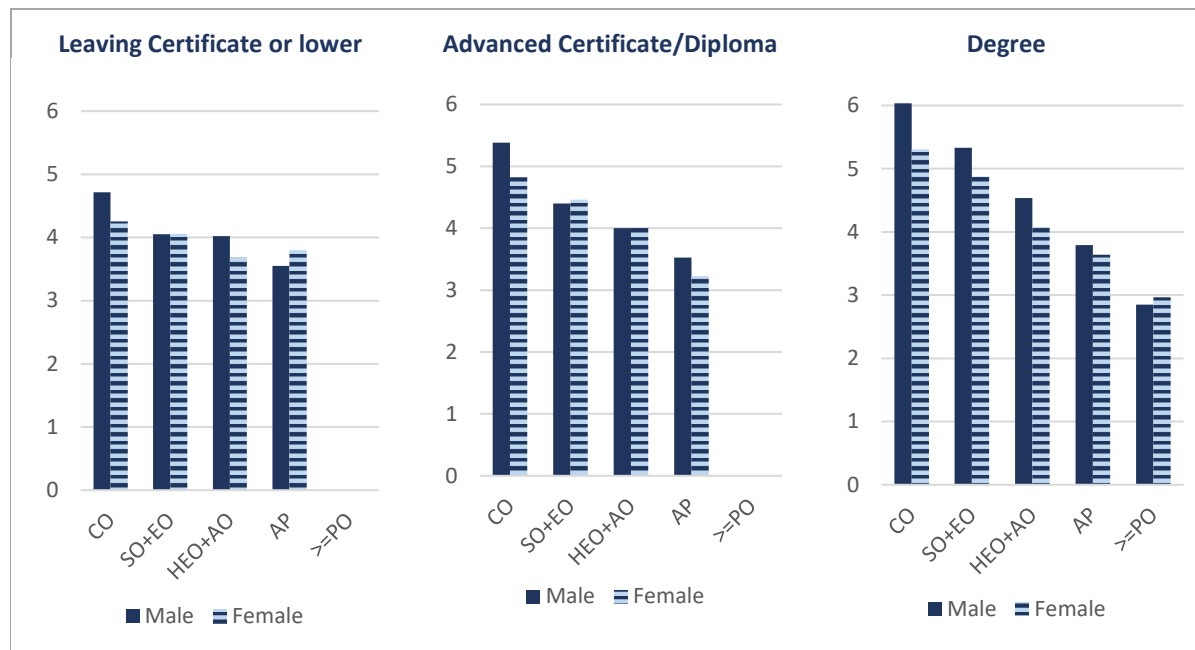
If we look at grade and education jointly, interesting patterns emerge (Figure 4.5).<sup>40</sup> We find the highest level of mismatch among civil servants who have a degree but who occupy the lowest position of the hierarchy. The same pattern is found for men and women.

The nature of the relationship between education, grades and perceived mismatch supports the validity of our measure of mismatch: the scale seems to measure what we wanted it to measure: over-skilling.<sup>41</sup>

<sup>40</sup> Due to a small number of cases when disaggregating by gender, grade, and education, we collapsed SO with EO and HEO with AO. For the same reason, results for individuals at the PO level and above with an educational level lower than degree are not shown.

<sup>41</sup> Results reported in Figure 4.6 can be considered as a proof of 'criterion validity', i.e. the scale is associated with outcomes that are known to be associated with it in the literature.

FIGURE 4.5 JOB OVER-SKILL SCALE ACROSS GRADE, BY EDUCATION AND GENDER



Source: Own calculation, based on the CSEES.  
 Note: Mean scores on a scale ranging from zero to ten.

Within education and grade, gender differences are statistically significant at CO level for all levels of education, as well as at SO+EO and HEO+AO levels for those holding a degree.

The higher levels of mismatch that we observe for men in some grades might be explained by higher levels of self-confidence among men. Unfortunately, the CSEES data do not permit us to test this hypothesis, but literature suggests many reasons why one could expect higher levels of self-confidence among men compared to women.<sup>42</sup> If this is the case, highly self-confident individuals may be more likely to overestimate or less likely to underestimate their skills, thus explaining the higher scores of over-skilling among men. This might also have particular implications for civil servants' likelihood of applying for promotions, with those with high levels of self-confidence more likely to apply.

#### 4.4 PERCEIVED PROMOTION OPPORTUNITIES

The CSEES does not contain direct information on respondents' experiences of promotion; however, there are a number of questions that address perceptions of promotion opportunities and the fairness of the promotion process. These perceptions are likely to be coloured by individuals' previous experiences of

<sup>42</sup> These reasons include socialisation about gender roles, and the gender structure of an organisation where hierarchies characterised by higher shares of men in top positions – such as in the case of the Irish civil service – favour the development of self-confidence among men, while hindering it among women (Kanter, 1977; Fagenson, 1990).

promotion and to be a predictor of willingness to apply for future promotion, though we cannot test this empirically. Here, we explore the extent to which perceived promotion opportunities differ between women and men within grades and consider how they are affected by the dimensions of work experience explored in the preceding sections.<sup>43</sup>

The four items used to develop the scale are:

- I believe that if I perform well I will have the opportunity to be promoted;
- I feel I have all the opportunities I need for promotion;
- There are opportunities for me to develop my career in my department; and
- My Department has a clear and fair promotion process.

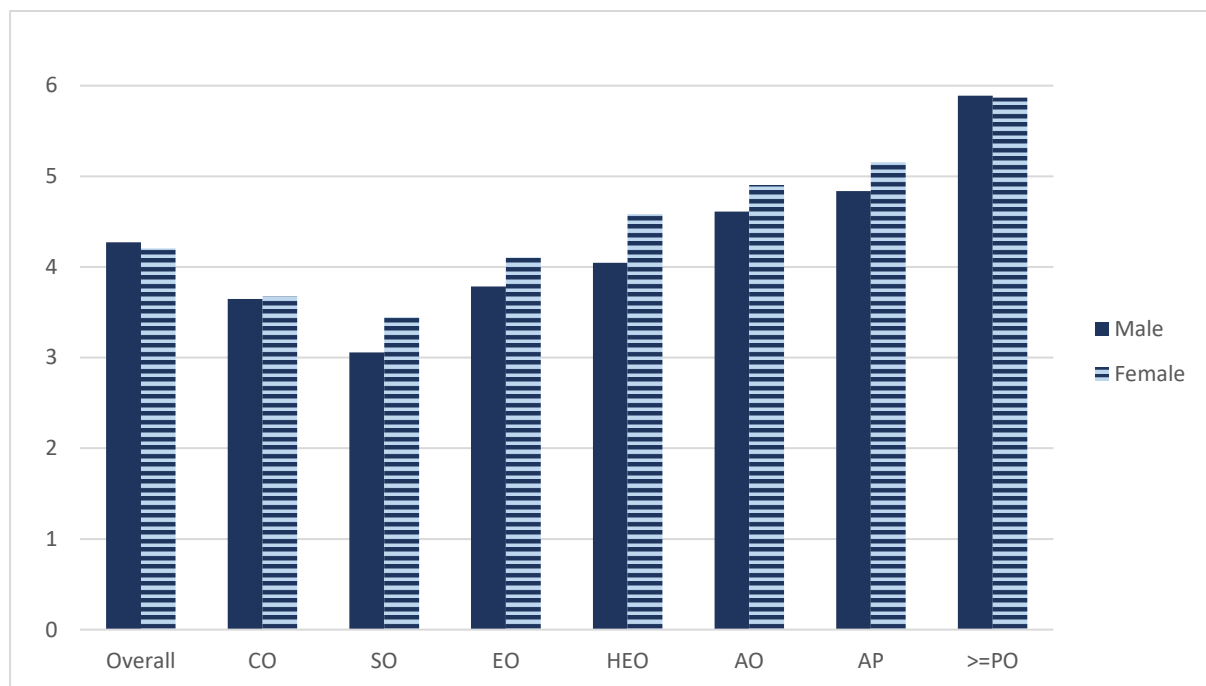
The items are highly correlated and have a scale alpha of .88. The measure is rescaled to run from zero to ten (see Table A4.12 in Appendix 4 for details). Overall, civil servants report rather negative perceptions of promotion opportunities. The level of agreement with the four items ranges between 23 and 39 per cent. In particular, less than one in four respondents agree with the statement that the department has clear and fair promotion opportunities.

Perceived promotion opportunities rise with grade level, with the exception that the CO group has a higher score than the SO group (see Figure 4.6). The mean response only reaches the positive end of the scale (over five) for those at PO level and above. These differences by grade do not reflect the grade ratios presented in Chapter 2, where it was shown that the grades with the most favourable balance between the number of positions in the grade above relative to the grade below occur for those at EO level and HEO/AO level. These patterns of increasing perceived opportunities over the ladder suggest the influence of positive past experience and other personal characteristics, the latter of which will be tested below.

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<sup>43</sup> In many other international public or civil service employee engagement surveys, there are no or few specific items relating to promotion. Item three above in the Irish survey has been used in the UK, Welsh and Scottish civil service employee surveys. In Canada, public servants are asked to indicate their level of agreement with the following statement: 'I believe I have opportunities for promotion within my department or agency, given my education, skills and experience.' In the US, federal employees are asked, 'How satisfied are you with your opportunity to get a better job in your organization?' and whether they agree that 'Promotions in my work unit are based on merit'.

FIGURE 4.6 PERCEIVED PROMOTION OPPORTUNITIES ACROSS GRADE, BY GENDER



Source: Own calculation, based on the CSEES.  
 Note: Mean scores on a scale ranging from zero to ten.

Overall, there is no difference in the perceived promotion opportunities of women and men, with a mean score of around 4.2 in both cases. However, within grades, differences emerge (see Figure 4.6). From SO to AP, women judge promotion opportunities more favourably than men. At the remaining grades, there is no substantial difference between men and women. Statistical models show that the more positive attitudes to promotion opportunities among women in the HEO, EO and AP grades observed in the graph become non-significant for all grades except HEO when length of time in the civil service is controlled.<sup>44</sup> This suggests that when men and women have been employed for the same period of time and are at the same grade, they share the same view of promotion prospects. We saw in Chapter 3 that at HEO, AP and PO grades and above, women on average had a shorter length of tenure in the civil service compared to men. It is likely that this past experience led to a more positive assessments of promotion prospects among women. Overall, controlling for grade, those with shorter tenures in the civil service, especially those recruited in the preceding five years, were more positive about their promotion prospects. Age and length of service are highly correlated so we include only length of service in the model. The age effects follow a similar pattern to tenure (not shown). Those in the youngest age category, aged under 30

<sup>44</sup> The gender by grade interactions regain significance when controls for work intensity and training are controlled (see Table A4.6 in Appendix 4), but there is a high degree of correlation between grade and both intensity and training so that the significance levels are interactions that are likely to become unstable.



years, have the highest scores but there is little variation among those in the older age groups.

Perceived promotion opportunities also differ significantly by education level. Controlling for grade level, gender and years of experience in the civil service, those with higher qualifications have more negative views of promotion prospect than those with low qualifications, perhaps reflecting a different view of external possibilities outside the civil service. The education effect only emerges when length of tenure has been controlled, which suggests that those with higher qualifications may expect more rapid promotion and their attitudes are negatively affected when this does not occur.

We next test the relationship between perceived promotion prospects and a number of factors investigated above – job tasks, managerial support, and training and skills match. At specific grade levels, namely HEO and PO, we found gender differences in the job tasks of women and men. Here, we investigate whether this matters for promotion opportunities. Holding grade and other characteristics constant, civil servants who work mainly on ‘service delivery’ or ‘direct service to the public’ have significantly more negative views of promotion opportunities than those involved in ‘policy’. Those in the ‘other’ task group also have lower scores. Once additional features of work are controlled, such as training and skills match, ‘corporate service’ tasks are also associated with more negative views of promotion prospects.

In the case of training opportunities and managerial support, no differences were found between men and women within grades; therefore, they are unlikely to influence the relationship between gender and perceived promotion opportunities. Overall, there is a strong positive relationship between training and promotion opportunities. Finally, those who report higher levels of work intensity and who feel that their current job does not match their skills have a more negative perception of promotion opportunities.

In the following section, we summarise how part-time working is associated with the range of outcomes investigated: human capital accumulation (training, managerial support, tasks); barriers (skills mismatch, job intensity); and promotion prospects. In the final section, we consider the effects of organisational context on the range of outcomes.

#### **4.5 PART-TIME WORKING AND OCCUPATIONAL OUTCOMES**

We saw in Chapter 3 that part-time working in the civil service is highly gendered, with women much more likely to be employed in part-time jobs.<sup>45</sup> Moreover, part-

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<sup>45</sup> In the CSEES, part-time work is defined as less than 37 hours per week.

time employment strongly varies across grades and between departments (see Figures 3.6 and 3.7 in that chapter).

The literature would lead us to expect part-time hours to be associated with several occupational outcomes, including training opportunities, skills mismatch, level of work intensity, task allocation and promotion prospects (see Chapter 1, Warne *et al.*, 1992; Connolly and Gregory, 2008; and Manning and Petrongolo, 2008).

Multivariate analyses show no significant role of part-time work for training opportunities or for managerial support (see models in Tables A4.1 and A4.2 in Appendix 4). Furthermore, we find no statistically significant difference in the tasks of part-time and full-time employees; this is true for both men and women (see Table A4.3 in Appendix 4). In contrast, those on temporary contracts are more likely to be involved in frontline service delivery.

Analyses do show interesting results for the other outcomes. Being employed in a part-time job substantially increases perceived job–skills mismatch (over-skilling); this is also the case controlling for grade, education and all the other relevant characteristics (see models in Table A4.5 in Appendix 4).

Work intensity decreases with part-time work (see models in Table A4.4 in Appendix 4). However, the role of part-time work is linked to the environment in which civil servants are employed. Indeed, the effect of part-time status on work intensity vanishes when we further control for department. This seems to signal that different environments offer part-time workers different sets of opportunities and constraints. Unfortunately, the CSEES data do not permit us to go into greater depth on this matter.

Previous research in the public sector in the US (DiPrete and Soule, 1988) found that those on part-time contracts are less likely to achieve promotion. However, we find that part-time employees have a more favourable perception of promotion opportunities, all else being equal (see models in Table A4.6 in Appendix 4). Given the absence of civil servants working part-time at the highest levels (AS, SEC) and the small proportion in grades from AO to PO (<7 per cent), it appears that this result may not reflect objective opportunities.<sup>46</sup> In the case of job satisfaction research (Clarke *et al.*, 1996; Booth and van Ours, 2008), higher levels of job satisfaction among part-time workers for objectively poorer conditions has been interpreted as an indication of adaptive preferences, such as lowering expectations, or the application of alternative comparative reference groups (such

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<sup>46</sup> There is no significant interaction by grade, which implies that this pattern persists at all grade levels.

as comparing one's opportunities to those of women in other organisations). These processes may also operate in relation to perception of promotion opportunities.

In line with expectations, those on temporary contracts feel they have poorer promotion prospects than those in permanent positions.

#### **4.6 ORGANISATIONAL CONTEXT AND OUTCOMES**

Finally, we consider whether the characteristics of departments influence factors that help or hinder promotion or that are associated with perceived promotion prospects (see Section 2.1.1 and Table 2.1 for department categorisation). Do features of the organisation such as location, size or proportion of females at senior level have an independent influence on these outcomes?

Location refers to whether civil servants work in the headquarters or in a peripheral office, and to the region in which the office is situated – Dublin or outside. Multivariate analyses reveal that employment in headquarters plays a greater role than region – this might be due to the association between the two location measures, where headquarters are more likely to be placed in Dublin than outside. Overall, working in the headquarters seems to have many positive features. In fact, it is associated with greater access to training and managerial support. This could be attributed to the fact that those employed in the headquarters enjoy more visibility to senior managers.

The relationship between location in headquarters and work intensity is dependent on grade level. For civil servants at PO level and above, location in headquarters is associated with higher work intensity. For those at EO level and below, we find work intensity to be lower in headquarters, while there is no significant differences in the effect of headquarters for those in the middle of the occupational ladder. Being employed in the headquarters is associated with higher levels of perceived job–skills mismatch, although this becomes non-significant when controlling for whether the agency is based in Dublin or outside.

Turning to the perception of promotion opportunities, we observe no significant relationship for headquarters and find that those based in Dublin have less favourable views than those outside Dublin (see models 8 and 9 in Table A4.6 in Appendix 4). Further analyses (not presented but available from the authors) have found a positive association between working in Dublin and perception of promotion opportunities overall. This positive association, however, disappears when grade and gender are controlled and becomes negative when controlling for other characteristics, including managerial support. Both grade and managerial support are positively associated with working in Dublin and with promotion opportunities.

#### 4.6.1 Female share of managerial positions

The share of women at the higher management levels is negatively associated with training and managerial support. Therefore a larger share of women in the top positions reduces the chances of receiving training and managerial support. Moreover, a higher share of female managers is associated with greater job–skills mismatch.

Interestingly, these effects do not vary between men and women, as we might expect. Namely, women are neither better sheltered against negative outcomes nor better supported towards positive outcomes in situations where women hold a more substantial share of managerial positions.

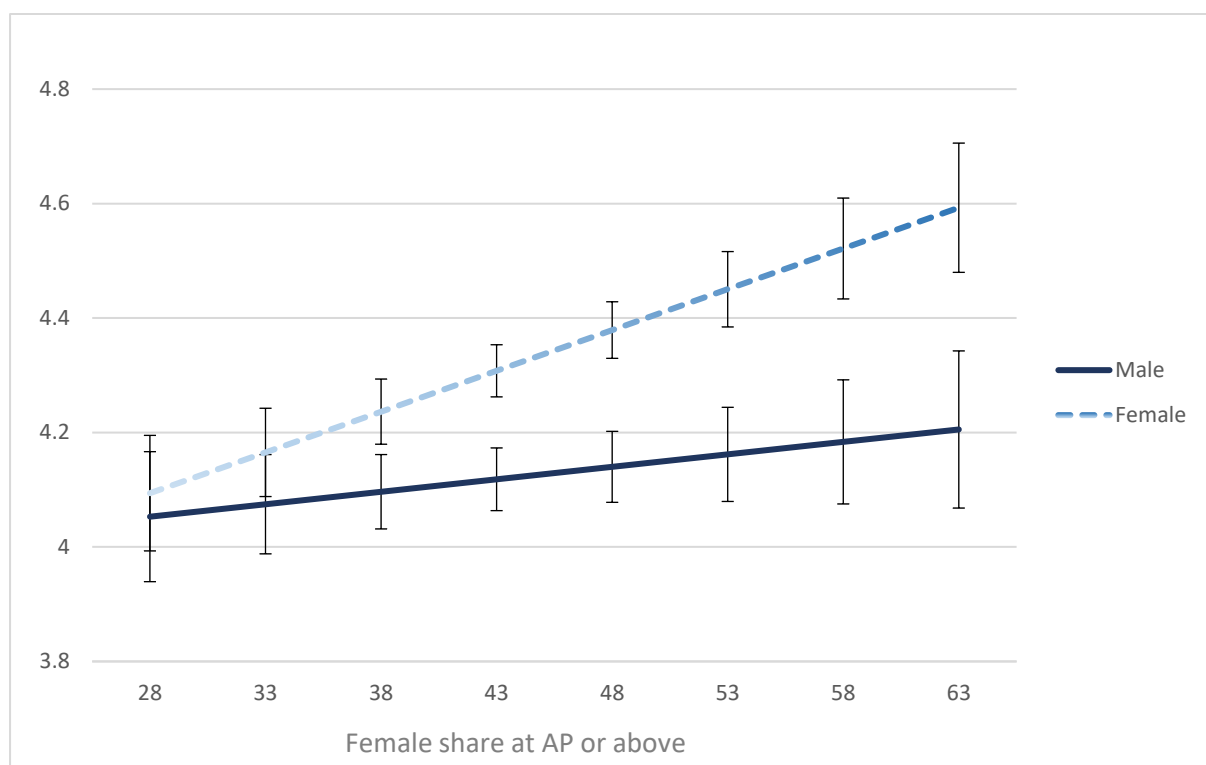
This result, however, does not necessarily contradict Kanter (1997), who claims that the capacity of women at high level to form alliances and exert pressure to favour other women is bounded by a ‘threshold effect’, where the threshold she identified is at 35 per cent. The share of women at AP level or above across the different civil service departments and agencies does not fall below 35 per cent and therefore all are above the proposed threshold where same-sex alliances and sex-based influence are most likely.<sup>47</sup>

The proportion of women at senior level (AP and above) within a department/agency is positively related to perceived promotion prospects for women. The effect is small but statistically significant. While the direction of the relationship is the same for men, the effect is insignificant (see Figure 4.7). The results suggest that increasing female representation at higher organisational levels may lead to a virtuous circle, encouraging more women to apply for promotion.

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<sup>47</sup> Cohen *et al.* (1998) found a U-shaped relationship between women being hired or promoted and the proportion of women employed above the level of that job, in line with Kanter’s predictions, but found a linear relationship for the proportion of women at that job level, i.e. a higher proportion of women increased chances, with no threshold effect.

FIGURE 4.7 PERCEIVED PROMOTION OPPORTUNITIES, BY FEMALE SHARE AT SENIOR LEVEL AND GENDER



Source: Own calculation, based on the CSEES.

Note: Estimates are based on Model 11 in Table A4.7 in the appendix. Scores range from zero to ten.

#### 4.6.2 Organisational size

Finally, we find the size of an organisation to be associated with a number of outcomes (see Table A4.7 in Appendix 4). Organisation size has an inverted U-shaped association with training opportunities and managerial support. Namely, training and support increase with the size of the agency and then decrease after a certain threshold. An explanation of this pattern could be that large agencies are more likely to provide training to their employees. However, in very large organisations, employees also have to compete to access these resources and may find it more difficult to be visible to senior managers who are gatekeepers to training and support.

Organisation size is negatively associated with work intensity: the larger the organisation, the lower the perceived levels of work intensity, perhaps because in smaller agencies and departments, staff have fewer colleagues to share the workload and are more likely to have multiple responsibilities. We find that those located in departments or agencies with fewer than 100 employees have more negative views of promotion opportunities; however, above this threshold organisational size does not have any impact. Larger organisations are also associated with a higher level of over-skilling.

While a larger department should imply greater opportunities for advancement and for skill-use, this is only the case for within-department promotion. Larger

departments are also likely to mean greater competition for positions and resources.

Overall, organisational characteristics examined account for part of the variation in outcomes across the departments. However, differences between departments continue to exist even when controlling for those organisational features (models not shown). This suggests that departments are also different in other relevant aspects such as the organisational culture, climate and norms that shape different individuals' subjective experiences across departments or in structural characteristics that are not measured in the survey.

#### **4.7 DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSIONS**

The CSEES does not collect direct information on respondents' experience of promotion or of their plans to apply for promotion in the future. Nevertheless, the data contain a range of measures that the literature has identified as being important for career advancement, as well as information on perceptions of promotion prospects.

Experiences and attitudes are strongly associated with respondents' current position within the civil service hierarchy. The SO grade appears to be something of a cul-de-sac. SOs have significantly longer tenure in the civil service and have a higher average age than those in the grades above, which suggests that workers become stuck at this grade. Those at SO grade report the lowest level of training opportunities, managerial support and promotion opportunities. At the same time, they report significantly higher levels of work intensity than those in the adjacent grades of CO and EO. As this grade is predominantly occupied by women, it appears to represent a blockage in the pipeline to higher-level positions among female civil servants.

Similarly, while there are no gender differences in the outcomes measured among men and women at CO level, the over-representation of women at this grade means that they are more exposed to the lower levels of managerial support, training opportunities and promotion opportunities. Higher levels of skills mismatch were reported at this grade level.

Those already at higher grades in the civil service report the highest access to training opportunities, promotion opportunities and managerial support. This may be a case of cumulative advantage whereby a 'favorable relative position becomes a resource that produces further relative gains' (DiPrete and Eirich, 2006).

Within grades, men and women reported the same level of managerial support, and the same access to training opportunities. While this seems to suggest that women do not experience discrimination from managers, the results should be

interpreted with caution. The scales are subjective measures of perceived support and opportunities, rather than objective measures, for example, of the number of training days received. Therefore, positive/optimistic or negative/pessimistic attitudes among respondents may lead to an over-estimation or underestimation of their access to support and/or training opportunities.

While the results show that there are many similarities in the experiences of men and women at the same grade level, some within-grade gender differences were found. The most consistent gap was observed for work intensity: within each grade, women were more likely to report greater pressure than men and the gap was widest in the most senior positions. The CSEES data do not allow us to explore the mechanism behind this finding, though a number of factors could be at play, including: less flexibility to meet demands through extending work hours because of outside commitments; gender differences in conscientiousness; and differential demands arising, for example, from greater involvement in service delivery roles where demand is externally driven. The qualitative data in the following chapters provide further insight into these issues. Whatever the cause of high work intensity, we find it is associated with poorer perceptions of promotion prospects, suggesting it is a barrier to advancement.

Within grade, and holding education constant, men were more likely to report that they were over-skilled for their current position. The over-representation of men at the higher grades of the civil service compared to women with the same level of experience and education (as seen in Chapter 3) would lead us to expect the opposite – that more women would feel over-skilled. The observed results may be due to a confidence gap between the genders.

Additionally, some differences were observed in the tasks performed by women and men at the same grade level. At PO level, women are less likely to be involved in policy, corporate support and programme implementation, and more likely to be involved in routine, operational tasks such as service delivery and frontline services. Since ‘policy’ is the area most associated with senior positions in the civil service, men’s greater access to such work is likely to be an advantage in promotion competitions.

The final within-grade gender difference ran contrary to our expectations – female HEOs, EOs and APs had a more positive view of their promotion prospects than their male colleagues at the same grade. When this was investigated further, we found that it was accounted for by the shorter tenure of women at these grades, suggesting they had advanced faster than men to that point (see also administrative statistics in Chapter 3). These results may reflect previous positive experience as much as future expectations. They could also reflect the positive impact on perceptions of recent efforts to promote gender balance at these grades and above.

Part-time work does not have as negative an influence on working conditions as expected. This may indicate that the penalty for part-time work is generally weaker in the civil service than in private sector employment.<sup>48</sup> However, we should be cautious in our conclusions, for a number of reasons. Firstly, the measure included in the survey includes all those working fewer than 37 hours per week. This is a higher than usual threshold for 'part-time' work. It is possible that those who work close to full-time hours do not experience the same penalties as those working much shorter hours. Future waves of the CSEES should consider including a measure of usual weekly working hours, rather than this dichotomous distinction. Secondly, the relatively positive responses of part-time workers may reflect the phenomenon of adjusted preferences. Unfortunately, we have no objective measure of the promotion chance of part-time workers in the civil service, as the administrative data do not contain information on previous part-time employment; in addition, the data on starting and current grade are not broken down by part-time work (though the latter may be possible on the system).

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<sup>48</sup> As noted earlier, the part-time penalty is not universal, at least in terms of pay and occupation (see Chapter 1).



## CHAPTER 5

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### Experiences of the promotion process in the civil service

Chapters 3 and 4 have looked at the extent to which women are represented across different grades of the civil service, the patterns of recent promotions by gender and the factors influencing perceived promotion opportunities. This chapter and Chapter 6 examine experiences of the promotion process and the potential barriers to applying for, and securing, promotion. The analyses are based on new qualitative research, involving interviews with 50 civil servants across four departments about their own work histories, supplemented by insights gleaned from interviews with 11 staff working in human resources roles within the civil service. The chapter places these experiences within the context of the career development of staff. As noted in Chapter 2, and in line with a range of recent qualitative research studies (see for example, McCoy *et al.*, 2014; McCoy *et al.*, 2016), the sample was selected from four departments, which differed in profile. The dimensions taken into account included: proportion of women in the department as a whole; proportion of women in senior grades; size of the department; proportion of staff working outside head office; and perceived promotion opportunities. The case study departments are not intended to be in any way representative of the full civil service, but in selecting departments of differing characteristics and profile, the study aims to understand experiences and attitudes across a diversity of contexts.

The early sections of this chapter examine motivations for joining the civil service, before exploring induction and access to education and training. The chapter then explores interviewee motivation for applying for promotion and their perceptions of the promotion procedure. The final sections of the chapter look at views on the factors facilitating promotion success and the responses of interviewees to lack of success. Throughout the chapter, quotes from interviewees are used to illustrate the main themes emerging from the study. They are labelled in terms of gender and current grade, with grades grouped to distinguish between those on Higher Executive Officer (HEO)/Assistant Principal (AP) level and those in Principal Officer (PO)/Assistant Secretary (AS) positions.

#### 5.1 RECRUITMENT TO THE CIVIL SERVICE

Most of those interviewed joined the civil service as school leavers or new graduates and were recruited as Clerical Assistants, Clerical Officers (CO), Executive Officers (EO) or Administrative Officers (AO). For most, both women and men, this was not a systematically thought-through process, with the decision being in many ways taken for granted, given that civil service posts were seen as ‘good jobs’.

*Quite a lot of people, certainly of my generation, you know, we didn't all say that was our career ambition; we landed in it. (Male PO/AS)*

*I mean you applied for everything leaving school. I think just everyone was sent off to apply for the civil service. (Female HEO/AP)*

In several instances, people were prompted by family or friends to apply.

*I was left school and my father was a civil servant at the time, so he was encouraging me to apply for a variety of public sector so the civil service just happened to be one of them. (Male HEO/AP)*

*It was opportunistic. I was studying at the time ... and someone I knew was doing the exams and I went along and did them too. ... it wasn't thought through. (Female HEO/AP)*

One respondent described her decision to apply for the civil service in the context of the lack of alternative career options for women in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

*It was back in the times when there were very few jobs for women, let's face it. EO [Executive Officer] was always seen as a good job for a girl, one of the few areas where you might make progress. (Female PO/AS)*

However, other respondents did not directly comment on this issue and the civil service seemed to be seen as providing good jobs for both men and women.

This group of entrants directly from school or higher education reported little in-depth knowledge of what public sector employment would be like, except where family members were already civil servants. In other cases, people applied for the job because they had experienced difficulties in obtaining a secure job in their original profession. This group was attracted by the security of employment and the potential for career progression. A smaller number of interviewees entered the civil service as senior managers, having acquired specialist expertise in the private sector. Some of this group saw stable employment as a motivating factor in their decision.

*I think I had done a good bit of travel. I had done a lot of different types of work. I had moved office a few times and I felt I needed a little bit of stability in my life. (Female HEO/AP)*

However, others stressed intrinsic interest in the job.

*I really wanted to kind of work in the policy side. (Male PO/AS)*

In general, few of those interviewed for the study entered the civil service with a very definite career plan. Thus, ambition and career progression must be seen as having been, at least partly, forged by their employment experiences.

## 5.2 EDUCATION AND TRAINING

Chapter 4 has described perceptions of access to education and training among respondents to the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey (CSEES), highlighting more positive perceptions among those in more senior grades. In keeping with these patterns, interviewees, who were all in relatively senior positions (HEO to AS), were generally very positive about the access to education and training they had received throughout their career. All staff had taken specific, short courses designed to enhance their skills in their specific roles. In addition, a large number of staff took degree-level or other courses outside of work time while availing of financial support from the civil service in so doing. Many staff had taken master's degree level qualifications on a sponsored basis on promotion to the AP position. Interviewees varied in their level of engagement with education and training, with some engaging in specific, short courses related to their job while others were proactive in seeking out opportunities for professional development.<sup>49</sup>

No differences by gender or department were evident in interviewees' descriptions of the training opportunities open to them. However, in keeping with the patterns found nationally in the survey data, staff in regional offices tended to be more negative about their opportunities for education and training, feeling that many of the courses were located in Dublin and therefore not accessible to them.

*We don't have access to a lot of the training courses. We don't have the staff to release to let somebody to go. (Female HEO/AP)*

There was also a potential dilemma in taking on specialist training, given that staff were likely to be moved to different functions after a short period of time.

*I wouldn't mind going on and doing more study on [this area] but then I think what's the point if I'm not going to be allowed stay here. (Female PO/AS)*

Senior managers reported some constraints in scheduling ongoing professional development, given their workload and the difficulties in being absent from the office for fixed periods of time.

Views differed on the importance of educational qualifications in the promotion process, with some considering that there was now an expectation that all those going for AP or higher grades would be graduates.

*I think there's probably more a push towards people with maybe third-level qualifications. (Female PO/AS)*

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<sup>49</sup> The lack of specific detail in this section on the type of courses taken reflects the risk of identifying interviewees due to their very specific training experiences.

Others emphasised the importance of education and training in enhancing the skills and competencies of staff.

*I'm not sure that they necessarily get you promoted or something like that but I think they help you do your job better. (Female PO/AS)*

However, it was felt that having postgraduate qualifications was not necessarily a prerequisite to promotion.<sup>50</sup>

*People come to me and say they're going for promotion and, "I should be doing a Masters and I should be doing this," and that to be honest, I've never seen and I've sat in a lot of boards, I've never really seen educational stuff bring someone over the line on. ... Now, if you have absolutely no sort of third-level qualification, that now stands out. ... I've never sat on a board or never got the sense that, you know, that an educational thing either went for somebody or went against them. (Female PO/AS)*

### 5.3 DECISION-MAKING AROUND PROMOTION APPLICATIONS

Decision-making around employment or educational pathways is difficult to capture in survey data. However, in-depth qualitative interviews provide an opportunity to explore the factors shaping decisions to apply for promotion or not at a particular point in time. The driving factors in deciding to apply for promotion differed across interviewees, not necessarily reflecting gender. Perhaps the most prominent group of responses centred on 'readiness', that is, having been at a specific grade for a period of time and feeling ready and able to proceed to the next level.

*I just thought in my head I was ready at that point in time to go to, for the next stage. And I felt I had enough experience to merit, to be able to go in and not make a fool of myself. (Male HEO/AP)*

It was also seen in the context of a general culture where people expected to apply for promotion after a certain period of time.

*There was kind of the culture in the thing was nearly well, you apply, you know, every time. So as soon as I was eligible, I applied. (Female PO/AS)*

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<sup>50</sup> This pattern is somewhat complicated by the fact that those promoted to AP over a particular period were generally sent to take a Master's in Public Administration or a Master's in Policy Analysis.

The kind of work people had been involved in, and the skills and experience they had accumulated, all played a part in the extent to which people felt 'ready' to apply for promotion.

*I had worked in a range of AP jobs before that. Some of them had been very challenging jobs. I had worked in areas where there had been no PO so I had kind of acted in that capacity in an informal basis. So I personally felt I was ready to do it. So, you know, I knew what I was getting into. (Female PO/AS)*

*I suppose I always like a challenge, you know, so I get to a point where, you know, I'm looking at the next grade and thinking, "I can do that job, I'd like to do that job, I'd like the opportunity to do that job." (Female PO/AS)*

There was also a group who intended to apply for promotion in the longer term but at this point were using the opportunity as 'practice'.

*The reason I went for it at the time, I didn't feel I was ready for it but it was a competency-based interview and I wanted to try that out because I'd never done one before. (Female HEO/AP)*

For others, a smaller group, the decision to go for promotion was largely driven by external factors. These included the direct encouragement of a line manager or a significant other (such as a family member):

*I had gone for TLAC [Top Level Appointments Committee] before and to be honest, I had given up on TLAC, I decided it just wasn't for me. ... So then to be fair, my Sec General ... said to me, well firstly, to be fair to him, he said, "You know, maybe you should do some coaching," so I did the coaching. And then he said, "Why don't you do the TLAC?" ... I probably need a bit of a push, so a supportive manager for someone with my sort of, you know, is very important, because if I didn't have that I wouldn't, you know, I mightn't have bothered. (Female PO/AS)*

Some interviewees also mentioned the financial incentives associated with higher pay in the new grade. For a small number, dissatisfaction with the current work situation was an influence on going for promotion.

*I actually went for the job because I had been looking for a move out of the previous job and I couldn't get a move so that's why I went for the promotion. (Female HEO/AP)*

Only a few of those interviewed appeared to have adopted a strategic approach to their career development, seeking out the kinds of roles that would facilitate promotion and taking advantage of education and training opportunities to enhance their skills.

*After about maybe five years as a PO you start thinking then like where are you going in terms of your career and the skills so it would have been probably initially around that idea ... what sort of skill set and competencies I'd need to do the role. So when I was doing my business planning and managing the unit ... you would have been conscious of, "Well, is this kind of bringing something to my kind of portfolio of skills and experiences for later on?" (Male PO/AS)*

*From time to time I've moved jobs within a grade in order to get [a] different experience or a new challenge. (Female PO/AS)*

Intrinsic interest in the particular role also played an important part for some intending to apply for very senior positions, given that AS and Secretary General (SEC) roles are advertised for specified positions.

*I was interested in the area in large measure. That would have been because I would see a lot of opportunities that would be at the next level up but I wouldn't necessarily go for them unless I was interested. (Female PO/AS)*

Familiarity with the role appeared to be a more important factor for some women, who were more inclined to go for a promotion in their existing area or division.

*I suppose the post at the time covered two probably broad policy areas, both of which I had worked on at various stages in my PO career. So ... it lent itself towards me kind of being, you're able to tick a lot of boxes, I suppose, in terms of the application. (Female PO/AS)*

For those not working in head office, going for promotion often involved the additional consideration of moving from their local area (an issue discussed further in Section 6.5).

*I haven't applied for any of the promotions since because they would either be interdepartmental, which more likely are going to be in Dublin, or if they were in this department it would require probably relocating back to Dublin to be successful. (Male HEO/AP)*

Respondents differed in whether their line manager had explicitly encouraged them to go for promotion.<sup>51</sup> For some, managerial support had played a critical role in their decision. For others, their manager was seen as adopting a mentor role and facilitating access to the kinds of work experience that were likely to enhance their chances of promotion.

*He was a great mentor. He both trusted you and guided you and, you know, encouraged you, I suppose like. And I would say that all of my*

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<sup>51</sup> In contrast, line managers were generally extremely supportive in providing assistance to prepare for the process, a pattern discussed in the following section.

*three promotions were under him because of the breadth of experience. (Female HEO/AP)*

However, some interviewees reported little explicit encouragement to go for promotion.

*He knew his job, he was very good at it. But again [he] wouldn't have been huge on the encouragement side of going for promotions and what you should be kind of looking out for and, you know, that kind of thing. There was never really any, "come on you need to be moving on". (Male HEO/AP)*

In sum, the decision to apply for promotion reflected a range of influences, including the kinds of skills and experiences accumulated in the current or previous post, explicit encouragement from managers or significant others, and the broader culture of being expected to 'move on' after a particular time period at a certain grade. These factors were mentioned by both women and men, though some women were more likely to be motivated by familiarity with the section, perhaps reflecting less self-confidence (see Chapter 6). The following sections report the experiences of preparing for, and engaging in, the promotion process.

#### **5.4 PERCEPTIONS OF THE PROMOTION PROCESS**

The sample included people recruited from the 1970s to the 2010s, so interviewees had experienced a range of different approaches to recruitment and promotion, including appointment on seniority/suitability, internal competitions and interdepartmental or external competitions. Many had experienced a number of different approaches over their careers. It is noteworthy that most of the senior staff interviewed had begun their careers at lower grades such as CA, CO or EO, indicating quite a substantial degree of mobility for some civil servants. Promotion opportunities varied over time, typically being curtailed during periods of economic crisis. This meant that some interviewees had periods of stasis, followed by a rapid series of promotions up the ranks. This timing had consequences for the willingness of some candidates to consider going for promotion in the future, an issue explored further in Chapter 6.

Across all four departments, interviewees, both women and men, reported a high level of awareness among themselves and their colleagues about how the promotion system worked. Most promotion rounds, especially internal competitions, were a public, if not collective, event, with a good deal of discussion among peers and between managers and staff about the topic. Some saw this as a potentially negative phenomenon.

*I find a big difference in the public sector in that everything is so public. Everybody seems to know who's going for what job ... and then everybody knows who didn't get the job, which obviously has a knock-*

*on effect on staff morale. So if you've a PO position and 20 go for it and, this is another thing, they email everybody who the top three people are and in a ranking of who the top three are. I find that appalling really. In the private sector, I could put my coat on there now and head out at lunchtime and do an interview with a company ... I might not get the job and I come back and nobody even knows I've gone for it. (Female PO/AS)*

#### **5.4.1 Preparation for the process**

Most interviewees reported a good deal of practical support from others in compiling their application form and preparing for interview, which provided them with detailed knowledge about how best to approach the process.

*I would have done my application form. I would have gone to my manager and to one or two other people and ask[ed] them to review my application form. And then I would make sure I just knew everything about it and then I'd always prepare, you know, the what, why, how. So, I'd delve into each competency and then I think I would have done two mock interviews as well. (Female PO/AS)*

*My manager at that time ... was a great support because she would have been involved in interviews herself and training for interviews and she had sat on a lot of boards outside of here in other departments for interviews as well so she was able to give us a great kind of insight into what we needed to do and understanding the whole idea of competency-based and what they're looking for and how to get across the best, I suppose, story to them and sell it to them. (Female HEO/AP)*

Several people were in a position to mobilise networks from outside as well as within their own departments to prepare for the process.

*I tend to speak to quite a few people ... people that I know who have gone through the system. And maybe people who are quite senior, at that level, so I try and maybe get a sense of, kind of, the competencies from their point of view, what they would be asking about, what's their kind of key issues. If there was a particular role in question, which there normally would be, then I would try and maybe, kind of, talk to the people who are in that role, or maybe the Sec Gen who is covering that kind of area within the department. (Male PO/AS)*

Practice interviews were seen as a useful way in which to hone skills.

*You just become a bit more efficient in how you do it and you get to the point and it's more relevant for the people. So you get your message across then in a better manner. (Male PO/AS)*



Even going through the process a number of times was seen as having a similar effect.

*It was definitely ... a learning curve ... each interview, each competition I did was an improvement on the last one in terms of honing what I thought they were looking for in terms of scoring the competencies. (Female HEO/AP)*

Some candidates sought help with preparation from external organisations, engaging in mock interviews and receiving feedback on their performance.

*I went through the expected competencies. I went through my application form. I tried to make a bridge between my experience and the role of the PO and to have examples and to have questions and that. And I did go through a degree of coaching in relation to it as well. ... I did [an] interview preparation course with a private provider. (Male PO/AS)*

A good deal of time was devoted by candidates to preparing for the interview.

*I did put a lot of effort into it. I did do the 30 hours or whatever they recommend and I honed and honed and honed, you know, and it was not just the example but the broader context and, you know, supplemental type of examples or whatever you would say. (Female PO/AS)*

*I just really wanted to get it, so I made a big effort and was very focused and very well prepared and very familiar with the process. ... I did a lot of preparation. I served on the interview boards so that gave me a lot of insight into [the] interview process. I did some training with some colleagues, you know, I discussed with my peers, all the usual stuff, but with a very kind of definite focus. (Female PO/AS)*

#### **5.4.2 Seniority**

Interviewees were asked about the kinds of promotion process they experienced and the perceived fairness of different approaches. Few considered seniority to be a good basis for determining promotion.

*I think we've made the mistake in the past, there used to be sort of almost, you know, natural promotion after a certain amount of time. I think that is very wrong in the sense that I think it led to people being promoted beyond their ability. (Female PO/AS)*

*Even back in the day I was a firm opponent of the seniority thing because we saw the disastrous results and especially at senior*

*management. There were people who just shouldn't have been [promoted]. (Male HEO/AP)*

However, many pointed to the need to take greater account of experience and competence in the job (see below).

### 5.4.3 Aptitude tests and exercises

Opinions diverged on the use of standardised assessment and situational tests.

*Stage two was the first time I had done an e-tray exercise<sup>52</sup> and again something you mark down to experience because I'll know the next time I do it that I'll have a better kind of plan around it to know how to approach it because ... it threw me to a certain extent. It was interesting but it was – yes, it was tough enough. ... I'll know the next time I do it I'll probably do better on it. (Male HEO/AP)*

Some found these tests relatively easy, while others found the prospect daunting.

*I know when you go for the competitions now, there's a lot of situational stuff and even the aptitude testing, there was none of that for the internal competition. And I would hate to do any of that. (Female HEO/AP)*

It was felt by several interviewees that the tests did not actually capture the kinds of skills and competencies, particularly soft skills, needed in the job.

*Sometimes there's people here that are amazing. They're committed, they're real civil servants. You know what I mean? Their public spirit, their commitment to the customer, their commitment to delivering good services is fantastic. They'll go out of their way. They work hard and they're just not good at doing these blinking exams and they don't get a chance. ... I think that those exams don't seem to capture those softer skills that are essential at a management level in particular that you really have really good people skills, that you can encourage, that you can bring people with you, that you can motivate, that you can build that team spirit. Those tests don't capture that. (Female HEO/AP)*

Others felt that results were often inconsistent across competitions.

*I know a lot of people don't apply for them anymore because the process is just crazy to them, do you know ... In the sense of people doing the psychometric tests and passing them maybe twice and failing them once. And it's the same – you know the way they're a*

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<sup>52</sup> This is a simulation exercise, which requires candidates to deal with in-coming email and carry out specific tasks while doing so.

*general test? So, like how can you fail? You know – why couldn't you carry your result forward if you do pass them? And if you fail them it's like, "I've passed these so many times and now I'm failing it". It's just that people get annoyed with it. (Female HEO/AP)*

Test performance was seen as reflecting investment in practice, with performance generally improving across competitions.

*I mean the thing with those aptitude tests is you just have to go off and keep practising. (Male PO/AS)*

*People are buying books, people are downloading tests and practising and practising and practising and practising and they can get really high up on the aptitude tests now. (Female HEO/AP)*

#### **5.4.4 Internal and open competitions**

Opinions also diverged on the relative merits of internal and external competitions. Here, internal competition refers to a promotion round run in a specific department, while open or external competitions allow candidates across different departments or outside the civil service to apply (see Chapter 2). On the one hand, internal competitions were seen as taking greater account of specific experience.

*The internal interviews, the benefit of them is you have a very good understanding of the people and what their capabilities are and what their history has been in terms of how successful they are and what they've been able to get through and what their potential might be. So that can work quite well. (Male PO/AS)*

On the other hand, some felt that this resulted in certain candidates being favoured over others.

*I don't like the politics of internal ones. Whereas the external ones, there's a process, you do either well in it or you don't, you go in, ... it just feels like it's more objective. (Female HEO/AP)*

It was also reported that having only department staff on the internal interview board ran the risk of 'a predisposition towards recruiting people who are – who have similar backgrounds to themselves' (Male HEO/AP).

In contrast, several other interviewees saw interdepartmental/external competitions as more demanding.

*I wouldn't do the interdepartmental AP competitions or anything. ... I used to just look at them and think it's far too much that they were asking of people for the post. ... The extent of what you had to do like the written, the presentations, the you know what I mean? Then your*

*interview and I used to just look at it and just think, "I'm not putting myself through all of that." (Female HEO/AP)*

Some felt that interview panels varied in their approaches, leading to potential inconsistency in the process.

*Like you definitely find in here people come in and say to you, "Oh you know one panel seemed grand and another didn't". And one panel were, maybe the person was trying to encourage you, you know help you to do your best and in another it's like nearly deliberately trying to knock your confidence. (Female HEO/AP)*

#### 5.4.5 Interviews

The general view was that 'no method is perfect' but that an interview should form at least part of the deliberations.

*Interviews on their own ... it's difficult in 40 minutes to really know whether that really is the best person for a job. I'm speaking as someone who's done interviews who's been an interviewer. But I haven't come across a better system. (Female PO/AS)*

On the whole, the candidates saw the process as fair. One senior manager described an internal process as follows.

*If they had their favourites, their pets, the people who were expected to get it, people who had served their time, any of those things. ... If any of those things were improperly affecting the outcome or the listing process, I shouldn't have really been in the mix. ... They just dealt with it based on what I had applied for and what I said in the interviews. ... It gave me confidence that the system was objective and based on what you did in the room. (Male PO/AS)*

*The process was seen as largely predictable, "a learnable process" (Female PO/AS).*

The competency-based interview was generally seen as preferable to the less structured approach previously used.

*I would think that the whole move towards the competence-based interviewing has probably helped to eliminate bias that might have been there in a more free-flowing process. (Female PO/AS)*

However, some favoured the more flexible approach of a less structured interview.

*I've done interviews with both competency interviews and just interviews where you presented your CV. And I prefer where you just*

*presented your CV. I think the competencies corral you. Where I think like an interview could be more free-flowing and ... you could dig deeper. I think an interview board could dig deeper and therefore ascertain, you know, really did she fulfil this role or that as opposed to sticking with the competencies that you've identified. (Female HEO/AP)*

The shift in interview approach towards the use of competencies as a framework was seen as requiring a change in mindset from potential candidates.

*You had to talk about yourself and your role whereas we'd been used to kind of talking about what the unit did and what the department did and so because we're, you know, we tend to work in small teams, that's kind of the way we're kind of built up to work cooperatively, you know, it's not a particularly individualistic culture. So the interview process was challenging in the sense that you had to kind of think, "Oh hang on what did you actually do?" Or "What was your skills?" So that was a gradual shift. (Male PO/AS)*

However, many felt that interview performance did not always reflect the actual work performance of a candidate.

*You do sometimes see results come out where you kind of think, "I can't imagine they were the best person at the interview". ... Sometimes you'd see people come through, particularly when you do stuff internally, you know of people you know who are very good at their job but just can't do an interview and your heart goes out for them or equally people come in and do a great interview and you kind of feel, "Well, you're not that great really". (Female PO/AS)*

*I think people see the promotion as objective but I think a lot of people share my cynicism at the whole, what do you call it, competency-based promotion. ... Certainly at more junior levels the fact that somebody could have done brilliantly in their current job and not make it through. That isn't even on the radar anymore. We've gone from that kind of experience in your current job being the main thing to it being in there to being a bit and you know it's not even on the radar anymore. (Female PO/AS)*

Others disagreed with this perspective, feeling that the outcomes of the interview process were what would be expected.

*The people who featured were the people I would have expected to feature. (Male PO/AS)*

One criticism of the reliance on interviews centred on the difficulty in ensuring that candidates had actually carried out the tasks that they were describing.

*You can see people who can get on the stage and be so good and they could sell any story to you and then they might have never been in that situation, they might have never done that job. They might know of the job because they sat beside the person who did it. But it doesn't mean, you know, they can do it. (Female HEO/AP)*

*People who can talk a good talk and maybe have done nothing for the previous couple of years can do very well in an interview because they have plenty of time to be practising for it. They do loads of interviews and get very good ... you know, those competency-based interviews are a skill. They're not based on merit in your job, merit in your role, kind of how you've previously performed. (Female HEO/AP)*

Thus, those without strong presentation and communication skills were seen as being at a disadvantage, despite the fact that they may be able to do the job well.

This view was contradicted by other interviewees, who felt that it would be difficult to disguise a lack of experience given the probing nature of the interview.

*There's nowhere in an hour-long interview with top level civil servants to spin out a fairly thin story about yourself. So it involves first of all having the experience, having done a lot of what they're asking you about, but having internalised it in real time. So when you're – so you're not trying to remember a clever answer. You're speaking from lived experience and then you can speak with a fluency and ... it's real and they can tell that. (Male PO/AS)*

Some reported that they found it difficult to present themselves in the way required in the competency-based interview.

*I don't like doing competency-based interviews where you sit down and you say how wonderful you are. (Male HEO/AP)*

*I find this competency-based and ... trying to tie what you're doing day to day back to competency-based stuff really difficult. (Male HEO/AP)*

The format of the process was generally seen as similar across different grades but the types of answers expected were seen as very different.

*I think in some ways they're similar in terms of the things you're asked. I think obviously you expect a different quality of answer from somebody who's going to be a PO. The interviewing style isn't designed to sort of catch you out or such it's – so the style and the format is similar but I just think the quality, you know, it's not as if a PO is interchangeable with an AO. It's just you can ask the same question again and expect a different answer. (Female PO/AS)*

The importance of training for interviewers was emphasised by a number of staff.

*I think probably the important thing now is that the selection and the selectors are probably given the right skills as well to ensure they're making good choices too. And I think it has improved like with the PAS system and the centralisation of that and the supports there. (Male PO/AS)*

#### 5.4.6 Work performance

A number of interviewees favoured a greater emphasis on weighting the assessment towards work performance in the current role, potentially also taking account of the vision the candidate had for their role for which they were applying.

*I like the idea of someone coming in to do a presentation. I think that should be, kind of, brought further down the line. I think, kind of, you learn an awful lot from somebody coming in and actually being given the opportunity to say what they're going to bring to the job ... maybe within the application form. (Male PO/AS)*

*I definitely do think your current manager should have some input. Like if you're going for an interview, that board should have some indication of what that person's like at work. You know, does your manager think you're suitable for promotion or not. (Female HEO/AP)*

The potential to use referees, as is done in the TLAC process, was suggested as a way of taking account of candidates' actual work performance.<sup>53</sup>

*There is no facility for, you know, a reference to be given in the way that it is for TLAC. For TLAC, you don't see your references. You're hoping that the person that you've identified as your referee will give something positive but they're not bound to but, in the internal competition, in the interests of transparency, you end up not being able to really write an explicit statement about your view of the person's suitability for the next grade. (Male PO/AS)*

Three managers who had been external appointments noted that the timeline was quite extended, which may pose a challenge where candidates are pursuing opportunities within and outside the public sector.

*I wasn't used to it so I thought it was very, very long and drawn out but ... the interview was fine. The exam was fine. It was just the time in between I thought was – I had almost given up. (Female HEO/AP)*

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<sup>53</sup> For other grades, managers are required to complete an 'approval' form for the candidate for internal promotion competitions but, unlike the TLAC reference, this document is seen by the candidate in advance of applying for promotion.

#### 5.4.7 The Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC) process

The TLAC competition, used for appointment to Assistant Secretary or Secretary General (or equivalent) grades, was seen as particularly demanding, with candidates describing searching interviews and a much more personal focus than those for less senior grades.

*The first one focused, I suppose, very much on your ability, your speciality and can you do the role ... have you got experience of managing teams. The second was the presentation and the role model and it was very much probing to see about you and your personality and they didn't give me an easy time like, they cross-cut each with questions. And I think looking back at it they were probably deliberately trying to create a stressful reaction and wanted to see how resilient you were and calm under pressure and I didn't quite find that in the first interview. The first interview was probing, more probing your knowledge, the second interview was probing how you would deal with certain situations and gave specific examples of how you would deal with a belligerent Minister. (Female PO/AS)*

While interviewees reported unsuccessful promotion applications across grades (see below), people were more likely to have had to apply for an Assistant Secretary position multiple times before being successful. This experience was seen as important in improving the candidate's ability to communicate their skills and to develop deeper insights into their own personality.

*It was a very kind of steep learning curve, of the actual experience of how the recruitment process works and just how you're meant to, you know, address the issues that come up in the interview and how you present yourself. And you know the role quite in detail and you have to learn an awful lot about yourself actually even long before you're in that process. So, it was probably the bit for me that I found interesting or challenging as well was learning about yourself and you become more conscious about your own strengths and weaknesses and then where you have strengths in your experience and where you might have weaknesses. So ... that was really the real challenge, I suppose, about learning more about yourself and then how that comes through then in the actual process. (Male PO/AS)*

The TLAC process was seen as quite distinct from promotion competitions at lower grades and thus insider knowledge of what approach was being sought was seen as crucial.

*It's not the most clear process, TLAC, you know, and people can be, you know, doing it and just doing very basic things wrong and not realising it. So that really struck me, is that had he [her manager] not*



*sort of given me, "This is actually how you prepare for this type of interview" I could have been, you know, I could have been wasting my time, to be honest. ... The TLAC is a lot more personalised [than PO competitions] and I didn't realise that you had to kind of personalise it a lot more. .... So, for example, you know, when you talk about your leadership style, you really have to personalise and tell them what your style really is. In a way, you don't have to do that for PO as much. ... You really have to think about your leadership style. You know, so how do you lead? And then you know you have the example of it, but I actually genuinely didn't know that. So, I didn't know you have to describe how you lead, how you communicate, how you manage. I didn't know that. (Female PO/AS)*

Because of the demanding nature of the TLAC process, some people applied before they felt they had a realistic chance of being promoted in order to obtain practice in going through the procedure.

*I think I carried out the first couple purely as practice. ... I wasn't really ... expecting to get through any kind of process really. I just wanted to experience it. (Male PO/AS)*

For TLAC interviews, the importance of soft skills was emphasised, as well as the broader notion of 'fit' to the role.

*What they're really trying to do is to see are you really just the right fit. You know you have all these type of skills, you know, you've got your experience. You have the skills and you understand the sector so are you just the particular right fit. And sometimes you are but sometimes there's someone else who might be just a better fit. (Male PO/AS)*

The TLAC process was described as 'professional' and fair.

*I think it is [fair] ... particularly because it lays such stress on the ability to communicate externally under pressure. So, I think that's very important. That's an important part of the role. (Female PO/AS)*

*I absolutely felt that I was tested, both at the preliminary interview stage, in terms of my own competency, my background, my interest in the job you know, what I could bring to the role that was on offer. And then equally, when I went into the TLAC process ... I felt that the interview process was fair. I couldn't argue with any of the questions that were asked of me. They were searching, there's no doubt about that, I was being tested to a level that I hadn't been tested at before, but I do feel that it was -- it was fair in all respects. (Male PO/AS)*

However, a few candidates reported some inconsistency whereby they were shortlisted for earlier competitions but not for subsequent ones. One also felt that

the style of questioning was not appropriate and that it is hard for the process to be anonymous in a meaningful way.

*When you come to this level the chances are that at least one of those three or four people across the board are somebody whom you have worked with, whom you know, who you might have to come across again. So it's not an easy process. (Female PO/AS)*

In sum, interviewees expressed different views about the kinds of approaches they felt should be used in the promotion process, though all saw the interview as a key component of the process. Perspectives did not differ by gender and both women and men reported a good deal of knowledge of the promotion system.

## 5.5 FACTORS IN PROMOTION SUCCESS

Doing well in a promotion competition was seen as reflecting self-confidence, good communication skills and preparation for the interview.

*I found it enjoyable because I felt I was so prepared going in and I was totally relaxed. ... I was really confident going in. I had been working on a kind of a project here ... so I kind of felt like I had something interesting to talk about that was new and exciting compared to the other candidates. (Female HEO/AP)*

*I think it was one of those things that I was – again, was ready for that move and ready for that progression, I was able to perform at interview with the confidence that I could do that job. (Male PO/AS)*

Thus, perceived readiness for the next level, which in itself played an important role in shaping the willingness to apply for promotion, helped to enhance promotion chances.

Practice and 'knowing the format' were mentioned as key factors in success.

*It seems to be a very well-studied process. And from what I can make out, the more you study the process, the better chance you have obviously of maybe getting through it. (Male PO/AS)*

More fundamentally, certain kinds of experience were seen as enhancing the chances of promotion; these included direct contact with the Minister, a high profile policy project and/or the chance of 'acting up' in the role. The extent to which this may impact differentially on women and men is discussed further in Chapter 6.

*I think the areas I was in, they were quite challenging and there was a lot of, you know, stories along the way and I'd have been in areas that were quite high profile and so I would have had quite a lot of exposure,*

*you know, to stuff and to, you know, Ministers and senior people and all of that kind of stuff. So I'd have been in some ways I'd have been almost acting up ... without the formal. (Female PO/AS)*

*I think in the competitive interview process, you definitely need more higher-level exposure. To, I suppose, more I suppose more policy-making roles or that, you know what I mean. Or more interacting with government or international organisations or what have you. (Female HEO/AP)*

This was seen as leading to potential inequity, because civil servants did not have a say in the work they were allocated (see above) and thus their promotion chances could be influenced by factors beyond their control (see Chapter 4 on the variation in work tasks across grade and, to some extent, gender).

*To a large extent, we don't have control over where we go and the kind of work we're in at a certain grade. ... Maybe it's a look at mobility that you don't leave somebody so long in a job that that's the only thing they can have on their CV. ... If they did a bad interview, that's one thing. But I don't think it's right to say, "Well, you don't have – well, you're working in whatever. That's not, you know, appropriate work to bring you to the next level." (Female PO/AS)*

*A lot of the time, you can be lucky or unlucky, if you're in a division where you don't have policy exposure or there's a managing structure that don't, you know, give the work to you to do. You're not going to get the exposure and then when you're going for an interview then you're talking about, "Well, what do you do?" "I'm responsible for the administrative budget." (Male HEO/AP)*

A successful transition from PO to AS, in particular, was seen as requiring skills in handling the political nature of the role.

*It's probably, one of the key ones is probably being able to engage in the political system and to deal with the political pressures as well. Like the pressures that come from say the policies that you're implementing and the push back and the pressures that come from the political system. (Male PO/AS)*

Some managers emphasised the way in which they tried to facilitate such opportunities for their own staff, making sure they attended meetings with external stakeholders. For example.

*That's something I've always tried to do, bring the APs with me to whatever, because sometimes you can be working in this little tunnel or darkness, you know, and I think that's really important that they're au fait with the wider environment. (Female PO/AS)*

In contrast, specialist or support roles were seen as making it more difficult to 'package' competencies in a way that was attractive to the interview board.

*I have a difficulty, I had seen it in other departments as well with the IT positions, it's very difficult to make the transition from an IT environment into a policy department. (Male HEO/AP)*

Managers were therefore seen as key in facilitating access to the kinds of work that would build up a strong portfolio of competencies. They were also seen as playing a key role in recognising or even enhancing the skills and competencies of potential candidates.

*Now I'm working in an area where I can go in and talk about something and be very positive about it because I have the coverage from my Principal Officer, who believes in me and has given me that faith. (Male HEO/AP)*

However, a small number of interviewees themselves actively sought to build up such a portfolio, seeking out transfer opportunities to broaden out their experience.

The various management and senior management grades were seen as requiring different sets of skills. In particular, many interviewees reported that the qualities required to be an effective PO were not necessarily those needed to be a good AS.

*It's [Assistant Secretary's], not the next level of the PO. It's just a different job. You're in a very political space. You're dealing with a lot of the interdepartmental discussions happen at Assistant Secretary level. You're moving in that sort of dark world and you're very politically exposed. (Male PO/AS)*

*The one to Assistant Secretary is probably the biggest step that I've taken. And there's a couple of reasons for that. I think that the range of issues which you're expected to manage as Assistant Secretary is quite diverse to what your experience at Principal Officer level [is] in terms of your own particular area. So when I look here at the [POs]... they've quite distinct areas of work that they look after; but at Assistant Secretary level, I think you're expected to kind of cover them all and be aware of what all the issues [are] and almost draw the threads together. And then layered on that is the, kind of, the corporate contribution. ... This particular step that I've taken at Assistant Secretary level was probably the biggest and the toughest one that I've seen over the course of my career. (Male PO/AS)*

## 5.6 INDUCTION AND HANDOVER

Across the four departments, few of those interviewed reported structured induction or appointment to their current position, though a small number of staff reported a handover period of several weeks.

*It involved sitting in with the people who worked in the posts ... for a number of weeks. (Female HEO/AP)*

The vast majority of staff interviewed had been promoted at least once and often many times over the course of their career; experiences of the promotion process itself are discussed in the following sections. In addition, managers had typically experienced a change of role, being allocated to a different function or unit, within a given grade, although the extent to which this involved a move between departments varied. A recurring theme was the absence of structured handover when taking over a new role or taking up a higher grade, with a 'sink or swim' approach being the typical pattern.

*You were thrown in the deep end and you had to manage. (Male HEO/AP)*

*I came in to management board ... first of all, there's no training. You just arrive. ... You do an interview on a day and the following morning or that evening you're told you're successful if you are and the next morning you're appointed and you're sitting at a desk as Assistant Secretary. (Female PO/AS)*

This approach was seen as creating difficulties for staff as they sometimes struggled to get to grips with a very new policy area and a new set of internal and external contacts.

*It was a very small area, and very new, and there would have been very little sort of assistance being provided. I would have had to sort of learn a lot on the hoof so to speak. ... It was difficult. I would have felt that every time you got promoted you need to acquire new skills and while a lot of the skills that I would have had ... would have stood me in good stead, there was a lot of new functions that I needed to deal with and a lot of specialist areas that I wouldn't have ... so it was very difficult. (Male HEO/AP)*

*I found it a steep learning curve because it was really learning on the job and find your own way. (Female HEO/AP)*

Managers reported that they themselves were expected to be proactive in sourcing information and 'reading themselves into' the role. In addition, some staff were expected to move from a situation where they had no staff to one where they had multiple direct reports.

*I suppose an awful lot of it is assumed that you're going to find that information out yourself. There is a jump from HEO to AP and, you know, it's kind of just a little bit, "Go off and find that out yourself" kind of thing. (Female HEO/AP)*

*I found it ... I have to say daunting in the first probably couple of months. I mean, kind of what I find something about the PO side of things is that I know it happens at most levels, but it's instantaneous. So, you kind of, you know, you get the role and tomorrow morning you start. And you're told, "Well, there's a meeting and the Taoiseach's going to it". ... so you're kind of – you really are – on a wing and a prayer for a while. (Male PO/AS)*

Unless they had been previously working in the same unit or function, staff reported rarely having a clear idea ('no idea what it would be like', Male HEO/AP) what to expect from their new role, with one female senior manager reporting the job as being 'much larger than I expected' (female PO/AS).

### **5.6.1 Prior familiarity with the area**

Being familiar with the background (policy area) and already knowing some staff or colleagues were seen as helping to ease the transition.

*I knew the areas, I kind of knew the pitfalls within the individual areas and what the landmines were and, you know, so it just made it much, much easier to navigate. (Female PO/AS)*

*It would have been exceptionally difficult if I hadn't worked here before. (Female PO/AS)*

Only a handful of those interviewed had been the recipient of formal coaching or mentoring, though this group largely found the experience beneficial.

*The coaching was all around the softer stuff. ... you can do training courses, but, you know, if it's a one-to-one experience, well, then you really get into, you know, the things that you're good at. And again, the areas that you need to kind of watch. So that bit of, I thought was good and, you know, what I learned, I'm still trying anyway – trying to implement. (Female PO/AS)*

### **5.6.2 Managerial support**

Line managers were generally described as being supportive in the context of people being promoted or changing roles, but it was seen as largely the responsibility of the staff member to familiarise themselves with their new responsibilities, often in an area outside their previous expertise.

*I think the support comes largely through kind of informal methods, more kind of coaching from management, you know. There would have been some good staff within the team already, so I would have learned from them. So ... there's not formal but it's informal. (Female PO/AS)*

The impact of the lack of structured transition was reinforced by the often short notice given to people about the change of role.

*More and more people are just being moved at short notice and they're moving into the job where the other person's already gone or going in a day and this kind of thing. That's happening more and more. I don't know what the logic of that is. ... You cannot expect the organisation to run if you're not given proper handovers and training people in when they're taking on new roles. (Female HEO/AP)*

### **5.6.3 Potential mismatch**

In addition, a number of staff expressed the view that their expertise and/or qualifications were not always well matched to the roles to which they were assigned.

*They could have asked me and I would have told them straight out, "I don't think I'm suited for that." (Male HEO/AP)*

*When you're being moved, it might say, well what area would you like to be in and what do you think, where you'd fit in and you might give them all that information but it doesn't go anywhere. (Female HEO/AP)*

### **5.6.4 Implications for departmental efficiency**

The lack of handover was criticised not only for causing difficulty for the newly appointed staff member, but also for affecting the efficiency of the department as a whole.

*There is virtually no induction, except that that is led by individuals. I do it because it's something that I believe in very passionately. But it's not general. ... We focused on putting together a programme for induction of people who join my specific division. But ... it could easily be applied across the system. But there's a need for a lot more of it and a lot more structured approach to it, because ... somebody who you bring in is not productive for a year to two years. So you really can't then today, you can't afford that time, so you have to ensure that people are acquiring knowledge from the first day they come in. (Female PO/AS)*

The discussion of induction and handover in the interview prompted many managers to link this lacuna to the broader issue of people management within the civil service.

*I was thinking that I don't remember ever in my career within the public service to date, anyone asking me if everything was okay. I'm pretty much sure no one has ever, kind of, you know, "How are you getting on?" Which I kind of think is really odd. ... My sense is that we don't do people management really well at all within the public sector. We're all about getting things done. (Male PO/AS)*

The importance of a structured approach to career development emerged as an important theme in the interviews.

*This idea of mobility and that somebody actually has a, not a heart-to-heart discussion with you, but a professional discussion saying, "right, what are your skill sets, what have you got, what do you need, where are the gaps and how do we bridge that" in terms of your next move or maybe not your next move if the system and the organisation can't facilitate it but in due course. So somebody who takes actually a personal and vested interest in you and has a discussion about your career path. (Female PO/AS)*

*I think we're suffering from a lack of structured development for people and I don't think it's good enough. It's not good for the organisation, it's not good for the individuals and ... I think there probably should be a mandatory element, a relatively mandatory element that says, "You're this; you need to do this stuff". (Male PO/AS)*

The extent to which the lack of a structured approach to transition between grades and roles may operate as a potential barrier to the willingness to apply for promotion, especially among women, is discussed in greater detail in Chapter 6.

## **5.7 PROMOTION AND DISAPPOINTMENT**

Many of the interviewees had applied for promotion to a specific grade on more than one occasion. Multiple attempts were more common for TLAC appointments but were also evident at other grades. Interviewees were not given feedback as a matter of course. In some instances, candidates sought feedback but many saw it as quite cursory and not giving a strong indication of how they needed to improve.

*It was just a one-liner really ... It was generally very good and there was one thing about leading people, they sort of felt maybe more examples could have been given. It was really just very short. (Female HEO/AP)*



*It seems to be across the board that either you haven't got enough experience or something – you know, there's very little to go on or very little practical to follow up. (Female HEO/AP)*

The need for specific feedback that would allow candidates to identify where they needed to improve their skills was mentioned.

*I'd rather be told ... "You spent too long, you waffled or whatever", just something rather than, you know, "needs to develop more policy experience". That means nothing. Whereas when you give genuine honest feedback people can improve. (Male HEO/AP)*

*I was really disappointed with the feedback process, really disappointed. Now, I presume it has changed but I was really disappointed with it ... we went through it and it was all me identifying my failings. So you've identified, this was a failing, so this is why you didn't get the interview. ... I took the whole thing to heart. ... I would have got over the other thing, if I had got good feedback saying, "Well, you were okay on this, but you really need to...". (Female PO/AS)*

One interviewee indicated the importance of providing feedback at all stages of a competition.

*You should get feedback from the first interview, you know, because that might help you for the second. (Female PO/AS)*

Informal feedback was seen as being more helpful than formal feedback, in terms of providing guidance for the future.

*What I found was maybe more the informal feedback ... so you would often know some of the people on the interview board. And so I would maybe, kind of, talk to them afterwards and say, kind of, "What do you think?" Just off the record and informally, and that was very useful, rather than, I suppose, getting a letter with a well-crafted couple of lines. (Male PO/AS)*

*I never got the proper feedback and then finally I did ask and ... somebody was on the board and they met me unofficially and from speaking with me they said, "You know, you come across verbally explaining your position a lot better than what you did on your application" ... So, you know, I didn't demonstrate what I could do. (Female HEO/AP)*

Interviewees differed in their response to not being successful.<sup>54</sup> A small number, both women and men, became quite disaffected and resolved not to try for promotion again.

*I didn't quite make the panel and then when I got the feedback I was told again that, you know, because I'd been working in a very specialised area ... and at that stage I felt like saying, "What do I have to do here, you know?" So, I just have to say I just got sour and said, "Ah stuff it", you know, and I decided I wouldn't bother. (Male HEO/AP)*

*I just felt after the interview I could have done a lot better and I was very disappointed with myself and I felt myself, "God, I'm not sure if I really want to go through this again." (Male HEO/AP)*

Some interviewees, mostly though not exclusively women, who had reached their early- or mid-fifties, felt that the effort of pursuing promotion further was not worth it in the context of potential early retirement.

Others continued to apply for promotion, regarding the exercise as an opportunity for further improvement.

*It's life. You get on with it. ... If at first you don't succeed try and try again. (Female HEO/AP)*

*It certainly gave me pause for thought for quite a while. And I don't think it stopped me applying the next time but it made me more determined to be ready. (Male PO/AS)*

The public nature of applications and promotion processes prompted embarrassment among some candidates when they were not shortlisted for interview, especially in internal competitions where there was more awareness among colleagues as to who had or had not applied for promotion.

*There's a gossip mill. They're very public. Everyone is talking about a competition and when it's going on. Who got through, who didn't get through and I think that can be just kind of exhausting for people as well. (Female PO/AS)*

*In one way, it's a very nice aspect that people, as I say, do wish you well and they say, "Go for it", and they'll help you and they'll read your forms and give you. And then, on the other hand, I think when you're the person then, when all the results come out, then I think it's very tough when you're the person who hasn't done well because then, you know, as soon as the thing comes out it's like, "Who's better, who's*

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<sup>54</sup> The outcome is not truly success or failure as some passed the threshold for appointment, were placed on a panel but not promoted within the timeframe of that panel.

*better?" And there's a list done of all the names, and who came where and when you're the person who's not done I think that's difficult. (Female HEO/AP)*

## 5.8 DECIDING NOT TO GO FOR PROMOTION: SO FAR AND NO FURTHER

Given that the sample was comprised of managers and senior managers, almost all of the interviewees had been promoted at some point in their career. A small number of interviewees expressed no interest in being promoted above their current grade. Some members of this group felt that they were 'happy' at their current grade and were 'not interested' in being promoted.

*I earn enough money, I'm at a nice stage in my life. I don't need it. (Female HEO/AP)*

*I intend to go when I'm 60 ...and I have enough to live on and ... so things are okay. (Female HEO/AP)*

Sometimes this decision was partly a reaction to a negative experience of promotion competitions (see above). Geographical location was also an issue for some, given that promotion would require a move to Dublin.

*I'm happy in the space where I am. I'm happy in the geographic location where I am. I mean, I've had the conversations with people and I've had that conversation with senior management and I've been encouraged to consider it but it's just not for me. ... I've made my choices and I'm happy with how they've worked out. (Male PO/AS)*

While more women fell into this category, it was not confined to those who had children.

Family responsibilities played some role in the decision not to pursue further promotion but did not emerge as a decisive factor. Some interviewees highlighted their desire for a good work–life balance, which was not seen as possible at a more senior level.

Others in the group were reluctant to apply for promotion because they did not see it as possible to keep flexible working arrangements at a senior grade (see Chapter 6 for a full discussion). For others, the potential timing of promotion rounds emerged as crucial in their decision as to whether or not to apply.

*I think if it were any time soon, yes, well, certainly I would definitely make the effort. I think, like, even in two years' time it'll probably be too late for me because ... I'd only be two years at the grade [before retirement]. (Female HEO/AP)*

Similarly, other interviewees felt that it was ‘too late’ for them to pursue promotional opportunities, given their age.

*I’m at a point in my career where I think that’s enough. I’m focused on other things now. So ... what I want to do now is focus more on making sure that what I’m interested in and motivates me, that I get to do more of that. And that I make sure that other people are inspired to do the same thing. ... I’m getting to the twilight of my career now, so I literally ... don’t want to have to do the hard work that comes with a promotion competition to do something I don’t really want to do. (Female PO/AS)*

One woman felt that her transition to PO had been challenging in terms of workload and she wanted to focus on doing a good job at her current grade, rather than seeking promotion.

*I wouldn’t [go for promotion]. ... It took me too long to settle into this PO thing and I’m just settling now. ... As I say, I had a very bad start and that project was just so huge ... I’d like to do a good job where I am. I’d like to leave some tangible outputs and outcomes and I would be super happy about that. (Female PO/AS)*

Others were discouraged by the long hours and commitment required by those at Assistant Secretary or Secretary General levels.

*I look at my boss and I look at other A Secs and ... I think their workloads are absolutely enormous. I think they’re too big. I think the responsibility is just huge. They’re 24/7, like you know, they’re available – they have to be available day and night. (Female PO/AS)*

*I knew that if I got a Sec Gen job it would be more responsibility, etc. So, after that I just kind of decided ... I’ll stay in the Assistant Secretary grade, you know. ... Also, the political side of it is huge, you know, in terms of having to be available to Ministers at all hours and everything. (Female PO/AS)*

## 5.9 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has explored experiences of the promotion process among civil servants at HEO to AS grades, placing these experiences in the context of their overall career development. Most had entered the civil service without a clear career plan and their ambition for promotion was largely shaped by their experience of work in the sector. Interviewees reported a lack of structured induction and handover as they moved between functions and grades, often leaving them to ‘sink or swim’ in adjusting to the new role. This pattern was evident across all four departments included in the study, so is likely to reflect an issue in

the civil service as a whole. The extent to which the lack of induction and handover potentially acts as a barrier to applying for promotion, especially among women, is discussed in the next chapter.

The decision to apply for promotion largely reflected a perceived readiness to move on and embrace a new role. However, promotion success was seen as reflecting the kinds of tasks and roles allocated to candidates, which was viewed as making it difficult for some people to obtain promotion. Interviewees had experienced a variety of approaches to promotion over their careers. They saw the system as largely fair but some were critical of the use of standardised assessments and were sceptical of the extent to which interview performance always reflected candidate skills. While the interview was seen as a crucial part of the process, many pointed to the need to place a greater emphasis on taking account of a candidate's performance in their current role. The findings also highlight the potential for a more detailed feedback process for unsuccessful candidates.

The findings did not point to strong gender differences in perceptions of the promotion process. However, the implications of the approach used may differ for women and men, an issue examined in the next chapter.

## CHAPTER 6

### Barriers to promotion

This chapter examines experiences of the promotion process, particularly focusing on the barriers to applying for, and securing, promotion. As with Chapter 5, the results derive from analysis of in-depth qualitative interviews with a cross-section of managers and senior managers across four distinct government departments. Drawing on the international literature and the evidence emerging from the analysis of the interviews, the chapter focuses on the five most prominent barriers shaping promotion outcomes. Section 6.1 examines the role of self-confidence in the decision-making process around promotion. Section 6.2 considers the role of flexible working arrangements in shaping the nature of work–life balance and opportunities for progression. Section 6.3 considers issues around the nature and timing of promotion rounds and the prevalence of promotion calls. The role of previous experience and opportunities is addressed in Section 6.4, while geographical mobility issues form the focus of Section 6.5. The chapter concludes with some consideration of the role of cultural processes in shaping promotion opportunities among men and women in the civil service today.

#### 6.1 THE ROLE OF SELF-CONFIDENCE

A common theme across all four departments was the role of ambition and self-confidence in shaping promotion decisions – self-confidence, in particular, was seen as a vital component in deciding to apply for promotion and being successful within that process. It was frequently argued that women typically need more encouragement to consider applying for promotion. For many who did progress to senior management, encouragement from their colleagues (affirmations like ‘You should go for it’) was key to their decision to apply for promotion. Often managers felt that women, in particular, need to be sure they meet all criteria in order to submit an application.

*I have seen people looking [considering promotion] and there might be ten criteria and a woman would have nine and she’d go, “I can’t go for that”, a guy would have two and he’d go, “oh I can have that no problem”. (Female HEO/AP)*

*It is a bit of a cliché ... but men tend to apply for promotion because it’s going, women tend to be much more careful in terms of – do they tick every single box? Whereas you know lads who probably have less going for them in a lot of ways but have a more self-assured perception of themselves. (Female PO/AS)*

Men and women alike contended that men are typically more ambitious and more confident in their ability than women. Men ‘blow their trumpet’ and for this reason often progress more quickly.

*The system was set up for people who could really blow their own trumpet a bit. ... Which, kind of, men are better [at] ... than women, in my experience, because men will say that they've done stuff that they haven't ... done really. They'll kind of embellish an awful lot more than – women tend to be much more straight, in my opinion ... Or they might be more modest in terms of what they're saying. (Male PO/AS)*

*Women just don't have the same confidence and they don't have the same ability to think they are great ... I know I question everything, I second guess everything I do ... whereas men don't – men just seem to think "Oh yes, I can do that, yes I can do that" ... that would be the biggest thing getting in the way of women ... [they need] a bit more self-belief. (Female HEO/AP)*

Managers and senior managers across all four departments highlighted a typically more cautious, modest approach among women, often characterised by waiting to apply for promotion until they are completely sure they fulfil the requirements and are well-placed to be successful.

*Women tend to underestimate their readiness and the guys are the opposite, [they] tend to overestimate their readiness. (Male PO/AS)*

*I think for women, particularly, they can be a bit on the modest side. So I've always said to them, "Listen, the guys aren't going to be modest. They're going to be singing all their achievements. So, go in there and that's the way you should approach it." (Female PO/AS)*

Progression among similarly qualified and experienced colleagues was the impetus for action for some: a fear of being left behind, rather than their own self-belief.

*I probably had dismissed it [considering applying for promotion] saying, "oh my god, how could I", I suppose I wouldn't be hugely confident. ... I would under-sell my own achievements all the time. ... I suppose there comes a point where you see other people starting to get promoted around you and you're sort of saying well, you know what, I took a lot, I did deliver, ... drove it and delivered it on time and ... worked really hard ... built a great team around me. ... So, I went for that then. (Female PO/AS)*

The role of self-belief and self-confidence was seen as particularly important in progression to senior management roles, where large-scale leadership would be part and parcel of the job.

*People often laugh and say, "Well if that was a man, they wouldn't think twice about doing it [going for promotion]" ... a woman [will] tend to go, "Well ... I'd need to be perfect, as in superhuman to step up to the mark and lead everybody". (Female PO/AS)*

Beyond confidence, it was also argued that women typically take more factors into account in deciding whether to apply for promotion.

*I think women, when they put themselves forward for promotion, unless they're extremely ambitious, will consider sort of family commitments and things like that. You know what I mean. ... If they think that they have to be in Brussels or London or whatever two days a week and they have three young children at home, I do think that would be a significant barrier. (Female HEO/AP)*

Ultimately, female managers noted that women needed greater certainty of success before applying for promotion and needed to be sure they ticked all boxes before submitting an application. This has important implications, as noted by one senior manager. She suggested that while 'the very good women will be fine', the experiences of those who were 'good' differ greatly from their equally competent male colleagues and they simply do not do as well.

*Our problem isn't how to get women to the top, our problem is how to make sure that the women who are as good as the men, not better, can do as well as the men that they are as good as ... I don't think we've cracked that. (Female PO/AS)*

Finally, some female senior managers felt that women 'try too hard', being overly conscientious and putting in more effort than their male counterparts in similar positions, in an attempt to, in some way, prove themselves.

*Maybe we're our own worst enemies as well ... I think we probably try too hard to prove that it's ... [that] we can do the job as a woman ... so we do it twice as good as a man ... [we] give ourselves no slack ... I wonder actually, it might be interesting to look at the sick leave records of men versus women in senior roles. I'd say women hardly ever take sick leave in senior roles. (Female PO/AS)*

*Women over-work ... they hold themselves up nearly for view all the time ... most women at the top tend to hold themselves up and question themselves regularly as regards, am I doing the best I can? Should I do better or should I up my game? ... A lot of men don't question themselves as much. (Female PO/AS)*

One potential solution is a greater focus on support and encouragement, as well as training, so that civil servants, particularly at managerial level, can become more aware of their career opportunities and potential.

*I think women may delay applying but then they'll do very well when they do apply because they're more than ready. ... So I think they need to be encouraged to apply for promotion ... the kind of self-*



*development and career development opportunities ... a stronger focus on training is very important. (Female PO/AS)*

However, it was also argued that the emergence in recent years of courses specifically for women is not the ideal approach. In many ways, it was suggested that both men and women would benefit from such self-development programmes.

*You know, they run these courses for women ... and I always sort of feel that looks like there's something that needs to be fixed in the women ... "If we send them off to a course they'll be grand or we can fix something" ... It's almost re-perpetuating the view that there is something different. (Female PO/AS)*

## **6.2 FLEXIBLE WORKING ARRANGEMENTS AND WORK–LIFE BALANCE**

The vast majority of female senior managers interviewed did not have children, and did not seek, or avail of, any flexible working arrangements over their career in the civil service. Many interviewees, male and female, observed that ‘the other thing you see quite a bit of [in senior management] is unmarried women’ (Female HEO/AP). Others argued that *the* key issue in career progression for women is motherhood – ‘it’s having children that kills you [in terms of career progression]’ (female PO/AS).

*As a department, we're quite well balanced in terms of the number of women we have at Assistant Secretary [grade] but I do think there is a lack of children at that grade ... And I'd actually probably say that with the PO grade as well ... I'm not saying they sacrificed having children but I think maybe their career was facilitated by the fact that, for whatever reason, maybe not their own choices even ... they don't have children. (Female PO/AS)*

Under the current system, many civil servants across the grades felt that where staff had young children, compromises were needed in terms of career progression, at least in the short term. Many mothers spoke of the stress in juggling the demands of senior management positions and being a parent: ‘being a mother and having a responsible job is really where the tension is’ (female PO/AS). Some spoke of the need for compromise, the need to accept that decisions have to be made and sometimes that means delaying career progression. Many of these women were themselves mothers, and reflected on the challenges and difficulties they faced in juggling their career with motherhood.

*I could not have been a PO if my kids had been younger ... and I actually have the height of sympathy when I see young mothers nowadays taking on the PO role and thinking they can do it all because something is giving. The job is not getting it or their kids are not getting it. One or*

*the other. I actually sympathise greatly with them and I worry how they actually can survive it because the job is demanding. (Female PO/AS)*

*You're going to have to choose at some point ... You can't have young children and at the same time [have a senior management role] – so you either have your children young and then try or do it [progress] or you postpone it [having children] ... I'm not sure it's possible to have it all, I suppose is what I'm saying. (Female PO/AS)*

In many interviews, civil servants across the grades felt that the single greatest barrier for women related to the availability, and acceptability, of flexible working arrangements.

*I think you have to have flexible working hours ... it has to be okay for somebody not to be on call ... I think childcare is the whole thing really ... Women still have most of the responsibility ... I mean to have to leave at five o'clock to pick up a child, is that acceptable at some levels in the department? Can they be off their phone? (Female HEO/AP)*

Some noted that the changing age and gender profile of civil servants means that flexible working arrangements have become more important than ever, but policy and practice has not changed to meet employee needs. This is particularly the case at senior management grades, where recognition of the demands of parenthood (such as needing to leave work at a set time) is still largely absent.

*In the past, POs were all men in their fifties ... so their kids were grown up by the time they had those kind of jobs. ... Now POs are men and women in their thirties. So everyone is on the same knife edge. ... It has to become more normal for POs to be ... you maybe have to go home early, kids are sick or whatever. More people will get used to that ... if that's still a rare thing, then it's an issue when you feel you're the one who is slipping out of the meeting. (Male PO/AS)*

Another senior manager felt that the single greatest barrier in the civil service relates to women with children and the lack of flexible working arrangements to facilitate their career progression alongside family life.

*Like, my own bugbear across the civil service is it's not a woman issue, it's a woman with children issue. There isn't discrimination against women mainly, but it's when you have children and you're looking for ... a little bit of flexibility. (Female PO/AS)*

Many observed that the key threshold is at AP grade, when flexibility in working arrangements is either unavailable, because availing of any such opportunities sends out the wrong message or because the demands of the job cannot be achieved within a reduced working time/day schedule.

*You can do up to HEO and have kids and balance fairly well and that's why you'll notice there's kind of maybe a falling off of women after HEO. ... How do we settle it that more can compete comfortably and still live their lives and rear their kids? And that's where the problem is ... it's about real flexible working arrangements ... We have flexible working but when you go to certain grades – I can only talk for this organisation – it's frowned upon ... you're not committed if you're flexible working. (Female PO/AS)*

*I got a phone call ... to say I was getting promoted [to PO] ... before I accepted the post they told me there would be no more shorter working year ... "enjoy the sunshine now" ... I was surprised it was that clinical, it was that cold. (Female PO/AS)*

This also applied to taking parental leave, where again many female managers spoke of challenges in terms of either gaining approval to avail of such leave or in meeting the demands of the job.

*When I got my promotion [to PO] ... I was told that I couldn't take one day a week parental leave. That I would have to work full-time. Now, I argued strongly that taking parental leave I am still working full-time. It's not part-time work ... but I was told "no" ... Well, I was very annoyed because it did make me think that all the family-friendly things that we say, actually when it comes down to it it's not true at all. (Female PO/AS)*

For many staff, taking flexible working arrangements and reduced working days often did not correspond with any change in workload; essentially, the job still entailed a full-time workload.

*I was on a four-day week for about a year but I ended up working a lot of the Fridays because of the demands of the job ... you were kind of doing the work but not getting paid for it so I ended up coming back [to full-time]. (Female HEO/AP)*

One female PO was working two half days (and three full days) on parental leave.

*It was never a half day really ... it got to the stage where I was working up till three o'clock ... without a lunch ... like, it wasn't a half day. ... Or you'd be getting phone calls, and I think because you were there in the morning people would ... "well, sure I'll just give her a ring and she's not really on leave". (Female PO/AS)*

*I think the problem generally with the work sharing, because I've done it for a long time, is that you tend to put in more hours ... like full-time people ... either you accept it or you don't. (Female HEO/AP)*

Sometimes a reduced working week was based on parental leave, but again the demands of the job often meant that additional hours were given to work.

*I work a four-day week ... I use parental leave. ... it's difficult [to manage] ... I've done Fridays off and I've done Mondays off ... but either way I find, you know, be it the Thursday and you're not back 'til Monday, you're kind of going, "Oh, it's a long gap before I'm back again" and the same applies on a Friday, so you tend to stay later on those evenings or else I find myself logging in over the weekend, or on a Monday morning just to keep something moving. (Female HEO/AP)*

In a similar vein, some managers felt they had to 'catch up' where they had taken a day of parental leave.

*My son's parental leave, I didn't use much of that at all, because I found the work I was in was busier, it was more demanding, and it was very hard. If you took a day off, all you were doing was trying to work twice as hard the next day to make up for it. (Female PO/AS)*

Across all four departments, female civil servants in particular spoke of the demands of senior management positions – almost universally they held that these jobs require full-time working, typically on transition to PO and AS grades and often also on transition to AP grade. This was playing a significant role in the promotion decisions of civil servants, women in particular. The fear of losing part-time or reduced working hours arrangements was a deciding factor in not pursuing promotion for many at this stage in their career.

*I've done three-day weeks, I've done back-to-back weeks, I've done half days ... I've done all different combinations ... I've very rarely worked a five-day straight week ... so I'd probably have to give up a lot of that stuff [if promoted to PO]. (Female HEO/AP)*

*If I was to go for promotion, I [would] have to give up my four-day week. Now, that would have an enormous impact on my life ... you must come back full-time on promotion. (Female HEO/AP)*

While the issue tended to impact more on women, it was not solely a female matter. One male PO working a four-day week was considering reverting to a 90 per cent role, if not full-time.

*I'm thinking of going back to one afternoon a week ... It's just too difficult to do the job in four days ... It's very hard to pull off ... If I went for promotion, I definitely wouldn't be able to do it. (Male PO/AS)*

Other senior managers argued that there was a real need for newly promoted senior staff to work full-time, at least initially. The possibility of moving to flexible working arrangements was something that might be considered in time.

*We do try to have, that when you're coming on promotion that you start initially on a full-time basis ... I know there is a tension around it but ... we can end up with problems if we have, you know, a preponderance of flexible working. (Female PO/AS)*

Many senior managers also spoke of long working hours (often 12 to 14 hour days), with some regularly working weekends as well. This serves as a barrier for women earlier in their careers.

*I think the workload expected here makes it difficult for women ... to move on and so I would know people who are AP here who would probably find it difficult to be able to move to PO, not that they wouldn't have the skills or the ability for it ... it's just the time commitment and the workload expected. (Female PO/AS)*

For part-time and flexible working arrangements to work effectively, a supportive manager was seen as important, particularly in dealing with parliamentary questions and other queries when the staff member was not at work.

However, others felt that flexibility is perceived to place additional demands on managers, who have to 'carry the can', and that was playing a role in shaping the reluctance among managers to approve requests for flexible working arrangements.

*You're not excited to get an application for, you know, part-time or shorter working year from staff ... it's within my responsibility to decide yes or no on their shorter working year [or other flexible arrangements] ...but if I do [approve it] I have to pick up the pieces ... there isn't any like, there's no compensation. (Female PO/AS)*

Across all of the departments, managers felt that working on reduced hours or days had implications for internal and interdepartmental mobility and opportunities to participate in secondments.

*I think it might make a difference in terms of how you're seen, in terms of internal moves, because you're [in] a little bit of a dilemma because you can't be moved to a full-time job. So you're more limited maybe in your choices. (Female HEO/AP)*

*The problem then being a work sharer is you can't really get a transfer anywhere else ... because even if the advertisements come up for secondments to other departments, they're all full-time positions. (Female HEO/AP)*

Interestingly, availing of flexible working arrangements was also seen to impact on career progression and promotion prospects. One senior manager reflected that

she may not have been successful in her promotion to PO had there been an awareness of her flexible working arrangements.

*When I was moved maybe it wasn't disclosed to my Assistant Secretary that I worked a four-day [week] and it was commented "And nothing, you know, against you personally [name], but if I'd known that ...". So I got the impression if they had known they wouldn't have accepted me ... It's becoming an issue ... questions over whether they would accept Principal Officers on a four-day week ... I don't know whether it signals less of a commitment or something to work ... Or whether they feel there's so much work on. (Female PO/AS)*

Others reflected that if they had availed of flexible working arrangements it would have impacted on their career progression, or at the very least, on the pace of their progression.

*I've never availed of any kind of shorter working year or work-life balance ... it may not have resulted in me moving on at the various points in time ... I think maybe it might have slowed me down ... in terms of moving on or progressing ... I definitely think it impacts on progression. (Female PO/AS)*

In sum, the perceived absence of *real* flexibility in working arrangements for those at senior management grades was argued to be an area that requires considerable attention. For many, this is seen as *the* key factor shaping the extent of gender balance in the civil service.

*I mean the job sharing is going to have to be grappled with at some stage ... there's no point pretending ... the people who are interested in TLAC [Top Level Appointments Committee] now ... I would say they either have kids who are kind of grown up or don't have kids, with implications for women being older than their male counterparts when they start thinking about TLAC ... If you are insisting on [full-time], then you're ruling out a whole clatter of women for PO ... and DPER [Department of Public Expenditure and Reform] might as well come up to that decision and take it honestly, rather than pretending that that isn't the factor that's keeping a lot of women back, is the full-time, you know. (Female PO/AS)*

Many senior managers felt that the issue represents a significant challenge: in terms of improving the accessibility of flexible arrangements at senior grades, in terms of the credibility of those entering into more flexible arrangements and in terms of ensuring the workload is appropriate. There was a general consensus that the solution is far from straightforward.

*How much flexibility? And if the department or the civil service are serious about it, are they willing to offer that level of flexibility to senior managers and will senior managers be taken credibly if they do it as well? ... We haven't got to a stage where the system says, "We're willing to put you on four days and we expect four days' work". So, we haven't got there. (Male PO/AS)*

So as well as access to *real* flexible working arrangements at senior management levels, the nature and demands of the role have to be addressed simultaneously.

*For me it's work-life balance is the thing ... so [we need] more roles where it's not a five-day role ... that the role is ... if it's a four-day week, it's a four ... 80 per cent role. (Female HEO/AP)*

*This goes back to our friends in DPER as well ... they set a cadre for the organisation ... but they're always looking to reduce the cadre, right? You know ... tighten your numbers ... So if I give one day a week off to somebody or two days a week off ... then that's a proportion of the cadre. For it to be real, I should be able to pull that percentage back someplace else, to be real, but I am not naive enough to think I can do that because it won't work. So you lose ... whereas real flexi means that somebody else will be taking up the extra piece of work. (Female PO/AS)*

It was also noted that, where flexible working arrangements are agreed, it is typically women who occupy these positions. This too has implications for the extent to which flexible arrangements become normalised and accepted as part and parcel of the civil service environment.

*I think it's probably the real test is when you almost have the same proportion of male Assistant Secs taking whatever leave or flexible arrangements as female. Because my experience so far has been, it's been, this is at PO level, is that it tends to be the female POs who take more flexible arrangements than male POs. That's probably a factor or a product of the age and generation of the male POs as well. But, I'm just trying to think, do I know any younger [male] POs who've done that. I don't actually, I don't. (Male PO/AS)*

However, across the four departments, there were some examples of male managers availing of flexible working arrangements across a range of grades, so flexible working arrangements have the potential to play a greater role for men and women alike.

More generally, the issue of work-life balance was an important one, for men and women across all four departments and at different grades. Some talked about rebalancing their lives and taking the decision to not work weekends, for example, or reduce the hours they worked.



*I have consciously, I suppose, kind of in more recent times tried to kind of say, "Okay", you know, even though people have my number, I've made it clear to people I don't work weekends. ... So, in the last year, I've probably achieved that probably a bit better in terms of making sure nothing comes home at the weekend. (Male PO/AS)*

One male senior manager noted that some of his managers in the past were overly work-focused, making him intent on ensuring a positive work–life balance for his life.

*Some of them were probably too focused in the civil service and so there's a question like: how much of your life do you devote to you career? And so I think, as an individual, I would be trying to get that kind of... there's a bit of a balance between family life and your career. (Male PO/AS)*

### 6.3 THE NATURE AND TIMING OF PROMOTION CALLS

The nature of promotions available and the timing of promotion rounds also served to create barriers to progression for civil servants. While many of the other barriers addressed in this chapter served to impact disproportionately on career progression for women, the nature and timing of promotion rounds have the potential to create difficulties for both men and women. In a number of departments, managers commented on the proliferation of job-specific advertisements, setting out in detail the requirements for the position. However, it appeared that these promotion rounds then became the basis for a more general panel, from which subsequent positions were filled. This practice was viewed with some concern among a number of managers, and was argued to restrict progression opportunities for staff more widely.

*Because in our department we have a bit of a history of advertising for job-specific vacancies ... and then forming a panel ... which is used for kind of every other job that comes up at that grade. So, people may have been shortlisted against the original criteria, deemed not eligible, and then suddenly other jobs are filled from that panel. (Female HEO/AP)*

*It's like they've nearly identified people that they want and they set out a job spec and then all of a sudden, "No, I don't have that degree and I don't have that course and I don't have that" ... you're kind of going, "I could nearly identify the person you're looking for here". (Female HEO/AP)*

In terms of the timing of promotion rounds, it was noted across all four departments that promotions tend to go in cycles, with greater opportunities in some years and fewer in others. This had obvious implications for promotion opportunities for civil servants and the pace at which they progressed.



*These things [promotions] go in cycles ... and at the moment things are moving ... and another few years we'll have something else and things won't be moving. (Female HEO/AP)*

A number of senior managers contended that the prevalence of promotion opportunities also impacted on quality – and in some cases they felt people can then achieve a promotion before they have the necessary experience.

*Because the civil service hasn't promoted in so long, it's expanding very quickly. Also, half the civil service is retiring in the next ten years. So there are plenty of opportunities for whoever wants them. So you'll have people getting promoted who ... are not fully seasoned in my view. So they'd be very bright, very hardworking, but not drawing on that reservoir of experience. (Male PO/AS)*

As noted in Chapter 5, among civil servants interviewed, a wide range of factors shaped the timing of promotion applications – perceived readiness, personal/intrinsic, family, financial and stage in life. For some people, it was felt that not seeking promotion reflected their enjoyment of their current role and responsibilities.

*Some really excellent APs who could be PO but have decided they prefer just you know ... at AP you're the desk officer. You're the kind of expert on an issue. They prefer that than moving to the management side of things so some of them will just decide this suits them better. They don't want the management side of the piece. (Female PO/AS)*

For others, practical or family motivations were underlying their decision to apply for promotion at a certain time.

*I've never really planned my career ... I went for the AP because I wanted to buy a house and the PO because we were having kids. So [for] both examples, it was just a practical decision about money. (Male PO/AS)*

Similarly, a number of managers felt that their stage in life, particularly in relation to retirement, was influential in shaping their decisions.

*I looked at how long I had to go before I was planning on retiring and I said, "Look, do I really need to put myself through this anymore?" And I said, "No, I don't". (Female HEO/AP)*

## **6.4 PREVIOUS EXPERIENCE AND EXPOSURE**

Many managers spoke of the relative value and recognition of 'policy' versus 'operational' roles and the implications of different types of experience for

progression and promotion opportunities. The perceived priority given to 'policy roles' was noted by many.

*People are always dying to tell you how important policy making is. It's almost like that's the nirvana. If you work in policy you're seen to be [better] ... whereas I often think, you know, people who work in operational areas are incredibly important as well. But, people, for some reason, in the people's own head they don't maybe emphasise that as much, or they're almost apologising for it. (Female PO/AS)*

As a result, being largely confined to operational type roles, or operational sections within a department, was seen as limiting the opportunities for promotion, for men and women alike.

*The last number of AP competitions, that I didn't go for, they were very much policy-based and that was fine, I wouldn't be a policy expert by any stretch ... I always felt from an operations AP type work, you were never really considered because you weren't policy-based ... I was never given the opportunity to work in an area for policy. (Male HEO/AP)*

Civil servants across the four departments acknowledged the importance of having a diversity of experience, roles, responsibilities and knowledge across a range of divisions and areas.

*You need to be very active and proactive and interactive I think if you want to get promotion, you need to know the wider dimension. ... Probably the topic matter didn't entice me or excite me. ... I think the breadth of my knowledge was just not adequate. (Female PO/AS)*

The opportunity to engage in 'the interesting jobs' was also discussed, and this was seen as shaping people's subsequent progression opportunities. It was also felt that men were more likely to get those opportunities.

*You are more likely to get promoted if you've been in the really interesting area, doing really important work, than if you've been in an ordinary area doing ordinary work ... and the guys are more likely to get the sexy jobs ... because I think there is a level of unconscious bias. (Female PO/AS)*

Others spoke of unequal access to the 'prestigious' roles – again it was felt that men typically did better than their equally qualified female counterparts. It was suggested that women tend to fall into 'co-ordination roles'. This too was seen to have important implications for career progression.

*I think there's another thing that goes on ... it's possibly unconscious ... women allowing themselves to fall into coordination roles. Roles*

*that are generally seen as being, “you want a safe pair of hands”, “So and so is great. They always do a great job”. But they’re not prestigious ... And at times women can sort of step forward for those roles or, you know, be in those roles for a while without realising the dangers of becoming typecast. (Male PO/AS)*

It was also pointed out that women are less likely to have experienced opportunities/postings abroad. Further, in cases where two civil servants were in a relationship, it was perceived that the man’s career took priority over the woman’s career.

*There’s what I call the real world about choices that people make at family level ... people who go abroad ... when somebody is going from the department, we would have people who are kind of couples ... in relationships or married ... generally it’s the woman who goes with the man, not the other way around ... they are both equally competent, they’re both equally at the same level ... but that’s what they’re deciding to do. (Male PO/AS)*

Male and female civil servants in specialist support roles (like IT) were seen as particularly disadvantaged when it comes to promotion opportunities. A number of managers suggested that their more specialised positions within departments left them on the outside in terms of staff sought in promotion rounds.

*I feel closed off ... I feel the glass ceiling ... we are committed people ... but we don’t get the kudos or the recognition ... We’re not in the colourful area that Assistant Secretaries or Principal Officers see are promotion material for their policy areas. (Male HEO/AP)*

*I think it’s inherently unfair ... because it’s not my fault the skillsets I have are not the universal skillset for many of the roles within the department. (Female HEO/AP)*

The importance of civil servants gaining management experience (which was not always possible and not necessarily gender-specific) was also noted across all four departments.

*I had no staff. ... in fact one of the times when I went for a PO interview, you know, in the commission, they wouldn’t believe that I was working on my own. And you know one of the comments on the feedback was, “Needs more management experience”. (Male HEO/AP)*

Again, exposure to a variety of roles and responsibilities is seen as playing an important role in building confidence and motivation and enhancing career progression.

*You need more higher-level exposure ... to more policy making roles ... more interacting with government or international organisations. (Female HEO/AP)*

*I think I'd probably need more experience in other divisions [to consider applying for promotion]. I've been a HEO in my current division and then an AP, so that's my only experience. (Female HEO/AP)*

One PO spoke of placing particular emphasis on developing the range of competencies of more junior staff in order to enhance their career progression.

*I would look at the competencies ... it has to be spread ... one of the problems I've had is that people have good examples of tasks but they make them fit into the wrong box and the competencies ... or they use the same ones more than once. So, really my role ... is to make them think about the tasks in such a way that they will be suitable for the range of competencies ... more about leadership, project management ... external engagement. (Female PO/AS)*

Hence, mobility and change in terms of roles and responsibilities were generally seen as important in enhancing promotion prospects for men and women in the civil service. However, as noted in Chapter 5, unexpected and unannounced moves internally and externally also sometimes had the effect of leaving people out of depth and 'on the back foot'.

*A. So, I now, as I say, after two years I still find it – I'd still be as they say on the back foot an awful lot. I don't feel 100 per cent. I don't feel even 50 per cent confident because I just don't have the background. I don't like that ... and you know, it's difficult.*

*Q. Yes. And is there anything that could have been that would have made that easier do you think, looking back?*

*A. They could have asked me. (Male HEO/AP)*

It was also noted that valuable and relevant experience outside the civil service, often in private sector organisations, was not recognised in the promotion process. One female manager had considerable managerial experience in the private sector but was deemed ineligible for a PO position on the grounds.

*"You met the standard but you haven't got enough management experience so you're not being called". They just opened the front page [of my application] and saw "Current job: AO [Administrative Officer]", dump. (Female HEO/AP)*

## 6.5 GEOGRAPHICAL MOBILITY ISSUES

For some civil servants, accepting a promotion involved moving to a new work location, which in some cases was related to a decentralisation process and the requirement to fill posts in regional locations. This sometimes created challenges, either in terms of the need to move home or to endure lengthy commute times. One civil servant with two children was commuting daily from Dublin to a regional location, following a promotion to a more senior position.

*During those four years I thought, “I’ve made the wrong decision”, finding the daily commute and other pressures very difficult. (Female HEO/AP)*

For some of those for whom taking a promotion meant moving home, this was a significant, if not decisive, factor in their decision regarding whether or not to accept the promotion. This was a particularly important factor among those with (young) children.

*It wouldn’t be possible to be commuting that distance. Not unless you were going to move your family back up there. (Female HEO/AP)*

It was also observed that moving to a regional location had serious implications for subsequent progression opportunities, in two of the departments in particular.

*In a sense, you’d go down [to a regional location] and you’re stuck in a ghetto for the rest of your life, you know, in a relatively small working area. (Male HEO/AP)*

Some civil servants had an understanding that moving to a regional location would have progression implications in advance of taking that decision.

*To be honest, when I decentralised I would have felt in the back of my own mind, “Well, that’s it ... I won’t be applying for any further promotions”. That would have closed the door on that, I would have felt. (Male HEO/AP)*

Others did not progress as they had expected following a regional relocation, which they felt might have impacted on their decision-making had they known in advance.

*I suppose for me – I’m [name of regional location] based so the decisions I have to make are around location versus grade ... so the opportunities [for promotion] are extremely limited and you’re looking at the age profile of the APs, both in their early fifties. They’re going to be around for a while. (Female HEO/AP)*

*The main constraint on me is geographic ... I’ve been based in [location] since 1989 ... I’ve no intention of moving out ... and it’s been*

*important in terms of the jobs I've turned down ... I was offered AP in a number of locations and I turned it down. (Male PO/AS)*

Conversely, the opportunity to move out of that location proved a barrier for some and meant their career progression was slower than might otherwise have been the case.

*So [I] went to [name of regional location] but the one thing about [location] is it was impossible to get out of it. I was nine years in [location] as a Clerical Assistant. (Female PO/AS)*

A number of civil servants felt that geographical location also had implications for the nature of the roles and responsibilities available to them – and that being based in a regional location often meant being confined to operational roles.

*I really think that unless you're physically up in Dublin and dealing with perhaps a cutting edge policy issue ... you're probably not at the races. ... And it's certainly applicable to anybody working in an operational area. (Male HEO/AP)*

Managers based in regional locations also felt that their access to temporary positions or secondment opportunities was also limited by virtue of not being based in or near Dublin.

*[Placement in agencies] gives people the opportunity to go out and again I suppose a new challenge and acquire new skills ... all of that is lost when you're in a regional [location] ... I see secondment posts coming up there in different places and I think, "God, if I was in Dublin maybe I might go out for a year or two just to see" ... to gain more experience and to show ... you're not resting on your laurels ... But that's lost when you go to a regional [location] ... when you decentralise, you effectively close the door on the opportunities. (Male HEO/AP)*

In addition, access to flexible working arrangements was also argued to be more difficult in smaller regional settings, particularly access to job-share type arrangements.

*All those work-sharers are in policy areas and they're all in headquarters buildings. (Male PO/AS)*

## **6.6 CULTURAL PROCESSES**

Across a number of government departments, female senior managers variously spoke of the underlying cultural ethos impacting on women. The terms 'boys' club' and 'back-slapping', in terms of the cultural ethos, were used in two departments in particular. In one department, a female AP spoke of a culture in the past where

‘there was a boy’s club definitely ... it was there and accepted and nobody cared it was there’. While acknowledging this was a feature of the past, she felt there were still remnants today.

*I think it’s still there to a lesser degree. I also think it’s become more subtle. So I think in some cases the mindset is still there but the behaviour doesn’t match ... there’s still an attitude to women ... I think it’s changing but I think there is ... I think it’s still underneath the surface at times ... I don’t think it’s something that’s gone. (Female HEO/AP)*

In a similar vein, senior civil servants in another department spoke of the role of a more subtle, informal climate among men, which they felt left female colleagues as outsiders to an extent. This impacted on their sense of connectedness and their access to informally shared information.

*I think it’s much more subtle in the, just the way business is conducted and in the way, you know, kind of slapping themselves on the back kind of culture ... I don’t believe in bias in promotions or quotas or anything like that ... I just think there’s a much more subtle sort of bias in the way people think ... There is almost a fear of change and, you know, putting more women in there [senior management] might change it, you know. (Female PO/AS)*

*At this very subtle kind of sub-conscious level ... there’s always this sort of, you know, good humoured banter that goes on amongst them [male colleagues] at meetings and, you know, you’re not really part of it ... it’s kind of the lads. (Female PO/AS)*

*I think that there’s still the informal kind of social atmosphere of the organisation ... women probably still, it’s more difficult ... you know if your mates are, you’re kind of hanging around with the other guys and they’re telling one another [information], because the higher up you go in the organisation, the more a lot of things happen like that [informally]. (Female PO/AS)*

A number of senior managers commented on recent policy discussions, which they feel have created a situation whereby women are more likely to be appointed or promoted. In January 2017, the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform announced that there would be a target of 50/50 gender balance in appointments at senior levels. The merit-based approach of ‘best person for the job’ would continue to apply but where candidates who compete for Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC) positions are of equal merit, then priority would be given to the female candidate where they are under-represented on the management board of

the department or office in question.<sup>55</sup> Given the timing of the interviews, shortly after this announcement, civil servants raised a number of concerns around these measures. A number of male managers felt this would hinder their promotion prospects and may impact on their willingness to apply for promotion in the future.

*Well, at the moment unfortunately there's bias towards women, I don't mean that in any disrespectful way, this is now government policy. ... It was in the paper a few weeks ago, saying they are going to favour women in senior positions. So, I think that's – I don't agree with discrimination, positive, negative, or anything. ... I think it's a mistake. ... I think you should give it to the person who is best suited, irrespective of their gender. ... I think most senior management positions recently have been to females. ... Now that's not to say that they weren't good candidates. ... But when you have a public declaration that they should be women. ... You know, you're disinclined to apply. (Male HEO/AP)*

Negative perceptions of positive discrimination were also evident among female managers.

*It annoys me this gender quotas, because I believe the best person for the job should get it. ... It's a slippery slope when we start going down this route. (Female HEO/AP)*

*[The recent announcement means that] ... if you have a tie and it's a man and a woman then they're supposed to promote the woman. ... I think that's going to cause – has the potential to cause – a problem for women. If then a woman comes into the job and then [people say]... "Well you only got that because [you are a woman]". (Female HEO/AP)*

*I don't want it to come down to a decision if it's me and a man in for a job that I get it just because I'm a woman. I want to get it because I am the best candidate ... Coming out and making these statements [around positive discrimination] will actually make it more difficult for a woman because the perception is going to be now, "Oh, she only got it because she's a woman", and I think that's creating its own imbalances and its own unfairness around the situation. (Female HEO/AP)*

## 6.7 CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has explored the barriers reported by managers and senior managers in progressing within the civil service. Across all four departments, managers spoke of the importance of self-confidence in progression. Many felt that men are often more ambitious and more confident in their abilities than women, who tended to

<sup>55</sup> See <http://www.per.gov.ie/en/minister-donohoe-announces-new-initiatives-for-achieving-gender-balance-in-the-civil-service/>.



wait to apply for promotion until they were sure they fulfilled all the requirements. The role of flexible working arrangements in shaping the nature of work–life balance and opportunities for progression was a prominent theme in the interviews. A perceived absence of *real* flexibility in working arrangements for those at senior management grades (PO and above) was seen as *the* key factor in shaping the extent of gender balance in the civil service.

The role of previous experience and exposure also arose, in particular, in terms of the relative value of ‘policy’ versus ‘operational’ experience. Further, it was felt that men typically did better than their equally qualified female counterparts in terms of accessing the ‘interesting’ and ‘prestigious’ roles. Geographical factors also play a role, in terms of constraints both on progression opportunities for those in regional locations and on the nature of roles and experiences of those based outside headquarters.

More broadly, senior civil servants in two departments spoke of an underlying ‘boys’ club’ cultural ethos, which served to leave female colleagues as outsiders and which impacted on their sense of connectedness and access to informally shared information. Positive discrimination policies were viewed as potentially adversely impacting on career progression, particularly for women.

## CHAPTER 7

### Conclusions and implications for policy

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This study set out to explore the processes and barriers that hinder gender equity at the highest level of the civil service. While there have been significant improvements in gender balance in the civil service over recent decades, women are still considerably under-represented in the most senior grades. Analysis of the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey data shows that, given the same educational qualifications and length of service, men are twice as likely as women to reach Principal Officer level or above. This pattern represents a significant gender difference in career advancement and an under-utilisation of female skills and talent. In addition to the individual cost of gender inequality in access to higher occupational positions, there is also a price for organisations. Greater diversity among senior staff is important for the quality of decision-making. Further, a lack of gender balance can undermine the legitimacy of the decisions made (OECD, 2012; 2014).

Since 2006, recruitment to higher-level grades has been open to those outside the civil service in a process overseen by the Public Appointment Service and, for Assistant Secretary and Secretary General, or equivalent, grades, the Top Level Appointments Committee. Administrative data show that in 2015–2016, external recruitment to the Assistant Principal grade and the Principal Officer grade narrowly favoured women: 55 per cent of Principal Officers appointed and 56 per cent of Assistant Principals were female. However, at the highest grades (Assistant Secretary and Secretary General), 58 per cent of appointees were male. The female share of new entrants to posts at Assistant Principal or above has been relatively stable since 2006, with a marginal decline from 58 per cent to 55 per cent over the period (see Figure 3.1).

Women are also likely to enter the civil service at a lower grade. Just under 69 per cent of female entrants to the civil service in 2015–2016 joined at Clerical Officer level, compared to 61 per cent of male entrants. This means that women have to climb higher to reach the top. Both the qualitative and the administrative data show some of those who currently occupy the most senior positions in the civil service originally entered at Clerical Assistant or Clerical Officer level, showing that there is a career path all the way through the civil service. However, such a journey takes a considerable period of time. For men, it took an average of 31 years to reach senior management positions from Clerical Officer, compared to 24 years for women. In contrast, for those entering at Assistant Principal level, it took men an average of 15 years and women an average of 16 years to reach senior management.

While external recruitment has opened up access to a wider pool of applicants, promotion remains the dominant route into higher-level civil service positions. The study provides insights into a range of barriers and processes that are associated with gender inequalities in outcomes, which include:

1. readiness, self-confidence and timing;
2. work intensity, flexible working and work–life balance;
3. geographic location;
4. promotion process; and
5. gaps in career development support.

### **7.1 APPLYING FOR PROMOTION: ‘READINESS’, SELF-CONFIDENCE AND TIMING**

Human resources data for 2015–2016 show that while there were improvements in the recruitment of women to higher grades via open competition, women remained under-represented among those who were promoted to Principal Officer or above. However, these figures do not reveal the point in the process where women are ‘falling out’. Results from show that, in the most recent period, women were less likely to apply for Principal Officer positions than men (making up just over 40 per cent of applicants) but they were somewhat more likely to be successful than men when they entered the competition. Similarly, in Assistant Principal competitions, the female share of successful candidates was slightly higher than the female share of applicants.

The qualitative interviews shed light on the reasons behind these gender differences in behaviour. Interviewees commonly noted that women were more likely to postpone applications for promotion until they were well over the threshold and had ‘ticked all the boxes’. This was attributed to lower self-confidence among women and perhaps an over-confidence among male applicants. Women were also seen as being less comfortable with highlighting their achievements, which was seen to both deter applications for promotion and to disadvantage women in the interview process (see below). The survey finding that women in the more senior grades (Administrative Officer, Assistant Principal, Principal Officer and above) have higher qualifications than men in the same positions is also consistent with this pattern of gender differences in the self-assessed ‘readiness’ for promotion.

For those women who had delayed applying for promotion until their children were older, timing could be a potential constraint in a context where most successful candidates for Top Level Appointments Committee posts had previously

applied on several occasions. A number of unsuccessful applications in their fifties could be seen as bringing some female candidates too close to (early) retirement for it to be 'worthwhile' to apply again. Evidence from the Northern Irish public sector review found that a significant proportion of employees opted out of promotion competitions due to approaching retirement or because of caring responsibilities. The latter reason was much more common among female respondents, an issue that is discussed further in the following section.

Over a typical career, an individual civil servant will have experienced peaks and troughs in the frequency with which promotion competitions were held. Most recently, a moratorium on open recruitment and promotion was imposed in response to the economic and fiscal crisis between 2009 and 2014 (see Section 2.1.4).<sup>56</sup> As a result, caring constraints could mean that some women missed opportunities at crucial periods in their career.

## **7.2 WORK INTENSITY, FLEXIBLE WORK AND WORK–LIFE BALANCE**

The administrative data point to two clear patterns in relation to flexible working arrangements: firstly, such arrangements are disproportionately taken up by women; and secondly, the proportion of senior management on such arrangements is very small among both women and men. Flexible working arrangements were seen by female and male interviewees as a significant advantage of working in the civil service. However, there appears to be considerable variation in the extent to which flexible arrangements are open to staff at particular grades and in particular sections or roles.

The risk of losing this flexibility to balance work with caring responsibilities was an important factor in deciding whether or not to go for promotion for some women. This pattern was reinforced by the significant workload and long hours worked by very senior staff, which often posed difficulties for family life for both women and men. Many senior managers reported working 12 to 14 hours per day, working at weekends and in the evenings, and in some cases reported the need for regular travel. The employee survey results highlighted that this phenomenon was typical for a significant proportion of civil servants who reported high levels of work intensity – that is, a high level of work demands and time pressure. Work intensity rose substantially with each grade level, with those at Principal Officer level and above recording the highest level of pressure. At every grade level, women recorded higher levels of work intensity than men.

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<sup>56</sup> However, some internal promotion competitions were held during this period.

The qualitative interviews suggest some of the possible mechanisms behind these gender differences in work intensity. Firstly, there was a view among women working shorter hours at the Higher Executive Officer level and Assistant Principal level that their workload was not reduced accordingly and so they felt they had to do the same job in a reduced number of days (although it should be noted that in the survey analysis, part-time work was associated with lower work intensity overall). Secondly, a higher level of conscientiousness was evident among many female interviewees, whereby they were determined to do as good a job as possible in their current grade. Such conscientiousness was also evident in the reluctance of some women to apply for promotion until they were 'sure' that they could do the job to a high standard. A third factor was the greater burden of responsibility for childcare (and eldercare) on women and the difficulties of combining these commitments with a very demanding work role.

Unfortunately, the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey did not contain information on family status or caring responsibilities, so the role of these factors in work pressure could not be tested using the quantitative data. However, gender differences in the time spent on caring and unpaid household work persist in Ireland, as elsewhere (McGinnity and Russell, 2008), and this is likely to affect perceptions of work–family conflict and work pressure.

We found that, within grades, higher work intensity was associated with poorer perceptions of promotion prospects in the survey data, reinforcing the findings of the qualitative research that high workload at senior level was a barrier to advancement. These findings are also consistent with results from the Northern Irish review of gender inequality at senior levels in the public service, where a long working hours culture and a lack of flexible work arrangements were two of the most common reasons for respondents opting out of career progression.

### **7.3 LOCATION**

In survey findings, being located outside headquarters was associated with perceived poorer promotion opportunities. While this barrier impacted on both women and men, women are more likely to be affected, as 67 per cent of female civil servants are located outside headquarters, compared to 62 per cent of male civil servants.

The interviews highlight that regional location or location outside headquarters influenced opportunities for advancement in two ways. Firstly, due to the limited number of senior vacancies at local office level, promotion would involve relocation or long commutes, both of which are inconsistent with a good work–life balance. Secondly, regional location limited the variety of roles and assignments

available to gain valued experience and, in some cases, limited access to training opportunities.

The limitations of regional location came across more strongly in the qualitative interviews in two departments in particular, which suggests that there are departmental differences in the opportunities available.

#### **7.4 PROMOTION PROCEDURES**

Among those interviewed for the qualitative research, all of whom had reached at least Higher Executive Officer level generally saw the promotion process as being fair. However, a number of aspects were identified as problematic by some of the interviewees, both male and female. Firstly, while the standardised tests and simulation exercises were generally believed to be valid, there was a sense that the tests could be learned or practiced, or that there were inconsistencies in results. Secondly, the emphasis on performance at interview and the low weighting given to performance in the current role was believed to disadvantage women, who were more diffident in presenting themselves in the most positive light. Thirdly, while the public nature of the promotion round created a high level of awareness and facilitated access to support, there was a downside in that success or failure became common knowledge. Fourthly, promotion to senior positions often involved multiple attempts (a situation also reported by Cairns on the basis of a survey of senior civil servants) and a number of interviewees felt that the level of feedback to unsuccessful candidates was insufficient.

The views of the promotion process and promotion opportunities expressed in the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey were less positive. For example, just under one-quarter of respondents agreed that they had all the opportunities they needed for promotion, 26 per cent agreed that if they performed well they would have the opportunity to be promoted, and only 23 per cent agreed that their department 'has a clear and fair promotions process'. The latter finding is echoed in the qualitative interviews, where some staff were more critical of the potential for bias in internal (departmental) competitions. Perceptions became more positive as respondents' position in the occupational hierarchy increased. Within grades, women were found to have the same or more favourable perceptions of promotion than men. How can this be reconciled with the gender differences found in terms of chances of reaching the highest positions?

In some cases, a positive attitude among women regarding promotion could be attributed to past experiences, rather than future prospects. For example, the more positive attitudes of women compared to men at Higher Executive Officer, Administrative Officer and Assistant Principal grades could be accounted for by the fact that they had reached their position in a shorter space of time than their male

counterparts.<sup>57</sup> The difference in perceptions at these grades disappeared when men and women with the same length of service were compared.

The lack of expected gender differences in perceived promotion opportunities could also be linked to differences in expectations, or to an individualisation of the constraints imposed by the organisation. In the latter case, women can feel they had 'chosen' not to advance any further because of the incompatibility of the demands of the job with other commitments, rather than seeing this choice as being constrained by the allocation of tasks, staffing arrangements or other structural factors, including the expected workload. A similar process may lie behind the absence of a negative relationship between part-time work and perceived promotion opportunities in the survey. The in-depth interviews with staff offer more nuanced insights into the patterns behind these apparently contradictory survey responses. Interviewees were likely to describe the promotions process as fair 'for everyone', while at the same time delineating the potential barriers and constraints in pursuing promotion themselves.

The extent to which the gender composition of management offers positive role models for women in lower grades has been the subject of international research (see, for example, Cohen *et al.*, 1998). Analyses of the survey data suggest that women report slightly more positive promotion opportunities in departments where women make up a higher proportion of senior staff. However, this was not found for training and management support, where the female share of managers was associated with lower perceived learning opportunities and support, though this may reflect the kinds of departments in which women are over-represented. The qualitative interview data were suggestive of different gender cultures across departments, depending on the gender profile of senior grades. Furthermore, there was a strong awareness that some women were 'doing well' in recent promotion competitions, which may serve as a positive signal to other women.

## 7.5 LACK OF CAREER DEVELOPMENT SUPPORTS

Career development is dependent on a set of interlinked supports and opportunities. On-the-job learning and formal training are essential elements of professional development and are likely to be important for promotion chances. Support from managers to access opportunities for development, mentoring and guidance in promotion applications was also identified as critical for advancement within the civil service.

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<sup>57</sup> Women at Assistant Principal level and Higher Executive Officer level had significantly shorter periods of service than men in these grades. The gap was less substantial at Administrative Officer level, though was in the same direction (see Figure 3.10).

Relevant experience in policy-related tasks or in roles that were visible to senior management was seen to be important for promotion prospects. In contrast, operational or service delivery roles were thought to be less effective for gaining (or at least demonstrating) the required competencies. Yet access to such roles was not evenly distributed across genders, departments or locations (head office versus regional or local offices). The survey data showed that, at Principal Officer grade, women were more likely than men to be engaged in service delivery and frontline services. A similar pattern was observed among those at the Higher Executive Officer grade. These inequalities suggest the need for a more structured and transparent approach to the allocations of tasks and functions (see below).

Many interviewees mentioned the issue of lack of structured induction and handover on being newly promoted. This led to a situation of 'sink or swim' for those entering new roles, especially at higher level. The absence of a systematically planned transition between roles is likely to negatively affect whether staff apply for promotion and, in particular, for positions outside their current department. Given lower levels of self-confidence among women, on average, they are likely to be particularly affected by the absence of such planning.

Managerial support emerged as crucial in shaping staff experience of their work. Firstly, access to the kinds of opportunities that would enhance promotion chances (such as being asked to attend meetings with the Minister or external stakeholders, or being allocated specific high profile projects) was fundamentally shaped by managerial decisions. Secondly, managers emerged as a crucial source of support in helping shape the decision to apply for promotion and, even more importantly, in helping candidates compile their application and prepare for interview.

The survey findings showed a differentiation in access to career supports across grades. Access to managerial support and training/learning opportunities were found to increase with grade level in a process of 'cumulative advantage'. While there was no gender difference between men and women regarding perceived supports within grades, the concentration of women in the Clerical Officer and (the former) Staff Officer grades meant they were disadvantaged in this respect. Part-time workers, that is, those reporting less than full-time equivalent hours, do not differ from full-time staff in their reported access to managerial support or training opportunities. However, the administrative data and the staff interviews highlight significant constraints in achieving promotion among this group of staff.

## **7.6 IMPLICATIONS FOR POLICY DEVELOPMENT: WHAT CAN BE DONE?**

The study findings point to a number of factors that could facilitate the promotion opportunities of all staff but which are likely to have particular benefits for women, given some of the barriers identified in the study. In a context where a significant



proportion of civil servants will retire over the next ten years, it is timely to consider issues of promotion opportunities, in order to provide the best possible and most equitable way of selecting high quality staff for the future.

### 7.6.1 Career development supports

The study highlights the need for a more systematic approach to career development for newly appointed and promoted staff, one that facilitates a personal development plan designed to help staff develop skills and competencies across a range of functions.<sup>58</sup>

This would be of benefit not only to those orienting themselves towards promotion, but for other staff who are not explicitly seeking promotion, by providing them with skill development and a diversity of experience that would enhance their contribution to their section/department. It is crucial that part of this career development structure involves a period of induction and/or handover, as staff move from one role to another.

### 7.6.2 Mentoring and coaching

The survey analysis shows that a greater proportion of female role models in senior positions within a department is positively related to women's perceptions of opportunity for advancement, albeit only to a slight extent. Mentoring, sponsorship and coaching are more active forms of support for leadership (Hewlett *et al.*, 2010; Gabaldon *et al.*, 2016). However, there is evidence that the effectiveness of mentoring can differ depending on the gender of the mentor and mentee (McDonald and Westphal, 2013; Day, 2001 ).

Mentoring and coaching would further facilitate staff adjusting to new tasks and functions. Such an approach is likely to enhance the confidence of staff, especially women, who may find the existing 'sink or swim' approach daunting. It is also likely to greatly enhance the effectiveness of the department or unit by ensuring the transfer of skills, expertise and contacts.

### 7.6.3 Promotion procedures

Staff at senior grades (Higher Executive Officer to Assistant Secretary) generally view the promotion procedures as fair. However, there is an argument for consideration to be given to taking account of a candidate's work performance in the promotion procedure. At present, only Top Level Appointments Committee

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<sup>58</sup> This might include 'stretch assignments' (Day, 2001). The Northern Ireland review (Ballantine *et al.*, 2016) found that 'acting up' opportunities was seen as the most beneficial organisational strategy by respondents.

candidates are required to give names of referees, while others applying for internal competitions have to acquire 'approval', via an appraisal, from their manager (the content of which the candidate sees). Taking up references as part of the promotion process may provide a useful way of taking account of work performance in conjunction with the competency-based interview. There may be understandable concerns about managers being unfair to individual staff members in certain circumstances. However, in a context where the vast majority of staff has worked for multiple managers over their career, they should be in a position to draw on a range of perspectives in support of their application. Rigorous training of interview boards for both external and internal promotion rounds is also crucial. In its absence, unconscious bias may emerge whereby boards favour candidates who resemble themselves. Finally, given that repeated applications were common, especially for Top Level Appointments Committee appointments, the provision of more detailed feedback would be of benefit to unsuccessful candidates. Constructive feedback and interviewee training were two of the most important factors for improving gender equality among executives in the Northern Ireland public sector survey (Ballantine *et al.*, 2016).

#### **7.6.4 Regional location**

In the qualitative interviews, staff located outside of head office were more negative about the possibility of securing promotion without relocating. While there is not necessarily an easy solution to this issue, it merits further attention in order to secure equity of access to senior positions within the civil service.

#### **7.6.5 Flexible working and task/role restructuring to reduce long hours**

A striking feature of the study findings is the lack of flexible working arrangements, alongside a heavy workload requiring long hours, among those at senior grades. Both factors operate as a barrier to staff with caring responsibilities (childcare and eldercare); this particularly affects women, given the gendered division of labour persisting in Irish households. This pattern raises a more general issue of the appropriate nature of work organisation at senior levels, given that long hours over a protracted period of time are likely to result in 'burnout' for staff and are therefore sub-optimal for the organisation as a whole. In order to achieve real gender equity in access to senior positions, there needs to be a greater openness to flexible working arrangements across grades and sections/departments, which could be achieved by structuring jobs not as 'empty places' but as sets of tasks and functions that could be configured differently across different members of staff. In addition, the allocation of employees to different sections and functions could be done on the basis of full-time equivalent numbers rather than headcount to encourage managers to be open to flexible practices among their staff.

### 7.6.6 Affirmative action and equal opportunities policies

Internationally, gender and race inequalities in access to senior appointments and other valuable positions have been addressed through affirmative action and equal opportunities programmes. Affirmative action involves preferential treatment for the disadvantaged group, often with fixed quotas, whereas in equal opportunities programmes targets are typically used but do not imply preferential treatment. Affirmative action policies have been most widely used and hotly debated in the US (Holzer and Nuemark, 2000; 2006). In Ireland, gender quotas are uncommon but have been used to increase political representation of women and for the representation of women on the boards of public bodies. While US studies have found affirmative action policy has shifted representation in affected companies from white men to minorities and women, the effects were not large (Holzer and Nuemark, 2006). More importantly, the authors conclude that there is virtually no evidence that the qualifications or performance of women lag behind those of men due to affirmative action (*ibid*, p.34). However, even in the absence of such evidence, quotas can be perceived as being associated with lower standards for the groups concerned, reinforcing negative stereotypes (Holzer, 2010).

In contrast to affirmative action, other approaches have sought to emphasise the fostering, rather than mandating, of equal opportunities within the organisation. Research has sought to identify ‘best practice’ in bringing about more equal representation of women and men in senior positions in the private and public sectors. Much of this research points to the importance of the context within which particular policies are implemented, with variation in ‘what works’ across different organisational settings (Tolbert and Castilla, 2017). A key feature of successful approaches is the extent to which managers take ownership of the goal of equal opportunity and engage in on-going monitoring of the profile of the workforce (Dobbin *et al.*, 2015; Hirsch and Cha, 2017). Thus, setting equality targets can work by creating normative pressure for compliance, signalling a commitment to equality objectives and increasing transparency, thus encouraging recruiters to search more widely, develop talent and address biases in existing policies and structures (Gabaldon *et al.*, 2016; OECD, 2014). There is evidence that such an approach has led to greater gender diversity on boards in Australia (Chapple and Humphrey, 2014).

In January 2017, it was announced by the Minister for Public Expenditure and Reform that there would be a target of 50–50 gender balance in appointments at senior levels. The merit-based approach of ‘best person for the job’ would continue to apply but where candidates who compete for Top Level Appointments Committee positions are of equal merit, then priority would be given to the female candidate where they are under-represented on the management board of the department or office in question. No time-frame was set to reach the target.

Setting a target to achieve gender balance in senior level appointments sends a signal of commitment to gender equality and, as an example of the equal opportunities approach, is uncontroversial. The second element of the policy gives preference to women, but only when they are equally qualified to the male candidates (in a broad sense). While this approach is on the soft end of preferential treatment, it nevertheless drew spontaneous negative comment from those interviewed for this study. Men considered this discriminatory, while women felt they would prefer to be promoted on merit alone. In this context, the policy may have negative unintended consequences and analysis is needed to establish whether the gains from a very mild form of preferential treatment are enough to outweigh potential negative side-effects.

### **7.6.7 Monitoring**

Setting targets for more equal gender representation demands regular information collection and monitoring. The research study has highlighted the need for ongoing monitoring of the profile of women and men applying for, and being successful in, promotion competitions. Some individual departments have themselves carried out gender audits. Regular information is published on the numbers going through Top Level Appointments Committee competitions; PAS compile information for their own purposes while information on internal promotion competitions is not made publicly available. In order to monitor gender equity, it is crucial that information on the outcomes of all kinds of promotion competitions be made publicly available. Such information on its own will not, however, be sufficient to assess whether certain groups of women, for example, those with children or other caring responsibilities, are less likely to reach higher grades. There is considerable potential to use the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey to monitor the profile of staff across different grades and thus identify groups of staff who may not be applying for, or succeeding in achieving, promotion. This will require the addition of a small number of items to the questionnaire, such as family composition, participation in flexible work options (past and present) and length of time at current grade.

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## APPENDICES

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### Appendix 1: Comparison of CSEES and administrative data

Firstly, we compare the distribution of grade levels by gender in both data sources to examine the extent to which some grade levels are under- or over-represented in the Civil Service Employee Engagement Survey (CSEES).

Table A1.1 shows the distribution of grades by gender. Comparing the CSEES and Department of Public Expenditure and Reform (DPER) data we see that, overall, the higher grades are over-represented in the survey (third column). This is in line with established findings that often show a gradient in survey completion depending on occupation. At the level of Principal Officer (PO) and above ( $\geq$ PO) and Assistant Principal (AP), about two per cent more staff completed the survey, compared to the actual proportion of staff at these grades, while Higher Executive Officers (HEO) are over-represented by about six percentage points. This may also be related to gender variation across the different grades. For example, the bottom row shows that, in total, a higher proportion of men completed the survey (40 per cent) compared to the actual proportion of men working in the civil service (37 per cent) and men are more likely to be working at higher grades.

The proportion of Executive Officers (EO) and Staff Officers (SO) who participated in the survey roughly matches their distribution across all grades; however, less than half the proportion of Administration Officers (AO) and a much lower proportion of Clerical Officer (CO) grades are represented (about seven per cent less). Again this may be driven by, or a result of, the lower proportion of women who completed the survey overall; 60 per cent compared to the actual 63 per cent female share, and is reflected in the lower proportion of female respondents at SO and CO level, despite the actual share of women working at these grades being higher.

TABLE A1.1 DISTRIBUTION OF GRADE LEVELS IN CSEES AND ADMINISTRATIVE DATA BY GENDER

Position	% Female		% Male		% Total	
	CSEES	DPER data	CSEES	DPER data	CSEES	DPER data
<b>Principal Officer and higher (&gt;=PO)</b>	34.9	38.5	65.1	61.5	7.3	4.8
<b>Assistant Principal (AP)</b>	45.6	48.0	54.4	52.0	13.9	11.5
<b>Higher Executive Officer (HEO)</b>	55.2	58.0	44.8	42.0	19.6	14.0
<b>Administrative Officer (AO)</b>	49.9	47.6	50.1	52.4	3.1	6.8
<b>Executive Officer (EO)</b>	62.6	60.6	37.4	39.4	20.4	20.1
<b>Staff Officer (SO)</b>	74.9	79.1	25.1	20.9	4.5	4.6
<b>Clerical Officer (CO)</b>	72.5	74.7	27.5	25.3	31.2	38.2
<b>Total</b>	60.0	63.1	40.0	36.9	N =12,880	N = 33,254

*Source:* Civil Service Human Resource Management System and CSEES data.  
DPER data refer to total headcount numbers at October 2016. Excluded cases are: 25 cases of unknown gender; four cases of unknown grade and 1,236 'other' grades.

*Note:* CSEES data exclude grades 'SVO', 'industrial' and 'other', departments labelled 'other' and cases where information is missing on sex, grade and department.

Turning to departmental distribution, Table A1.2 below shows that the distribution of survey respondents is very similar to the proportions shown in the DPER's database, with a less than one-percentage-point difference in most instances. There is a slight over-representation of the Office of Public Works (OPW) and the Central Statistics Office (CSO) and a slight under-representation of the Department of Justice and Equality, the Department of Social Protection and the Office of the Revenue Commissioners.

TABLE A1.2 DISTRIBUTION OF DEPARTMENTS IN CSEES AND ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

Government department/agency	CSEES		DPER data		% Difference (CSEES - DPER)
	N	%	N	%	%
<b>Office of Public Works</b>	242	1.9%	639	1.9%	0.0%
<b>Central Statistics Office</b>	441	3.4%	879	2.6%	0.8%
<b>Office of Revenue Commissioners</b>	2,319	18.0%	6,317	19.0%	-1.0%
<b>Department of Agriculture, Food and the Marine</b>	968	7.5%	2,987	9.0%	-1.5%
<b>Department of Art, Heritage, Regional, Rural and Gaeltacht Affairs</b>	206	1.6%	540	1.6%	0.0%
<b>Department of Children and Youth Affairs</b>	82	0.6%	186	0.6%	0.1%
<b>Department of Communications, Climate Action and Environment</b>	137	1.1%	320	1.0%	0.1%
<b>Department of Defence</b>	197	1.5%	346	1.0%	0.5%
<b>Department of Education and Skills</b>	712	5.5%	1,560	4.7%	0.8%
<b>Department of Finance</b>	295	2.3%	430	1.3%	1.0%
<b>Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade</b>	552	4.3%	1,240	3.7%	0.6%
<b>Department of Health</b>	168	1.3%	392	1.2%	0.1%
<b>Department of Housing, Planning, Community and Local Government</b>	311	2.4%	640	1.9%	0.5%
<b>Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation</b>	321	2.5%	800	2.4%	0.1%
<b>Department of Justice and Equality</b>	1,907	14.8%	5,988	18.0%	-3.2%
<b>Department of Public Expenditure and Reform</b>	717	5.6%	1,517	4.6%	1.0%
<b>Department of Social Protection</b>	2,608	20.2%	6,786	20.4%	-0.2%
<b>Department of Taoiseach (inc. Oireachtas)</b>	521	4.0%	1,211	3.6%	0.4%
<b>Department of Transport, Tourism and Sport</b>	176	1.4%	476	1.4%	-0.1%
<b>Total</b>	12,880	100%	33,254	100%	

Sources: Civil Service Human Resource Management System and CSEES data.

Note: See note to Table A1.1 for exclusions.

In Tables A1.3 and A1.4, we examine the distribution of job composition, in the form of tenure length and full- or part-time work status, across both the CSEES and the DPER database. Although there is no clear pattern for length of tenure, those with the longest job tenure (more than 30 years) and those who have been working for less than five years in the civil service are under-represented in the survey by about six percentage points and four percentage points, respectively (Table A1.3).

TABLE A1.3 DISTRIBUTION OF JOB TENURE LENGTH IN CSEES AND ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

Years in civil service	CSEES data		DPER data	
	N	%	N	%
>30 years	3,013	23.8	9,866	29.7
25–30 years	921	7.3	1,942	5.8
20–25 years	1,423	11.2	2,716	8.2
15–20 years	1,807	14.3	5,566	16.7
10–15 years	2,376	18.8	4,886	14.7
5–10 years	1,767	14.0	3,414	10.3
<5 years	1,351	10.7	4,864	14.6
<b>Total</b>	<b>12,658</b>	<b>100.0</b>	<b>33,254</b>	<b>100.0</b>

Sources: Civil Service Human Resource Management System and CSEES data.

Note: See note to Table A1.1 for exclusions

Table A1.4 below shows that a much larger proportion of women work part-time (about one-quarter); however, women working part-time are slightly under-represented in the CSEES (21 per cent), compared to actual figures from the DPER database (25 per cent), while slightly more full-time than part-time female workers completed the survey (79 per cent versus 75 per cent). The largest proportion of male civil service employees are working full-time (96 per cent) and there is very little difference between the proportion of men who completed the survey, compared to DPER data, depending on whether they work full-time or part-time (about one per cent in both cases). This would suggest that the overall finding that part-time workers are under-represented (14 per cent) compared to their share in the civil service (17 per cent) may be gender driven.

TABLE A1.4 DISTRIBUTION OF FULL- OR PART-TIME WORK IN CSEES AND ADMINISTRATIVE DATA

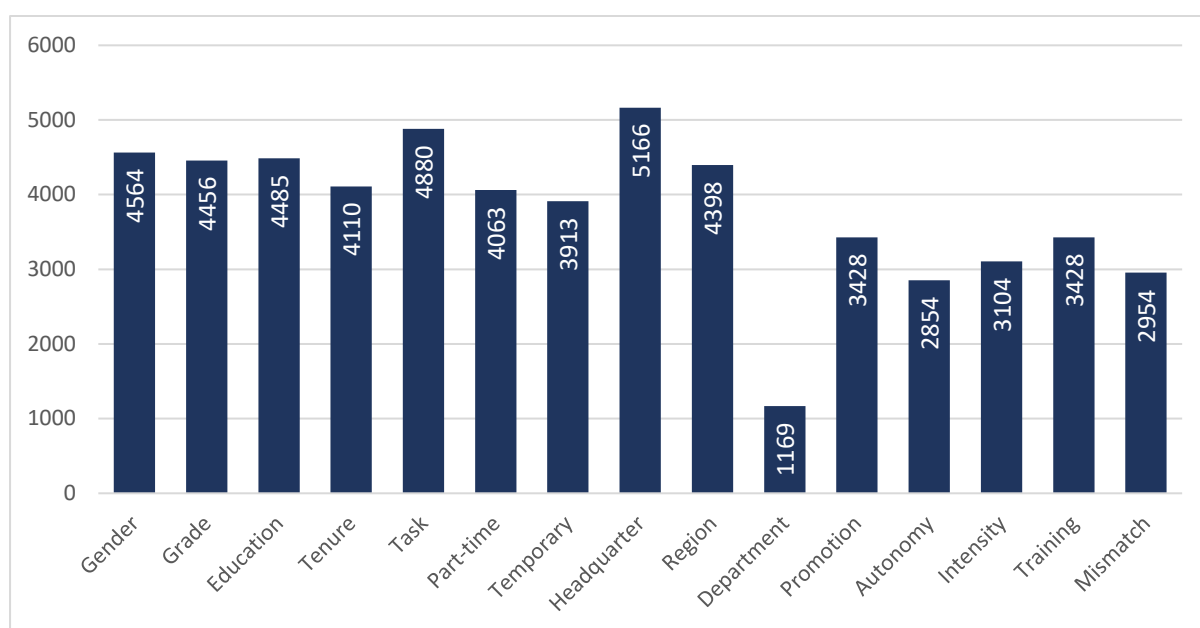
	Female		Male		Total	
	CSEES	DPER data	CSEES	DPER data	CSEES	DPER data
<b>Part-time</b>	21.6%	24.6%	2.4%	3.7%	13.8%	16.9%
<b>Full-time</b>	78.4%	75.4%	97.6%	96.3%	86.2%	83.1%
<b>Total</b>	59.4%	62.3%	40.6%	37.7%	N =12,584	N = 34,254

Sources: Civil Service Human Resource Management System and CSEES data.

Note: See note to Table A1.1 for exclusions.

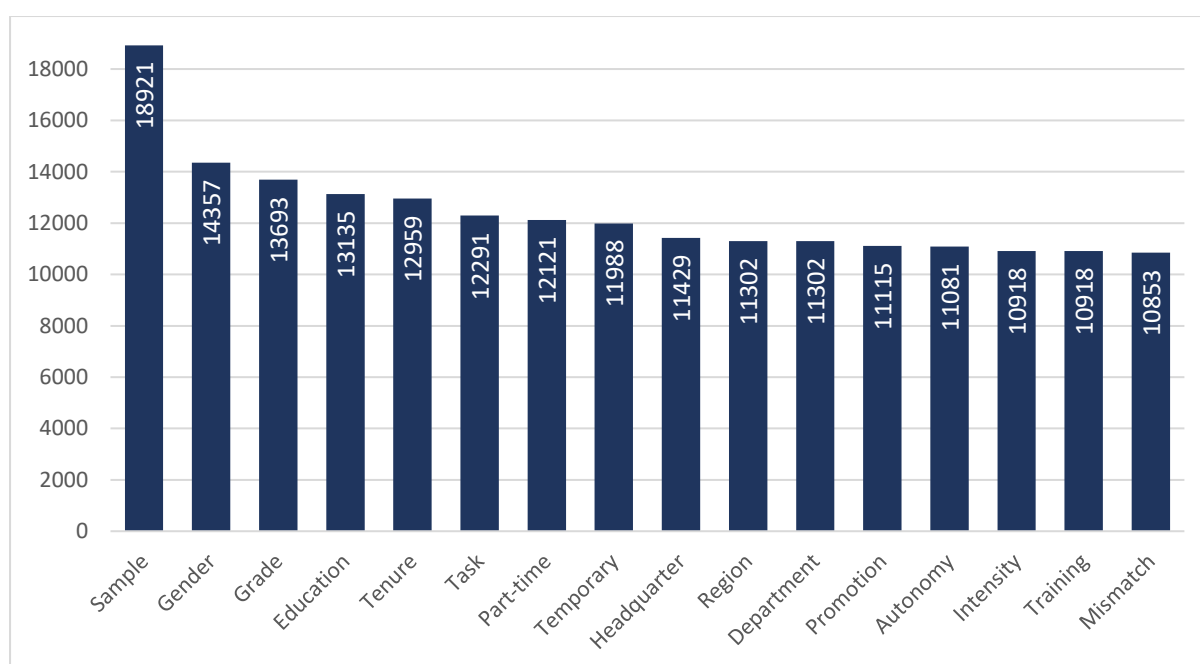


FIGURE A1.1 NUMBER OF MISSING VALUES FOR EACH VARIABLE



Source: CSEES data (2015).

FIGURE A1.2 NUMBER OF VALID CASES WHEN VARIABLES ARE JOINTLY CONSIDERED



Source: CSEES data (2015).

## APPENDICES

### Appendix 2: Overall share of grade by department

TABLE A2.1 PROPORTION OF SENIOR POSITIONS BY DEPARTMENT, 2016

Department/agency	AP and below	PO	AS and above
Agriculture	95.6	4.0	0.4
Arts	95.0	3.9	1.1
Children	87.1	11.3	1.6
Communication	86.9	11.3	1.9
Defence	93.6	5.5	0.9
Education	87.6	11.5	0.9
Environment	90.3	8.3	1.4
Finance	88.1	9.4	2.5
Foreign Affairs	89.4	8.5	2.2
Health	88.0	9.4	2.6
Jobs	93.0	5.3	1.7
Justice	93.1	5.6	1.3
Expenditure	87.3	11.1	1.6
Social Protection	98.4	1.4	0.2
Taoiseach	84.5	10.2	5.3
Transport	91.4	7.1	1.5
Office of Public Works	95.4	4.1	0.5
Revenue	97.8	1.9	0.3
CSO	96.5	2.8	0.7
Education Group	91.6	7.7	0.7
Finance Group	88.9	7.8	3.3
Jobs Group	91.8	6.7	1.5
Justice Group	97.2	2.0	0.9
Public Expenditure Group	96.9	2.8	0.3
Taoiseach Group	86.1	10.7	3.1
<b>Total</b>	<b>95.2</b>	<b>4.0</b>	<b>0.8</b>

Source: Civil Service Human Resource Management System.

## APPENDICES

## Appendix 3: Likelihood of occupying an Assistant Secretary position or higher

TABLE A3.1 LOGISTIC MODEL OF REACHING AS LEVEL OR ABOVE

		Model 1		Model 2		Model 3		Model 4	
		Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.	Exp(B)	Sig.
<b>Gender</b> Ref = Female	Male	4.2	***	3.2	***	2.3	***	2.3	***
<b>Level of Education</b> Ref = Advanced certificate or lower	Degree			16.1	***	23.4	***	24.1	***
	High degree			34.5	***	66.2	***	67.5	***
<b>Length of stay</b> Ref = <10 years	10–20 years					1.1		0.6	
	20–25 years					6.8	***	2.7	**
	25–30 years					5.7	***	2.1	
	>30 years					14.3	***	4.8	***
<b>Age</b> Ref = <39 years	40–49							16.3	***
	50–59							20.8	***
	60+							19.2	***
	Constant	0.004	***	0.001	***	0.000	***	0.000	***
	N	13,412		13,412		13,412		13,412	
	Pseudo R2	0.041		0.156		0.261		0.280	

Source: CSEES data (2015).

Note: \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

## APPENDICES

## Appendix 4: Modelled results tables and scale construction

TABLE A4.1 MODELS OF PERCEIVED TRAINING OPPORTUNITIES

	Model 1	Model 2
<b>Sex (ref. Male)</b>	-	-
Female	0.030	0.037
<b>Grade (ref. CO)</b>	-	-
SO	-0.167	-0.170
EO	0.347***	0.315***
HEO	0.485***	0.444***
AO	0.714***	0.656***
AP	0.784***	0.704***
>=PO	1.000***	0.969***
Other grades	-0.145	-0.053
<b>Education (ref. Low)</b>	-	-
Medium	0.011	0.005
Primary degree	0.045	0.018
Master's degree/PhD	0.131*	0.088
<b>Tenure (ref. &gt; 30 years)</b>	-	-
5 years or less	0.463***	0.466***
5–10 years	-0.360***	-0.343***
10–15 years	-0.198**	-0.196**
15–20 years	-0.119	-0.110
20–25 years	-0.155*	-0.157*
25–30 years	-0.176*	-0.169*
<b>Work arrangement (ref. Full-time)</b>		-
Part-time		0.010
<b>Contract (ref. Permanent)</b>		-
Temporary		-0.026
<b>Task (ref. Policy)</b>		-
Programme implementation		0.322***
Service delivery		0.104
Corporate support		0.237**
Direct service to public		-0.019
Other		0.106
<b>Location (ref. Not headquarter)</b>		-
Headquarters		0.269***
<b>Region (ref. Outside Dublin)</b>		-
Dublin		0.011
Constant	5.015***	4.870***
Adjusted R-squared	0.046	0.056
Observations	12,059	12,059

Source: Own calculation based on the CSEES data (2015).  
 Note: \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

TABLE A4.2 MODELS OF MANAGERIAL SUPPORT

	Model 1	Model 2
<b>Sex (ref. Male)</b>	-	-
Female	-0.058	-0.053
<b>Grade (ref. CO)</b>	-	-
SO	-0.187	-0.170
EO	0.611***	0.536***
HEO	0.571***	0.484***
AO	0.857***	0.641***
AP	0.986***	0.762***
>=PO	1.041***	0.842***
Other grades	-0.361**	-0.292*
<b>Education (ref. Low)</b>	-	-
3rd level non-degree	-0.224***	-0.242***
Primary degree	-0.085	-0.153*
Master's degree/PhD	-0.105	-0.220*
<b>Tenure (ref. &gt; 30 years)</b>	-	-
5 years or less	0.984***	0.879***
5–10 years	0.031	0.046
10–15 years	0.142	0.137
15–20 years	-0.089	-0.081
20–25 years	-0.098	-0.094
25–30 years	-0.170	-0.176
<b>Work arrangement (ref. Full-time)</b>		-
Part-time		0.038
<b>Contract (ref. Permanent)</b>		-
Temporary		0.406**
<b>Task (ref. Policy)</b>		-
Programme implementation		-0.018
Service delivery		-0.470***
Corporate support		-0.053
Direct service to public		-0.701***
Other		-0.305**
<b>Location (ref. Not headquarters)</b>		-
Headquarters		0.293***
<b>Region (ref. Outside Dublin)</b>		-
Dublin		0.121*
Constant	5.296***	5.610***
Adjusted R-squared	0.035	0.051
Observations	12,188	12,188

Source: Own calculation, based on the CSEES data (2015).

Note: \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

TABLE A4.3 TASK ALLOCATION AMONG FULL AND PART-TIME WORKERS

	Men (%)		Women (%)	
	Full-time	Part-time	Full-time	Part-time
<b>Policy</b>	12.6	9.1	9.7	9.9
<b>Service delivery</b>	29.2	33.1	32.3	32.6
<b>Programme implementation</b>	8.7	5.8	5.5	4.5
<b>Corporate support</b>	16.0	18.2	13.7	14.2
<b>Direct service to the public</b>	16.9	16.9	19.6	19.3
<b>Other</b>	16.6	16.9	19.1	19.5
<b>Total</b>	100	100	100	100

Source: Own calculation, based on the CSEES data (2015).

Note: Part-time is defined as less than 37 hrs per week.

TABLE A4.4 MODELS OF WORK INTENSITY

	Model 1	Model 2
<b>Sex (ref. Male)</b>	-	-
Female	0.214***	0.229***
<b>Grade (ref. CO)</b>	-	-
SO	0.883***	0.848***
EO	0.320***	0.365***
HEO	1.000***	1.024***
AO	0.714***	0.776***
AP	1.247***	1.378***
>=PO	1.293***	1.420***
Other grades	0.127	0.190*
<b>Education (ref. Low)</b>	-	-
3rd level non-degree	0.128*	0.134*
Primary degree	0.036	0.076
Master's/PhD	0.235***	0.313***
<b>Tenure (Ref &gt;30 years)</b>		
5 years or less	-0.712***	-0.485***
5–10 years	-0.042	-0.018
10–15 years	0.041	0.054
15–20 years	0.082	0.071
20–25 years	0.030	0.020
25–30 years	-0.016	0.001
<b>Work arrangement (ref. Full-time)</b>		-
Part-time		-0.138*
<b>Contract (ref. Permanent)</b>		-
Temporary		-0.873***
<b>Task (ref. Policy)</b>		-
Programme implementation		0.013
Service delivery		0.084
Corporate support		-0.143
Direct service to public		0.531***
Other		-0.125
<b>Location (ref. Not headquarters)</b>		-
Headquarters		-0.240***
<b>Region (ref. Outside Dublin)</b>		-
Dublin		-0.225***
Constant	4.407***	4.456***
Adjusted R-squared	0.070	0.094
Observations	12,037	12,037

Source: Own calculation, based on the CSEES data (2015).

Note: \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

TABLE A4.5 MODELS OF JOB OVER-SKILLING

	Model 1	Model 2
<b>Sex (ref. Male)</b>	-	-
Female	-0.330***	-0.378***
<b>Grade (ref. CO)</b>	-	-
SO	-0.169	-0.169
EO	-0.427***	-0.441***
HEO	-0.833***	-0.859***
AO	-1.014***	-1.197***
AP	-1.468***	-1.545***
>=PO	-2.163***	-2.263***
Other grades	-1.236***	-1.095***
<b>Education (ref. Low)</b>	-	-
Medium	0.373***	0.389***
Primay degree	0.601***	0.611***
Master's/PhD	0.676***	0.668***
<b>Tenure (ref. &gt; 30 years)</b>	-	-
5 years or less	0.027	0.221*
5–10 years	0.544***	0.541***
10–15 years	0.436***	0.418***
15–20 years	0.219**	0.189*
20–25 years	0.146	0.123
25–30 years	0.264**	0.224*
<b>Work arrangement (ref. Full-time)</b>		-
Part-time		0.278***
<b>Contract (ref. Permanent)</b>		-
Temporary		-0.781***
<b>Task (ref. Policy)</b>		-
Programme implementation		-0.364**
Service delivery		-0.228**
Corporate support		-0.405***
Direct service to public		-0.364***
Other		-0.240**
<b>Location (ref. Not headquarters)</b>		-
Headquarters		0.099
<b>Region (ref. Outside Dublin)</b>		-
Dublin		0.077
Constant	4.534***	4.729***
Adjusted R-squared	0.065	0.073
Observations	12,128	12,128

Source: Own calculation, based on the CSEES data (2015).

Note: \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001





TABLE A4.6 CONTD.

	Model 1	Model 2	Model 3	Model 4	Model 5	Model 6	Model 7	Model 8	Model 9
<b>Work hours (ref. Full-time)</b>						-	-	-	-
<b>Part-time</b>						0.212***	0.181***	0.181***	0.185***
<b>Contract (ref. Permanent)</b>						-	-	-	-
<b>Temporary</b>						-0.154	-0.336***	-0.336***	-0.349***
<b>Task (ref. Policy)</b>							-	-	-
<b>Programme implementation</b>							-0.149	-0.130	-0.172*
<b>Service delivery</b>							-0.246***	-0.227***	-0.266***
<b>Corporate support</b>							-0.257***	-0.254***	-0.256***
<b>Direct service to public</b>							-0.399***	-0.369***	-0.422***
<b>Other</b>							-0.249***	-0.233***	-0.260***
<b>Work pressure</b>							-0.075***	-0.074***	-0.076***
<b>Training opportunities</b>							0.403***	0.403***	0.403***
<b>Skills–job mismatch</b>							-0.090***	-0.091***	-0.089***
<b>Manager career support</b>							0.160***	0.159***	0.160***
<b>Location (ref. Not headquarters)</b>								-	
<b>Headquarters</b>								0.065	
<b>Region (ref. Outside Dublin)</b>									-
<b>Dublin</b>									-0.091**
<b>Constant</b>	4.230***	3.490***	3.646***	3.665***	4.565***	4.608***	2.403***	2.367***	2.481***
<b>Adjusted R-squared</b>	0.000	0.083	0.085	0.086	0.105	0.106	0.407	0.407	0.407
<b>Observations</b>	11,721	11,721	11,721	11,721	11,721	11,721	11,721	11,721	11,721

Source: Own calculation, based on the CSEES data (2015).

Note: \* p<0.05; \*\* p<0.01; \*\*\* p<0.001

TABLE A4.7 MODELS OF PERCEIVED PROMOTION OPPORTUNITIES, SELECTED COEFFICIENTS FOR CONTEXTUAL EFFECTS

	Model 10	Model 11	Model 12	Model 13
Full set of controls <sup>1</sup>	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
Female share AP and above	0.009***	0.004		
Female * Female share AP and above		0.010*		
Size of agency/office (ref. 0/100)			-	
More than 100			0.430**	
Grade ratio within department (ref. Grade above same size or larger)				-
Smaller than 1/5				-0.248**
Between 1/5 and 1/3				-0.178*
Between 1/3 and 1/2				-0.052
Between 1/2 and 1				-0.087
Constant	1.994***	2.248***	1.977***	2.613***
Adjusted R-squared	0.407	0.407	0.406	0.400
Observations	11,629	11,629	11,629	11,040

Source: Own calculation, based on the CSEES data (2015).

Note: \*  $p < 0.05$ ; \*\*  $p < 0.01$ ; \*\*\*  $p < 0.001$ . <sup>1</sup> Controls include all those in Model 8 above.

### Scale construction

In the analyses presented in Chapter 4, we make use of several scales aimed at capturing the perceptions of civil service employees on various job dimensions. These dimensions include the employees' perception of training and promotion opportunities, the work intensity that their job entails, and on the level of 'match' between the skills needed to perform the job and the skills possessed.

The scales that measure these dimensions have been constructed using principal component analysis, which reduces a large number of questions to a smaller number of dimensions/underlying concepts. Indeed, this technique identifies similarities between questions according to the degree of association between the answers: the higher the association, the more the questions measure the same underlying concept. For the construction of the scale, each question has been weighted according to its degree of association with the overall dimension.

In Tables A4.8 to A4.12 and Figure A4.1, we present the items/questions that contribute to each scale.

Employees were asked to express their level of agreement with the statements on a five-point Likert scale: strongly disagree; disagree; neither agree nor disagree; agree; and strongly agree. The scales measure the overall degree of agreement with the items. For some items, the polarity has been reversed in order to make sure that for every item that composes a scale, the direction of the meaning is the same: high values measure positive or negative feeling about the dimension. Items for which this operation has been done are reported in the tables.

TABLE A4.8 TRAINING AND LEARNING DEVELOPMENT, SCALE CONSTRUCTION

Item	Item-test correlation	% Agree and strongly agree
1. I am able to access the right learning and development opportunities when I need to.	0.84	49.8
2. Learning and development activities I have completed in the last 12 months have helped improve my performance.	0.82	41.4
3. Learning and development activities I have completed while working for my department are helping me to develop my career.	0.80	39.3
4. I receive training to keep me up to date with developments in my department (e.g. new rules, procedures, guidelines, IT systems).	0.81	43.6
5. I receive the training that I need to do my job well	0.83	45.4
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	<b>0.88</b>	

Source: CSEES data (2015).

TABLE A4.9 MANAGERIAL SUPPORT, SCALE CONSTRUCTION

Item	Item-test correlation	% Agree and strongly agree
1. My immediate manager takes an interest in my career development.	0.92	48.7
2. My immediate manager makes sure I get credit for my achievements.	0.92	55.7
3. My immediate manager gives me helpful feedback to improve my performance.	0.93	52.1
4. My immediate manager provides assignments that give me the opportunity to develop new skills.	0.89	42.1
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	0.94	

Source: CSEES data (2015).

TABLE A4.10 WORK INTENSITY, SCALE CONSTRUCTION

Item	Item-test correlation	% Agree and strongly agree
1. It often seems like I have too much work for one person to do.	0.85	51.6
2. There is too much work to do everything well.	0.82	33.8
3. I never seem to have enough time to get everything done in my job.	0.85	43.8
4. The amount of work I'm asked to do is fair.	0.72	24.2
5. I am given enough time to do what is expected of me in my job.	0.82	26.4
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	0.87	

Source: CSEES data (2015).

Note: Polarity has been reversed for items 4 and 5. Percentages are computed for the reversed items.

TABLE A4.11 JOB-SKILLS MISMATCH, SCALE CONSTRUCTION

Item	Item-test correlation	% Agree and strongly agree
1. I feel that my work utilises my full abilities.	0.87	39.5
2. My job gives me a chance to do the things I feel I do best.	0.92	27.1
3. I feel that my job and I are well matched.	0.89	16.7
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	0.87	

Source: CSEES data (2015).

Note: Polarity of all items has been reversed. Percentages are computed for the reversed items.

TABLE A4.12 PROMOTION OPPORTUNITIES, SCALE CONSTRUCTION

Item	Item-test correlation	% Agree and strongly agree
<b>1. There are opportunities for me to develop my career in my Department.</b>	0.83	38.9
<b>2. I believe that if I perform well I will have the opportunity to be promoted.</b>	0.89	26.2
<b>3. I feel I have all the opportunities I need for promotion.</b>	0.88	23.9
<b>4. My Department has a clear and fair promotion process.</b>	0.84	22.9
<b>Cronbach's Alpha</b>	0.88	

Source: CSEES data (2015).

In the tables, together with the list of items, we also present their correlation with the overall scale (item-test correlation) and the Cronbach's Alpha.

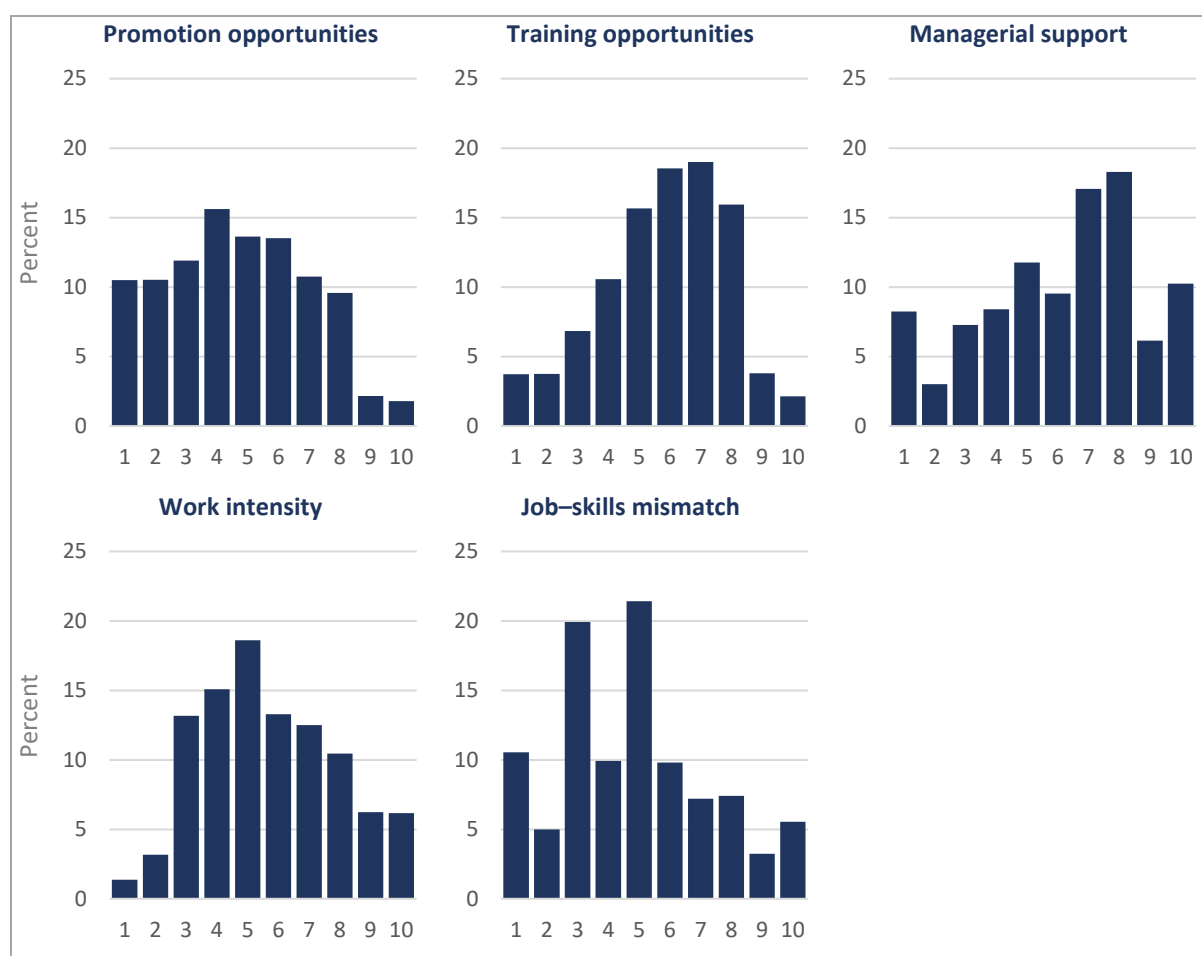
The former measure shows that in all the cases, the correlation between every single item and the scale to which they belong is very high, ranging from 0.72 and 0.95.

Cronbach's Alpha measures the internal consistency of a scale, namely it expresses the degree to which the items that compose the scale are associated. It ranges between 0 and 1, where the higher the value, the higher the internal consistency of the scale.

All the scales present a high value for the Cronbach's Alpha which indeed ranges between 0.87 and 0.94. This makes all the scales highly satisfactory in terms of their internal consistency.

In order to permit an easy and meaningful interpretation of the scales, we have rescaled them to the range zero to ten. The distribution of the scales is presented in Figure A4.1.

FIGURE A4.1 DISTRIBUTION OF THE SCALES



Source: CSEES data (2015).

Note: X-axis: range of scales' score; Y-axis: percentages.

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