

Committee on Equality of Opportunity EOC 08-02(p3)

Date: 12 December 2002
Time: 9.00am
Venue: Committee Rooms 3 and 4
Title: Results of the evaluation of the pilot Grade 7 open recruitment exercise

Purpose

1. To update the Equality of Opportunity Committee of the outcomes of the evaluation of the above recruitment scheme.

Summary

2. An independent company evaluated the pilot and their first report was received at the beginning of November. This paper outlines the key findings

Timing

4. The results of this report will feed into the Recruitment and Deployment strategy, which we aim to have in place on 1 April 2003.

Background

5. The G7 open recruitment scheme ran between January and June 2002 as a pilot to inform the proposed Recruitment and Deployment Strategy arising from the "Lifting every Voice" report by Roger McKenzie which recommended that all posts should be advertised and open to competition.

6. The evaluators requested interviews with a sample of 4 internal candidates and 4 external candidates from the following groups:

- those who were unsuccessful at sift stage
- those who did not pass the Assessment Centre
- those who were unsuccessful at interview
- those who were successful at interview

The people who were interviewed were chosen at random, but had already confirmed at application stage that they wished to be involved in the evaluation. They also undertook additional interviews with a number of applicants who expressly wished to be involved in this first stage of the evaluation. The evaluators also interviewed a number of other parties with an interest or involvement in the exercise, including TUS, Presiding Office, Equality Policy Unit, the Project Support Team, representatives from the Project Board and a number of customer representatives who sat on panels for these posts as Members or Chairs. There were 33 interviews in total.

Current position

7. The evaluation of the Grade 7 scheme is being undertaken by an independent company of occupational psychologists – Cassin-Scott Associates Ltd (CSAL). CSAL have now produced an interim report of their findings to date and made a number of recommendations.

Summary of findings

8. The evaluators came to the following conclusions based on the information they collated and considered:

- The pilot was broadly successful in that a diverse pool of applicants was assessed and decisions were made using fair and open

competition on merit (as far as can be established) using a rigorous approach.

- The use of specialised (as opposed to generic) recruitment, open competition, competency based approaches and assessment centres, were generally approved of by assessors and candidates alike.
- There was no difference in the performance of candidates on the basis of gender or disability. Ethnic minority and Welsh language samples were too small for conclusions to be drawn but there was no conspicuous evidence of discrimination. Internal candidates were far more successful than external candidates.
- The Project suffered from a lack of planning in the early stages, insufficient personnel resource and the lack of a proper recruitment software system but the commitment of those involved led to a successful conclusion. The development of standardised systems during the Pilot and since the Pilot should ensure the efficient running of future competitions.
- The stages managed by the Project Support Team (the sift and interview) appeared to work effectively and are well documented although improvements in assessor training are required.
- The contract with the Assessment Centre provider was poorly conceived which led to problems in the costings, control of data and sharing of information.
- Feedback given to candidates was well received.
- Personnel should take a stronger lead in the management of sift and interview panels and need the training and explicit authority to do this.
- This is a good first step but a greater understanding of the potential applicant pool is required to ensure that a diverse and fully representative applicant pool be attracted.

10. The evaluators have identified a list of recommendations, which are attached at Annex A for your information.

Next Steps

11. The outcomes from the evaluation will be used in the development of an open recruitment strategy and it is envisaged that this will be in place by the new financial year.
11. CSAL will continue with the evaluation, the second stage of which is to evaluate the effectiveness of the recruitment exercise in terms of those appointed to posts and perceived outcomes.

Compliance

11. There are no issues of regularity or propriety in relation to this paper.

Cross-cutting themes

13. By implementing open competition, the Assembly will be further demonstrating its commitment to equality of opportunity.

Action

13. The Committee is invited to note the outcomes.

CONTACT

Cassin-Scott Associates Ltd. - An Evaluation of the Band F Recruitment Pilot for the National Assembly for Wales

Summary of Recommendations from the report

R1 It is essential that those designated to lead the project have sufficient explicit authority to do so, whether this be by using people of adequate seniority or providing support or specific empowerment for the officer in question e.g. making senior managers answerable to the project board rather than to the project manager.

R2 Contracting and management authority must be clearly defined.

R3 As a major strategic project it is essential that the Project Board continue to meet and oversee the development of the project while it runs.

R4 The communication strategy must be given sufficient priority and resource if the efficiency and credibility of the project is to be maintained.

R5 Projects of this magnitude must have sufficient resource to ensure that the Assembly can present a polished and professional image to maintain their credibility to the applicant population.

R6 An effective computerised recruitment system is required. As a bare minimum the ethnicity, gender and disabled status of candidates should be recorded as the Civil Service Commissioners' Recruitment Code requires that successes at each stage of a selection process for each grade be published. It is also advisable that age is recorded.

R7 The 'Chair's Report' should be retained for future competitions.

R8 As a matter of some urgency ways of reducing the total time it takes to appoint personnel must be explored.

R9 Standard timetables for competitions that make it clear what input is required from Personnel and the customer, when, and what the implications (particularly in elapsed time) are for failing to meet these obligations should be created by Personnel Division.

R10 It is essential that communication channels with all stakeholders such as the Trade Union side and the Equality Policy Unit be maintained before, during and after projects.

R11 The contract to assessment centre providers should make it clear who can and cannot have access to assessment materials produced by the contractor and for which the Assembly owns copyright, and the Assembly should ensure that this allows them to hold copies of the materials.

R12 Contractors must be made aware of the requirements of the CSC Recruitment Code and they must contract to abide by it. They should not give any undertakings of confidentiality without agreeing this with the Assembly.

R13 Personnel and their representatives should take on a more explicit role in managing the sift and interview sessions and need to be given the training and authority for this.

R14 Key staff responsible for managing recruitment should be appropriately qualified or developed, or be supported by such staff, and all should be aware of the requirements of the Recruitment Code. It is also desirable that they develop their skills by continuing liaison with the Equality Policy Unit and with personnel networks (the Cabinet Office runs several Recruitment Networks).

R15 As the Assembly is competing with other organisations for top quality managers it is important that the materials used in Recruitment convey a positive and professional image for the organisation.

R16 Sending acknowledgement slips and update letters should happen routinely after each stage of the process.

R17 All assessors should be trained in the NAW assessment method, not in a generic assessment approach.

R18 The training must cover scoring mechanisms and procedural matters and must relate to the sift as well as the interview.

R19 The training process needs to be completely revised to meet the specific needs of the Assembly's recruitment system. It should include practical exercises and Equality and Diversity should underpin the course and not treated purely as 'bolt-ons'.

R20 A standardised and documented procedure for ensuring that candidates with disabilities are contacted and their requirements acted upon must be created.

R21 Personnel should create a standard Job Description format and guidance on completing them. Liaison between Personnel and the customer on the Job Description should be a standard part of the recruitment timetable. It may be desirable to seek external expert help when drafting guidance on how to put together job descriptions.

R22 It should be a standard part of the job description development that each generic competence is examined to see how it relates to that particular job. The generic competencies should then be incorporated into the job description rather than standing outside them as a separate set of competencies.

R23 All components of job descriptions should be challenged as part of the design process to ensure they reflect the demands of the job.

R24 More explicit information on the competencies being assessed at each stage should be conveyed to the candidates.

R25 Advertisements should be designed to attract rather than to inform and should carry a positive and highly visible Equal Opportunities statement. The place candidates learnt about vacancies should continue to be monitored to inform future decisions on the most effective locations for advertisements in attracting diverse and successful applicants.

R26 More guidance on completing the competency questionnaire should be provided to candidates along with examples of what is required.

R27 The level of documentation required of Assessors at the sift can be reduced to provide overall summaries as long as individual marks for each competency are retained.

R28 The Competency Based Questionnaire should be anonymised.

R29 British Psychology Wales should receive feedback from the findings of this report that relate to them.

R30 Feedback should come to NAW rather than to the contractor and candidates should have the option of completing the forms anonymously.

R31 The Assembly should consider reducing the length of the assessment day or increasing the range of assessment.

R32 NAW assessors for Grade 7/Band F recruitment should be at Grade 6 or above and should play a more active role in the assessment centre. More junior assessors should not be present.

R33 Good assessment skills are very demanding and it should not be assumed that attendance on the one-day course is sufficient; passing the course should be a requirement for anyone wishing to be an assessor.

R34 The rules for how quickly a candidate can attend a further assessment centre should be made explicit at the start.

R35 Interviewers should be explicitly encouraged to probe answers and interact with interviewees in training and documentation.

R36 Consideration should be given to the use of external assessors at sift and interview.

R37 NAW should commission research into identifying how to make the organisation more attractive to underrepresented groups and consider the use of Positive Action. It is important that Personnel work with the Equality Policy Unit to develop an understanding of what the perceived barriers are to working for the Assembly.

R38 The success of internal candidates should be conveyed to internal staff to reassure them that they are not at a disadvantage and that their training and experience in the organisation are valued at assessment.

R39 Materials to help applicants get through the assessment should be equally available to internal and external candidates.

R40 The same pay and conditions rules should apply equally to internal and external candidates and

11. Of those falling to Personnel, several of those underway relate directly to the Staff Recruitment and Deployment Strategy. The Committee was informed at its June meeting of the outcomes of the staff consultation exercise. The comments of the three equality commissions in Wales, the Civil Service Commissioners and Roger McKenzie about the proposed strategy were also summarised.

Since then a key action has been to undertake an evaluation of the Grade 7 pilot. A paper (.....) outlining the evaluation approach was The report is expected in early November and a paper outlining the findings will be presented to the December meeting of the Committee. An awayday including all key internal stakeholders (Personnel, EPU, TUS) has been organised for 1 November 2002. It is anticipated that a revised strategy taking on board the comments of the Committee will be developed as a result. A timetable outlining the key milestones to deliver the strategy in the new financial year is attached at **Annex B**.

Annex A – Recommendations from the CSAL interim report

Annex A

CASSIN-SCOTT ASSOCIATES LTD. - AN EVALUATION OF THE BAND F RECRUITMENT PILOT FOR THE NATIONAL ASSEMBLY FOR WALES

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