



## **Celebrations to mark 100 years of the State Pension**

A specially commissioned stamp to commemorate the centenary of the Old Age Pensions Act (1908) was unveiled by Minister for Social and Family Affairs, Mary Hanafin T.D. today (*17<sup>th</sup> September 2008*). Over 300 serving and former Pension Officers were at the unveiling which marked one hundred years since the introduction of the State Pension (Old Age Pension).

The 55c stamp, which was commissioned by An Post, was designed by Bold Design and is based on a typographical representation of the subject matter with a Harp, as a symbol of the State, in the background. The stamp will first be issued on September 19<sup>th</sup>.

The State Pension was introduced in 1908 by David Lloyd George, the Chancellor of the Exchequer in the Liberal Government. This new pension, which was paid to those over 70 years of age, was worth between one and five shillings, depending on the individuals means - this equates to a pension of between €11 and €27 in today's terms.

Minister Hanafin described the introduction of a state pension as one of the most progressive and well intentioned supports for citizens. **"Today about 11% of our population - over 400,000 of over 66 year olds - receive a weekly social welfare payment. Protecting the living standards of our elderly, giving them independent means as well as a range of services is the cornerstone of a civilised society.**

**One hundred years ago, Ireland and its citizens were amongst the poorest and most destitute in Europe. Average life expectancy was around 54 years of age, with only about 3% of the population living to an age to possibly gain a pension. While the earlier Poor Law effectively destined thousands to end their days in a workhouse, it was not until the introduction of the Old Age Pensions Act of 1908, that for the first time a pensions scheme was put in place which established the principle of entitlement to support from the State.**

**The role of the Pension Officer, who were originally attached to the Customs and Excise service until the Department of Social Welfare was established in 1947, was pivotal in helping generations of older men and women to access their rights and**



## **Department of Social and Family Affairs**

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**entitlements. Well over 1,500 men and women have served as Pension Officers, and now known as Social Welfare Inspectors, in the past 100 years. We owe them a great debt of gratitude for their commitment to public service and their furtherance of the greater good of their fellow citizens."**

The advent of the Old Age pension was the catalyst for the introduction of a range of social benefits including support to widows and widowers, those with a disability and carers to name but a few of the 50 or so schemes now administered by the Department of Social and Family Affairs. There are currently approximately 400 Social Welfare Inspectors working throughout the country, dealing with a full range of services from the Department including Pension entitlements.

Minister Hanafin went on to say **"looking to the future of our pensions system, we are now seeing much longer life expectancy and a much more active and participative generation of pensioners. Making provision and ensuring that future generations of older people are financially secure is a priority for this and future Governments and something that countries across Europe are looking at dealing with given the changing demographic trends of recent decades."**

**ENDS**