

Minutes of ninety-first meeting of the Board of the Public Appointments Service held remotely by Zoom, at 2.00pm on 15th December 2020

Present (Board): Mr. Tom Moran, Ms. Mary Hurley, Ms. Anne-Marie Taylor, Ms. Shirley Comerford, Ms. Mary Connaughton, Mr. John O'Callaghan, Dr. Eddie Molloy, Ms. Anne O'Connor, Mr. Dave Cagney, Ms. Catherine Dobbins (Secretary).

Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

The minutes were agreed.

It was noted that the Agresso upgrade would be discussed as part of the CEO's Report.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

CEO's Report for the Board and Operational Report

The Board noted the Operational Activity Report, which was circulated in advance of the meeting.

The CEO updated the Board on a number of key areas and current trends in activity. This included an increase of 45% in the number of applications being processed in comparison to 2019, with the number of assessments also up by 12%; however, it was noted that advertised posts are down 8% and assignments down 44%. The CEO informed the Board that reports on timescale KPIs are now included in the operational report, and will be included going forward with details to the end of the previous month, similar to activity reports. She explained that overall, we are meeting the targets for campaign timescales and filling posts for clients; however, the reports demonstrate that we are not meeting targets for a number of general service grades, local authority recruitment and State Boards recruitment. The main delays occurred in Q2 for both local authorities (who were slower to engage with remote interviewing) and State Boards (with the change of government impacting on State Boards process); there were significant improvements in both areas in Q3. The CEO updated the Board on CRM team engagement with clients in relation to projected resourcing requirements. The Board discussed the area of workforce planning in detail and acknowledged the difficulties involved for clients and discussed the various supports which could be put in place centrally. It was also acknowledged that workforce planning goes beyond numbers and needs to focus on skills retention and development and building career paths for those with highly valuable specialist skills. It was agreed that David Cagney might do a presentation at the next meeting in relation to developments in this area.

The CEO highlighted the paper circulated to the Board on employee engagement and the successful retention of PAS Excellence Through People Certification for 2020/1. The Board also noted that PAS is a finalist in the CIPD Ireland HR Awards 2021, having been shortlisted in the *Embedding a culture of workplace well-being – small / medium category*. The Board congratulated PAS on its approach to people engagement and wellbeing and this external recognition of it.

The CEO updated the Board on the outcome of the review of the issue arising during the Technical Agricultural Officer campaign and the actions taken in the short term in response to it, with the medium term response acknowledged as part of Project Nova. The Board

acknowledged that the issue had been handled well by PAS and recognised the need to ensure learnings feed into Project NOVA and the replacement of STAR.

An update was also provided on key strategic projects, including Project NOVA; it was noted that the OGP has collaborated with PAS to support the Path to Market project, with an RFI for the supply, implementation and support of a Recruitment and Applicant Tracking System underway. It was noted that this approach would inform the development of an RFT in Q2 2021. The CEO also provided an update on the benchmarking conducted this year as part of this project, with a benchmarking report currently being drafted. It was noted that the STAR replacement system would assist in removing the opportunity for human error, as there will no longer be the need for manual intervention and spreadsheets that are required to run current campaigns STAR. The need to ensure PAS was informed in terms of opportunities for AI was acknowledged, and the work underway by our Occupational Psychologists and as part of the Path to Market Project in this area was discussed.

The CEO also provided an update on the Office 365 Project, with Phase 1 of the project signed off ahead of schedule. The role of the Office 365 Business Champions in driving user adoption across the organisation was noted.

The Board discussed the importance to PAS of digital transformation, and welcomed the establishment of a specific function to guide this, while highlighting the importance of ensuring digital transformation is systemic. It was noted that PAS has adopted a business partnership approach to digital transformation and innovation, with specialists working with the business to implement solutions that will help them deliver for the customer. Eddie Molloy suggested that the adoption of a socio-technical philosophy would be important and agreed to meet with the team to discuss this area further.

The CEO also updated the Board on the building project and welcomed the agreement by OPW of an extension to lease for Chapter House with the landlord. It was noted that the building contract will be signed in the coming days by the OPW, and it is expected to complete all works in 2021.

The CEO also provided an update on ED&I related developments, with the launch the first ED&I Strategy being scheduled for February 2021, and the new Head of ED&I expected to start in late January 2021. It was noted that the new ED&I Strategic Programme Board would commence in January to oversee the implementation of the ED&I Strategy, with an external Chair with significant experience in ED&I being appointed to this Board. It was noted that an RFQ is being prepared to engage external research expertise to help develop a three-year roadmap for managing, investigating and reporting on ED&I related data, and that a client and public service focused ED&I event / webinar is being planned for end of Q1, 2021. The Board discussed this area in some detail, and noted the focus in the update for this meeting on the area of disability. However, it was also noted that all grounds are covered in the ED&I Strategy, and this update only covered areas which had been progressed since the November meeting. The significant role which PAS can play in centralising and supporting all of the various ED&I related strands being progressed across the system was noted; the importance of this role in ensuring a coherent response and leading on cultural change, supported by relevant data, was recognised.

An update was provided by the CEO on Medical Consultant recruitment in 2020 to date, with 107 posts received for advertising (7% increase on 2019), 113 posts advertised (11.5% increase on 2019), 118 shortlisting and main boards held (22% decrease on 2019); a total of 14 shortlisting and main boards were held in November and 83 candidates have been recommended to date.

The CEO informed the Board that, following an analysis by the Management Board, it was agreed that PAS could provide support to the HSE in the relation to the additional Medical Consultant posts, Grade III Clerical level posts, and their Level VII recruitment needs - all areas where PAS has significant expertise and teams already established that could be expanded to take on this additional work. Unfortunately, at this time, PAS is not in a position to assist with recruitment or internal promotion campaigns at Grades IV, V and VI, as there is not available capacity to manage these in such a way as to meet the timelines the HSE require, in addition to effectively delivering on the current workload.

The CEO informed the Board that she followed up on the draft NDTP Report discussed at the previous Board meeting and this report will not be progressing any further.

The CEO updated the Board on some developments in work being undertaken for the local authorities. This included a new SEO competition advertised at the end of July 2020, which introduced acychronised video interviews to replace the traditional shortlisting stage, resulting in a 15-week turnaround from closing date to results issuing, in contrast to 46 weeks for the previous campaign. It was noted that the use of online and video interviews seems to have helped hugely in reducing timelines, making it easier for candidates and board members dispersed around the country to participate in the process, which is reflected in 100% attendance record for the last interview stage of the competition. The CEO also updated the Board on the Director of Service competitions where acychronised video interviews has now replaced the traditional preliminary interview stage, reducing by 3-4 weeks the time taken to complete these competitions. It was noted that this new initiative has now been introduced for other local authority roles, including Head of Finance.

The CEO outlined how PAS use a variety of assessment tools to manage large volume applications. While the number of applications to date in 2020 is significant, this year PAS has run a number of campaigns that generally attract the highest volumes (e.g. Clerical Officer, Executive Officer and Assistant Principal). Many of the applications for these campaigns are still active and will progress through the selection process. It was noted that an analysis of the application numbers is under way and information will be provided at the next meeting to provide clarity on the progression of candidates through the process. It was also noted that a “deep dive” into large volume campaigns is also underway to ensure the approaches, tools and data are being used to best effect to manage large volume campaigns.

The Board discussed the additional work being undertaken for the AGS and noted that all PAS aspects of this project have been completed and the Regulations are with the Minister for Justice to be signed, with PAS having no role in this matter until they are signed.

The area of updates on projects was discussed, and the Board requested an overview of all projects with target dates. It was agreed that the previous version of this report would be circulated, and the Board asked for its feedback on what it would like to see in such a report and the frequency with which it would like to receive it.

Financial Position

The CEO updated the Board on the current financial position, and informed them that DPER have provided approval in principal for a Virement of €200k from A2 costs to cover the additional expenditure on pay. Savings in other areas were also communicated to the Board, including IT costs, and reduced board member costs with a move to remote and demand led interviewing.

It was noted that the contract with Unit4 has now been signed for the Agresso upgrade, but no charges have been incurred to date.

Board Evaluation

Nicolas Marcoux from the IPA gave a presentation to the Board, summarising the outcome of the Board evaluation process and recommendations for the Board's consideration. He outlined the approach to the evaluation and how the ratings were determined. It was noted that overall the report was very positive with some areas identified to strengthen the role of the Board and its engagement with the organisation. Recommendations were made in relation to Board composition, training, the areas of focus for the Board, and its role in strategy development and review. The relationship with the Audit Committee was also discussed, as was the role of the Board in risk management and determining the risk appetite. The relationship with stakeholders was also discussed, and some recommendations made to strengthen this engagement. It was noted that the Internal Audit function will also be reviewed, and feedback provided to the Board on this review. The Board discussed the report and provided very positive feedback on the process and the detail contained in the report. The Board discussed the role of the Board and agreed this was one of the areas which required further discussion. Some slight suggestions to be included in the final version were provided to the presenter. It was agreed that further review and potential implementation of the recommendations would be included in the workplan for 2021.

Update on Super 8

The paper circulated with the Board papers was noted. It was agreed that a working group would be established to explore the area of KPIs further and Anne-Marie Taylor and Eddie Molloy agreed to work with the CEO and Ciaran Oman on this and prepare a paper for the next Board meeting.

Approach to Interviewing for 2021

The Board noted the paper circulated in advance on this area. Michelle Noone attended the meeting to provide an overview of the research undertaken to support the paper presented to the Board and to outline the external views sought in relation to the proposal. The Board noted the large number of senior processes which have been completed fully virtually since March, and noted the advantages of this approach, including the availability of specialist board members from outside the country and the ease of access for all candidates. The Board agreed that the approach suggested appeared to be evidence based and linked to the overall government roadmap approach. The Board asked that any potential impact from an ED&I perspective on this approach be considered and noted that continuing to ensure a consistent, high quality experience for candidates was critical, while also meeting the needs of clients for some flexibility in this area.

Update on Key Risk Area of Shortlisting

Aoife Lyons attended the meeting to discuss this paper, which had been discussed with the Audit Committee at their most recent meeting, and had been circulated to the Board in advance. She outlined that a higher number of appeals was one of the reasons why this area had been subject to review from a risk point of view. She also outlined the

developments made in this area to ensure that learning from reviews are incorporated into the process, including enhanced training and briefings. She highlighted the importance of the Job and Person Specification, and the supports provided to clients to ensure this is at the level required to inform the selection process, and particularly the shortlisting criteria. She also outlined the supports provided to Boards to improve the quality of feedback to candidates and to ensure consistency, so that there can be increased confidence in the Boards' decisions. She also outlined how the move to video interviews for shortlisting can help ensure a consistent and more objective approach to shortlisting.

Draft Workplan 2021

The Board noted the draft Workplan that had been circulated in advance and agreed that the additional session on KPIs would be added to the workplan.

AOB

The CEO thanked the Board for their support and guidance during the year.

Next meeting

To be arranged for February.