



Public Service Commission  
of Canada

Commission de la fonction publique  
du Canada

# Views of hiring managers and human resources specialists on the Public Service Commission of Canada's recruitment programs and inventories

## Executive summary

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This public opinion research report presents the results of an online survey and focus groups conducted by Ipsos Limited on behalf of the Public Service Commission of Canada. The research study was conducted with Government of Canada hiring managers and human resources specialists between February and March 2022.

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Mike Colledge  
President  
Ipsos Public Affairs

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# Executive summary

## Introduction and methodology

This research was commissioned by the Public Service Commission (PSC). The purpose of the research was to help guide future PSC recruitment program efforts and marketing strategies geared towards federal public service hiring managers and human resources specialists (HR specialists).<sup>1</sup> The primary objectives were to:

1. measure the satisfaction levels of hiring managers and HR specialists with the PSC's recruitment programs and inventories;
2. identify the reasons why they may or may not be hiring from the PSC's inventories and pools;
3. explore and identify potential areas for improvement and make recommendations; and
4. obtain data to develop communications and marketing strategies.

The research involved a combination of a quantitative survey and qualitative discussions with hiring managers and HR specialists across the federal public service.

The quantitative portion of the research was an online, open-link survey. PSC disseminated the survey broadly across the target population of hiring managers and HR specialists. The survey invited both users and non-users of PSC recruitment programs and inventories to participate. The survey was offered in both official languages and was hosted on an accessible and device agnostic survey platform. The survey was pre-tested in late February 2022 and launched on March 1, 2022. The survey was promoted for 4 weeks and closed on March 30, 2022. The median length of the survey was 9 minutes. No incentives were offered for participation.

A total of n=1,262 surveys were completed, representing a participation rate of 15.7%. While the responses reflect a cross-section of users and non-users by region, department or agency, language and tenure, the open-link survey methodology does not allow for the results to be generalized to the target population, and inferential statistics must not be applied when reporting on the collected data. This methodology also does not allow for non-response analysis. However, it is possible that respondents and non-respondents may differ. Further details on the survey methodology are included in section 1, Introduction and methodology.

The survey was complemented by a mix of qualitative online focus group discussions and interviews (see table below). Twenty-two departments and agencies were included in the qualitative research.

Method	Language	Number of participants
4 focus group discussions with hiring managers and HR specialists	English	25
2 focus group discussions with hiring managers and HR specialists	French	8
8 interviews with heads of HR, HR specialists and a director general of a department	English and French	12

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<sup>1</sup> A hiring manager is responsible for hiring new employees to fill new or existing positions within the federal public service based on one or more criteria. A human resources specialist's role is to counsel managers and employees on the interpretation and application of human resource legislation, policies and procedures.

All participants had experience with using **at least one** PSC program and several participants had not used **some** of the PSC programs and inventories.

It should be noted that qualitative research findings are exploratory and directional in nature.

## **Summary of key findings**

### **Key challenges facing hiring managers and HR specialists**

Federal public service hiring managers and HR specialists are facing a significant challenge in filling open positions, consistent with the current labour shortage in Canada. Seven in 10 (72%) indicated that they are having a difficult time (very or somewhat) filling open positions in their department or agency. Most of the challenges are about finding available, quality candidates and are not related to the process of accessing or using PSC's recruitment programs and inventories. Bilingualism requirements were more frequently noted as a barrier to hiring than lack of technical skills or experience.

In the qualitative research, there was consensus that "it's a job-seeker's" market, while at the same time several participants reported that their departments have been growing. Participants spoke of the challenges of attracting "fresh blood" to the public service, and often this was attributed to hiring requirements and processes, including the priority system, bilingualism criteria and an archaic and outdated application process that is not aligned with what today's candidates are used to.

### **Familiarity with PSC recruitment programs and inventories**

Familiarity with PSC student recruitment programs and inventories was reasonably high; most (77%) hiring managers and HR specialists were at least somewhat familiar with PSC's recruitment programs and inventories for hiring students (full-time high school, CEGEP, college or university student). However, significantly fewer were familiar with PSC's recruitment programs and inventories for hiring non-students, including 62% who were familiar with graduate (college or university graduates) programs/inventories. Familiarity was even lower with more focused recruitment programs and inventories. Just over half of hiring managers and HR specialists were familiar with PSC recruitment programs and inventories for hiring students from specific employment equity groups (53%) or pools or inventories aimed at one employment equity group (52%). Just 1 in 3 (34%) indicated familiarity with PSC recruitment programs and inventories for hiring candidates for mid and senior level positions in policy.

Familiarity with PSC's recruitment programs and inventories contributes to program/inventory usage and thus is an important part understanding how to increase usage. There is a correlation between tenure within the federal public service and familiarity with PSC recruitment programs and inventories. Those who have been in a federal public service hiring role for longer are more familiar than those with less time in a hiring role.

More communication and marketing of PSC recruitment programs and inventories was welcomed by participants in the qualitative research. Reactions to current marketing of post-secondary recruitment (PSR) programs as free, offering year-round access and available across Canada were lukewarm at best. There was a clear sense that these were basic expectations and do not add value to users.

### **Overall satisfaction and experiences with using PSC recruitment programs and inventories**

Overall, a majority (62%) of public service hiring managers and HR specialists (who have made at least 5 new hires in the past 2 years) reported that none of their 5 most recent hires were discovered through PSC recruitment programs or inventories.

On average across PSC's 6 main programs and inventories, 60% indicated being satisfied (greater than 3 out of 5) with the PSC's recruitment programs and inventories they have tried to access, and among those who tried to access at least one of the programs and inventories in the past year, 62% were satisfied.

Users were most satisfied with the quality of student (63%) and graduate (56%) candidates and least satisfied with PSC advice and guidance on finding suitable candidates (28%). Just under half were satisfied with their familiarity with how to access candidates through PSC programs and inventories (46%) and how quickly they can access candidates through PSC programs and inventories (48%). Slightly fewer participants (43%) were satisfied with their familiarity with what is available through PSC programs and inventories, how easy it is to access candidates through PSC programs and inventories and the diversity of candidates. Just under 2 in 5 were satisfied with the interest of candidates (38%), whereas closer to 1 in 3 were satisfied with the information provided by the PSC about their programs and inventories (36%), the availability of candidates (34%) and the quality of candidates for mid-senior level positions (31%).

The strongest correlations with satisfaction are availability of candidates, quality of student candidates and interest level of candidates. The extent to which hiring managers and HR specialists can find available candidates who are interested in open positions at the time the positions need to be filled drives satisfaction with PSC's programs and inventories more than other aspects.

Participants in the qualitative research shared mixed experiences with using PSC recruitment programs and inventories, and a number of cross-cutting themes emerged in the discussions:

- Past experience with using PSC recruitment programs and inventories matters. Lack of success in hiring candidates from PSC programs and inventories coloured interest and usage in future.
- A main factor in the perceived lack of success is candidates either accepting alternative offers or the pools and inventories contain candidates that are no longer actively looking for a position.
- PSC pools and inventories suffered from the perception that screening is too broad or "simply checking a box" with no validation that candidates do indeed have the skills and experience.
- There are not enough candidates in pools targeting equity groups.

## **Nuances by program and inventory type**

### **Federal Student Work Experience Program**

It was evident in the qualitative research that a core value proposition of the Federal Student Work Experience Program (FSWEP) is the opportunity to develop relationships with students who can be bridged<sup>2</sup> into longer-term positions. Moreover, participants valued the ability to access a healthy number of diverse students, resulting in successful placements, and FSWEP's easy, quick and efficient process for accessing candidates. "The lottery system" was a main source of dissatisfaction with FSWEP.

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<sup>2</sup> Student bridging generally refers to the non-advertised appointment of a student who was employed in the federal public service through a student program such as the Federal Student Work Experience Program (FSWEP), the Post-Secondary Co-op/Internship Program (CO-OP) or the Research Affiliate Program (RAP).

Having enough candidates who reflect one or more employment equity groups is also a driver of satisfaction with FSWEF (the strength of the correlation with satisfaction is 0.488).<sup>3</sup>

### **Post-Secondary Co-operative Education and Internship Program**

Access to high quality candidates with relevant specialized skillsets was the main perceived value of the Post-Secondary Co-operative Education and Internship Program (CO-OP) in the qualitative research. In terms of negatives, CO-OP processes were described as “labour intensive” when compared to FSWEF. Platforms, timelines and submission dates vary by institution, which creates more “legwork” for managers.

### **Research Affiliate Program**

The common perception was that the Research Affiliate Program (RAP) is applicable only to science-based positions or research-heavy departments and agencies. Therefore, many qualitative participants did not see RAP as relevant to their departments. Among participants with some experience of RAP, there was appreciation of the stability the program provides.

### **Post-Secondary Recruitment**

HR specialists (56% versus 39% of hiring managers), those who have been in their current position for at least 5 years (46% versus 25% less than 5 years) and those who have made 21 or more hires over the past 2 years (57% versus 35% 20 hires or less) were more likely to have tried accessing the Post-Secondary Recruitment (PSR) program.

Many qualitative research participants admitted to knowing very little about this inventory and the people who are in it. This was the main reason that underpinned lack of PSR use. Among the few participants with at least some awareness of or experience with PSR, they shared limited success of recruiting candidates in the past and showed little interest in using the inventory again. The “freshness” of the inventory was one of the main concerns.

### **Recruitment of Policy Leaders**

Just 12% have tried accessing the Recruitment of Policy Leaders (RPL) program, of which a little less than 2 in 5 (37%) have tried doing so within the past year. The top 7 departments and agencies that reported using RPL were:

- Public Services and Procurement Canada
- Canada Border Services Agency
- Health Canada
- Impact Assessment Agency of Canada
- Employment and Social Development Canada
- Infrastructure Canada
- Innovation, Science and Economic Development Canada

Just under 2 in 5 (38%) were satisfied with the RPL program, and about as many (37%) were dissatisfied.

The high calibre of candidates was the main draw of RPL for qualitative research participants. However, having to go through a mentor felt cumbersome and participants did not appreciate being on the mentor’s timelines. Several participants would have benefitted from more information about RPL.

### **Indigenous Student Employment Opportunity**

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<sup>3</sup> Correlation coefficients are used to measure the strength of the linear relationship between 2 variables, and range between 0 and 1. The closer to 1, the stronger the correlation.

Only 1 in 5 (22%) have tried accessing the Indigenous Student Employment Opportunity (ISEO) program, however, most (84%) of those have been in the past 2 years (58% in the past year). The top 7 departments and agencies using ISEO based on the sample of survey respondents included:

- Canada Border Services Agency
- Fisheries and Oceans Canada
- Indigenous Services Canada
- Crown Indigenous Relations and Northern Affairs Canada
- Employment and Social Development Canada
- Public Services and Procurement Canada
- Supreme Court of Canada

A little more than 4 in 10 (43%) were satisfied with the program. By comparison, 3 in 10 (30%) were dissatisfied.

### **Employment Opportunity for Students with Disabilities**

Only 17% have tried accessing the Employment Opportunity for Students with Disabilities (EOSD) program. However, most (83%) of these hiring managers and HR specialists have done so within the past 2 years (57% in the past year). About half (47%) say they were satisfied with the program. By comparison, almost 3 in 10 (28%) were dissatisfied.

### **Inventories aimed at one employment equity group**

Familiarity with PSC's graduate or focused recruitment programs and inventories tended to be lower, which is a barrier to access. One in 4 have tried accessing inventories aimed at one employment equity group (26%), of which 85% have tried to access in the past 2 years and two-thirds (63%) within the past year.

### **Future improvements**

While the level of satisfaction between recruitment programs and inventories varies substantially, the reasons contributing to satisfaction largely do not. The strongest correlates to satisfaction relate to the availability, quality and interest of candidates. With these results, Ipsos recommends taking the view that two of 3 can be remedied with more frequent contact with candidates to update their availability for work and interests in working for the federal public service and in which roles and capacities. The issue of quality and qualifications can also, at least partly, be improved by having more frequently updated information from candidates about their latest qualifications and experience.

Below are the key recommendations made by hiring managers and HR specialists in the qualitative research, which are supported by the survey findings.

1. Quality control of pools and inventories
  - a. Include mechanisms and prompts that require applicants to update their profile on a regular basis.
  - b. A feedback mechanism where HR specialists and managers who access programs and pools report back to PSC on which candidates should be removed because they are no longer interested in a position.
2. Streamlined processes
  - a. Ensure the same candidates do not end up showing up in spreadsheet pulls multiple times.
  - b. Simplify the process for applicants so they submit only a single application and then PSC funnels their information into whichever PSC or departmental pool or inventory is most relevant, in alignment with their profile and interests.
  - c. Provide tips, tricks and other guidance toolkits to help applicants through the application process.
3. Enhanced pre-screening and assessment of candidates
  - a. Pre-screen candidates in pools or inventories for statement of merit criteria.
  - b. Include basic pre-assessments that allow managers to filter and hone in on specific competencies.

#### 4. Modernization of tools

- a. Provide a centralized, user-friendly, interactive tool (perhaps an app) where managers can easily review and access candidates (without having to request lengthy spreadsheets) and where the candidate profiles are up to date and provide a more complete picture of the person (over and above a CV).

#### **Future communications and marketing of PSC programs and inventories**

Given the importance of having access to quality candidates, the research suggests that PSC should consider undertaking a review of the specific qualifications and qualities most desired by hiring managers and HR specialists to have up-to-date information on those skills and experiences. That will allow PSC to consider new or supplementary communications, marketing and/or outreach strategies for attracting the most sought-after qualifications. This likely is perceived as requiring greater marketing and promotion among the public to attract interest in working for the federal public service broadly and in specific positions and roles available.

The following recommendations by hiring managers and HR advisors have implications for future communications and marketing of PSC programs and inventories among users.

- A one-stop shop where information for all PSC inventories and pools can be found and increasing awareness of this.
- Testimonials from past managers and specialists who have used PSC programs and inventories; these audiences can act as credible voices to mitigate negative “bureaucratic mysteries” associations that act as a barrier to use.
- More information on the specific profile of candidates in each pool and inventory and tailoring that profile to each department or agency’s needs.
- More communications on what is being done to create programs and inventories that are diverse.
- More information on how and whether PSC programs and inventories are kept fresh, especially if there is a certain time of the year when programs and inventories are refreshed. For example, a newsletter can be issued when there is a batch of new candidates. This would allow departments to better align their usage of those programs with whenever the lists are being refreshed.
- Both HR specialists and hiring managers think they would benefit from more communication on all of the above items.