

Report on the Findings of the Review of Audit/Complaint Recommendations 2006/07 – 2008/09

Following on from the review of audit/complaint recommendations 2006/07 – 2008/09 I conducted follow up meetings with the following Departments:

Department for Employment and Learning (DEL)

Department for Regional Development (DRD)

Department of Enterprise, Trade and Investment (DETI)

The overall objective of this exercise was to evaluate whether the three Departments had addressed issues made by way of recommendations to audit/complaints in accordance with the Commissioner's Code of Practice. I looked at common issues and if there were emerging themes throughout Departments.

A number of areas were consistent throughout the three Departments, namely:

- i. That guidance notes and/or background information should be included in the application pack along with any statutory disqualifications which may apply.**
- ii. That a scoring frame or marking matrix be used when assessing candidates against criteria to ensure a consistent level of measurement by panel member.**
- iii. That the criteria deemed necessary to meet essential criteria remain consistent throughout all documentation.**
- iv. That all shortlisting documentation is fully recorded.**

Improvements for the above have been amended as follows:

- i. All three have revisited their application packs and have included descriptions of what panels will be looking for. This is also complemented with the Information Pack which gives competences against which the panel will judge the applicant's ability to meet each criterion.**
- ii. Panel members now agree a scoring framework in advance, to be used at all stages of the process. This will record their assessment and rationale for decisions taken.**

- iii. **Procedures are now in place to ensure that criteria remain consistent throughout, with DETI in particular, adding an entry in their checklist for competitions and certified by Grade 7.**
- iv. **Panel members must keep notes to substantiate their own decisions and comments should be provided to support agreed marks. Panel members have full responsibility to complete and sign all shortlisting documentation.**

A number of different areas were also highlighted in all three reports and these are detailed as follows:

- **That the assessment documentation used by panel members is produced in the same format.**
- **That the wording of rejection letters accurately reflects the reasons why a candidate has been unsuccessful.**
- **That all requests for feedback are handled immediately.**
- **That application forms are simple and straightforward and ask only what is required.**
- **That the process and policy in handling electronic applications to ensure equality of opportunity for all candidates is reviewed.**

From my findings these issues have been addressed as follows:

- **This recommendation has been taken on board with all panel members receiving an individual sift sheet, interview booklet and a summary booklet (for the chair) in the same format. Panel members have to sign all documentation.**
- **Letters are now adapted to inform candidates if they did not meet some or all of the criteria to a satisfactory standard. Included in this letter is information on how to request full feedback and the Chair deals directly with this response.**
- **The Department acknowledges requests for feedback and a system is in place to ensure that such requests are sent to the Chair within 2 working days. The full response is issued with 10 working days of receipt in accordance with the Department's policy on customer service standards. This requirement is monitored by PAU and if a response is not issued PAU will contact the candidate to inform them of the delay and explain the circumstances.**
- **The Department has designed a draft application form to enable candidates to easily describe their skills and experience against criteria and for panels to easily assess candidates' responses.**

Sponsor branches are advised to tailor this form to meet their requirements.

- **This policy has now been reviewed and the Department will record the time and date of receipt on the Department's server. If a late application was emailed in good faith, the Department policy allows for reconsideration and a degree of judgment to be exercised.**

In conclusion, I have found evidence of progress within the Departments and some excellent examples of good practice as demonstrated above. In addition, DETI have devised for example, an action plan checklist which determines the action required, the lead person and deadlines to be met for each stage of the public appointment process. DEL have introduced case managers for each competition who have lead responsibility for the various competitions being held throughout their Department. They are also currently piloting their new enhanced procedures in the current competition to ensure this is as robust as possible.

In summary, I consider that a number of positive changes have been made by the Departments, however until further compliance reviews are carried out these findings remain subjective.

I would like to thank all three Departments for their open and frank discussions.