

COMMITTEE ON EQUALITY OF OPPORTUNITY

Date: 22 November 2000

Time: 2pm

Venue: Assembly Chamber

Title: PUBLIC APPOINTMENTS: INDEPENDENT ASSESSORS

Purpose

To consider the future arrangements for Independent Assessors.

Summary /Recommendations

The Committee has indicated that it would like to replace the existing body of Independent Assessors with a revised list of individuals who are selected independently of the Assembly.

It is recommended that the Committee agrees this in principle and requests detailed proposals.

Timing

The Minister requested this interim paper be presented at today's meeting. Detailed proposals can be submitted for the Committee's next meeting in January.

Background

The Assembly's Public Appointments Unit (PAU) currently holds the details of 70 individuals who are called upon to be Independent Assessors. Independent Assessors are appointed to ensure that public appointment exercises are carried out properly. They can report to the Commissioner for Public Appointments if they consider that appointments have been made improperly or unfairly. Of the 70 there are 30 men and 40 women. One is disabled and one is from an ethnic minority. The majority of these individuals took on the role and was invited to attend a training seminar held by the Office of the Commissioner for Public Appointments (OCPA) in November 1999. For each appointment exercise, one or two Assessors oversee the entire appointment process through paper audit and through personal participation in sift and interview stages of the selection process. There is no remuneration for

Independent Assessors but expenses are paid.

The Committee has expressed concern about the selection of Independent Assessors and whether Assessors, appointed by the Assembly, can be considered genuinely independent. It was also considered that the current list is not representative of the population of Wales. It has been suggested that it would be timely to establish a fresh list of individuals willing to serve as Assessors and to set up a system which ensures that the selection, training and management of these Assessors is open and transparent and entirely independent of the Assembly itself.

OCPA is currently undertaking a review of the role of Independent Assessors and specifically of the selection, training and management of Assessors. OCPA's review is due to being completed in April 2001. It is envisaged that thereafter, OCPA will be able to offer a more comprehensive training programme (both induction and in-service training) to Assessors and to hold a central list of Assessors for the smaller Whitehall Departments to call upon (which could be used by the larger Departments in specific cases).

Consideration

We propose that a new list of Independent Assessors be established as follows:

- PAU to thank the current list of Assessors for their service, to notify them that a new list is being established and that their term of office will expire on an agreed date (possibly 31 March 2001) and to invite them to re-apply.
- In liaison with OCPA, PAU to run an 'appointments exercise' – with advertising and publicity in the Welsh media – to encourage fresh applicants (particularly targeting under-represented groups)
- To liaise with OCPA on a selection process wholly independent of the Assembly. The Assembly's Public Appointments Unit will simply process the applications. The sift and interview panels could include representatives from OCPA, from equality organisations, from trade unions and business organisations, but excluding Assembly members and Assembly staff.

In this way the new list will have been arrived at in an open, transparent and fair way without the direct involvement of the Assembly in the selection of individual assessors.

The list would have to be managed – i.e. names drawn from it for particular exercises, training organised etc. This could be done by OCPA centrally (as part of their central register) or by the PAU, or, alternatively by the Welsh commissioner if there were to be a separate Commissioner for Wales. (We are looking into the legal position on a Welsh Commissioner and will report to the Committee in January). Initial discussion with OCPA suggest they would favour the second option – which could lend itself to responsibility passing to a Welsh Commissioner in due course, if that were the case. If OCPA were to manage the Welsh list they would require funding.

The Committee is invited to agree that officials prepare a detailed proposal on the basis of the selection procedure outlined above and that the list should be managed by the PAU – but in a way that would minimise the risk of the Assembly being seen as ‘controlling’ the process.

Public Appointments Unit

November 2000