



Highlights



Verification of Educational Credentials

October 2010

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. In addition, the PSC recruits qualified Canadians from across the country.

Why did the PSC conduct this study?

Job applicants' provision of accurate background information in appointment processes is fundamental to our merit-based system. The purpose of this study was to describe public service practices and policies with respect to the verification of educational credentials reported by applicants in external appointment processes. The study also identified areas for improvement and best practices.

Due to the inherent risk in appointing a new hire to the public service, the study focussed on external appointments only. The study was narrowed by purposively selecting a sample of high-risk occupational groups. These occupational groups included Nursing, Law, Engineering and Land Survey, Financial Management, Biological Sciences and Defence Scientific Service. It was expected that organizations that employed professionals in these high-risk occupational groups would be the most likely to have verification practices in place.

Data for the study were obtained from three sources: interviews with key informants, a review of government-wide and organizational documents related to verification of education and the review of staffing files for external processes.

What did the PSC find?

The study found that there are no government-wide policies or guidelines that state that education must be verified within the context of a staffing process. Key legislation such as the *Public Service Employment Act* and the Selection and Appointment Policy state that candidates must meet all essential qualifications to be appointed; however, these documents do not directly address the verification of education process.

Key informant interviews conducted with heads of human resources (HR), security officials, HR advisors and hiring managers across four public service organizations indicated that these organizations had no internal policy stipulating that candidates' educational credentials must be verified.

Despite the absence of a formal policy, all four organizations had verification practices in place. Thus, 85% of all staffing files reviewed included at least one document indicating a more stringent verification procedure (such as a copy of the degree and/or transcript, a foreign equivalence statement or proof of professional certification), whereas 11% of the files included a curriculum vitae only. Fewer than 4% of the files reviewed had no documentation indicating credentials were verified.

Key informant interviews revealed that the risks of misrepresentation of education were considered to be minimal, given that practices were in place to detect it. The bigger challenge cited was in detecting the misrepresentation of work experience.

Best practices involved staffing tools to ensure that educational credentials were verified, such as the use of a staffing checklist with a section that refers to proof of education as well as requesting to see official confirmation of credentials.

What action is the PSC taking?

The PSC is currently clarifying guidance to indicate that educational credentials must be verified, particularly upon entry to the public service, when changing to an occupational group with a different educational qualification, when the educational requirements for a position are increased or when an educational asset qualification is applied. This guidance will include a definition of what constitutes verification of education credentials.

