



An Coimisiún
um Cheapacháin
Seirbhíse Poiblí
Commission
for Public Service
Appointments

Commission for Public Service Appointments

Strategy Statement 2016–2018

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1. Introduction

The Commission for Public Service Appointments (CPSA) was established in October 2004 under the Public Service Management (Recruitment and Appointments) Act 2004. The CPSA is a regulatory body whose function is to set and monitor standards of probity, merit, equity and fairness to govern the recruitment and selection of persons for appointment to positions in the Civil Service, An Garda Síochána, the Health Service Executive (HSE) and the Health Information and Quality Authority (HIQA), and to certain managerial, professional and technical positions in local authorities and Vocational Education Committees.

This Strategy Statement represents the fourth review of strategic objectives by the CPSA and is the first since the Office of the CPSA merged with the Office of the Ombudsman in 2012.

Considering the overlap in values, vision and mission, the staff of the Office of the Ombudsman are exceptionally well suited to fulfilling the role of the CPSA's secretariat.

The Office of the Ombudsman also provides secretariat services to the Information Commissioner, the Commissioner for Environmental Information and the Standards in Public Office Commission (SIPOC) (incorporating the Referendum Commission when established). These different offices carry out separate and distinct statutory functions. Nonetheless, they function as a single amalgamated agency under one Vote and with one Accounting Officer and a management board, which manages the organisation while simultaneously protecting and preserving the statutory independence and functions of each of the constituent parts.

Each of the offices has its own staff members, but the finance, human resources, legal and information technology functions are shared between all five of them. Equally, there are separate strategic plans covering the work of each of the offices.

The plan sets out the CPSA's key objectives for the next three years. These will be supported by detailed annual business plans. The plan builds upon the significant achievements made since the last plan was published and will help the CPSA to make improvements in the area of public service recruitment.

There have been some significant changes in public service recruitment over the last three years. The gradual easing of the moratorium on recruitment has led to a significant increase in recruitment activity. While it is difficult to predict with certainty, this increase in activity is likely to be sustained given the age profile of the Civil and Public Service and the ensuing high numbers of retirements expected over the coming years. The 2015 Civil Service Renewal Plan places greater emphasis on developing professional expertise within departments and offices and also on open recruitment.

In addition, many civil service offices and departments have greater autonomy to make their own appointments and no longer require the approval of the Department of Expenditure and Reform to recruit staff. These changes are likely to lead to a significant increase and a greater array of recruitment activity, encouraging departments and offices to use their own recruitment licences in ensuring their specific recruitment needs are met.

This development will place different demands on the CPSA. In addition to its continuing engagement with the Public Appointments Service, it will need to monitor activity in other areas that, until very recently, saw very little recruitment activity.

The CPSA believes that it can play a significant role in underpinning confidence in the system of appointments in order to engender trust in the new appointees. The systems through which individuals are appointed to positions in public bodies have a key role to play, not only in recruiting and selecting the most competent candidates, but also in building trust and confidence in the institutions of the State.

The CPSA standards for recruitment are publicly available in its Codes of Practice. The CPSA focuses on ensuring that high-quality and effective recruitment and selection practices, which are consistent with current best practice, are observed to ensure that the best people are appointed on merit.

The CPSA will continue to work vigorously to ensure appointments systems operated by public sector recruiters are above reproach. It must also be certain that its own procedures are fit for purpose and are applied rigorously. The business plans adopted by the CPSA in support of this Strategy Statement will need to establish a programme of engagement with public sector bodies and also a review of its own procedures.

The CPSA considers that the principles it has set out in its Code of Practice afford sufficient safeguards while, at the same time, providing offices and departments with the flexibility they require to meet their challenging and changing environments. While the values espoused in the codes are enduring, the CPSA appreciates that it must continually review how the principles are defined and monitored. For instance, the CPSA is disappointed to note that there have been some recurring failings by recruiters in applying aspects of the principles set out in the codes. It must consider how it can be more vigilant in guarding against these shortcomings by recruiters.

Throughout the lifetime of this Strategy Statement, the CPSA will continue to support and develop its staff through a variety of mechanisms, such as induction, specialist training and broadening work experience, in the interests of our staff, our clients and the entire organisation.

Based on the level of success achieved following its last planning cycle, the CPSA remains confident in its ability to again meet the challenging key objectives it has set itself.

2. Role, Vision and Values

Role of the CPSA

Established under the Public Service Management (Recruitment and Appointments) Act 2004, the CPSA is charged with regulating recruitment to a wide range of positions in the public service. It is concerned with promoting confidence in the system of appointments by ensuring that recruitment is carried out in an open and transparent fashion and that those appointed are selected on merit. It carries out this work by:

- Establishing standards of probity, merit, equity and fairness, and other principles as it considers appropriate, to be followed in the public interest in recruiting and selecting persons for positions in the Civil Service and other public service bodies
- Publishing the standards established as Codes of Practice
- Auditing and evaluating recruitment policies and practices to safeguard the standards and to establish whether the Codes of Practice are being observed
- Considering applications and granting recruitment licences, as well as amending and revoking these where necessary
- Issuing instructions and advice to licence holders
- Establishing and setting down appropriate appeal procedures to address candidates' complaints and grievances and examining complaints alleging shortcomings in the conduct of appointment processes

In carrying out audits of and examining complaints about appointment processes, the CPSA may from time to time identify areas for improvement and make recommendations that it expects Office Holders to heed so that they can bring about improvements in future appointment processes.

Vision

'Appointments to public bodies are made in accordance with the principles of merit, fairness and openness and are in line with best practice.'

Our vision is that public bodies demonstrate a continuing commitment to making appointments to positions within remit on merit following competitive, transparent fair selection processes that are in line with best practice.

Values

In fulfilling our mission, we subscribe to the following core public sector values:

- Probity and integrity
- Being open and accountable
- Exercising sound judgement based on expert knowledge
- Acting fairly and proportionately
- Dealing with errors effectively
- Seeking continuous improvement

These values are not intended to be a checklist but rather to provide a valuable framework that all public service recruiters should adhere to. In addition to the principles above, we have committed to a set of values that guide our staff in everything they do. However, these values should not be considered in isolation from each other as they may often overlap.

Our organisational values are set out below. These describe the qualities that our staff are expected to demonstrate when carrying out their functions. We expect them to apply these values to all their decisions, actions, policies processes and systems when reviewing recruitment activity conducted by public bodies.

Independence – We will examine complaints, conduct reviews and make decisions in a fair, objective and impartial manner.

Professionalism – We aim for excellence and expertise when delivering our services. In regulating recruitment activity, we will display an understanding of risk management, best practice and sound judgement when arriving at our decisions. We will continuously review our performance to ensure that recruiters and candidates can have a high level of confidence in what we do.

Fairness – We will treat all people with respect, dignity and fairness is fundamental to our relationships with our stakeholders. It also contributes to a healthy work environment that promotes engagement, openness and transparency.

Objectivity – We will deliver continuous performance improvements and avail of best practice methods for delivering a first-class service and, in doing so, enhance confidence in public service delivery.

3. Strategic Objectives

The following three key high-level objectives will act as the primary enablers for achieving our vision.

- To actively and continually improve recruitment and selection standards across the Public Service
- To review and update the methods through which the CPSA carries out its functions
- To promote the CPSA's role and mandate

We have identified the following key actions through which the office will achieve the above objectives:

Improve recruitment and selection standards across the Public Service

- Adopt an audit plan that focuses on areas where the greatest learning can be achieved.
- Publish reports of audits as well as maintain a case book setting out the Commission's position on common areas of complaint.
- Influence improvements in recruitment by raising awareness of lessons identified in our findings or casework.
- Offer our perspective to recruiters through shared learning.
- Deliver a flexible and responsive framework that supports public service delivery needs.

Review and update methods through which the CPSA carries out its functions

- Review and update Codes of Practice to ensure they provide a sufficiently flexible framework for recruiters without compromising the integrity of the codes' principles.
- Conduct properly planned, focused and fit-for-purpose audit and complaint investigations.
- Develop and implement case management systems.
- Be recognised by others as a source of expertise.

Promote the CPSA's mandate

- Update The CPSA's Casebook to ensure that it highlights the precedents established and the lessons learned from CPSA audits and complaints.
- Provide clear and comprehensive guidance and advice to all stakeholders.
- Promote improved awareness of the role and mandate of the CPSA to stakeholders.
- Explore opportunities to publish and promote key findings and recommendations.

5. Next Steps

This Strategy Statement will be supported by a detailed Business Plan, which will clearly reflect the strategic objectives and related key actions. The business planning process is supported by individual staff action plans and organisational risk register, which are monitored and reviewed on a regular basis against quantifiable and time-bound performance indicators.

6. Reporting on Progress

Reporting on progress on the objectives set out in this Strategy Statement will be done regularly, both internally and externally, through a variety of mechanisms, including annual reports, staff meetings and minutes of meetings.