



Public Service Commission
of Canada

Commission de la fonction publique
du Canada

Summary Report on the Pre-Qualified Pool (PQP) Evaluation

February 28, 2005



Canada 

Table of Contents

Executive Summary	3
Introduction	5
What is a Pre-Qualified Pool (PQP)?	5
Why have PQPs?	5
How were PQPs established?	5
Which departments are using PQPs?	6
Why and how was this evaluation done?	6
Documents reviewed for Best Practices	7
Objectives	8
Findings	8
Department of Fisheries and Oceans(DFO) evaluation findings.....	9
PQP template	9
Referrals, selection, and appointments issue	10
Recourse process.....	10
Definition of a “Reasonable Expectation of Appointment”	10
Clarification of “best fit”	11
Eagerness of departments to use PQPs	11
Answers to the six lines of inquiry	11
1. How has the policy been used to date? Why had there been a limited number of requests by departments for the authority to establish PQPs?.....	11
2. To what degree does the PQP contribute to objective decisions related to appointments of fully qualified candidates representative of the Canadian public?.....	12
3. Does the establishment of a PQP improve access to jobs in the Public Service (PS)?	13
4. Does the PQP contribute to savings in costs and time as well as promote flexibility?.....	13
5. What aspects of the policy and regulations are contributing to the expected results and what aspects should be changed, if any, and in what manner?.....	14
6. Does the use of the PQP contribute to improved staffing and recruitment practices?.....	14

Recommendations and Responses	15
(1) The Submission Process	15
(2) Delegating Authority	15
(3) PQP Tools	17
(4) The PQP Policy	17
(5) PQP Referrals	17
(6) Monitoring and Reporting	19
Conclusion	19

Executive Summary

The purpose of this summary evaluation report is to address the key results achieved by departments that have been piloting pre-qualified pools (PQPs) to fill positions below the EX level. The principal intent of the evaluation was to inform the policy and delegation sectors of the Public Service Commission (PSC) about the status and effectiveness of the PQP policy in the context of decisions to be taken about its future delegation.

The evaluation findings are presented at a time when the PSC and departments are preparing for the full implementation of the new *Public Service Employment Act* (PSEA), which is planned for December 2005.

The PSC evaluation report found that to date only the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO) had been able to fully establish (as of May 2003) its external PQP pilot, to staff AS-01 positions.

As a result, the PSC evaluation focussed primarily on the experience at DFO and on interviews that were conducted with human resources (HR) representatives in 12 federal departments and agencies. As called for in the decision approving delegation of the PQP authority to DFO, the department conducted its own review of its experience and sent a report to the Commission. Our evaluation includes a review of the DFO report, along with other evaluation tools that are discussed in the methodology section.

Findings from other PQP pilots were limited, given that the departments using the authority were in the initial stages of their “pool” development. Consequently, the PSC was not able to evaluate how the new recourse mechanisms associated with internal PQPs would work.

The evaluation found that DFO had met the main objectives of the PQP policy: to provide managers with an efficient and flexible staffing mechanism that provides candidates with improved access to job opportunities, while protecting merit, fairness and transparency.

In particular, the rigorous candidate assessment process put in place at DFO contributed significantly towards ensuring that the PQP had provided fully qualified candidates with improved access. Numerous steps were taken at DFO to communicate with managers, candidates, and employees about the AS-01 PQP, to ensure a fair and transparent process. Overall, the experience at DFO confirmed that when implemented correctly, the PQP mechanism can constitute a low-risk staffing process that respects merit and Public Service staffing values.

The evaluation findings largely supported DFO's own self-assessment that its PQP initiative was a success. The PQP mechanism was used effectively to appoint a total of twenty-eight candidates, although it fell somewhat short of staffing the 40 candidates it had initially expected to recruit from the pool. The Department has shared its PQP experience and, by so doing, has generated increased interest in PQPs among other federal agencies and departments.

The successful outcome of the DFO PQP depended on several critical success factors, including: proper HR planning; effective communication with all stakeholders; senior management and union support; the proper allocation of time and resources (for technology, infrastructure, tools and administration); and a dedicated project team.

In addition to reviewing the experience at DFO, we interviewed 15 other departmental stakeholders about the PQP submission process and the implementation of the PQP policy, to assess why they had or had not used the PQP authority or related mechanisms, such as partially assessed pools. Overall, we found departments were quite eager to move away from the existing vacancy-by-vacancy approach and experiment with this authority. However, we also found that several departments had been deterred from using this new tool by what they perceived to be "excessive template requirements" and a "rigorous PSC submission/approval process".

Given that the PQP staffing mechanism represents a low risk to merit and the Public Service staffing values, the evaluation report recommends that consideration be given to the early delegation of the PQP authority to all departments and agencies.

The evaluation report also recommends that the PSC clarify some key policy questions that were found to contribute to departmental concerns. This included the need to clarify terms such as "reasonable expectation of appointment" and "best fit" for selection from the pool, the conduct of referrals, and eligibility for recourse. This needs to be done before the general delegation of PQPs takes place.

The six report recommendations and the PSC directorates' responses to these recommendations can be found under the Recommendations and Responses section of this summary report.

Introduction

This document provides a summary of the evaluation of the pilot pre-qualified pool (PQP) that was established for positions below the EX level at the Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO).

The primary purpose of the evaluation was to provide information and advice to the Delegation and Policy directorates of the Public Service Commission (PSC) on the implementation of its PQP policy, in the context of the changing PSEA. The evaluation was completed in September 2004.

What is a Pre-Qualified Pool?

A “pre-qualified pool” (PQP) is a group of individuals who have been through a full assessment, and are deemed to be equally qualified to be hired for similar positions of the same occupational group and level. A PQP is established when one or more departments need to fill several positions with the same qualifications.

Why have PQPs?

There are a number of reasons for having PQPs. To start with, they provide managers with an efficient and flexible way of staffing when there is a recurring need to fill similar positions in the same occupational group and at the same level. They also allow for transparent appointments of competent candidates, while saving time and costs. In addition, they provide candidates with improved access to job opportunities, while protecting the hiring values of merit, fairness and transparency. Finally, under the new PSEA planned for implementation in December 2005, the PSC will delegate greater responsibilities in staffing and recruitment to departments. Having PQPs in place can assist departments to take on these new responsibilities under the new Act.

How were PQPs established?

When the PSC decided to authorize departments to establish and make appointments from PQPs, it was for two reasons:

- to respond to a July 2000 report from the Committee of Senior Officials’ (COSO) Sub-Committee on Recruitment. This Committee suggested that more inventories and pools of “pre-qualified recruits” were needed because departments were reporting that there was a demand for this service either as a centralized one or across departments with similar needs.

- to respond to the July 2001 report from the Auditor General (AG). This report recommended that creating a greater number of central and departmental inventories would allow managers to be able to quickly identify pre-qualified candidates.

As a consequence, the PSC amended the *Public Service Employment Regulations* (PSER) on July 24, 2001 to provide for the establishment of PQPs. In addition, specific PQP Recourse Regulations for use with internal pools (i.e., when a PQP is **only** open to Public Service employees) were approved in April 2002. Following this, on May 31, 2002, the PSC delegated the authority to make appointments from a PQP (below the EX level) to all departments, once departments obtained the PSC's approval to establish a PQP.

Which departments are using PQPs?

To date, six departments have been authorized to proceed with a PQP. These are:

- Department of Fisheries and Oceans (DFO);
- Department of the Environment (DOE);
- Department of National Defence (DND);
- Citizenship and Immigration (IMC);
- Health Canada (SHC); and
- Canada Border Services Agency (CBSA).

While PQP pilots are underway in several of these departments, only DFO has fully used the PQP policy and undergone a complete staffing process.

Overall, there was a great deal of interest in PQPs among at least half of the larger federal departments and agencies that have been investigating the advantages of having pools for groups below the EX level. In fact, some 15 large departments had held discussions with the PSC to obtain delegated PQP authority.

Why and how was this evaluation done?

We wanted to find out how PQPs were being used to date, and in particular, how DFO's PQP was working. DFO was the only department with an approved and completed PQP, where the entire staffing process could be examined. So we did a number of things:

- reviewed DFO's staffing files related to its AS-01 pool.
- reviewed DFO's own report, *Pre-Qualified Pool Selection Process Pilot Initiative (December 2003)*.
- analyzed the results of a PSC questionnaire that was sent to 22 hiring managers at DFO and the results of a PSC electronic survey that was sent to 639 screened-in candidates at DFO.

- to further examine how PQPs were being used, interviewed HR specialists in 12 large federal departments and agencies, including five departments that have obtained PQP authority.
- interviewed HR representatives of three functional communities that used Partially Assessed Pools (PAPs): Communications, Science and Technology, and Regulatory and Inspection.
- obtained the views of the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC) and the Professional Institute of the Public Service (PIPS). Discussions also took place with both the Public Service Commission Advisory Council (PSCAC) PQP Working Group and with senior HR and policy specialists at the PSC. It should be noted that the principal purpose of the PSCAC PQP Working Group has been to examine the implications of using the PQP models and monitor the departments' PQP pilots.

To examine how PQPs have been used to date, we looked at a number of aspects:

- purpose or rationale for the departmental PQP(s);
- number of applicants and appointments made and pool profile;
- process duration and pool management; ;
- referral processes;
- stakeholders' satisfaction with the overall process;
- costs incurred, risks and challenges; and
- best practices and critical success factors.

Documents reviewed for Best Practices

To identify best practices, the documents reviewed included:

- the Report of the COSO Sub-Committee on Recruitment, July 2000: *Recruitment and results, What do we need to look at?*
- the Auditor General's Report (OAG), July 2001: *Recruitment for Canada's Future Public Service: Changing the Practices*
- the PSC's PQP template, PQP policy, and recourse regulations;
- reports on Smart Shops (HR training sessions/workshops) and Internet/intranet information on PQPs;
- reports and minutes prepared by the PSCAC PQP Working Group, as well as comments from members of the Professional Institute of the Public Service (PIPS) and the Public Service Alliance of Canada (PSAC); and
- the PSC's Accountability Directorate's files on Canada Customs and Review Agency (CCRA) pools.

Objectives

To determine whether the objectives of the PQPs were achieved, we examined six key lines of inquiry:

- 1. How has the policy been used to date? Why is there a limited number of requests by departments for the authority to establish PQPs?*
- 2. To what degree does the PQP contribute to objective decisions related to appointments of fully qualified candidates representative of the Canadian public?*
- 3. Does the establishment of a PQP improve access to jobs in the Public Service?*
- 4. Does the PQP contribute to savings in costs and time as well as promoting flexibility?*
- 5. What aspects of the policy and regulations are contributing to the expected results and what aspects should be changed, if any, and in what manner?*
- 6. Does the use of the PQP contribute to improving staffing and recruitment practices?*

Findings

From the DFO report, we observed that the following are critical success factors for PQPs:

- **Solid HR planning:**
 - forecasting an accurate number of anticipated vacancies and types of appointments (acting, term or indeterminate); and
 - knowing the language requirements of the positions being staffed.
- **Ongoing communication with all stakeholders:**
 - being open and transparent; and
 - having regular communications.
- **Effective project management:**
 - dedicating resources for a PQP project team;
 - developing generic work descriptions, statements of qualifications and assessment tools;
 - maintaining a database; and
 - involving hiring managers.
- **Meaningful conflict resolution mechanisms**
- **Public Service staffing values:**
 - ensuring that PQPs are designed, implemented and managed in a fair, equitable and transparent manner resulting in competent, non-partisan and representative appointees.

DFO evaluation findings

From the DFO review, we found that the PQP at DFO was a useful tool and a fruitful exercise. While the department had initially expected to fill 40 positions from the AS-01 PQP, 28 pool candidates were eventually appointed:

- 25 pool candidates were hired by DFO;
- 3 pool candidates were hired by other departments.

The DFO report identified several key PQP practices and success factors, including:

- for efficiency and cost effectiveness, an Internet Web site was used to better communicate with the candidates;
- dedicated contact persons were available to answer candidates' questions;
- proper project planning and costing was done;
- various linguistic profiles were developed;
- more emphasis was placed on the assessment of all qualifications, by ensuring that appropriate assessment criteria were identified in the statements of qualifications;
- clear rules and parameters were established for the PQP process;
- all testing locations were appropriate and functional;
- sufficient notice was provided to candidates and assessment tools were tested;
- unions/management participated early in the planning;
- buy-in from managers on the required standards of competence was ensured; and
- proper training was provided for hiring managers and selection board members.

In addition, we found that DFO was the first department to use and apply the PQP policy. As a DFO representative recently stated, "it took months of varied human resources activities before the department was in a position to make offers from their PQP, due to the fact that it was the first department to actually submit a proposal to the PSC, and as a result, during the early delegation submission drafting stage, both the PSC and DFO were learning as we moved along. In some cases, some of the early information received by the department didn't cover issues such as selection criteria at the referral stage, etc."

PQP Template

We observed that the main reason departments did not ask for delegated authority was because of the perceived excessive requirements of the PQP template and rigour of PSC submission and approval process.

According to most departments interviewed, the overall use of the template provided by PSC on its Web site "generally went well" and "the background and introduction parts of the template were fine." However, all nine departments described the template as being "too long, labour intensive and repetitive." This was particularly true for the rationale and PQP management aspects of the template.

Referrals, selection, and appointments issue

We found that departments had many questions regarding the conduct of referrals, selection and appointments:

- How should the selection and referral process be conducted (for example, randomly, top-down, three named referrals, etc.)?
- Who will have access to recourse and when? If random referrals are conducted, will this mean that those not referred (yet meeting the selection criteria) also have a right to recourse? Or does it mean only those who were randomly selected and interviewed have recourse?
- What will happen to candidates remaining in the pool after the validity period (two years for the pilot) has elapsed? The unions believe that no new pools should be established until the existing pools are emptied.
- How long is a PQP valid? The issue of pool duration needs to be addressed, since it is not evident that pre-qualified candidates are no longer qualified after the pool is no longer valid.
- Are random referrals allowed or is top-down ranking the only allowed approach?

Recourse process

We found that departments were unclear as to who has a right to recourse with internal PQPs and when. It should be noted that there is no similar recourse mechanism for external PQP candidates.

The current internal PQP recourse process, which is an opportunity for internal candidates to appeal when they are not selected to fill a position, has two key decision points:

- after notification is given of not being placed in the pool; and
- when a qualified candidate is not appointed, but was considered to meet the selection criteria.

Five of the 12 large departments interviewed expressed concerns about the current PQP recourse process. Specifically, these departments were critical of the second point at which a candidate has recourse and felt that it should be eliminated.

Definition of a “Reasonable Expectation of Appointment”

We found that the different interpretations of PQP terms like “reasonable expectation of appointment” are viewed by many departments as being “too restrictively applied and interpreted by the PSC and Public Service unions.”

Although the objective of PQP appointments from the pool is to fill indeterminate positions, some candidates may only have received term or acting appointments during the life of the pool. As stated by one department: “The policy is more strictly applied for pools than for most eligibility lists, which is not helpful for managers. Reasonable expectation has come to mean almost a guarantee of appointment!”

Clarification of “best fit”

We observed that clarity or direction is needed on how managers should decide on selection from the pool to a position. With large numbers of applicants, ratings of competencies can be very close. Managers need guidance on how to justify their decisions to candidates and current employees.

Specifically, what is meant by “best fit” regarding candidates who have been referred to a hiring manager? Some departments believe that once the selection criteria have been provided by the manager, all those who “qualify” for the position **must** be referred.

Eagerness of departments to use PQPs

Overall, we found that departments are eager to use PQPs. They wish to move away from a vacancy-by-vacancy approach to staffing, replacing it in part with an approach that is both more cost effective and reflects sound HR planning. In fact, a few large departments have already developed initiatives that are allowing them to recruit “pre-assessed” candidates to fill several similar positions at a time. These initiatives include the use of inventories (which are being used by several functional communities) to fill positions more effectively and with greater speed.

Answers to the six lines of inquiry

1. How has the policy been used to date and why had there been a limited number of requests by departments for the authority to establish PQPs?

To date, only DFO has fully used and applied the PQP policy. Of the initial estimated 40 vacant positions at DFO, 25 were filled by DFO and 3 were filled in other departments.

In part, this was due to the lack of fully bilingual candidates in the AS-01 pool. According to DFO, in an attempt to provide an opportunity for some of the current casual and term employees who were not fully bilingual, managers initially requested various AS-01 linguistic profiles be staffed from the pool. However, when these term/casual candidates were not successful in the PQP process, these same managers requested that fully bilingual candidates be referred. In addition, changes to the government’s approach to imperative staffing have resulted in a lower demand for

unilingual candidates than was originally predicted.

In determining why there was a limited number of PQP requests, interviews with PQP users, non-users, and departments that had withdrawn their PQP submission revealed the following:

- The main reason departments withdrew or did not go forward with a PQP submission was the length and rigour of the template and the submission process in general.
- Other barriers were:
 - an inability to control the volume of applicants and conduct effective HR planning;
 - the perceived policy and recourse risks associated with PQPs;
 - increased administration and resource costs;
 - the availability of other staffing options; and
 - in some cases, an inability to effectively address union and/or regional concerns.

2. To what degree does the PQP contribute to objective decisions related to appointments of fully qualified candidates representative of the Canadian public?

Overall, we found that the candidate assessment process put in place at DFO was thorough and rigorous. According to the DFO PQP report, considerable effort was made to review the tools, including the use of an employment equity lens, in collaboration with the Personnel Psychology Centre (PPC). All of the hiring managers surveyed found that the candidates they appointed were fully qualified. From these findings we can conclude that the PQP process at DFO contributed to making objective decisions regarding the appointments of fully qualified candidates.

The overall PQP process at DFO benefitted from a strong senior management support. Efforts were made by the HR unit to communicate the PQP approach to all concerned and ensure their early involvement in the development of competency standards.

In terms of representativeness, the development of the assessment tools for the AS-01 pool at DFO took account of employment equity (EE) considerations. Of the sixty candidates who were entered into the pool, five (8%) came from EE groups.

Also, one department established an external PQP that was designed to specifically target persons with disabilities and visible minorities. Twenty-four positions were expected to be filled over the next two years, by EE candidates. Hence, PQPs can effectively be used to improve a department's representativeness.

3. Does the establishment of a PQP improve access to jobs in the Public Service ?

Given that these types of positions are normally staffed from within the Public Service, the establishment of the DFO PQP appears to have improved access to Public Service jobs for those outside the federal workforce.

- Of the 1,352 applicants, 1033 (76%) came from persons outside the Public Service.
- Of the 60 fully qualified candidates who entered the pool, 77% came from outside the Public Service.
- Finally, of the total 28 candidates appointed, 20 (71%) were from outside the Public Service.

This demonstrated that an external PQP can be a useful tool for the purpose of injecting “new blood” into the Public Service. In addition, pools can be established with the aim of specifically improving the department’s EE representation. As for ensuring that a sufficient number and quality of candidates were attracted, this did not appear to be a problem for either the DFO or DOE PQPs.

4. Does the PQP contribute to savings in costs and time, as well as promote flexibility?

The PSC does not systematically collect information regarding departmental recruitment costs. Hence, we did not have any comparable cost data that could serve to effectively assess in a rigorous manner whether PQPs had contributed to time and cost savings.

The DFO report stated that the total cost of their PQP pilot was \$223K. Based on the number of successful candidates (28), this equates to \$7,900 per individual appointed. Generally, PQPs and Partially Assessed Pools (PAP) were found to cost between \$5,000 and \$9,000 per appointment.

With respect to the time required to staff positions, twenty-eight (28) positions were staffed from the DFO pool over of a period of about thirty-five weeks. A rough comparison with data on a large number of individual open competitions from the PSC Program of Special Surveys shows that for processes involving more than 500 applicants (which is typically the case for PQPs), the average staffing time is about 40 weeks. This data supports the notion that PQP processes are more effective time-wise and cost-wise than individual competitive processes.

PQPs also appeared to be providing managers with increased flexibility by reducing the need to use eligibility lists that are applied and followed in a top-down manner.

5. What aspects of the policy and regulations are contributing to the expected results and what aspects should be changed, if any, and in what manner?

In evaluating the PQP policy and regulations, we found that, overall, they contributed to the expected results. However, certain policy issues were identified, and these should be addressed by the PSC with feedback from other stakeholders. These include:

- clarifying certain key PQP terms (“best fit” and “reasonable expectation of appointment”);
- clarifying whether departments have the authority to create sub-pools within a pool;
- providing guidance regarding pool structure, validity periods, and how assessment, referrals and selection should be conducted;
- revising the PQP template;
- revising the submission process; and
- revisiting the recourse process and regulations.

6. Does the use of the PQP contribute to improved staffing and recruitment practices?

The use of PQPs was found to improve staffing and recruitment practices. The DFO PQP significantly contributed to a better understanding by the department of fairness, equity and transparency by defining the recruitment, assessment and referral process. DFO was cognizant of the need to design, develop and use assessment tools that could accurately assess the qualifications of candidates and serve as a predictor of future behaviour. With the exception of the General Competency Test Level 2, the department developed these tools in-house and provided training to the individuals involved in various parts of the process (i.e., selection board members). In addition, the referral processes were effectively explained to stakeholders, and useful tools (such as referral forms) were developed to assist managers and HR specialists in identifying the selection criteria up front.

At the same time, hiring managers retained some flexibility in choosing the candidates who had the best experience for the positions and were a good fit with their team.

Based on a file review of the 25 appointments made at DFO, there appeared to be two or three cases where referrals were not contacted or interviewed by the hiring manager. This occurred either because some of the candidates could not be reached in a timely manner or because the first candidate interviewed was hired. DFO stated that in their view “this method of hiring was not deemed to be problematic at the time due to the fact that referrals were randomly generated and that all candidates in the pool were fully qualified.” To ensure transparency, however, we believe that all candidates being referred from a pool should be contacted and considered equally by the hiring manager. This is because it is the hiring manager who determines in advance the number of pool candidates to be referred.

Recommendations

The recommendations of this study are as follows:

(1) Recommendation – the submission process

The principal deterrent for obtaining delegated authority for PQPs has been what departments see as a demanding, time-consuming and rigorous submission/approval process. This process is not consistent with the assessment that PQPs are a low-risk staffing option with respect to merit. If the PSC wishes to see greater use of PQPs, it could delegate this authority, provided certain conditions are met, especially solid HR planning.

We recommend that the Delegation Directorate should consider delegating to all departments with a valid Staffing Delegation and Accountability Agreement (SDAA) the Commission's authority to establish pre-qualified pools (PQP) for positions below the EX level, provided that basic conditions to be set by Delegation Directorate are met.

(2) Recommendation - delegating authority

Failure to delegate this authority may send the wrong signal to departments that already perceive the PSC as being skeptical and lacking trust in their ability to be fully accountable. Recruitment statistics at DFO indicated that if this authority is not given to departments early, a higher number of casuals might be appointed. Given that the PQP authority stems from section 10(2) of the current PSEA, there appears to be no statutory impediment to such delegation.

We recommend that the Delegation Directorate consider delegating PQP authority to all departments and agencies, as soon as it is feasible (prior to the December 2005 coming into force of the Public Service Modernization Act).

Responses from the Delegation Directorate to Recommendations 1 and 2?

There are three main reasons for not proceeding with these recommendations.

First, the establishment of a PQP is a major undertaking which requires a significant investment of time and resources from a department. DFO's experience demonstrated that "it took months of varied human resources activities before the department was in a position to make offers from their PQP." The creation of a PQP under the current PSEA will require departments to manage it under the conditions and limitations of that Act, even after the coming into force

of the new PSEA. Given that the coming into force is less than a year away, it would not be worthwhile to initiate new PQPs under the existing Act.

Second, the new PSEA provides for greater flexibility, thus eliminating some of the constraints of current PQP practices, one of which is the commitment to a reasonable expectation of appointment for each candidate in the pool. It would, therefore, make more sense for departments to manage PQPs under the flexibility provided by the new PSEA.

Third, the consultations with various stakeholders revealed that overall, there was not a great enthusiasm for full PQP delegation at this time. A summary of these consultations is provided below:

- HR Modernization Consultation Group of the National Staffing Council
While the members expressed a general consensus for the PQP initiative, they had a strong concern regarding their HR workload and capacity to manage further delegation in the context of modernization initiatives. Only one department, DFO, which had already managed a PQP on a pilot basis, was eager to receive the proposed delegation.
- PSCAC PQP Working Group
The two bargaining agents present at the consultation meeting, namely PIPS and CAPE, opposed the full PQP delegation to departments, mainly because of their concerns with the internal recourse mechanism. They indicated their preferences to continue with the current practice of delegating PQPs upon approval from the PSC, until the implementation of the new PSEA. The PIPS President and the CAPE President later wrote to the PSC President to express their concerns. The three departments represented at this meeting each had a different view on the proposal, and therefore there was no departmental consensus on PQP blanket delegation.
- Staffing Models and Tools Working Group
(under the auspices of the Deputy Minister Committee on Staffing and Staffing Recourse)
This working group had been encouraging departments to experiment with PQPs under the current PSEA. However, after discussions with the committee co-chair of issues related to the timing of PQP delegation and some of the constraints under the current Act, it was recognized that delegation at this point in time would not make sense.
- PSC stakeholders
Internal consultation within PSC, which took place some months ago, that had indicated there was support for this initiative at the time.

(3) Recommendation - PQP tools

The PQP template is already a useful tool in assisting departments to develop their PQPs, and should be maintained and updated regularly. A “frequently asked questions (FAQ) document” could also provide useful advice about: special accommodation; application requirements; employment equity considerations; Internet technology; pool infrastructure and administration; testing for language and other proficiencies; and other related issues, such as sub-pools, referrals and recourse.

We recommend that the Policy and Delegation directorates consider preparing and posting a list of FAQs to assist departments in developing their PQPs.

Response to Recommendation 3

A list of FAQs has been prepared, and was posted on the PSC Web site in December 2004.

(4) Recommendation - the PQP policy

To avoid misinterpretations and/or complaints by stakeholders, certain PQP-related terms such as “best fit” and “reasonable expectation for appointment” need to be defined or clarified.

We agree in principle with the premise that departments should “provide pool candidates with a reasonable expectation of being appointed.” Under certain conditions, however, such as major organizational changes, changes of government, and budget constraints, the expectation may need to be modified. Even with the best HR planning, departments have little control over how many candidates will apply and qualify to enter the pool.

We recommend that the Policy Directorate consider addressing the PQP policy issues that were identified in this report regarding the notions of “reasonable expectation for appointment” and “best fit” for selection.

(5) Recommendation - PQP referrals

The risks associated with the delegation of PQPs are at the management and administration phase, more specifically with the referral and selection process once the PQP has been established.

According to the DFO files reviewed, not all candidates who were referred for a position were advised that they had been referred. In two or three cases, not all the candidates who were referred to a hiring manager were contacted by the manager for further consideration.

According to a DFO representative, “It was not a requirement of our process to inform candidates each time that they were referred to a position, but that we took it upon ourselves to do so... In some cases, the first candidate interviewed was fine and the manager made an offer. Once again, we never committed to anything that precluded this type of action. As all the candidates in the pool were to be referred and random selection was used every time a manager asked for referrals, it did not appear to be unfair if the manager decided to hire the first, second or third person. We do not believe that this way of handling referrals was contrary to the values of fairness and transparency.”

In our view, however, this practice can clearly affect the candidates’ perception of the fairness and transparency of the PQP process.

Departments should be able to demonstrate that all candidates who were referred were given an equal opportunity to be considered and that candidates are made aware of this by the hiring manager, should they wish to challenge a particular decision.

We recommend that the Policy Directorate consider communicating to departments that all those being referred from a PQP should be considered for the position as well as formally informed of this consideration.

In open competitions, when departments do not consider all external candidates, random referrals would be an acceptable approach, provided employees and unions are advised of this procedure at the outset of the process.

Unions and several departments have expressed the view that “if referrals were done randomly” via a lottery or electronic system, there might not be a need for recourse.

We recommend that the Policy Directorate explore the notion of random referrals in internal and external PQP processes.

Responses to Recommendations 4 and 5

The issues raised in recommendations 4 and 5 are addressed through the “Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)” in Chapter 15 of the PSC Staffing Manual. It is felt that clarification of the notions of “reasonable expectation for appointment” (FAQ 1.3), “best fit/right fit” (FAQ 3.1) and “random referral” (FAQ 3.2) will correct the misunderstandings expressed by departmental representatives. With respect to Recommendation 5, FAQ 3.1 responds to the concern expressed in the first part of the recommendation (i.e., that the manager must consider each person who meets the selection criteria). With regard to the

second aspect, the PQP Recourse Regulations provide that a manager must formally inform all those who meet the selection criteria and are not selected of the decision after a selection is made, and also of their right to recourse (FAQ #5.2). In addition, Chapter 15 of the *Staffing Manual*, which contains the policy on PQPs, was modified in December 2004 to ensure consistency with the guidance provided by the FAQs.

(6) Monitoring and Reporting

An identified risk with PQP delegation is that “not all candidates would obtain a reasonable expectation of appointment.” However, asking departments/agencies to submit frequent reports on candidates appointed is an excessive PQP policy requirement. PQPs represent a relatively low risk to merit and their use should be encouraged. Such a time-consuming reporting requirement may become a deterrent to the wider application of PQPs.

The Audit Operations Directorate believes that PQPs should be monitored annually via the Staffing Delegation and Accountability Agreements (SDAA). Problems identified through this process or by other means could result in more assertive PSC intervention.

We recommend that the Accountability Directorate consider including PQPs in their risk assessment of departments when reviewing departmental staffing performance reports.

Response to Recommendation 6

The reporting cycle for 2004-2005 is well under way. The oversight analysts will flag issues related to PQPs from a risk perspective, should any emerge for departments using this approach. Given the timing of the reporting cycle and the low level of risk identified in the evaluation study, we do not plan to add another formal reporting requirement at this time for the 2004-2005 cycle. However, this issue will be more formally built into future reporting requirements.

Conclusion

The implementation of the new PSEA will have a major impact on the staffing and recruitment methods of the future. The use of PQPs may assist departments in exploring the flexibilities in the new legislation. The information gathered during the course of this evaluation has, therefore, provided valuable insights in shaping any new strategies, policies and regulations that will be required to meet future challenges.