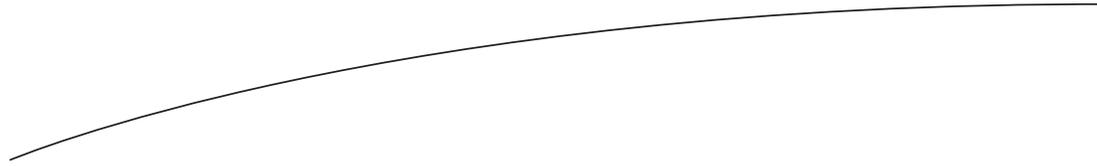




Public Service Commission  
of Canada

Commission de la fonction publique  
du Canada



# Time to staff in the federal public service – An update

A summary report by the  
Public Service Commission of Canada

October 2009

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# **Time to staff in the federal public service – An update**

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## Highlights

Under the current *Public Service Employment Act* (PSEA), the average time needed to staff an indeterminate position in the federal public service has decreased from 24.1 weeks to 23.5 weeks. The figure reported in an earlier study conducted under the former PSEA was 22.8 weeks. Distinct processes, normally intended to staff a single position, take less time to staff under the current PSEA. As was noted in the earlier study, the number of candidates applying to a process continues to drive the length of the process.

Several factors stand out as major contributors to the overall pattern of time to staff, a number of which contribute to its apparent increase under the current PSEA:

- *Processes open to the public* take longer than those restricted to public servants. For the period of October 2007 to September 2008, 47% of processes were open to the public, compared to 34% during the 2000-2003 period. This difference in the types of processes used increases the average time to staff.
- *Collective processes*, designed to appoint more than one candidate, have increased in frequency over the past three years, from 30% of surveyed staffing actions to 43%. These processes take longer than distinct ones, which contributes to an increase in the average time to staff.
- *Organization size*: Managers in large departments and agencies report more time required for indeterminate staffing than medium-sized and small organizations. Larger departments and agencies attract more applicants per process and are more likely to use collective processes.
- *Procedural and capacity factors*: Managers consistently identified the preparation phase prior to posting the position, and the scarcity of human resources (HR) support, as factors that slow down staffing.

## Objectives

The Public Service Commission (PSC) is an independent agency reporting to Parliament, mandated to safeguard the integrity of the public service staffing system and the political neutrality of the public service. To that end, the PSC conducts audits, studies and investigations to confirm the effectiveness of, and to make improvements to, the staffing system.

Time to staff remains an issue for managers in public service organizations, as well as for candidates applying to positions within the federal public service. In May 2006, the PSC published *Time to Staff in the Federal Public Service: Some Contributing Factors*.<sup>1</sup> This study provided statistical information about the time it took organizations under the PSEA to fill indeterminate positions in the federal public service.

The current study provides an update to the findings of the 2006 study, with a particular focus on comparing time to staff before and after the coming into force of the current PSEA on December 31, 2005.

## Time to staff

One objective of the current PSEA is the improvement of the efficiency and timeliness of staffing processes. Efficient and timely staffing processes allow the public service to maintain effective operations and program delivery and enable managers to compete more effectively with other prospective employers. Timely staffing processes also ensure that employees are appointed more quickly and are in place to get the work done.

Time to staff is one area that the PSC is monitoring to determine performance in staffing. The time it takes to staff a position is important to candidates and hiring managers for different reasons. For candidates, a prolonged delay between application and confirmation of the outcome of the staffing action may influence their continued engagement in the process, their motivation for applying to the same employer in the future and whether they recommend that employer to others.

For managers, reduced time to staff potentially increases the likelihood that the best candidates will still be available at the end of the process. In addition, more timely appointments reduce the workload for the remaining staff in the work unit, which contributes to one of the PSEA goals aimed at better integrating HR and business planning.

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<sup>1</sup> This study is available on the PSC Web site at [www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/adt-vrf/rprt/2006/tts-dpd/index-eng.htm](http://www.psc-cfp.gc.ca/adt-vrf/rprt/2006/tts-dpd/index-eng.htm).

## Data

Two survey-based sources of data are used in this report. From 2000 to 2007, the PSC administered the Survey of Appointments (SOA) semi-annually to samples of hiring managers and recent appointees in order to gather data on staffing processes. SOA data for the period of January 2000 to December 2003 were used for the 2006 study. The present study uses SOA data for appointments made between April 2006 and September 2007. Given that this period includes processes carried out under both the former and current PSEA, managers were asked to identify under which Act the process was conducted.

The second data source is the PSC's Survey of Staffing (SOS), introduced in 2009 and replacing the SOA. The SOS covers a broader target population, uses a much larger sample size and is conducted using a different sampling methodology, but it addresses the same subject matter in the same way. Data from the SOS used in this update cover staffing processes that were concluded between October 2007 and September 2008. Both the SOA and the SOS define time to staff as "the time elapsed, in weeks, between when the staffing request form is submitted and the appointee's actual start date."

## Scope and methodology

The two survey-based data sources that were used cover indeterminate recruitment, indeterminate promotions and term-to-indeterminate movement. The SOS also covers term processes and unsuccessful processes; however, these are omitted from the current study for purposes of a more appropriate comparison. Where managers responding to the SOA provided information about a designated appointment and accompanying process, managers responding to the SOS were asked to respond on the basis of the process most recently concluded within the reference period. Due to differences in sampling methodology, the SOS also included more cases from small and medium-sized organizations.

## Key findings<sup>2</sup>

Since the coming into force of the current PSEA, the average time needed to staff an indeterminate position in the federal public service has decreased from 24.1 weeks between April 2006 and September 2007 to 23.5 weeks between October 2007 and September 2008. The figure reported in the 2006 study conducted under the former PSEA was 22.8 weeks. Distinct processes, normally intended to staff a single position, take less time to staff under the current PSEA, a finding that has continued since the coming into force of the current Act.

An examination of the types of staffing processes reveals a number of factors resulting in the overall pattern observed over the period being reported on in this study. In general, the size of the process is a significant factor in the time required to staff a position.

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<sup>2</sup> A more detailed report including technical analysis is available upon request.

## Collective processes take longer

The use of collective processes by departments and agencies has increased over the last few years. Collective processes are designed to appoint more than one candidate. From April 2006 to March 2007, 30.0% of managers reported using collective processes, a proportion that increased to 38.5% from April 2007 to September 2007 and to 43.6% from October 2007 to September 2008.

Substantial differences in time to staff emerge when collective and distinct processes are considered separately. Table 1 shows that, for the period of April 2006 through September 2007, collective processes took an average of 31.1 weeks, compared to 22.7 for distinct processes. More recent data, for the period of October 2007 through September 2008, show improvements in the time to staff for both types of processes, with collective processes taking on average 27.4 weeks, compared to 22.1 weeks for distinct processes.

**Table 1: Variations in time to staff across collective and distinct processes**

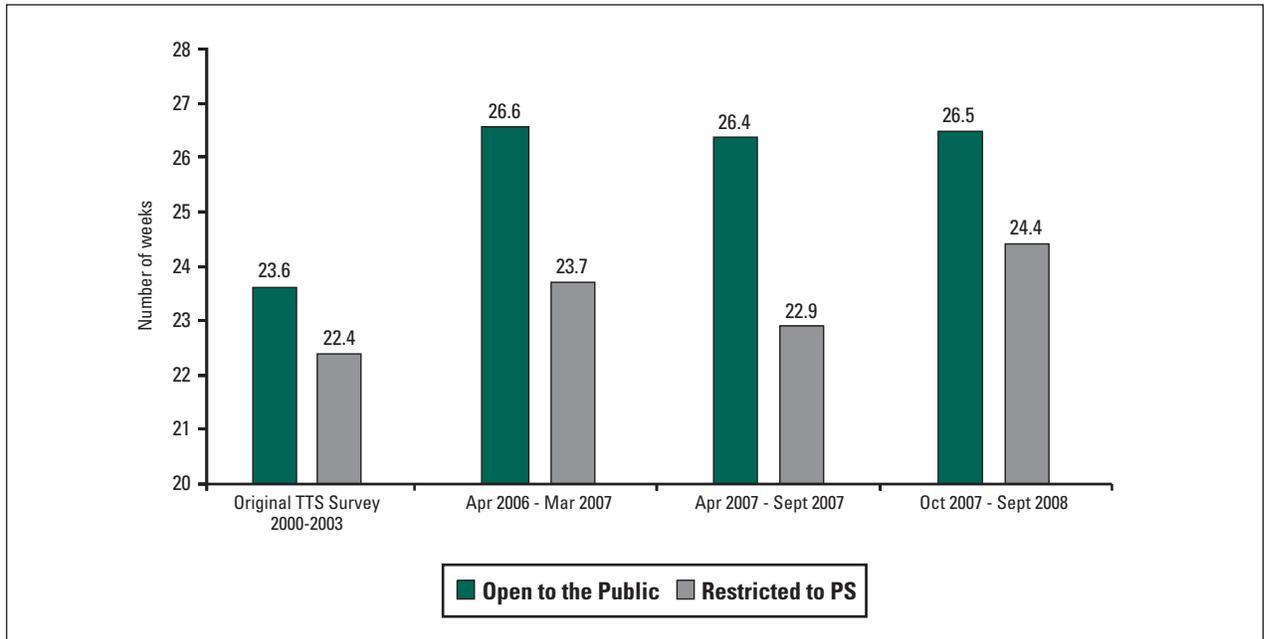
Time to staff (in weeks)	April 2006 – September 2007	October 2007 – September 2008	2006 study
<b>All processes</b>	<b>24.1</b>	<b>23.5</b>	<b>22.8</b>
<b>Collective</b>	<b>31.1</b>	<b>27.4</b>	*
Internal	27.8	27.1	
Open to public	32.5	27.8	
<b>Distinct</b>	<b>22.7</b>	<b>22.1</b>	*
Internal	22.1	21.6	
Open to public	23.3	23.1	

\* No distinction was made in the 2006 study.

## Processes open to the public take longer

For the period of October 2007 through September 2008, the average time to staff for processes open to the public was 26.5 weeks, compared to 24.4 weeks for processes internal to the public service. This difference is influenced by the larger number of applicants applying to open processes. Open processes attracted 125 applicants, on average, whereas processes restricted to those already employed in the public service drew on average only 37 applicants.

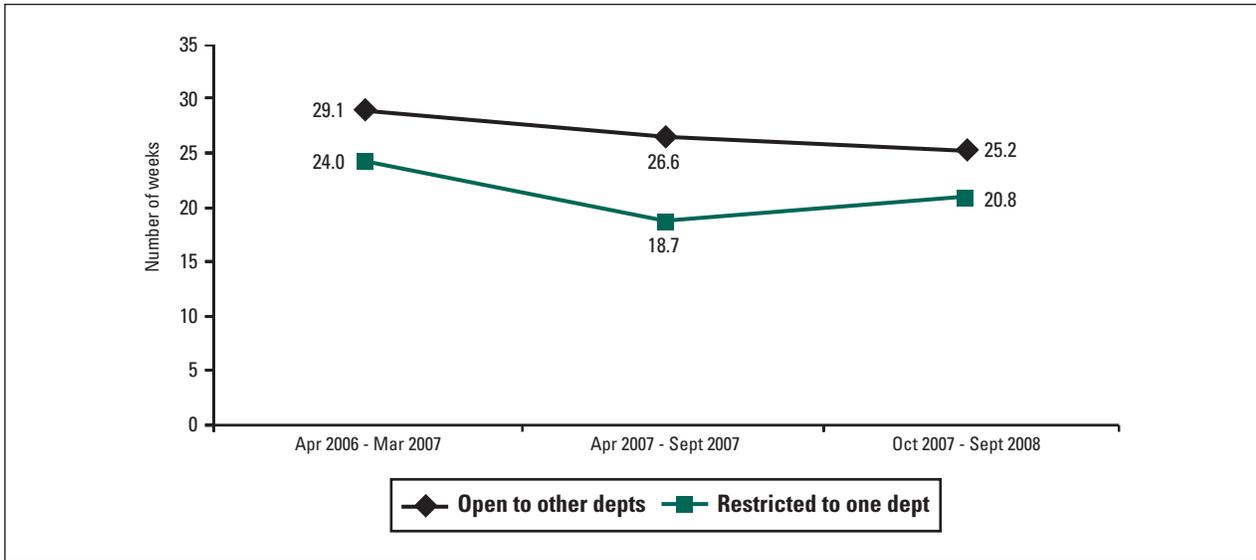
**Figure 1: Time to staff, by period and by internal versus external process**



From 2000 to 2003, just over a third (34%) of managers surveyed indicated that they used an external process. By 2007-2008, this percentage had increased to nearly half of staffing processes (47%). This increase in the number of staffing actions that are open to the public has contributed to the increase in the average time to staff.

Internal processes restricted to one department or agency were generally faster than those open to other organizations (see Figure 2). This appears to be due to the volume of applicants, as processes open to other organizations resulted in an average of 77 applicants, compared to 22 applicants for processes restricted to a single department or agency.

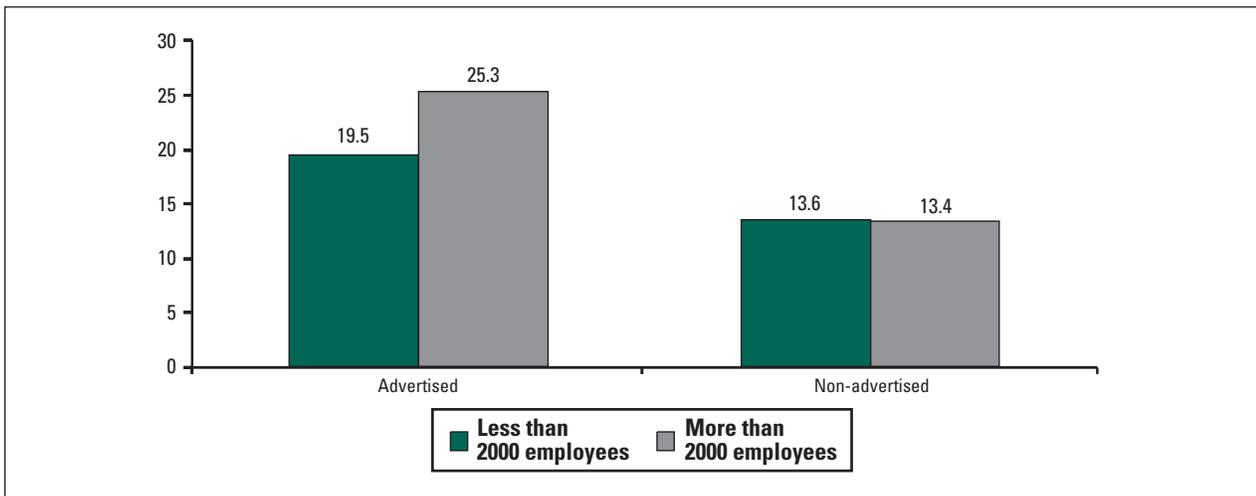
**Figure 2: Time to staff, by period and organizational restriction**



### Processes in large organizations take longer

On average, advertised processes conducted in large organizations took six weeks longer to staff than those in medium-sized and small ones. Managers working in large organizations reported an average time to staff of 25.3 weeks, compared with 19.5 weeks for medium-sized and small organizations. No significant difference in time to staff was noted for non-advertised processes based on organization size.

**Figure 3: Time to staff, by organization size and process type (weeks)**



Differences in time to staff based on organization size appear to stem from differences in their respective use of collective processes and processes open to the public. Whereas almost half (47%) of managers from large organizations reported using a collective staffing process, only 34% of managers in medium-sized and small organizations reported doing so. Furthermore, half of the managers from large organizations reported opening their staffing processes to the public (50%), compared to only 36% of their counterparts employed in medium-sized and smaller organizations.

## Processes in which the first offer of appointment is accepted are faster

The measure of time to staff used here includes the time required to make subsequent offers of appointment when the initial offer is declined. Managers whose offer of appointment was declined by their first choice of candidate reported taking longer to staff a position, compared to those whose first choice accepted the offer (28.0 weeks versus 22.9 weeks). The present data do not permit us to conclude whether the increase in the length of the process was due to the loss of the preferred candidate or whether the loss of the preferred candidate was due to the increased length of the process.

## Manager perceptions on time to staff

Administrative activities conducted prior to posting the position, such as preparing job descriptions and drafting statements of merit criteria, as well as the availability of HR support, are perceived by managers as being important factors that contribute to the length of their staffing processes. Over 70% of managers surveyed indicated that slowness in the pre-process preparation delayed their staffing to some or to a great extent, a percentage that has remained fairly constant since April 2006. Similarly, over 60% of managers reported that insufficient HR support delayed their staffing to some or to a great extent.

The current PSEA was intended to provide managers with a degree of flexibility that would permit staffing to become more efficient. In anticipation of the transition from the previous to the current PSEA, managers were asked whether they felt that they had enough flexibility to carry out staffing processes in an efficient manner. The perception of those managers completing a competitive process under the previous PSEA was generally positive (82% reporting sufficient flexibility). This improved slightly for those managers conducting staffing processes under the current PSEA, with 86% of managers surveyed indicating sufficient flexibility.

Perception of greater flexibility was associated with shorter processes. Managers who reported “a great deal” of flexibility in carrying out their staffing actions reported an average time to staff of 20.1 weeks, compared to 26.4 weeks for managers who indicated “some flexibility” and 34.5 weeks for managers who reported “little or no” flexibility.

## Concluding remarks

The current *Public Service Employment Act* was expected to improve the efficiency and the flexibility of staffing processes. Time to staff is one area that the Public Service Commission is tracking to evaluate staffing performance. The findings of the Survey of Staffing and the Survey of Appointments indicate a slight improvement in the time to staff since the implementation of the current Act. However, due to the types of staffing processes undertaken, the overall average is still slightly above that experienced under the former Act. Data show a higher use of collective processes as well as an increase in processes open to the public, both of which typically attract more applicants. Survey findings also show that managers find that pre-process preparation and lack of human resources support continue to delay the staffing process.

## Study team

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