



An Coimisiún
um Cheapacháin
Seirbhíse Poiblí
Commission
for Public Service
Appointments

Audit of Recruitment and Selection Policies and Practices within
An Garda Síochána relating to promotions
to the Rank of Sergeant and Inspector

Executive Summary

AUDIT REPORT
December 2015

Executive Summary:-

The Commission for Public Service Appointments (the Commission) reviewed the processes employed by An Garda Síochána to promote staff from Garda to Sergeant and from Sergeant to Inspector. The Commission wanted to evaluate the safeguards used in the evaluation of candidates to determine whether they were sufficiently robust to protect the integrity of these processes. It also wanted to establish whether the processes were compliant with best recruitment practice as set out in the Code of Practice.

The appointment processes for promotion to Sergeant and Inspector take place annually and are managed centrally by Competitions Unit within An Garda Síochána's HR directorate. The competitions involve:-

- A "HQ Directive" circulated to all members of An Garda Síochána bringing their attention to the competitions and seeking applications;
- A highly structured and detailed Competency Based application form;
- Line Management Assessments and Ratings of candidates;
- Formation of a large number of Interview Boards each comprising two individuals who are not members of An Garda Síochána, and one Senior Garda - each Board chaired by one of the external Board members;
- A structured competency based Preliminary Interview for all eligible applicants organised on a Regional Basis – the Senior Garda who sits on the Regional Board works in a different Region;
- The best placed candidates from the Regional Interviews are invited to attend a second structured competency based interview by the final selection board or "Central Panel" also comprising two civilians and a senior Garda. None of these Board Members are involved in the Regional Interviews.

Broadly speaking, the Commission is satisfied that the processes incorporate adequate safeguards, including those listed above, that protect the integrity of the selection processes and offer the necessary assurance that candidates are appointed on the basis of their interview performance.

However, notwithstanding the enormous time and resources committed to these appointment processes the Commission considers that there are a number of elements inherent in their design and implementation that do not reflect best recruitment practice, the appointment of candidates on merit and, at the same time, conspire to diminish confidence in the promotion system.

The HQ Directives advertising the promotion competitions examined in this review were circulated in August 2013 and the final notice of results to candidates issued in June 2014.

The Commission noted that almost 1,000 candidates applied and were interviewed for the Garda to Sergeant competition and almost 400 candidates applied and were interviewed for the Sergeant to Inspector competition. These competitions involved in excess of 320 days interviewing for members of An Garda Síochána at Chief Superintendent and Assistant Commissioner level in addition to the hiring of external Interview Board Members for more than 600 days. While the numbers of interviews entailed in these two processes is already extraordinarily high, the Commission also noted the low participation rate at Garda and Sergeant level with only approximately 10% of those at Garda level and only 20% at Sergeant level applying for promotion. The Commission accepts that there are a range of factors that can contribute to this relatively low participation rate, eg satisfaction at the current grade and role, personal circumstances. It considers that An Garda Síochána should explore how it might increase the numbers of candidates applying for promotion with a view to improving the overall quality of those selected.

The Commission recognises that many of the parameters under which these competitions are run are set down in either primary legislation or statutory instruments. The Commission believes that many of these legislative provisions are outdated and need to be changed. Having carefully considered the promotion systems for posts at these levels, the Commission considers that An Garda Síochána must revise the manner in which it appoints its Sergeants and Inspectors and, in this regard, recommends that the Garda Commissioner takes the following actions:-

1. Engage with the Department of Justice and Equality along with the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform to review and update the Promotion Regulations to reflect best recruitment practice and to support reform of the current selection processes;
2. Benchmark promotion methodologies against those employed in other Police forces to see how the evaluation of candidates for promotion may be improved;
3. Continue to ensure that appropriate and effective measures are taken to eliminate the risk of canvassing by and on behalf of candidates including reminding all Interview Board Members that it is an offence to interfere with an appointment process and that any efforts to canvas are reported to Garda HR;
4. Ensure that members of the Interview Boards declare which candidates they know or have worked with and Competitions Unit maintains a register detailing these declarations;
5. Develop a fresh panel of Interview Board Members so that the same individuals are not called upon to act on these selection boards time and time again;
6. Eliminate line management ratings and simplify the line management assessments presented to the Interview Boards;
7. Support the promotion systems by applying a probationary period for newly promoted staff;
8. Consider how candidates may apply and be considered for posts on a Regional/Divisional basis;
9. Consider the role and current relevance of the Sergeant and Inspector Professional Examinations in establishing eligibility for these positions;
10. Review competencies used to assess candidates to ensure that the criteria relied upon by the selection boards reflect the current requirements of the roles;
11. Replace the enormously expensive and resource intensive Preliminary Interviews with a suite of bespoke screening tests designed to test

candidates on the duties and responsibilities of the role in a fair, objective and consistent manner.

12. Pending the establishment of the suite of bespoke screening tests the following steps are recommended:-
 - a. Provide all Board Members with intensive interview skills training in advance of each selection test;
 - b. Engage additional assessors to move between Interview Boards to monitor and control the effectiveness and the consistency in the approach of the Interview Boards;
 - c. Bring a larger number of candidates forward to the final stage selection process and place more candidates on the final panel so that future vacancies can be filled;
 - d. Lower the rank of those serving on the Preliminary Interview Boards to increase the available pool of board members and make the process more cost effective.

(The additional costs involved in implementing the steps a – c above are offset by reducing the frequency of these competitions from annual to biannual.)