

Minutes of meeting of the Board of the Public Appointments Service held in Chapter House, at 10am on 3rd November 2022

Present (Board): Mr. Tom Moran (Chairperson), Ms. Anne-Marie Taylor, Ms. Margaret McCabe, Ms. Mary Connaughton*, Ms. Fiona Quinn*, Ms. Yvonne Cooke, Ms. Catherine Dobbins (Secretary).

Apologies: Dr. Eddie Molloy.

The Board met without the Executive and discussed the findings of the Board self-assessment. A number of useful points were discussed and the Chairman agreed to discuss these with the CEO at a later date. It was noted that there was a significant amount of experience among the Board Members and that this is available to the Executive whenever needed.

Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

The minutes were agreed.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Reports for the Board

Operational Report

The Board noted the Operational Activity Report (and the supporting papers), which were circulated in advance of the meeting.

The CEO discussed the recruitment delivery targets, and informed the Board that 99% of roles had been filled for clients in 2022 to date.

In relation to recruitment timescales, she informed the Board that 71% of campaigns had been delivered within agreed timescales for 2022 (72% for Q3). She highlighted that the Local Authority sector is at 82% for 2022 (which continues to be above target); P&T is at 75% (with the main issues relate to securing external board members and the availability of client nominees, and the units are working with clients and CRM on this); Medical Consultants is at 73% (and they continue to work on meeting the increased demand from the HSE, with the new structure implemented and the unit working towards improvement in KPI's in Q4). She noted that SER remains lower at 53% and this is of significant concern; this was due in part to volume, and PAS is also working with TLAC to resolve difficulties in obtaining TLAC interview dates. It was noted that, while State Boards is at 65% for 2022, it is up to 76% in Q3; it was noted that 80% of delayed State Board campaigns were extended due to low numbers of applications, 40% were delayed due to availability of client nominee and 20% delayed due to Board member availability.

The Board agreed that recruitment units should aim to have boards in place in advance of the closing date in order to tighten the timescales and to better mitigate the risks around board member availability. The Board agreed that it was important that both PAS and clients

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work together to reduce recruitment timescales, which may require interaction at Secretary General level. The CEO noted that PAS is continually examining ways to shorten the process and move elements to earlier in the process and welcomed the engagement of the Board in relation to this.

The Board discussed the need to extend a number of State Board processes due to low numbers of applications; it was noted that one potential reason for this may relate to the low levels of remuneration for some Boards which may not appear to prospective candidates to reflect the level of work required, and that this may need to be communicated to DPER. The outreach and search by PAS to attract applicants was welcomed and the Board agreed that Departments should also engage on pushing these out further on social media and other channels, and that it may be useful to ask existing board members (including Chairs) to promote other opportunities to their networks. It was agreed that the CEO would discuss this further with the Head of Senior and Executive Recruitment.

One of the area of most concern continues to be general grade assignments, at 30% of delivery timescales achieved in 2022 (18% for Q3), mainly due to the difficulties outlined at the previous meetings. It was noted that Sandra Cairns would discuss these issues, and the actions being putting in place to address them as the Key Risk Area for this meeting

The CEO noted that there has been a significant increase in activity in 2022 (over 2021) and it also compares well to 2019. This included 418 campaigns advertised (compared to 303 in 2019); 47,074 applications processed (compared to 39,251 in 2019), 34,659 assessments (compared to 52,315 in 2019), 10,693 interviews (compared to 12,280 in 2019) and 7,295 assignments (compared to 8,476 in 2019).

It was noted that the CSMB's People Sub-Group are now engaging with some of the strategic recruitment related issues raised previously by PAS.

The Board spent some time discussing the overall issues around service delivery, particularly in relation to SER and General Service recruitment. The Board welcomed the work internally in PAS in identifying key blockages and agreed that assistance may be needed from clients to make significant progress quickly. It was noted that clients continue to be very satisfied with the quality of the service, and the candidates they receive from PAS, and that the issues relate to delivery timescales. The Board agreed to allocate a significant portion of the next meeting to discuss this area further and explore what can be done by PAS, and which areas require further engagement with DPER or clients and potential areas where the Board may be able to assist. It was agreed that it would be useful to receive some further presentations to inform this discussion, particularly in relation to SER, information on upcoming demands/skills requirements, data on attrition rates, and the level of agility in our processes to respond to peaks in demand.

The CEO updated the Board on the Future of Work and return to Chapter House, with staff now attending the office for one team anchor day per week and a flexible second day in line with the availability of office space; it was noted that, once the 2nd floor becomes available, staff will attend the office for 2 days per week, with an option to attend for additional days in line with business needs. The CEO informed the Board that the office desk booking platform has been launched, and the remote health and safety assessment of home workstations have been completed. It was noted that the Hybrid Working policy (circulated with the Board papers) will be launched shortly and that all line managers are currently engaging in the 'Managing a Blended Workforce' online course, to support the launch of the Hybrid Working policy, and to assist them in managing staff in a hybrid working environment. The CEO informed the Board that staff are kept updated via internal forums and communication channels.

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The CEO provided the Board with an update on Project Nova. The Board noted that this represents an important and positive milestone for the project. The CEO informed the Board that the OGP and Project Team are developing the Invitation to Tender (ITT) for the second stage of the procurement process.

The Board was informed that the Chapter House project is nearing final completion, despite the electrical contractor that had been working to finalise the project no longer being in a position to finish out the remaining work; it was noted that a new contractor will be appointed by the OPW to finish out the remaining work to in the coming weeks. The CEO informed the Board that the work on first rooms to be equipped with audio visual technologies will commence in November and it is hoped that this installation can be concluded in January, but that this is subject to supply chain issues.

The CEO updated that Board on the ED&I Project Board, which took place on September 26th, with the primary focus of the meeting on the data analysis the ESRI have done for the Equality Monitoring Dashboard project. The Board noted that the ESRI had presented their keep findings from the 'health check' on PAS data and their deep dive analysis on application and assignment data across gender, ethnicity and disability. The Board welcomed the fact that this report will be presented to them at their meeting in December and that it will provide a baseline for a number of key areas which will allow PAS to measure progress going forward.

The CEO provided an update on the Public Sector Recruiter Network, and the recent session on 'Best Practice in Equality, Diversity and Inclusion (ED&I),' which explored the theme of Inclusive and Accessible Recruitment. The CEO informed the Board that this included an overview of our ED&I journey to-date, underpinned by our ED&I Strategy (2021-2023) and a spotlight on some of the key areas that are currently underway to drive change, including outreach and engagement with underrepresented groups), the development of an Equality Monitoring Dashboard and the Reasonable Accommodation project that explores the disabled candidate's journey. The Board noted that the session also explored how to take a universal design approach to create more inclusive processes and what 'accessibility' means in recruitment, with speakers from the NDA, and the National Gallery. It was noted that the December session will focus on Best Practice in Talent Attraction.

Risk Management

The CEO noted that the ongoing issues in relation to Service Delivery Timescales which were discussed by the Board at the last meeting and the Management Board members with responsibility for delivery continue to monitor the implementation of the Service Delivery Action Plan; an update on delivery in terms of general service grades would be provided at the Board meeting as the Key Risk area.

It was noted that a report on the areas highlighted by the Audit Committee in relation to Project Nova was discussed at the last Audit Committee meeting and the Committee was assured by this Report.

The CEO informed the Board that some recruitment campaigns currently underway are very high profile roles which by their nature carry additional public scrutiny and increase the risk of reputational damage in the event of any issues occurring during these processes (HSE and An Board Pleanála roles). The Board noted that these are managed by very experienced recruitment leads at a senior management level in PAS and a detailed recruitment plan is agreed with the client in advance - highlighting the roles and expectations of all parties.

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Financial Position

The CEO discussed the Financial Report for end September, which was included with the Board papers. The CEO explained that as at end September there are still vacancies to be filled, so the payroll budget remained favourable, but that this favourable variance would reduce as staff numbers increase, and the agreement to backdate public sector pay increases to February 2022 would also lead to additional costs of a similar level of the savings to date. The CEO outlined that changes to the OGP framework contract for electricity would also lead to additional costs by year-end, and that there will also be additional furniture costs incurred, leading to an unfavourable variance.

It was noted that expenditure on Testing is higher than budgeted to date, and PAS will be overspent at year end due to an increase in the cost per test; expenditure on Interview Boards also remains high, and the allocation is likely to remain under pressure for the remainder of the year.

It was noted that, in terms of capital, the OPW had provided an update to inform PAS that previously notified additional costs of €270k were incorrect, and there would be no additional costs charged to PAS for the main contract. It was noted that work on the Audio Visual project has been delayed due to supply issues with some of the equipment, and the project manager is working with the supplier to work out a revised timeline for the project and revised costs for 2022 are expected to be in the region of €350k, with outstanding costs of €70k being delayed to 2023. It was also noted that there have been delays to expenditure on Project Nova to date and costs will be significantly lower than allocation.

The Board welcomed the news that PAS received a Supplementary Allocation of €574,000.

Super 8

Ciaran Oman joined the meeting to discuss the Super 8 Report and gave an overview of the reporting structure for the new Members present. He discussed the analysis conducted into issues causing delays, both within and outside of the control of PAS, and informed the Board that further analysis is underway on this area. It was noted that work has been done to categorise the types of requests for general grade assignments and Ciaran acknowledged that more work is needed on this area.

It was noted that a number of issues in relation to selection board member availability may relate to pay, and the Board noted that submissions have been made to DPER in this regard; it was agreed that the CEO would engage further with Colin Menton in relation to this. It was also agreed that an exercise would be conducted in relation to benchmarking selection board member pay. Mary Connaughton agreed to follow up with some of her contacts in relation to this, and it was agreed that PAS would engage with some of the commercial organisations on this matter.

It was noted that application numbers are down consistently over recent quarters. The feedback from P&T campaigns was noted and the Board would welcome more such feedback on other campaigns across the PAS recruitment process, including SER.

Update on the Key Risk Area – Meeting Demand for General Service Grades

Sandra Cairns made a presentation to the Board on this key risk area. She outlined the activity in 2022 to date and the level of campaigns advertised. She outlined the key areas where panels have been quickly exhausted, including a number of panels for Dublin. She outlined the challenges for recruitment, including the fall off in applications, the attrition rates leading to insufficient candidates being successful, the level of co-operation from candidates,

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the nature of TCO contacts, the uncertainty around hybrid working and the requests for prioritisation. She discussed how PAS has tried to be agile and flexible in order to meet client and candidate demands, including the use of EOIs and outsourcing of some aspects of clearance to clients. The Board agreed that it was important to tap into other markets, including part-time workers. The Board noted the lack of route to permanency from TCO to CO and welcomed the engagement with DPER on this matter. Sandra outlined the planned approach to the current TCO and CO campaigns, in order to ensure that panels are available as quickly as possible, and welcomed the changes being implemented to speed up the clearance process.

Update from the Audit Committee

The Board noted the Minutes of the last Audit Committee meeting and the Report on the Management of Outsourced Providers of Candidate Services, which had been included in the Board papers; the Board had no questions on either document. It was noted that the Committee is very satisfied with Mazars and the working relationship with them. The changes to the Committee were also noted.

Next meeting

The meeting will be held on 13th December at 9am.