

PUBLIC SERVICE AGREEMENT 2010-2014

ACTION PLANS FOR CHANGE

Introduction

Léargas is a Company Limited by Guarantee established under the Companies Acts and having Charitable Status.

It operates, under contract with both the European Commission and the Department of Education and Skills and the Office of the Minister for Children and Youth Affairs, as the National Agency in Ireland for the Lifelong Learning Programme, (Comenius, Grundtvig, Leonardo da Vinci and transversal activities such as Study visits and Language Label, together with eTwinning) and the Youth Programme. Léargas also manages the WorldWide Programme on behalf of Irish Aid and manages a number other bilateral or International activities on behalf of the Department of Education and Skills. The National Centre for Guidance in Education operates under the aegis of Léargas and until recently Léargas also operated the North South Exchange Consortium based in Dundalk.

Progress to date

As we entered into 2008 Léargas employed 51 people. Since 2008 Léargas employment figures have decreased as follows:

The North South Exchange Consortium has been terminated and the four members of staff have been let go; the position of Adult Guidance Co-ordinator in the National Centre for guidance in Education has been terminated; the vacant position of Database Administrator has been left unfilled; the receptionist function has been vacated and is now unfilled and the position of caretaker has been discontinued. The position of Project officer supporting the implementation of the European Voluntary Service Action of the EU's Youth Programme is currently vacant following the resignation of the incumbent.

In addition, Léargas has introduced flexible working arrangements, including shortened working hours for three volunteers, to meet targets in reduction of staffing costs set by the department.

Léargas currently outsources a number of functions including accounting, network administration, development of databases, building security and internal audit.

Previous functions undertaken by the Caretaker and Receptionist are now shared between all members of staff.

Léargas, in co-operation with the EU Commission has introduced new technology into its programme management and delivery systems with the introduction of new databases shared between the Commission and National Agencies and the ongoing introduction of eforms which allow members of the public to develop and make their funding applications online, making access to the programme more transparent and accessible.

Léargas has developed and introduced new workflow management and financial management software that interfaces with the EU databases to simplify processing of applications and payment and accounting of grants. The introduction of these systems, together with developments in our website has made the task of informing the public and facilitating their access to the programme more transparent and cost efficient.

Léargas has moved to make the overwhelming majority of its grant-aid payments using electronic fund transfer technology.

Concurrent with these developments, the Commission has introduced eight new actions into the programmes involving new promotional, administrative and management tasks, which Léargas has managed to carry out to date, without additional staff resources, thus increasing productivity.

Thus Léargas has already made significant developments to enhance efficiency and effectiveness and to make our service more open to and accessible by, the general public.

There are however limitations to the extent to which we can outsource or sub-contract activities as a National Agency.

The 2010 Guide for National Agencies Implementing the Lifelong Learning Programme, in a footnote on page 14 points out:

In accordance with article 4 (2) a) of the EC Decision n° 1807/2007 "The NA may not delegate any task of budget implementation." Budget implementation tasks are tasks involving public mission discretionary powers such as awarding of grants or public contracts, making budgetary and legal commitments, validating and authorising expenditure, establishing and issuing recovery orders. As a consequence, under this paragraph, the tasks for which the NA may draw human resources from external contractors are those for which technical expertise may be needed (such as audit, accounting or IT support and maintenance) or other support tasks (such as archiving). The immediate plan for improvement on delivery of our service while increasing effectiveness and efficiency involves the introduction of a Voice over Internet Protocol (VoIP) telephone system.

Description of the Change Proposed

The change involves the replacement of old phone technology with VoIP or Internet Telephony. A traditional telephone conversation requires a dedicated connection between the two people talking. The callers are essentially renting a direct line between their locations for the duration of the call. VoIP does not require a dedicated connection as it uses the Internet as the carrier, reducing the cost of calls dramatically.

Paragraph of the Public Service Agreement to which it relates

The proposed change relates to paragraph 10 of the agreement which refers to the introduction of new or improved technology.

Benefits Arising from the change

The primary benefit will be the reduction of costs of phone calls of up to 30%. Thus it is expected that the cost of the system will be funded by savings over three years.

The system will facilitate greater mobility in the location of staff within our premises and in the longer term will facilitate greater use of video-conferencing, reducing the need to travel to some extent and further reducing costs.

In addition, mobile devices can also be supported by a VPN connection making it possible to eliminate costs of mobile phone calls where good internet connections are available.

Timeframe for implementation

The system will be installed and functional by the end of December 2010.