



## Public Sector Staffing and Pay 2024

### Key Messages

- *The Revised Estimates for Public Services* set out the projected pay costs and associated public service headcount for the coming year (excluding Local Authority pay and staffing),
- Gross pay reported for 2024 for the public service is €25,481 million for almost 373,285 employees, not including Local Authority staff,<sup>1</sup>
- All subsectors of the public sector except Defence now employ more people than in Q4 2013 (when public service employment was at its lowest level in recent times),
- In Q2 2023 there were 11,137.38 additional Whole Time Equivalents employed in the Public Sector compared to Q4 2022, an increase of 2.95%, and
- Gross payroll costs for the public sector (including Local Authorities) is likely in the region of €31.9 billion.<sup>2</sup>

### The Public Sector

Funding public service pay is a substantial component of Voted spending in any given year. **The gross cost of the 2024 pay bill for the public service in the *Revised Estimates for Public Services 2024* is over €25,481 million.** Each year the *Revised Estimates for Public Services* set out the projected public sector headcount for the coming year as well as updating headcount figures for the present year.

- Excluding Local Authority staffing, the public service headcount for 2024 is projected to reach 373,285, up from 356,850 set out for 2023 in the *Revised Estimates for Public Services 2023* (+4.6%).
- However, compared to the revised 2023 headcount of 380,725 (as published in the *Revised Estimates for Public Services 2024*), the headcount estimated for 2024 (373,285) is a decrease of 2% / 7,440 on 2023.

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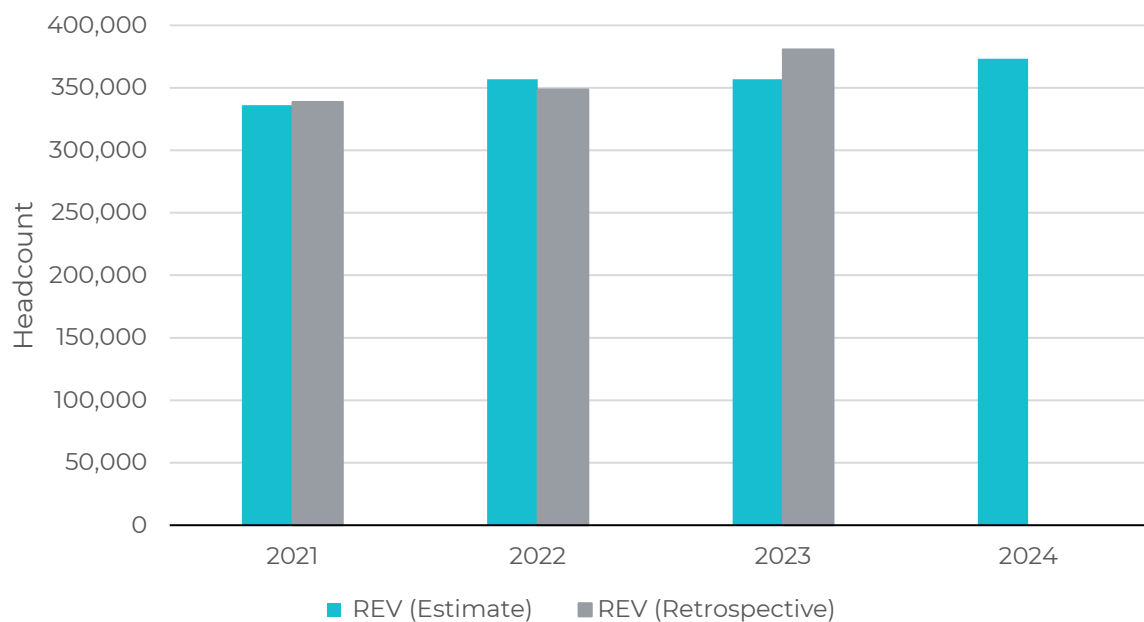
<sup>1</sup> Local Authority staff are public service staff under Vote 34 Housing, Local Government, and Heritage. Local Authority pay is not encompassed by the Revised Estimates as staff are paid by the Local Authorities.

<sup>2</sup> PBO estimate comprises of gross pay and pension costs of €25,481.1 million and €4,398.6 million respectively (*Revised Estimates for Public Services 2024*, pp.19-20) and approximately ~€2,000 million further for Local Authorities.

- The most recent [audited payroll costs for Local Authorities](#) are for 2021. Payroll costs for 2021 were almost €1,987 million.<sup>3</sup> In Q4 2021 there were approximately 31,112 WTEs employed in Local Authorities.<sup>4</sup>
- Employment in Local Authorities has increased by ~873 WTEs from Q4 2021 to Q2 2023 (+2.8%). All else being equal, 2023 Local Authority pay may have been approximately €2,042.5 million in 2023.

Figure 1 shows the projected and updated public sector headcount for years 2021-2024. Notably, headcount in 2023 was ultimately considerably greater than originally forecast, with the number of public sector employees whose pay is funded via the Revised Estimates being 23,875 greater than forecast in the *Revised Estimates for Public Services 2023*. For example, the forecast headcount of Health (Vote 38) and Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth (Vote 40) for 2023 was 147,116; however, the *Revised Estimates for Public Services 2024* suggests that the combined headcount of these areas reached 152,193 in 2023, some **5,077 more staff than originally forecast**.<sup>5</sup>

**Figure 1: Estimated and Retrospective Headcount 2021-2024**



Source: PBO based on the *Revised Estimates for Public Services* for years 2021-2024. Full collection can be found [here](#).

<sup>3</sup> Department of Housing, Local Government and Heritage, [Amalgamated Audited Annual Financial Statements: 31 Local Authorities for the year ended 31<sup>st</sup> December 2021](#) (2023) p.32.

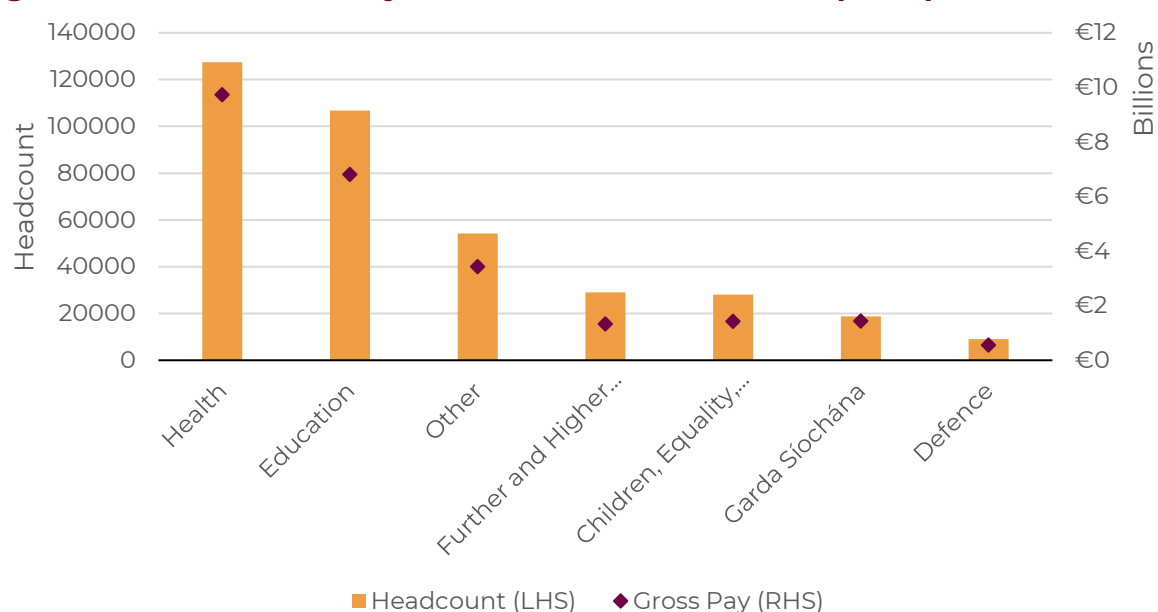
<sup>4</sup> Department of Public Expenditure, NDP Delivery and Reform, '[Databank](#)' (Accessed 18 January 2024).

<sup>5</sup> These Votes are considered together due to the transfer of functions from the Health Vote to the Department of Children, Equality, Disability, Integration and Youth in 2023.

There are two primary measures of staffing, and it is important to ensure that comparisons between datasets reflect these differing methodologies. Firstly, **headcount** is a simple measure of the total number of employees of a body or bodies without any regard to whether they work full time. Alternatively, the measures of **Full Time Equivalents (FTEs)** or **Whole Time Equivalents (WTEs)** reflect a more nuanced measure of employment. For example, in November 2023 the HSE reported a headcount of 163,544; however, these workers represented just 145,052 WTEs.<sup>6</sup> Detailed dual reporting of headcount and WTE data for all public sector bodies, as done by the HSE, would assist the development of a more nuanced understanding of public employment, composition and pay.

Figure 2 illustrates the staffing and associated gross pay costs for Votes which employ more than 7,500 persons and an 'Other' category for the remaining Votes as set out for 2024 in the *Revised Estimates for Public Services 2024*.

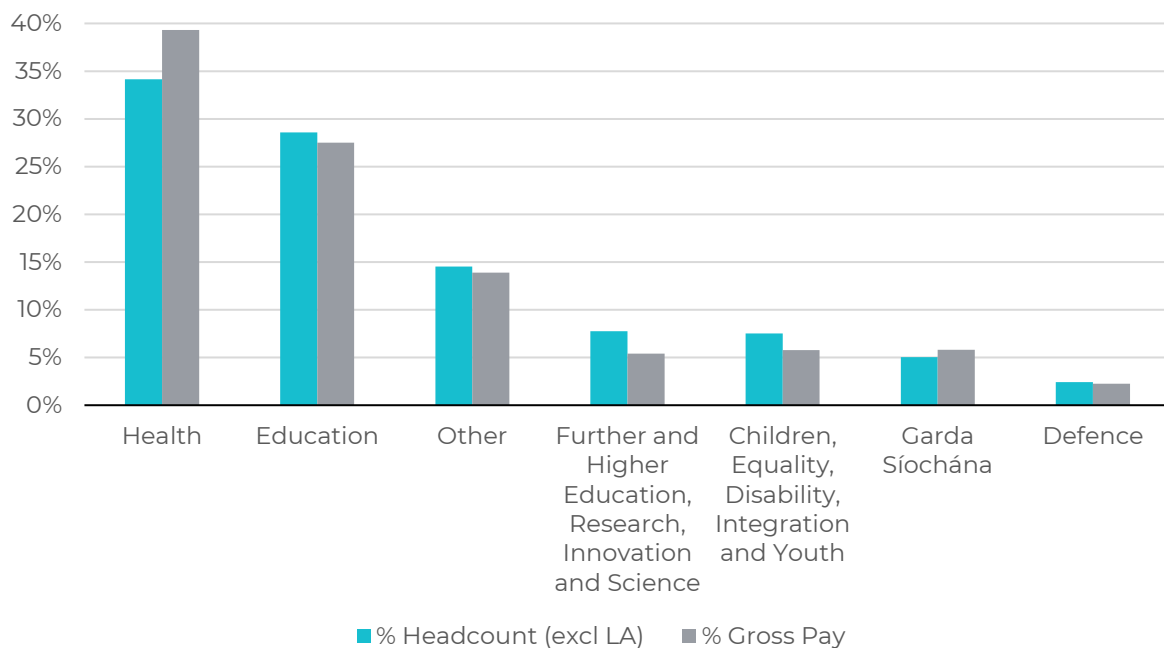
**Figure 2: Gross Voted Pay & Associated Headcount (2024)**



Source: PBO based on the [Revised Estimates for Public Services 2024](#) (December 2023).

Figure 3 illustrates that Voted pay is highly concentrated in a small number of Votes. Voted pay (€25,481 million) is associated with 373,285 public service staff (excluding Local Authority staff). In previous years, while the Local Authority staff were included in the headcount for Vote 34 Housing, Local Government and Heritage, the pay of these workers was not. However, in the *Revised Estimates for Public Services 2024* neither the headcount nor gross pay for circa 32,000 Local Authority workers are reported.

<sup>6</sup> HSE, [Health Service Personnel Census: November 2023](#) (accessed 16 January 2024).

**Figure 3: Key Votes Cross Pay & Headcount (% of total)**

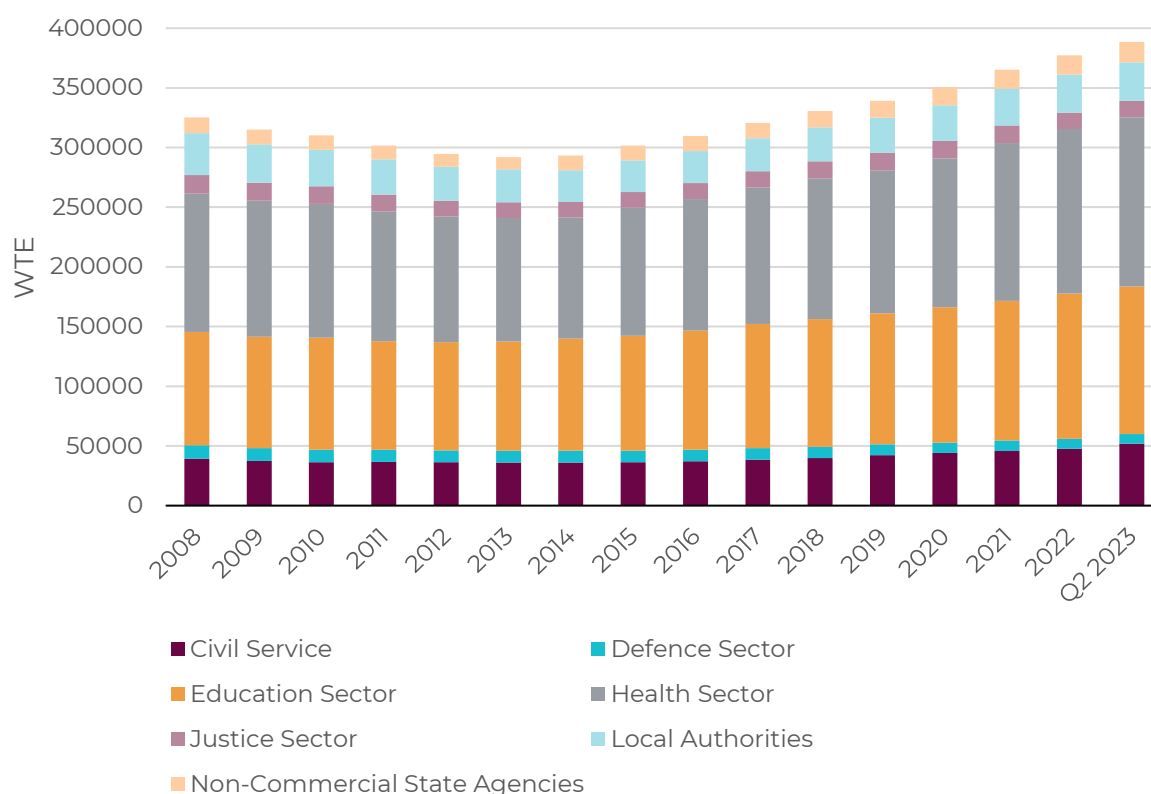
Source: PBO based on the [Revised Estimates for Public Services 2024](#) (December 2023).

Figure 3 shows that both (Voted) pay and staffing are highly concentrated, noting that:

- **Vote 38 Health:** This Vote employs 34.2% of public service employees who receive 39.3% (€9,627 million) of the 2024 gross Voted pay allocation (€25,481 million),
- **Vote 26 Education:** This Vote employs 28.6% of public service employees who receive 27.5% of the 2024 gross Voted pay allocation,
- **Vote 45 Further and Higher Education, Research, Innovation and Science:** This Vote employs 7.8% of public service employees who receive 5.4% of the 2024 gross Voted pay allocation,
- **Vote 40 Children, Quality, Disability, Integration and Youth:** This Vote employs 7.5% of public service employees who receive 5.8% of the 2024 gross Voted allocation,
- **Vote 20 Garda Síochána:** This Vote employs 5% of public service employees who receive 5.8% of the 2024 gross Voted pay allocation;
- **Vote 36 Defence:** This Vote employs 2.4% of public service employees who receive 2.3% of the 2024 gross Voted pay allocation, and
- **Other:** The remaining Votes employ 14.5% of public service employees who receive 13.9% of the 2024 gross Voted pay allocation.

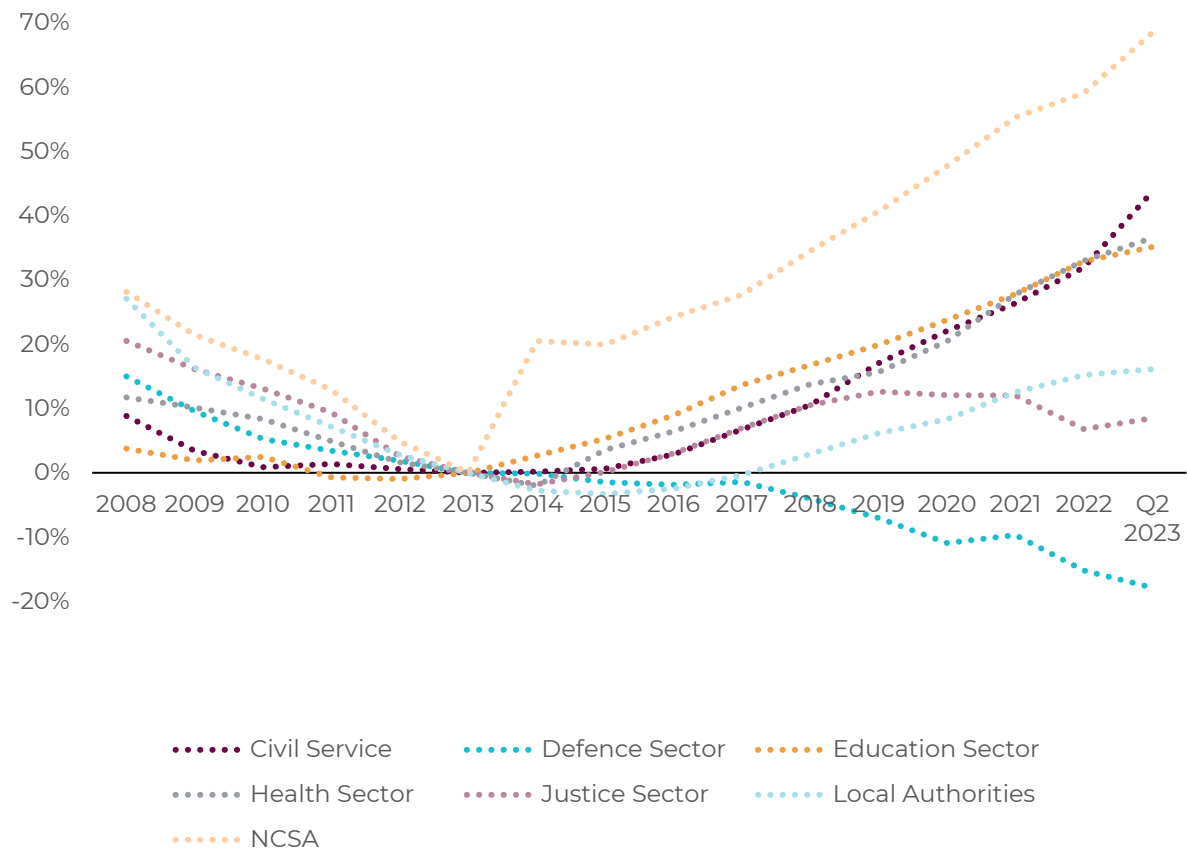
Figure 4 illustrates the sectoral composition of the public sector during the period Q4 2008 to Q2 2023. Following the financial crisis, public sector employment declined annually for the period 2008-2013. In this period, employment (WTEs) declined by 33,278.8 – most notably in the Health sector (-12,175.2) and Local Authorities (-7,464). However, since Q4 2013 to Q2 2023 public sector employment has grown by 96,609 WTEs; this growth is primarily associated with the Health (+37,859.4) and Education (+32,176.7) sectors.

**Figure 4: Public Sector Employment (WTE) by Sector (Q4 2008-Q2 2023)**



Source: PBO based on DPER databank.

Additionally, Figure 5 illustrates how employment in the public service has changed relative to Q4 2013 baseline. It highlights the decline in staffing levels from 2008 to 2013 and the subsequent broad rebound in staffing levels to Q2 2023. This approach illustrates that the Non-Commercial State Agency (NCSA) sector suffered the greatest proportionate decrease in employment in the period 2008 to 2013 but has also experienced the greatest proportionate increase subsequently. NCSAs are bodies that are under the aegis of Departments or Local Authorities, some well-known examples include Bord Bia, Teagasc, Enterprise Ireland and Fáilte Ireland.

**Figure 5: Change in WTE (%) Relative to 2013 Baseline**

Source: PBO based on DPER databank.

Note: All data is Q4 except 2023 which relates to Q2 figures (the most recent available at time of writing).

As can be seen in Figure 5, **the defence sector is the only sector in which employment remains below 2013 levels (-18%).**<sup>7</sup> While the establishment of the permanent defence forces (PDF) (the recommended or desired staffing of the PDF) has been reduced, and now stands at 9,589,<sup>8</sup> the strength (actual staff in situ) is significantly below strength (approximately 1,825 personnel below current establishment strength as of May 2023).<sup>9</sup> PDF strength at levels below establishment are recognised as a capability deficiency.<sup>10</sup>

<sup>7</sup> This reflects ongoing changes to the recommended strength of the permanent defence forces (PDF) described in greater detail in PBO, [Defence Forces: Remuneration, Recruitment and Retention](#) (2020) p.8.

<sup>8</sup> There had been a longer-term trend of reductions to the Establishment Strength of the PDF which had been as high as 11,500 in 1998, this stabilised at 9,500 in 2012 before a 2023 increase to 9,589.

<sup>9</sup> Houses of the Oireachtas, [Dáil Éireann Debate](#) (June 2023).

<sup>10</sup> Department of Defence, [White Paper on Defence Update 2019](#) (December 2019) p.3.

Table 1 illustrates public sector employment (in whole time equivalents) by sector in Q4 2008, Q4 2013 and Q2 2023. It shows that 2013 had the lowest level of employment for the period covered at just below 292,000 WTEs. The table provides a comparison between employment levels in Q4 2008 and Q4 2013, noting a decrease of more than 33,000 WTEs. In contrast, the table also shows an overall increase of over 96,609 WTEs from Q4 2013 to Q2 2023. This reflects a net increase over the period Q4 2008 to Q2 2023 of more than 63,330 WTEs.

For more detailed analysis of the composition of the Irish public sector and the associated pay costs see Parliamentary Budget Office, [\*The Irish Public Sector: An Overview of the Composition of the Public Sector, and of the Development of Exchequer Funded Public Sector Pay\*](#) (2021).

**Table 1: Whole Time Equivalents by Sector (Q4 2008, Q4 2013 and Q2 2023)**

	End Q4-2008	End Q4-2013	End Q2-2023	Change (Q4-2008 to Q4-2013)	Change (Q4-2013 to Q2-2023)
Civil Service	39,313.09	36,117.79	51,915.45	(3,195.30)	15,797.66
Defence Sector	11,265.00	9,796.60	8,046.19	(1,468.40)	(1,750.41)
Education Sector	95,024.34	91,589.84	123,766.54	(3,434.50)	32,176.70
Health Sector	115,755.35	103,580.20	141,439.66	(12,175.15)	37,859.46
Justice Sector	15,691.50	13,020.50	14,127.34	(2,671.00)	1,106.84
Local Authorities	35,007.53	27,543.51	31,984.76	(7,464.02)	4,441.25
NCSA	13,060.39	10,189.95	17,167.94	(2,870.44)	6,977.99
<b>Total</b>	<b>325,117.20</b>	<b>291,838.39</b>	<b>388,447.88</b>	<b>(33,278.81)</b>	<b>96,609.49</b>

Source: PBO based on DPER databank.

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