

Minutes of ninety-fifth meeting of the Board of the Public Appointments Service held through zoom, at 10am on 8th November 2021

Present (Board): Mr. Tom Moran (Chairperson), Ms. Anne-Marie Taylor, Ms. Shirley Comerford, Ms. Mary Connaughton, Mr. John O'Callaghan, Ms. Mary Hurley, Ms. Catherine Dobbins (Secretary).

Apologies: Ms. Anne O'Connor, Dr. Eddie Molloy.

John O'Callaghan informed the Board that he would be stepping down from his role as Board Member at the end of 2021, and may not be able to attend the final meeting in December, due to other work commitments. He explained that this was due to his change of role in the Department of Justice and he acknowledged the contribution of the other Board Members to the work of PAS. The Chairman thanked John for his contribution to the effective working of the Board during his time on the Board.

Minutes of previous meeting and matters arising

The minutes were agreed.

Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

Reports for the Board

Operational Report

The Board noted the Operational Activity Report (and the supporting papers), which were circulated in advance of the meeting.

The CEO updated the Board on a number of key areas.

The CEO informed the Board that delivery in terms of the overall campaign timescales is now at 76% (target 80%), with SER continuing to perform very strongly in terms of this KPI, as are Medical Consultants; Professional & Technical were above target for Q3 and are nearing the target for 2021 overall, as are Local Government (although their performance dipped in Q3). The CEO highlighted the dip in performance in the State Boards, and stated that they remain furthest from the overall target; the delays in Q3 were as a result of a delay in putting panels together because of issues arising with availability of Board Members (mostly in terms of client nominee availability).

The CEO outlined that the number of campaigns advertised and the number of assignments made are significantly up on the quarterly averages, and noted that all recruitment areas have a busy schedule of campaigns to be advertised.

The Board was informed that the Sergeant and Inspector Internal Promotions for AGS are progressing to schedule.

The CEO outlined some emerging trends, including changes in the volume of Requests; the volume of requests for general service grades has remained high throughout Q3, however, a number of open competitions which have closed for applications recently indicate a downward trajectory for application numbers. She noted that, following a spike in applications in 2020, we are seeing a significant drop in applications compared to the numbers received pre-pandemic; this included AO applications dropping by 27% from 2019, and the Temporary Clerical Officer application rate dropping by 32% from 2019. It was also highlighted that panels in place are also being exhausted faster than previously, with PAS having to launch new competitions earlier than planned (e.g. AP and CO). The CEO highlighted that PAS is reviewing processes on an ongoing basis to respond with agility to the challenging market in which we are currently operating. The Board discussed whether the fall in volume of applications is having any impact on the quality of candidates being delivered to clients. The Board was assured that there are systems in place to maintain quality, with minimum standards in place and the close monitoring of outcomes, and it was agreed that there would be a further discussion on this at the next meeting. It was noted, that in the client feedback surveys, the quality of outcome has always scored highly in terms of satisfaction.

The Board also had a discussion in relation to the success of executive search. It was noted that the return in terms of TLAC roles is not as high as other Senior Executive roles; international search has been done for a large number of high profile campaigns and it has proved to be very rewarding. It was agreed that additional information on this would be provided for the next meeting.

The main area of concern highlighted by the CEO in terms of recruitment service delivery is in the area of general grade assignments, with this area significantly impacted by increased demand. She outlined that there was a considerable dip in general grade assignments (45% for Q3) which means that overall delivery in this area is at 57% for 2021 (target 80%). The Board noted that a complete review of Clearance and Assignments has been completed by a new senior manager with responsibility for this area, and that issues were identified, both within and outside the Clearance & Assignments process. The CEO informed the Board that actions have been agreed and have been implemented, but it is expected that these may take up to eight weeks before significant improvements can be seen in terms of the KPI. The Board requested a short update on this process at the next meeting and would propose to look the outcome in more detail in early 2022.

The Board noted that there is also strong demand across all sectors for campaigns to be scheduled and there is engagement with all sectors re managing those demands and scheduling campaigns in the various pipelines. The CEO highlighted the difficulties in meeting the demands of all stakeholders. It was noted that in the past longer panels of candidates helped address some demand issues, but more recently this has not always fitted the modern model of recruitment, with the candidate at the centre and filling increasing numbers of specialist requests for clients (in terms of both skills and locations). It was noted that the general service recruitment teams are examining this issue and balancing the various factors in determining the best approach to recruitment in this area. The CEO suggested that in the future it may be a combination of approaches such as large events and more regular campaigns. It was noted that clients have various needs in this regard and there is no general agreement amongst clients in relation to this.

It was noted that the future HRM Operating Model may assist in addressing some of the pressure points around fluctuating demands, levels of workforce planning and some of the other challenges facing PAS. It was agreed that it is critical that the proper structures are in place to engage with workforce planning across the entire system in order to help PAS plan and deliver. It was agreed that when public service bodies who use PAS get additional

funding for staffing, that the impact on PAS must be taken into account. The Board welcomed the plans by DPER to review how PAS is funded in this regard.

The Board noted that the Client Experience Lens is very positive and remains on target with a green status. The CEO informed the Board that feedback has been collated from 24 different professional & technical recruitment campaigns in Q3 2021 and that this feedback is consistently positive in terms of the client experience; the survey is still open to 10 further competitions, with the potential there to collate more data.

The CEO informed the Board that the other lens are also positive with ongoing developments in People & Culture and Corporate Governance, as can be seen in the report.

The Board noted that the delivery KPIs are communicated to clients as part of the client management engagement process on a one-to-one basis, with the client newsletters also used as a communications tool. She informed the Board that meetings are also held with Local Government CEOs to discuss delivery, and that overall communication is through fora such as the HR Managers Network and HR Managers Forum. It was noted that quarterly meetings are also held with DPER HR side to share KPIs and challenges, but that the communications externally are not at the same level of detail as the information received by the Board.

The CEO outlined recent developments in workforce planning as highlighted in the Board papers. It was noted that 70% of clients submitted projections for Q4 and that clients who submitted a return in Q2 constituted 77% of actual requests.

It was noted that for Q4, there was a decrease in general grade projections of 30% and the data also indicates a shift back to Dublin posts. The Board noted the gap which continues to exist between projected and actual demand and agreed that this will continue to be kept under review.

The CEO updated the Board on the completed process to procure external expertise to develop an overarching customer (client and candidate) engagement strategy to inform our strategic approach to client and candidate service delivery, with Ipsos MRBI awarded the contract to undertake this work. The Board noted that it is anticipated that the Customer Engagement Strategy will be finalised in early Q2 2022, and that PAS will continue to roll out the customer engagement pilot, using the Qualtrics tool, to capture client feedback in the meantime.

The CEO highlighted the official launch of the Public Jobs Schools Resource Kit, and the significant engagement as part of the launch activity including a press release and photo call and with coverage across many national titles in print and online, including a front cover feature in the Irish Times.

The CEO provided an update on the recent publicjobs.ie national brand awareness campaign and the recent Management Board Branding Session to discuss future plans in relation to branding. The CEO outlined that this was an initial session to formulate views before bringing a proposal to the Board.

The Board was updated on the launch of the Professional Certificate in Resourcing & Recruitment, which PAS had worked closely with the IPA to develop. It was noted that the programme will run over three modules including the Resourcing Context, the Recruitment and Selection Practice and the Regulatory Framework, and it aims to drive professional standards in recruitment across the public service.

The Board discussed the recent Compliance/Reputation Management Month in PAS, which included comprehensive and concise briefings and training to staff to improve overall awareness of key areas and to reduce reputational risk across the organisation. The CEO informed the Board that as part of the outcome from the month PAS is hoping to sign up with Transparency Ireland for their Integrity at Work programme, and outlined the other public bodies that have already signed up. It was noted that this would involve the CEO and the Chair of the Board signing a pledge on behalf of PAS to support, act and signpost around integrity at work and it is hoped to do this over the coming weeks.

Risk Management

The Board noted the risks as outlined in the Risk Report.

Financial Position

The CEO informed the Board that PAS has requested a supplementary estimate of .8m in A1 (to fund the resources for the additional HSE recruitment) and €2.865m in capital to pay for the Chapter House Project this year – this will allow for the capital allocation in 2022 to be used for Nova and AV equipment to support remote delivery.

It was noted that PAS made a detailed submission to DPER as part of the estimates process, and the amount allocated was below the amount identified by PAS to manage expected recruitment and other demands in 2022. The CEO highlighted that PAS will again have to work with clients to ensure it can get the resources it needs to meet those demands.

The CEO discussed the engagement with the HSE and D/Health to get an additional €2.16m in funding transferred to PAS to meet the demands for Medical Consultant recruitment in 2022.

There was some concern in relation to the need for a supplementary for A1, but it was noted that the shortfall in A1 would be met by the HSE payment and the resulting surplus will then be returned to the exchequer at year end. The Board welcomed the realisation in DPER that funding model needs to be reviewed to develop a more sustainable solution for PAS.

Update from the Audit Committee

Clare McGrath, Chair of the Audit Committee attended the meeting. She thanked Kathleen and Catherine for their ongoing support to the Committee, and the management team for engagement around the implementation of recommendations and the provision of comprehensive and focused reports. She highlighted the work on the Strategic Audit Plan for 2022-24 (a draft of which was included in the Board papers) and noted that the Audit committee would welcome any feedback on it from the Board. She highlighted that the Audit Committee are very satisfied with Mazars, and their engagement at all stages of the process, from drafting the terms of reference to the production of very good reports. She highlighted her engagement with Mazars to develop an audit around the PAS digital journey / remote working and was very satisfied with their approach in relation to this. She noted the Audit Committee's satisfaction with the completion of the Agresso update.

She also discussed the STAR replacement project and the risks in relation to this project; noting that much of the delay to date related to OGCIO requirements or a lack of funding. She stated that it is vital that there is responsibility at a senior level for the entire project, even though different areas may own different aspects of the project.

She also highlighted the need for risk to be a key part of overall business planning and the need to consider the interdependencies of IT and the business as part of this process. She also stated that the Risk Business Month was a very useful intervention to ensure that all areas of compliance and reputational risk are considered and highlighted to staff.

She highlighted the Audit Committee's recommendation that an external member be added to the Risk Management Committee.

The Board thanked the Audit Committee for all of their work.

It was agreed that the integration of all elements of the Nova Project would be considered at the next Project Board meeting to ensure there are no gaps

Update on Key Risk Area: Information Governance and Records Management

Sinead Dolan, DPO, provided an update to the Board on developments since the paper was prepared, informing them that the Records Management project has been pushed out to Q1 due to capacity issues in some units. She provided an update on the Data Sharing and Governance Act, and outlined that the impact on PAS was minimal at this stage as it had a legal basis for processing data from other public service bodies. She also updated the Committee on the plans for preparing campaign files on the return to PAS and the decisions being considered in relation to this matter. The Board noted that this is a high risk area due to the level of personal data held by PAS. The DPO noted that the systems are in place to ensure that all data is being returned to PAS from PAS Representatives and the main risk relates to the fact that this material is not currently searchable as it is not in structured format (i.e. on campaign files) due to staff not being in the office to finish this task. Sinead updated the Board on her engagement with a technology solution to ensure she has oversight of the data in this area. She also stated that on completion of the records management project, the DPO will know what files people are currently using on the shared directories, and the new system PAS is moving to will have high administrative controls that will allow the DPO access to all relevant data.

The Board acknowledged the level of work being undertaken in this area and thanked the DPO for the very comprehensive paper. The CEO highlighted the business partnering approach being taken by the DPO to get engagement around this key area and informed the Board that this has increased awareness of data protection obligations and the risks to the reputation of the organisation around this area.

Board Evaluation Action Plan

The Board noted that all actions are either completed or are underway and ongoing.

Update on Delivery of Strategic Projects - Strategic Programme of Work

The Board noted that the key three strategic projects are progressing well, with the detailed project updates for end Q3 included in the board packs in addition to the overall dashboard.

It was noted that the NOVA Project Board have delivered Path to Market, on time and on budget, and that the NOVA Project Board have been allocated a sufficient level of capital funding in 2022 to deliver the procurement and implementation phases of NOVA, with the procurement phase launched in October.

The Board noted that the Chapter House project is currently running close to programme. The project remains in line with cash flow projections as set out by the OPW.

The Board discussed the implementation of the ED&I Strategy and noted that it is progressing well. The CEO highlighted the procurement of an EDI Diagnostic Review and the commencement of the Inclusio pilot in PAS last week. She also informed the Board that the first draft of Equality Monitoring Dashboard is now in place, and that we have secured the ESRI to help analysis data and shape the accompanying narrative for the data. It was noted that PAS has joined Open Doors to start to develop thinking on alternative routes, and that a review of the Willing Able and Mentoring programme has been completed, which will help to shape conversations around routes to permanency. It was noted that work to expand the OWL programme continues with colleagues in Oireachtas and DPER. The Board asked that the ED&I Team consider the role of targets to assess implementation of the Strategy.

AOB

The Board asked that ESG be put on the agenda for a future meeting.

Next meeting

The meeting will be held on 1st December at 2pm.