

Minutes of ninety-fourth meeting of the Board of the Public Appointments Service held in Dublin Castle, at 9.30am on 14th September 2021

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

Apologies: Ms. Anne O'Connor, Ms. Mary Hurley, Dr. Eddie Molloy.

Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

The minutes were agreed. The Board thanked and complimented the management team for keeping operations running smoothly over a challenging 18 months. It was agreed that meetings would continue to be conducted virtually for the remainder of 2021.

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 updated the Board on a number of key areas.

The CEO discussed the PAS Super 8 Performance Report, pointing out that although the lens is amber overall, the metrics improved for Q2. The CEO highlighted that although PAS is only on target for 1 of the 3 headline metrics (positions successfully filled), campaign delivery timeframes are approaching target (75% aiming for 80%) for 2021 overall. It was noted that all recruitment areas are showing significant improvement over Quarter 1 (reference slide 4) with campaign delivery timelines exceeding the target in Q2 overall. The CEO highlighted that although State Boards and P&T are still not meeting the targets, both have improved, and the focus remains on further improvements in these areas. It was noted that general grade assignments have also improved but there is still an amount of work to do there; additional resources have been allocated to the unit at a management level and a review of the entire clearance process is underway.

The Board welcomed that the update showed that the number of campaigns advertised is well above average for a quarter as are the assignment numbers. It was noted that number of applications and assessments are down on rolling averages, which is partly due to the sequencing of some of the larger volume civil service campaigns. However the CEO highlighted that as assignments are up, PAS may be starting to see a correlation resulting from the work being undertaken to improve the efficiency of our model vis-à-vis the ratio of applications/assessments to assignments; it was agreed that further analysis will be undertaken to determine if this is a pattern that is emerging.

The Board discussed the drop in application numbers and the CEO highlighted the issue of high levels not taking up entry level roles when offered them, which means significant

additional resources are being expended at this stage of the process. It was noted that this is in line with general labour market trends. Although it was noted that there is a lot of movement and promotions in the system, this appears to be less than that seen in the private sector or the UK, and there is no indication centrally that retirements have increased significantly.

The Board discussed whether the needs of departments and offices in relation to resourcing have changed with the nature of work appearing to change. It was noted that there is no fall off in demands for entry level staff from the larger operational departments as it appears that these IT enabled operations were able to migrate smoothly to operating online and organisations continue to need staff at clerical level for these roles.

It was agreed that PAS would look at how to engage with clients in relation to the Super 8. It was also agreed that some commentary would be included where the KPIs are not being met in relation to the actions being taken, or to explain where particular campaigns are being delivered significantly outside the agreed KPI.

It was noted that overall, 6 of the 8 lenses used to monitor our organisational performance are green following the Quarter 2 review. The Board discussed the Client experience lens and the insights provided into P&T campaign delivery this quarter and acknowledged the plans for a consistent flow of client feedback on a monthly basis as each competition is completed. This Board agreed that this specific real-time feedback would be very welcome.

The CEO updated the Board on the Candidate Experience working group now in place and the procurement of external expertise in this area to develop a Customer Engagement Strategy which will ensure PAS takes a strategic approach to customer engagement, obtaining continuous customer feedback and ensuring processes are in place for acting on that feedback consistently across the organisation.

The Board noted that the other lens are also positive with ongoing developments in People & Culture, Corporate Governance and Digital & Socio-Technical Transformation Lens. The Board noted that the People & Culture lens update is extraordinarily good and the other lenses are also very positive with a lot ongoing in each of these areas.

The Board thanked Anne-Marie for driving this project on behalf of the Board and are very satisfied with what is now being delivered in this area and that the dashboard is being used to manage and drive organisational performance.

The CEO updated the Board on workforce planning. It was noted that there was a small decrease in general grade projections of 0.7% for Q3 and the data continues to show a marked shift to the regions with regard to projections. It was noted that in Q2 2021, there were 63% more requests than projected and that a significant gap continues to exist between projections versus actual; the Client Managers are following up directly with those clients who have not engaged in the workforce planning process.

The CEO complimented David Cagney and his team for the support given in relation to workforce planning. David Cagney highlighted the importance of workforce planning in the next iteration of Civil Service Renewal and as part of the HR Operating Model project, and highlighted the importance of PAS input into both. The Board discussed the interdependencies between organisations and PAS in the process to obtain resources. It was noted however, that there is no central agreement in relation to the demand model that organisations require, with some focusing on the need for specialist staff and others wanting resources immediately being more focused on numbers than organisational/role fit. David Cagney highlighted the importance of the HROM in ensuring consistency and coherence in HR across the civil service.

The CEO discussed the Customer Engagement Strategy that PAS is preparing, and as part of this PAS will be trying to support clients, ensuring that PAS understands their needs and can gain their trust. It will also focus on candidate engagement in order to progress the strategic aim of putting clients and candidates at the centre. It was acknowledged that the role of PAS in terms of advisory services is crucial, and not just as a service provider, as it's important that PAS would use its knowledge and influence to advance public sector recruitment. It was agreed that it would be important for PAS to share the current KPIs as part of this in order to build trust in PAS systems and processes. It was agreed that the CEO would consider how to advance this area.

The Board noted the ED&I Q2 Project Update included with the Board Papers. The importance of setting appropriate ED&I related targets was discussed. It was also noted that PAS is liaising with DPER in relation to ED&I and Civil Service Renewal, with the importance of the EDI Audit Tool and ensuring its usage highlighted. It was agreed that while each sector needs to own its own ED&I related commitments, PAS will provide whatever assistance it can to the various sectors in terms of strategy and policy and the attraction of diverse pools. It was agreed that the priority for all sectors is data to ensure that there is a baseline in place against which improvements can be measured and that an ED&I audit of each sector would be a good starting point. It was noted that both the HSE and PAS will be trialing the use of Inclusio to gather such data.

The CEO updated the Board on the development of the new Competency Framework, with the first meeting of the Steering group held. It was noted that all participants were highly engaged and good feedback was gathered on the project, with ideas on where to focus; data collection has started, with questionnaires distributed across Government Departments and focus groups being held with job holders.

The CEO also provided an update on the PAS applications for the Civil Service Excellence and Innovation Awards, including:

Application 1: Employee Wellbeing Programme

Application 2: Embedding a GDPR and privacy-thinking awareness throughout PAS.

Application 3: Optimising candidate assessments within the virtual space.

Application 4: Public Service Employee and Industrial Relations Graduate Programme.

The CEO also provided an update on the building project and noted that the project is running to target and in line with cash flow projections as set out by the OPW; the only additional costs relate to AV equipment required to deliver a blended recruitment model. The CEO stated that the attention to design has been excellent and creates a very positive impression of a professional looking organisation. It was noted that the OPW have not yet sourced a replacement for Baggot Street and that as soon as the third floor is complete, staff will be rotated through to ensure all can attend the office.

It was agreed that the papers provided to the Board would be reviewed; the importance of the CEO's Report overall was highlighted.

Risk Management

The Board noted the risks as outlined in the Operational report.

Financial Position

The CEO outlined that Staff costs are running ahead of profile as at the end August, these figures include costs for additional staff taken on for HSE Covid recruitment work, funding will be received from the HSE. It was noted that costs for Advertising and Testing are lower than profiled at this stage in the year, however, this is mainly due to the inclusion of advertising and testing costs for AGS work in the profile, with no costs incurred to date; these costs will be incurred in Q4. It was highlighted that interview Board costs remain unfavourable to date, this reflects both increased activity, increased board days and an increased use of Board members paid at a higher rate due to reduced availability of others. The CEO highlighted that overall recruitment costs will be unfavourable at year-end compared to the allocation, but this should be offset by funding from the HSE to cover the additional work being undertaken on their behalf.

It was noted that there has been no capital expenditure to date in 2021, DPER has confirmed that €200k capital carryforward is available bringing the available resources to €2m for the year. The CEO informed the Board that at the end of 2020 a payment of €1.8m was transferred to the OPW as a contribution to the Chapter House project, this was recognised as expenditure against the 2020 capital allocation and included as a cost in the 2020 Appropriation Accounts, as agreed by DPER and OPW; however, the C&AG is currently in discussions with PAS and DPER in relation to this.

The CEO informed the Board that PAS made a detailed submission as part of the Estimates process, and made the case for increases in A1 and A2 in order to provide the level of services that PAS is being requested to for clients, including additional services for core clients.

Key Risk Area - Corporate Risk Register and Executive Summary of Key Risks

The Board discussed the risk of organisations doing their own recruitment and agreed that this should be reflected in the Corporate Risk Register. The future potential service offering from PAS and the service delivery model was discussed with more partnership approaches likely to be adopted and greater role for PAS in internal processes once the new system is in place. It was agreed that it would be important to understand why some clients might opt to do their own recruitment, but it was acknowledged that PAS would not have the capacity at present to conduct all of the required recruitment. It was agreed that it was important that PAS be given the resources to meet client requirements and it was agreed that additional resources are required to meet existing demands. It was noted that there are ongoing pressures in relation to delivery timescales which are resource related and there was agreement on the importance of the role of PAS being recognised and appropriate resourcing provided.

The importance of technology was also noted and the move to automated candidate journey and the need for PAS to show leadership in this area, including in the use of AI. The importance of project Nova in this regard was discussed.

Update from the Audit Committee

The Board noted the update from the Chair of the Audit Committee including the draft Minutes of the Audit Committee meeting on 1st July, the Report on the Role of the Audit Committee in Relation to Risk, and the Report on the Audit of Payroll. The Board agreed to reflect on the governance links between the Board and the Audit Committee over the next year.

Board Evaluation Action Plan

The Board agreed that they had a useful discussion at their previous meeting without the executive, on areas such as training, strategy, HSE recruitment, and the Board composition. The Board agreed that there was a good mix of skills and background on the Board at present, and that additional areas of expertise may be identified in advance of future vacancies.

The Board had discussed the potential for PAS to participate in an external evaluation process, but given the demands on PAS in 2022 agreed that the review would not be suitable for 2022. The Board noted the challenges for 2022, including the recruitment pipeline, the building project, project Nova and the return to work process. It was noted that a Management Board away day is being organised for November in order to agree how to best manage these challenges. It was agreed that an OCR Review would be put on the work plan for discussion in mid-2022. It was also agreed that an external speaker should be sourced to discuss some common themes from previous OCR reviews.

Update on the Delivery of Strategic Projects and Business Plans (including the Strategic Programme of Work)

The Board noted the papers provided and agreed that the Strategic Programme of Work Update was excellent, and welcomed the approach to tracking and reporting in this area.

Next meeting

To be arranged for October / November.