



Pwyllgor Archwilio/Audit Committee

Bae Caerdydd/Cardiff Bay
Caerdydd/Cardiff
CF99 1NA

11
June
2002

ADVERTISING FOR ASSEMBLY POSTS

On 11 February 2002 you wrote to Janet Davies, my predecessor as the Chair of the National Assembly's Audit Committee, raising a number of concerns regarding the Assembly's arrangements for recruitment advertisements. Janet Davies asked Sir John Bourn, the Auditor General for Wales (who is independent of the Assembly) to investigate this matter and he has now reported his findings to me.

Firstly, it may be helpful if I set out the legislative framework governing the Assembly's activities in this important area. Sections 48 and 120 of the Government of Wales Act 1998 place a statutory responsibility on the Assembly to "*make appropriate arrangements with a view to securing that its business is conducted with due regard to the principle that there should be equality of opportunity for all people.*" This statutory requirement is consistent with other existing legislation, for example the Disability Discrimination Act 1995, which is aimed specifically at the need for equal opportunity within both the public and private sectors.

Given the importance of such legislation, in a Plenary Debate on 7 December 2000 the National

Assembly for Wales gave cross-party support for action to maximise access for disabled people to employment opportunities within the Assembly. Responsibility for the Assembly's advertising policy rests with the Permanent Secretary, and following investigation by Assembly officials (which included consultation with the Disability Rights Commission) it was agreed that size 14 took effect from 6 September 2001. Advertisements placed prior to that date had been of varying size and format.

However, the Assembly subsequently received a number of complaints concerning this policy, due to the size and cost of the adverts placed. To address these concerns, the Assembly undertook a prompt review that included advice from the Royal National Institute for the Blind Cymru. This resulted in a modification to the policy, effective from 13 September 2001, that now required advertisements to have only the title and reference to the availability of alternative formats in size '14 point font', with the remainder of the text placed in size 10 point font.'

Despite these cost saving changes the Finance Minister, Edwina Hart, recognised the continuing high cost of the Assembly's advertising policy and has since undertaken a further review to determine whether better value for money could be obtained whilst still meeting all legislative requirements. As a result of this review, the Minister unveiled a new policy document on 30 April 2002. I enclose copies of her announcement, which became effective immediately. (The policy is also available on the Assembly's Internet site: www.waies.gov.uk).

Examples of the key changes made are:

- A reduction in the volume of information supplied in the text of the advert, with greater use made of the information packs available to applicants on request from the Assembly;
- A move towards 'composite' adverts covering a number of posts, to be placed on a monthly basis and achieving economies of scale; and
- the need for certain posts to be advertised through the Job Centre network and local press only, rather than at higher cost in the national media.

Turning to your specific enquiries about the cost of the advertisement in the Western Mail on 7 February 2002, and the role of Danielle Smalley Partnership, the Auditor General for Wales has established that the advertisement cost £10,107 (inclusive of VAT). Under the new policy, such a post would be advertised much more cheaply. Danielle Smalley Partnership is contracted by the Assembly to provide information packs to applicants and to forward all applications received to the relevant Assembly officials. The Partnership provides only administrative function and plays no role in the design or placing of recruitment advertisements.

I am copying this letter to Janet Davies.



DAFYDD WIGLEY
CHAIR OF THE AUDIT COMMITTEE
RECRUITMENT ADVERTISING POLICY:

PLENARY STATEMENT

1. Over the last few months, Assembly Members and members of the public have expressed concern at the way in which job opportunities in the Assembly are advertised. There has been criticism of the size, the multiplicity and the associated cost of job adverts. There have also been calls to use local as well as national newspapers. As I have explained in this chamber before Easter, these are matters for the Permanent Secretary. However, I am taking this opportunity to explain how posts are being advertised and how this responds to the concerns which have been expressed.

2. The National Assembly's statutory duty is to secure that its business is conducted with due regard to the principle of equality of opportunity. This places on us an obligation to ensure that the National Assembly's workforce better reflects the diversity of the communities it serves. The Committee on Equality of Opportunity has taken a particular interest in this most notably through its commissioning of the "Lifting Every Voice" report on institutional racism written by Roger McKenzie. I know that there is widespread support for this among Assembly Members. It is important, therefore, that the approach adopted to advertising posts promotes diversity through fair and open competition.

3. Hand in hand with that we must ensure value for money. Newspaper advertising is expensive: advertisements in high circulation papers for individual jobs can cost a high proportion of

the first year's salary. We need, therefore, a policy which ensures that our job vacancies are highly visible and that filling them represents good value for money.

4. Finally our recruitment advertising policy must also include use of best practice and modern channels of communication. Newspaper advertising alone is often not enough: we need to do more to reach Gut to communities and groups previously discouraged from applying to work for us. In parallel with 'this we need to use the internet more so as to reduce cost to us and increase accessibility and ease of use for candidates.

5. To these ends the Personnel Division of the National Assembly has produced an advertising policy in consultation with the Trade Unions and equality organisations in Wales, notably Disability Wales. It has also evaluated the responses received to recent job advertisements in a wide range of media to confirm which provide the best response. In devising its policy it has sought to strike the appropriate balance between being informative, widely accessible and securing value for money.

6. The aim of that policy will be to move progressively to a more diversified approach to recruitment advertising, with much greater emphasis on an Internet based recruitment process. Reliance on specific advertisements in the newspapers will diminish and be replaced by much smaller references to job availability information through the Assembly's website, This should ensure continued visibility at less cost, but also speed the process by giving candidates immediate access to all the information they need.

7. Elements of this improved approach - including access via the internet to application forms - is already in place. The rest will be developed. as we gain confidence that we can maintain the visibility and attractiveness of our job vacancies and also as we are satisfied that the new arrangements meet our commitments in equality.

8. Officials are also developing arrangements recently put in place to use local, job centres to promote vacancies at the *administrative support* grades. Information drawing attention to these opportunities is placed in local newspapers in relevant geographical locations.

9. Personnel Division, working with the Equality Policy Unit, are also giving attention to improving awareness among under-represented groups of job opportunities in the Assembly, for instance through fliers for inclusion in community newsletters. [Sanjiv Vedi, the first member of the Assembly's Senior Civil Service from an Asian background, is taking a particular lead here.]

10. It will be sometime before we are ready and able to put in place all these new arrangements. In the meantime; our job advertising in newspapers will ensure that:-

- bilingual job advertisements **are professionally** presented and meet the best practice standards set by disability organisations in Wales;
- the newspapers and other media where jobs are advertised achieve wide readership and geographical coverage so that they attract sufficient quality applicants for each post to enable a meaningful choice to be made balanced against the costs involved;
- we follow the advice of Disability Wales on the format to be used to assist people with visual impairment;
- particular emphasis is - given to the visibility of highly specialist or very senior posts.

11. This will mean that, for the time being; instead of individual jobs appearing in the newspapers virtually every week most will now be advertised as part of a regular cycle, appearing usually once a month in a composite and bilingual format. The Presiding Office is making similar arrangements. Specific job adverts will appear from time to time outside this sequence for highly specialist or senior positions, but this is intended to be the exception.

12. Based on a review of readership, geographical coverage and the sources of applications for posts we shall continue to use the "Western Mail" (Thursday edition), "Golwg", "Y Cymro" and the "Daily Post". Other newspapers and journals will be used where the specialist nature of the vacancy makes that desirable. Officials will be in touch and will meet with newspaper editors who have been concerned at their papers not being used to explain our advertising policy, although, as I have said, we do use local newspapers where, in conjunction with job centres, it makes sense to do so. Members will understand that greatly expanding their use would also significantly increase costs.

13. You will see from this that the feedback received about the shortcoming of past approaches is being applied to improve the current arrangements. The long-term strategy is to use the internet to attract and handle job applications, to use job centres linked, where appropriate, to local newspapers, to reach out to marginalised communities through direct contact and local networks and in the meantime to rationalise our use of newspapers to sustain visibility while achieving better value for money.

14. These arrangements will be kept under review.

11th February 2002

Ms Janet Davies AM
Head of Scrutiny Committee
National Assembly for Wales
Cardiff Bay
Cardiff
CF99 INA

Dear Ms Davies

Not for the first time have I seen a huge-advertisement in the Western Mail for what I consider to be a very junior post within the Assembly. As a taxpayer, I want to know precisely how much this advertisement cost. Even if an annual arrangement fee is paid to your consultants Daniel Smalley Partnership, surely the amount spent can be reduced if you agree that the size of such advertisements can be cut down by at least a quarter for junior posts.

I look forward to your response.

Thank you.

Yours sincerely