



Public Service Commission
of Canada

Commission de la fonction publique
du Canada

Visible Minority Recruitment Issues for the Federal Public Service

An Analysis of Survey Results

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Canada

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1.0 Introduction

For several years, the federal Public Service has advocated policies aimed at rendering the make-up of its workforce representative of the Canadian population. The *Employment Equity Act*, introduced in 1995, mandates employers within the federal Public Service to work towards the achievement of equality within the workforce and the elimination of employment disadvantages for women, members of visible minorities, Aboriginal peoples and persons with disabilities.

Yet, only last year, the Taskforce on the Participation of Visible Minorities in the Federal Public Service observed that the gap between visible minority representation in the Public Service and this group's labour market availability was in fact widening in the case of most departments. The Task Force, chaired by Lewis Perinbam, challenged the Public Service to achieve a visible minority representation of one in five employees by the year 2003. Although the most recent statistics indicate that the Public Service is not on track to reach that level within the proposed timeframe, the goal of establishing representativeness remains firmly in place. Success in this area will demand a careful targeting of recruitment initiatives.

Reaching out effectively to the visible minority population requires an understanding of the way in which members of visible minorities may respond differently from other members of the population to individual recruitment practices. Results from the *Survey of Student Employee Opinion in the Federal Public Service* and the *Survey of Newly Hired Indeterminate Employees in the Federal Public Service*¹ provides some helpful insights into the views of members of visible minorities regarding:

- career priorities,
- the employment experience in the Public Service,
- career intentions, and
- the job-search process.

¹ Henceforth the surveys will respectively be referred to as the Student Survey and the New Hires Survey.

For analyses of the surveys' overall results, see: Doug Booker, Kathy Malizia, Leah Ben-Porat, Deborah Yin and Andrea Chatterton, *Recruiting the Next Wave: A Survey of Student Employee Opinion in the Federal Public Service, Summer 2000*, PSC, 2001; and Brian McDougall, Micheline Nehmé and Rolina van Gaalen, *Joining the Core Workforce: A Preliminary Report on the Survey of Newly Hired Indeterminate Employees in the Federal Public Service*, PSC, 2001. See also: Andrea Chatterton, *New Hires Survey Thematic Report: The Recruitment Experience, Job Satisfaction and Career Plans of Visible Minorities Recently Hired in the Federal Public Service*. These, and other related reports, can be found at http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/research/index_e.htm, or in French at http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/research/index_f.htm.

Together, these insights tell us about:

- conditions most likely to draw members of visible minorities to employment with the Public Service;
- directions in which efforts might be taken to improve the image held by member of visible minorities of the Public Service;
- specific job related information that needs to be provided more efficiently to potential recruits as they consider employment opportunities; and
- the advertising methods that are most effective in reaching members of visible minorities.

2.0 The Surveys

Both surveys were conducted via the Internet by the polling firm Ipsos-Reid. The Student Survey was conducted during the summer of the year 2000, and involved 3487 students employed primarily through the Post-Secondary Co-operative Education and Internship Program (Co-op) and the Federal Student Work Experience Program (FSWEP). This survey was aimed at gauging students' views regarding the student employment programs, employment within the federal Public Service in general, and their career aspirations.

The New Hires Survey was conducted during the winter of 2001, and involved the participation of 990 federal public servants who were hired into indeterminate positions between July 1, 1999 and June 30, 2000. This survey was designed to provide insight into the recruitment process, the respondents' motivations for joining the Public Service, their assessment of their employment experience thus far, and their career intentions.

3.0 Visible Minority Survey Respondents

Visible minority representation among participants in the Student Survey stood at 12% (N=415). The most common fields of study among the Student Survey respondents who identified themselves as members of visible minorities were Commerce, Management or Business Administration (20%); Computer or Information Science (17%); Social Sciences (12%); and Engineering and Applied Sciences (11%). Visible minority students had a higher representation in the field of Computer or Information Science than other students, of whom 11% were enrolled in that area. A large majority of visible minority participants in the Student Survey were registered in an undergraduate program at a university (70%) and 15% in a college or CEGEP program. Compared to other students, visible minority students were more likely to be enrolled at the university level.

Members of visible minorities comprised 19% (N=189) of the participants in the New Hires Survey. Half of them held a position as a term employee at the time when they accepted their indeterminate appointment (50%), and about two in five had no previous experience working with the Public Service (40%). These figures were very similar to those for other respondents. The proportion hired through the Post-Secondary Recruitment Program, however, was larger in the case of members of visible minorities than in the case of other respondents (23% compared to 17%).

Immediately prior to joining the Public Service (either as a term or indeterminate employee), approximately half of the visible minority respondents (50%) were working in the private sector. Another 14% were working in the broader public sector (including, for example, health and education), and 18% reported not to have been employed at that time. The respective figures for other respondents were 47%, 9% and 16%.

On average, visible minority participants in the New Hires Survey were more highly educated than other participants. An impressive 71% of visible minority respondents indicated having completed at least a Bachelor's degree, compared to 56% of the other survey participants.

4.0 Surveys Results

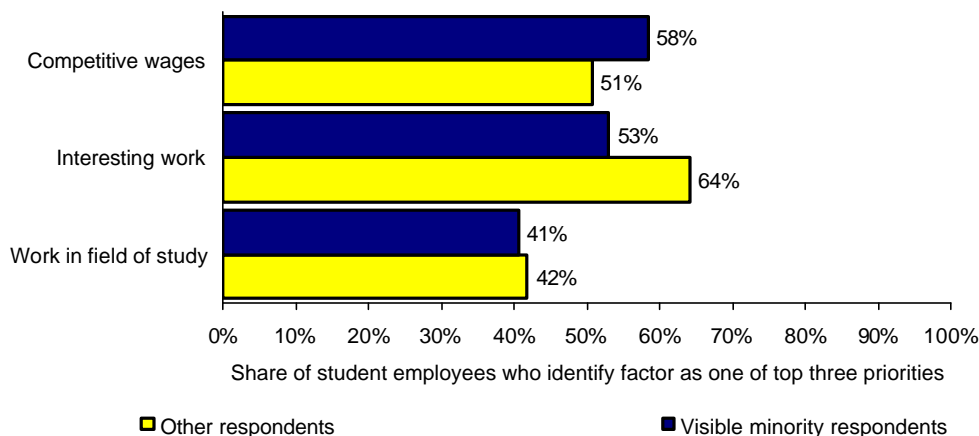
4.1 Career Priorities

The goal of encouraging members of visible minorities to consider the opportunities available in the Public Service, can best be accomplished if the benefits of employment in this sector are highlighted during the recruitment process and correspond to the types of things members of visible minorities consider important. We therefore need to know what members of visible minorities are looking for in a job.

In response to the question that asked Student Survey participants to select the three factors they considered most important when choosing a future career, visible minority students most commonly selected:

- competitive wages (58%),
- interesting work (53%), and
- the opportunity to work in their field of study (41%).

Chart 1: Career Priorities of Student Employees



Although other respondents included the same three items on their lists of top three priorities, they ranked the top two factors in reverse order. Thus they were relatively less likely to choose competitive wages (51%) and relatively more likely to select interesting work (64%) as one of their top three priorities.

Because the priorities of visible minorities are in certain ways distinct, there is value in considering these distinctive preferences in designing effective recruitment strategies. Also, strategies designed based on the results of all respondents may be less effective in attracting visible minorities.

Clearly, it makes sense to market the Public Service as providing opportunities for interesting work and work in the employee's area of expertise, given that the Student Survey shows that these factors are highly important to both visible minority and other respondents. Yet, it also should be recognized that such an approach may not prove to be as effective in attracting visible minorities, as the issue of competitive wages is of relatively greater importance to them.

This raises the question of whether or not members of visible minorities currently believe that the Public Service offers the types of conditions they judge to be of greatest importance. Both surveys provide noteworthy insights on this issue.

4.2 Expectations of FPS providing Conditions identified as Priorities

Chart 2 indicates students' expectations regarding the likelihood of finding in the Public Service work in their field of study, interesting work and competitive wages. With respect to these expectations, we are primarily interested in the responses of students to whom these factors are in fact important. *The figures for each one of the three factors were therefore calculated so as to only represent the views of those students who included that respective factor among their top three priorities.*

The results show that only just over one third (36%) of the visible minority students who identified competitive wages as one of their top three priorities expected this to be associated with Public Service employment. The remainder of these students either did not expect competitive wages, or were uncertain as to what to expect. Although the expectations of other students are also reason for concern, the proportion of these students who anticipated finding competitive wages in the Public Service was significantly larger.

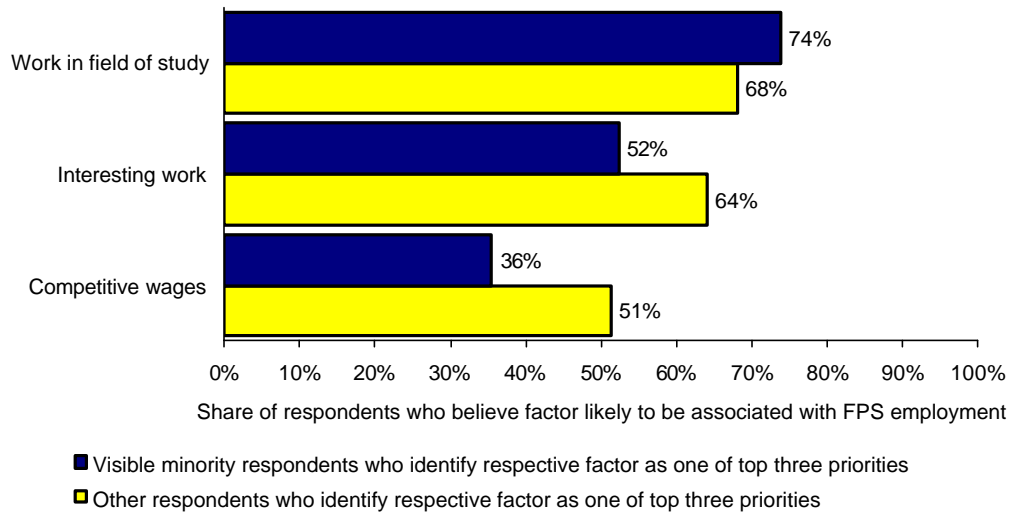
These findings signal a worrisome gap between the aspirations and expectations of visible minority student employees. While visible minorities respondents were more likely than other respondents to consider competitive wages as highly important, they were less likely to believe these could be found in the Public Service.

In comparison, considerably larger proportions of visible minority respondents who included work in their field of study or interesting work in their top three priorities believed those conditions to be associated with Public Service employment (74% and 52% respectively). Nevertheless, the large numbers of survey participants who either did not expect, or were unsure they could expect to find these factors, show that the image of Public Service employment could be improved in these areas.

It must furthermore be noted that in response to being asked whether or not their current job makes full use of their education, large proportions of newly hired visible minority and other

employees indicated they did not feel this to be the case (41% and 35% respectively), which suggest roots of retention problems already exist in relation to these new recruits.

Chart 2: Student Employees' Perceptions of Ability of FPS to Deliver Conditions they Identify as Priorities



As certain regions of the country contain especially high concentrations of visible minorities, it might be speculated that the differences in expectations regarding wage levels noted above are a function of region rather than visible minority status.

Individual regions do not contain adequate numbers of visible minority respondents to determine if this is the case, but we can test this hypothesis by aggregating data from the three regions where students were least optimistic about finding competitive wages in the Public Service (i.e. British Columbia, the National Capital Region, and Ontario minus the NCR). Among respondents in these combined regions who chose competitive wages as one of their top three career priorities, 31% of visible minority students expected to find this factor in the Public Service, compared to 40% of other students. Although the percentage difference thus calculated is smaller, it remains significant and consistent with the national trend.

The relatively high proportion of visible minority students enrolled in Computer or Information Science, can similarly not account for the differences in expectations regarding competitive wages.

Although the number of visible minority students enrolled in this field is too small to analyze, we can assess the effect of taking Computer or Information Science students out of the sample. Focusing in this manner exclusively on students in fields of study other than Computer or Information Science who identified competitive wages as among their top three priorities, we find that 36% of visible minority students, compared to 54% of other students, believed

competitive wages were likely to be found in the Public Service. The previously noted difference in expectations thus persists at a comparable level.

The New Hires Survey throws light on the issue from another angle. Only 21% of visible minority respondents (compared to 29% of those who were not members of visible minorities) cited salary as one of the three most important reasons for having accepted their first term position in the Public Service. Conversely, considerably larger proportions of visible minority respondents than other respondents (43% compared to 30%) identified the opportunity to work in their field of study as among the three most important reasons for having accepted their first term job.

It appears therefore, that although competitive wages are the top priority for members of visible minorities, only a minority expect to find competitive wages in a Public Service career and most who accept a position, do so primarily for reasons other than the salary levels.

4.3 Overall Perceptions of FPS Employment

The answers to a number of other questions included in the surveys provide further details about how the Public Service is perceived. The data indicates that in the eyes of many visible minority employees, the Public Service is not the most desirable employer.

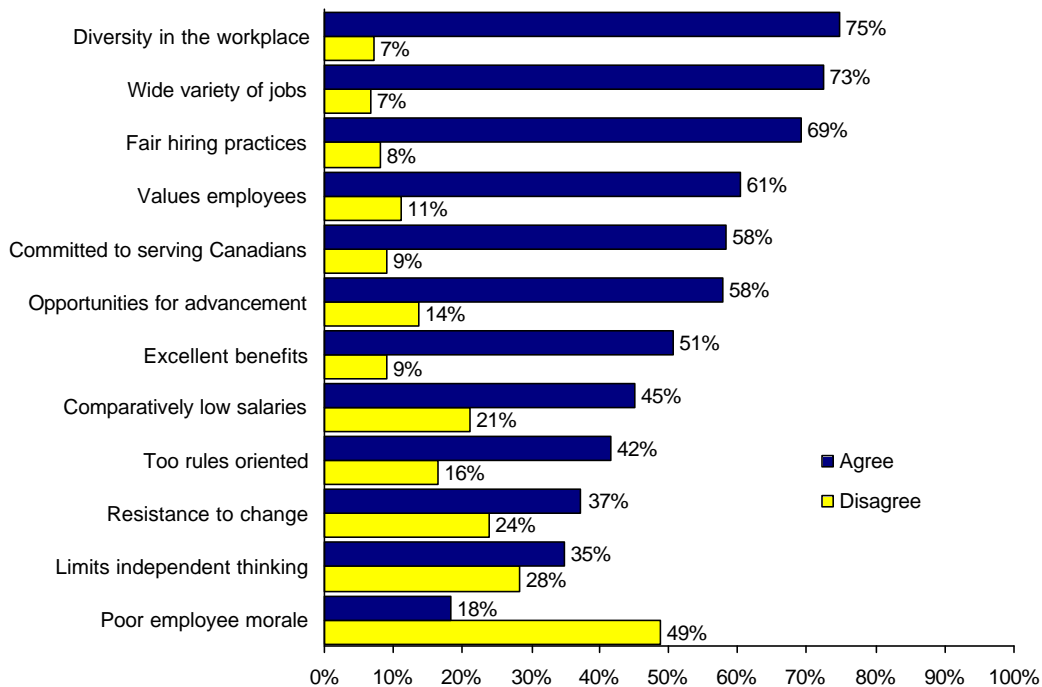
Among the new hires, fewer than half the visible minority employees (48%) and just over half of the other employees (53%) indicated that during their job search, the federal Public Service as their first choice as a sector of the economy in which to work. Nearly one third of visible minority respondents (32%) compared to about one quarter of the other employees (24%) stated that the private sector had instead been their first choice.

Since these are people who nevertheless joined the Public Service, these findings are worrisome in two respects:

- if these views are prevalent among all potential visible minority employees, the Public Service is not seen by some as an option;
- those who were hired and for whom the Public Service is a second choice are less likely to stay when external opportunities become available.

The chart below shows the proportions of members of visible minorities that agreed and disagreed with various statements regarding the working conditions and working environment within the Public Service.

Chart 3: Perceptions of Visible Minority Student Employees Regarding the Federal Public Service



The survey results indicate that, in general, visible minority respondents hold a positive view of the federal Public Service in many regards, most notably in the areas of diversity in the workplace, the wide variety of jobs available, and the fairness of hiring practices.

Opinions on a number of matters were, however, relatively negative, and it is in relation to these elements that the image of the Public Service needs improvement. Significant proportions of Student Survey respondents who were members of a visible minority agreed that the Public Service:

- has relatively low salaries (45%),
- is too rules oriented (42%),
- is resistant to change (37%), and
- limits independent thinking (35%).

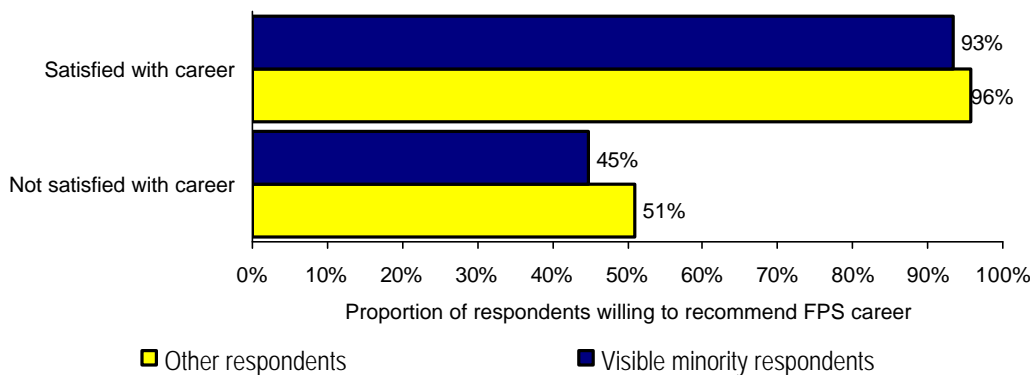
Many of these perceptions were shared by respondents who were not members of visible minorities. However, members of visible minorities often voiced significantly less positive opinions than other survey participants. This difference was most apparent in the areas of salaries, benefits, variety of jobs, the extent to which employees are valued and opportunities for advancement.

The views expressed by visible minorities respondents to the Student Survey were generally echoed by visible minority participants in the New Hires Survey, and similar differences were evident in this survey between visible minority respondents and others². Of the visible minority participants in the latter survey, 54% disagreed that the Public Service encourages independent thinking, and 51% disagreed that the Public Service is open to change. The most striking difference in the responses of visible minority and other employees shows in relation to the issue of wages, with 68% and 49% respectively disagreeing that Public Service wages are competitive.

A number of other concerns of visible minorities came to the surface in the New Hires Survey. A significantly smaller proportion of visible minority employees felt they had a good opportunity for a promotion than other employees (56% compared to 66%), and large segments of both groups (32% and 26% respectively) did not believe the job selection process in their work unit was conducted fairly. Significantly, the overall level of job satisfaction among visible minority recruits was considerably lower than among other new hires (65% compared to 80%).

While the potential negative ramifications of these views are obvious in relation to retention, it is also important to recognize their potentially detrimental effect on recruitment. Visible minority employees were significantly less inclined to be willing to recommend to others a career in the Public Service (76%, compared to 87% of other employees). Not surprisingly we find a strong correlation between overall job satisfaction and willingness to recommend work in the Public Service to others. Among visible minority respondents, 93% of respondents who were satisfied with their career indicated they would recommend the Public Service to others, compared to only 45% of those visible minority employees who were not satisfied with their career.

Chart 4: Relationship between New Hires' Job Satisfaction and their Willingness to Recommend FPS Career to Others



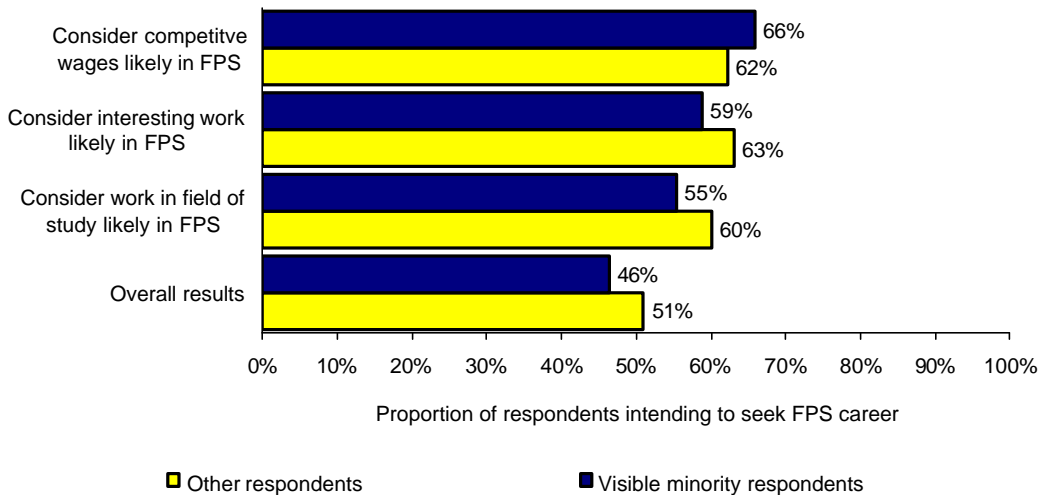
² Participants in the New Hires Survey were not asked to assess opportunities for advancement in the federal Public Service.

4.4 Career Intentions

Results from the Student Survey show that nearly one in five visible minority students (19%) stated they would either probably or definitely not seek a career in the Public Service, compared to 46% of the visible minority respondents who felt they would probably or definitely seek such a career. The views of visible minority respondents toward employment in the Public Service were slightly more negative than those of other respondents, of whom 51% were interested.

These attitudes appear to be influenced by the students' impressions regarding the working conditions, specifically pertaining to their career priorities (see Chart 5). Among visible minority respondents, those who believed they could work in their field of study, have interesting work and receive competitive wages, were each in turn more likely to express an interest in a federal Public Service career. The impact of students' anticipating competitive wages was particularly striking. Of the visible minority students who considered competitive wages to be likely in the Public Service, 66% intended to seek a Public Service career.

Chart 5: Relationship between Expectations regarding Finding Career Priorities in FPS and Interest in FPS Career



4.5 Information Available to Potential Recruits about Positions Advertised

It is imperative that details regarding jobs advertised be readily available to the potential applicant, in order to sustain the interest of potential recruits in the jobs advertised. Unfortunately, respondents to the New Hires Survey indicated having some difficulty accessing relevant information during their job searches.

In view of the importance attached to the issue of wages by members of visible minorities, it is particularly alarming that more than a quarter (29%) of this group of respondents indicated they did not have access to information regarding a salary scale for their first term job before it was offered to them.

Similarly, in light of 'interesting work' ranking as the second highest priority for members of visible minorities, information regarding the type of work to be performed in a position they might choose to apply for should be easily available. Yet, 27% of members of visible minorities did not have access to a job description prior to applying for the position for which they were originally hired.

Even larger numbers of visible minority respondents reported information regarding other important aspects of the jobs advertised to be lacking. For instance, 87% did not have information about the hiring manager, 85% did not have information about opportunities for training, 82% did not have information about opportunities for career advancement, 68% did not have information about the working conditions, 53% did not have a general description of the department's or agency's activities, 48% did not have a general description of the work unit's activities and responsibilities, and 30% did not have a statement of qualifications.

Providing quick and easy access to pertinent information is probably one of the most useful means of keeping potential applicants interested in jobs they see advertised. The apparent difficulties reported by new hires in obtaining basic information regarding the positions they were hired for, therefore needs to be recognized as a weak spot within the existing recruitment program.

4.6 The Effectiveness of Recruitment Tools

Data from the New Hires Survey indicate that traditional approaches to recruitment, such as participation in job fairs, are relatively ineffective means of reaching out to members of visible minorities. The data suggests that the job search activities of members of this group primarily involve Internet based tools. Most visible minority respondents (53%) indicated that at least three-quarters of their overall job search activity involved the Internet.

Certain kinds of Internet use seem to be particularly popular. Of those who used the Internet during their search for employment, 80% of visible minority respondents reported having checked the PSC website, 73% had applied for one or more jobs online, and 72% had used the Internet to check the websites of employers and companies they might like to work for. Considerably fewer (40%) indicated having requested a 'career alert' (now referred to as 'SOS jobs') by indicating the type of employment they were looking for on the PSC website (jobs.gc.ca). Members of visible minorities were even less likely to have posted a resumé or description of the kind of job they were looking for on a general job board, such as Workopolis

and Monster.com (32%), and fewer yet had posted their resumé on the websites of employers and companies (20%).

When asked to select from a range of options the three job search activities they had found most useful in finding out about the position that was to become their first term appointment, 69% of visible minority respondents chose looking at Public Service Commission jobs website (jobs.gc.ca), and 48% picked checking other Internet websites.

It is noteworthy that although respondents who were not members of visible minorities likewise indicated a preference for Internet based job search activities, their reliance on this tool in comparison to other options was not equally pronounced. In contrast, they were more likely than members of visible minorities to list as one of three most valuable job search activities talking to family, friends and contacts (41% compared to 33%), and talking to contacts or colleagues from previous jobs or school (37% compared to 31%).

Given that the Co-op program and FSWEF are aimed specifically at students, schools, colleges and universities are in a position to function as a primary source of information for interested students. Consistent with these expectations, results from the Student Survey identify professors, teachers and schools collectively as the most commonly cited source of information regarding the student employment programs. A particularly large proportion of visible minorities respondents (46%) cited this source, in comparison to 39% of the other students.

The Internet was the second most commonly identified source of information for visible minority students (26%), followed by peers (23%) and career centers or guidance counselors (also 23%). Career centers or guidance counselors, picked by only 17% of other students, were more commonly identified by members of visible minorities (23%).

Consistent with result from the New Hire survey is evidence from the Student Survey demonstrating that members of visible minorities were less likely than other respondents to have found out about the Co-op program or FSWEF from family members, peers, or government contacts. As was the case for professors, teachers and schools, career centers and guidance counselors were considerably more likely to be identified as a source of information regarding the student employment programs by members of visible minorities than by others (23% versus 17%). Human Resource Centers (HRDC) were noted as a source of information by roughly one in ten respondents in both groups (9% and 11% respectively).

Overall, the two surveys indicate that the Internet currently plays a very prominent role in the search for employment. In the case of jobs intended specifically for students, however, sources based within the educational institutions continue to provide much of the information about the employment programs that offer these opportunities (i.e. FSWEF and the Co-op program).

5.0 Conclusion

The results of the two surveys raise a number of key issues pertinent to the recruitment of members of visible minorities.

The Student Survey data indicate that although members of visible minorities and other respondents shared the same three top priorities for selecting a career, they did not rank these three factors in the same order. While the opportunity to perform interesting work was the most commonly identified priority overall, members of visible minorities were most inclined to value wages that are competitive with those offered by other employers.

Interest in a Public Service career was found to be strongly related to students' expectations of such a career offering the conditions they identify as priorities. In the case of visible minorities, perceptions of Public Service wage levels clearly had the most significant effect on their career intentions. Alarming, only a minority of visible minority respondents believed jobs in the Public Service would be associated with competitive wages.

As we consider the implications of these findings, we need to distinguish between factors that can and cannot be controlled by individual departments and managers. Certain choices can be made at these levels to enhance the attractiveness of jobs to members of visible minorities, such as ensuring a better fit between task assignments and employees' areas of specialization and interest. To the extent that jobs already involve a highly suitable matching of individual talents and job content, this may need to be conveyed more effectively to potential recruits.

The issue of compensation is one that must be addressed by the Treasury Board. It should be underlined that efforts aimed at increasing visible minority representation are hindered greatly when Public Service wages are commonly perceived as unattractive in comparison to those offered by other employers.

There are a number of other areas in which the image of the Public Service appears to be suffering. Large numbers of visible minority and other respondents felt the work culture in this sector was excessively prone to be rules oriented, resistant to change and to limit independent thinking. Significantly, visible minority respondents were less positive than others in their assessments of the extent to which employees are valued, opportunities for advancement, and (in the case of new hires) the fairness of the hiring process. Efforts to improve the actual conditions and the image of the Public Service in each of these respects would be well directed.

Many respondents reported not having had access to basic information related to positions advertised (including pay scales) until after they applied for them. In light of the ambivalence expressed by many members of visible minorities regarding Public Service employment, it is particularly important that information be made readily available regarding the many opportunities this sector offers, and the details pertaining to the specific positions available.

The Internet was identified by a large majority of respondents to the New Hires Survey as the preferred and most commonly used tool for searching for work. The PSC website was found to be particularly popular. Members of visible minorities indicated relying even more heavily on the Internet for finding employment than other respondents, who conversely were more inclined than the former to find their personal network of contacts with potential employers to be of value. These results suggest that a channeling of recruitment efforts toward Internet based tools is likely to help maximize the number of visible minorities applicants for positions with the Public Service. A key component of such a move should be improved access via the Internet to all relevant information regarding the jobs advertised.

Finally, the results of the Student Survey and the New Hires Survey show that caution is warranted when using the overall survey results to inform decisions regarding approaches to hiring. The views of members of visible minorities are in many respects distinct. They need to be given special attention during the process of designing recruitment strategies, if these initiatives are to be effective in drawing more members of visible minorities to the Public Service.