

CPANI

The Commissioner
for Public Appointments
Northern Ireland

“Guardian of the Public Appointment Process”

FOLLOW-UP REPORT September 2013

ON RECOMMENDATIONS MADE IN JANUARY 2013 AUDIT OF

OFMDFM– Commissioner for Victims and Survivors

An audit was carried out on the competition, run by Victims and Survivors Unit [VSU] of the Office of the First Minister and deputy First Minister [OFMDFM], to appoint a Commissioner for Victims and Survivors.

The audit was published by CPA NI in January 2013 and contained 10 recommendations for improvement, as follows:

1. In order to comply with paragraph 3.3 of the Code, the Department should ensure that Ministerial approval is sought via a Ministerial submission to determine how the Ministers require the list of appointable candidates to be presented.
2. The Department must ensure that a complete audit trail is readily available including all pertinent contemporaneous records, to ensure compliance with paragraph 5.3 of the Code.
3. The Department should ensure that the appointment plan is a fully comprehensive document that addresses all the requirements of paragraph 3.6 of the Code clearly and in detail.
4. As stated in the Code in paragraph 3.11, if the timetable must be varied all applicants must receive notice and an explanation of any variation which may affect them.
5. The Department should ensure that all advertisements are provided to CPA NI at the time of publication as required in paragraph 3.18 of the Code.
6. In future competitions, details of expenses should be included as stated in paragraph 3.20 of the Code.
7. In keeping with the principles of openness and transparency, and to comply with paragraph 3.30 of the Code, the Department should ensure that all selection panel individual applicant assessment documents are retained. This applies equally when an outside agency is used.
8. In keeping with the principles of openness and transparency, and to comply with paragraph 3.30 of the Code, the Department should ensure that it keeps full and contemporaneous records of all the assessment procedures, deliberations and outcomes. In cases where an outside contractor is handling the procedures, the Department must continue to discharge its responsibility for such procedures. The Department should review its control mechanisms with regard to contractors for future competitions.
9. Paragraph 3.25 of the Code states, 'Everyone who applies for a post must be kept informed by the Department of the progress and ultimate outcome of his or her application in a timely and courteous manner'. In cases where there may be unavoidable delays, it is important that candidates are kept informed. The Department should ensure that it does this in all future competitions.

10. In keeping with the principles of openness and transparency, the Department should ensure that the date of the Ministerial appointment decision is recorded in the relevant documentation.

As can be seen from the recommendations, whilst the competition was run largely in compliance with the CPA NI Code, there were some Departmental inadequacies and problems were also identified with the work done by HR Connect, the organisation which administered the competition on behalf of OFMDFM.

The Victims and Survivors Unit has had no further public appointment competitions since the audit was published, so this follow-up check has taken the form of:

- production of an assurance, in written form, from the VSU, that it has made 'arrangements to ensure that the faults [identified in the audit report] do not occur again'.
- production of a letter from the Head of the Civil Service which was delivered to the Head of Enterprise Shared Services [and thereby to HR Connect] drawing their attention to the problems.
- a statement from VSU that the audit report has been forwarded to the OFMDFM Head of Corporate Service, asking for it to be disseminated within OFMDFM to alert staff involved in public appointments and suggesting that he gives consideration to the production of an appointments manual to assist in future competitions.