

# Advisory Service



## Labour Relations Commission Advisory Service



# The Advisory Service



## **Mission**

*“To work closely with employers, trade unions and employees to promote, develop and implement best industrial relations policies, practices and procedures, in order to enhance the economic well-being of the enterprise and assist in employment creation and retention”*

## **Frequently Asked Questions**

### **1. What is the Advisory Service?**

The Advisory Service works with employers, employees and their representatives in non-dispute situations to develop effective industrial relations practices, procedures and structures that best meet their needs. The Service is independent, impartial and experienced in industrial relations practice and theory.

Staff of the Service, in discussion with the parties will tailor assistance to individual workplace requirements. This assistance is confidential and free of charge. The Service assists employers and employees build and maintain positive working relationships and works with them to develop and implement on-going effective problem-solving mechanisms. With these in place, the organisation (management and employees) is free to concentrate on core objectives, meet competitive challenges, implement organisational change and positively address employee expectations and concerns.

### **2. Who can use the service?**

The service is available to all employers and employees. To use the service employees need not be trade union members, nor do employers have to belong to a representative body. While certain public sector employments do not come within scope of the statutory function of the LRC, the Advisory Service will always assist these parties on an ad hoc basis outside their established employee relations frameworks.

### **3. What type of services does the Advisory Service deliver?**

The Advisory Service delivers a broad range of services to its customers including:

- Industrial Relations Audits
- Joint Working Parties
- Preventative Mediation/Facilitation
- Advice/Workshops
- Frequent Users Initiative

### **4. What do these services cost?**

The services delivered by the Advisory Service are free to users. In certain circumstances parties may be requested to provide a venue for meetings.

### **5. Do parties travel to Dublin to avail of these Services?**

No. Staff of the Advisory Service will attend at every place of employment, regardless of geographic location. Much of the Advisory Service work is undertaken in the actual workplace. However, on occasions meetings/facilitation take place off site, but in the geographic location, to facilitate particular requirements of various parties and the type of service being delivered.

### **6. What is an Industrial Relations Audit?**

Where a broad range of problems are perceived to exist or where the parties wish to gain a greater understanding of the dynamics at play in an organisation, it may be appropriate to conduct a thorough audit of industrial relations practices and procedures together with a survey of the views of all the groups in the enterprise.

Typically the audit is presented to the parties in the form of a confidential report containing findings, conclusions and recommendations. In some cases however it may be more appropriate to focus on the change agenda and present the parties with a series of recommended improvements. The Service provides further support in terms of post-report monitoring and, where necessary, assistance with implementation of the required changes and improvements in the form of a Joint Working Party.

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## 7. What is a Joint Working Party?

A Joint Working Party means joint sessions of company management/representatives and employees/representatives working together to agree and implement recommendations or decisions to improve industrial relations in the workplace. The Advisory Service provides assistance in the setting up of such working groups and will chair sessions as required. This service is designed to give the parties direct involvement in developing mutually acceptable solutions to the various difficulties identified in their workplace.

## 8. Can the Advisory Service provide any other preventative services?

Yes. Assistance is often required in situations where parties anticipate future difficulties. The Service assists in such cases by providing preventive mediation. Many organisations also require assistance to improve work organisation. The Service advises on and develops specific disputes and grievance procedures, new work practices, structural change and other measures required to maintain and enhance competitiveness.

## 9. What kind of Advice does the Advisory Service provide?

In some instances (1) employers and trade unions (together or separately) or (2) employers, where workplaces are not unionised, approach the Service for detailed advice on good practice when putting in place negotiating agreements, grievance/ disciplinary procedures and other industrial relations frameworks. The Advisory Service will provide whatever assistance is required in these circumstances.

## 10. What is the Frequent Users Initiative?

The Frequent users Initiative is a consultative process undertaken by the Advisory Service on a regular basis. The purpose of the initiative is to explore with the users of our dispute resolutions services the reasons for their frequent recourse to the Commission. The process involves

- Identifying organisations (Employers and Unions) that have availed of the LRCs dispute resolution services on a frequent basis
- Exploring the reasons for the frequent usage with the parties
- Identifying measures for the improvement of industrial relations, if necessary.

While this service is confidential and has no impact on the parties' access to the LRC's dispute resolution services it monitors levels of usage of the Commission's dispute resolution mechanisms to ensure effective and efficient use of resources and to focus assistance on areas of greatest need.

## **11. What is an SI 76?**

An SI 76 is also known as the 'Enhanced Code of Practice on Voluntary Dispute Resolution (SI 76 of 2004)'. The Code provides a recognised framework for the processing of disputes arising in situations where negotiating arrangements are not in place and where collective bargaining fails to take place. The Advisory Service facilitates a six-week procedure, which is designed to assist management and unions to resolve the issues in dispute. Outstanding issues may be referred to the Labour Court. This is the only service involving issues of dispute that the Advisory Service deals with.

## **12. What is Re-Solve?**

Re-Solve is an electronic facilitation tool that enables facilitators to negotiate, interact, problem solve and gather information when working with groups. It facilitates surveys, voting and interactive conferencing with particular uses for

- Brainstorming
- Option gathering and organising
- Group decision making and prioritisation

Staff of the LRC, using a dedicated pool of laptops, currently delivers the Re-Solve service. This electronic meeting tool complements the LRC service delivery by improving the productivity and quality of meetings and workshops. These benefits include:

- Having participants use the electronic meeting tool to add ideas and respond directly to questions in their own words provides an efficient and energising way of brainstorming to gather data, share ideas and build creative solutions
- Anonymity allows difficult issues on the table and changes the tone of a discussion from a focus on personalities to a focus on common ground
- Speedier and enhanced documented outcomes.

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## 13. Can an Advisory Service workplace involvement that explains the benefit of the Service be outlined?

Yes. The following case study outlines the type of benefit that the involvement of the Advisory Service can achieve.

### Case Study

Acknowledging that workplace relationships had deteriorated in a public sector organisation both management and unions requested the assistance of the Advisory Service to review industrial relations and to make appropriate recommendations. In March 2003, following a confidential interview process involving all stakeholders, the Advisory Service issued its report. A joint Working Party (JWP), comprising members of management and employee representatives, was established to implement the report's recommendations. A series of meetings of the JWP took place subsequent to the review that focused on a number of key industrial relations issues, mainly training and development, communications, management structure and the industrial relations process. A training and development programme was agreed and put in place to address related issues identified in the report. This programme, which was jointly developed by the parties, identified the technical, managerial and personal training and development needs of staff. The programme included a schedule of initiatives and training courses to address these needs. The JWP also developed a communications model to address communications deficiencies identified in the report. Those directly concerned were of the view that: "The joint working approach was critical to the successful identification and resolution of issues which had been detrimental to the industrial relations climate in the organisation. This approach and the commitment of all stakeholders was instrumental in the improvement in workplace relationships effected by this process"

#### **14. How do I avail of these services?**

Queries and requests for the assistance of the Advisory Service should be directed to the

Director of the Advisory Services Division

The Labour Relations Commission

Tom Johnson House

Haddington Road

Dublin 4

email: [advisory@lrc.ie](mailto:advisory@lrc.ie)

Or

Through the on-line Enquiry form [www.lrc.ie](http://www.lrc.ie)

Requests should include an outline of the nature of the service required and contact details for all concerned parties.

