

# Audit of Casual and Student Hiring Practices

**November 2005**

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### **Acronyms used in the report**

AED	Audit and Evaluation Directorate
CO-OP	Co-op/Internship Program
EC	Environment Canada
FSWEP	Federal Student Work Experience Program
HRMIS	Human Resources Management Information System
OAG	Office of the Auditor General
PSC	Public Service Commission
PSEA	Public Service Employment Act

### **Prepared by Audit and Evaluation**

### **Acknowledgments**

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## **EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

Environment Canada was requested by the President of the Public Service Commission (PSC) to undertake a review of its casual and student employment staffing practices. In that context, a proposed audit of the casual and student hiring practices was approved by the Department Audit and Evaluation Committee in June 2005 and added to the Departmental Audit and Evaluation Annual Plan for fiscal year 2005-2006.

The primary objective of the audit was to determine whether casual and student hiring practices within Environment Canada were in accordance with relevant legislation, employment policies and staffing values.

All human resources operations across the Department were involved as part of this audit. The scope included casual staffing actions, for the period of April 1, 2004 to May 31, 2005. The scope also included student staffing actions under the Federal Student Work Experience Program (FSWEP) and the post-secondary Co-Op/Internship Program (Co-op) for the period of October 1, 2004 to May 31, 2005. The audit did not include a review of staffing actions related to the Research Affiliate Program and the Student Bridging Program made by closed competition process.

Audit activities such as documentation review, detailed testing and interviews were conducted as part of this audit. The data were obtained from Human Resources Branch. Based on a 90 percent confidence level with a margin of error set at 10 percent, a random sample of 128 casual and student staffing actions were selected. A review of employment history was also undertaken primarily to determine the extent to which other staffing methods, such as temporary help and contracts, were being used in the Department to hire the same person.

Overall, the results of the audit found substantial compliance to the policy with the exception of the application of the merit principle for student employments, for which we cannot conclude due to the lack of documentation in the human resources files. Although Environment Canada Casual Employment Policy and Student Employment Policy establishes the requirements and the guidelines for the effective management of casual and student employments, some practices could be improved. The recommendations largely deal with administrative measures that can be put in place.

Currently, human resources offices have different practices in terms of managing casual and student employments. Some of these can be considered best practices and should be considered for implementation across the department. There is a need for greater consistency particularly with respect to documentation that must be kept on file, where the documentation should be kept, and forms that need to be completed. The greater the consistency, the easier it will be for the Department to monitor and ensure adherence to the policy.

The rationale for hiring casual employees needs to be better documented. The rationale on file should provide sufficient information to demonstrate that the employment is in fact for a specific period of time and/or a specific need. The policy states four reasons where staff can be hired on a casual basis: to meet unforeseen needs or emergencies; to replace employees for short absences such as vacation, sick leave or training; to

conduct projects that are dependent on the availability of funds or have a limited time span; and to meet safety and security requirements and avoid severe service disruption (excluding legal strikes). In most of the files reviewed (78%), one of the four reasons was identified; however, from those files, very few files (28%) had the additional information required to detail the reason such as the person being replaced, or the project to be conducted.

Information such as a detailed description of responsibilities is often missing from the casual staffing files (72 percent). Although not a specific requirement of the policy, this type of information is required to establish the classification of the position as well as evaluate the candidates against the requirements of the position.

Currently, evidence that the person employed qualifies for employment as a student is often missing from the file. Twenty-eight percent (28 percent) of the files reviewed did not contain sufficient information to determine the status of the student. Based on the interviews, there seems to be some uncertainties as to who is responsible for verifying this information.

As with all appointments in the Federal Public Service, priority is given to Canadian citizens. Non-Canadian may apply for jobs within the federal Public Service; however the Public Service Employment Act sets specific parameters. The audit indicated that only 15 percent of the student files had proof of citizenship on file (copy of passport or citizenship card).

PSC requires that 'Result values' (competency, representativeness and non-partisanship) and 'Process values' (fairness, equity and transparency) be integrated in the staffing process including those for casual and student hiring. To determine whether those values are applied, sufficient information such as résumés of all candidates interviewed, results of the selection process with the interview questionnaire, and a statement of qualification should be on file. The file documentation review indicated that the type of information kept by the Human Resources Section varies from one region to another. Some regions collect all the information pertaining to the staffing action process while others only collect the information pertaining to the successful candidate.

### Recommendations

The Assistant Deputy Minister, Human Resources Branch should:

- ❖ standardize controls and documentation practices in order to monitor EC efficiency and effectiveness of the staffing process of casual and student employees;
- ❖ ensure that staffing files for both casual and student employments are kept in a centralized area;
- ❖ clarify who is responsible for obtaining supporting documentation such as proof of Canadian Citizenship and documentation confirming the student status. This information should be kept on file; and
- ❖ collect all documentation pertaining to the casual and student staffing process and monitor the results of the selection in light of PSC requirements for 'Results-Value' (competency, representativeness and non partisanship) and 'Process Value' (fairness, equity and transparency).

Management Response

*Human Resources Branch accepts the findings of the above noted audit and is currently taking the following measures to address the issues raised:*

- *Amendments to the Environment Canada Casual Policy and Student Employment policy to ensure that there is a clear direction and national application;*
- *Update tools for managers and HR Assistants including a staffing documentation check list to be completed on all files;*
- *Review of our delegation training to ensure a consistent message is provided to our managers;*
- *Examination of best practices across the country with intentions to implement a “national “standard approach.*





## 1.0 INTRODUCTION

Environment Canada was requested by the President of the Public Service Commission (PSC) to undertake a review of its casual and student employment staffing practices. In that context, a proposed audit of the casual and student hiring practices was approved by the Department Audit and Evaluation Committee in June 2005 and added to the Departmental Audit and Evaluation Annual Plan for fiscal year 2005-2006.

### 1.1 Background

The 2001 *Report of the Auditor General of Canada* on “Recruiting for Canada’s Future Public Service” concluded that hiring is more focussed on short term operational needs than long term recruitment. The Office of the Auditor General (OAG) reported that the trend towards short term hiring has stemmed from management’s attempt to work around the complex system for indeterminate hiring. In the report, the OAG determined that 48.4 percent of hiring in the Public Service in 2000-01 was of the casual nature<sup>1</sup>. In addition, the report revealed that 64 percent of new indeterminate employees came directly from casual or term status.

The Public Service Commission (PSC) *Annual Report 2003-04* outlines casual hiring as a significant risk to equity of access because casual workers do not have to go through a selection process based on merit. The report further identifies that in 2003-04, 15,373 (39 % of new hires) persons were hired as casuals. In addition, PSC data showed that of 4,424 casual employees that were on strength in June 1998, 27 percent became indeterminate employees.

The *Terms and Conditions* for the hiring of casual employees are listed in Environment Canada and Treasury Board of Canada policy documents. Section 21.2 of the *Public Service Employment Act (PSEA)* lists the terms, conditions and provisions for casual employees working within the Government of Canada. The documents are consistent in describing the intent of a casual placement within the Public Service and the terms of each, including the specific length of each contract, the number of days that a casual employee can work within a department during a twelve month period, the purpose of casual positions, the competitions that casual employees are entitled to apply in, and the termination of contracts. *The State of Human Resources in Environment Canada* report determined that between 2000-01 and 2003-04 the number of casual employees hired within the department increased by 618 (89%), from 694 to 1312 employees while the number of employees in the department increased by 21 percent.

The *Terms and Conditions* for hiring post-secondary students in Environment Canada are based upon *PSEA* regulations. Student employment primarily falls under either the Federal Student Work Experience Program (FSWEP) or the Co-op/Internship Program,

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<sup>1</sup> Casual nature means <sup>1</sup> (a) a person employed on a casual basis pursuant to the *Public Service Employment Act*, or (b) any other person employed for a specified period pursuant to the *Public Service Employment Act* unless the term of employment is for a period of three months or more, or the person has been employed for a period of three months or more with no break in employment in excess of five working days.

and standards for each are outlined in Treasury Board Secretariat Student Employment Policy. The document illustrates the eligibility, compensation, benefits, citizenship and re-employment standards that student hiring within government departments must follow. The *State of Human Resources in Environment Canada* report determined that between 2000-01 and 2003-04, the number of students employed had increased from 279 to 454 (61 percent) for Co-op/Internship and from 177 to 279 (63 percent) for FSWEP.

## **1.2 Audit Objectives and Scope**

### **Audit Objective**

The primary objective of the audit was to determine whether casual and student hiring practices within Environment Canada were in accordance with relevant legislation, employment policies and staffing values.

### **Audit Scope**

All human resources operations across the Department were involved as part of this audit. The scope included casual staffing actions, for the period of April 1, 2004 to May 31, 2005. The scope also included student staffing actions under the Federal Student Work Experience Program (FSWEP) and the post-secondary Co-Op/Internship Program (Co-op) for the period of October 1, 2004 to May 31, 2005. This period was chosen to avoid overlap with the audit of Staffing Files currently being done by PSC. The audit did not include a review of staffing actions related to the Research Affiliate Program and the Student Bridging Program made by closed competition process as this area is captured under the PSC audit.

## **1.3 Audit Methodology**

The audit included an examination of all policies, guidelines and processes pertaining to the hiring of casual and student employees. Structured interviews with human resources advisors were also conducted. Furthermore, based on a 90 percent confidence level, with a margin of error set at 10 percent, a representative sample of 128 casual and student staffing action files was randomly selected for review. The audit criteria were defined based on the policy requirements (Detailed audit criteria are provided in Annex A). The data were downloaded from the *Human Resources Management Information System* (HRMIS). The audit also included a review of employment history to determine whether other mechanisms such as temporary help and contracts were being used to hire the same staff.

The following table presents the results of the sample by region.

Region	Casual			Student		
	Number	Percentage	Samples Selected	Number	Percentage	Samples Selected
Atlantic	146	15%	10	44	8%	5
Quebec	165	17%	11	44	8%	5
National Capital	213	21%	14	222	41%	25
Ontario	209	21%	14	141	26%	16
Northern & Prairie	138	14%	9	61	11%	7
Pacific & Yukon	118	12%	8	34	6%	4
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>989</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>66</b>	<b>546</b>	<b>100%</b>	<b>62</b>

## **2.0 FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS**

### **2.1 Casual Employment**

Casual employment is the hiring of employees for specified needs and periods of time. Managers with delegated staffing authority are authorized to hire casual employees for any positions within their organization. The aim is to hire qualified people quickly and fairly in order to respond to unforeseen requirements and for a short period of time. Casual employment should not be a "quick fix" for a long-term need.

A total of 989 casual staffing actions were processed during the period under review. Of those staffing actions, 66 were selected for a detailed review. Two of the 66 files were not available at the time of the audit. In some regions, the files for casual employment are not kept in a central area increasing the risk of misplacing the files. Based on this, the following observations and statistics are based on the remaining 64 samples.

#### **2.1.1 Letter of Offer/Contract**

Environment Canada Casual Employment Policy requires that all appointees receive a written offer that includes the terms and conditions of employment, the period of employment and an indication that continuing employment should not be anticipated after those duties are completed.

All files reviewed contained the required information. The results have indicated that the format of the written offer varies from one region to another. Some regions are using a template form called 'Letter of Offer of Casual Employment' and others are using the more traditional letter of offer. Although this is not a major issue, consistency across the Department is desirable.

### **2.1.2 Periods of Casual Employment**

Periods of casual employment can be for a duration of up to 90 calendar days but the number of days worked must not exceed 125 days in any 12-month period in the same department. Any number of hours worked in a day counts as a full day of work. A person can be reappointed without interruption for one or more periods not exceeding 90 calendar days, provided the number of days worked does not exceed 125 days in any 12-month period.

The audit found a high level of compliance with these limits: the 90-day limit was exceeded in 10 percent and the 125-day limit in only 2 percent. In most cases when the 90-day limit was exceeded, it was unintentional, and by only one or two days. This usually occurred because the staffing action was for three months which can total between 90 and 92 days depending on the month. For example, if someone is hired for the period of January 1 to March 31, the term would equal 90 days, however, the same person hired for the period of August 1, to October 31 would equal 92 days. Tracking the number of days worked can be onerous, specifically at times when an employee works outside normal hours. Currently, most of the regions are manually tracking the days by calendar ensuring that statutory holidays and leave without pay are identified. One region has developed an electronic tool in the form of a spreadsheet that calculates the number of days worked between any given periods. The spreadsheet also takes into account the statutory holidays which are deducted from the total number of days worked. This practice reduces the risk of error in calculating the number of days of casual employment.

### **2.1.3 Rationale for Casual Staffing**

Documentation of the rationale for hiring casual employees is weak. Environment Canada Casual Employment Policy states that managers can hire a casual employee under the following circumstances:

- ❖ to meet unforeseen needs or emergencies;
- ❖ to replace employees for short absences such as vacation, sick leave or training;
- ❖ to conduct projects that are dependent on the availability of funds or have a limited time span; and
- ❖ to meet safety and security requirements and avoid severe service disruption (excluding legal strikes).

On the majority of the files reviewed (78), at least one of the above mentioned reasons for hiring was selected. However, very few (28 percent) had a written rationale to support their selection such as the name of the employee being replaced, the nature of the emergency, the name of the project, etc. Casual employment should not be used to fill a permanent need; therefore a written rationale would provide additional information that substantiates the casual employment. One region has established a review committee that looks at each request for a casual employee. The request is evaluated based on the rationale provided by the manager and approval to hire the casual employee is given through the committee, led by the Regional Human Resources Director.

## **2.1.4 Description of Responsibilities**

A description of responsibilities is required to establish the classification of the position. If the responsibilities are similar or identical to an existing classified position, that position can be quoted. The description of responsibilities is also used to evaluate the candidates against the requirements of the position. Seventy-two percent (72 percent) of the files reviewed did not have a description of responsibilities on file.

## **2.2 Student Employment**

Both the Federal Student Work Experience Program (FSWEP) and the Co-op/Internship program (Co-op) offer temporary public jobs to full-time students from high schools, colleges, technical institutes and universities across Canada all year around. These programs allow managers to fill short-term needs fast with talented students in a field that matches their requirements.

The sample contained 62 student staffing actions. The file for one staffing action could not be located at the time of the audit; therefore, the observations and statistics are based on 61 samples.

### **2.2.1 Student Status**

To be considered for employment by the federal government under one of the student employment programs, a person must be registered as a full-time secondary or post-secondary student in an accredited institution, must be currently recognized as having full-time status by the academic institution; and must be returning to full time studies. Evidence that the person employed qualifies for employment as a student is often missing from the file. Twenty-eight percent (28 percent) of the files reviewed did not contain sufficient information to determine the status of the student. Based on the interviews, there seems to be some uncertainties as to who is responsible for verifying this information. Some Human Resources Managers indicated that, in the case of FSWEP students, the responsibility rested with PSC because it manages the database. As for Co-op students, they noted that the responsibility rested with managers since they were the first point of contact. The Department needs more consistency in documentation required to confirm student status. A student's transcripts on file would meet the requirements.

### **2.2.2 Citizenship**

As with all appointments in the Federal Public Service, priority is given to Canadian citizens. Non-Canadian citizens may apply for jobs within the Federal Public Service; however the Public Service Employment Act sets specific parameters. The files review indicated that although the Report on Staffing Form identified the candidates as being Canadian, there was rarely evidence on file to substantiate it. Only 15 percent had supporting documentation on file. A requirement for proof of citizenship in staffing files (copy of passport or citizenship card) would provide assurance and documentation consistency

### 2.2.3 Fairness and Equity in Hiring Process

PSC requires that ‘Result values’ (competency, representativeness and non-partisanship) and ‘Process values’ (fairness, equity and transparency) be integrated in the staffing process including those for student hiring. To determine whether those values are applied, sufficient information such as résumés of all candidates interviewed, results of the selection process with the interview questionnaire, and a statement of qualification should be on file. The file documentation review indicated that the type of information kept by the Human Resources Section varies from one region to another. Some regions maintain all the information pertaining to the staffing action process while others only maintain the information pertaining to the successful candidate.

Of the 61 files reviewed, 23 were re-employment, therefore, this criterion did not apply for those. Of the remaining 38 files, 21 did not have the results of the selection process, 17 files did not have the résumé of all the candidates, 20 did not have a statement of qualification on file to assess whether the candidate met the requirement. Accordingly, it was not possible to assess whether the selection process was based on the merit principle. The requirement for documentation of the hiring process should be consistent across the Department. To enhance accountability, documentation should be kept in one place and in one file.

## 2.3 Employment History

The review of employment history was undertaken primarily to determine the extent to which other staffing methods, such as temporary help and contracts, were being used in the Department to hire the same person. The following table presents the employment history of the sixty-four (64) casual employees included in our sample.

Casual Employee	Number	Percentage
Number of casual employees re-appointed for one more period not exceeding the 125 days threshold	49	77%
Average number of casual appointments per employee Standard Deviation	3.74 2.97	N/A
Average appointments duration per employee Standard Deviation	8.14 5.97	N/A
Number of casual employees extended through <b>one</b> other staffing method <sup>2</sup>	21	33%
Number of casual employee extended through <b>two</b> other staffing methods <sup>3</sup>	2	3%

<sup>2</sup> A casual employee extended through either Temporary Help, Term (Specified period of time) or indeterminate

<sup>3</sup> A casual employee extended through a Term (Specified period of time) and then through Temporary Help/contract

Casual employees <u>immediately</u> extended beyond the 125 days through other staffing methods:		
❖ Agency/Contract	4	6%
❖ Specified period of time (Term)	15	23%
❖ Indeterminate	2	3%
Casual employees that became indeterminate	5	8%

The table shows that there are a high number of incidences where an employee is rehired through different methods. This could be an indication of a full time need being filled by temporary staffing to avoid the formal competition staffing process.

Staffing through agencies and contracts does not require Human Resources approval as the request is processed through contracting. Staffing through these methods can be very fast, however, the costs associated with these versus a casual or a student can be high. These methods should not be used for recurring needs for fixed periods of time. Seasonal employment should be considered instead. Furthermore, contracting and agency hiring can take away developmental opportunities for staff such as an acting appointment or an assignment.

The audit also included the employment history of student hiring. The following table presents employment history of the 61 students in our sample:

Students re-employed through a student program	38	62%
Students re-employed through a casual	4	7%
Students re-employed through Temporary Help/Contract	2	3%
Student re-employed as indeterminate through bridging	4	7%

This table shows that the majority of students are re-employed through the student program. It is to the advantage of the Department to re-hire students who were performing well.

## **2.4 Best Practices**

A number of best practices were noted during the audit. These best practices should be examined and where appropriate implemented across the department:

- ❖ Some HR assistants/advisors from Pacific & Yukon, Downsview and Quebec are using check lists to ensure that staffing files contain the required forms and information;
- ❖ HR operations from Pacific & Yukon, Prairie and Northern have Intranet web-sites for managers describing the process for hiring casual and student employees. This is an important tool for both new and current managers to ensure that all are following the process as required in the employment policy. Templates are linked to each of the steps;

- ❖ HR operations from PNR provides training on the student hiring process and how to conduct selection boards to managers;
- ❖ HR operations from Atlantic have implemented a Casual Hiring Review Committee; and
- ❖ HR operations from Quebec have developed an electronic spreadsheet to calculate the number of days worked by casual employees.

## **2.5 Recommendations**

The Assistant Deputy Minister, Human Resources Branch should:

- ❖ standardize controls and documentation practices in order to monitor EC efficiency and effectiveness of the staffing process of casual and student employees;
- ❖ ensure that staffing files for both casual and student employments are kept in a centralized area;
- ❖ clarify who is responsible for obtaining supporting documentation such as proof of Canadian Citizenship and documentation confirming the student status. This information should be kept on file; and
- ❖ collect all documentation pertaining to the casual and student staffing process and monitor the results of the selection in light of PSC requirements for 'Results-Value' (competency, representativeness and non partisanship) and 'Process Value' (fairness, equity and transparency).

### Management Response

*Human Resources Branch accepts the findings of the above noted audit and is currently taking the following measures to address the issues raised:*

- *Amendments to the Environment Canada Casual Policy and Student Employment policy to ensure that there is a clear direction and national application;*
- *Update tools for managers and HR Assistants including a staffing documentation check list to be completed on all files;*
- *Review of our delegation training to ensure a consistent message is provided to our managers;*
- *Examination of best practices across the country with intentions to implement a "national "standard approach.*

## **3.0 CONCLUSION**

The results of the audit found substantial compliance with the policy with the exception of the application of the merit principle for student employments, for which we cannot conclude due to the lack of documentation in the human resources files. Environment Canada Casual Employment Policy and Student Employment Policy establish the requirements and the guidelines for the effective management of casual and student employments. The implementation of the recommendations contained in this report should improve management practices and allow for better consistency throughout the Department.



In our professional judgement, sufficient and appropriate audit procedures have been conducted and evidence gathered to support the accuracy of the conclusions reached and contained in this report. The conclusions were based on a comparison of the situations against the audit criteria as they existed at the time of the audit. The conclusions are only applicable to the Human Resources Operations across the Department.

## **Annex 1 - Audit Criteria**

### **Casual Employment**

#### **Terms and Conditions of Employment**

- ❖ Does a contract/letter of offer for employment exist for the casual employee?
  - Does it include the position title?
  - Does it include the start/end dates?
- ❖ Has the Casual employee been hired to fill a temporary need within the department?
- ❖ Is there a rationale or organization chart on file explaining why the employee was hired e.g. replacement).
- ❖ Was the Casual employee terminated from their position? If so, what was the reason for termination?

#### **Policy Requirements**

- ❖ Was the length of time that the Casual employee worked in the department during a 12 month period (12 months from their 1<sup>st</sup> working day) within the *EC/TB Casual Employment Policy* guidelines
  - ≤ 125 working days within one year in the department
  - ≤ 90 calendar days per contract
- ❖ Did the manager have “delegated staffing authority”
- ❖ Is the HR Advisor registered? (Refer to documents provided by HR)

#### **Employment History**

Has the Casual employee been hired by the department in the past? If yes, provide details as follow

### **Student Employment – FSWE/CO-OP**

#### **Terms and Conditions of Employment**

- ❖ Did the student employee receive an employment contract with the appropriate terms of agreement? Does it include:
  - Wage?
  - Start/end dates?
  - Supervisor’s name?
- ❖ Have the job requirements or nature of work been established?

#### **Policy Requirements**

- ❖ Did the manager have “delegated staffing authority”
- ❖ Is the HR Advisor registered? (Refer to documents provided by HR)
- ❖ Was preference given to a Canadian Citizen? If not provide rationale?
- ❖ Does the department have the appropriate documentation to show that the student meets the requirements of a “student” e.g. (Registered as a full-time student, with

full-time status, at an accredited institution, and returning to full-time studies in the next academic term).

- ❖ Was the student's wage determined by the appropriate level of education and experience as outlined in the Treasury Board of Canada's *Terms and Conditions of Employment for Students*?
- ❖ Has the student been re-employed as a student for a second term? If yes, does documentation exist to show that the student completed another application for employment?

**Fairness and Equity in Hiring Process**

- ❖ Was the student referred randomly, along with other potential candidates, through the PSC's inventory? Does documentation of other referred students exist?
- ❖ Does an account and/or ranking of candidates interviewed exist?
- ❖ Was documentation (CV's) of each candidate interviewed kept on record upon the completion of the interview process?
- ❖ Did the successful candidate meet the requirements outlined in the statement of qualifications?
- ❖ Has merit principle been applied?
- ❖ Is there sufficient information on file to demonstrate the process used to determine the winning candidate?
- ❖ Was the selection results form returned (fax) to PSC?

**Employment History**

- ❖ Has the student been hired by the department in the past? If yes, provide details as follow: