

Minutes of ninety-seventh meeting of the Board of the Public Appointments Service held through zoom, at 2pm on 23rd February 2022

Present (Board): Mr. Tom Moran (Chairperson), Ms. Anne-Marie Taylor, Ms. Shirley Comerford, Ms. Mary Connaughton, Dr. Eddie Molloy, Ms. Catherine Dobbins (Secretary).

Apologies: Ms. Mary Hurley, Ms. Anne O'Connor.

The Board wished to formally pass on their condolences to the Board Secretary on her recent loss.

The Board noted that there have been no Board Members nominated as yet to replace the Department of Justice and DPER nominees on the Board.

It was noted that three members of the Audit Committee are due to complete their terms of service in 2022.

The Board congratulated the Chair on his recent appointment as Chair of the Kerry Board.

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 updated the Board on a number of key areas.

In terms of the headline recruitment KPIs, the CEO informed the Board that PAS is achieving targets in terms of positions filled and approaching target in terms of recruitment timelines (but there is a lot of variation within this with the lowest being State Boards). It was acknowledged that there are still clearly issues with General Grade Assignments, and that this would be discussed in detail as part of update on clearance and assignments which would be taken as the next agenda item. In relation to State Boards, the CEO stated that of the campaigns which were delivered outside of the KPIs, 45% were due to a combination of extending the closing date and availability of the essential board members; a further 45% were due to the closing dates being considerably extended, in some cases by as much as 5 and 6 weeks.

The CEO informed the Board that in Q4 the number of campaigns advertised, number of applications received, and assessments delivered were significantly over the previous quarterly averages, with the number of interviews also above average; the area of assignments was the only area below average.

The Board welcomed the high levels of staff engagement as set out in the Operational Report but expressed some reservations about service delivery timescales, which appear to be getting worse in some areas, and the potential impact on PAS reputation, suggesting that

this risk may have increased due to the tightening labour market in conjunction with poor client workforce planning. The Board discussed the area of candidate expectations around matters such as timelines.

The CEO stated that the upcoming report on Clearance and Assignments would focus on some of these cross sectoral issues and would outline the measures being taken by PAS, in terms of increasing resources in professional & technical, senior executive and medical consultant recruitment. She also outlined the ongoing approaches to streamlining and process improvements.

It was agreed that PAS would keep monitoring this area, addressing the challenges, and engaging with clients around this. It was agreed that 2022 will be a very challenging year for PAS in terms of expectations for delivery and there may be a need to defer activities which are less of a high priority.

The CEO informed the Board that all possible actions from the previous meeting have been implemented in advance of this meeting, or included as part of the agenda for this meeting.

The CEO updated the Board on the nomination of PAS for a National Recruitment Federation (NRF) Award for Innovative Recruitment. It was noted that PAS would be attending the awards, including a member of PAS staff who is on the Dean's List in NCI from her participation in their recruitment degree programme in 2021. The CEO highlighted the networking opportunities available to PAS from membership of the NRF, and the Board agreed that it appeared to offer value for money. It was agreed that information on this award would be shared with the Board when the Minutes are being circulated.

The CEO discussed the two papers which had been submitted to the Civil Service Management Board (CSMB), and which had also been circulated to the Board. She highlighted the main challenges, issues and recommendations discussed with the CSMB. The CEO also outlined how PAS has been responding to these challenges and the improvements in customer engagement and the behaviour change needed from clients. She noted that clients are very satisfied with the outcomes of the service being provided by PAS but the issues with timelines are recognised.

The Board discussed some of these key issues, including lack of full engagement with workforce planning in the civil service, challenges in relation to the levels of retirements and resignations, and the challenges around attracting key skills in a time of skills shortages and the higher rates of candidate attrition. The Board also discussed the increased demand for specialists and the impact of this on PAS.

It was acknowledged that some key strategic issues which were identified cannot be immediately resolved (such as legislation change), but agreed that in such a tight market that it is essential that there is a move towards addressing some of these in the short term. Some key areas were discussed, including the issues around TCO recruitment, re-engagement and the lack of an established transition to permanency. The need to expand the pool of potential candidates to those who wish to work part-time was also acknowledged. There was also acceptance that some central agreements in relation to eligibility for specific campaigns and issues around sequences would require much wider engagement between DPER and the unions. It was agreed that PAS would prepare a paper for the pay talks to cover some of these key issues. The CEO informed the Board that the CSMB welcomed the recent approaches being adopted in terms of HSE and AGs recruitment as a model for engagement.

The Board welcomed the commitment of the CSMB to progress some of the key strategic issues through the People Sub-Group of the CSMB, and their broad agreement on the need

for change. It was agreed that PAS would itself prioritise what it sees as the key deliverables from these papers and develop its own plan and engage further with DPER and the CSMB Sub-Group in relation to the actions required.

Risk Management

The Board noted the risks as outlined in the Risk Report. The CEO informed the Board that there have been no material increases in risks since the last meeting identified in the report, and that all significant risks are currently kept under constant review, and those identified in this report are being managed at Management Board level.

The Board was informed that since the report was prepared, PAS has been notified of a data breach in relation to the loss of 15 application forms printed by a board member. The background to the case was outlined to the Board by the CEO, and the Board noted that a communication had been issued to impacted candidates, and that the DPC had been notified. The Board noted that a number of recommendations have been implemented, or are in the process of being implemented, on foot of this very serious incident.

The Board agreed that one way to reduce the impact of this risk was the ability to use other identifiers on applications instead of names, and noted that this would potentially be an option with the new Talent Acquisition System. The Board also acknowledged that this would also be useful from an ED&I perspective. The Board discussed the potential impact of this on the reputation of PAS and the client body concerned, and welcomed the PAS engagement at a senior level in relation to this matter.

It was agreed that the Board would get a report on the response to the data breach at the next meeting.

Financial Position

The Board noted the Financial Report for end January, which was included with the Board papers. The CEO informed the Board that it will be very challenging in terms of the A2 allocation, which is being prioritised through the Finance sub-group of the Management Board. It was also noted that it may also be challenging in terms of capital as OPW did not spend 900k of capital payment in 2021.

The CEO updated the Board on the recent governance meeting with DPER and the plans to look at current funding model through the governance structures currently in place.

Key Risk Area – Clearance and Assignments Timescales

Sandra Cairns and Eimear O'Connor gave a presentation on this key risk area. They provided an overview of the changes implemented to date and the impact of those. They highlighted the significant increase in assignments in January 2022, in comparison to previous years, but acknowledged that 450 assignments per month is close to the limit of what can be achieved. They outlined the challenges in the clearance process, including attrition levels and disengagement at all stages of the process, meaning that filling vacancies is requiring multiple assignments. They also highlighted the issues with TCO already on contracts re-applying. To demonstrate the high levels of attrition at all stages, a case study of the TCO was used. The response of PAS to these challenges was also outlined to the Board, including immediate and longer term actions. It was agreed that the Candidate Experience unit would be asked to carry out some research into the reasons for the high levels of attrition. The Board also discussed potential issues with the grade structure in the civil service and the impact of this on recruitment.

Update on Super 8 for 2021 and Review of Super 8

Ciaran Oman discussed the previously circulated Super 8 report with the Board, and also asked for feedback on the current format as part of the annual review. The Board acknowledged the value of the Super 8 and the increased focus on service delivery. It was agreed that the review would look at the types of metrics and reporting being used in all areas of the Super 8 to ensure it remains dynamic, and it was agreed that a discussion would be held at Management Board to ensure that key risks are being reflected in the reporting. Ciaran agreed to engage with the Board on this matter further at the next meeting.

Update from the Audit Committee

The Board noted the update from the Chair of the Audit Committee and the two audit reports circulated in advance. It was noted that the Audit Committee are very happy with Mazars, and with the quality of their audits which provide excellent assurance to the Committee.

Brand Project Update

Aine Gallagher attended the meeting (with a representative from Core Media) to provide an overview of the Brand project. They highlighted the need for a Brand Strategy and Marketing Plan, and provided an overview of research into the recognition of PAS brands and opinion on public service careers. They outlined the role of marketing in this area and the importance of brand positioning. It was confirmed that no decisions have been made in relation to this project and such decisions will involve the Board and the wider governance structures around public service recruitment (including DPER and the Government). The Board highlighted the need to ensure that the reputation of the organisation for fairness, objectivity and trust would have to be retained as part of any branding process. The Board agreed that they are willing to engage in discussions in relation to this, including outside of the set Board schedule, if required.

Draft Board Workplan for 2022

The Workplan which was circulated in advance was noted.

AOB

It was agreed that the next meeting would take place in Chapter House if possible, and would include a tour of the building.

It was noted that the Management Board are meeting on-site on 9th March to discuss the Return to the Office, and an update would be provided to the Board after this session.

Next meeting

The meeting will be held on 20th April 2022 at 2pm.