



Public Service Commission
of Canada

Commission de la fonction publique
du Canada

Time to Staff in the Federal Public Service: Some Contributing Factors

A Statistical Study by the Public Service
Commission of Canada

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Canada

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Highlights

The time it takes to staff remains an issue for public service managers who work in federal organizations under the *Public Service Employment Act* (PSEA). Regardless of actual staffing time, there is general dissatisfaction with the pace of hiring. This statistical study examines data related to the time to staff gathered through the Public Service Commission (PSC) Survey of Appointments. The main themes of this study are as follows:

1. The mean elapsed time for a competitive process for an indeterminate (permanent) position, beginning with the commencement of a staffing action and ending when the appointee reports to work, is 22.8 weeks (the median is 17.3 weeks). (See Appendix 2 for definitions of mean and median.)
2. Time to staff is significantly influenced by the number of applicants in a competitive process. When there are only a few applicants, staffing time is faster. In particular, when there are between one and five applicants, the mean staffing time is 13.7 weeks (the median is 10.0 weeks).
3. Departments that take longer to staff more frequently run larger processes from which they staff multiple positions. Departments that staff positions more quickly (with a mean elapsed time to staff of less than 20 weeks) tend to run much smaller processes from which they staff fewer positions.
4. The mean time to staff a position by a competition with a regional area of selection is four and one half weeks shorter than the mean time to staff a position by a competition where the area of selection is national or has a national component, due, in part, to the smaller number of applicants.
5. The public service has statutory and policy requirements (e.g. priority rights, formal appeal processes, language testing and security clearance) that lengthen the staffing process. The PSC Survey of Appointments reveals that a lack of stakeholder availability (e.g. board members, human resource support, candidates, etc.) and a lack of staffing process knowledge or expertise on the part of stakeholders also prolong the time to staff.

The Public Service Commission's role in staffing

The Public Service Commission (PSC) is an independent agency reporting to Parliament, mandated to safeguard the integrity of the public service staffing system and the political neutrality of the public service. In addition, the PSC recruits qualified Canadians from across the country. The PSC develops policies to ensure that appointments are made according to the principle of merit and respect the staffing values. The PSC conducts audits, studies and investigations to confirm the effectiveness of, and to make improvements to the staffing system.

Background

Objective. The objective of this study is to communicate statistical information and analyses about the time it takes to make indeterminate appointments in the federal public service for organizations under the PSEA. The study is based on the results of the PSC Survey of Appointments that was conducted semi-annually over the four-year period from 2000 to the end of 2003, prior to the implementation of the new PSEA.

This study makes no attempt to look at outcomes of the staffing system other than the time to staff. This study provides benchmark information and insights about potential opportunities for improvements that can be used in modernizing staffing in the public service.

Scope. The PSC Survey of Appointments covers indeterminate recruitment (hiring of individuals from outside the public service), indeterminate promotions, and term-to-indeterminate movement (see Appendix 2 for definitions). This accounts for about 30% of the staffing activities that took place in the years analyzed in this study. It does not include staffing activities related to casual employment, student employment or specified period (term) employment, nor does it cover deployments or indeterminate lateral appointments.

Delegation and the Staffing Process.¹ The PSC is responsible for staffing in the public service under the PSEA and has delegated much of its staffing authority to deputy heads. For the types of processes open to the public that are included in this study, the PSC conducted the entire executive (EX) staffing process, managed the priority administration system, advertised competitions and referred candidates from inventories. For the closed processes that are included in this study, the PSC conducted EX staffing and managed the priority administration system.

The staffing process for a competitive process is described in Figure 1.

¹ The delegation and staffing process described is that which was in effect during the study period, prior to the implementation of the new PSEA. In most cases, staffing under the former PSEA was based on appointing the “best qualified” candidate. Under the new PSEA, every person who is appointed must meet the qualifications, including official language requirements for the work to be performed.

Figure 1: Competitive staffing process
(Based on the PSEA prior to December 31, 2005)

1. Preparation

- Approve staffing action.
- Have up-to-date job description.
- Prepare statement of qualifications based on job description and selection standards.
- Decide on selection process (open or closed).
- Decide on area of selection.
- Decide on and prepare assessment tools (interviews, tests, reference checks, etc.).
- Decide on screening and selection board members.
- Consider persons with priority rights.

2. Advertising and Screening

- Prepare an advertisement poster (usually bilingual), indicating job characteristics and requirements, area of selection, closing date, etc.
- Issue poster (on government Web site).
- Receive applications by closing date.
- Screening board reviews applications and retains those meeting basic criteria.
- Screening board prepares Screening Board Report, indicating which candidates are screened in or out, and why.
- Send letters to screened out applicants.
- Invite screened in applicants to next step in process.

3. Assessment and Selection

- Selection board uses tools to assess and rate candidates.
- Conduct language testing or verify results, if applicable.
- Selection board prepares Selection Board Report, indicating which candidates are qualified or not, and why.
- Establish eligibility list with some or all of the qualified candidates, indicating their ranking and the validity period of the list.
- Give right of appeal to screened out applicants and candidates who did not qualify (they have two weeks to appeal). The right to appeal does not apply to open processes.
- Notify successful candidates and indicate their rank on the eligibility list (if applicable).

4. Appointment and Post-Appointment

- Ensure candidates to be appointed meet the conditions of employment e.g. security clearance, medical requirements.
- If there are no appeals, issue letter(s) of offer to top candidate(s).
- Make appointment(s).
- Give post-board feedback, if requested.

5. Appointee reports to work

Under the former PSEA, positions filled through non-competitive processes were not advertised and there were no eligibility lists. Justification for using a non-competitive process was required and merit was required to be assessed.

PSC survey of appointments: January 2000 - December 2003

The PSC conducts a semi-annual survey of hiring managers and recent appointees to gather data on appointment processes. These surveys are the primary data source for the staffing time estimates used in this study (see Appendix 1 for methodology).

The survey asks hiring managers about the elapsed time for competitive staffing processes pertaining to indeterminate positions (beginning with the commencement of a staffing action and ending when the appointee reports to work). This study presents the results of the 2 577 manager responses from the eight survey periods covering the period from January 2000 to December 2003.

Based on the survey responses, we determined that the mean elapsed time for a competitive process for an indeterminate position is 22.8 weeks (the median is 17.3 weeks).

Broken down by type of process, the mean time for processes open to the public (open processes) is 23.6 weeks, while the mean time for processes open only to persons employed in the public service (closed processes) is 22.4 weeks. In general, open processes involve more stakeholders, such as the PSC, and attract more candidates. These factors increase the time to staff. On the other hand, closed processes include the right of appeal, a process that adds two or more weeks to the time to staff.

Figure 2: Distribution of survey responses by appointment type and selection process²

	Open	Closed	Total Number of Responses (Open and Closed Processes)
PROMOTIONS	132 (15.0%)	1 429 (84.2%)	1 561 (60.6%)
TERM TO INDETERMINATE MOVEMENT	146 (16.6%)	268 (15.8%)	414 (16.1%)
RECRUITMENT	602 (68.4%)		602 (23.4%)
ALL	880 (34.1%)	1 697 (65.9%)	2 577 (100.0%)

² Persons employed in the public service can apply in open processes resulting in promotions and term-to-indeterminate movement.

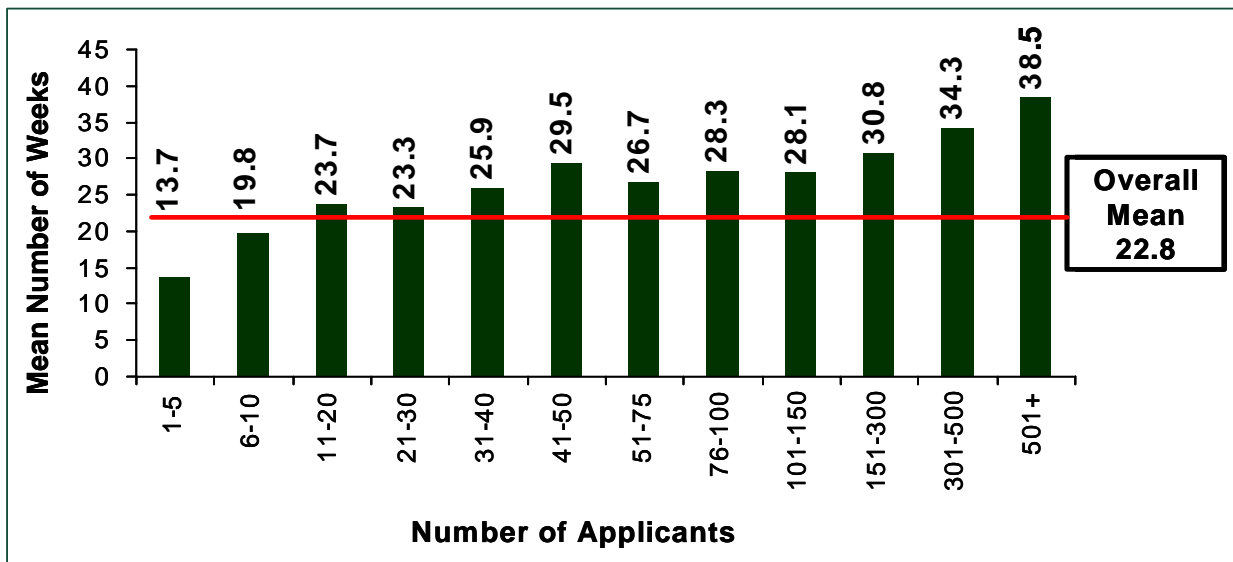
Staffing that results in a promotion takes, on average, the longest time at 23.2 weeks (the median is 20.0 weeks). Term-to-indeterminate appointments take, on average, the least time to staff at 21.0 weeks (the median is 14.0 weeks). On average, external recruitment is similar to promotions, at 22.7 weeks (the median is 17.3 weeks).

Large competitions and their impact on staffing time

One major difference among departments is that some departments run a significant number of large processes, often resulting in the appointment of a large number of candidates to similar positions. As might be expected, these larger, more complex processes can take much longer than processes involving only a few applications for a single position.

Number of Applicants. Figure 3 illustrates the effect of large competitions, with the mean time to staff plotted against how many candidates applied. The chart reflects the mean duration of a staffing process, according to how many candidates applied.

Figure 3: Mean number of weeks by number of applicants (January 2000 - December 2003)



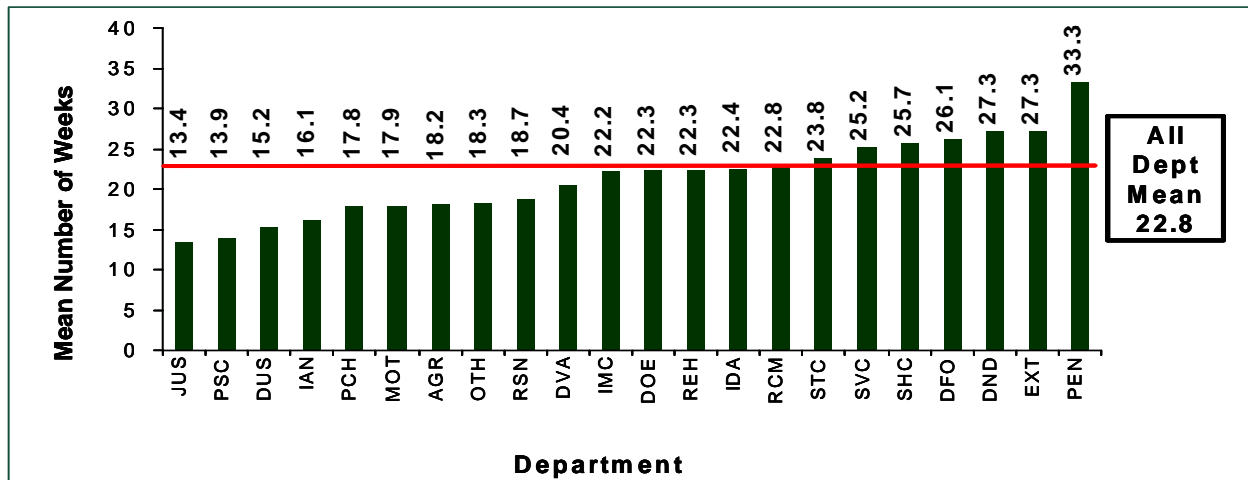
It is clear from Figure 3 that when there are only a few applicants, staffing time is shorter. In particular, when there are only one to five applicants in a process, the mean time to staff is 13.7 weeks (the median is 10.0 weeks), significantly below the overall mean of 22.8 weeks. Close to 25% of the survey responses involved between one and five applicants. When the number of applicants is between 6 and 10, the mean time to staff increases by six weeks to 19.8 weeks. More generally, as the number of applicants increases, so too does the staffing time. For processes involving more than 500 applicants, mean staffing time peaks at 38.5 weeks.

Number of appointments. Close to 43% of the survey responses involved a process with only one appointment. When staffing involves only one appointment, the mean time to staff is comparatively short, at 18.0 weeks. On the other hand, when more than one appointment is made from the same staffing process, the time to staff is generally longer than the overall mean time of 22.8 weeks.

Time to staff by department

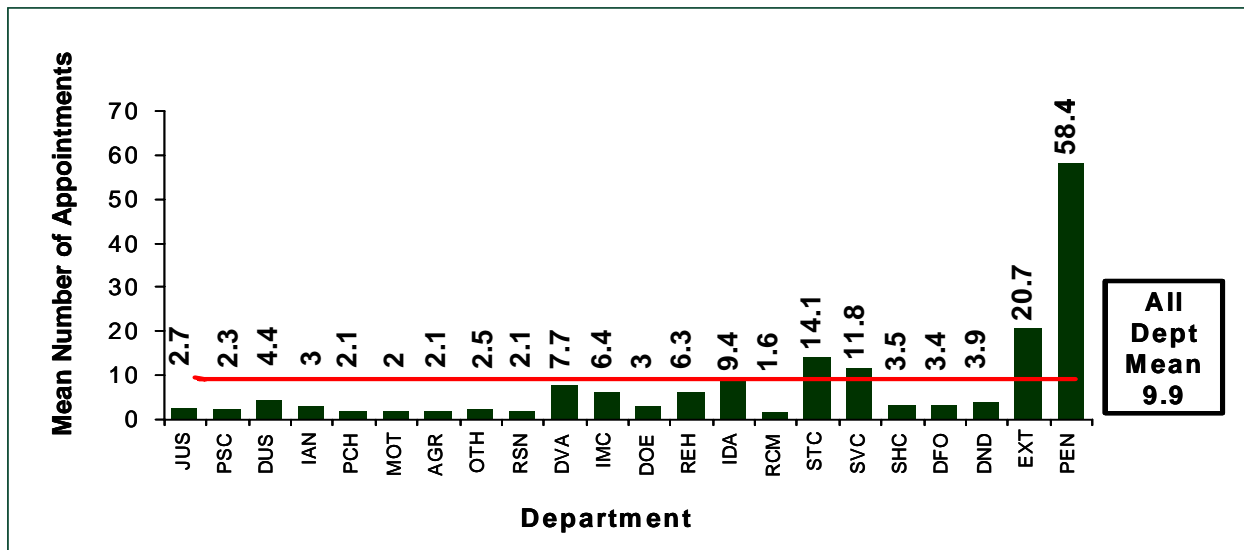
When the PSC Survey of Appointments data are broken down and analyzed by department, differences in staffing time emerge. One way to assess the influence of large competitions within individual departments on elapsed staffing time is to compare the graphs shown in figures 4 and 5. The first shows the mean time to staff per process by department. The second presents the mean number of appointments per process by department.³

Figure 4: Mean number of weeks per process by department (January 2000 – December 2003)



³ See Appendix 3 for a description of the acronyms used in this section.

Figure 5: Mean number of appointments per process by department (January 2000 - December 2003)



As might be expected given our previous analysis, departments that take longer to staff more frequently run larger processes from which they staff multiple positions. For example, looking at departments that take a mean of 20 weeks or more to staff, 8 of the 13 departments (Veterans Affairs Canada (DVA), Citizenship and Immigration Canada (IMC), Human Resources Development Canada (REH), Canadian International Development Agency (IDA), Statistics Canada (STC), Public Works and Government Services Canada (SVC), Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada (EXT), and Correctional Service Canada (PEN)) staffed, on average, 6 or more positions from the same process. Departments that staffed positions more quickly (with a mean elapsed time to staff of less than 20 weeks) tended to run much smaller processes, staffing on average about four and a half or fewer positions from the same process. Nevertheless, there are a few departments that took quite a long time to staff, even when the mean number of appointments from the competition was relatively small.

Correctional Service Canada (PEN), at 33.3 weeks, takes the longest time to staff, well above the mean for all other departments. However, this Department runs some of the largest staffing processes which, by their very nature, are extremely time-consuming. Indeed, 59.5 % of the survey results for Correctional Service Canada (PEN) pertain to Correctional Service Officers; all involved large processes, averaging 605 candidates and 104 appointments per process.

Other factors influencing staffing time

While staffing time is influenced by the size of the competition, other factors are also involved. For the period of January 2002 to June 2002 and thereafter, the PSC Survey of Appointments asked managers additional questions about the extent to which the total elapsed time to staff positions was affected by a number of specific factors — language testing, security clearance, priority clearance, the availability of stakeholders (e.g. board members, HR support, candidates, etc.), knowledge of the staffing process or expertise of stakeholders, a formal appeal process and other factors. The January 2002 to June 2002 Survey asked managers to identify the three most significant factors. For the period of July 2002 to December 2003, these questions were modified to ask managers which factors delayed the time to staff, “to a great extent”, “to some extent” or “not at all.” Figure 6 shows the results of how often managers selected “to some extent” or “to a great extent” in their responses.

The survey results show that a lack of availability of stakeholders (e.g. board members, human resources support, candidates, etc.) and a lack of staffing process knowledge or expertise on the part of stakeholders had a significant impact on time to staff. Other factors such as security clearance, language testing, priority clearance, and formal appeal processes, although relevant, had less impact.

Figure 6: Percentage of managers responding “To Some Extent” or “To a Great Extent”

Factor	Percent
• A lack of availability of stakeholders (board members, human resources support, candidates, etc.)	46.2%
• A lack of staffing process knowledge or expertise of stakeholders (board members, human resource support, etc.)	39.6%
• Security clearance	25.4%
• Language testing	24.1%
• Priority clearance	23.8%
• A formal appeal process	21.9%

Area of selection

Geographic, organizational and occupational limits, known as “area of selection” determine where prospective candidates must reside or work to be eligible to compete and to be considered for competitions. As part of the staffing process, managers define the area of selection when they prepare advertisement posters. The geographic area of selection may have a national component based on organizational limits (e.g. an area of selection could be national for departmental employees and regional for other persons employed in the public service).

A national area of selection for external recruitment of executive and equivalent positions and for positions two levels below the executive level has been required since 2001.

Figure 7 highlights differences in time to staff between processes (both open and closed) where the area of selection is regional⁴; and those where the area of selection is national or has a national component.⁵ The mean time to staff a position by competition with a regional area of selection is four and one half weeks shorter than the mean time to staff a position by a competition with a national area of selection or national component, due, in part, to the smaller number of applicants. When the area of selection was regional, the mean number of applicants per process was 55.1, a number which increased to 159.0 applicants when the area of selection was broadened.

Figure 7: Means and Medians by area of selection

Area of Selection	Elapsed Time to Staff		Number Applied		Number Appointed	
	Mean	Median	Mean	Median	Mean	Median
All	21.9	17.3	81.5	14.0	5.8	2.0
National or National Component	25.4	22.0	159.0	25.0	7.6	2.0
Regional	20.9	16.0	55.1	12.0	5.2	2.0

Note: The table includes appointments for indeterminate external recruitment, indeterminate promotions and term-to-indeterminate movement.

⁴ Local area of selection is included in the figures for regional area of selection.

⁵ For comparative purposes, the results exclude the processes involving Correctional Service Officers (CX's). Even though small in number, when looking at comparisons between staffing times for competitions with a regional area of selection and staffing times for competitions with a national or national component, the inclusion of the CX's, tends to distort the comparisons.

The PSC is taking a measured approach to broadening the use of a national area of selection for external advertised processes. To facilitate this change, the PSC began implementing a Web-based recruitment and screening tool in November 2005 to help departments and agencies with expected increases in volumes of job applications. The PSC plans to fully implement this tool in tandem with the planned broadening of the national area of selection.

Appendix 1: Methodology

The data used in this analysis is extracted from the PSC Survey of Appointments for the period of January 2000 to December 2003. It is based on a 12% random sample of appointments made under the *Public Service Employment Act* (PSEA). The target population includes only indeterminate external recruitment, indeterminate promotions and term-to-indeterminate movement. Survey questionnaires were sent to sampled individuals appointed as a result of a competitive process, and to a manager with knowledge of the process, for appointments in the January 2000 to June 2002 period. In July 2002, the survey was expanded to cover non-competitive processes as well. For the purposes of this study, only manager responses were used. There were 3 556 completed questionnaires related to competitive processes. The number of completed questionnaires with respect to the time to staff question was 2 577. The overall survey response rate was about 50%. The survey response rate for the questions on time to staff was 37.5%.

Appendix 2: Glossary (Based on the PSEA prior to December 31, 2005)

Area of Selection: Refers to the established geographical, occupational, and organizational parameters that prospective candidates must meet in order to be eligible for appointment to the federal public service. In a non-competitive process, the area of selection determines who has the right of appeal.

Casual Employment: A short-term employment option to hire persons to the public service for a period not exceeding 90 calendar days at one time, nor for more than 125 working days within any 12-month period in any one department. None of the provisions of the PSEA (other than those authorizing the making of such appointments) applies to these hires.

Closed Competition: A competition open only to persons employed in the public service.

External Recruitment: The primary mechanism for replenishing the federal public service with members of the general public. This is primarily accomplished through open competitions.

Formal Appeal: The recourse process for an individual who has not been selected for an appointment in an internal closed competition or without competition process, pursuant to section 21 of the PSEA.

Indeterminate (Permanent) Employment: Part-time or full-time employment of no fixed duration.

Individual Merit: A person is assessed and found qualified for appointment without being compared to others. Individual merit appointments can only be made in the circumstances described in the *Public Service Employment Regulations*.

Mean: The most common measure of central tendency, the mean is the arithmetic average of a set of numbers.

Median: The value of the middle item when the data are arranged from lowest to highest; a measure of central tendency. If there is an even number of observations, the median is the average of the two middle observations. In raw data, the median is the middle value that has exactly half of the data above it and half below it. For example, in terms of time to staff, if the median is 17 weeks, 50% of all values take longer than this estimate while 50% take less time.

National Area of Selection: The result of removing geographic limits that prospective candidates must meet to be eligible to apply for public service positions.

Open Competition: A competition open to the public, including persons employed in the public service.

Priority Person: A person who has an entitlement under the *Public Service Employment Act* or *Regulations*, for a limited period, to be appointed without competition and ahead of all others to any position in the public service for which he or she is qualified.

Specified-period (Term) Employment: Part-time or full-time employment of a fixed duration.

Appendix 3: Department acronyms and description

AGR	Agriculture and Agri-Food Canada
DFO	Fisheries and Oceans
DND	National Defence Canada (Public Service Employees)
DOE	Environment Canada
DUS	Industry Canada
DVA	Veterans Affairs Canada
EXT	Foreign Affairs and International Trade Canada
IAN	Indian Affairs and Northern Development Canada
IDA	Canadian International Development Agency
IMC	Citizenship and Immigration Canada
JUS	Justice Canada
MOT	Transport Canada
PCH	Canadian Heritage
PEN	Correctional Service Canada
PSC	Public Service Commission
RCM	Royal Canadian Mounted Police (Public Service Employees)
REH	Human Resources Development Canada
RSN	Natural Resources Canada
SHC	Health Canada
STC	Statistics Canada
SVC	Public Works and Government Services Canada
OTH	Other/smaller departments not listed above

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