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### Museum boss felt 'ambushed' into taking retirement

PAUL CULLEN, Political Staff

THE DIRECTOR of the National Museum is taking early retirement this month after 24 years at the helm of the institution. An angry Pat Wallace complained yesterday of being “ambushed” and “almost forced out” by the Government’s early retirement scheme, which allows public servants who retire before the end of February to leave on preferential terms.

More than 7,700 public servants have applied to retire by the end of the month on the basis of tax-free lump sums and pensions calculated on the basis of their salaries before their pay was cut in 2010.

Those who have applied for early retirement have until the end of this month to make a final decision on whether to proceed with their applications or remain in their posts until the normal retirement age.

Mr Wallace told The Irish Times he was leaving with sadness but was “exhausted from taking on the system” over cutbacks at the museum. He informed Minister for Arts and Heritage Jimmy Deenihan last week of his intention to retire and informed colleagues on Monday. Mr Wallace claimed the museum was neglected in last December’s budget and was suffering under the broad-brush application of staffing cuts.

“That kind of crude accounting rule might work in a departmental office but not in a museum full of specialists,” he said.

Staff numbers had been cut from 162 to under 150 and a number of specialists were also leaving at the end of this month, he added, including experts on coins and insects and a marine biologist. Mr Wallace said it was unlikely these other posts would be filled.

“It’s a disaster for a small organisation like ours. It took us over 10 years to recover from the cuts imposed by Ray MacSharry in the 1980s.” A new collections centre had been opened in Swords but there was no budget line for the facility. He attacked the “very crude method” used by the Department of Public Expenditure to encourage public servants to retire before the February deadline.

“I’ve given remarkable service over 40 years, but this is a very unsatisfactory way to conclude your working career. No respect is being paid to what you’ve done, to the staff of the institution or its ethos.” He said the scheme involved the imposition of a crude rule which amounted to “go and f\*\*\* off out of here”.

Mr Wallace (63) could have worked until October 2013 before reaching retirement age. He said he came back after Christmas “full of beans” but then thought, “do I have to go on suffering like this?” The highlights of his term as director included the opening of Collins Barracks in Dublin and the Museum of Country Life in Co Mayo, he said. With more than 40 years of service, Mr Wallace is entitled to a full pension equivalent to half his salary of about €110,000 a year. He expressed the hope that the Government would move quickly to fill the position of director. “It’s a job for a young person, as I was when I started. The museum needs someone to steady the ship.”

An archaeologist by profession, he plans to spend his retirement writing about the excavations of Viking Dublin at Wood Quay and Clontarf. Mr Wallace said he would be available to help the museum after his retirement