

TASMANIAN STATE SERVICE EVALUATION REPORT 2010



RECRUITMENT IN THE STATE SERVICE

CONDUCTED BY:

**THE OFFICE OF THE STATE
SERVICE COMMISSIONER**



DISCLAIMER

The matters raised, research conducted, conclusions drawn and opportunities for improvement identified in this report are provided as information for state sector agencies to consider in achieving better practice in recruitment policies and procedures. As explained in the evaluation background, this information is based on a sample and therefore represents an overview of recruitment practices within the State Service rather than a depiction of what may occur in individual agencies.

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COMMISSIONER'S FOREWORD

One of the statutory functions of the State Service Commissioner contained in Section 18 (1) of the *State Service Act 2000* (the Act), is to evaluate the application within agencies of practices, procedures and standards in relation to management of and employment in, the State Service. To achieve this function my office conducts an ongoing evaluation program with the aim of examining agency human resource practices both from a compliance perspective and to stimulate and identify best practice.

The decision to undertake an evaluation of agency recruitment and selection practices resulted from the identification of a number of matters regarding the application of the 'merit principle' and related agency recruitment practices. These matters had been identified by agency operatives and through: our employee surveys, the selection review process administered by the Office of the State Service Commissioner (OSSC) and concerns raised by individuals seeking to gain employment within the State Service. Our strong view is that an organisation's success will always highly correlate with the quality of its employees.

In this context, good policies and practices for attracting and selecting the right employees are pivotal in building and maintaining an efficient and highly performing public sector by generating selection decisions that will positively impact on the efficiency, culture and values of an agency. Alternatively, poor or less than satisfactory selection decisions will generate operational and organisational disruption and add to human and financial resource costs. With this in mind, the evaluation looked closely at the content and features of each agency's guidelines and sampled selection documentation as a measure of what happens in practice.

Underpinning State Service recruitment practices are the procedures and minimum requirements as set out in Commissioners Direction No. 1 – *Employment in the State Service* (CD No. 1) operative from 1 January 2009. For our evaluation to be complete, it was also necessary to examine these requirements to review their appropriateness, operational impact and effectiveness in facilitating the business activities of State Service agencies. Therefore, part of the evaluation was to generally examine agency compliance with these provisions and to understand the impact CD No. 1 may be having on the effectiveness and efficiency of agency recruitment practices. In other words, we not only expected the evaluation to identify and canvas solutions to agency recruitment processes but also to identify possible revisions to CD No. 1. By association, the analysis could also identify issues related to the employment provisions of the Act.

As the full report will testify, the evaluation has proven to be quite complex. However, it has enabled us to correlate and address a significant amount of valuable feedback concerning operational issues, agency policies and procedures and CD No. 1, and to identify best practice, supported by a comprehensive analysis of comparative statistical data drawn from a sample of agency recruitment and selection reports. While the report primarily focuses on results from a whole-of-service perspective, there is an opportunity for individual agency's to seek specific feedback from OSSC on where they stand operationally against the practices and procedures of other agencies.

The report also seeks to extend the scope of previous evaluations in that it not only identifies and reports on the major issues restricting the ability of State Service agencies to achieve efficient and effective recruitment outcomes consistent with the Act, but where possible, it identifies opportunities for improvement and in some cases suggests options to address the issues identified, consistent with prevailing best practice.

Hopefully this report, combined with the continuing work being undertaken by individual agencies and the Public Sector Management Office, coupled with revisions to CD No. 1, will produce more appropriate recruitment practices that will enable the State Service to operate and succeed in more aggressive, sophisticated and increasingly competitive local, national and international labour markets.



Iain Frawley
ACTING STATE SERVICE COMMISSIONER

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Firstly I would like to acknowledge the willingness of all State Service agencies to participate in this evaluation project and for their assistance in ensuring that all information requests were processed in a timely and co-operative manner.

On behalf of my project staff I also want to acknowledge the outstanding assistance provided by agency contact officers. These individuals patiently contributed considerable amounts of time and effort to help identify any issues that may be restricting the ability of State Service agencies to achieve efficient and effective recruitment outcomes and to locate and manage the collection of data from archived selection files.

Finally I would like to thank the staff from my office that were involved in this project: Purcelle Fox-Hughes, Benn Rafferty and Clio Simmons, for designing and leading the evaluation and Roseanne Armstrong and Ian Wilcox for their assistance in collecting, collating and inputting information.

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.1 Introduction

Over the past five years, an average of 3,436 State Service job vacancies have been advertised each year by government agencies covered by the *State Service Act 2000* (the Act).

Appointment and promotion decisions within the State Service are based on the merit principle as defined under section 7(2) of the Act. The State Service is a public service in which employment decisions are based on merit.

From information gathered through State Service agency and employee surveys, the analysis of matters brought before the State Service Commissioner, operational interaction with agency operatives and from public comments received, the Office of the State Service Commissioner (OSSC) developed the view that the application of the merit principle and related agency recruitment practices required examination.

Based on this information, and consistent with the State Service Commissioner's statutory functions, it was decided to undertake an evaluation of recruitment practices operating across all agencies as a major project under the OSSC 2009–2010 Evaluation Program.

The primary objective of this evaluation was to identify any issues that may be restricting the ability of State Service agencies to achieve efficient and effective recruitment outcomes consistent with the Act and Commissioner's Direction No. 1 (CD No. 1) operative from 1 January 2009. A secondary objective was to review the range of recruitment practices in operation in order to highlight any innovative strategies or activities, identify opportunities where agencies could improve their practices and procedures, and to obtain sufficient information to assist the process of reviewing the requirements of CD No. 1.

The evaluation methodology included: interviews with human resource managers to identify issues with process and CD No. 1; a detailed analysis of a significant whole-of-service sample of both permanent and fixed-term selection reports to identify what happens in practice; and an assessment of agency recruitment and selection guidelines to assess the differences between procedures and practice. Sample methodology is discussed further in the background section of this report.

Due to the economic situation in the 2008–09 financial year and the subsequent decline in job vacancies over that period, it was decided to use data from the 2007–08 period for this evaluation as this was more representative of annual job vacancies over the last five years.

In terms of timeframes, agencies were advised in April 2009 of the evaluation process and provided with background material. By June 2009 OSSC had met with each agency and then a review of sample reports was undertaken in October and November 2009.

It was found that overall the State Service is generally performing well in meeting the merit and recruitment requirements for permanent and fixed-term vacancies (over 12 months duration) as set down in the Act and CD No. 1. Due process is also followed for fixed-term vacancies (12 months or less) although the amount of time and effort devoted to shorter term selection exercises was commensurately less than that applied to permanent and longer term fixed-term vacancies.

However, there are a number of recruitment practices and processes within individual agencies which could be enhanced to make the outcomes for those agencies more efficient and effective. The opportunities for improvement sections of this report include best practice suggestions for all agencies to consider.

From a whole-of-service perspective, the evaluation has also identified a number of systemic issues and makes the following general observations:

- The *Right Job, Right Person* recruitment system being piloted by the Department of Health and Human Services sets a high standard of practice that could be adapted for use by all agencies. The *Right Job, Right Person* is a toolkit resource for agency human resource managers to assist in the employment of the most appropriate person for a vacancy, based on the principal of merit and evidence-based selection.
- Consideration could be given to examining the vacancy advertising issues raised by agencies through existing forums, the establishment of an appropriate agency reference group or through a formal review.
- Adoption of proposed amendments to CD No. 1 will provide greater operational flexibility for all agencies and enhance merit outcomes.
- The number of employees receiving selection panel training is low. Most agencies could improve their training efforts in this area.
- There is an over reliance on the use of interviews as the preferred method of assessing candidates. The development of a suite of complimentary selection methods could enhance the quality of selection panel recommendations.
- Practices around the gathering and utilisation of referee reports (usually reports from work supervisors) vary across agencies and requires significant improvement. Referee reports should normally be obtained for the nominee and preferably for an appropriate number of leading applicants.
- There is a significant omission in most agency guidelines regarding the provision of advice on the role and function of the delegate (usually a senior manager with a formal delegation to approve a selection recommendation) and on issues such as managing minority reports and disputing selection outcomes.

- In order to assist applicants, agencies could notify all applicants at the time of their exclusion from the selection process, for example, following shortlisting.
- Scribes, whether sourced from the agency or from external providers, may be an underused resource.
- The evaluation findings for fixed-term vacancies of 12 months duration or less were positive concerning agency selection practices. However, practices around the filling of shorter term vacancies and the use of approved fixed-term employment registers could be more thoroughly examined.

It should also be noted that a review of the requirements of CD No. 1 was completed in parallel with this evaluation and that produced a revised consultation draft of CD No. 1 which was distributed to all Heads of Agency and other major stakeholders in May 2010.

Following are the *Positive Findings* and *Opportunities for Improvement* from the evaluation.

1.2 Positive Findings for Permanent and Fixed-Term Vacancies (Over 12 Months)

Vacancy Identification and Advertising

- Most agencies directed that Statements of Duty were to be reviewed prior to advertising and most had an approval system for recruitment processes. Generally, Statements of Duty contained selection criteria which were generic and generally easy to understand. The average number of selection criteria was six which is consistent with best practice standards.
- With regard to advertising, all agencies met the minimum Gazette information requirements as specified in CD No. 1 and some utilised a wider range of advertising options.

Selection Panels

- Most agency guidelines specified that at least one selection panel member should have training or experience in staff selection. Most selection panels had three people and were gender balanced. Many agencies were reviewing their guidelines to remove reference to gender balance and a prescription of panel numbers to an emphasis on choosing panel members who have an understanding of the role and responsibilities of the vacancy and who bring objectivity and fairness to the process.

The Selection Process

- All selection panels used a shortlisting process and most documented reasons for the shortlisting of individual applicants. Most agencies had a requirement that selection panel members be involved in shortlisting. Most panels

used an interview for selection. Some selection panels used other innovative selection methods as well as an interview.

Referee Reports

- Most agency guidelines provided a direction regarding obtaining referee reports (usually reports from supervisors). The nominated referee was the applicants work supervisor in 99 per cent of cases. Seventy six per cent of selection reports included referee reports. Sixty-two per cent of reports were signed off by the referee. Over 60 per cent of agencies had a requirement to contact at least one referee for all candidates considered suitable for appointment.

Selection Reports

- Most agency guidelines provided a selection report template and recommendations as to the format and information required for the selection report. Most selection reports contained a high level of detail, but were concise. Eighty-nine per cent of selection reports showed evidence that they were verified by the human resource operatives.

Notification of Outcomes and Post Selection Counselling

- The majority of applicants were notified of the final outcome following selection. Post selection counselling was offered to unsuccessful candidates, at vacancy finalisation, in 84 per cent of cases. Those not offered post selection counselling were almost always applicants external to the State Service.

Applicants

- Agencies are attracting a large pool of applicants who are external to the State Service. Sixty-seven per cent of applicants were external to the State Service.

The Use of Scribes

- About 40 per cent of agencies provided advice on the role of scribes. Some selection panels used internal scribes (often human resource operatives) to write selection reports in order to have a more consistent approach. Occasionally, scribes were also used as part of the decision-making process and to obtain referee reports.

The Length of Process

- About 50 per cent of agencies prescribed a timeframe for completion of the selection process. The average length of time taken between the date of advertising to the date signed by the delegate was 54 days. In general, agency performance in relation to selection process timeliness has changed little over recent years. Whilst acceptable there is still room for improvement.

1.3 Positive Findings for Fixed-Term Vacancies (12 Months or Less)

Advertising

- In relation to advertising, all agencies adhered to the requirements of CD No. 1. Depending on the vacancy and length of appointment, some agencies only used one method of advertising, while for others a combination of options were used such as advertising in the Gazette and advertising within the agency at the same time.

The Selection Process

- A formal panel was convened in 96 per cent of cases. Evidence of shortlisting taking place was found in 85 per cent of cases with reasons given for shortlisting/exclusion in most cases. An interview was used in 66 per cent of cases.

Selection Reports

- Selection reports were produced for almost all vacancies with most agencies (12) consistently producing selection reports. The number of report pages was comparable to selection reports for permanent and fixed-term vacancies (over 12 months duration). Sixty-eight per cent of selection reports were verified by human resource operatives.

Post Selection Counselling

- Post selection counselling was offered in most cases following vacancy finalisation. The fact that agencies are offering post selection counselling for vacancies irrespective of the duration of the vacancy is a positive outcome.

The Length of Process

- The average length of time taken to produce reports for short-term vacancies, from the date of advertising to the date signed by the delegate, was shorter (32 days) than for permanent and fixed-term vacancies over 12 months duration (54 days).

1.4 Opportunities for Improvement for Permanent and Fixed-Term Vacancies (over 12 months)

Vacancy Identification and Advertising

- In developing Statements of Duty, agencies should continue to develop selection criteria that promote the main requirements of a vacancy to enable potential applicants a better opportunity to self-assess their competitiveness. Statements of Duty should also ensure that there are no artificial barriers which may preclude applicants from applying for vacancies.

- To assist in job analysis and the development of Statements of Duty, a template or job evaluation questionnaire could be considered. Such a tool can prompt those managing vacancies to consider the current role, responsibility and requirements of the vacancy.
- Agencies are defining the important selection criteria required for a role which usually results in the development of no more than six criteria. It is not considered necessary to further weight selection criteria as agencies should include only the important criteria for the role, which would be equally weighted.
- Consideration could be given to examining the vacancy advertising issues raised by agencies. This might be accommodated through existing forums, the establishment of an appropriate agency reference group or through a formal review.
- Some agencies need to re-examine their advertising requirements and develop and document the range of advertising options appropriate to the specific needs of their agency. Options could include those methods already employed by some agencies such as: professional association newsletters and journals, recruitment organisations and job websites. More innovative options such as targeting emails to appropriate institutions/ organisations and using contemporary communication tools such as *Facebook* could also be considered.
- To assist those managing vacancies, all agencies could consider including in their guidelines advice as to:
 - o other options for advertising a vacancy in addition to the minimum requirements stated in CD No. 1;
 - o the role and responsibilities of the vacancy contact officer; and
 - o their late application policy.
- To assist potential applicants, all agencies could encourage applicants (via the advertisement) to contact the vacancy contact officer prior to lodging their application.
- Agencies should provide written confirmation to applicants upon receipt of their applications.
- The inclusion of panel members from outside the immediate work area and/or external to the agency can improve the perception of fairness of the selection process, from an applicant's perspective.
- It would normally be expected that selection panel members are higher than or equivalent to the classification level of the vacancy.
- Whilst all selection panel members should be trained, it is preferable to have at least one panel member trained in (or have a good knowledge of) selection processes. As it would appear that there are comparatively low numbers of employees being trained, most agencies could improve: their training efforts; their directions around who should be trained; and provide advice on how to access selection panel training. In the interim, the production of a suitable guide or toolkit to assist untrained selection panel members would be useful.
- All agencies should provide advice to panel members on potential conflict of interest situations. For example, advice that panel members should provide notification of potential conflicts as soon as a situation is identified so the chairperson can manage the situation appropriately. Further, whilst preferable that panel members are not referees, where it is unavoidable, the referee report should be completed prior to interviews. It would also be advisable to obtain an additional referee report from another source, where possible.

The Selection Process

Selection Panels

- In agency guidelines, it is important to emphasise that where possible all selection panel members should have a good understanding of the role and responsibilities of the advertised vacancy and must ensure that acceptable standards of probity, fairness, consistency and ethical conduct will be applied throughout their selection activities. Panel composition should be about these core issues.
- At present, only 11 per cent of selection panels choose to use other selection methods as well as an interview. All agencies should consider using a range of complimentary selection methods which individual selection panels could customise to suit the particular requirements of the vacancy under selection.
- All agencies could consider advising selection panels that where applicants look competitive, but have not specifically addressed the selection criteria, they seek additional information before routinely excluding those applicants from further consideration. These applicants are often external to the State Service and do not always fully appreciate the relevance of specifically addressing each selection criteria.
- To assist selection panels, all agencies could consider providing:
 - o advice that internal applicants do not need to be routinely interviewed if they do not meet the requirements of the vacancy or that other candidates meet those requirements to a greater extent;

- o advice and direction on utilising desktop assessments;
 - o a requirement for selection panels to document the reasons for the non-shortlisting of applicants for interview;
 - o a direction that all applicants be simultaneously advised as to whether or not they have been shortlisted for interview, and in the case of those excluded from interview, they be offered post selection counselling at that stage; and
 - o advice that where appropriate, panels should consider the use of second interviews.
- Interview panels usually develop a question for each selection criteria. While it is useful to develop questions which encapsulate the selection criteria, panels should be mindful that questions need to be aimed at allowing the applicant to provide enough relevant information for the panel to be able to make an informed decision. Whilst selection panel members should not introduce different or inconsistent lines of questioning, impromptu questions exploring a candidate's response is useful. In some cases, a criterion might be better assessed through other methods such as testing or referee comments.

Referee Reports

- It is clear that referee reports are not obtained in some selection exercises and in some others, often only for the nominee. As a minimum, referee reports should normally be obtained for the nominee and preferably for an appropriate number of leading applicants (this includes obtaining referee reports for 'known' applicants). These reports should be from referees who have had a direct working relationship with the applicant. Proposed CD No. 1 amendments to allow an increased capacity in making subsequent selections from a selection process, further supports this position.
- Only three per cent of referee reports were obtained from referees other than those nominated by the applicant. Agency guidelines should indicate that it may be appropriate in some cases to contact referees not nominated by the applicant. In cases such as these, applicants should be made aware that the selection panel is contacting these referees and that the applicant should be offered a right of response if there is adverse comment.
- To assist selection panels, agency guidelines should provide:
 - o a direction to always obtain referee reports, even in cases where candidates are well-known to the panel;
 - o a direction that referee reports should primarily be obtained from work supervisors;

- o advice on the preferred method of obtaining those reports (written versus verbal);
- o advice on handling unfavourable referee comment; and
- o for potential review purposes, a requirement that referees sign their written report or provide email confirmation of the validity of a written summary of comments obtained verbally.

Selection Reports

- Some smaller agencies are in a position to thoroughly check each selection report and verify the information. Some larger agencies have difficulty doing this because of the sheer volume of reports being processed. It is therefore advisable to have comprehensive guidelines and templates to assist chairpersons and panel members in writing the selection report. Advice and templates should include the following:
 - o full details of: the vacancy; the names and titles of selection panel members; the number of applications received and whether they are internal or external to the State Service; a shortlist with reasons for applicant exclusions; interview dates and methods of assessment as well as an order of merit; and a clear comparative assessment outlining how the selection outcomes were arrived at. It is important to emphasise that applicant assessments should only be developed following full consideration of that information available from applications, interview performance and referee reports, rather than an over reliance on interview performance;
 - o recommendations concerning the nominees length of probation, the proposed commencement salary and any adjustments that may be required to the workplace to accommodate the nominee; and
 - o all panel members need to sign and date their selection reports.
- All agencies could consider providing guidance for panel members around arrangements for the submission of minority reports or the documentation of any panel disagreements around process or outcomes.

The Role of the Delegate and Notification of Outcomes

- There is a significant omission in most agency guidelines regarding the provision of advice on the role and function of the delegate including issues such as managing minority reports and disputing selection outcomes. Specific guidelines for delegates in these matters could produce a more robust, efficient and open selection process.

- In order to assist applicants, agencies should notify all applicants at the time of their exclusion from the selection process, for example, following shortlisting. Some agencies already do this, followed by another letter at vacancy finalisation. The practice of only notifying State Service employees of the name of the successful applicant is justifiable given current selection review arrangements.
- Agencies should strongly recommend to selection panels that selection reports include an order of merit list for leading candidates. This will also assist the process of making subsequent appointments, if required.

Post Selection Counselling

- As a standard practice, unsuccessful applicants should be afforded the opportunity to receive post selection counselling. However, it is accepted that this may not always be practical for selections related to vacancies that attract a large volume of external applicants. Notwithstanding, the timely provision of post selection counselling to unsuccessful applicants, particularly those external to the State Service, can negate perceptions of bias and assist and encourage these applicants in applying for future State Service vacancies.
- In order to assist selection panel members and chairpersons, agencies should consider adding more detail to their agency guidelines regarding post selection counselling. This could include advice about: the rules and procedures for providing post selection counselling; advice on the subject areas to be covered during the counselling; and an outline of the information that could be made available to applicants about the selection process, themselves and/or the nominee.

Applicants, Nominee and Incumbency

- Although a large percentage of applicants for vacancies were external to the State Service, a much smaller percentage of external applicants were successful in gaining selection for a vacancy. While there could be many and varied reasons for this, it may be useful to refer back to the opportunities for improvement identified in the Vacancy Identification and Advertising section of this evaluation for opportunities for improvement around this issue.
- Applicants should also be encouraged (via the advertisement) to contact the vacancy contact officer prior to lodging their application. This may assist applicants external to the State Service to become fully conversant with the requirements of the vacancy in order to make an informed decision as to whether or not to apply and then to

adequately address the selection criteria and the selection panel if offered an interview. This might produce a more competitive applicant pool and a more efficient selection process.

- As incumbency remains an issue of concern, consideration needs to be given to amending Commissioner's Direction No. 1 to strengthen the provisions related to advertising vacancies and to place maximum periods on the length of time an employee can act in a vacancy.

The Use of Scribes

- Scribes, whether sourced from the agency or from external providers, may be an underused resource. Dedicated scribes can often minimise the time taken to complete a selection process especially when used for the collection of referee reports as well as the drafting of the selection report. As there are no restrictions regarding the use of external scribes or the range of services they can offer, agencies could consider the extent to which they utilise these services and reflect this in their guidelines.

The Length of Process

- Agencies seeking further improvement in the efficiency and timeliness of their selection processes could review their completion timeframes and develop and promote reportable benchmarks in their guidelines as a means of improving accountability.
- Agencies not currently using some form of electronic system for tracking and monitoring the progress of selection exercises could consider implementing an appropriate system.

2. EVALUATION BACKGROUND

2.1 Introduction

The application of merit to appointment, promotion and other employment decisions is one of the ways in which the Tasmanian State Service demonstrates its ethos of fairness to employees and the community it serves. The *State Service Act 2000* (the Act) is the principal source of legislation relating to merit in employment. Commissioner's Direction No. 1 – *Employment in the State Service* (CD No. 1) supports this.

The Act, supported by CD No. 1, provides agencies with the framework within which to operate, with each agency then developing their own human resource processes and procedures. Section 7(1) (l) of the Act requires that members of the community be provided with a reasonable opportunity to apply for employment within the State Service, while appointment and promotion decisions within the State Service are based on the merit principle as defined under section 7(2) of the Act. A decision relating to appointment and promotion is based on merit if:

- an assessment is made of the relative suitability of the candidates for the duties; and
- the assessment is based on the relationship between the candidates' work-related qualities and the work-related qualities genuinely required for the duties; and
- the assessment focuses on the relative capacity of the candidates to achieve outcomes related to the duties; and
- the assessment is the primary consideration in making the decision.

Over the past five financial years, an average of 3,436 State Service job vacancies have been advertised each year by agencies and authorities covered by the Act. As a result of agency and employee surveys, review activity, operational interaction with agency operatives and from public comments received, OSSC developed the view that the merit principle and related agency recruitment practices should be examined. There was also some anecdotal evidence from agency human resource operatives suggesting that existing recruitment practices may tend to focus on 'process' rather than 'outcome' and as a result recruitment processes may not be as efficient or effective as they could be.

In particular, the Tasmanian State Service Employee Surveys of 2005 and 2007 found that approximately half of the workforce showed uncertainty or disagreement that employment decisions were based primarily on merit, and a similar number did not agree that recruitment and promotion decisions were fair. In addition, most applications lodged with the Office of the State Service Commissioner (OSSC) for a selection review related to both merit and process issues, with the

majority of applications essentially arguing the fairness and/or thoroughness of selection processes and procedures. There was also some indication that the unsatisfactory selection processes and lack of courtesy and fairness issues, identified in the Auditor General's Special Report No. 49, *Staff Selection in Government Agencies* (December 2003) may still be of concern.

Based on this information, and consistent with the State Service Commissioner's statutory functions, it was decided to undertake an evaluation of recruitment practices across all agencies as a major project under the OSSC Evaluation Program 2009-2010.

2.2 Evaluation Objectives

Permanent vacancies and fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration should be publicly advertised and filled on the basis of merit.

Consistent with this requirement, the objectives of the evaluation were to:

- identify any major issues restricting the ability of State Service agencies to achieve efficient and effective recruitment outcomes consistent with the *State Service Act 2000* and Commissioner's Direction No. 1;
- identify opportunities where State Service agencies could improve their practices and procedures, consistent with prevailing best practice; and
- obtain sufficient information and data to assist the process of reviewing and revising the requirements of CD No. 1.

The scope of the evaluation included an examination of all aspects of State Service recruitment processes, from vacancy identification to vacancy finalisation, in respect of permanent and fixed-term appointments as defined by the *State Service Act 2000*. The scope of the evaluation did not however include Heads of Agency, senior executives (or equivalent specialists) or prescribed officers. The focus of the evaluation was to examine the extent to which normal recruitment processes were applied rather than the quality of selection outcomes.

2.3 Evaluation Methodology

The evaluation methodology included:

- interviews with agency human resource managers to identify issues restricting the ability of agencies to achieve efficient and effective recruitment outcomes, including issues specific to CD No. 1;
- a detailed analysis of a significant whole-of-service sample of both permanent and fixed-term selection reports to identify what happens in practice, to test the validity of the issues raised, and to assist the process of identifying solutions or opportunities to improve practices; and

- an assessment of agency recruitment and selection guidelines to assess the impact of differences between procedures and practice, to identify whole-of-service procedural deficiencies and highlight best practice.

Due to the economic situation in the 2008-09 financial year and the subsequent decline in job vacancies over that period, it was decided to use data from the 2007-08 period as this was more representative of annual job vacancies over the last five years. It was also decided that the major sample of selection reports would relate to both permanent and fixed-term vacancies of greater than 12 months duration on the basis that these vacancies are required to be advertised in the Gazette and would attract the same selection processes.

The whole-of-service sample of agency selection reports (related to permanent and fixed-term vacancies of greater than 12 months duration) was drawn from a list of positions advertised in the Gazette during the 2007-08 financial year. The number of sample selection reports required to produce a valid result was estimated using standard sampling calculators. This produced a sample size of 200 reports which was 6.5% of total vacancies advertised for the 2007-08 period. The size of the sample drawn from each agency was related to each agency's percentage of the total number of vacancies advertised in 2007-08, applied to the selected sample size.

In addition, a sample of 75 selection reports (7% of the total number of fixed-term vacancies of 12 months duration or less) was drawn from individual agency selection activity lists for the 2007-08 period. Full details of the sampling methodology are available on request.

The reporting of these two different vacancy types (permanent and fixed-term over 12 months and fixed-term under 12 months) was undertaken separately. The major focus of this evaluation was on permanent and fixed-term vacancies (over 12 months duration) due to the greater significance of these types of appointments and promotions.

The analysis of selections for fixed-term vacancies under 12 months duration was less detailed. This analysis was primarily done to check: if appropriate selection processes were in place; and to examine the premise that the amount of time and effort devoted to shorter term selections would normally be commensurately less than that applied to permanent and longer term fixed term vacancies.

The assessment of agency recruitment and selection guidelines looked in detail at the information contained in each agency's guideline, measured against a set of generic practices and procedures related primarily to selections for permanent vacancies. These practices and procedures were essentially a composite list of all those found to be operating somewhere within the State Service.

2.4 Evaluation Outputs

This report presents consolidated evaluation data, conclusions and opportunities for improvement for the State Service as a whole rather than outcomes in respect of individual agencies. However, there is additional data related to individual agencies contained in the compact disc attached to the report. This information and data could provide individual agencies with an opportunity to make some broad comparisons with the outcomes and practices of other agencies.

As part of this evaluation, agency human resource managers also assisted OSSC to identify those requirements of CD No. 1 which might be amended from an operational perspective. Based on that feedback, and by drawing on the information and data contained in this report, OSSC has developed a revised draft of CD No. 1 as an additional outcome of this evaluation project. The CD No. 1 draft was distributed to all Heads of Agency and other major stakeholders for comment in May 2010.

2.5 Other Related Data

This section of the report selectively presents data previously published by the Commissioner in annual and employee survey reports and data provided by the Public Sector Management Office related to annual State Service vacancy numbers and selection panel training. The information is intended to highlight a number of related issues and to provide a data framework to help identify the environment in which recruitment in the State Service operates.

Vacancies Advertised

Where an agency proposes to permanently appoint a person or promote an employee to perform duties in an Agency, the duties must first be advertised in the Gazette unless the State Service Commissioner determines otherwise.

The *Jobs Tas* website supports the Commissioner's merit protection role by facilitating broad access to up-to-date information about State Service vacancies published in the Gazette, thus providing a reasonable opportunity for members of the community to apply for State Service employment.

Over the period of our evaluation (2007-08) there were 3,591 vacancies advertised both in the Gazette and on the *Jobs Tas* website. The average number of visits to the website per month over this same period was 65,709, and the average number of pages viewed per month was 542,026. The Public Sector Management Office manages the site.

Figure 1.0 Vacancies Advertised by Agency
1 July 2007 – 30 June 2008

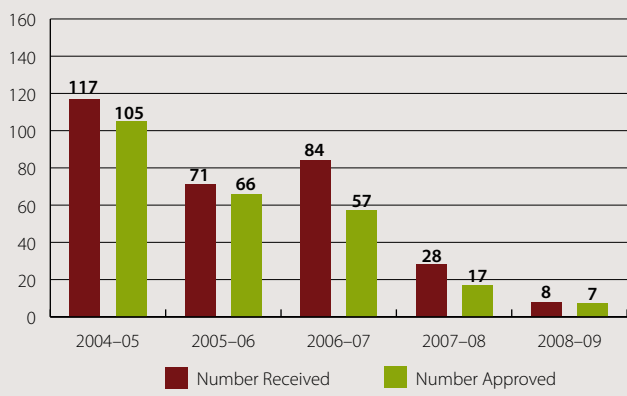
Agency	Vacancies Advertised 2007-08
Dept. of Economic Development	119
Dept. of Education	454
Dept. of Environment, Parks, Heritage and Arts	276
Dept. of Health and Human Services	1590
Dept. of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources	186
Dept. of Justice	224
Dept. of Police and Emergency Management	97
Dept. of Premier and Cabinet	77
Dept. of Primary Industries and Water	281
Dept. of Treasury and Finance	104
Tasmanian Audit Office	10
Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority	19
TAFE Tasmania	134
The Public trustee	20
Totals	3591

Promotion Without Advertising

In order to uphold the merit principle, permanent vacancies should normally be publicly advertised and filled on the basis of merit. Only special and compelling circumstances warrant the promotion of a permanent employee without advertising. Accordingly, Section 40 of the Act allows a Head of Agency to seek the approval of the Commissioner to promote an employee without advertising the duties.

There has been a marked decline in promotions without advertising requests and approvals over recent years with the majority of current approvals resulting from promotions following the completion of approved training programs.

Figure 2.0 Promotions Without Advertising – Requests Received and Approved Between 1 July 2004 – 30 June 2009



Selection Reviews

Following advertising, an agency receives applications and conducts an appropriate selection process. Once a Head of Agency or their delegate approves a selection recommendation, the applicants for the vacancy are notified of the selection outcome in writing.

Included in the notification for permanent appointments is information on the review rights available to State Service employees. A selection review provides an unsuccessful State Service applicant with an opportunity to seek a review of a selection decision through OSSC. Applicants who are not State Service employees do not have review rights under the Act.

Reviews are conducted by the Commissioner (or his delegate). Statistically the overwhelming majority (over 95%) of selections for permanent appointment or promotion to State Service vacancies do not attract reviews. The following table shows selection review activity for 2007-08. Note that a high percentage of selection reviews dealt with during the reporting period were resolved through conciliation and that the figures include two applicants who lodged 19 reviews each against similar vacancies advertised at the same time within the Department of Health and Human Services.

Figure 3.0 Selection Reviews (section 50(1)(a) of the Act)
1 July 2007 – 30 June 2008

AGENCY	Actions	Granted	Not Granted	Resolved
Dept. of Education	12	-	2	10
Dept. of Environment, Parks, Heritage and the Arts	1	-	-	1
Dept. of Health and Human Services	54	2	2	50
Dept. of Justice	9	-	1	8
Dept. of Police and Emergency Management	2	-	-	2
Dept. of Primary Industries and Water	13	-	-	13
Dept. of Treasury and Finance	1	-	-	1
Tasmanian Audit Office	11	-	-	11
TOTALS	103	2	5	96

Training

The Training Consortium (part of the Public Sector Management Office) offers training for selection panel participants from all agencies through a course entitled *Working with Merit for Successful Selections*. The number of courses and participants for the 2007-08 and 2008-09 financial years are as follows. Note that some agencies also conduct selection panel courses independently of those offered by the Training Consortium.

Figure 4.0 Working with Merit for Successful Selections – Course Statistics 2007-2009

Courses	2007-08	2008-09
Public courses	2	3
In-house courses	2	4
Total courses	4	7

Participants	2007-08	2008-09
Dept. of Economic Development	1	3
Dept. of Education	-	-
Dept. of Environment, Parks, Heritage and Arts	-	21
Dept. of Health and Human Services	3	16
Dept. of Infrastructure, Energy and Resources	1	1
Dept. of Justice	1	-
Dept. of Police and Emergency Management	12	6
Dept. of Premier and Cabinet	2	2
Dept. of Primary Industries and Water	3	7
Dept. of Treasury and Finance	16	42
Tasmanian Audit Office	-	-
Port Arthur Historic Site Management Authority	18	-
TAFE Tasmania	-	-
The Public trustee	-	-
Total	57	98

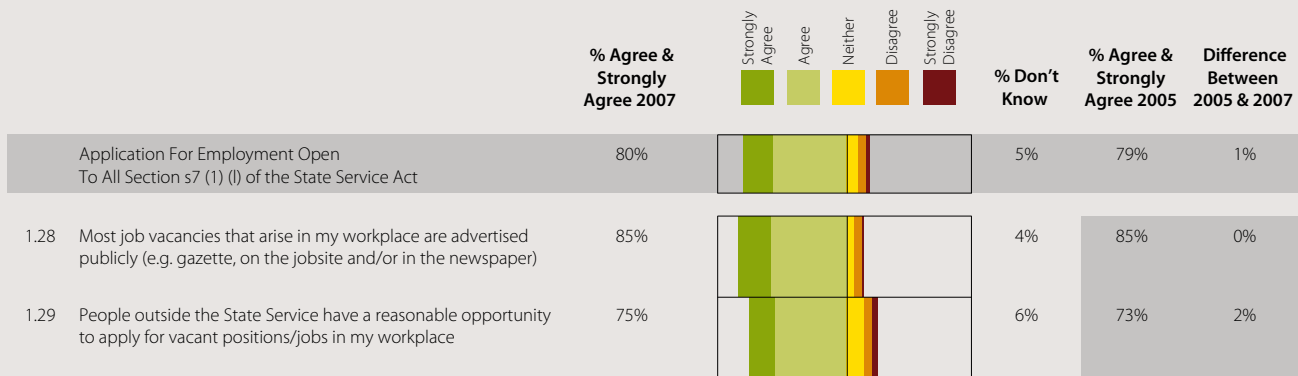
**Perceptions of Merit within the Tasmanian State Service
(an employee perspective)**

The 2007 State Service Employee Survey provided an insight into employee’s attitudes towards the application of merit. All employees are encouraged to respond to the Survey and thus data is collected anonymously from a range of employees in different occupations, across all levels of responsibility. The following data is the outcomes in respect of merit-related issues:

Section 7(1)(l) of the Act states: *‘the State Service provides a reasonable opportunity to members of the community to apply for State Service employment’*. The results for this principle are shown in Figure 5.0, below.

Overall, a large majority (80%) of employees supported this principle, with 85 per cent agreeing that job vacancies are advertised publicly and 75 per cent believing that people outside the State Service have a reasonable opportunity to apply for vacant positions.

Figure 5.0 Application for Employment Open to All



Section 7(1)(b) of the Act states: 'the State Service is a public service in which employment decisions are based on merit'. The results for this principle are shown in Figure 6.0, below.

A majority of employees (54%) provided overall support for employment being based on merit and a clear majority of employees (65%) agree that selection criteria accurately reflect job requirements.

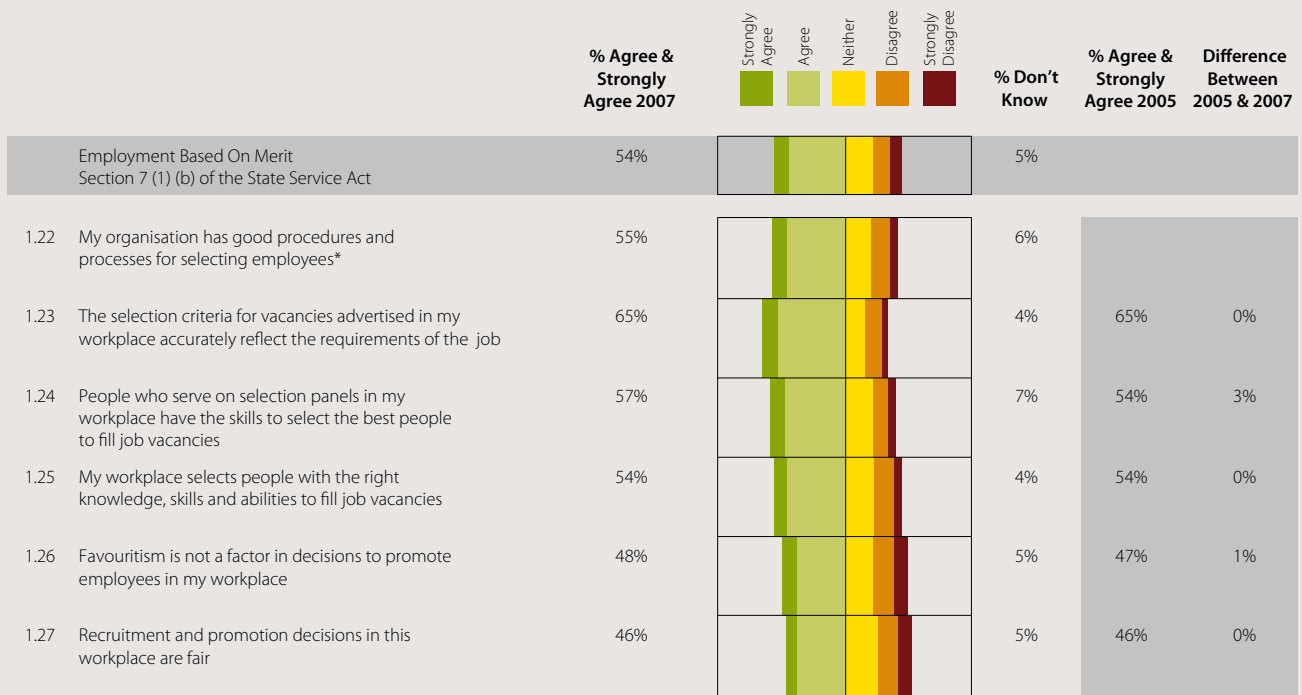
Approximately half of all employees agreed that their workplace selects people with the right characteristics for jobs (54% agreement), that people who serve on selection panels have necessary skills (57% agreement), that favouritism does not impact promotion decisions (48% agreement), and that recruitment and promotion decisions are fair (46% agreement).

While there may be some reservations amongst employees about the fairness of recruitment and promotion decisions,

the majority of employees feel that their organisation has good procedures and processes for selecting employees (55% agreement).

Some caution is needed when interpreting these results. First, as with issues associated with managing performance, statements associated with recruitment and selection also tend to be some of the lowest scoring sections of public sector surveys, with results similar to those presented here. Second, averaged responses to employee surveys may not demonstrate universal support for recruitment and selection processes given the limited number of promotion opportunities within organisations and the limited exposure employees have with recruitment processes. For example, those employees who have had an unsuccessful job application and those who have not participated on a selection panel showed significantly less confidence in recruitment and selection process decisions.

Figure 6.0 Employment Based on Merit



*Not included in 2005 survey

PART ONE:

PERMANENT AND FIXED-TERM
VACANCIES (OVER 12 MONTHS)

3. VACANCY IDENTIFICATION AND ADVERTISING

3.1 Recruitment Approval Process and Statements of Duty

Background

Selection criteria describe the knowledge, skills, abilities, and qualifications a person needs to perform a particular job. Such criteria are used to identify the right person for the role.

Agencies can develop selection criteria which fit the duties of an assortment of vacancies. This part of the evaluation looks at the selection criteria used by agencies in Statements of Duty. While particular attention is paid to the development of selection criteria, this section also examines the recruitment approval process and job design.

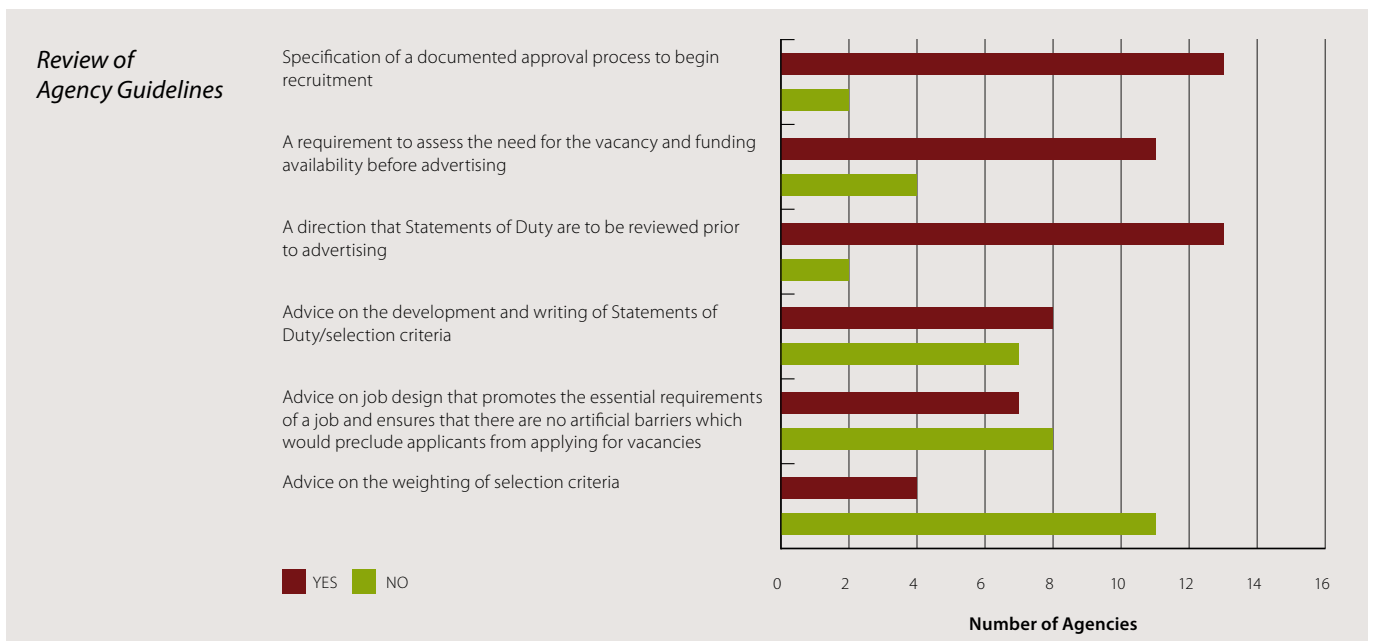
Matters Raised with OSSC:

- Does the language used in some Statements of Duty inhibit those applicants who are external to the State Service from applying for vacancies?
- Are there difficulties with job analysis and the development of selection criteria?
- Is the number of selection criteria used in Statements of Duty excessive?
- Should weighted selection criteria be used and should those weightings be made apparent to the applicant?

Findings

Review of Sample Reports

- 100% of selection reports contained generic selection criteria.
- The number of criteria used in Statements of Duty varied between five and nine, however, the average number of selection criteria was six.
- Apart from one agency, it was found that very little weighted criteria were used: only 8% of the reports used weighted criteria and where used, the Statements of Duty made weightings apparent to the applicant.



Conclusion

Most agency guidelines directed that Statements of Duty/ selection criteria were to be reviewed prior to advertising and prescribed a documented recruitment approval process. However, only about half of all agencies provided advice on the development and writing of Statements of Duty/selection criteria.

The review of sample reports found that, generally, Statements of Duty contained selection criteria which were generic, generally easy to understand and which should not present a barrier for applicants, external to the State Service, from applying. Subsequent to these findings, the review of Statements of Duty carried out by agencies in relation to the 2008 Award translation process has possibly further assisted a movement to more relevant and up-to-date Statements of Duty.

The review of sample reports found that the average number of selection criteria per Statement of Duty was six which is not regarded as excessive. The Auditor-General's Special Report No. 49, *Staff Selection in Government Agencies* (December 2003), stated that a maximum of seven selection criteria was an acceptable number and anything in excess of this made the process unduly complex for the selection panel and the applicants. Interestingly, at the time of the collection of information for that report (2001-02), three agencies consistently advertised vacancies with more than seven selection criteria. The general movement now to an average of six selection criteria is an improvement.

The review of sample reports also found that most agencies did not use weighted criteria and only four agencies provided advice on the weighting of selection criteria in their guidelines. The Auditor-General's Report (December, 2003) found that most agencies did use weighted criteria to some extent. Consistent with the reduction in the number of selection criteria, the use of weighted criteria by agencies has declined in recent years.

Opportunities for Improvement Identified in the Evaluation

- In developing Statements of Duty, agencies should continue to develop selection criteria that promote the main requirements of a vacancy to enable potential applicants a better opportunity to self-assess their competitiveness. Statements of Duty should also ensure that there are no artificial barriers which may preclude applicants from applying for vacancies.
- To assist in job analysis and the development of Statements of Duty, a template or job evaluation questionnaire could be considered. Such a tool can prompt those managing vacancies to consider the current role, responsibility and requirements of the vacancy.
- Agencies are defining the important selection criteria required for a role which usually results in the development of no more than six criteria. It is not considered necessary to further weight selection criteria as agencies should include only the important criteria for the role, which would be equally weighted.

3.2 Advertising

Background

This section of the evaluation examines advertising for permanent and fixed-term vacancies (over 12 months duration). Commissioner's Direction No. 1 (CD No. 1) specifies that:

Where it is proposed to permanently appoint a person or promote an employee to perform duties in an Agency, the duties must be advertised in the Gazette unless the State Service Commissioner determines otherwise [Section 39(1) of the Act].

This Direction also specifies what information must be contained within the advertisement such as vacancy title, identification number and so on.

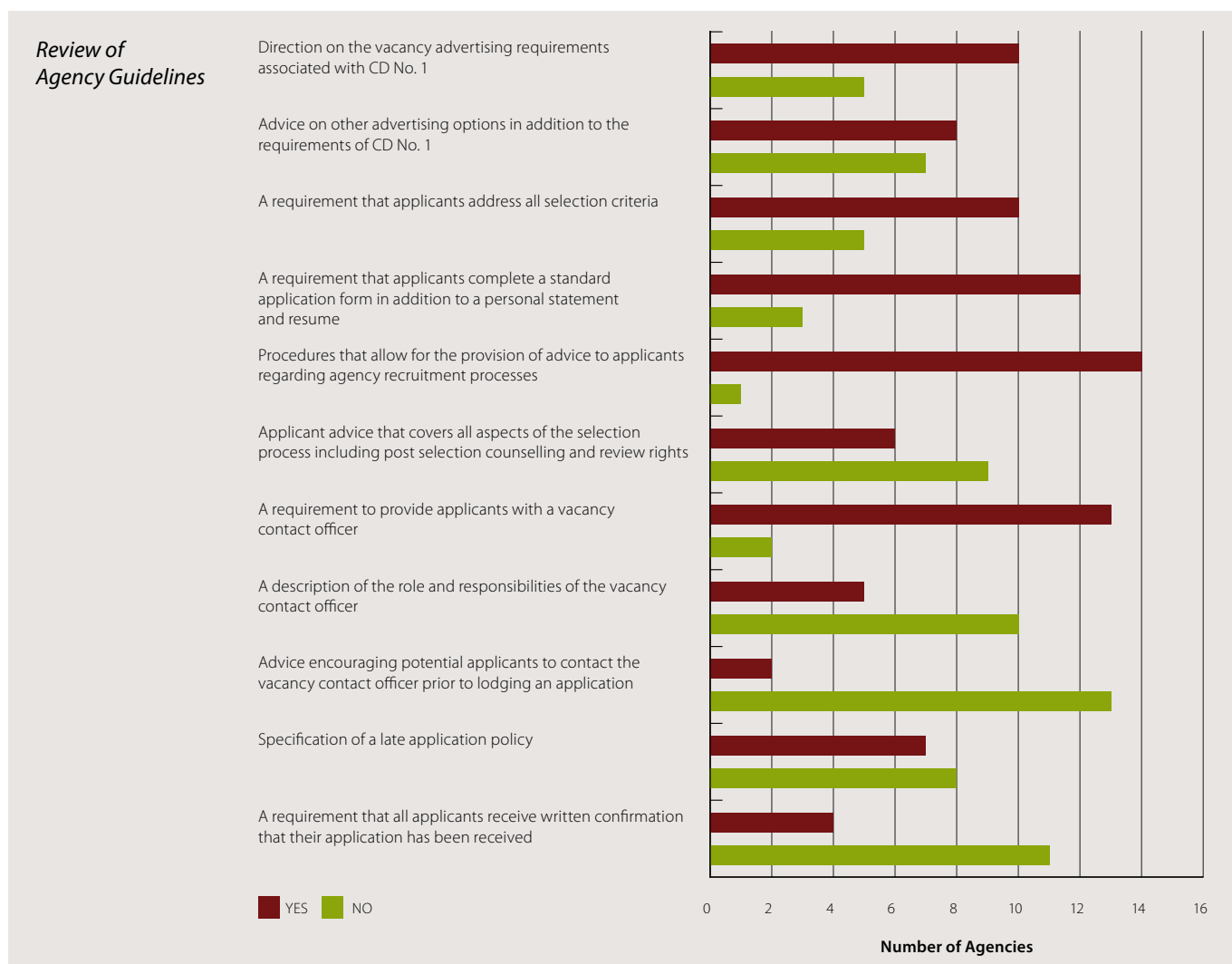
Matters Raised with OSSC:

- What is the role and how effective is the Gazette and the *Tas Jobs* website?
- How useful are other methods of advertising? Some agencies expressed a view that using other methods of advertising could assist them in 'selling' and better explaining the vacancies advertised.

Findings

Review of Sample Reports

- As the sample was drawn only from a list of gazetted vacancies, the report is unable to substantiate whether or not all vacancies were appropriately advertised. However, all sampled vacancies met the Gazette information requirements as outlined in CD No. 1.
- Some agencies also chose other methods of advertising a vacancy, such as local Tasmanian newspapers, professional association newsletters, recruitment organisations (such as Coopers Recruitment) and job websites (such as Career One and Seek Australia).
- For fixed-term vacancies (over 12 months duration) agencies advertised in the Gazette and some also informed employees within their agency separately.



Conclusion

All agencies met the minimum Gazette information requirements as specified in CD No. 1. In addition some agencies utilised other advertising mediums, usually for hard-to-fill vacancies.

The review of agency guidelines found that only two agencies had a requirement to encourage potential applicants to contact the nominated vacancy contact officer prior to lodging an application and only five agencies had advice regarding the role and responsibilities of the vacancy contact officer. In addition, only about half the agencies had a late application policy and four agencies only had a written requirement that dictated the need for all applicants to receive written confirmation of the receipt of their application. Improved information around these issues could greatly assist applicants and those managing the filling of vacancies.

Separate to the sample and guideline review, human resource operatives raised a number of issues concerning vacancy advertising. These issues were:

- A view that the Gazette had limitations as an advertising tool.
- Comment that local (consolidated) weekend newspaper advertisements, whilst useful for generally promoting the availability of job opportunities in the State Service and directing applicants to the *Tas Jobs* website, were not as effective in attracting the attention of potential applicants for hard-to-fill (often professional) vacancies.
- Consistent with this view, some agencies expressed a desire to have the capacity to place individual advertisements in local Tasmanian papers under certain circumstances. It was thought that this may provide agencies with scope to better 'sell' the vacancy by promoting the individual

culture and attributes of the agency and by providing an expanded description of the role. Agencies understood that any changes in this respect would need to be considered in the context of the current whole-of-government vacancy advertising policy.

- In addition to the previous point, some agencies appeared to be unaware or uncertain as to the range of advertising options available to them (e.g. trade gazettes, professional journals, online job websites) for advertising vacancies, particularly hard-to-fill vacancies. Also, only about 50 per cent of agencies provided advice in their guidelines on other options for advertising a vacancy in addition to the requirements of CD No. 1. On this issue it would appear that some agencies need to re-examine their advertising

requirements and develop and document the range of advertising options appropriate to the specific needs of their agency.

- Most agencies thought that some operational aspects of the *Tas Jobs* website could be enhanced. In particular, they were keen to explore the possibility of providing real-time vacancy advertising and a capacity to accept and manage online applications through the website. However, it was understood that any such considerations would need to take account of the move by some larger agencies to off-the-shelf application and management systems (such as *PageUp*), the effectiveness or otherwise of emerging e-recruitment technology, and importantly, the availability of adequate resources and funding.

Opportunities for Improvement Identified in the Evaluation

- Consideration could be given to examining the vacancy advertising issues raised by agencies. This might be accommodated through existing forums, the establishment of an appropriate agency reference group or through a formal review.
- Some agencies need to re-examine their advertising requirements and develop and document the range of advertising options appropriate to the specific needs of their agency. Options could include those methods already employed by some agencies such as: professional association newsletters and journals, recruitment organisations and job websites. More innovative options such as targeting emails to appropriate institutions/ organisations and using contemporary communication tools such as *Facebook* could also be considered.
- To assist those managing vacancies, all agencies could consider including in their guidelines advice as to:
 - o other options for advertising a vacancy in addition to the minimum requirements stated in CD No. 1;
 - o the role and responsibilities of the vacancy contact officer; and
 - o their late application policy.
- To assist potential applicants, all agencies could encourage applicants (via the advertisement) to contact the vacancy contact officer prior to lodging their application.
- Agencies should provide written confirmation to applicants upon receipt of their applications.

4. SELECTION PANELS

Background

This area of the evaluation looks at the composition of selection panels and the expertise of panel members. Chairpersons, in particular, usually have the responsibility for appointing selection panel members, drafting the selection report and post selection counselling. Panel members should have a good understanding of the requirements of the advertised vacancy and should know how and when to declare a conflict of interest. Primarily, it is important that those who take on these roles have the knowledge and proficiency to carry out the task and can bring objectivity and fairness to the process.

Matters Raised with OSSC:

- What should be the composition of selection panels?
Do they need to include:
 - o a certain number of panel members;
 - o a gender balance;
 - o at least one member from outside the immediate work area or the agency;
 - o members who are at the same or higher classification level than the vacancy.
- How do we deal with potential conflicts of interest for panel members?
- Should all selection panels have at least one member who is trained and/or experienced in selection?

Findings

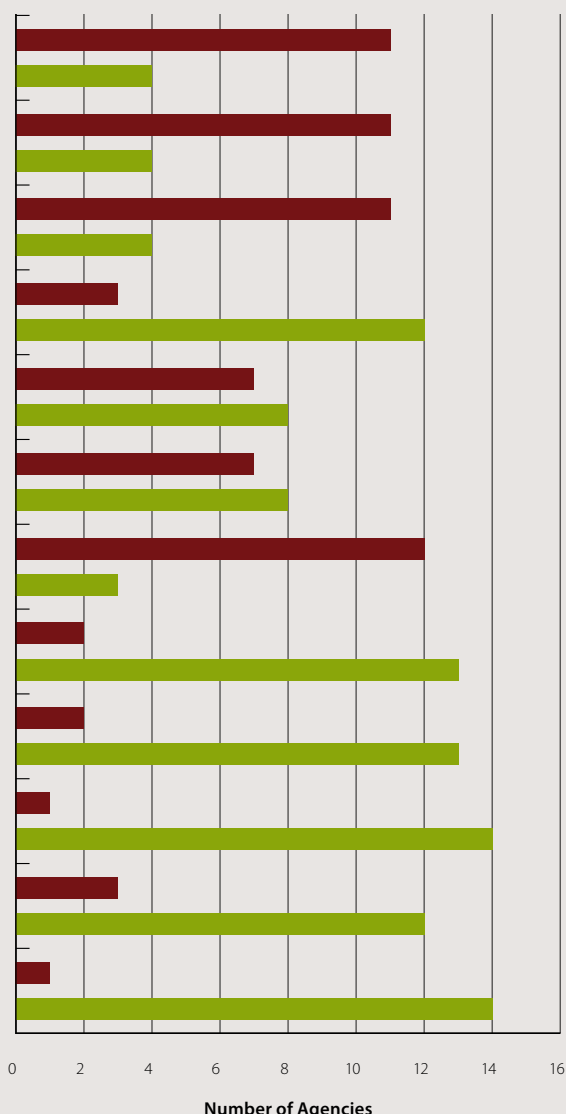
Review of Sample Reports

- On average, there were three people on selection panels, of this, 57% were female and 43% were male.
- 85% of selection panels were gender balanced although two larger agencies (at times) had selection panels that were not gender balanced.
- 56% of selection panels had members who were external to the immediate work area.
- 24% of selection panels had a member who was external to the agency.
- Three agencies always included a panel member external to the agency.

Review of Agency Guidelines

- A direction that selection panels must have at least 3 members
- A direction that selection panels must have gender balance
- A direction that selection panels must have someone from outside the immediate work area
- A direction on the preferred classification level of State Service employee panel members compared to the classification of the vacancy.
- Advice on the circumstances in which a panel may need to include someone external to the organisation
- Advice to panel members on declaring and addressing potential conflicts of interest
- A direction that at least one panel member must have had training or experience in selection processes
- Specification of the training requirements for selection panel chairpersons
- Specification of the training requirements for other selection panel members
- A direction that all managers, supervisors and members of selection panels undertake selection training
- A reference to the agency providing internal training in recruitment and selection practices
- A reference to the agency providing access to external training in recruitment and selection practices

■ YES ■ NO



Conclusion

The sample of reports substantiated the general practice that most State Service selection panels are comprised of three people and are gender balanced. However only 56 per cent of selection panels had members who were external to the immediate work area and only 24 per cent had a member who was external to the agency; essentially this was a reflection of individual agency policies where some agencies specifically mandated a need for independent panel membership whilst others were silent on the issue.

While the majority of agency guidelines had a direction or recommendation that selection panels must have at least three members; be gender balanced; and have someone from outside the immediate work area, many agencies indicated

that they were reviewing their guidelines to remove reference to gender balance and the prescription of panel composition. Rather than considering panel membership in light of these issues, the emphasis is on choosing panel members who have an understanding of the role and responsibilities of the vacancy and who bring objectivity and fairness to the process.

Only three agencies gave direction in their guidelines on the issue of the preferred classification level of selection panel members compared to the classification of the vacancy. Feedback from a few agencies suggested that there may be a small movement towards allowing selection panel members to be at or below the classification level of the vacancy in order to expand the pool of suitable employees available to sit on selection panels.

However, it would normally be expected that panel members are equivalent to or higher than the classification level of the vacancy.

A review of agency guidelines found that most agencies specified that at least one selection panel member should have training or experience in selection processes. However, very few agencies made mention of (internal or external) training for selection panel chairpersons, other panel members or managers. In addition, only about 50 per cent of agencies provided advice on conflicts of interest issues for panel members.

The Training Consortium (TTC) offers agencies a selection course for prospective selection panel members entitled *Working with Merit for Successful Selections*. A review of their course and participant statistics for 2007-08 and 2008-09 showed that over these two years, courses conducted increased from four to seven and participants from 57 to 98. However, the bulk of participants have come from a small number of agencies and in most cases individual agency numbers (compared with the size of the organisation) were low.

Whilst some agencies may conduct in-house training for panel members undertaking selections, only a small number of agencies pay particular attention in their guidelines to prescribing the skill or experience requirements around this issue. It could be said that most agencies need to significantly improve their guideline requirements and their selection training efforts.

Opportunities for Improvement Identified in the Evaluation

- In agency guidelines, it is important to emphasise that where possible all selection panel members should have a good understanding of the role and responsibilities of the advertised vacancy and must ensure that acceptable standards of probity, fairness, consistency and ethical conduct will be applied throughout their selection activities. Panel composition should be about these core issues.
- The inclusion of panel members from outside the immediate work area and/or external to the agency can improve the perception of fairness of the selection process, from an applicant's perspective.
- It would normally be expected that selection panel members are higher than or equivalent to the classification level of the vacancy.
- Whilst all selection panel members should be trained, it is preferable to have at least one panel member trained in (or have a good knowledge of) selection processes. As it would appear that there are comparatively low numbers of employees being trained, most agencies could improve: their training efforts; their directions around who should be trained; and provide advice on how to access (internal or external) selection panel training. In the interim, the production of a suitable guide or toolkit to assist untrained selection panel members would be useful.
- All agencies should provide advice to panel members on potential conflict of interest situations. For example, advice that panel members should provide notification of potential conflicts as soon as a situation is identified so the chairperson can manage the situation appropriately. Further, whilst preferable that panel members are not referees, where it is unavoidable, the referee report should be completed prior to interviews. It would also be advisable to obtain an additional referee report from another source, where possible.

5. THE SELECTION PROCESS

Background

Shortlisting assists in identifying those applicants who best meet the selection criteria by comparing their experience and qualifications with the advertised selection criteria and against other applicants. Shortlisting is usually based on written applications.

This section of the evaluation looks at the way selection panels shortlist applicants and the selection methods used for selecting the nominee. The evaluation also looks at how widely shortlisting was used and the extent to which selection methods other than interviews were used, including the use of desktop selections (selections based on written applications only).

Matters Raised with OSSC:

- Should shortlisting be used in all selections or is it market driven (that is, primarily used only where there are a large number of applicants)?
- Should applicants not addressing the selection criteria be automatically excluded from being shortlisted for interview?
- Are there misconceptions around having to interview internal applicants and around selecting a nominee if the applicant pool is poor?
- What kinds of selection methods can be used by selection panels, other than interviews?
- Should panels develop an interview question for each selection criteria?

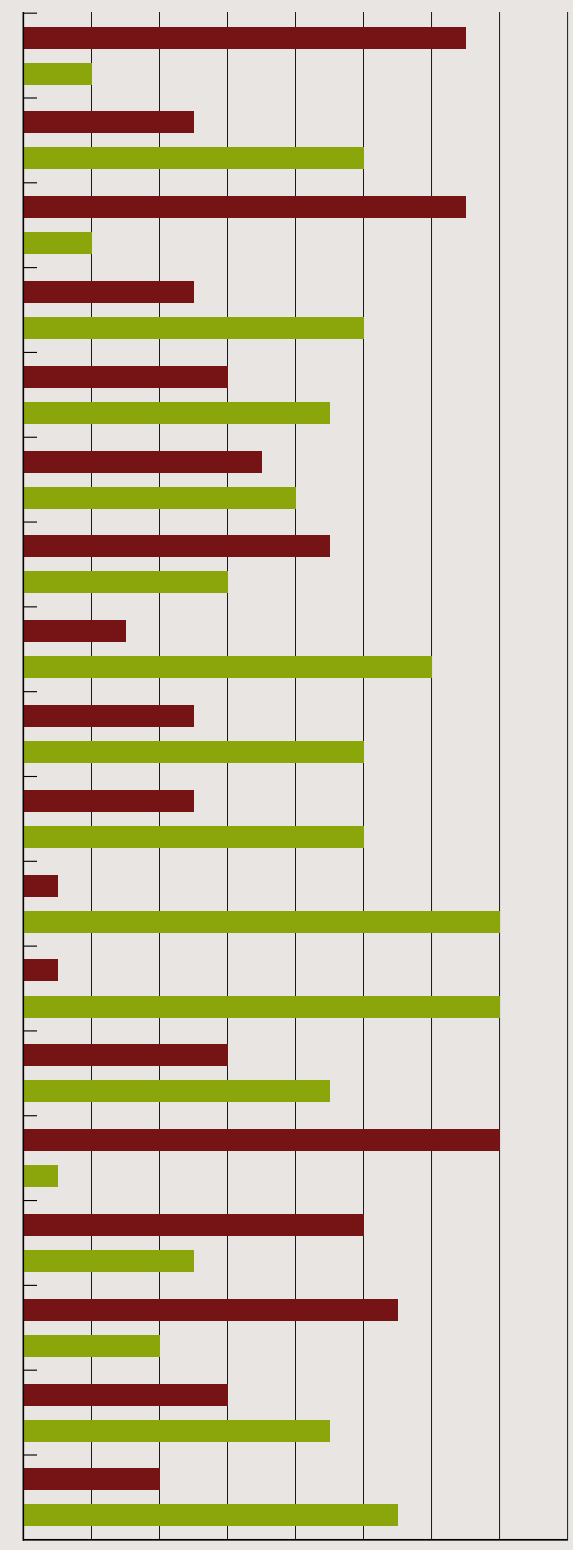
Findings

Review of Sample Reports

- All of the sample selection reports reviewed showed evidence of shortlisting taking place.
- The majority of selection panels used a comparative assessment of all applicants to shortlist, although some simply assessed applications on an individual basis.
- The reasons for shortlisting were given in 75% of cases.
- 25% of selection reports listed 'failure to address the selection criteria' as the reason not to shortlist an applicant for interview.
- Of those shortlisted; interviews (and in some cases, other additional selection methods) were used in 90% of selections, while desktop selections (selections based on written applications only) were used in 10% of cases.
- On average, about eight applicants applied for each vacancy advertised and about three applicants were shortlisted for interview.
- When interviews were used, an interview question was created for each selection criteria in 81% of cases.
- 11% of selection panels used a combination of interview and some other selection method. Other selection methods used included:
 - o presentations;
 - o written or verbal analysis/critique of an issue or situation;
 - o presentation of a portfolio of work;
 - o trade tests/professional tests;
 - o role plays;
 - o keyboard/computer tests;
 - o written exercises including testing the correct use of grammar;
 - o practical activities; and
 - o psychological profiling.
- Only one agency appeared to have a documented process for desktop assessments and this was only applied to selections where initial shortlisting made it clear that there was only one outstanding applicant.
- Under 1% of selections were discontinued due to lack of suitable candidates.

Review of Agency Guidelines

- Advice on shortlisting processes
- A recommendation that panels exclude applicants from interview if they do not meet the minimum requirements or other applicants meet the criteria to a higher standard
- A direction that all panel members are to be involved in shortlisting
- A recommendation that panel members initially shortlist independently then finalise a list as a group
- A recommendation that applicants failing to address the selection criteria can still be considered if they appear competitive
- Advice to panels that there is no obligation to interview in-service applicants (unless they meet the selection criteria and are competitive)
- Advice that encourages panels (when appropriate) to obtain information other than what is presented in the written application to assist with shortlisting
- A direction to panels to check that applicants meet permanent residency or visa requirements
- A direction that panels record the reasons for not shortlisting an applicant for interview
- A direction to panels to simultaneously advise all applicants in writing as to whether or not they have been shortlisted for interview
- A direction to panels to offer post selection counselling to applicants not shortlisted for interview, at the time they are excluded
- Advice to selection panels on the use of desktop assessments
- Advice to panels on accommodating the interview needs of interstate and overseas applicants
- Advice to panels on interview selection methods
- Advice to panels on other selection methods
- Advice to panels on preparing for and conducting interviews
- A direction to panels that applicants should be given adequate notice of their interview time
- Advice on the use of second interviews



■ YES ■ NO

0 2 4 6 8 10 12 14 16

Number of Agencies

Conclusion

All agencies used a shortlisting process and most agencies documented the reasons for shortlisting individual applicants, although a quarter simply stated 'failure to address the selection criteria' as that reason. However, only about a third of agencies had a direction for panel members to record reasons for *not* shortlisting applicants for interview.

The majority of agencies used interviews exclusively as their selection method and an interview question was created for each selection criterion in most cases. On average, three applicants were shortlisted for interview. Whilst a limited number of agencies used additional selection methods (as well as interviewing candidates) there is considerable potential for all agencies to consider using other selection methods. There was little evidence that selection reports viewed used second interviews as part of the selection process.

The review of agency guidelines indicated that only one agency provided advice on undertaking desktop assessments even though desktop selections were made in 10 per cent of the selection reports viewed. Improved direction and advice around this method may encourage greater application of the process in cases where it is clear that a particular applicant is an obvious choice. If fairly administered, this form of selection can provide a quicker and more efficient selection outcome.

Most agencies had a requirement that selection panel members be involved in shortlisting. About a third of agencies had a requirement that each panel member initially shortlist independently and to record their reasons for later discussion with the full panel.

Opportunities for Improvement Identified in the Evaluation

- At present, only 11 per cent of selection panels choose to use other selection methods as well as an interview. All agencies should consider using a range of complimentary selection methods which individual selection panels could customise to suit the particular requirements of the vacancy under selection.
- All agencies could consider advising selection panels that where applicants look competitive, but have not specifically addressed the selection criteria, they seek additional information before routinely excluding those applicants from further consideration. These applicants are often external to the State Service and do not always fully appreciate the relevance of specifically addressing each selection criteria.
- To assist selection panels, all agencies could consider providing:
 - o advice that internal applicants do not need to be routinely interviewed if they do not meet the requirements of the vacancy or that other candidates meet those requirements to a greater extent;
 - o advice and direction on utilising desktop assessments;
 - o a requirement for selection panels to document the reasons for the non-shortlisting of applicants for interview;
 - o a direction that all applicants be simultaneously advised as to whether or not they have been shortlisted for interview, and in the case of those excluded from interview, they be offered post selection counselling at that stage; and
 - o advice that where appropriate, panels should consider the use of second interviews.
- Interview panels usually develop a question for each selection criteria. While it is useful to develop questions which encapsulate the selection criteria, panels should be mindful that questions need to be aimed at allowing the applicant to provide enough relevant information for the panel to be able to make an informed decision. Whilst selection panel members should not introduce different or inconsistent lines of questioning, impromptu questions exploring a candidate's response is useful. In some cases, a criterion might be better assessed through other methods such as testing or referee comments.

6. REFEREE REPORTS

Background

This section of the evaluation examines referee reports. Generally, it is assumed that referee reports are from employers, managers or workplace supervisors. Referee reports can greatly influence the panel's selection. They are a way of validating information and of acquiring new information which may not have come out during the selection process. However, referee reports are often used only as a mechanism to confirm a decision or to verify information about the most competitive applicants for comparative assessment rather than being used as an integral component of the selection process.

This section looks at the preferred method of obtaining referee reports and whether information was acquired only on certain aspects of the selection criteria (to validate a decision or enhance the information gathered through the selection process) or whether, in general, information is collected on all of the selection criteria. It also looks at whether or not the referee had a direct working relationship with the applicant.

Matters Raised with OSSC:

- Should referee reports be used as an integral component of the selection process or simply to confirm a decision?
- How should referee reports be best collected and are signatures required?
- Should referee comments be collected on all selection criteria or just for those criteria that need clarification?
- Should reports only be from supervisors (that is, not from referees who do not have a direct working relationship with the applicant) and should reports be obtained for applicants that are 'known' to the selection panel, usually because they are work colleagues.

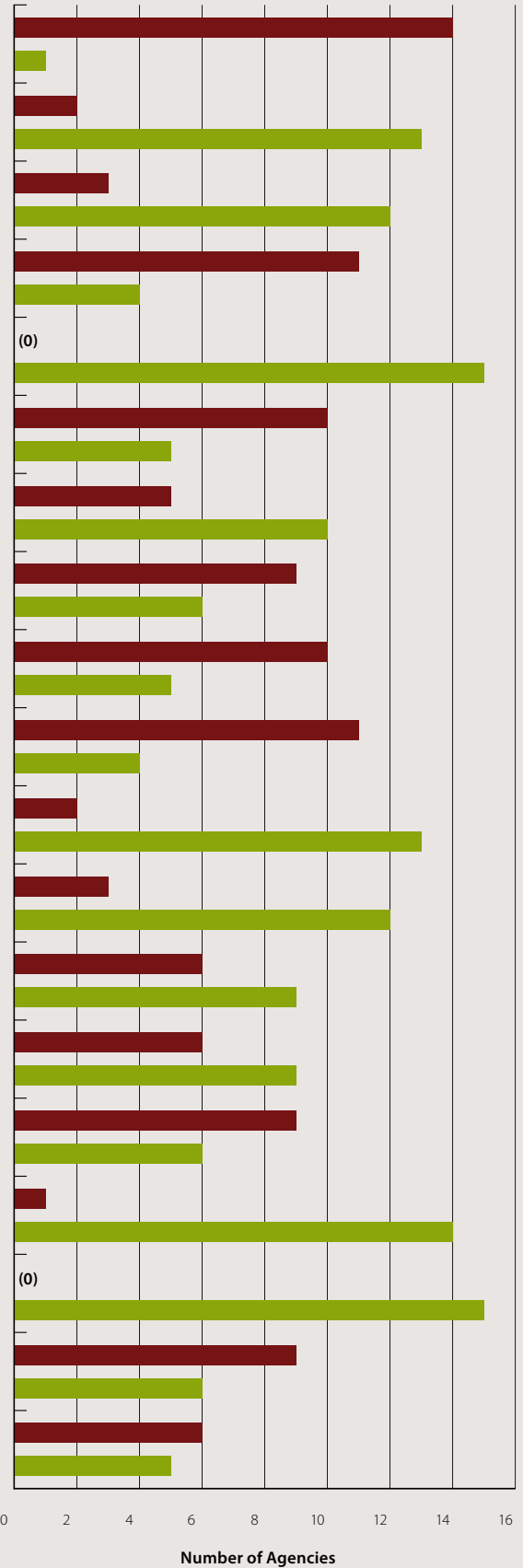
Findings

Review of Sample Reports

- 76% of selection reports included referee reports. In many cases where they weren't obtained, the reason given was that the preferred applicant was 'known to the panel'. The Auditor-General's Special Report No. 49, *Staff Selection in Government Agencies* (December 2003) also found that referee reports were often not collected because of the familiarity of the successful candidate to selection panel members.
- For those selections where referee reports were obtained, in 47% of cases reports were obtained for all shortlisted applicants while for the remaining 53% of cases reports were only obtained to finalise or validate a final candidate.
- Of those obtained, only 3% of reports were collected from referees other than those nominated by the applicant. Reasons given for obtaining referee reports from non-nominated referees were either because the panel were unable to contact the nominated referee or they saw value in obtaining further information 'from work colleagues'.
- In terms of collection methods, 47% of referee reports were conducted as telephone interviews and 62% were conducted as written exercises (note that these two percentages exceed 100% because in some selection reports, both written and verbal reports were obtained). As a general rule, written reports tended to be a large agency practice and verbal telephone reports a small agency practice.
- Comments were obtained for all selection criteria in 88% of cases.
- 62% of referee reports collected were signed by the referee however, less than 1% of referee reports were counter-signed by the applicant after the referee report was obtained.
- The nominated referee was the applicant's work supervisor in 99% of cases.
- The applicant was 'known to the panel' in 48% of cases, where referee reports were obtained.

Review of Agency Guidelines

- Advice on obtaining referee reports
- Advice that referee reports are an integral part of the selection process, not just a means of verifying claims and statements
- Advice on the type of vacancies that require the gathering of referee reports
- Advice on the collection of referee reports both prior to and post shortlisting
- A direction to contact at least one referee for all shortlisted applicants
- A direction to contact at least one referee for all candidates considered suitable for appointment
- A direction to contact more than one referee for leading candidates
- A recommendation that selection panels obtain verbal rather than written referee reports
- A direction that selection panels establish that referees have sufficient knowledge of the applicant to provide comments
- A direction that referees must be a current or former work supervisor/manager
- Advice that referee comments can be provided to the applicant if requested
- Advice on the handling of unfavourable referee comment
- Advice on how to manage referee reports obtained from selection panel members
- A recommendation that referee reports obtained from selection panel members should be provided prior to interview
- Advice regarding the contact of referees not nominated by the applicant
- A direction that referee reports be obtained (where appropriate) even if a candidate is well known to the panel
- A direction that applicants be shown a written copy of referee comments
- A direction that referees either sign their written report or provide email confirmation that it is a true and accurate record of conversation
- The agency provides a referee report template (four 'unknown' answers)



Conclusion

Overall, 76 per cent of the sample of selection reports viewed included referee reports. Of these, around half of the referee reports were obtained for all shortlisted applicants, and the other half to validate the claims of the nominee. In almost all cases, the referee was the applicant's work supervisor.

The collection method for referee reports tended towards written exercises rather than verbal telephone reports although this reflected a large agency bias. In most cases (88%) comments were obtained for all selection criteria. About 60 per cent of all reports viewed were signed by the referee. This corresponds with about 60 per cent of agency guidelines having a requirement that referees sign their written report.

In terms of other agency guidelines, most agencies provided a direction on obtaining referee reports and a direction on the collection of referee reports both prior to and post shortlisting. About half of all agencies provided a referee report template for the use of selection panels.

No agency provided advice as to contacting referees for all shortlisted applicants, although this did happen in 47 per cent of cases. Over 60 per cent of agencies had a requirement to contact at least one referee for all candidates considered suitable for appointment or close to selection.

Opportunities for Improvement Identified in the Evaluation

- It is clear that referee reports are not obtained in some selection exercises and in some others, often only for the nominee. As a minimum, referee reports should normally be obtained for the nominee and preferably for an appropriate number of leading applicants (this includes obtaining referee reports for 'known' applicants). These reports should be from referees who have had a direct working relationship with the applicant. Proposed CD No. 1 amendments to allow an increased capacity in making subsequent selections from a selection process, further supports this position.
- Only three per cent of referee reports were obtained from referees other than those nominated by the applicant. Agency guidelines should indicate that it may be appropriate in some cases to contact referees not nominated by the applicant. In cases such as these, applicants should be made aware that the selection panel is contacting these referees and that the applicant should be offered a right of response if there is adverse comment.
- To assist selection panels, agency guidelines should provide:
 - o a direction to always obtain referee reports, even in cases where candidates are known to the panel;
 - o a direction that referee reports should primarily be obtained from work supervisors;
 - o advice on the preferred method of obtaining those reports (written versus verbal);
 - o advice on handling unfavourable referee comment; and
 - o for potential review purposes, a requirement that referees sign their written report or provide email confirmation of the validity of a written summary of comments obtained verbally.

7. SELECTION REPORTS

Background

This area of the evaluation examines selection reports. Selection reports are the main documentation to come out of a selection process. They should include information regarding the selection process and reasons for the selection recommendations. Often comparisons are made between applicants to rate the most suitable for the vacancy. Selection reports should contain enough information about the selection for the decision to be justified to the satisfaction of the delegate.

This part of the evaluation includes an examination of the composition of selection reports, whether there were any dissenting views from panel members or the delegate regarding the successful applicant or applicants and whether reports were checked by human resources personnel.

Matters Raised with OSSC:

- There are concerns that the quality and length of reports vary across agencies.
- Are dissenting views of panel members or delegates being documented?
- Should all reports be checked by human resources to provide consistency in information and format?
- Do selection reports tend to be interview reports with assessments not adequately reflecting information contained in applications and referee reports?

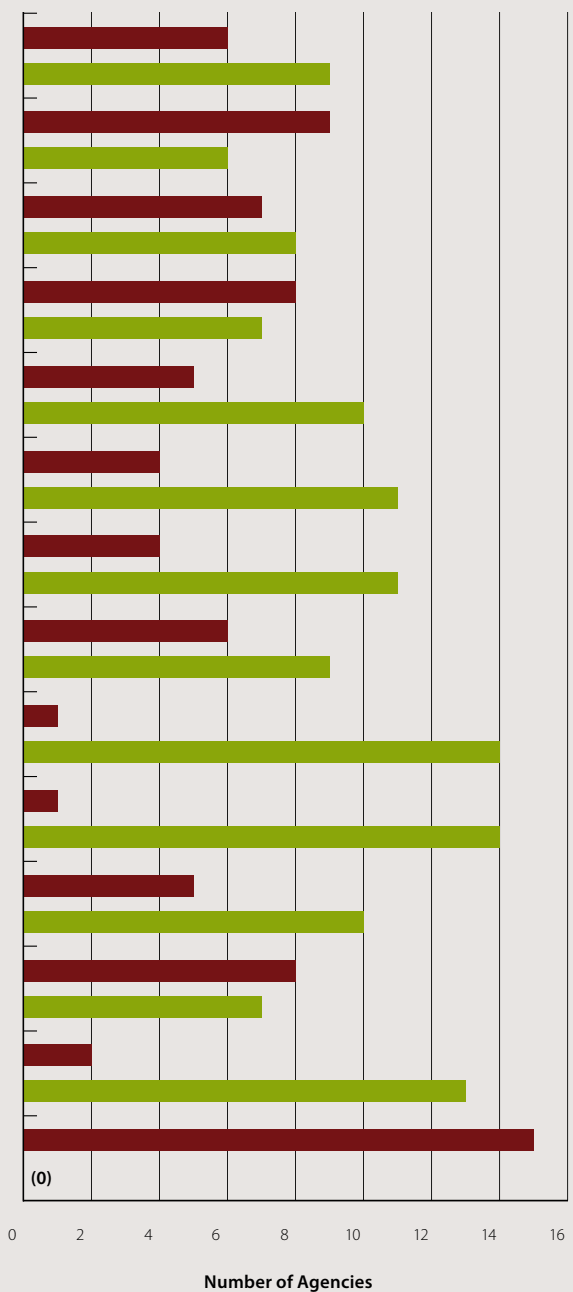
Findings

Review of Sample Reports

- 91% of reports referred to the candidate's application. The other reports only referred to the interview (or other selection method), suggesting that the written applications were used for shortlisting only.
- 76% of selection reports had referee reports attached, however only 55% of selection reports referred to referee reports in individual applicant assessments.
- 88% of reports referred to interview performance. The majority of those that didn't refer to interview performance were desktop selections, that is, the assessment and selection was based on the written application only.
- The average number of pages in selection reports was eight.
- It was estimated that 80% of reports contained a high level of detail, 20% contained a lower level.
- None of the reports contained dissenting views from panel members and less than 1% had evidence of the decision being challenged by the delegate.
- 89% of reports showed evidence that they had been checked in some way by agency human resource operatives.

Review of Agency Guidelines

- A requirement that the selection panel chairperson be primarily responsible for drafting the report
- A requirement that the selection report clearly outlines how the merit selection was arrived at
- An option to use a rating scale to rank applicants in order of suitability
- A requirement that (as a minimum) selection reports contain individual assessments, a comparative statement and referee reports on leading applicants
- A requirement that selection reports list suitable applicants in order of merit
- A direction to list a contingency nominee to cover situations where the original nominee withdraws
- A requirement that selection panels check any approved essential requirements prior to completing the selection report for approval
- A requirement that selection reports contain a recommendation on the proposed commencement salary (not classification level)
- A requirement that selection reports contain a recommendation on the length of probation for appointments
- A requirement that selection reports include recommendations on adjustments required in the workplace to accommodate the preferred candidate
- A direction that selection reports only recommend appointment or promotion if the panel is fully satisfied that the candidate(s) are suitable for appointment
- A direction to selection panel members on how to submit a minority report or document any disagreement
- A direction that all panel members sign and date the report
- The agency provides a selection report template



Conclusion

On average, most of the reports contained a high level of detail, but were concise. The average number of report pages was eight.

From the reports viewed, data tended to confirm that selection report assessments were heavily written around interview performance rather than including information from written applications. Further, referee reports tended to be used to confirm, rather than assist the development of assessments.

Only eight agencies provided advice in their guidelines on how to submit a minority report or document any disagreement. While it was found that only a very small percentage of reports viewed contained evidence of dissenting views from delegates, some form of guidance in this area may be helpful for panel members and delegates. Such guidance may encourage individual panel members to be more open should they have concerns about the appropriateness of the selection outcome.

Most agency guidelines provided a selection report template and recommendations as to the format and information required for the selection report. However, based on the reports viewed, and an analysis of agency guidelines, whilst most reports generally provided the basic information, there was scope to include additional information from a best practice perspective.

Opportunities for Improvement Identified in the Evaluation

- Some smaller agencies are in a position to thoroughly check each selection report and verify the information. Some larger agencies have difficulty doing this because of the sheer volume of reports being processed. It is therefore advisable to have comprehensive guidelines and templates to assist chairpersons and panel members in writing the selection report. Advice and templates should include the following:
 - o full details of: the vacancy; the names and titles of selection panel members; the number of applications received and whether they are internal or external to the State Service; a shortlist with reasons for applicant exclusions; interview dates and methods of assessment as well as an order of merit; and a clear comparative assessment outlining how the selection outcomes were arrived at. It is important to emphasise that applicant assessments should only be developed following full consideration of that information available from applications, interview performance and referee reports, rather than an over reliance on interview performance;
 - o recommendations concerning the nominees length of probation, the proposed commencement salary and any adjustments that may be required to the workplace to accommodate the nominee; and
 - o all panel members need to sign and date their selection reports.
- All agencies could consider providing guidance for panel members around arrangements for the submission of minority reports or the documentation of any panel disagreements around process or outcomes.

8. THE ROLE OF THE DELEGATE AND NOTIFICATION OF OUTCOMES

Background

A delegate is usually a senior manager with a formal delegation to approve selection recommendations. This area of the evaluation examines the role of the delegate and the availability of advice regarding minority reports. This section of the evaluation also looks at whether unsuccessful applicants were notified of the outcome of the selection and, if so, at what stage in the selection process. As a general rule, unsuccessful applicants should be notified of their exclusion in a timely manner.

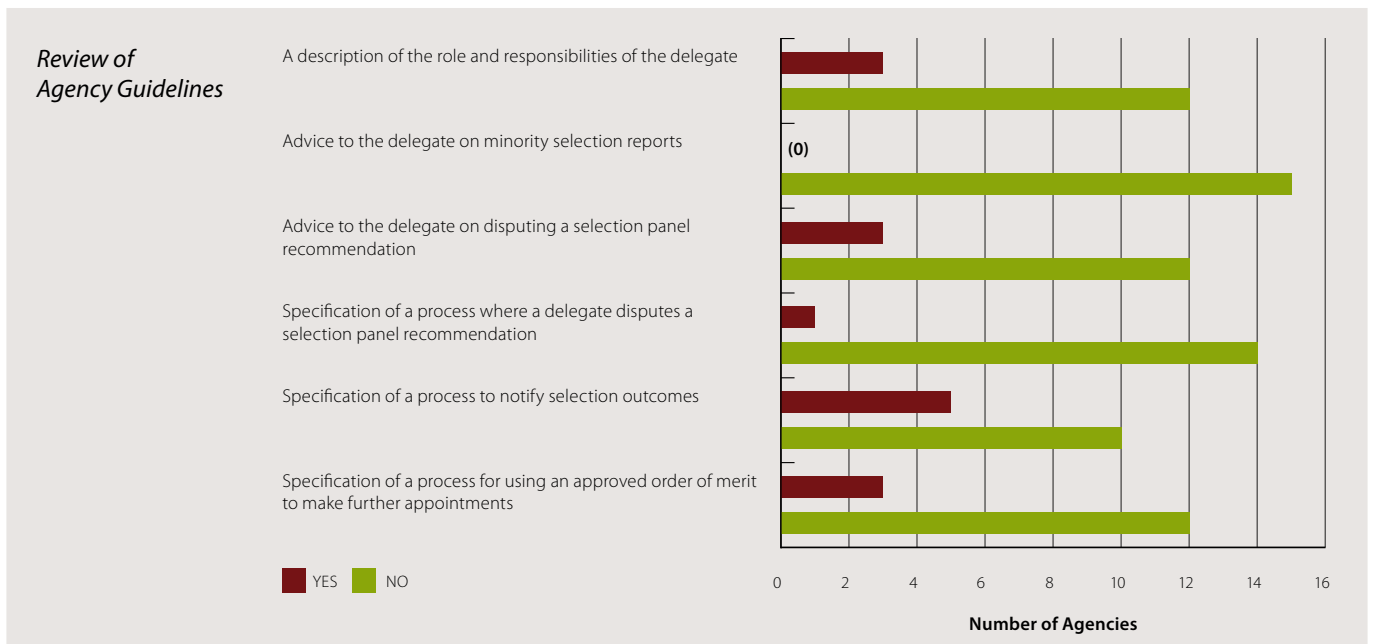
Matters Raised with OSSC:

- The role and function of the delegate is often not clearly understood by applicants, the selection panel or the delegate themselves.
- Should applicants shortlisted out of the selection process have to wait until the successful applicant is approved before receiving notification of the outcome?
- Should all applicants receive the name of the nominee in their notification of outcome advice?

Findings

Review of Sample Reports

- It was found that less than 1% of reports were challenged by the delegate.
- Unsuccessful applicants were notified of their exclusion 'following shortlisting' in only 37% of cases.
- All applicants were notified in writing of the final outcome of the selection in 92% of cases. Those who were not notified were usually external to the State Service.
- All applicants (that is, internal and external to the State Service) were notified in writing of the name of the nominee in only 22% of cases.



Conclusion

Based on a review of agency guidelines, only three agencies provided a description of the role and responsibilities of the delegate. No agency provided advice to the delegate on how to manage a minority selection report and few provided guidelines on how a delegate could dispute a selection outcome. Feedback from recruitment operatives also suggests that some selection panels, human resource operatives and delegates are unsure of their responsibilities in this area or the extent of their authority in examining and challenging selection panel recommendations.

Unsuccessful applicants were notified of their exclusion 'following shortlisting' in only 37 per cent of cases. This means the majority of applicants who were excluded from the selection process following shortlisting were left waiting for the selection to be finalised in order to be notified of the outcome. This could be a wait of up to two months, and sometimes longer. To avoid this situation, it is important to advise these applicants, particularly those who are not State Service employees, so that they can immediately consider other employment opportunities.

The majority of applicants were notified of the final outcome following approval of the selection although only about 22 per cent were notified (in writing) of the name of the nominee. This reflects the common agency practice of only notifying State Service applicants of the name of the nominee, as they are the only applicant group that have potential review rights.

Only a few agencies provided advice to selection panels regarding recommending an order of merit, should the nominee not take up the vacancy or further appointments are required.

Opportunities for Improvement Identified in the Evaluation

- There is a significant omission in most agency guidelines regarding the provision of advice on the role and function of the delegate, including issues such as managing minority reports and disputing selection outcomes. Specific guidelines for delegates in these matters could produce a more robust, efficient and open selection process.
- In order to assist applicants, agencies should notify all applicants at the time of their exclusion from the selection process, for example, following shortlisting. Some agencies already do this, followed by another letter at vacancy finalisation. The practice of only notifying State Service employees of the name of the successful applicant is justifiable given current selection review arrangements.
- Agencies should strongly recommend to selection panels that selection reports include an order of merit list for leading candidates. This will also assist the process of making subsequent appointments, if required.

9. POST SELECTION COUNSELLING

Background

Post selection counselling is an important phase of the selection process. Its purpose is to provide unsuccessful applicants with constructive feedback which will provide them with information as to why they were unsuccessful and assist them with future job applications. From a management perspective, effective post selection counselling together with an open selection process also minimises the need for employees to seek recourse through lodgement of a formal selection review. Usually, the selection panel chairperson is the delegated post selection counsellor.

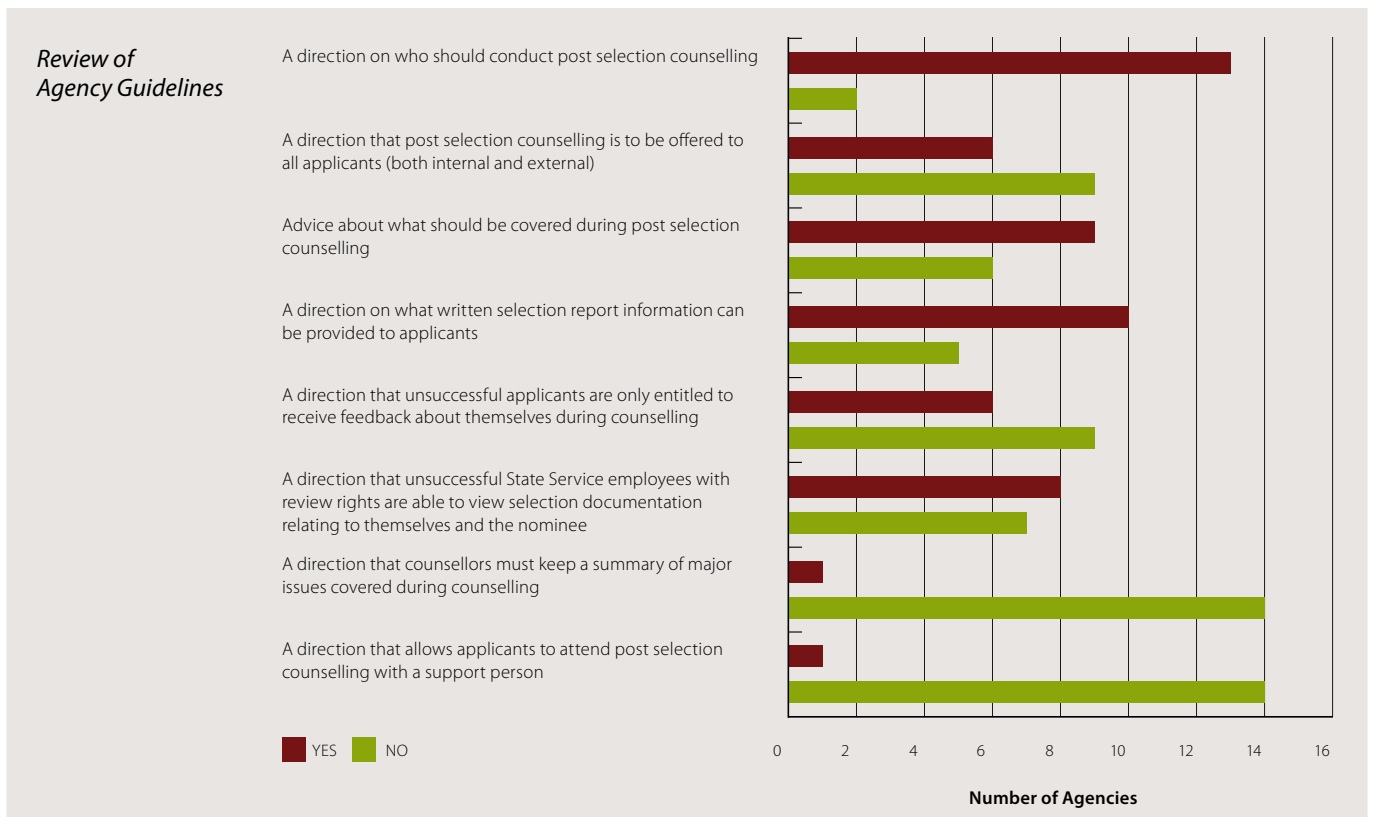
Matters Raised with OSSC:

- Should selection panel members and chairpersons be given more guidance and training in relation to post selection counselling?
- Should post selection counselling be offered to unsuccessful candidates at the time they are excluded from the selection process?

Findings

Review of Sample Reports

- Post selection counselling was offered to unsuccessful candidates, at the time they were excluded from shortlisting, in only 29% of cases. This was due to the fact that only five agencies offered post selection counselling at the shortlisting stage.
- Post selection counselling was offered to unsuccessful candidates, at vacancy finalisation, in 84% of cases. In practice, all but two larger agencies appeared to always offer post selection counselling to all applicants.
- Those not offered post selection counselling were almost always applicants external to the State Service.



Conclusion

It was found that 84 per cent of unsuccessful candidates were offered post selection counselling at vacancy finalisation. The shortfall relates primarily to practices at two larger agencies where usually counselling was not offered to external applicants but was provided if requested. Conversely, only five agencies appeared to offer post selection counselling to applicants at the time they were excluded from shortlisting. This was largely related to the fact that most agencies don't notify applicants of their exclusion and therefore lose the capacity to offer post selection counselling at that stage of the selection process.

This finding is consistent with that contained in the Auditor-General's Special Report No. 49, *Staff Selection in Government Agencies* (December 2003) which also found that 84 per cent of unsuccessful applicants were offered post selection counselling with some agencies not offering post selection counselling to unsuccessful non-State Service applicants.

With regard to agency guidelines, only 40 per cent of agencies had a direction that post selection counselling was to be offered to all applicants (both internal and external), and only about half of all agencies provided advice on what information applicants were able to receive and what should be covered during post selection counselling. Eight agencies also had a direction that unsuccessful State Service employees with review rights were able to view selection documentation relating to themselves and the nominee.

Accordingly it would appear that all agencies are performing well in terms of offering post selection counselling but opportunities exist for this to be offered earlier in the selection process for those not shortlisted for interview. Therefore, there is scope to improve agency guidelines around these matters.

Opportunities for Improvement Identified in the Evaluation

- As a standard practice, unsuccessful applicants should be afforded the opportunity to receive post selection counselling. However, it is accepted that this may not always be practical for selections related to vacancies that attract a large volume of external applicants. Notwithstanding, the timely provision of post selection counselling to unsuccessful applicants, particularly those external to the State Service, can negate perceptions of bias and assist and encourage these applicants in applying for future State Service vacancies.
- In order to assist selection panel members and chairpersons, agencies should consider adding more detail to their agency guidelines regarding post selection counselling. This could include advice about:
 - o the rules and procedures for providing post selection counselling;
 - o advice on the subject areas to be covered during the counselling; and
 - o an outline of the information that could be made available to applicants about the selection process, themselves and/or the nominee.

10. SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

10.1 Applicants, Nominee and Incumbency

Background

This section of the evaluation is included for information and discussion purposes. It looks at the average number of applicants for a vacancy and whether they were internal to the agency, internal to the State Service or external to the State Service. This information is also provided about the nominee. This section also examines incumbency and whether acting in a vacancy gives an applicant an additional advantage in securing that vacancy.

Matters Raised with OSSC:

- Are the majority of successful applicants already internal to the State Service?
- Are candidates given an advantage if they act in a vacancy prior to applying for that vacancy?

Findings

Review of Sample Reports

Applicants

- The average number of applicants for a vacancy was eight.
- Of this, a quarter (24%) was internal to the agency. The majority (67%) were external to the State Service; and only 9% were internal to the State Service (but not from the agency in which the vacancy was advertised).
- The average number of those interviewed was three.
- Of those interviewed, 45% of interviewees were internal to the agency; 11% were internal to the State Service (but not from the agency in which the vacancy was advertised); and 44% were external to the State Service.

Nominee

- The majority of successful applicants were internal to the agency (63%), while 29% were external to the State Service; and 8% were internal to the State Service (but not from the agency in which the vacancy was advertised).

Incumbency

- From our review of selection reports, the successful candidate had been acting in the role prior to being selected to fill it on a permanent basis in 23% of cases. This represents 46 out of the 200 selection reports viewed. Of those 46 candidates:
 - 11 had been acting for 1-3 months;
 - 10 had been acting for 3-6 months;
 - 15 had been acting for 6-12 months; and
 - 10 had been acting for over 12 months.

Conclusion

From our sample, we found that 67 per cent of applicants were external to the State Service; however the majority of successful applicants (71%) were internal to the State Service.

Of the 200 selection reports viewed, the successful applicant had been acting in the role prior to being selected to fill it on a permanent basis in almost a quarter of cases. Thus, having work experience in the State Service, and particularly in the role for which the applicant is applying, provides the applicant with a competitive edge over others. Conversely, long-term acting in a vacancy may generate expectations which, if unfulfilled, may create difficult workplace consequences.

Opportunities for Improvement Identified in the Evaluation

- Although a large percentage of applicants for vacancies were external to the State Service, a much smaller percentage of external applicants were successful in gaining selection for a vacancy. While there could be many and varied reasons for this, it may be useful to refer back to the opportunities for improvement identified in the *Vacancy Identification and Advertising* section of this evaluation. These included consideration being given to developing selection criteria that promote the main requirements of a position to enable potential applicants a better opportunity to self-assess their competitiveness. Statements of Duty should also ensure that there are no artificial barriers which may preclude applicants from applying for vacancies.
- Applicants should also be encouraged (via the advertisement) to contact the vacancy contact officer prior to lodging their application. This may assist applicants external to the State Service to become fully conversant with the requirements of the vacancy in order to make an informed decision as to whether or not to apply and then to adequately address the selection criteria and the selection panel if offered an interview. This might produce a more competitive applicant pool and a more efficient selection process.
- As incumbency remains an issue of concern, consideration needs to be given to amending Commissioner's Direction No. 1 to strengthen the provisions related to advertising vacancies and to place maximum periods on the length of time an employee can act in a vacancy.

10.2 The Use of Scribes

Background

This part of the evaluation looks at the use and role of scribes. The scribe can provide a service to assist selection panels with selecting applicants. They can attend interviews and take detailed notes for writing selection reports which reflect the views of the panel. However, scribes can also provide a more complete service throughout the selection process including shortlisting applicants, assisting with interviews, sitting on the panel and obtaining referee reports. Sometimes internal or contracted external scribes assist with the decision-making process and at other times they simply write the draft report for the panel’s endorsement. Scribes may enhance the efficiency of the selection process.

Matters Raised with OSSC:

- What should be the role of internal and external scribes in agency selection processes?

Findings

Review of Sample Reports

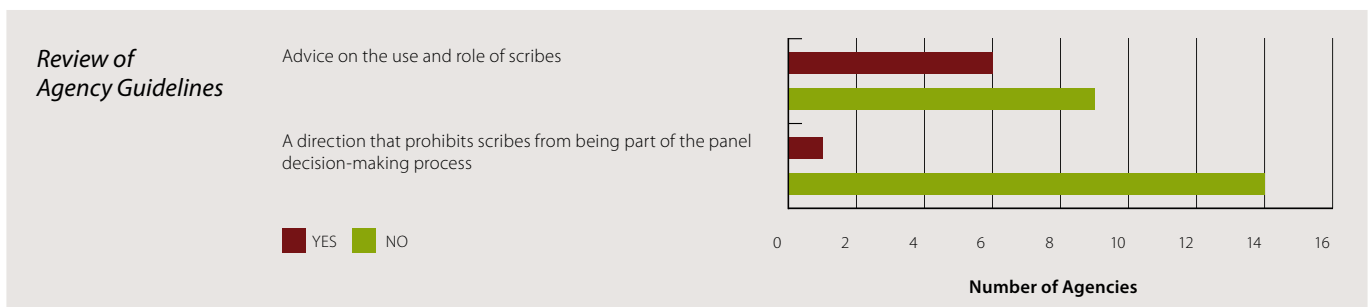
- On average, around 6% of selection panels used internal scribes as part of the selection process. The majority of agencies did not use internal scribes at all. Such tasks were usually undertaken by the chairperson.
- Some selection panels used internal scribes (often personnel from the human resource section) to write selection reports in order to have a more consistent approach. More often than not, these scribes were not part of the decision-making process.
- Only 2% of selection panels used contracted external scribes as part of the selection process, some as full selection panel members, and some simply for taking notes during the selection process.
- Some contracted external scribes were also asked to obtain referee reports for the panel.

Conclusion

Although about 40 per cent of agencies provided advice on the role of scribes, only a small percentage of agencies used internal or contracted external scribes. When used, scribes usually took notes during the selection process and drafted the selection report for the panels approval. Occasionally, they were used as part of the decision-making process and to obtain referee reports.

Opportunities for Improvement Identified in the Evaluation

- Scribes, whether sourced from the agency or from external providers, may be an underused resource. Dedicated scribes can often minimise the time taken to complete a selection process especially when used for the collection of referee reports as well as the drafting of the selection report. As there are no restrictions regarding the use of external scribes or the range of services they can offer, agencies could consider the extent to which they utilise these services and reflect this in their guidelines.



10.3 The Length of Process

Background

This section of the evaluation looks at the length of time taken by agencies to complete the selection process. In particular, it examines the length of time between advertising and the signing of a recommendation by the panel, the time taken to produce a selection report post interview and the time taken by delegates to sign final approval.

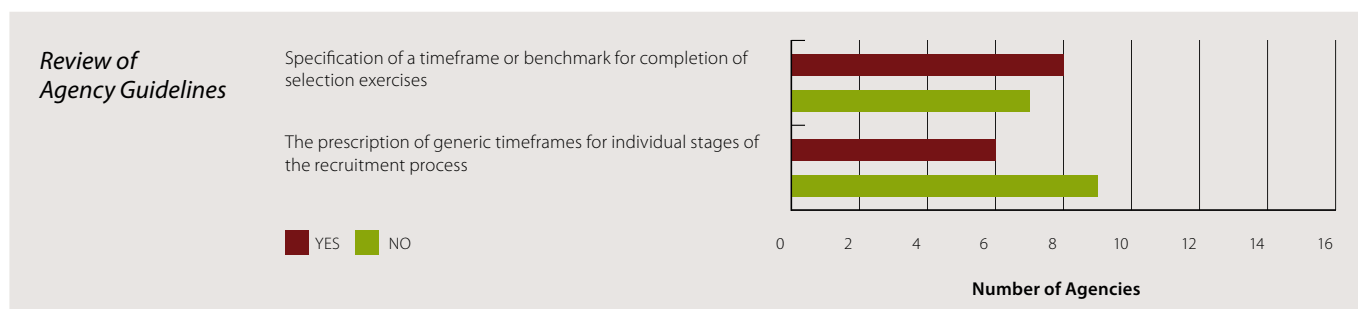
Matters Raised with OSSC:

- Are selections taking too long and is this partly due to the non-specification of completion timeframes?
- The final approval and sign-off process, for selection reports, is often not carried out in a timely manner.

Findings

Review of Sample Reports

- The average length of time taken from the date of advertising to the date signed by the delegate is 54 days. However, the average number of days for each agency varied between 31 days to 62 days.
- The average length of time taken to produce selection reports from the interview date to the report being signed by the panel was 10 days, although some reports were signed within five days while some took up to 21 days.
- The average time taken by delegates to sign the selection report (that is, the time between the panel and delegate signing the report) is four days. The average number of days for each agency varied from one to seven days. This part of the process was very quick in most instances.



Conclusion

About 50 per cent of agencies do prescribe a timeframe for completion of the selection process, usually around 60 days. Our sample found that the average length of time taken between the dates of advertising to the date signed by the delegate was 54 days (with individual agencies varying between 31 to 61 days).

We can compare this with the Auditor-General's Special Report No. 49, *Staff Selection in Government Agencies* (December 2003). That review found that the average time taken to fill a vacancy from the date of advertisement to the date of the appointment letter was 60 days (with individual agencies varying between 37 to 81 days).

From a comparative point of view, data from the South Australian State Government *Public Sector Performance Commission*, indicates that currently their average time for recruitment process is 67 days.

The Australian Public Service Commission recommends a target of 45 days although their recent *State of the Service Report 2008-09* stated that a survey of Australian government agencies showed the average time to be 61 days, ranging from 21 to 142 days.

Tasmanian State Service agency performance in relation to selection process timeliness has changed little over recent years.

Whilst acceptable, there is still room for improvement. The average length of time taken to produce selection reports (measured as the time taken between the interview date and the date the report was signed by the panel) was 10 days, which is also considered timely.

Opportunities for Improvement Identified in the Evaluation

- Agencies seeking further improvement in the efficiency and timeliness of their selection processes could review their completion timeframes and develop and promote reportable benchmarks in their guidelines as a means of improving accountability.
- Agencies not currently using some form of electronic system for tracking and monitoring the progress of selection exercises could consider implementing an appropriate system.

PART TWO:

FIXED-TERM VACANCIES
(12 MONTHS DURATION OR LESS)

11. ADVERTISING

Background

This section of the evaluation examines advertising for fixed-term vacancies (12 months duration or less).

Commissioner's Direction No. 1 (Clauses 5.7 – 5.9) specifies that:

For any fixed-term appointment up to and including 6 months, the Head of Agency may make a selection from employees in their agency without advertising. Such appointments shall not be subject to any extensions.

For any fixed-term appointment of more than 6 months and up to and including 12 months the Head of Agency must:

- (a) *seek expressions of interest from within that Agency, and such other Agencies as the Head of Agency determines, for the duties to be performed; or*
- (b) *select a person who is registered on a fixed-term employment register approved in accordance with Section 18(1)(b) of the Act; or*
- (c) *advertise the duties to be performed in accordance with Clause 4 of this Direction (CD No. 1).*

For any fixed-term appointment greater than 12 months, the Head of Agency must advertise the duties in accordance with Clause 4 of this Direction (CD No. 1).

Findings

All agencies adhered to the appointment/advertising requirements of CD No. 1. Most agencies only used one of these methods, but depending on the nature and length of the vacancy, a combination of options was used in some cases.

Review of Sample Report

- 41% of fixed-term vacancies examined were advertised in the Gazette. However, some agencies choose to use the Gazette for all short-term vacancies, while some did not use the Gazette at all.
- 65% of vacancies were advertised internally to the agency using an internal agency expression of interest process (EOI).
- 7% of short-term fixed-term vacancies were advertised internally to the State Service through an external expression of interest process usually in conjunction with an internal EOI.
- 4% were filled from a fixed-term register, although this was predominantly used by one agency.

Conclusion

Although some agencies used a combination of methods, the preferred method for advertising vacancies up to 12 months or less was to use an EOI process within the agency in which the vacancy occurred. The next preferred method was advertising in the Gazette.

As discussed in more detail in the section dealing with applicants and nominees (later in the report), the evaluation found that some vacancies advertised through internal EOI processes attracted applicants from State Service employees outside the agency in which the vacancy was advertised and, in some instances, from applicants external to the State Service.

12. THE SELECTION PROCESS

Background

This section covers three broad areas: selection panels; shortlisting of applicants and selection methods. As mentioned in part one of this document, selection panels and chairpersons in particular, need to have the knowledge and proficiency to carry out the task of selecting suitable nominees. Accordingly, the evaluation looked at whether selection panels for short-term vacancies were formally convened in a similar way to those for permanent or fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration.

This section of the evaluation also examined the shortlisting of applicants and the selection methods (desktop, interview or other methods) used to choose nominees.

Findings

Review of Sample Reports

Selection Panels

- A formal panel was convened in 96% of cases.
- The average number of panel members varied between two to three compared with permanent or fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration, where there nearly always were three members.
- Panels were gender balanced in 81% of cases compared with 85% of cases for permanent or fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration.

Shortlisting

- Evidence of shortlisting was found in 85% of cases compared with 100% for permanent or fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration.
- Where shortlisting took place, reasons for shortlisting/exclusion were given in 64% of cases.

Selection Methods

- Desktop selections (based on an assessment of written applications only) were used in 34% of cases. This compares with 10% for permanent or fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration.
- An interview (or some other selection method) was used in the remaining 66% of reports.
- Where a selection method was used, 7% of selection panels used both a combination of interview and some other selection technique or only used the other selection method.

Conclusion

Although the average number of selection panel members was slightly less than for permanent or fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration, formal selection panels were convened for nearly all vacancies. Shortlisting was not used as much for short-term vacancies (85%) as it was for permanent and fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration (100%). Desktop assessments were used more often for fixed-term vacancies of 12 months or less (34%) than for permanent and fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration (10%).

The main distinction, then, is the greater use of desktop selections (selections based on an assessment of written applications only) rather than reliance on interviews or other selection methods.

13. SELECTION REPORTS

Background

This area of the evaluation examines the composition of selection reports and the extent to which they were vetted by human resource operatives. The section also examines referee reports and whether the collection of referee reports was as rigorous for short-term vacancies as it was for permanent and fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration.

Findings

Review of Sample Reports

Composition

- Selection reports were produced in 93% of cases. The majority of agencies (12 agencies) consistently produced selection reports.
- Of those produced, an assessment and write-up was undertaken for 77% of reports.
- The average number of pages for selection reports was six, compared with eight for permanent or fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration.
- It was estimated that only 53% of reports contained a high level of detail, as opposed to 80% of reports for permanent or fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration.

Referee Reports

- Referee reports were obtained for 51% of those selection reports examined.
- Of those, referee reports were used to finalise/validate a final applicant in 25% of cases.

Verification by Human Resources

- 68% of reports examined were verified by human resource operatives.

Conclusion

Selection reports were produced for most vacancies and although the number of pages produced for each report was comparable to selection reports for permanent and fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration, there was less individual and comparative detail.

While referee reports were obtained in 51 per cent of cases, this is a significantly lower percentage than the 76 per cent of selection reports which included referee reports for permanent and fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration. It would appear that obtaining referee reports for short-term vacancies is not seen as being as necessary. The fact that many of the internal applicants for these vacancies would be known to the panel would influence this outcome.

Similarly, while 89 per cent of selection reports for permanent and fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration were vetted by human resources operatives, only 68 per cent of selection reports for short-term vacancies were similarly vetted.

These conclusions generally support the premise that not surprisingly, while due process continues to be followed, the amount of time and effort devoted to shorter term selection exercises is commensurately less than that applied to permanent and longer term fixed-term vacancies.

14. POST SELECTION COUNSELLING

Background

This section deals with post selection counselling related to short-term vacancies. Post selection counselling is an important stage of the selection process despite the nature or the duration of the vacancy.

Findings

Review of Sample Reports

- Unsuccessful applicants shortlisted out of a selection process were offered post selection counselling at the time of being shortlisted in 35% of cases.
- At vacancy finalisation, post selection counselling was offered to all unsuccessful candidates in 89% of cases.

Conclusion

It was found that 84 per cent of selection reports for permanent and fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration, offered post selection counselling to all unsuccessful candidates at vacancy finalisation. However, external applicants were often not offered post selection counselling, depending on the practice and procedures of individual agencies.

In comparison, the review of sample reports for fixed-term vacancies of less than 12 months duration showed that agency performance in respect of offering post selection counselling (both at the shortlisting stage and post vacancy finalisation) was slightly better than that for permanent vacancies. The slight difference may be related to the fact that a greater percentage of applicants for shorter term vacancies were State Service employees who are better placed to expect and receive this form of counselling.

15. SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION

Background

This section of the evaluation is included for information and discussion purposes. It looks at whether the applicants and nominee were internal to the agency, internal to the State Service or external to the State Service. Incumbency is also reviewed.

The length of time taken to produce reports is also examined and compared with the amount of time taken to produce reports for permanent and fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration.

Findings

Review of Sample Reports

Applicants

- The average number of applicants for short-term, fixed-term vacancies was five, although this varied between 2 and 13.
- Of this, 34% of applicants were internal to the agency; 7% were internal to the State Service (but not from the agency in which the vacancy was advertised); and 59% were external to the State Service.
- Of the 75 vacancies reviewed, 41 were advertised by EOI only. Of these, 10 vacancies were filled by external applicants to the State Service, although this practice was restricted to a small number of agencies.

Nominee

- Internal agency applicants were successful in winning the position in 61% of cases.
- 3% of successful applicants were internal to the State Service (but not from the agency in which the vacancy was advertised).
- 36% of successful applicants were external to the State Service.

Incumbency

- The review of selection reports indicated that 16% of successful applicants had been acting in the advertised vacancy prior to selection. This percentage represents 12 out of 75 selections. Of those 12 applicants:
 - 2 had been acting for between 1-3 months;
 - 3 had been acting for between 3-6 months;
 - 3 had been acting for between 6-12 months; and
 - 4 had been acting for over 12 months.

The Length of Process

- The average length of time taken from the date of advertising to the date the selection report was signed by the delegate was 32 days, varying between 9 and 47 days.

- The average length of time taken to produce selection reports, from the date of interviews to the date the report was signed by the panel, was 6 days. This compares with 10 days for permanent and fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration.

Conclusion

The average number of applicants was five, compared with eight for permanent and fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration. The percentage of successful internal applicants at 61 per cent was similar to that for internal applicants for permanent and fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration at 63 per cent. However, the percentage of successful applicants external to the State Service for short-term vacancies was 36 per cent compared to 29 per cent for permanent and fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration. This differential probably reflects the fact that agencies tend to either seek applicants for shorter term vacancies from only within their own agency or Gazette harder-to-fill vacancies rather than using an expression of interest process across agencies.

Of the 41 vacancies advertised through an internal agency expression of interest process only, 10 were filled by applicants external to the State Service. Although this practice was restricted to a small number of agencies, it would be useful to clarify the requirements around this practice as merit considerations would suggest that if external applicants are to be considered (let alone appointed) then Gazettal of the vacancy would be the better practice. Examination of this issue should be included in the review of Commissioner's Direction No. 1.

With regards to incumbency, successful applicants had been acting in the short-term vacancies for which they were successful in 16 per cent of cases, compared with 23 per cent of cases for permanent and fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration.

The average length of time taken to produce selection reports for short-term vacancies, from the date of advertising to the date the selection report was signed by the delegate, was much shorter at 32 days, compared with 54 days for those reports related to permanent and fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration.

It was estimated that 80 per cent of reports viewed for permanent and fixed-term vacancies of over 12 months duration contained a high level of detail, compared with 53 per cent of reports for short-term vacancies.

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1

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