

TOP LEVEL APPOINTMENTS COMMITTEE (TLAC)

FOURTH REPORT TO THE MINISTER FOR PUBLIC EXPENDITURE & REFORM

2015 DEVELOPMENTS & TRENDS



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Part 1: Foreword

This report is prepared for the Minister for Public Expenditure & Reform, Paschal Donohoe T.D.

On behalf of my colleagues, I am happy to present the Fourth Report of the reformed Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC) for the period January – December 2015.

In 2015, TLAC experienced another busy year, with 32 competitions held.

Mr Clive Brownlee retired from TLAC in September 2015. I would like to express my appreciation of his generous support and wisdom during his term on TLAC.

TLAC is pleased to welcome a number of new members who joined an expanded committee in 2015: Ms Brid Horan, Mr Tony Keohane, Mr Charles Dolan, Ms Niamh O'Donoghue, Mr John Murphy, Mr Jim Breslin and Mr Maurice Quinn.

I would like to acknowledge the commitment and contribution of these new members and of my other TLAC colleagues who continue to give generously of their time, energy and expertise in meeting the considerable demands of TLAC.

I would like to express my thanks to the staff of the Public Appointments Service for their professionalism and ongoing support of TLAC in the execution of its remit together with my sincere appreciation of the dedicated service of Ann Higgins, Secretary to TLAC.

Finally, I would like to thank the former Minister, Brendan Howlin, T.D. and the Department for their strong support for the work of TLAC in 2015.

Dorothy Scally

Chairperson

June 1st, 2016

Executive Summary

The number of vacancies for TLAC level posts increased in 2015 to the highest level seen since the structure of the Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC) was reformed in 2011 to support the Government objective of open recruitment.

In 2015, TLAC undertook thirty-two recruitment campaigns for senior civil servants. In respect of four of these competitions which were more specialist roles, PAS carried out the final interview process with representation from TLAC. From these campaigns, thirty appointments were made, with TLAC unable to make recommendations for two posts. During 2015, three posts were filled at Secretary General level, four at Deputy Secretary level, and the remaining twenty-three at Assistant Secretary General level or equivalent.

TLAC retained external executive search services to complement the PAS recruitment campaign for two specialist posts. In addition to retained search for these posts, many campaigns were supported by the executive search function of the Public Appointments Service. This was to ensure that the widest possible pool of suitable candidates was available for the most senior Civil Service positions.

The use of an in-depth assessment as an input to the TLAC process was trialled in early 2015. It was agreed to include this stage in the selection process for all Secretary General level posts.

Review of the data for campaigns completed in 2015 identified the following trends:

- There was an overall decrease in the average number of applications for TLAC posts in 2015. While the number of applications varied considerably from post to post, each TLAC level post advertised in 2015 attracted an average of 24.6 applications compared with an average of 29.1 in 2014. Overall there were 789 applications for the thirty-two posts advertised in 2015.
- The numbers of women both applying for and being appointed to TLAC level posts increased. 29% of all applications in 2015 were from women, an increase from 27% in 2014 and 21% in 2013. Women also accounted for 33% of the successful candidates, again an increase from previous years.
- Greater numbers of civil servants applied for TLAC posts and the proportion of applicants coming from the Civil Service increased substantially to 53% of all applications compared with just 31% in 2014.

- The proportion of applications from the private sector, in contrast, decreased significantly from 45% to 22%.
- The number of appointments from outside the Civil Service continued to fall somewhat from previous years with 20% of appointments of non-Civil Service candidates compared with 23% of appointments in 2014 and 24% of appointments in 2013.
- A greater proportion of appointments went to candidates currently working in the Department with the vacancy, or from an Agency of that Department, than in previous years: 80% of TLAC appointments in 2015 went to a candidate from within the hiring Department or an Agency of that Department. There has been an increasing trend towards more appointments of candidates from the 'home' Department, with the proportions rising from 46% in 2012, to 57% in 2013, 60% in 2014, and the substantial increase to 80% seen in 2015.

For the future, a number of issues need to be addressed:

- The declining number of suitable applicants from the private sector for senior management posts and the necessity to explore what actions can be taken to attract more interest from high quality private sector applicants, particularly in view of the economic recovery and increased employment opportunities generally.
- The increased incidence of appointment of candidates from the hiring Department or one of its Agencies raises concerns about whether strong applicants from other Departments can compete effectively for TLAC roles across the Civil Service. In 2015, there was only one appointment made where the civil servant was previously working in a different Government Department. There is a need to ensure that 'Department specific' knowledge and experience is not overemphasised in the job description/briefing process. The selection process should take into account the longer term capability of candidates and balance that potential with the ability to 'hit the ground running' and be effective in the role quickly because of experience in or knowledge of the area or work of the Department.
- Any additional actions, whether requiring adjustments to remuneration and employment packages or otherwise, needed to ensure that all TLAC level campaigns continue to attract enough high-quality candidates to maintain a competitive process.

The Role of TLAC

- The role of TLAC is to support the Government objective that the recruitment and selection process for the most senior Civil Service positions is accessible to the widest pool of qualified candidates from all sectors.
- TLAC identifies the best candidate(s) for each position and makes recommendations to the relevant Minister or Government as appropriate.
- TLAC operates under the Code of Practice of the Commission for Appointments in accordance with the principles of merit, consistency, accountability, probity, best practice and professional confidentiality.
- TLAC operates in an independent manner and strictly on the basis of open competition and merit.
- Subject to certain exceptions, TLAC deals with all posts at and above Assistant Secretary level or equivalent in the Civil Service.

TLAC Structure

In 2015, the Government agreed to expand the membership of the Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC) from five external members (including the chairperson) to seven external members and from four internal members to six internal members. The membership of the Committee was increased from nine to thirteen members in total and now is comprised of, (i) the Secretary General, Department of Public Expenditure and Reform; (ii) the Secretary General to the Government; (iii) four other senior civil servants appointed for three year terms and; (iv) seven members from outside the Civil Service appointed for three year terms, one of whom is the chairperson.

The Membership of the TLAC Committee is as follows:

- Dr Dorothy Scally, Professional Development Consultant (Chairperson);
- Mr Kevin Empey, Director, Willis Towers Watson
- Mr. Clive Brownlee, Praesta Ireland (term ended 30 September 2015)
- Ms. Jane Williams, Managing Partner, Sia Partners
- Mr. Tony Keohane, former CEO & Chairman, Tesco Ltd (with effect from 1st September, 2015).
- Ms. Brid Horan, Non Executive Director (with effect from 1st September 2015).
- Mr. Charles Dolan, Director, Consulting Ltd (with effect from 1st September 2015).

- Mr Robert Watt, Secretary General, Department of Public Expenditure & Reform
- Mr Martin Fraser, Secretary General to the Government
- Ms. Niamh O'Donoghue, Secretary General, Department of Social Protection
- Mr. John Murphy, Secretary General, Department of Jobs, Enterprise and Innovation
- Mr. Maurice Quinn, Secretary General, Department of Defence (with effect from 1st September 2015).
- Mr. Jim Breslin, Secretary General, Department of Health (with effect from 1st September 2015).

The TLAC process consists of:

- Shortlisting of candidates, on the basis of the information contained in the candidates application, to identify those most likely to attain the standard required at the interview stage;
- Competitive preliminary interview;
- Completion of an online questionnaire(s);
- In-depth executive assessment for Secretary General level posts;
- Competitive interview, which may include a presentation, conducted by the Top Level Appointments Committee (TLAC).
- Recommendations to Minister/Government.

The process is explained more fully in the Appendix to this Report.

Developments during 2015

TLAC, in conjunction with the Public Appointments Service, continued to review its selection methodology in order to take account of developments in best practice in recruitment activity.

The practice adopted in 2014 of incorporating short presentations into the final TLAC interviews has proved to be a useful part of the process and has remained a feature of TLAC interviews in 2015.

In addition, the use of an in-depth assessment as an input to the TLAC process was trialled in early 2015. It was agreed to include this stage in the selection process for all Secretary General level positions

PART 2: 2015 Statistics

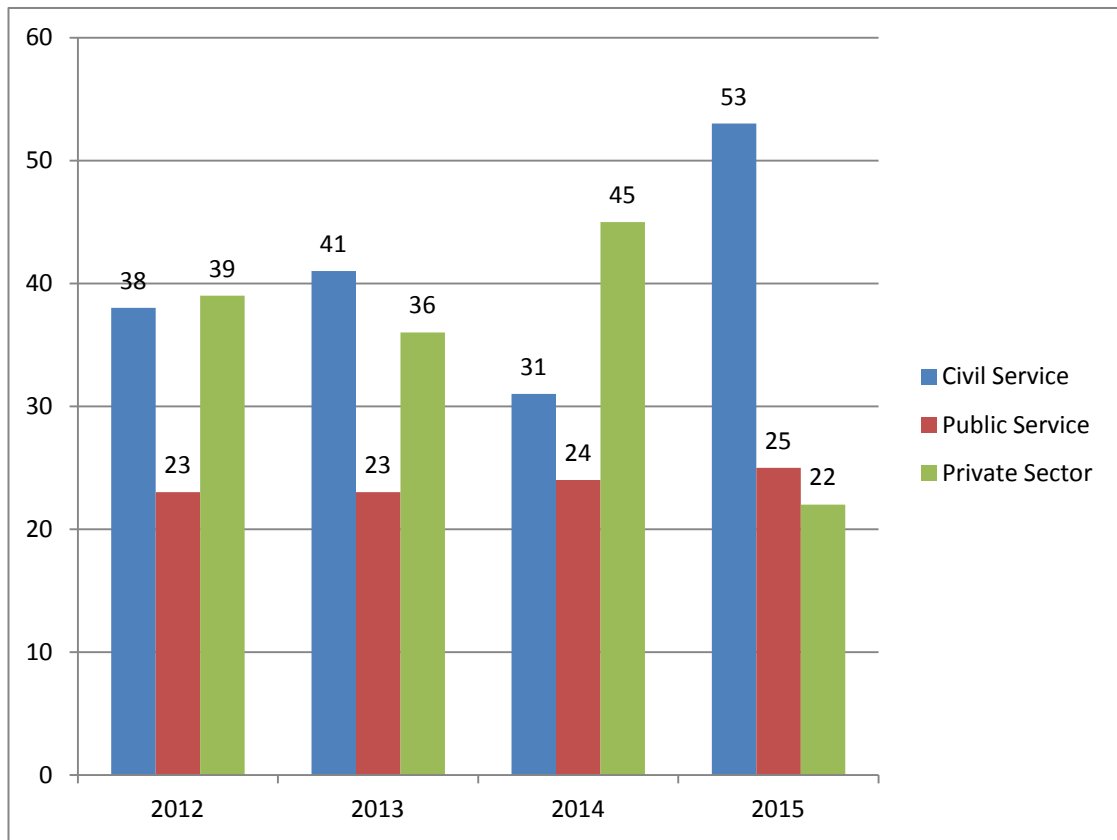
A. Breakdown of Candidates by Sector per Stage in the TLAC Process

In 2015 there were 789 applications received for thirty-two TLAC posts in comparison with 699 received in 2014 for twenty four posts. The average number of applications per post, therefore, decreased from approximately 29.1 in 2014 to 24.6 in 2015. The number of applications per campaign varied considerably with specialist posts and more senior level posts (i.e. Secretary General and Deputy Secretary level) attracting much smaller numbers of applications.

The proportion of applications from the private sector decreased significantly from 45% in 2014 to 22% in 2015, while representation of civil servants among the overall applicant group rose substantially to 53% compared to 31% in 2014.

The proportion of applications from public servants remained similar at 25% (from 24% in 2014).

TLAC % Applications Received by Sector



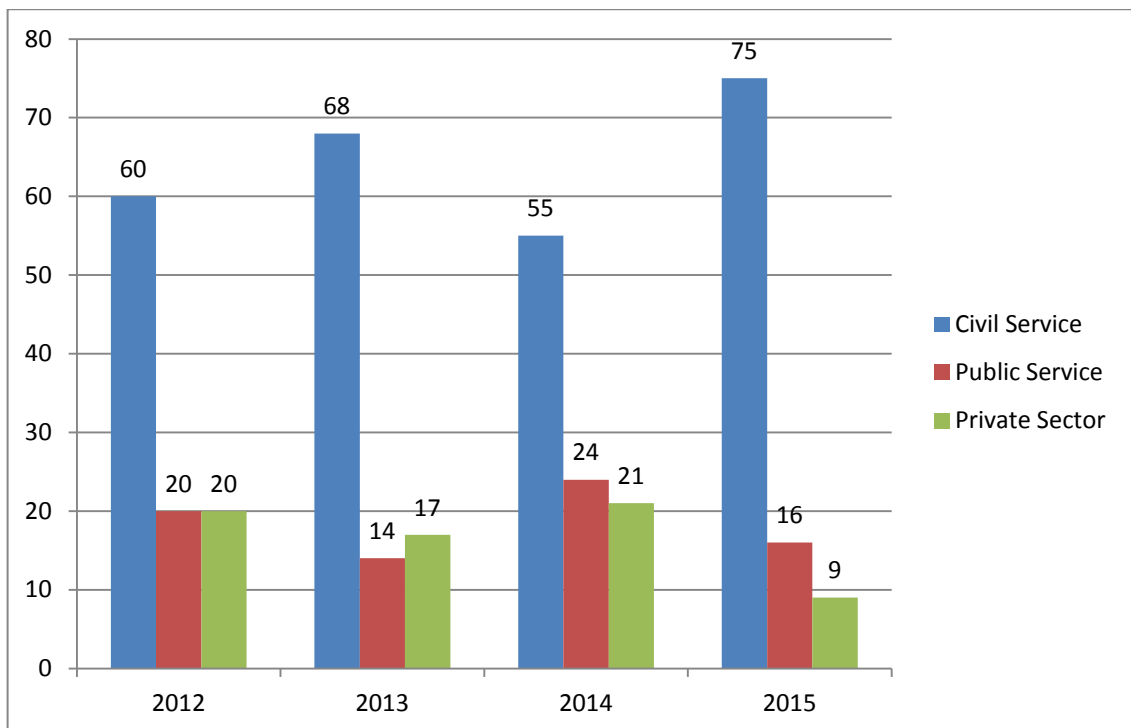
Shortlisting

The first stage in the TLAC process is shortlisting, which is carried out by a selection board convened by PAS under an independent chair and includes a member of TLAC. The board, following a briefing by the Secretary General of the hiring Department agrees shortlisting criteria consistent with the skills, experience and competencies required for the post. Based on the information provided in the candidates' applications, the board assesses each candidate's suitability using the agreed criteria to determine a shortlist of candidates to go forward to the preliminary interview.

Civil servants were significantly more likely to be shortlisted for preliminary interview than candidates from other sectors, with 75% of candidates shortlisted in 2015 from the Civil Service. This is a significant increase from the 55% observed in 2014.

Applicants from the Public Service accounted for 16% of the shortlisted group, a decrease from 24% in 2014, and the private sector applicants among the shortlisted group also decreased substantially from 21% in 2014 to 9% in 2015.

% Shortlisted for Preliminary Interview by Sector



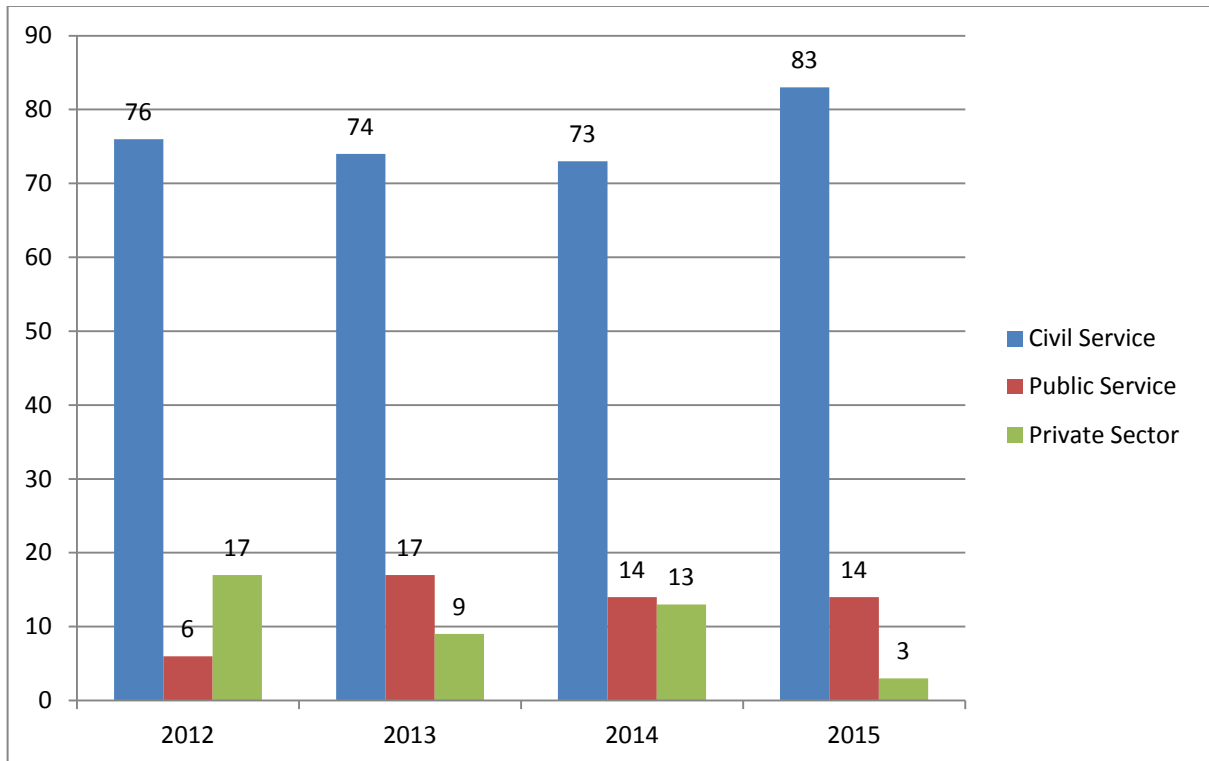
Preliminary Interview

The preliminary interview focuses on exploring the candidates CV, track record and competencies to demonstrate suitability for the post under consideration. Following a comprehensive interview and consideration of the applications from candidates, the interview board identifies those candidates who, in its judgement, should progress to the next stage of the process. These candidates then proceed to the TLAC final interview. Generally, no more than five candidates proceed to TLAC final interview.

Civil servants were more likely than candidates from other sectors to be successful at preliminary interview and accounted for 83% of candidates who qualified at preliminary interview and were sent forward to the TLAC interview stage, again an increase from the 73% seen in 2014.

The proportion of candidates from the broader public service who qualified at preliminary interview remained consistent with the previous year at 14%. Significantly fewer candidates from the private sector qualified at preliminary stage. Only 3% of all candidates going forward to the TLAC stage interview were from the private sector, a substantial decrease from 13% in the previous year.

% Candidates Invited to Final Interview – by Sector



Successful at Final Interview

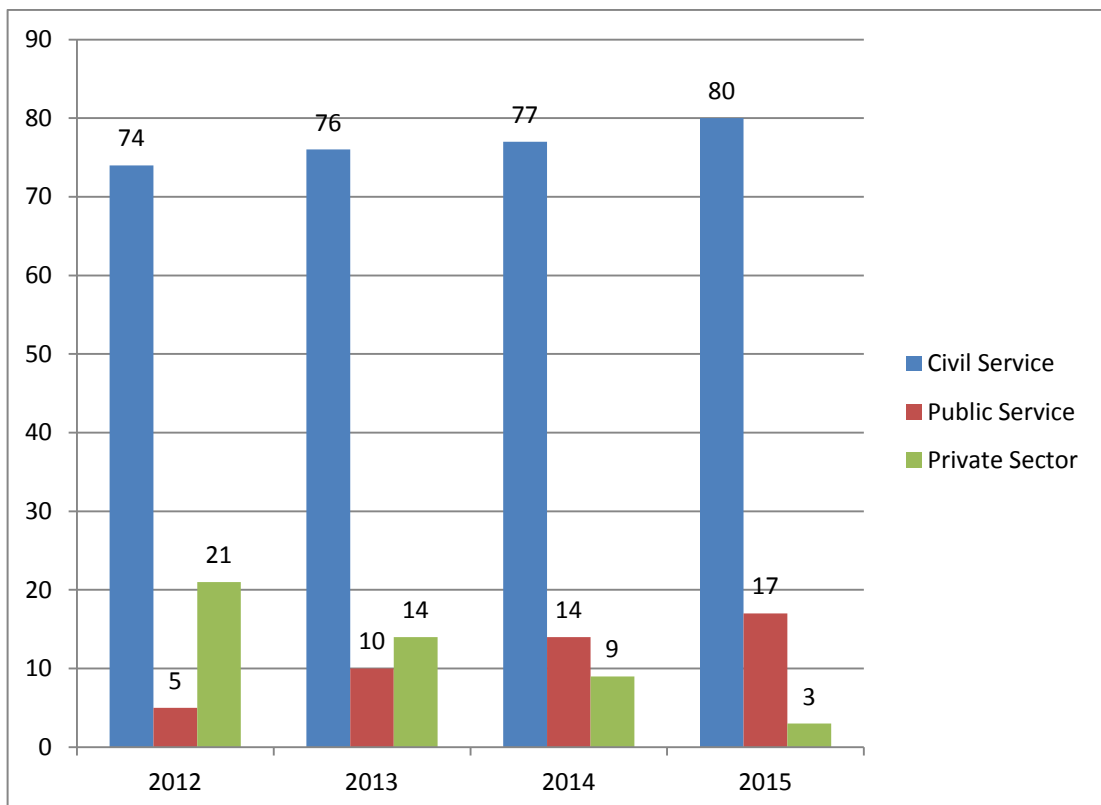
The TLAC interview is conducted by a sub-panel of the Top Level Appointments Committee, which is focused on identifying the most suitable candidate/s to be recommended to the Minister/Government for a particular post.

The vast majority of TLAC appointments made in 2015 (i.e. 80%) were of civil servants which was a slight increase from the 77% seen in 2014.

17% of all candidates appointed were from the Public Service. This percentage was from a Public Service cohort of 14% sent forward to TLAC.

Only one TLAC appointment (3%) in 2015 was a candidate from the private sector, a significant decrease from previous years.

% Successful Candidates Recommended to Minister/Govt – by Sector



The data for 2015 in the preceding tables, from percentages of applications received to percentages recommended for appointment, can be summarised as follows:

% Applicants recommended for Appointment – by Sector

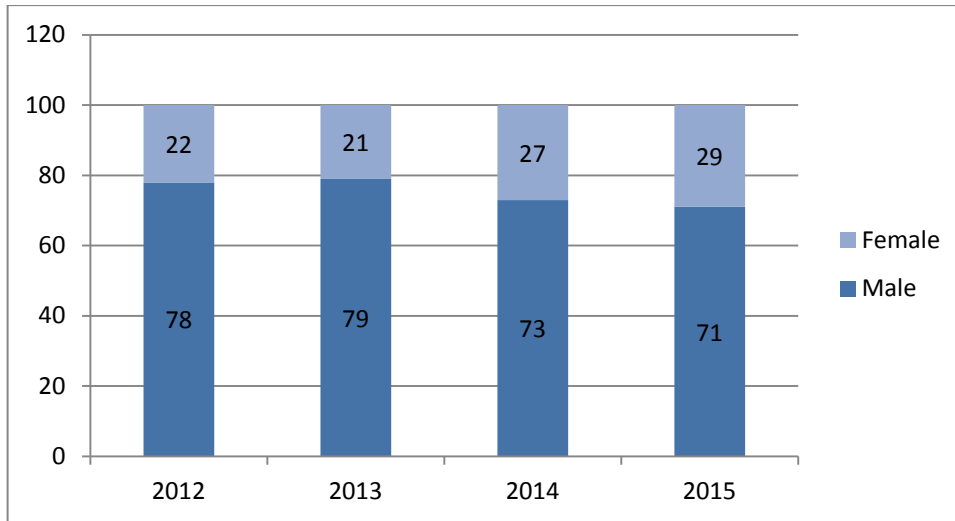
	% Applicants	% to TLAC Final Interview	% Recommended for Appointment
Civil Servants	53%	83%	80%
Public Servants	25%	14%	17%
Private Sector	22%	3%	3%

B. Breakdown of Candidates by Gender per stage in TLAC Process

Gender Breakdown of Candidates

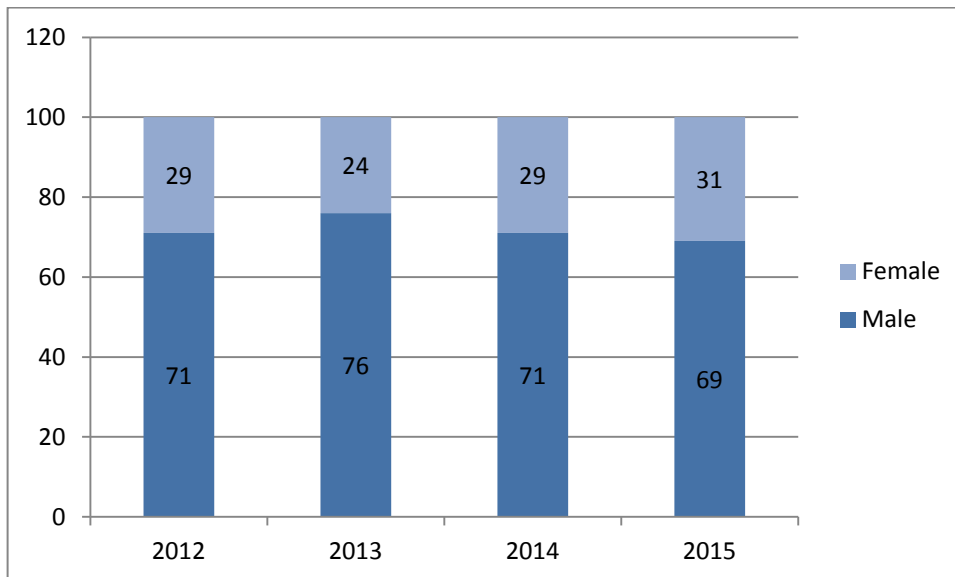
The proportion of applications from female candidates continued to increase in 2015 with females making up 29% of all applications in comparison with 27% in 2014 and 21% in 2013.

% TLAC Applications received – by Gender



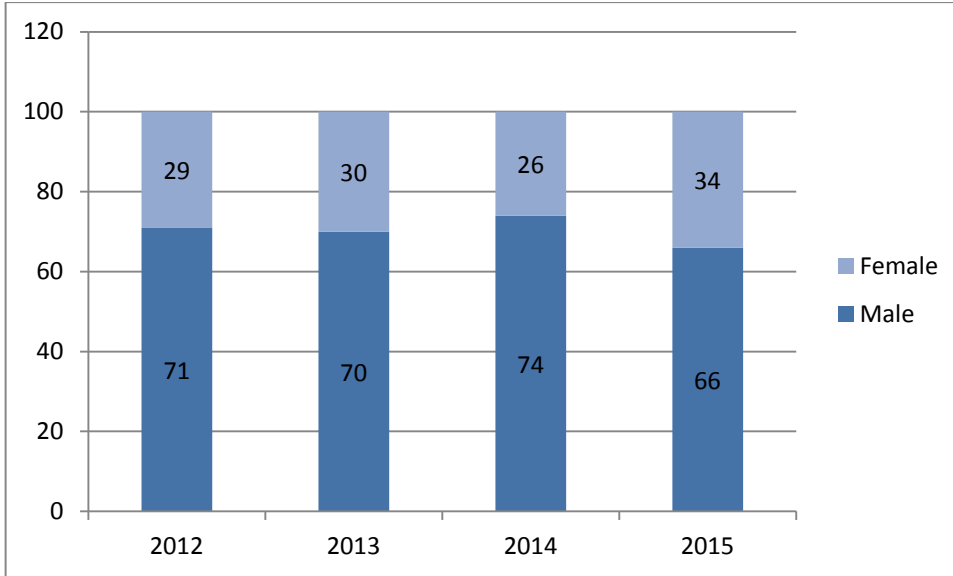
Females were also more likely to be shortlisted and represented 31% of the shortlisted group in 2015, an increase from 29% in 2014 and 24% in 2013.

% Shortlisted for Preliminary Interview – by Gender



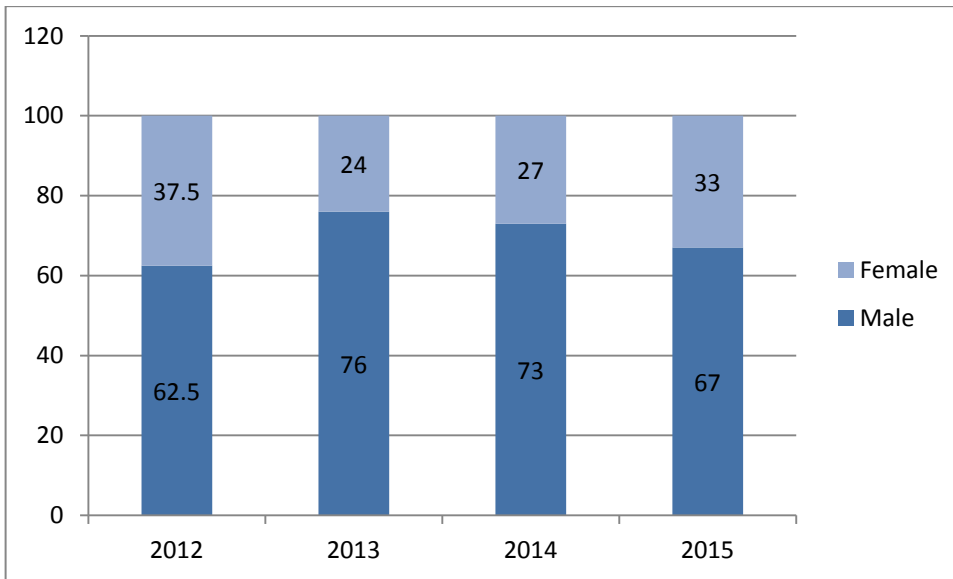
Female applicants were slightly more likely than males to be successful at preliminary interview and to be sent forward to the TLAC interview stage, with 34% of the candidates going to TLAC in 2015 being female. This compares with 26% in 2014 and 30% in 2013.

% Candidates to TLAC for Final Interview – by Gender



% TLAC Successful Candidates – by Gender

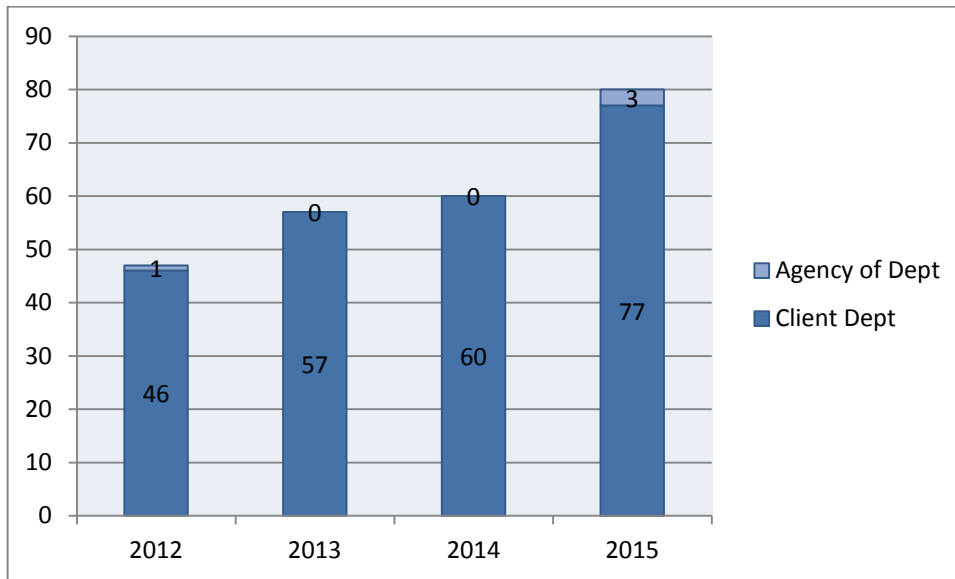
33% of TLAC appointments made in 2015 were female candidates, which is the biggest proportion since 2012 when 37% of appointments were female candidates.



3C. Percentage of TLAC appointments from Home Department or Agency

Since 2013, there has been an increasing trend of appointments from the 'home' Department/Agency of that Department. By 'home' Department is meant the hiring Department. The trend has continued in 2015 with 80% of all appointments being of candidates from the hiring Department or an agency of that Department. This is a significant increase on the 60% of appointments of candidates from the home Department in 2015.

% Appointments from Home Dept/Agency of Home Dept



Trends

A. Open Recruitment

While there was an increase in Civil Service applicants for TLAC level vacancies in 2015, there was a significant decrease in the number of applications from the private sector.

Applicants from the private sector were also significantly less likely to be shortlisted for interview or to be appointed to a post.

In 2015, 20% of candidates appointed by TLAC were from outside the Civil Service. These were predominately from the broader Public Service with only one appointment of a candidate from the private sector.

The number of appointments to TLAC level posts from outside of the Civil Service, i.e. Public and private sector appointees, fell to 20% in 2015 from 23% in 2014 and 24% in 2013.

The proportion of applications from outside the Civil Service overall decreased dramatically in 2015 falling from 69% of overall applications in 2014 to 47% in 2015.

As the proportion of applications from the broader Public Service remained similar to previous years, this decrease reflects a much lower proportion of applications from private sector candidates, down to 22% from 45% in 2014. This fall-off in applicants from the private sector is not unexpected given the strong growth in the economy and the rise in private sector employment.

An analysis of the shortlisted candidates shows that only 9% of candidates brought to preliminary interview for TLAC posts were from the private sector. This suggests that not only has the number of private sector applicants decreased significantly, but many of those submitting applications were not considered to be at an appropriate level to warrant an interview.

While the majority of TLAC posts advertised in 2015 attracted an adequate number of applications to ensure a highly competitive process, the average number of applicants per competition varied quite considerably depending on the particular post.

The more senior level posts at Secretary General and Deputy Secretary level tended to attract smaller numbers of applications, as did the more technical or specialist posts at this level.

There were no appointments made from two Assistant Secretary level TLAC campaigns in 2015.

B. Gender Representation.

Both the number of applications from women and the proportion of female TLAC appointments increased in 2015.

2015 saw a continuation of the upward trend in applications from women at 29% of applications compared with 27% in 2014 and 21% in 2013. Women also accounted for 33% of all appointments made in 2015, an increase from recent years.

The participation and success of women in securing appointments at this level is improving. Given that approximately two thirds of the Civil Service are female, women are still underrepresented at senior levels. TLAC welcomes the initiatives underway in the Civil Service to encourage and develop talented females such as the W-Lead development programme for female principal officers. Efforts to encourage more applications from women should be intensified.

C. Appointments to candidates from within the Department:

The number of appointments of candidates from within the hiring Department increased substantially.

In 2015, a trend for an increasing proportion of appointments of candidates from the 'home' or hiring Department or an agency of that Department continued. In 2012, 47% of appointments were from the hiring Department or an agency of the Department; this rose to 57% in 2013 and to 60% in 2014. 2015 saw a further sharp increase to 77% of appointments from the hiring department and 3% to an agency of that Department. Of the civil servants appointed to TLAC positions in 2015, only one vacancy was filled by a civil servant from outside of the hiring Department or an agency of that Department.

Considerations

An analysis of recruitment activity for TLAC in 2015 has identified a number of issues which need to be addressed:

- **Reduced applicant numbers from the private sector**

The objective of open recruitment is to attract a broad and diverse applicant pool for senior Civil Service posts. TLAC recognises the knowledge, experience, contribution and perspective that private sector candidates can bring to the Civil Service while acknowledging that successful candidates from outside the civil service are tending to stay in the role for 3 to 5 years.

The decreasing diversity of applicant pools in 2015 was mainly due to a significant reduction in applications from the private sector. Some reduction in applications from private sector candidates might be expected in the context of an improving economic situation. Nonetheless, the fall in applications from suitable candidates has been very sharp. Feedback from the executive search process indicates that the remuneration for these posts frequently cannot compete with that on offer in the private sector notwithstanding that senior Civil Service roles have attracted some quality private sector applicants previously due to factors other than the remuneration package.

A number of issues need to be addressed. These include looking at the competitiveness and impact of the remuneration packages for these roles, whether enough is being done to make private sector candidates aware of the opportunities at senior levels in the Civil Service, and whether barriers, real or perceived, inhibit potential private sector applicants putting their names forward for these posts.

- **Significant increase in TLAC appointments from the Department with the vacancy.**

TLAC noted that a number of very welcome strategic HR initiatives are underway in the Civil Service via the implementation of the Civil Service Reform Programme. Investment in leadership development and a more formalised approach to talent management should result in strong candidates putting themselves forward for consideration for TLAC level vacancies.

TLAC is satisfied that all recommended candidates in 2015 were highly suitable for appointment. It is, however, important to ensure a highly competitive final stage process for all roles. The impact of smaller numbers of candidates going forward to the TLAC stage interview in recent years should be further examined, particularly in light of the trend towards less diverse candidate pools and a much greater proportion of appointments from the home department.

All vacancies arising at Assistant Secretary level must first be considered for filling by mobility across the Civil Service. The Senior Public Service (SPS) decides whether a vacancy should be advertised for mobility before going to an open TLAC competition. If the mobility initiative fails to identify a suitable candidate, then the vacancy falls to be advertised as an open TLAC competition.

During 2015, 80% of TLAC appointments made were of candidates from the hiring Department or Agency of that Department. In all cases but one, where a civil servant was appointed to a TLAC level role, they were currently employed in the Department.

An analysis of appointments made shows that certain departments stand out as having had a significant proportion of their TLAC level vacancies arising since 2011 filled by candidates from outside the Department. In contrast, within that period, posts in a number of other departments have been filled exclusively with candidates from within these departments. The more technical nature of certain roles within these departments may favour the appointment of a candidate with experience and particular expertise in the area. The potential disadvantages, however, of filling all senior level posts over an extended period of time from staff currently working in the same Department require immediate attention.

It should be ensured that 'Department specific' knowledge and experience is not overemphasised in the job description/briefing process. The selection process should take into account the longer term capability of candidates and balance that potential with the ability to 'hit the ground running' and be effective in the role quickly because of experience in or knowledge of the area or work of the Department.

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- **Ensuring a competitive selection process for all TLAC posts.**

Greater number of applications from within the Civil Service is a positive development. The majority of TLAC vacancies have attracted strong internal applicant pools resulting in a competitive selection process. Some roles, however, particularly at Deputy Secretary and Secretary General level have attracted smaller numbers of suitable applicants with the result that fewer candidates go forward to the final interview stage.

It is possible that highly talented and suitable Civil Servants are not putting themselves forward for consideration for roles at this level. Information should be gathered and assessed on this issue. Some anecdotal evidence suggests that such potential candidates recognise the significant workload and demands of roles at this level, the high profile nature of the jobs, the media commentary and very public nature of accountability for delivery that goes along with Secretary General and Assistant

Secretary jobs, but that the remuneration on offer does not compensate sufficiently for the increased responsibility and visibility.

TLAC guidelines specify that a maximum of five candidates should be recommended by the preliminary interview board for a TLAC interview but that only those considered by the preliminary board to be capable of meeting the standards required for appointment should be sent forward. The average number of candidates progressing to the TLAC interview stage has reduced over the last two years to an average of 3 candidates per campaign.

In respect of seventeen of the thirty-two campaigns run in 2015, three or fewer candidates were sent forward to the TLAC interview. Of the twenty four campaigns in 2014, twelve resulted in three or fewer candidates going forward to TLAC.

The outcome of the new strategic HR initiative with respect to the number of civil servants going forward for the most senior posts in the Civil Service will be important.