



An Coimisiún
um Cheapacháin
Seirbhíse Poiblí
Commission
for Public Service
Appointments

**Audit of Appointment Processes for two senior positions
in the Health Business Service Directorate
in the Health Service Executive**

**AUDIT REPORT
June 2017**

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1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In April 2017, the HSE wrote to the Commission inviting it to examine the conduct of the appointment processes for the following two senior positions within its Health Business Services directorate (HBS):-

- General Manager National Pensions Improvement and
- Grade VIII HR Manager and HBS HR Digital Programme.

It advised that the selection processes for these two roles had been included in a Protected Disclosure made by a senior staff member within HBS. The complainant made allegations of impropriety in relation to the appointment processes.

In deciding to initiate an examination of the selection processes concerned, the Commission took account of the recruitment function carried out in HBS on behalf of the HSE as well as the complainant's role in HBS.

The Commission noted that the complaint raised issues in relation to the job and person specification for the role and in particular (i) the approval process prior to initiating the recruitment and selection campaign, (ii) the eligibility criteria, (iii) the length of the contract and (iv) the description of the location of the post in Manorhamilton.

The Commission noted the HSE's decision to suspend the appointment process for the Grade VIII HBS HR Digital Programme Manager pending the Commission's consideration of the issues raised. However, following its examination of information on the background to these two posts provided by the HSE, the job and person specifications for the role and the manner in which the two posts were considered and approved, the Commission informed the HSE it did not consider that the continued suspension of the recruitment process for the post of Grade VIII HBS HR Digital Programme Manager was required under the provisions of the Code of Practice.

The Commission continued its review of the appointment process. It noted that:-

- The HSE advertised the posts on the careers page on www.hse.ie and published detailed descriptions of the role, the terms and conditions for the positions along with an outline of the conduct of the appointment process. The supporting information also provided a contact person for informal enquiries. The positions were also notified to staff of TUSLA and through the Talentpool (a database of potential applicants), together with LINKEDIN;. This is in line with the HSE's normal procedures.
- The job descriptions set out that both posts would be located in Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim. They provided that the General Manager post would be for an initial period of 12 months while the Grade VIII post was a permanent position;

- The General Manager post attracted 5 candidates, 3 of whom were serving employees of the HSE while 4 candidates applied for the Grade VIII post, 3 of whom worked for the HSE;
- The HSE employed a vetting/shortlisting process for both positions and applied criteria consistent with the job and person specifications for the role;
- The members of the shortlisting board appear, on the face of it, to have the knowledge and experience to evaluate candidates against the requirements of the role;
- They were provided in advance with a comprehensive briefing document setting out the process they were required to follow and, on the day of the shortlisting exercise, were supported in their work by a member of the recruitment team;
- Two candidates were shortlisted and invited to interview for the General Manager post while four were invited to attend for interview for the Grade VIII post;
- Following the interview, one candidate was appointed to the General Manager position.

The Commission is largely satisfied that the HSE had appropriate measures in place to support the appointment of candidates on merit on the basis of an objective and transparent recruitment and selection process.

However, it considers that there are some practices and procedures that the HSE could change that may improve the effectiveness of similar appointment processes in the future. These are:-

1. Ensure that authorisation process for positions takes full and proper account of the impact of offering only short term assignments on the size and quality of the candidate pools particular when the post is located in an area at a remove from large population centres.
2. Explore how LINKEDIN, Facebook and other social media platforms might be used to build interest and trigger more active engagement with potential candidates particularly for categories of positions that have proven difficult to fill.
3. Ensure that the selection criteria for positions are not unduly restrictive and reflect only the duties and requirements of the role.
4. In seeking to maximise the impartiality and objectivity in the selection process the Commission recommends that the designated informal contact should not among the members of the interview board.

2. INTRODUCTION

The Commission for Public Service Appointments oversees recruitment and selection to positions across the Civil and Public Service. In carrying out this oversight function the Commission seeks to ensure that those appointment processes exemplify the principles of probity, merit, transparency, impartiality, consistency and fairness. The Commission is firmly of the view that these core principles are not mere ends in themselves but the means to achieving the greater goal of attracting and selecting the strongest possible candidates for positions thus facilitating the delivery of efficient and effective services.

The Commission publishes Codes of Practice which set out the standards Public Bodies within its remit are required to meet in the conduct of their appointment processes. It examines complaints from individuals who believe that a public body has failed to adhere to the standards prescribed in the Codes. It also carries out audits of appointment processes conducted by those Public Bodies to determine whether the public body has adequate safeguards in place to protect the integrity of the selection process, to ensure that candidates are recruited and selected on merit, in a fair and objective fashion and that there is no scope for patronage.

3. BACKGROUND/PURPOSE OF THE AUDIT

In April 2017 a number of allegations were made by way of a Protected Disclosure complaint relating to the recruitment and selection of persons to positions in the HSE. The allegations received were in respect of the appointment processes for the following positions:-

- General Manager National Pensions Improvement (General Manager) and
- Grade VIII HR Manager and HBS HR Digital Programme (Grade VIII).

The allegations in respect of the General Manager post were that the position had been falsely advertised in terms of its location, in order to restrict the potential applicant pool and facilitate an application from one individual.

In respect of the Grade VIII post it was alleged that the HSE:-

- did not adhere to proper procedures in its deliberations and approval of the post
- did not consider whether the post was suppressible and
- afforded a greater emphasis to the HR elements of the role as opposed to the digital aspects so that the job matched a particular individual.

Both appointment processes were carried out by the HSE under its Recruitment Licence and are therefore subject to the Commission's Codes of Practice.

The HSE requested that the Commission audit both recruitment processes.

This report has been prepared under Section 43(5) and Section 13 of the Public Service Management (Recruitment and Appointments) Act 2004.

Whilst informed by the complaint as communicated to the Commission, the Commission examined the conduct of the appointment processes in their entirety.

Details of the Commission's audit procedures are set out at Appendix 1.

4. REVIEW METHODOLOGY

In preparation for its review of the promotion processes, the Commission's Audit Team met with the members of the Health Business Services Division in the HSE to seek an overview of and information on the background and administration of both processes. This included conducting interviews with the Assistant National Director HR and a Campaign Manager within the HBS.

The Audit Team also examined the recruitment files for both posts including:

- Background/Sanction for Posts
- Job and Person Specifications,
- The Terms and Conditions,
- Descriptions of the Selection Process
- Additional Candidate Information
- Assessment Criteria
- Training/Briefing Material for the members of the selection boards
- Interview/Shortlisting Notes

5. BACKGROUND

In the course of its examination of these appointment processes, the Commission asked that the HSE to provide the background to the two positions. The HSE provided the Commission with the following documents:-

- I. HBS Briefing Paper – Pensions Administration – Business Case
- II. Review of Pensions Function – Report by Crowleys DFK Chartered Accountants
- III. HBS Health Business Service Strategy 2017 – 2019

These documents set out many of the factors the HSE took into account in establishing and designing the job and person specifications for the roles.

The Commission notes that the Public Sector Reform Plan provided for the implementation of shared service models across the different sectors including the Health Sector.

The Health Business Services Division (HBS) was established in February 2014 as the business services provider for all publicly funded health and social care services. The HBS is tasked with the delivery of shared service functions for the HSE, specifically providing transactional HR Services to the HSE in the areas of pensions, personnel records, recruitment and agency management.

The Commission noted that HBS, HR, is located in Manorhamilton, Co. Leitrim, with satellite offices distributed across the country. Both the central governance offices for Pensions and Recruitment are based in Manorhamilton and the central governance for Personnel Administration, Merchants Quay, Dublin 8.

The HSE advised that, in line with its People Strategy 2015-2018, the HBS was mandated to develop a number of central governance structures for each of its functions which had previously been managed through regional/local structures.

It set out that the HBS Strategy 2017-2019 was developed to support the overall organisational transformation agenda. Two of the action points included in this Strategy are:

- Action No. 6 – To Implement a Pensions Improvement Plan
- Action No. 12 – To Implement HBS Digital Programme (E-business Solutions)

The HSE provided the Commission with the following information in relation to the establishment and approval of this roles:-

5.1 General Manager

The HSE Pensions function administers 11 different pension schemes catering for over 100,000 members. Previously the pensions function was managed through the eight regional structures, each operating to their own standards.

The HSE decided to transition the 8 regional pension offices into a central governance structure enabled by one single ICT platform.

In 2016 the HSE commissioned an external assessment of the pensions function. This assessment, identified significant risks from both a compliance and regulatory perspective.

The Report formed the basis of a business case for a Pension Improvement Programme approved by the HSE's Governance Committee in November 2016. The Committee approved half of the funding to secure a Pension Improvement Programme office in Manorhamilton together with 3 small teams regionally.

Any new posts at Grade VIII (and equivalent) level require sanction from the Department of Health, and in some instances, the Department of Public Expenditure and Reform.

On 16 February 2017, sanction was provided by the Department of Health to make an appointment to the position of General Manger National Pensions Improvement Programme. The sanction provided that the post should be located in the HBS, Manorhamilton, for an initial period of one year, with further approval dependent upon the governance committee approval at the end of 2017. Approval for this post was granted in line with both HSE and Department of Health (DOH) pay bill management policy.

5.2 Grade VIII

The HBS Strategy 2017/2019 provides for the development of appropriate ICT platforms as an integral part of the development of HBS HR.

The position became vacant in January 2015 due to a staff member's retirement. Previously the role had been developed within the confines of pensions, with a significant amount of the role related to developing an in-house ICT "Pensions Register" system.

The Chief Information Office (CIO) of the HSE subsequently determined that the Register was unsuitable for roll out across the pensions unit function and recommended that the HSE source ICT platforms from the open market.

This decision, along with other significant HBS HR ICT projects such as the development of CRM technology, Recruitment Solutions, the roll out of electronic personnel records as per action 12 of the HBS Strategy, formed the basis of the HSE's decision to examine the vacant position and re-engineer the role to ensure a coordinated approach to the development of appropriate ICT platforms for HBS HR.

The Job Specification was developed in consultation with the function head Eithne Fox, Assistant National Director HBS HR, Mr. Pat Kelly, Assistant National Director in the office of the CIO and Mr. Kevin Kelly, General Manager Digital Lead.

A Job Order form was completed and formally recommended by the Head of HBS HR and National Director of HBS Jane Carolan on 16 February 2017 and issued to the recruitment team to initiate the recruitment process.

6. JOB AND PERSON SPECIFICATIONS

Detailed Job and Person Specification documents were prepared in respect of both posts outlining the location of the positions, reporting structure, the principal duties and responsibilities of the role and the skills, knowledge and competencies required for the roles.

6.1 General Manager

The HSE advised that the Job Specification for the Programme Manager was developed in consultation with the Pensions Standard and Quality Manager and the National Pensions Manager and reviewed by the Pensions Expert in the Department of Health.

It set out that the person appointed would report to the Assistant National Director of Human Resources in the Health Business Services, would be based in Manorhamilton and would be assigned for an initial period of 12 months, with the potential to extend the timeframe. The HSE advised that both the pensions programme office and the central governance office for pensions are based in Manorhamilton. The job specification set out that while the applicant would be required to attend regular meetings throughout the HSE, the base of the post was HBS Manorhamilton.

While it has no role in determining the terms and conditions assigned to a particular role, the Commission considers that the relatively short initial timeframe for the post combined with its location in Manorhamilton may have had an been factors to the relatively small candidate pool. It is of the view that a larger candidate pool may be generated by allowing greater certainty in tenure.

6.1.1 Principal Duties and Responsibilities

The Job and Person Specification set out that the post holder would be responsible for the development and implementation of a National Pensions Improvement Plan for the administration of pensions in the HSE and TUSLA.

The post holder would be responsible for the delivery of a fully scoped pension improvement plan, inclusive of costings, by Q2 2017. Among a detailed list of the duties and responsibilities of the role were to:

- Develop a comprehensive measurable improvement plan for pensions administration in the HSE

- Co-ordinate and lead a programme of change that will deliver the implementation of pensions improvement plan in keeping with the HSE's shared services strategy
- Develop a fully scoped pension improvement plan
- Provide leadership in the areas of change management to ensure that policies, programmes and activities are aligned to organisational goals
- Work with service providers, national division, hospital groups and CHO management teams to ensure that national pensions management function supports current and evolving health and social care needs and structures
- Work collaboratively with all the stakeholders to ensure the effective implementation of the Pension programme

6.1.2. Eligibility Criteria

Applicants were required by the closing date for receipt of applications to demonstrate the below criteria:

- Extensive experience at senior level in a Human Resource role within a Civil or Public Service environment
- A record of delivering change, working in a complex environment through strong interpersonal and communications ability
- Significant project management ability including management and delivery of multiple concurrent projects of work
- Experience of managing and working collaboratively with multiple internal and external stakeholders

The Commission's Code of Practice prescribes that selection criteria for positions must not be overly restrictive and that candidates should be assessed solely on their ability to carry out the duties and responsibilities required for the role. It considers that the inclusion of a requirement that candidates have experience within a civil or public service environment is potentially restrictive and may not support the generation of the widest potential candidate pool.

6.1.3. Skills, Competencies and Knowledge

The skills, competencies and knowledge candidates were required to demonstrate were prescribed as below. These were accompanied by a number of performance indicators in respect of each.

- I. Professional Knowledge and Experience
- II. Leadership, Direction and Managing Change
- III. Results Focused with Critical Analysis and Decision Making
- IV. Working With and Through Others
- V. Interpersonal and Communication Skills
- VI. Drive and Commitment

6.2. Grade VIII

The Job and Person Specification set out that this was a permanent, whole time position.

It provided that the post holder would be required to work closely with managers within the HBS, the HBS business and systems analysts, the Office of Digital & CTM Solutions and that s/he would act as a link between HBS HR, the Office of the Chief Information Office and external ICT providers

The location of the post was for placement in Health Business Services, HSE, Manorhamilton. The information available to candidates at the outset of the process also noted that the person appointed would be required to regularly attend meetings in different locations across the HSE.

6.2.1. Principle Duties and Responsibilities

The details on the post set out that successful applicants will support the Head of HBS HR in implementing the HBS HR Digital Programme. It explained that an ambitious programme of digital enablement is set out within the HBS Strategy 2017 to 2019 which is aligned to many of transformational service improvement actions identified within the HBS Strategy.

It set out that the HR Manager in HBS HR Digital Programme would lead the development of multiple e-business systems within the HBS structure. It also outlined that the role involves ensuring that HBS HR have robust business information systems in line with the key strategic initiatives, as set out in the HBS Strategy 2017 to 2019.

Among a detailed list of the duties and responsibilities of the role were to:

- Analyse HBS HR Business requirements, develop and map business process solutions to meet business needs
- Liaise with technical architects, systems developers and project managers before, during and after analysis and implementation of the chose business information solutions

- Provide project management for key HBS HR business systems project initiatives
- Work closely with business teams to design, develop and document IT systems and solutions
- Co-ordinate user training on all aspects of HBS HR business information systems and solutions
- To lead in the development of procurement specifications for ICT platforms and ICT innovations in relation to the HBS HR Digital Programme and to ensure assurance of same

6.2.2. Eligibility Criteria

Applicants were required by the closing date for receipt of applications to demonstrate the below criteria:

- Significant experience in a senior role that has involved developing information systems, as relevant to the role
- Experience in analysing and documenting business processes while working closely with business managers, as relevant to the role
- Experience of working collaboratively with cross functional teams and third party vendors in developing business information systems, as relevant to the role

6.2.3. Skills Competencies and/or Knowledge

The skills, competencies and knowledge for the job that candidates were required to demonstrate were prescribed as below. These were accompanied by a number of performance indicators in respect of each.

- Professional Knowledge and Experience
- Managing and Delivering Results (operational Excellence)
- Critical Analysis, Problem Solving and Decision Making
- Leadership and Managing Change
- Communication and Interpersonal Skills
- Person Commitment and Motivation

An Additional Campaign Information document was made available to candidate at the outset of the two selection processes. This document outlines how the candidate

could apply for the post, the appropriate deadlines and how the selection processes would be structured. It also detailed the review and appeals mechanisms available under the Code of Practice and details surrounding probation, superannuation and ethics in public office.

7. MARKETING OF POSITIONS

In line with the HSE's standard practice, both posts were advertised on the career's page of the HSE website between 2 to 3 weeks in advance on the closing date for receipt of applications. The positions position were also notified to staff of TUSLA and through the Talentpool (a database of potential applicants), and placed on LINKEDIN.

When asked if the adverts were supported by any other communications, the HSE advised that, while notices of vacancies had previously been circulated via email across the HSE, an executive decision had been taken to no longer issue notification of positions to staff members of the HSE via email. This decision was made on the basis that the high volume of positions advertised required manual intervention to resend emails across the different directorates/business units and as such was increasing the administrative workload.

It further advised that the emails were always not circulated in a consistent manner so that they reached staff in the different business units in a timely manner. Finally, there was a concern that these email were seen as junk mail or spam and were potentially obstructing staff inboxes.

The closing date for applications was advised as 8 March 2017 for the Pensions Manager position and 3 April 2017 for the General Manager HR position. The numbers of applications received, both internal staff members of the HSE, non HSE Public Service and external candidates are detailed below:

Position	Applicants	HSE	Public Service (Non HSE)	External
General Manager National Pensions Improvement	5	2	2	1
Grade VIII HR Manager and HBS HR Digital Programme.	4	3	-	1

The Commission notes the relatively low number of applications received for both positions. When asked about the number, the HSE commented that it is not untypical for it to receive a low response to adverts for posts requiring quite specialised and

skills sets. The HSE also said that applications for its managerial and administrative roles generally come from serving employees. It also noted that the numbers of candidates for such positions, in locations a distance from large centres of population, tend to be quite low.

It also notes that the information accompanying the advert on HSE.ie set out that candidates could seek additional information on the posts from Ms Eithne Fox, Assistant National Director. The HSE advised that it is quite usual that some candidates will seek additional information and make contact with the designated individual.

The HSE advised that as the line manager for both posts, Ms Fox, was well placed to evaluate candidates for the role and was therefore picked to sit on the two selection boards. However when it became apparent that she was a respondent in a protected disclosure complaint, Ms. Fox excused herself from the selection process.

In the interest of protecting the integrity of the appointment process, the Commission is very anxious that Office Holders have measures in place to mitigate the effect of any connection which may exist between candidates and selection board members that may give rise to a conflict of interest. In this regard, it recommends that the HSE seek someone other than a member of the selection board member as the informal contact for any candidate wishing to discuss any aspect of the position in advance of the process.

8. SELECTION PROCESS

The selection process for both positions consisted of:

- completion of a structured application form
- a vetting/shortlisting exercise and
- a competitive interview.

8.1. Application Form

Candidates were required to complete and submit an application either via email to HBSjobs@hse.ie or by post. The structured application allowed the HSE to ascertain candidates educational achievements, and detailed career history.

The form also allowed for a consistent assessment of a candidate's experience in the context of the prescribed eligibility criteria.

The candidates were also required to include contact details for three referees.

8.2. Vetting/ Shortlisting

The Candidate Information Booklet which was available on www.hse.ie at the outset of the appointment process, set out that a ranking or shortlisting exercise may be carried out on the basis of information supplied in the application form. The criteria for ranking and or shortlisting would be based on the requirements of the post as outlined in the job specification.

The eligibility sift board members were required to assess candidates as 'eligible' or 'ineligible' against prescribed eligibility criteria.

The shortlisting processes were facilitated by a member of the recruitment team in the NBS. This person's responsibilities included briefing the shortlisting board members, clarifying the eligibility criteria and ensuring that the decision reached was based on the candidates' suitability to perform the duties and responsibilities of the role as outlined in their applications.

The eligibility sift/shortlisting process for Pensions General Manager was carried out 9 March 2017. The process was conducted by Mary Gorry, Assistant National Director Human Resources and Ms Eithne Fox, Assistant National Director.

Following the shortlisting process, 4 candidates were considered eligible for progression to interview stage.

The shortlisting process in respect of Grade VIII was carried out on 13 April 2017. It was conducted by Ms Miriam Keegan, HR & Payroll Programme Director, Assistant National Director, Mr Kevin Kelly, Business Manager, Digital and CRN Solutions and Ms Josephine Hynes Group Director of HR UL Hospital Group.

Candidates were again assessed on the basis of the eligibility criteria as prescribed. Following the shortlisting process two applicants were invited to interview stage.

8.3. Interview Process

The HSE advised that, in line with its normal procedures the Board Members were issued with an interview pack a week in advance of the interviews which included the applications forms and detailed guide to the interview process. This guide provided an overview of the selection process, setting out that the interview would follow a structured format, with evidence evaluated against a performance rating scale for each competency area.

The guide also provided information on:

- Preparing for Interview
- Questioning a candidate/questioning technique
- Examples of appropriate questions for each competency areas
- Performance Indicators for each Competency Area
- Guidelines for scoring
- Guidelines for conducting the interview
- Guidelines for Notetaking and Summary Comments

The communication with Board Members also outlined their obligations under Freedom of Information, the Employment Equality Acts.

The HSE has advised that in the region of 70% of applications for promotion posts within the HSE are received from internal applicants. It considers that this is due to the size and scale of the HSE and HSE funded organisations. It set out that the HSE and HSE funded organisations are by far the largest employer of employees in the healthcare market in Ireland and as such a significant proportion of its interview board members would have some knowledge of a number of the candidates. Accordingly it considers that while the selection boards need to declare connections that might potentially represent a conflict of interest, a register of all connections between candidates and board members would add little value to the appointment process.

It also noted that the HSE has recently revised its procedures and that there is more explicit advice now provided to board members in relation to the management of these connections than that evidenced in the guidance issued to these interview boards. The Commission notes however the absence of any explicit procedures for ensuring

any conflicts of interest are made known to all members of the board and guidance on the management of same in its training/briefing to board members in advance. It would consider this of particular relevance in view of the relatively high proportion of applicants coming from within the HSE's internal structure.

Position	Applicants	Successful at Shortlisting	Successful at Interview
General Manager National Pensions Improvement	5	3	2
Grade VIII HR Manager and HBS HR Digital Programme.	4	2	-

Candidates successful at shortlisting stage were invited to interview a week in advance of the designated date. They were advised of the time and date of their interview and that:

- The Interview would last approximately 45 minutes
- The content of the interview would be based on the requirements of the post, as outlined in the Job Specification and that it would be useful for candidates individual experience and knowledge to the eligibility criteria and skills outlined in same
- During Interview, the selection board will assess how candidates demonstrate the experience necessary for the post of General Manager, National Pensions Improvement Programme

Interviews for the position of Pensions General Manager for two candidates took place on 27 March. As one the candidates was not available on the day of the interview the selection board reconvened on 31 March to carry out same.

The Selection Board for the post was comprised of:

- Ms Mary Gorry, Assistant National Director HR (National HR)
- Mr Sean Keane, Former Pensions Manager Standards and Quality
- Mr. Willie Murphy, Former Assistant Director of HR with the HSE

- Eithne Fox, Assistant National Director HBS HR

The format of the interview was as follows:

Interview Assessment Areas	Suggested Time (mins)
Introduction and Review of Experience to Date	5
Leadership, Direction and Managing Change	8
Results Focused with Critical Analysis and Decision Making	8
Working With and Through Others	8
Knowledge/Experience relevant to the Role	12
Communication and Interpersonal Skills (Global Assessment)	
Wrap Up and Close/Questions	4
Time Available for Interview	45
Time Available for Assessment and Summary Comments	15
Total Time Available	60

An examination of the interview notes for candidates indicates that generally candidates were interviewed generally consistently with regard to the assessment areas prescribed.

Following interview, two candidates were deemed successful. All three applicants were provided with a copy of their interview marking sheet, which included their respective score for each category along with a summary comment.

There were no appeals at any stage of the process.

The position was offered to the first candidate, who accepted the post. The contract was issued to the successful applicant on the 21 April 2017, who commenced duty on 24 April 2017.

Interviews for both candidates in the **Grade VIII HBS HR Digital Programme Manager** competition were scheduled to take place on Tuesday 25 April. The format of the interview was outlined as follows:

Interview Assessment Areas	Suggested Time (mins)
Introduction and Review of Experience to Date	5
Managing and Delivering Results (Operational Excellence)	7

Critical Analysis, Problem Solving and Decision Making	7
Leadership and Managing Change	7
Knowledge / Experience Relevant to the Role	10
Communication and Interpersonal Skills (Global Assessment)	
Wrap Up and Close/Questions	4
Time Available for Interview	40
Time Available for Assessment and Summary Comments	15
Total Time Available	55

Following receipt of a protected disclosure, a decision was made to put on hold the selection. Candidates were advised by email that the scheduled interviews were postponed until further notice.

9. CONCLUSIONS/RECOMMENDATIONS

The Commission is satisfied, in the main, that the processes and procedures in place for the recruitment and selection for both positions were in compliance with the Code principles. The audit found that the appointment processes examined were managed in a fair and objective manner and there was a genuine commitment on the part of the HSE to ensure the integrity of the process.

The Commission acknowledges in particular the detailed Job and Person Specifications available to candidates at the outset of the process as well as the Selection Board Guidance material provided to members of the selection board. On foot of its discussions with members of staff with responsibility for these and other appointment processes, it is satisfied that there is a clear understanding of the requirements of the Code and the obligations on Office Holders to ensure candidates are assessed fairly and consistently.

The Commission has a number of recommendations which it considers will support the HSE in its continuing efforts to recruit, select and appoint staff on the basis of merit and in line with its obligations under the Code of Practice.

9.1 Advertising / Candidate Pools

The Code of Practice provides that all appointment processes are supported by clear, concise and effective marketing targeted at an appropriate applicant field.

The Commission notes with some concern the relatively small number of applications received for both positions. It also notes the HSE's comment that it is not unusual that posts of this nature attract quite limited pools of candidates.

While it has no role in determining the terms and conditions assigned to a particular role, it considers that the relatively short initial contract on offer for the General Manager post combined with its location in Manorhamilton may have contributed to the relatively small candidate pool.

Recommendation 1

The Commission encourages the HSE to take the steps to expand its marketing activities and advertising base in order to attract a wider candidate pools for similar positions, particularly from outside of the public service. It considers that the HSE should explore how LINKEDIN, Facebook and other social media platforms might be used to build interest and trigger more active engagement with potential candidates particularly for categories of positions that have proven difficult to fill.

Recommendation 2

The Commission recommends that when seeking approval for the filling of positions, the HSE considers the impact of the tenure and to consider how any other terms and conditions may negatively impact on the likely candidate pool.

9.2 Eligibility Criteria

The Code of Practice sets out that the Office Holder must ensure that candidates are assessed against job related criteria. The eligibility criteria employed must not be overly restrictive and should only reflect the duties, responsibilities, skills and competencies required for the role.

The Commission considers the inclusion of eligibility/assessment criteria relating to candidates experience within a civil or public service organisation is unnecessarily restrictive and may deter potentially suitable candidates from applying.

Recommendation 3

The Commission recommends that the HSE ensure that the criteria employed is not unduly restrictive and that it avoids including experience in any specific sector within the essential requirements for a position.

9.3 Management of Connections

The Commission recognises that it is quite common that one or more members of selection boards will have some connection with one or more candidates. This arises quite in particular in senior, specialised positions. The Commission is interested in understanding the level of safeguards that an Office Holder applies to mitigate any potential conflicts of interest arising from these connections. The Commission is satisfied that the HSE has recently updated its procedures and notes that these procedures do take proper account of the need to identify and manage potential for conflicts of interest.

However it notes that candidate information accompanying both posts included one of the members of the interview board members as the contact person for informal enquires and information on the post. The Commission does not consider that it may make it more difficult for a board member to engage with candidates in an entirely objective or consistent manner if they have spent an amount of time discussing the details of the role with one or more of the candidates.

Recommendation 4

The Commission recommends that designated contact person for candidates enquiring about the role is not a member of the selection board.

10. ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The Commission would like to thank the staff of the Health Business Service for the time, cooperation and support provided during this audit.