

ANTI-DISCRIMINATION (PAY) ACT, 1974

AND

EMPLOYMENT EQUALITY ACT, 1977

EQUALITY OFFICER'S RECOMMENDATIONS NO: EP 30/1999 & EE 31/1999

Mr. John M. Lowe
(Represented by Hamilton Turner, Solicitors)

AND

Bank of Ireland
(Represented by Dr. Mary Redmond, Solicitor)

File No: EP 21/1987

1. DISPUTE

- 1.1** This dispute concerns a claim by Mr. John Lowe that he is entitled, on resignation, to the payment of a marriage gratuity by his employer (the Bank of Ireland) in the same way as female staff received marriage gratuities. This claim was lodged in terms of the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act, 1974 and the Employment Equality Act, 1977.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1** Female employees recruited prior to 1974 are entitled, on marriage, to claim a marriage gratuity either at the time of marriage or if they resign subsequently. Marriage gratuities are not paid to female employees recruited after 31st December, 1973 and male employees irrespective of when they were recruited.
- 2.2** The claimant commenced employment with the Bank of Ireland on 25th September, 1972. He got married in April, 1978 and resigned his position in the bank in June, 1983. The claimant wrote to the bank claiming a marriage gratuity on 2nd January, 1986 and the bank, by letter dated 3rd February, 1986 refused to concede such entitlement.
- 2.3** On 9th February, 1987 the claimant referred a claim to the Labour Court stating his belief that he was entitled to a marriage gratuity under the terms of the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act, 1974 and the Employment Equality Act, 1977. At this time a large number of similar claims were lodged by other male bank officials. A group was formed to represent all these claimants and it was agreed to investigate one claim as a test case. This claim was submitted by Mr. Kavanagh against the Bank of Ireland. The Equality Officer, who investigated this claim, issued a recommendation¹ which was appealed to the Labour Court² and subsequently to the High Court³. The Equality Officer and the Labour Court found in favour of the claimant (Mr. Kavanagh). The High Court, however, overturned the Labour Court's determination. Since this test case seven other marriage gratuity claims have been investigated by Equality Officers⁴, one of which was appealed to the Labour Court and a determination issued⁵.

¹ Recommendation No. EP 11/1985

² Determination No. DEP 10/1985

³ High Court Ruling (1990) CMLR 87

⁴ Mr. Brian Curran v Allied Irish Bank, Ref: EP 10/1992

Mr. William Deeney v National Irish Bank, Ref: EP 4/1991 & EE 12/1991

- 2.4 This claim was assigned to the Equality Officer here concerned for investigation on 22nd July, 1998. Submissions were sought and obtained from both parties to the claim.

3. ARGUMENTS MADE BY THE PARTIES

The Claimant:

- 3.1 The claimant argues that, as all females who were recruited prior to 1974 and who married while in the service of the bank are entitled to a marriage gratuity (in accordance with an agreement of March, 1974 entered into between the Bank and the Irish Bank Officials Association), he too should also have the same entitlement. In making his claim the claimant relies upon the provisions of the 1974 Pay Act, Article 119 of the EEC Treaty and Equal Pay Directive 75/117.
- 3.2 The claimant contends that, in the High Court case of Bank of Ireland and Kavanagh the learned Trial Judge erred in law in finding that the payment of a marriage gratuity to a female employee, employed prior to 1974, did not constitute discrimination contrary to the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act, 1974. In his judgement Mr. Justice Costello noted that the “marriage gratuity is not payable to all Bank’s female staff on marriage”. While the claimant accepts that this is correct, he notes that the marriage gratuity is payable to females meeting certain conditions which he too is able to meet. The claimant, therefore, contends that the only and appropriate comparison to be made is one between himself and a female in the same position i.e. who commenced employment with the bank prior to 1974 and married while in that employment.
- 3.3 In this context the claimant cites the judgement in Barber -v- Guardian Royal Exchange Assurance Group⁶ in which the Court of Justice compared a male and a female of the same

Mr. Adrian Hegarty v Bank of Ireland, Ref: EP 02/1998

Mr. Martin Horgan v Bank of Ireland, Ref: EP 03/1998

Mr. G. Murphy v Bank of Ireland, Ref: EP 04/1998

Mr. T. Keady v Bank of Ireland, Ref: EP 19/1998

Mr. P. Quigley v Bank of Ireland, Ref: EP 20/1998

⁵ Mr. Curran v Bank of Ireland, Ref: DEP 3/1994 Appeal of EP 10/1992

⁶ ECJ Case C-262/88, [1990] 1 AER 660

age. The Court of Justice stated as follows:

“It is contrary to Article 119 of the Treaty for a made compulsorily redundant to be entitled to claim only a deferred pension payable at the normal pension age when a woman in the same position is entitled to an immediate retirement pension as a result of the application of an age condition that varies according to sex”

The claimant submits that, in order to give full effect to Article 119, the Equality Officer is obliged to apply the rationale set out by the European Court of Justice in the Barber decision to his claim for a marriage gratuity.

The Respondent:

3.4 The respondent contends that the claimant has no entitlement to a marriage gratuity and says that marriage gratuities are payable to a certain number of female employees who meet certain criteria. In its submission the respondent has raised the following additional points:

- ◆ The Equality Officer must make findings of fact and, as the claimant has failed to supply the facts necessary to support his claim, it should be dismissed.
- ◆ The 1974 Pay Act lays down the test of determining whether the relationship between pay and work or work’s value is different because of one’s sex i.e. the test of “like work”. The respondent cites the Labour Court determination in Curran v Allied Irish Bank as affirming the need to establish “like work” in a similar context where equal entitlement to a marriage gratuity was being claimed.
- ◆ The claimant named a female comparator who worked for another financial organisation. The respondent says that this comparator is not a valid comparator for the purposes of this claim.
- ◆ The respondent refers to the historical circumstances relating to the agreement of 1974 and says that but for this collective agreement female employees would have been forced to resign on marriage while male employees in similar circumstances did not face the same prospects.
- ◆ According to the respondent this claim is out of time and the Equality Officer, therefore, lacks jurisdiction to hear it.

The respondent also argues that the High Court decision in Bank of Ireland v Kavanagh binds

the Equality Officer in her findings in this case.

4. CONCLUSIONS OF THE EQUALITY OFFICER

- 4.1** The issue for consideration by me is whether or not the claimant is entitled to a marriage gratuity in terms of the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act, 1974 and the Employment Equality Act, 1977. In making my recommendation in this claim I have taken into account all the arguments made by the parties.
- 4.2** The first issue for consideration is whether or not this claim relates to remuneration and is covered by the 1974 Act or whether it relates to conditions of employment and is appropriate for consideration under the 1977 Act. Remuneration is defined in the 1974 Act as “*any consideration whether in cash or in kind which an employee receives, directly or indirectly in respect of his employment from his employer*”. As this dispute concerns entitlement to a marriage gratuity which is a monetary payment, I am satisfied that it specifically relates to remuneration and is appropriate for investigation under the 1974 Pay Act and not the 1977 Equality Act.
- 4.3** A number of recommendations and determinations along with a High Court ruling have issued under the 1974 Act in similar disputes. The first of these disputes concerned a claim for a marriage gratuity by Mr. Kavanagh from the Bank of Ireland. His claim was allowed by both the Equality Officer and the Labour Court, but the High Court (on appeal) found that the claimant was not entitled to a marriage gratuity. In his findings Mr. Justice Costello said:

“It is obvious that a simple contractual stipulation to the effect that all women married should be granted a gratuity would attract the operation of sections 2 and 4 of the 1974 Act in favour of men doing like work because the Bank could not claim that it was paying higher remuneration to women on grounds other than their sex. But that is not what the Bank is doing in this case. A female employee who qualifies for the gratuity and thus gets paid a higher pay not because she is a woman, but because she is a woman who has fulfilled certain conditions, namely, that she has (a) married and (b) had entered the Bank’s employment before the year 1974. Her higher pay is not based on her sex but on grounds other than her sex, a point convincingly demonstrated by the fact that all of her female colleagues who marry and who are doing like work will be treated differently from her on the same footing as men if they had entered the Bank’s service after 1st January,

1974.

The point can be illustrated by an example. Let us suppose that there was three employees doing like work in a branch of the Bank of Ireland, A, a female employee who entered the Bank's service fourteen years ago in 1973, B, a female employee who recently joined the Bank and C, a male employee who joined the Bank at the same time as A. Let us suppose that all three marry on 19th June, 1987. Only A will qualify for the marriage gratuity. It cannot be said that on her marriage she qualified for the marriage gratuity because she was a woman - if that was the case B should also have qualified. Clearly there are grounds other than her sex which explain the higher pay which she will enjoy over her two colleagues. And so I think that the Bank has been able to establish that the differences in remuneration between their male employees and some of their female employees doing like work fall within the exemption contemplated in subsection (3) of section 2 and that the determination of the Labour Court that there should be imported into Mr. Kavanagh's contract by virtue of sections 2 and 4 of the 1974 Act a term entitling him to the marriage gratuity was incorrect. The appeal, therefore, succeeds."

In all subsequent investigations by Equality Officers in similar disputes they found in line with the High Court ruling i.e. that the claimants had no entitlement to a marriage gratuity. In any of these recommendations which have been appealed to the Labour Court, and determinations have issued, the latter has upheld the Equality Officer's recommendations.

- 4.4** It is a well established practice of Equality Officers to follow a decision of the High Court unless the case can be distinguished on the basis of the facts. I am satisfied that this case cannot be so distinguished from the case considered by the High Court. On this basis I find that the claimant in this case does not have an entitlement to a marriage gratuity under the terms of the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act, 1974.
- 4.5** In view of my findings above it is not necessary for me to consider in detail any of the arguments advanced by the parties. However, the respondent, in its submission, raised the issue of time limits. In this regard I wish to point out that, under the 1974 Pay Act, no time limit is specified and the six months time limit set out in the Employment Equality Act, 1977 cannot be advanced in this claim as this claim does not fall to be considered under this act for the reason set out in paragraph 4.2 above. Furthermore a time limit issue is not for decision by an Equality Officer. This was determined by the Supreme Court in the case of Aer Lingus

Teoranta v The Labour Court⁷ in which Mr. Justice Walshe stated:

“... The Equality Officer has no function to deal with any matter concerning the question of time bar and therefore any finding he makes is strictly without prejudice to what the Labour Court may decide about the latter point. If it were otherwise then the Labour Court would, ..., have to hold a preliminary enquiry into every case whereas in fact the Labour Court can decide on a question of the acceptability at the same time as it falls to determine the merits of the case”.

5. RECOMMENDATION

5.1 1974 Pay Act:

In view of my conclusions above I find that the Bank of Ireland did not discriminate against Mr. John Lowe and that he is not entitled to the payment of a marriage gratuity under the terms of the Anti-Discrimination (Pay) Act, 1974.

5.2 1977 Equality Act:

I find that this claim relates to remuneration and it is, therefore, excluded from the application of the provisions of the Employment Equality Act, 1977 by virtue of Section 3(1) of that Act.

Gerardine Coyle
Equality Officer

10th August, 1999

⁷ Case No. 141/88