



Highlights



Audit of the Federal Student Work Experience Program and subsequent appointments through bridging mechanisms

May 2009



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 audit?

The Federal Student Work Experience Program (FSWEP) is the largest program by which students can obtain experience working for the federal public service. After graduation, an individual formerly employed under the program may be appointed to a public service term or indeterminate position through an expedited process known as a “bridging” mechanism.

The objective of this audit was to determine whether 11 selected federal organizations complied with legislative and policy frameworks when they hired students for the first time through the FSWEP and when they used bridging mechanisms to appoint graduates who were formerly hired as participants in this program. The audit also examined whether, for the period from April 1, 2006, to March 31, 2007, selected federal organizations each had an appropriate framework in place to plan and monitor bridging appointments.

The audit looked at a sample of 250 cases representing the population of 2 728 first-time FSWEP appointments that occurred in the 2006-2007 fiscal year and 42 bridging appointment files.

What did the PSC find?

The audit raised questions as to the continuing relevance of the Treasury Board (TB) requirement that all FSWEP students have learning plans, given the rate of compliance with this requirement.

The audit also raised concerns about adherence to values and compliance with the legislative and policy requirements in cases of unsatisfactory FSWEP appointments. Unsatisfactory appointments included nine cases of pre-matching (6%) and an additional four appointments that were undertaken by organizations without having sought referrals from the Public Service Commission’s (PSC) national inventory of FSWEP candidates. The audit also identified 128 FSWEP cases (51%) that needed improvement and 113 cases (43%) that were satisfactory.

The audit noted some confusion about the roles and responsibilities of stakeholders involved in the appointment of FSWEP students; the result sometimes was insufficiently rigorous application of program requirements and guidance. After the period covered by this audit, the PSC introduced changes to the technology structure through which it administers student programs. As of November 2007, the FSWEP general inventory was transferred to the Public Service Resourcing System (PSRS) platform in order to offer managers and students a more efficient and streamlined FSWEP, including standardized guidance on roles and responsibilities.

The audit noted the introduction of the new, streamlined technology for the PSRS platform. Overall, the use of FSWEF as a staffing tool is operating reasonably well but areas for improvement have been identified.

One bridging appointment and over a third of the bridging appointment processes were identified as unsatisfactory since they did not respect the PSC Appointment Framework. Of the 16 unsatisfactory cases (38%), the audit found:

- one unauthorized appointment (2%) of an individual who had no contractual agreement but who nevertheless was working on the premises of a federal organization;
- ten appointment processes (24%) in which there was no evidence of an assessment or else there was an inadequate assessment, and therefore no evidence that the person appointed met all the essential qualifications; and
- five appointment processes (12%) with no written rationale for the use of a non-advertised process.

The audit also identified 10 bridging appointments that demonstrated a need for improvement (24%) and 16 that were satisfactory (38%).

The audit indicated that bridging appointment files needed improvement because they were poorly documented. The audit concludes that more rigour is needed in the documentation supporting bridging appointment decisions to ensure that legislative and policy requirements and appointment values are respected.

For the period under review, audited organizations had not integrated bridging appointments into their human resources (HR) plans. Furthermore, although the 11 audited organizations tracked the numbers of bridging appointments, few of them monitored selection and appointment decisions to ensure that they respected the legislative framework and appointment values.

What action is the PSC taking?

The PSC is committed to reviewing the guidance provided to departments and agencies to better reflect the streamlined requirements of the new PSRS platform and to clearly specify roles and responsibilities in areas such as identifying search criteria, contacting students, verifying program eligibility requirements and assessment and appointment processes.

The PSC is also committed to conducting outreach activities and training for hiring managers and HR advisors to familiarize them with the use of the new PSRS platform and the FSWEF selection and appointment processes.

The Office of the Chief Human Resources Officer (OCHRO) of the Treasury Board Secretariat concurred with the recommendation of the audit regarding learning plans and is currently carrying out a Policy Review Project (PRP) to streamline the suite of mandatory instruments governing people management. The PRP is consistent with the Treasury Board policy review initiative and is expected to be completed early next year. OCHRO's policies governing student employment will be included in this review, and the recommendation will be duly considered in the context of that exercise.

The deputy heads of all audited organizations were provided with an opportunity to acknowledge and comment on the audit results. They have concurred with the audit findings and agreed with its recommendations. The audit was viewed as providing an opportunity to reflect on policy requirements and to better communicate and understand the program's requirements as well as each stakeholder's roles and responsibilities. Deputy heads noted that they have been improving their practices as a result of this audit and that they had already taken action to improve the quality of student appointment and bridging appointment processes to address the recommendations in this audit.