

AHCPS seek balance on remote work, slams 'unfair' pay awards

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The union representing senior civil servants has called on the Government to ensure a balance between flexibility and protection of worker's rights following the implementation of blended and remote working.

The general secretary of the Association of Higher Civil and Public Servants (AHCPS), Ciaran Rohan, speaking at the union's virtual annual delegate conference, called on the Government to ensure that enhanced wellbeing policies and appropriate supports for blended working are put in place.

"We are also calling for legislation on the 'Right to Disconnect' to be implemented for greater protection of workers", Mr Rohan added.

He referred to a survey last year of AHCPS members, in which the vast majority (89%) of the 1,500 members surveyed felt that properly set up remote working would improve work life balance.

However, over half of those surveyed said new ways of working make it harder to 'switch off' and 35% said they had an increased workload when working from home.

MASK-WEARING

The conference also called on the Government to amend public health legislation to make it compulsory for employees and the public to wear masks in public offices.

Mr Rohan said that the legislation initially required that masks be worn on public transport and in shops, but public offices were not included.

He said that this is a particular issue in Intreo offices, where staff engage with the public face to face. He said that while the majority do wear masks, there had been incidents where the exclusion of public offices had been used to stage protests.

Responding, the Department of Social Protection said that Government buildings were not included in the legislation "as it was considered that entrance by the public was controlled and social distancing was rigorously enforced". The Department said the practice in Intreo centres is that customers are advised to wear masks and that masks are provided at the entrance.

PAY DIFFERENTIALS

On pay, the conference passed a number of motions condemning the “practice of reducing the national pay awards for senior AHCPs grades, so interfering in the pay differentials with other Civil Service grades and devaluing our work”.

This refers to the restoration of FEMPI pay cuts this year and next year and the ‘Building momentum’ pay agreement.

Under the Haddington Road Agreement (HRA) in 2013, those on salaries of €65,000 up to €185,000 and over had their salaries cut by 5.5% up to 10%. While some of these cuts have been restored under the gradual unwinding of the FEMPI pay cuts, some restoration remains. Under the 2017 Public Service Pay and Pensions Act, the remaining cuts are to be restored in July this year and in July next year for the higher paid.

However, under the ‘Building Momentum’ pay agreement, those due to receive a restoration this year or next “will not benefit from the general round increase in that year”.

For APs and POs in the AHCPs, who are due their final restoration payment on July 1 this year, it means that they will not benefit from the 1% general increase under ‘Building Momentum’ due on October 1 this year.

The AHCPs conference called this an “unfair and inequitable” practice and called on the union’s executive to ensure “that any future pay award does not negatively disturb the pay differentials further and that any agreement on productivity will be contingent on restoration of the pay differentials which existed before this unfortunate practice was imposed”.