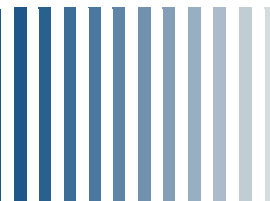




Protecting Merit and the Public Trust

A NEWSLETTER FOR PARLIAMENTARIANS



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In 1918, the Civil Service Commission (now known as the Public Service Commission) was mandated to safeguard merit in all federal government hiring. Since then, merit has been the fundamental principle guiding the formation of our federal workforce.

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The aim of Protecting Merit and the Public Trust is to promote meaningful dialogue with Parliamentarians by touching upon the major issues facing the Public Service Commission.

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE - A Question of Public Confidence

Recent government polling conducted by Millward Brown Goldfarb suggests that Canadians' confidence in their public institutions remains low, citing that only 36% of Canadians trust the federal government to do what's right. Canadians continue to question both the relevance and ethical standards of politicians, political parties, public institutions and the public servants hired to serve them. Canadians expect their Public Service to be competent, non-partisan, representative, and able to serve them in the official language of their choice. Merit is the foundation of such a Public Service.

Those who serve Canadians have a responsibility to build and maintain confidence in public institutions and their officials. The Public Service Commission (PSC), as an independent agency reporting to Parliament, acts to safeguard the public interest by protecting the merit principle. The oversight and safeguarding of merit continues to be our focus, along with facilitating a streamlined staffing regime.

Parliament created the PSC to work with the Public Service staffing system. We ensure Canadians are served by a Public Service that is based on professionalism and excellence, and derived from staffing processes that are fair, equitable and transparent.

Canadians and their representatives in Parliament want such a Public Service, and we are committed to this goal. Legislative reform to modernize human resources management in the federal government presents a unique opportunity for the PSC to work with Parliamentarians in furthering Public Service values. But, we face the challenge of an environment increasingly characterized by scarce

resources, rapid technological change, and growing uncertainty on the international stage.

Ten years have passed since the last major reform of the Public Service employment legislation. Changes now will affect Canadians for many years to come. Parliamentarians have a crucial role in ensuring that the principles which have given Canada a professional Public Service are upheld for future generations.

In this, the premier issue of *Protecting Merit and the Public Trust*, we present our perspective on topics of interest to Parliamentarians, such as modernizing the Public Service staffing system and expanding access to federal government jobs. We hope that this and future issues will help foster a healthy dialogue, laying the groundwork for a strong partnership with Parliamentarians, government departments and human resource professionals to ensure public confidence in the Public Service of Canada.

Please feel free to contact us for more information on these or any other issues in which we share an interest. I can be reached at 992-2788 or, if you prefer, send me an e-mail at Scott.Serson@psc-cfp.gc.ca.

I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Scott Serson
President
Public Service Commission of Canada

Federal Government Staffing and the PSC

The central challenge today for all professionals in the human resources community is to sustain the foundation of a modern accountable staffing system. Deputy Ministers and Agency Heads are accountable to the Public Service Commission (PSC) for the performance of their staffing systems through an annual performance report. This report, together with supporting accountability tools such as monitoring and audits, help form the basis of our Annual Report to Parliament each fall, which informs Parliamentarians and Canadians as to how the system is working.

The PSC is governed by the *Public Service Employment Act* (PSEA). The PSC has always played a crucial role in the development and modernization of the staffing system, working closely with government departments, while at the same time overseeing the staffing system.

For efficiency and to give managers ownership of the accountability system, federal government staffing has evolved into a highly delegated model. The PSC is given the authority within legislation to provide federal departments and agencies with an overall staffing framework based on merit – a principle that involves respecting the three process values of equity, fairness and transparency.

Today, Deputy Heads of departments and agencies covered by the PSEA have extensive, delegated staffing authority that empowers them to create staffing systems tailored to their specific business requirements. They must, however, ensure these systems strive for a workforce that is non-partisan, competent, representative, and able to serve Canadians in the official language of their choice.

So, while departments are in charge of day-to-day activities, overseeing the integrity of Public Service staffing remains the responsibility of the PSC. Should

system deficiencies occur, the PSC can take corrective action up to and including revocation of appointments and withdrawal of delegation.

Our oversight is proactive and, as a result, we are seeing greater understanding and ownership of the staffing system among departments. In our partnership with departments and agencies we are encouraging the development of numerous best practices, as well as pilot projects designed to test more responsible approaches to staffing.

Following are three watch-points we are actively pursuing with departments and agencies:

① Short-term Hiring

During the last two decades, both the private and public sectors have increased their reliance on contingent labour. Used as a support to the permanent work force, short-term hiring has the advantage of reducing costs and providing greater flexibility for employers to adjust to the business cycle. However, using short-term hiring as the only staffing tool compromises competence, non-partisanship, equity of access, and fair treatment of employees. It also has a negative impact on representativeness and increases the potential for partisan appointments.

② Quality Staffing Documentation

We continue to be concerned with the lack of adequate documentation of staffing actions in some files because it goes to the core of accountability. The lack of key documentation compromises our ability to clearly examine and verify that the values of fairness, competency, and non-partisanship have been applied in the hiring process. We will be analyzing this issue further in our next Annual Report to Parliament.

③ Modernization of Human Resource Management

As modernization of the federal Public Service progresses, the PSC will play a vital role in preserving the integrity of the merit principle and reporting to Parliament on the innovative and effective staffing approaches that need to be put in place to meet the human resource planning and development challenges of the information age. It is a trust and mandate we take very seriously indeed. ♦

Merit: The Foundation of an Effective Public Service

"The Commission is an independent agency reporting to Parliament that ensures that staffing and recruitment for the Public Service are conducted according to the principle of merit.

We believe protecting this principle is crucial to an effective Public Service. We have noted over the last ten years the

number of times the former Auditor General has commented on the fact that Canada's federal Public Service is one of the most respected Public Services in the world. We believe this is a direct result of the application of values that have served us so well over the years." ♦

Values and a Modern HR System

Modernization is the buzz around town when it comes to the federal Public Service. While the Commission fully supports the government's objective to modernize the federal Public Service staffing system, safeguarding and adapting merit to a changing human resources environment is an ongoing focus for the PSC.

The following are guiding principles for the PSC during these times of change – ones we advocate because they will help ensure the emergence of a truly effective modernized human resources environment. They include:

- merit as the fundamental principle for all recruitment and promotion, to ensure a Public Service that is highly competent, professional and representative;
- the independent oversight of staffing to preserve the integrity of merit and the credibility of the Public Service. Monitoring and after-the-fact oversight should continue to be important elements of merit protection, but should serve as just two aspects of a more holistic approach whose central aim is improvement and innovation;
- a values-based staffing system to ensure greater authority and accountability, so that managers can respond to changing operating environments and evolving client needs; and,
- an ongoing commitment to Official Languages and Employment Equity.♦

Opening Doors for Students

Improving access to federal government jobs for Canada's best and brightest students is a major priority for the PSC. In 1998, 'student bridging' was introduced as a simple and expeditious means of opening Public Service doors to new graduates. Bridging allows managers to hire students – on either a permanent or term basis – who have completed their program of study, and who have worked with the Public Service and have been assessed as demonstrating merit during that period.

Today, the PSC has introduced several refinements to student bridging that we believe help make Public Service employment an even more attractive option. The first change allows students to bridge into a Public Service position up to 18 months after completion of studies, rather than the initial 12

months. The second change permits bridging between departments and agencies, not just the more common intra-departmental bridging. This new option may be appropriate when a department or agency has employed an exceptional student, but does not have the capacity to hire the student full-time upon graduation.

The PSC will continue to periodically revisit the student bridging process to ensure it continues to simplify entry into the Public Service for high-calibre students.♦

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Selecting Qualified Candidates Regardless of Geographic Location

Removing geographic limits (also known as area of selection) so that all qualified Canadians can have access to federal government jobs is a major objective for the Commission. We've heard the concerns raised in the House of Commons and in the media, and are taking concrete measures to remove barriers and enhance access. In fact, such steps are an important part of the Commission's mandate to modernize recruitment.

Modern technology is the means by which we will broaden access and streamline the selection process, a fact that has been born out by the results of two pilot projects, one testing a national area of selection, and another testing electronic recruitment. The studies conducted by the Commission indicate that investing more money in the current manual system will fail to provide an efficient means for opening up areas of selection. This is because staff cannot manually process the current volumes of applications received in a reasonable timeframe. Technology is the only viable solution. E-recruitment will help the PSC and departments and agencies manage the increased volume of applications. It will facilitate screening, reduce hiring time and improve the overall quality of the hiring process.

You can find the results of these two pilot projects, and the PSC's proposed next steps, in a report entitled *Enhancing Canadians' Access to Federal Public Service Jobs* on our Web site: http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/centres/reports-rapports/aos/index_e.htm. The findings and next steps were presented to Parliament via a technical briefing in November 2002.♦

Expanding Canadians' access to federal jobs regardless of their geographic location is a goal the PSC shares with Parliamentarians, and we are confident that e-recruitment is the tool that will help us get there.

The Public Service – Employer of Choice

Statistical evidence derived from the PSC's recruitment activity suggests that the federal Public Service remains an employer of choice for many job seekers.

HIRING FACTS

• Volumes

In 2001-2002, the PSC received 470,000 applications, with an average of 111 applications per recruitment process.

• Recruitment Trends

The percentage of indeterminate hires continues to rise vis-à-vis term hires from 12% in 1997-1998 to 24% in 2001-2002. Between April 1, 2001 and March 31, 2002, there were 5,046 indeterminate hires to the core Public Service, which totaled 155,360 as of March 31, 2001.

• Speed of Staffing

The overall elapsed time for staffing an indeterminate position in the Public Service through a competitive process is estimated to be, on average, 14 weeks.★

Valuing Diversity

Visible Minorities

A meritorious Public Service that reflects this country's diverse population is in a strengthened position to serve the interests of all Canadians — a reality that the Prime Minister has himself endorsed with his commitment to promoting a truly 'representative' Public Service.

But promoting diversity in the federal workforce requires tools. One such tool is the *Embracing Change* action plan which commits the federal government to achieving benchmarks for departments. Benchmarks support merit. Through our outreach, hiring practices and recruitment systems, we are working towards eliminating systemic barriers that prevent qualified visible minorities and others from participating in the federal government.

As part of our commitment to helping departments reach Employment Equity goals, the Commission is meeting with Parliamentarians and Committees to review related staffing activities, and has planned additional meetings with departments and agencies in the coming weeks and months. These meetings provide a useful forum for exchanges on best practices and the identification of existing challenges.★

Persons with Disabilities

At the forefront of many Public Service initiatives is the recruitment and self-identification of persons with disabilities. The PSC recognizes that sensitizing the Public Service to the complex issues surrounding persons with disabilities remains an area where guidance is required. To illustrate, little is known throughout the Public Service, indeed in the public domain, about all the challenges facing persons with learning disabilities. Examples like this, along with recent increases in the number of requests for accommodation during the assessment and selection processes, emphasize the need for more information on the assessment of persons with disabilities.

The PSC's Personnel Psychology Centre is addressing some of these challenges for managers with the release of their recently revised *Guidelines for Assessing Persons with Disabilities*. The Guidelines, which support the new joint PSC and Treasury Board Secretariat *Duty to Accommodate Policy*, provide clients with a basic knowledge of general principles and practices to be followed in determining accommodations. These guidelines are available on our Web site at: http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/ppc/disability/disability_preface_e.htm.★

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Recent Reports

- The *2001-2002 Annual Report* to Parliament, an important piece of the accountability framework, was released in October.
http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/centres/annual-annuel/2002/index_e.htm
- The *2001-2002 Departmental Performance Report*, another key element of the accountability framework, was released in November. The report speaks to the positive impact of the PSC as an organization, and the value it has brought to the staffing system of the Public Service.
http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/rma/dpr/01-02/PSC/PSC0102dpr02_e.asp
- *Executive Succession Reconsidered: Planning for Public Service Renewal*, a study on the readiness and willingness of the EX feeder groups (service managers and professionals) to fill executive positions, was released in November. It compiles findings from the *2002 Survey of Managers and Professionals*.
http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/centres/reports-rapports/esrrd/index_e.htm
- The *Thematic Review on Staffing Values*: While progress has been made on many fronts, this review indicates that more work is required in a number of areas, notably monitoring of staffing transactions, strengthening the capacity of the human resources community and improving strategic human resources planning to address long-term recruitment and renewal needs.
http://publiservice.gc.ca/hr/lhp/2002/02_40e.htm ♦

Contact Info

Kathy Trim, Director
Public Affairs
Public Service Commission of Canada
613-992-9563
katharine.trim@psc-cfp.gc.ca

Public Servants Express Strong Desire to Pursue Executive Careers

A recent survey of executive feeder groups (those managers and professionals who make up over 90% of executive appointments), indicates that there is a substantial pool from which to draw entry-level executives.

The survey, conducted for the PSC's Research Directorate, is the first in recent years looking at the executive feeder population, and is examined more closely in the just-released report *Executive Succession Reconsidered: Planning for Public Service Renewal*. Respondents expressed a strong desire to become executives. They expressed the belief that pursuing an executive career would give them the opportunity to work in a broader context, influence progress, and have better access to senior-level decision makers – all of which they considered highly motivating. Two in three of those interested in an executive career felt they would be ready to work at that level within two years. However, the survey revealed that there

are development needs among the entire sample – notably experience in work at the political level and knowledge of a second language. The PSC is taking measures to address these needs.

It is encouraging to note that historically under-represented groups, such as women and visible minorities showed a keen interest in an executive career. Indeed, visible minority members, expressed a stronger desire to progress than all other respondents. It should be noted, however, that this group remains under-represented in the traditional feeder groups from which executives are recruited, which will impact our ability to diversify the executive cadre. Strategies will be implemented to ensure we make progress towards achieving *Embracing Change* benchmarks, including external recruitment and giving visible minority members the skills and abilities needed for a successful career in the Public Service. ♦

Speeding up Staffing with Pre-qualified Pools

The Commission is delegating to departments on a case-by-case basis the authority to appoint from pools of pre-qualified candidates, within a strict management framework. This is designed to improve access to federal jobs for pre-qualified candidates. This delegation promotes partnering and a sharing of workload, but it also makes sure that all departments are accountable for their staffing decisions. In addition, it aids the establishment of pre-qualified pools for functional communities such as engineers and other professional groups. In order to allow for careful monitoring of the pre-qualified pool process, the delegation is being piloted only with interested departments.

Simplified Recourse System Introduced for Pre-Qualified Candidates

The PSC has also introduced a simplified recourse system for pools of pre-qualified candidates. Recourse for unsuccessful candidates – including review by a third party – is now available when a decision is made. This is expected to result in a saving of both time and resources, while providing for an in-depth third party review. ♦